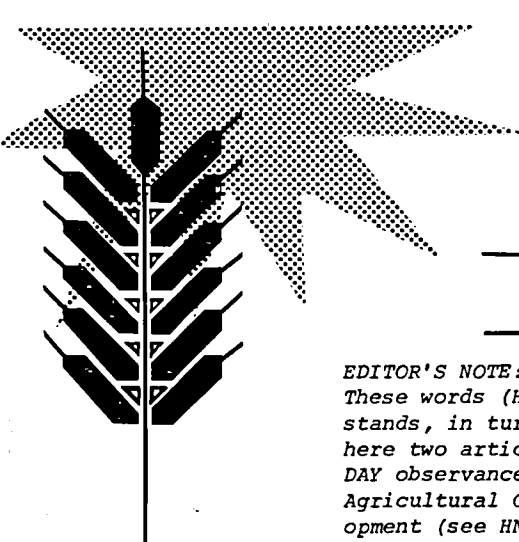




Hunger Notes

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EDITOR'S NOTE: "Behind hunger stands poverty. Behind poverty stands powerlessness." These words (HN July 1979) bear repeating. Behind the powerlessness of the poor stands, in turn, a whole range of lacks which organizing helps overcome. We present here two articles about that kind of empowerment offered especially for **WORLD FOOD DAY** observance October 16 by *Ceres* (May-June 1982), journal of the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization. The World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (see HN Feb., Mar., Nov., 1979), to which *Ceres* editor Peter Hendry refers below, dealt directly and daringly with causes of hunger too often ignored.

THE POWER TO ORGANIZE

"...Governments should consider action to:

...remove all barriers to the free association of rural people in organizations of their choice and...

When he delivered his moving address three years ago, President Nyerere showed that he was clearly aware of the disparity between the rhetoric of political statements and the realities of peasant life. Indeed, in his self-deprecating manner, he quoted precisely the comment of Lipton reproduced here. The point remains valid. How many political leaders recognize the gap between their governments' perceptions of how development programmes might benefit the poor and the perceptions of these intended beneficiaries? And even among those who do, how many have found a way to bridge that gap so that the perceptions and priorities of the poor become an integral part of the planning process? An FAO study undertaken at the time of the WCARRD Conference¹ found "very few successful efforts to build genuine people's organizations." In none of the 16 countries studied had the government created any system to gather information on the poor, let alone involve them in the development process.

"If the people are to be able to develop they must have power. They must be able to control their own activities within the framework of their village communities. And they must be able to mount effective pressure nationally also. The people must participate not just in the physical labour involved in economic development but also in the planning of it and the determination of priorities. At present the best-intentioned governments — my own included — too easily move from a conviction of the need for rural development into acting as if the people had no ideas of their own."

President Julius K. Nyerere of Tanzania, address to the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, July, 1979

"The sincere egalitarian rhetoric of say, Mrs. Gandhi or Julius Nyerere was, allowing for differences of style and ideology, closely paralleled during early industrial development. ... But the rural masses of India and Tanzania lack the power to organize the pressure that alone can turn such rhetoric into distributive action against the pressure of the elite."

Michael Lipton, *Why Poor People Stay Poor*, Temple Smith, London, 1977.

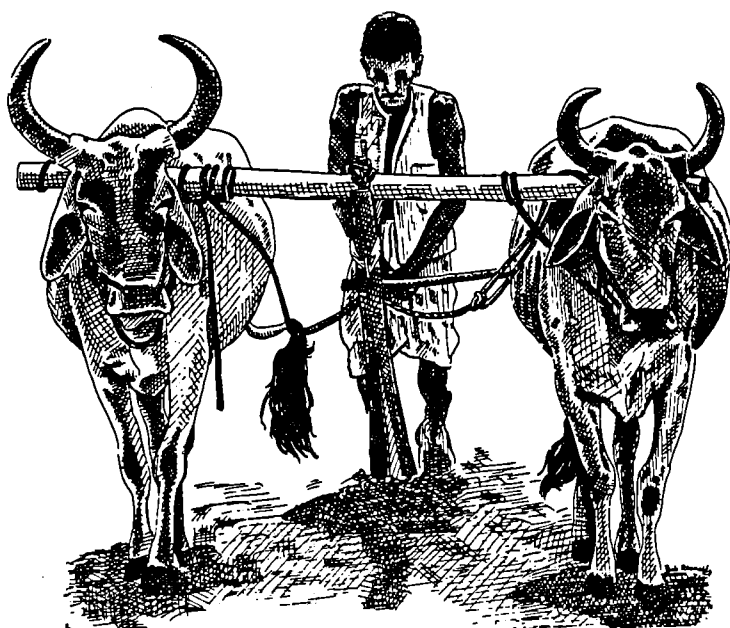
...encourage the establishment of self-reliant local, regional and national federations of peasant and worker associations and rural cooperatives...

Programme of Action, World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, 1979

In a recent letter to ministers of agriculture of all member countries in the developing world in regard to the second World Food Day next October, FAO Director-General Edouard Saouma recalled the WCARRD emphasis on strengthening rural-based organizations and appealed to governments to involve these groups in planning and carrying out World Food Day activities. Such an initiative, he maintained, would not only foster public recognition of the role of such organizations in national development but could also bring them into closer collaboration with their governments and with the international community.

The following articles are concerned, in one manner or another, with the question of more effective organizations for the rural poor. This section is being made available in off-print form as a gesture of support for World Food Day observances that may be including this topic in their programmes or publications.

¹ World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development.



India is proving that investments in the removal of poverty can yield higher than any other

by Pran Chopra

TAKE-OFF

The conventional view of Indian poverty is that it is not only massive but also so obstinate as to be irreversible, or reversible only at costs that would devour everything India seeks to invest in future growth.

In the past, such pessimism has inhibited the search for ways to reduce poverty at affordable costs; today these same views inhibit recognition of the fact that, in the last five years or so, a cluster of social and economic experiments scattered across India have demonstrated that it is cheaper to remove poverty than to let it persist. Though not yet widely shared, this

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FOR

perception is supported by field experience indicating that poverty is much less massive than hitherto believed. Moreover, the benefits of removing it may be calculated not only in social and humanitarian terms but in the purely economic sense as well. Poverty, it has now been shown, can be removed by means that recover their costs in fairly short periods of time.

Widening the gap

Unquestionably Indian poverty is massive, and it is increasing. India's growth processes further pauperize the poor, turning today's marginal farmers or tenant cultivators into tomorrow's landless labourers, and widening the gap between richer and poorer sectors of the population and of the country. Yet even conservative economists are beginning to admit that, because of the way in which they are made, estimates of poverty in India are too high.

The usual method is to divide the gross national product by the population and call the answer the per caput income. A parallel exercise calculates how much per caput income is needed to sustain a minimum intake of

SELF-HELP

calories, designated the poverty-line intake. All whose incomes are estimated to be lower than this are declared to be living below the poverty line. According to some estimates, as much as 60 percent of India's population lives below the poverty line.

But such estimates fail to answer two questions. First, if so many Indians are living below the poverty line, how is it that in many parts of India even unskilled labour can earn wages far above poverty-line income? Second, how does it happen that visible levels of consumption of goods and services are often much higher than can be sustained by poverty-line incomes?

The answer is that the national income, and consequently the per caput income, is seriously underestimated. Conventional statistical services omit two kinds of income, each growing faster than the national income as a whole. First, there is a sizable and rapidly growing proportion of the corporate income that constitutes the black market, euphemistically called the parallel economy. According to some economists who are using new kinds of statistical tools, this deliberately hidden economy is already almost half as large as the "white money" economy and is growing more rapidly. At the bottom end of the income scale, there are those myriads of unrecorded nonmonetary transactions of the more primitive rural economy.

Thanks to the momentum Indian agriculture has acquired at all but the lowest income levels, these are no longer negligible amounts. By including these two kinds of income, a recent US Central Intelligence Agency study has placed India's per caput in-

come at US\$445, as against the \$140 or so recorded in India's official statistics.

None of this, of course, is much consolation to those to whom the gains of development have not trickled down. Therefore, far more important than the revised estimates of poverty are the demonstrations in many parts of the country that it is possible to take the gains directly (and, if desired, disproportionately) to the poorest people without the richer people intercepting them on the way; that the costs of doing so are minimal, even negative; that India now has the financial means and technologies for doing so; and that there can be higher returns on investments made in removing poverty than in anything else.

Three types of poverty

There are three main types of poverty in India, and cheap remedies have been demonstrated against all three. Although there are as many subtypes of poverty as there village communities, each remedy is flexible enough to suit them all.

The first of the three main types is the mass poverty seen in the east-central section of the Gangetic plain, where nature has not been unkind at all but man has been exceedingly unkind to man. The soils are good; there is ample rainfall and plenty of subsoil water. But feudal agriculture, a many-layered and oppressive tenurial system, compounded by the burden of a severe caste system, persisted here for many generations and thoroughly sapped the will and energy of the lowest economic and social strata. They have not been able to bestir themselves and exercise the rights conferred upon them under many agrarian and social reform laws passed since India became independent.

The second type of poverty inhabits the whole of the region stretching southward from the Gangetic plain to the southern extremity of the Deccan uplands, leaving out the eastern and western coastal districts of peninsular India. Poverty here is vastly exacerbated by the harshness of nature.

Rainfall is scanty, the ground rocky, the topsoil thin, vegetation meagre. Wind and water constantly erode such soil as there is. Average landholdings are larger than further north or in the coastal districts, but that means little. Dairying and other forms of animal husbandry more tolerant of dry conditions than crop farming have been broken by the absence of fodder crops and the consequent deterioration of all animal wealth.

The third type is the poverty of the artisans and craftsmen and those in other nonfarm occupations who, unable to find a living in the attenuated village, crowd into city slums to sweat it out in subsistence-wage labour. While they rot in the cities, their traditional crafts decay in the village and so do their families and such rural assets as they may have left behind.

The magnitude of the poverty of each type is such that the energies of the whole state system as well as socioeconomic actions should be organized in every village community. But the right type of political will is nowhere yet in evidence. In the meantime, however, mini-miracles are being performed in which many tools that will be invaluable when large-scale action begins are being perfected and demonstrated.

Item: A Delhi-based voluntary organization, Deendayal Research Institute (DRI), has shown how subsoil water can be used for irrigation at costs that the smallest farmers can afford, and how, at similarly low costs, cleaner potable water may be drawn up from deeper than the traditional shallow wells permit. A modest-sized water pump and a five horsepower diesel or electric motor to run it costs the equivalent of US\$700.

Bamboo pipes

This is still too much for many peasants. So it is a widespread practice in this area, and in others too, that the poorer farmer digs his own well bore and fits on top of it a pump set hired by the hour from a richer neighbour; the going rate now is about a dollar an hour. Farmers whose fields are small

find the rent cheaper than the interest they would pay if they borrowed money to buy their own pump sets. But this is only good for the not-so-poor farmer. Poorer ones cannot afford to have their own conventional well bore because of the high cost of steel pipes.

DRI has therefore helped to develop and spread a skill displayed by some local artisans, namely, splicing together sections of a locally grown bamboo to form durable pipes of uniform bore. Now tubewell pipes a couple of hundred feet long are being made of bamboo, and, as experience has shown, cost only a third as much as steel pipes of equal length. They are at least as durable as steel, being rust-free and proof against cracking so long as they are cut from green bamboo and remain wet.

Faced with rising costs of diesel and electricity and increasing irregularity in the supply of both in remote areas, DRI has supported two local mechanics in experiments that have successfully demonstrated how bullock power can be used to drive the water pump at the same number of revolutions per minute as the motor does, and thus draw the same quantity of water from the same depth.

Because the gearing used was made from heavy cast-off parts from a nearby sugar factory, the bullocks have had traction problems. Soon, however, gears will be custom-made by a local foundry, and later a pump will be made for pipes with a larger bore so that with a lower rpm it can fetch up the same quantity of water.

*It is cheaper
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Beyond irrigation

While the bullock-powered pump is still in its infancy, low-cost well bores have shown their prowess. Thanks to a movement sparked by DRI among the 3 000 villages in the Gonda district of Uttar Pradesh, 27 000 deep wells have been bored where only three years ago all except a dozen or so were of the open and shallow surface well variety. Seventeen thousand of these have pipes of bamboo instead of steel.

The significance of this development extends beyond irrigation. For a country in which animal power is as vastly unemployed as is its manpower, and commercial energy is both scarce and expensive, the Gonda experiment makes eminently good economic sense. It also can lead to another step: a farmer who has four head of cattle can sustain a biogas plant large enough to meet most of his kitchen needs. A plant of this size costs only about \$500, and banks will lend most of this amount at low interest.

Secondly, half the diseases most common in rural India can be eliminated if villagers can get their water from deep and sealed sources such as tubewells rather than from open shallow wells that are constantly contaminated through seepage and surface inflow, especially during the rains. Third, the health and sanitation of the village can improve further if animal and farm wastes and human wastes as well can be disposed of in biogas plants. Fourth, the slurry released by the biogas generator as a cost-free by-product is an excellent fertilizer, especially for kitchen-garden farming which, if intensive, can be more profitable than many crops. Savings in fuels and fertilizers pay back the cost of the biogas plant in two or three years.

The fifth dimension

But it is the fifth dimension of the Gonda experiment that I found to be the most promising. It shows what a mountain of social backwardness, traditionalism and isolation can be moved by well-organized and motivated human effort such as achieved by DRI. Local talent has been sparked

by the reliance placed upon it: the bamboo pipe and the bullock-powered pump have been created by local and, in many cases, illiterate craftsmen with only technical guidance and encouragement given by outsiders. People have been roused to join actively in planning to meet the needs of their villages. Orthodoxy has been persuaded that it is not pollution of religion and customs but good economics and common sense to feed night soil into the biogas chamber. Encouraged by these signs of change, DRI has decided to aim not only at economic improvement of the Gonda district but at its social rebirth.

Three hundred or so km south of Gonda the second type of poverty begins in an arid zone of thin and rocky soils extending all the way to the southern tip of the Deccan uplands. Here the largest nongovernmental programme in India is bringing benefits of development directly to the poorest people, without waiting for "trickle down" theories to prove themselves. The programme is being operated by the Bharatiya Agro-Industries Foundation (BAIF) in 8 000 villages scattered throughout the zone, roughly in centres of about 20 each spread over a radius of about 15 km, and at 50 more centres in the more fertile state of Karnataka, where the Foundation works in partnership with the state government and the paper and pulp industry. The core of BAIF's philosophy also is that local materials, resources and skills should be used and development generated *in situ* so that local poverty does not push people into the social and economic wretchedness of mass migration. The philosophy encountered harder obstacles here than in Gonda, but has found ways around them.

The first obstacle was that, although the region was better suited to dairying than to crop farming, most farmers had only poor, low-yielding stock. High-yielding exotic breeds are too expensive and, in any case, often perish in these harsh conditions.

In 1975, with Danish help, BAIF began some experiments at Uruli Kanchen near Pune, in Maharashtra state. Using imported semen from top-quality Friesian and Holstein stock, it built

up India's largest herd of high-yielding cows and prize bulls. This foundation stock has since been used to upgrade local herds, combining high milk yields with good survivability under hot, arid conditions.

Simultaneously, with just a fistful of seeds imported from Hawaii, BAIF raised a sizable forest of the *Lucaena leucocephala*, which has been renamed the *ku-babul* in the local language. In the language of the needs of the arid zone it can only be called the "miracle tree." Profusely, and almost interminably because of its very high regenerative power, it yields a protein-rich fodder. It grows a foot a month, seeds twice a year (thus can be multiplied very rapidly), needs very little external watering because its root system goes deep down for ground water, and improves and builds up the topsoil because it is a generous "fixer" of nitrogen and humus.

Extensive network

All this happened only at Uruli Kanchen. But, in the past three years or so, BAIF has built up an extensive delivery network of field operation centres. It has worked at some places on its own, at others in partnership with other voluntary organizations, or as the executive partner or agent of state governments or the central Planning Commission of the Government of India. From each centre a motorcycle-borne veterinary assistant with his nucleus of assistants and village-level agents plays many roles: inseminator, cattle inspector and doctor, *ku-babul* propagator, and motivator and counsellor in all sorts of fields.

All BAIF's many locally adapted forms of social organizations aim to bring together small and marginal farmers (and in some places the landless) so that they can become effective receivers and practitioners of the technology package developed at Uruli Kanchen. It is also hoped that what generally happens to the benefits of general development can be avoided — that they are intercepted by the better off before they can trickle down to the poor, as they are supposed to.

Most users of BAIF's packages have, to begin with, only degraded,



denuded land to work on, whether owned by them or leased from BAIF. The first job of a BAIF centre is to organize work teams of 30 or 40 families to improve their smallholdings, by building up water-storage ponds, check-dams, contour bunding and drainage to check waterlogging or erosion and to retain rainwater for the minimal watering that even the *ku-babul* needs. Most labour is free. Wage-earning opportunities are few within the locality and the alternative, migration, is not possible for everyone. But, out of government relief resources or privately raised funding, BAIF provides free food for the workers throughout the three years or so it takes for intensive application of labour to produce three things: for the improved land and water back-up to start sustaining thicker vegetation; for improved livestock to establish a self-sustaining cycle; and for the *ku-babul* to provide a fodder back-up. Somewhere along the way biogas comes in in many cases.

Costs recovered

Once the package is completed, all costs can be recovered quickly. Detailed financial profiles of a typical BAIF centre show that fodder and dairy production alone can yield as much as 20 times total investment. There are also highly remunerative supplemen-

tary activities. Sericulture and fish culture have been added in some places, industrial pulps in others, at the fringe of a typical one-ha fodder-and-dairy mode. But one of the most promising is nutrient film farming, which, by applying minute quantities of water directly to the roots, produces the same value of yield with a quarter of the land and a fifth of the water required for conventional farming. I saw such farming successfully practised in a village of Harijans, the lowest and poorest of the Indian castes, many of whom had been given land of their own for the first time in their lives.

Though BAIF's work only covers about 10 000 villages so far, the immense potential of its approach can be seen from one fact alone: at a conservative estimate, India has about 60 million ha of underemployed or unemployed land of the kind this approach requires, and there are about as many families at a similar level of idleness whose labour is available if it can be motivated and harnessed. A marriage of this idle labour and idle land could banish India's poverty.

Besides BAIF, there is AGRINDUS, which is proving practically the same thing in about 100 tribal villages in a similar area, except that its approach is as much social as economic. If the costs of the social welfare elements AGRINDUS has added, typically health and education, are excluded,

the costs and benefits of lifting a family above the poverty line are almost exactly the same in the AGRINDUS and BAIF projects. This is not a coincidence but confirmation that these approaches to banishing poverty are not charitable whimsicality but sound economics.

Two other approaches, one governmental and one voluntary, have successfully shown that the third of the three kinds of poverty, that of artisans and craftsmen, can also be alleviated at costs which are less than the benefits and which can be recovered within fairly short periods. The main cost is low-interest loans of amounts not much above \$400 or \$500, as pump-priming for the poorest families to enable them to get started in occupations that have been checked out for economic viability and the requirements of the community. Typically, the net increment in income equals the loan in a couple of years, and the loan is cleared in three to five years.

A governmental scheme, "antyodaya," has already benefited a couple of hundred thousand families in the state of Rajasthan, southwest of Delhi (see "Unto the Last," *ceres*, Jan.-Feb. 1981), in occupations from making camel carts, shoes and bangles to tailoring, smithy shops and tea stalls and even to running a village band! Adoption of antyodaya by other states has been slow but not nil. However, a private action research organization based in New Delhi, the Centre for Policy Research, in partnership with the State Bank of India, has shown in the nearby district of Alwar, in Rajasthan, that an entire craft can be rehabilitated, and its artisans rescued from the sweat shops of Jaipur and restored to their families and farms back in the village. The artists, all of them makers of marble religious idols, now work as their own masters. They retain more of their profits and are training younger members of their families in the craft. In their spare time they are able to look after their bits and pieces of land and generally live in surroundings more congenial than conditions of exile in crowded cities.

Credit is crucial

In all of these schemes, whether for farm or nonfarm occupations, cheap credit is crucial. Therefore one of the most encouraging things that has happened in the past few years is that the banking system has started lending a big hand to special programmes meant for small artisans, craftsmen and cultivators and for still poorer sectors. All important banks, whether purely commercial (all of which nationalized some years ago and since then have been under instructions to open rural branches) or of the rural cooperative system, have been allotted districts for which they have special responsibilities, which, by and large, they have been discharging. The largest banking group, the State Bank of India (SBI), has responsibility for more than a fourth of all districts of India and has the best record of all for discharging it.

There remain some dark spots in the role of bank credit in rural development. For example, much rural credit still comes from the traditional moneylender, who, with his usurious practices, is the antithesis of development. Also, the record of loan repay-

ment, although generally good, has been damaged by some state governments' cancellation, in fits of misguided populism, of all debts of the poorer people. This encourages default in the hope of future cancellations.

But how a little bit of credit is able quickly to generate many times its own amount in quite poor hands is amply proved by a recent SBI report on its own and other banks' credit operations in one typically poor district, Parbhani, in Maharashtra. Per caput income in the district is half the state average; nearly 83 percent of the work force is engaged in agriculture and more than half of it consists of landless labourers. The banks surveyed the credit needs of the district's poorer people in 1974, and especially their capacity to absorb credit profitably. By 1979 they had met these needs by 105 percent, though more in the small industries and services sectors than in the purely agricultural sector. Average borrowings ranged between the equivalent of US\$300 and \$600, depending upon the nature of the occupation. Total loans amounted to roughly \$40 million. The result was an increase in net annual income that would enable the borrower to pay back the loan and

interest in two or three years.

The tools exist

None of this is to say that poverty is about to be banished in India, much less that economic equality is around the corner. This has not happened yet even in Kerala, where more widespread education and more radical politics have removed more poverty than in any other state in India (see "Paradox of Kerala," *ceres*, Mar.-Apr. 1981). Even the marginal alleviation of poverty, which is now definitely possible, has not gone as far as it could have within the present financial and technological limitations, because the will falters more often than it is mobilized in effective ways.

But it does amount to saying that the tools now exist (and many more of them have been proved than I have described here) by which rural self-help can be taken to the point where a contrywide effort to remove poverty can truly lift off. This has been demonstrated on scales large enough to be significant and at costs which show, in a very rough estimate, that all the money needed for it does not exceed the increment in India's national product over no more than two years.

WHAT LEVERS ARE LEFT for the CAMPESESINO?

The frustrations and fears of peasant leadership in Latin America

by Guillermo Almeyra

Rogelio Pedraz, a Jesuit, the leader of his congregation in El Salvador and Director of the elite Catholic University, weighs his words. In recent years 119 priests have been assassinated, among them, the head of the Salvadoran Church, Monsignor Arnulfo Romero, mainly because of their efforts to help the poor. Nearly half of El Salvador's 4.5 million population lives on less than \$20 a month.

Yet Pedraz has said bluntly: "If

in the face and making sensible forecasts. And reality, according to our information, shows that El Salvador is going straight toward armed revolution and a Socialist system. I must add that the people of this country unfortunately had no other possible choice than resorting to armed struggle."¹

Augusto Cotto, Protestant pastor, educated in the United States, member of his church's hierarchy in that country and a university professor, returned

there is something that I really dislike it is Communism, and if I had to choose, I would always prefer the domination of the 'gringos,' of the US, to that of the Russians. But here it is not a question of what I prefer: the problem consists in looking reality

to the country of his birth, El Salvador, to help rural transformation. He died a leader of the revolutionary organization in a mysterious accident on the Panama border. He was a kind, soft, calm, responsible man; in appearance, the antithesis of the classic

guerilla. He often reminded us that no one wants armed revolution. If he had to resort to it, it was because others had blocked all roads to reform and opposed them illegally and brutally.

Manuel da Conceição, peasant leader in northeast Brazil. During the 1960s, under the presidency of João Goulart, he sought to organize unions of small farmers from his region, Maranhão. He was imprisoned for his efforts and tortured, losing a leg to gangrene. After the military coup of 1964, his life was saved thanks to an international campaign. A peasant, a *caipira*, who had never left his native land, he had to choose exile. Now he has returned to continue his task, within the law. Together with the *Comunidades de Base* of the Brazilian church and a party born from the trade union movement he fights for true agrarian reform that will ensure land for the thousands of *posseiros*² whom the transnational companies and the *grileiros*³ are trying to evict, frequently with the support of police and military authorities.

Emidio Quispe, a peasant from Viracocha, in the highland plateaus near La Paz, Bolivia, was one of the representatives of small farmers in the Bolivian *Central Obrera* before the military coup, which outlawed the trade unions. Now he is forced to "conspire" from a shabby hotel in Mexico and decide whether to spend the subsidy he receives as a refugee on cigarettes, on a sandwich or on transportation to go from one town to another to speak, usually at trade union centres or universities.

Three, four, a thousand profiles of persons of very different origin, education, nationality and social standing. All of them, however, lead to a disturbing common conclusion: in many Latin American countries, in order to achieve even minimal reforms, to receive education, to have water and sanitary facilities, soap, a roof over one's head, old-age pensions, the only way left open, even for those who begin with a lawful struggle, is — sooner or later and against their will

— violence. Even the UN General Assembly, in its resolution on El Salvador, has implicitly recognized this.

It is true that the cases of El Salvador and Guatemala are extreme. The same is not happening in many other Latin American countries, whose governments support themselves with the consensus (active or passive) of the rural world and of the sectors of peasant origin rapidly urbanized in recent decades. But what is different in the manner, the form, the pace of social processes, is not different at the bottom. Even in Mexico — legally and socially the most advanced Latin American country and the most democratic — agrarian reformers die at the hands of latifundium-holders who will not accept the organization of Indian cooperatives on lands that they devote to grazing.

In northern Mexico, the leader of one of the country's peasant organizations, Margarito Montes, reported that private armed guards were being employed to drive peasants off their land. In the tourist town of Taxco, State of Guerrero, the peasants of another organization, the Ayala Plan, fought a bitter struggle to prevent their *ejido*'s being taken for use as a private airport for a Holiday Inn, in direct violation of the law.

Ferocious opposition

The Guatemalan Government, which was forced two years ago by a strike in the banana enterprises to set new salaries in that agro-industry and in the coffee plantations, met ferocious opposition from the entrepreneurs against the application of new reforms. Since then there has been a recurrence of mass assassinations of hundreds of indigenous peasants from the northern region, who came down to work in the modern plantations as unskilled seasonal labourers.

Who makes up the rural cadre that fights for reforms? As a rule, in Mexico, it is young civil servants from university, full of good intentions, members of the many organizations of the alienated: the National Institute for Indian Affairs, Coplamar and others. In Central America, priests, rural intellectuals (who may be young peasant soldiers or students who chose

*Is it possible
for peasants to have
a stronger voice
without violence?*

"to go to the people"), militants from the leftist political organizations (or even from the Christian Democratic Party). In South America, priests, peasants with a little education, unionists, political militants and even local deputies and council members. They would have no support from illiterate, often indigenous, populations, if they used only abstract slogans or political statements. Above all they try to change the local situation by organizing rural labour unions, small producer cooperatives and aid centres, and by promoting literacy campaigns. But what is possible in other parts of the world is met with repression here. This in turn breeds revolution. The cost of the small reforms in lives and property, in burned villages and cooperatives, razed crops, assassinated union members leads the young, the overwhelming majority of the population, to resistance as the only way to survive. It also leads those rural organizers who survive to choose means they might never before have contemplated.

In Europe and North America, nations were built on the basis of the democratization of the rural world, incorporating it into the national market, improving its culture and its social and political involvement. In many Latin American countries, the agrarian structure is characterized by the penetration of landholding oligarchies and transnational corporations that block the way to both agrarian reform and the building of a modern nation. As a result, the agrarian struggle becomes a political and international cause. Whatever foreign hands may try to kindle the fire, the origin of revolutionary cadres is to be found in

*The struggle
for land
is not
the only
problem...*

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oligarchies' opposition to reforms. Rural organizers are obliged to choose between total submission to what is repugnant to their conscience or to adopt the Napoleonic slogan: *On s'engage et puis on voit*.

Is it possible for peasants to have a stronger voice in national decisions without resorting to violence? In some countries, yes. For example, in Mexico the possibility of putting pressure on a government that has its support and consensus in the memory of the Mexican Revolution is far from exhausted. Within its party, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, the Government has two supporting pillars. One is the *Congreso del Trabajo* (Labour Congress), i.e., the labour unions, which, incidentally, have so far been unable to organize rural workers. The other is the *Confederación Nacional Campesina* (National Peasants' Confederation), an institutional organization that is also a member of the Party. Rural opposition is disjointed, and only recently has it tended to coordinate its action. Native lands and forests are constantly invaded by local landholders, quite often with the support of local authorities; villages are burned down, women are raped, peasant leaders are assassinated. But the possibility of channelling rural anger through state aid organizations (Coplamar, for example, in charge of promoting marginal areas) or through the local PRI politicians themselves is still alive.

It is therefore possible to set up a local relationship of strength by combining political pressure (for example, a promise to vote or not in municipal or state elections) with the direct resistance of the Indians or peasants. It is even possible to drive a wedge between the differences among national civil servants, some of whom are taking up the fight for the peasants.

This is not so in other countries. In Chile today, 69.2 percent of the holdings account for only 9.8 percent of the overall farming area calculated in ha of basic irrigation. Former landowners, many dispossessed by previous agrarian reforms, have been replaced by stockholding companies or cooperatives that subject the small peasant to a harsher regime than that he knew before and that wield much more political power, thanks to their integra-



tion with the state.

Capitalistic modernization

A capitalistic modernization of agriculture is occurring throughout Latin America; it lies at the bottom of a massive expulsion of small peasants. In Mexico the most skilled and the youngest peasants go across the United States border as "wetbacks" at the rate of one and a half million a year. Even children too young to work come to Mexico City at the rate of 600 000 a year, turning it into a monster beyond governing. The same happens with the Guatemalan Indians who go to the coastal lowlands at harvest time or who flood the southern states of Mexico when there is farm work to be done.

More than eight million *boias frias* (so called because they never have a hot meal) wait around Brazil's urban squares to get a day's job (or several days' work if they are lucky and strong) with no roots and no future. In fact, the modern agricultural sector does not require permanent labour: instead, it needs to keep up the minifundium with self-sufficient production to have at hand a reserve of cheap labour. It is difficult, therefore,

to bring about a change in the rural situation that is not radical. And it is difficult to separate the struggle to quench the thirst for land from the struggle to establish or regain democracy by whatever means.

In Brazil, CONTAG (National Federation of Agricultural Workers) declared in August 1980 that "we believe that we rural workers should actively participate in the struggle for the full reestablishment of democratic freedom and conditions of justice, since there will be no freedom for labour unions in a nondemocratic system."

Under totalitarian regimes, the peasant vote is no longer important. This has led to a lessening of the contractual force of the small peasants at the national and local levels, which has not yet come about in Mexico. On top of this, the repression of local reformist cadres forces any action for change to become semiclandestine, no matter how lawful and limited it may be. Lawfulness is not identified with the legality imposed by the state in violation of the rights guaranteed by their own constitutions and the UN. The state, in the face of the peasants' protests and, in particular, those of the

indigenous communities, reacts with "national security" laws and militarizes the areas occupied by those communities, as in the case of Guatemala.

Resistance into struggle

It is no surprise, therefore, that resistance against the state should turn into a struggle that is bound up with great interests and thus builds another embryonic state in the areas of conflict. In this sense, the fight for rights and for the reforms necessary to ensure them, in many Latin American countries, is closer to that waged by the peasants of the former Portuguese colonies than to that of any other countries. The peasants are increasingly becoming the prevailing forces among the guerrillas, while the reformist cadres of the past become rural revolutionary leaders.

Does this mean that every road of access to legal action is forever closed to rural organizers and the poor peasants of most Latin American countries? Not at all. Even under the most repressive regimes reforms are attempted and legal loopholes sought.

In El Salvador, the person responsible for agrarian reform was assassinated by the extreme right (for asking, on the eve of elections, to put an end to a "demagogic" law), but there are groups, mainly among the Christian Democrats, that still try to change the agrarian organization in the country despite the government role in repression.

Protesting new laws

In Bolivia, Peru, Brazil and even in Chile the peasants (for example, the Chilean *mapuches*) are protesting against the new laws and calling for the return of the old ones. Or, to put it more directly, they issue publications, hold meetings and come to agreements with Christian communities of various origins, with the students and with sectors of different parties. One never knows whether the publication of a piece of writing will or will not be a cause for repression: one publishes and then one sees what hap-

pens. One can never foresee whether a publication will be tolerated or repressed.

In Nicaragua, the *Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo* (Farmers' Association) is attempting to organize the peasants, now scattered, and to give them weight in state decisions as to what, how and for whom to produce. This is a change that, not-

But that is not the only problem. Housing, rights, education and clothing are also matters to be dealt with. For example, Juvencio, a Nahuatl Indian from the arid state of Guerrero. This small farmer lives mainly from his crafts. His few emaciated pigs fight over the goats' droppings for survival. The little maize that he sows with his old, nearly blind



withstanding all its limitations, is being applied in neighbouring countries to encourage the democratic struggle and national organization.

It should be pointed out that the struggle for land is still the crucial problem in the rural world and that the solution to the problem of land tenure is of vital importance in order to avoid uncontrolled urbanization and the marginalization of millions of farmers.

father is not enough to meet the needs of his family of eight. So he has to make and sell the beautiful masks for which his region is famous in order to eat, send his children to school, and repair his one-room house, which has a dirt floor and no sanitary facilities or drinking water.

As a craftsman he is a relatively well-to-do man in his village, but when he goes to Mexico City, after hours on a country bus, he is robbed on the

street or at the bus stop by persons claiming to be policemen, because they know that an Indian has no documents and no protection. So he loses both his meagre earnings and his materials. His problem is not so much that of needing more land — since he already has a small piece — but rather of needing support and, above all, respect.

Juvencio is highly religious, a “guardian” of Saint Augustine at village celebrations, but he is beginning to get fed up. In the municipal elections of his village the Communists came out on top. Of course, neither Juvencio nor the great majority of those who voted, as he did, in favour of the Mexican Communist Party have the slightest idea of what that party stands for: they simply wanted to vote “against.” The result was that Juvencio’s village began to be considered hostile and now has even less government help than before.

Capacity for suffering

The Mexican peasant has an enormous capacity for suffering abuse, but he is hard-headed and tenacious. He hears everybody talk about the Mexican Revolution — a revolution brought about by people like him and such fighters for independence as General Guerrero, also a peasant and an Indian. Part of the reason for the large number of abstentions in Mexican elections is that peasants like Juvencio have not severed their bonds with the state born of the Revolution of Madero, Zapata and Villa. But they are a time bomb. If the state does not defuse it, more than one Juvencio may stop being tame.

Rapid expansion by agro-industries has caused massive migrations, the expulsion of millions of peasants from the lands where they lived at subsistence level and the disappearance of small, well-off landholders. The better lands have been put to strawberries and other fruits and flowers for the foreign market, to the disadvantage of food production. The *Sistema Alimentario Mexicano* (SAM) is a sign of the awakening of awareness on the part of the Government of Mexico of the ex-

The origin of revolutionary cadres is to be found in oligarchies’ opposition to reforms

plosive potential of the penetration of the countryside by finance and big business. Other countries have repressive laws instead of a SAM, and the difference is not small. It should be noted, of course, that the possibilities for action in Mexico on the part of those who sincerely want to avoid the “Central Americanization” of the social situation in the rural areas are therefore far superior to those found in other countries.

Ending the fragmentation

The process of economic growth and industrialization has created the possibility of contact between peasants and urban sectors (workers, students, marginalized people who struggle for housing, etc.). From this stems the possibility of ending the fragmentation and isolation of peasants’ struggles and of looking for a national organization to fight for a coherent reform policy. The policy that prevails in many countries to the benefit of only the small financial, agro-industrialist, exporting and importing sectors also concentrates on another pole which shows up as the nation against that minority that is bound up with the transnationals. This is also an element of strength for a sector that has been hurt in its own livelihood: the peasants who otherwise would be doomed to disappearance, pure and simple. In fact, they, as well as the Guatemalan *quichés*, are now able to reach national and even international public opinion. Thus they emerge from their anonymous, neglected, vulnerable lives.

National organization, thanks to the efforts of the most varied currents and forces of the ecclesiastical communities or reformist sectors of the state, is the focal problem now being faced by the

Latin American peasant — hence the present efforts toward unification in almost all those countries and the transformation of rural organizers and local leaders into coordinators of broader, nationwide enterprises. This process, as we have said, varies according to the regions and countries and faces different types of resistance.

The Latin American countryside is in a transitional phase with large upheavals, along with which there are changes in the rural populations, in the relations between rural classes, between them and the state, between reforms and direct political action, between the city and the peasantry. The pact between the Bolivian miners and the peasants neighbouring the mines who supplied the miners with food during their strikes in exchange for support for their claims is one example of a process that is tending to spread. The transnationals put an end to the old Latin American society and, naturally, to its basis: the former agrarian relationships that were not only economic but also social, political and cultural. An understanding of this reality produces contradictions: a reformist policy in Mexico, which has a democratic regime, and a repressive one in dictatorial countries.

The reformist forces of the country workers must also, of course, take into account what there is in common and what is different in this new overall situation, both as regards their programme objectives and their methods. Once again, the historical substantiation of a Jesuit applies to this analysis. The law of gravity also applies to social situations: a river, although blocked or dammed up, still runs to the sea. And while there is time and latitude it is better to channel it properly rather than run the risk of the disastrous floods caused by inept social experts and the sorcerer’s apprentices who think only of themselves.

¹ Statements made by Rogelio Pedraz, S.J., to a special correspondent of the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, which published them on 27 February 1982.

² Peasants who farm empty lots.

³ People who occupy by armed force lands belonging to others.

resources

CERES, Journal of the FAO. 6/year, \$12. Order from UNIPUB, 650 First Ave., NY, NY 10016.

COOPERATIVES AND THE POOR. Uma Lele. World Bank Publications Unit, 1818 H St. NW, Wash. D.C. 20433. Reprint Series 169. 17pp. Free.

FEASIBILITY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PARTICIPATION. Normal Uphoff, et.al. 1979. Center for International Studies, 170 Uris Hall, Cornell Univ., Ithaca, NY 14853. 338pp. \$5.50.

FOOD FIRST COMIC. Leonard Rifas. 1982. Institute for Food & Development Policy, 1885 Mission St., San Francisco, CA 94103. \$1.00.

MANAGING INDUCED RURAL DEVELOPMENT. Jon R. Moris. 1981. Internatl. Development Inst., Indiana Univ., Bloomington, IN 47405. \$12.50.

PARTICIPATION OF THE POOR IN RURAL ORGANIZATIONS. Bernard van Heck, ed. 1979. #92-5-100 789-6. Publications Div., FAO, Via delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Rome, Italy.

THE PEASANTS' CHARTER. Programme of Action approved at WCARRD, 1979. Free from World Food Day Secretariat, FAO, Rome; or FAO Liaison Office, 1776 F St. NW, Wash. DC 20437.

SUCCESS AT THE BOTTOM: How Can We Help? Hunger Notes, Nov. 1981. World Hunger Education Service, 1317 G St. NW, Wash. DC 20005. \$1.50.

network news

LOCAL NEWS STRENGTHENS ADVOCACY

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), one of the oldest and most effective advocacy organizations on domestic hunger, finds items from local newspapers on local hunger or poverty conditions are powerful tools in changing attitudes of members of Congress as well as editors of national news media. Send local clippings to FRAC, 1319 F St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20004.

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Los Ninos, an interfaith international child serving organization, is looking for volunteers to staff its Justice House on the San

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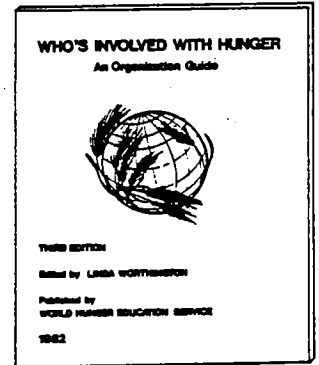
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