
Peasant Mobilization for Land Reform: Historical Case Studies and Theoretical Considerations

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◆ Summary/Résumé/Resumen

Summary

In this paper, more or less successful past social mobilizations for the promulgation of agrarian reform laws and their implementation are examined in roughly chronological order, from the early experience of Mexico, Russia, China and Japan to Bolivia, Cuba, Indonesia and Zimbabwe. Cases where effective reforms did not come about, such as the Philippines, Brazil and India, are also considered.

Generalizing from the case studies, it seems that a certain level of frustration incites peasants to risk building or joining a peasant organization. Comparison of the different case study areas where important regional or nationwide movements began reveals that they were not the poorest, most marginalized agricultural areas but those where “development” had created growing discrepancies. Another characteristic shared by these areas was that they were not isolated — most of them had access to a city — and were less rigidly traditional and feudal than other areas. They also tended to be densely populated.

The first steps toward peasant organization were often taken by peasants who wanted to solve a specific problem or deal with a concrete grievance. A real impulse was often achieved, however, when those who were in a position to solve the problem or to respond to the grievance were not willing to do so. This forced the peasants to become more aware of their frustration. This rigidity of the powerholders was often motivated by fear that by giving in to requests from below, the status quo would be in danger.

Once a peasant organization had come into existence, a process of consolidation and of gaining strength generally followed. It seems that the availability of charismatic, or solidarity-inspiring, leadership among the peasants was highly important in getting an organization to the point where it could confront elites. Cases of abuse were presented to the courts, and mass demonstrations and public meetings were held to support petitions for justice or land. Continuous frustration, often encountered during the slow course of legal procedure, prepared the ground for more radical peasant action such as peaceful or symbolic occupation or invasion of lands considered to be expropriable.

There is considerable evidence regarding the obstacles to peasant mobilization. Certain strategies used by large landowners, often with state support, to prevent peasants from organizing included the firing of agricultural workers or the eviction of tenants who were potential or actual leaders and who took the initiative to organize their peers. If such actions did not result in preventing an organization from emerging, the assassination of the most important leader(s) has in a number of cases tried to block the organizational process.

In most cases of social mobilization land redistribution was the strongly desired objective. This was especially so in areas where the creation or extension of large *latifundios* or plantations, through usurpation of land belonging to local or indigenous peasants, had occurred. The more recent the despoliation and usurpation, the more strongly felt was the injustice. It was then generally some form of direct action from the peasants which made it clear beyond doubt to the authorities, as well as to the vested interests and landholding groups, that peasant

demands were serious. There are abundant examples where effective reform measures were won by militant peasant organizations through such direct action approaches. This happened frequently with severe risks for social and political stability and occasionally at the cost of many lives, particularly on the side of the peasants.

Recapitulating the strategic aspects of peasant mobilization, one could say that initially the means used to present the demands were generally moderate: petitions, lawsuits, and complaints to the courts or the labour inspector. But wherever peasants had some organizing experience or could count on support from people with such experience, more radical demands, such as land reform, emerged. After meeting with the intransigence or even violence of landed elites, an escalation of these demands occurred, generally accompanied by an escalation of the means used to exert pressure for them. Direct action then became a frequently used approach and land invasions, generally explicitly peaceful and non-violent, were an expression of this. Violence generally came from the landlords' or government's side in this process of escalation. Consistent use of the non-violent strategy thus could bring peasants into revolutionary action because of the intransigence and rigidity of elites.

Once land reform was effectively being implemented, the role of peasant organizations took various forms. An important function played by peasant organizations in the process of land distribution was to fill the vacuum created by the disappearance of the large landowner as the central figure in or behind the local government and power structure. There were many indications that where a peasant organization played a role in the distribution of land and the preceding struggle, post-reform measures and programmes, such as the formation of co-operatives or credit societies, could be carried out more easily. Local leadership had considerable experience both in dealing with official agencies and in harnessing support from the members.

It is remarkable that in the increasingly abundant literature over the years on rural development and on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as part of the growing interest in the role of "civil society", hardly any attention is paid to the kind of militant rural organizations created by underprivileged people on their own behalf — such as peasant or tenant unions. Mainstream scholars in the rural development field have only gradually and partially learned to appreciate the tremendous political potential of peasants to mobilize for radical reform.

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Resumé

Dans ce document, les mouvements de mobilisation sociale qui dans le passé se sont déroulés avec plus ou moins de réussite sont analysés dans un ordre chronologique à partir des premières expériences ayant eu lieu au Mexique, en Russie, en Chine et au Japon (et Taïwan), puis en Bolivie, à Cuba, en Indonésie jusqu'à la plus récente au Zimbabwe. Les cas où des réformes efficaces n'ont pas abouti, comme aux Philippines, au Brésil, et en Inde sont aussi pris en compte.

En généralisant à partir des études de cas, il semble que ce soit un certain niveau de frustration qui conduise les paysans à prendre le risque de mettre en place ou

rejoindre une organisation paysanne. En comparant les zones d'études de cas où d'importants mouvements à l'échelle régionale ou nationale ont commencé, il est évident que ce n'était pas les plus pauvres, les régions agricoles les plus marginalisées, mais celles où le "développement" avait favorisé des oppositions.

Ces zones ont une autre caractéristique en commun qui est qu'elles ne sont pas isolées, la plupart d'entre elles ayant un accès facile aux grandes villes, et ont une moins forte rigidité traditionnelle aussi bien que féodale que les autres régions. Elles ont en outre une population dense.

Les premières démarches vers des organisations paysannes ont été faites le plus souvent par des paysans, qui voulaient résoudre un problème spécifique, ou qui avaient affaire à une injustice flagrante. Les événements se sont accélérés cependant dans les cas où ceux qui étaient en position de résoudre le problème ou réparer l'injustice, n'ont pas eu la volonté de le faire. Ceci força les paysans à prendre plus conscience de leurs frustrations. Cette rigidité des détenteurs du pouvoir était souvent motivée par la peur. Ils craignaient qu'en cédant aux demandes venues de la base, ils ne mettent le statu quo en danger.

Une fois qu'une organisation paysanne avait pris forme, il s'en suivait un processus de consolidation et de renforcement. Il semble qu'une direction dotée de charisme, d'un esprit de solidarité, étaient fort importants pour amener une organisation à se confronter à une élite. Les cas d'abus étaient présentés devant la justice. Des manifestations ainsi que des réunions publiques étaient organisées pour soutenir les pétitions pour la justice et la terre. La frustration continuelle subie durant le lent déroulement de la procédure judiciaire, préparait le terrain pour une action paysanne plus radicale, telle que l'occupation pacifique ou symbolique, ou l'invasion des terres considérées comme susceptibles d'expropriation.

Il existe des preuves évidentes des obstacles à la mobilisation paysanne. Certaines stratégies utilisées par les grands propriétaires terriens, le plus souvent avec le soutien de l'Etat, pour empêcher les paysans de s'organiser, ont même été jusqu'à tirer sur les travailleurs agricoles ou chasser les fermiers qui étaient des "leaders" actuels ou potentiels, et qui prenaient l'initiative d'organiser leurs camarades. Si ces actions n'ont pas empêché l'émergence d'une organisation, l'assassinat des "leaders" les plus importants a souvent été une tentative de bloquer le processus d'organisation.

Dans la plupart des cas de mobilisation sociale, la redistribution de la terre était le but le plus fortement recherché. Ceci était spécialement le cas dans les zones où la création ou l'extension de grandes *latifundias*, ou de plantations obtenues suite à l'usurpation des terres appartenant aux paysans indigènes locaux, s'étaient fait récemment. Plus récentes étaient les spoliations et les usurpations, plus fortement était ressentie l'injustice. Il y avait en général une forme d'action directe de la part des paysans qui levaient le doute des autorités, des ayants-droits, et des grandes entreprises agricoles, quant au sérieux des réclamations paysannes. Il existe beaucoup d'exemples où des mesures efficaces de réforme ont été gagnées par les militants des organisations paysannes suite à ces approches directes. Ceci se réalisait fréquemment avec de grands risques pour la stabilité politique et sociale, et parfois avec la perte de beaucoup de vies humaines, particulièrement du côté paysan.

Pour récapituler les aspects stratégiques de la mobilisation paysanne, on pourrait dire qu'au départ, la manière utilisée pour introduire la demande était modérée : pétitions, procès, plaintes devant la justice ou l'inspection du travail. Mais partout où les paysans avaient une quelconque expérience d'organisation ou pouvaient compter sur des personnes ayant cette expérience, des demandes plus radicales telle la réforme agraire apparurent. Après s'être heurtés à l'intransigence et même la violence de l'élite foncière, il s'ensuivait une demande plus insistante, généralement accompagnée par une escalade dans les moyens de pression à leur disposition. Ainsi, l'action directe devint l'approche la plus souvent utilisée et l'invasion des terres, généralement de façon pacifique et non violente, était une expression de cette approche. La violence venait généralement du côté des propriétaires terriens ou du gouvernement dans le processus d'escalade du conflit. L'usage répété de la stratégie non violente pouvait ainsi conduire les paysans dans une action révolutionnaire en réponse à l'intransigence et à la rigidité des élites.

Une fois la réforme agraire réellement appliquée, le rôle des organisations paysannes a pris des formes variées. Un rôle important joué par les organisations paysannes dans le processus de distribution de la terre, était qu'une fois cette procédure réalisée, elles occupaient le vide laissé par la disparition des grands propriétaires terriens comme personnage central dans ou auprès du gouvernement local ou dans la structure du pouvoir. Là où les organisations paysannes ont joué un rôle dans la lutte préalable et dans la distribution de la terre, les mesures et les programmes d'après-réforme, telle la mise en place de coopératives et de sociétés de crédit ont pu se faire plus facilement. Les dirigeants locaux avaient acquis une expérience considérable pour traiter avec les agences officielles comme pour garder le soutien des membres.

Il est surprenant de constater que malgré l'abondance croissante à travers les années d'une littérature sur le développement rural et les organisations non gouvernementales (ONG) comme partie prenante du rôle croissant de la "société civile", presque aucune attention n'est accordée au cas des organisations rurales militantes, créées par des personnes peu privilégiées telles les paysans et les unions de fermiers. Certains intellectuels travaillant dans le domaine du développement rural ont seulement graduellement et partialement appris à apprécier l'immense potentiel politique des paysans à se mobiliser pour une réforme radicale.

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Resumen

La relación entre movilización social y reforma agraria ha sido una cuestión para la discusión (y un poco de experimentación) en círculos de las Naciones Unidas y sus agencias especializadas desde los años 50. De los varios estudios auspiciados por la OIT y la FAO en los años 60 y 70, quedó en claro que la participación social en el desarrollo rural depende primordialmente de la composición institucional existente en un país o región. La cuestión principal es: ¿Participará la gente efectivamente en el (y compartirá los resultados del) desarrollo, o bien, participará en la resistencia pasiva o activa y se levantará en contra de medidas que frustran sus expectativas o que son desventajosas para ella? En el segundo caso, los

afectados pueden elegir la movilización para cambiar la composición institucional, por medio de un movimiento de reforma radical o hasta una revolución.

En este estudio se examinan de manera más o menos cronológica los casos relativamente exitosos de pasadas movilizaciones sociales para promulgar leyes de reforma agraria y su implementación ocurridos en México, Rusia, China y Japón (y Taiwan), Bolivia, Cuba, Indonesia y la más reciente experiencia de Zimbabwe. También se analizan casos como los de las Filipinas, Brasil e India donde las reformas no resultaron efectivas.

Los estudios de caso nos permiten enunciar que, en general, pareciera existir cierto nivel de frustración socioeconómica de parte de los campesinos que los lleva a asociarse a –o iniciar- una organización. Comparando los diversos casos en donde importantes movimientos regionales o nacionales se iniciaron, resulta evidente que los puntos de origen no fueron las zonas rurales más pobres y marginalizadas, sino aquellas en las cuales el “desarrollo” había creado crecientes discrepancias. Otras características compartidas por estas regiones es que no están geográficamente aisladas – la mayoría teniendo fácil acceso a ciudades importantes –, están densamente pobladas y son menos rígidamente tradicionales y feudales. Un significativo efecto secundario de la “modernización” y la concentración de la tierra en manos de unos pocos propietarios absentistas fue el cambio en el lazo tradicional que unía al propietario y al campesino. Así, los aspectos explotadores del sistema tradicional se hicieron más evidentes. El estudio comparativo de los casos muestra que, en el largo plazo, la dureza de los propietarios contribuyó fuertemente a la toma de acciones defensivas organizadas por parte de los campesinos.

Generalmente, los primeros pasos en la organización de los campesinos fueron realizados por aquellos que deseaban resolver un problema específico o una injusticia concreta. El impulso real fue frecuentemente dado cuando aquellos que se hallaban en posición de solucionar el problema o responder por la injusticia cometida se negaron a hacerlo, llevando a que los campesinos se concientizaran más de sus frustraciones. La rigidez de aquéllos que poseían el poder fue muchas veces motivada por el miedo a que, al acceder a peticiones “de los de abajo”, se pondría en peligro el status quo.

La existencia de un liderazgo carismático o solidario entre los campesinos fue un factor decisivo en la organización de los campesinos para confrontar a la élite. El punto fuerte de los líderes del campesinado fue la capacidad para articular de manera clara lo que sus seguidores sentían respecto de sus frustraciones socioeconómicas.

En algunas circunstancias, figuras tales como organizadores de origen urbano que “descendieron a los pueblos” cumplieron con las mismas funciones. En un principio, generalmente, encontraron resistencia y desconfianza, pero muchas veces se convertían en líderes respetados, gracias a cualidades personales y a los métodos empleados. En muchos casos, la existencia de una organización rudimentaria, posibilitaba a los líderes políticos urbanos que simpatizaban con los campesinos a asumir el liderazgo total de la organización y ayudarla a tener impacto regional y hasta nacional.

Una vez que la organización campesina estaba fundada, seguía un proceso de consolidación y fortalecimiento necesario para obtener beneficios concretos de la lucha. Se presentaron casos de abusos en las cortes y se celebraron manifestaciones populares y encuentros públicos para apoyar las peticiones de justicia o de tierras. La constante frustración experimentada por los campesinos durante el curso de los lentos procedimientos legales, preparó el terreno para acciones más radicales, a veces con prácticas que sobrepasaban los límites de las posibilidades legales, como la desobediencia civil. El método más efectivo y practicado fue la ocupación o invasión pacífica o simbólica de tierras consideradas expropiables. Estas iniciativas eran, sin duda, riesgosas ya que podían fallar y desilusionar a los seguidores u ocasionar represiones implacables.

Existe evidencia considerable en lo concerniente a los obstáculos frente a la movilización campesina. Estrategias usadas por los grandes terratenientes, muchas veces con apoyo del Estado, para prevenir la organización de los campesinos, incluyen el despido de trabajadores agrarios o el desahucio de los arrendatarios que contaban con el potencial para liderar o que ya eran líderes de alguna organización. Si estas acciones no lograban impedir la organización de los campesinos, procedían, entonces, al asesinato de los líderes.

Ha sido ampliamente documentado que las autoridades legales de zonas rurales de la mayoría de los países, generalmente, interpretan la ley en favor de los propietarios, aún cuando esto signifique la circunvención o violación de la ley o los derechos humanos. Cuando la legitimidad del sistema existente era seriamente socavada por los mismos modos con los cuales este sistema pretendía mantenerse, los campesinos tomaban conciencia de la represión y se desencadenaba un fuerte sentimiento revolucionario. En muchas ocasiones, los obstáculos a la organización campesina han sido contraproducentes en el largo plazo, ayudando a movimientos inicialmente moderados a conseguir mayor cohesión. Sin embargo, en algunas oportunidades, la politización de los movimientos ha disminuido su efectividad. Mientras que la influencia ejercida por los grupos políticos de izquierda fortaleció a las organizaciones campesinas en la mayoría de los casos, en otras oportunidades, las fuerzas opositoras a tales grupos radicales llevaron a la destrucción de movimientos potencialmente poderosos.

En la mayoría de los casos, el objetivo fuertemente deseado fue la redistribución de la tierra. Esto sucedió así, en particular, en aquellas áreas donde la creación o extensión de grandes latifundios o plantaciones por medio de la usurpación de tierras pertenecientes a campesinos o indígenas locales fue reciente. Cuanto más reciente el despojo y la usurpación, más sentida fue la injusticia. Generalmente, fue algún tipo de acción directa por parte de los campesinos la que mostró claramente a las autoridades y grupos terratenientes que las demandas de los campesinos eran serias. Existen numerosos ejemplos en los cuales medidas efectivas en favor de la reforma agraria resultaron de tales acciones directas por parte de las organizaciones de campesinos militantes, aún cuando hayan sido acompañadas de alto riesgo para la estabilidad social y política y, ocasionalmente, costando muchas vidas, especialmente del lado de los campesinos.

Al recapitular los aspectos estratégicos de la movilización campesina, se podría decir que los medios utilizados primeramente fueron generalmente moderados: peticiones, juicios y quejas presentadas en las cortes o ante el inspector de trabajo. Pero, en aquellas oportunidades en las que los campesinos tenían cierta

experiencia organizativa o contaban con el apoyo de personas con dicha experiencia, emergieron demandas más radicales como la reforma agraria. Luego de encontrarse con la intransigencia y violencia de la élite terrateniente, se intensificaron las demandas y aumentaron los medios de presión utilizados. Durante el proceso de escalamiento, la violencia provino, en general, de parte de los terratenientes o del gobierno. El uso consistente de la estrategia campesina de la no-violencia y la intransigencia y rigidez de las élites contó con el potencial para llevar a los campesinos a la acción revolucionaria.

Una vez que la reforma agraria fue efectivamente implementada, el rol de las organizaciones campesinas adoptó diferentes formas. Una de las importantes funciones de estas organizaciones durante el proceso de distribución de tierras fue la de llenar el vacío dejado por la desaparición de los grandes propietarios como figuras centrales en o detrás del gobierno local y la estructura de poder. En aquellas situaciones en las cuales las organizaciones campesinas desempeñaron su debido rol durante la distribución de tierras y la lucha precedente, la formación de cooperativas o sociedades de crédito se realizó de manera más fácil. El liderazgo local contaba con considerable experiencia en negociar con las agencias oficiales y en encaminar el apoyo de los miembros.

Debe remarcarse que en la abundante literatura sobre desarrollo rural y organizaciones no gubernamentales, escasa atención se ha prestado a las organizaciones campesinas militantes o a las uniones de arrendatarios.

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◆ Abbreviations and Acronyms

AIKS	All-India Kisan Sabha
AMT	Aguman Ding Maldong Talapagobra (League of Poor Labourers, The Philippines)
ANAP	National Association of Small Cultivators
BTI	Barisan Tani Indonesia (Indonesian Peasant Front)
BUDC	Barrio United Defence Corps (Philippines)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (United States)
CONTAG	Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura (Federation of Agricultural Workers, Brazil)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFF	Federation of Free Farmers
Huk	Hubko ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon (People's Army against the Japanese), Philippines
ILO	International Labour Organization
JCRR	Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction (Taiwan Province of China)
KMP	Kilusang Magnubukid ng Philipinas (National Peasant Movement in the Philippines)
KPMP	Katipunan Pambansa ng mga Magbubukid sa Pilipinas (National Union of Peasants in the Philippines)
MNR	National Revolutionary Movement (Bolivia)
MST	Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Brazil)
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	non-governmental organization
NPA	New People's Army (Philippines)
PKI	Indonesian Communist Party
PRRM	Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
ZANLA	Zimbabwe Nationalist Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZANUPF	Zimbabwe African National Union/Popular Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union

INTRODUCTION¹

Although the past three decades have seen a global trend toward rapid urbanization, still the majority of people, especially the “poor”, are living or trying to live off agriculture. But in spite of — or perhaps due to — “development” and “modernization”, this has become increasingly difficult. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO’s) 1996 World Food Summit, the global economy, as it is structured at present, will not be able to abolish hunger and starvation among mostly rural masses during the next two decades. Part of this dilemma, and a key reason for the almost cancerous growth of mega-cities in Third World countries, is the increase of landlessness among the peasant population. This increase is due partly to population growth, and it has only been partially offset by resettlement or colonization in virgin areas. However, the real driving force behind this trend has been the modernization of agriculture, particularly its commercialization, including the large-scale privatization and commoditization of land. In this context, cash-crop production, especially for the world market, has been a crucial factor. As Korten has pointed out:

In Brazil, the conversion of agriculture from smallholders producing food for domestic consumption to capital-intensive production for export displaced 28.4 million people between 1960 and 1980 — a number greater than the entire population of Argentina. In India, large-scale development projects have displaced 20 million people over a forty-year period (1995:49).

One element of this capital-intensive production trend has been a decline in official interest in radical land reform measures since the 1980s. As noted by Cristina Liamzon (1996:317): “Third World countries were increasingly forced to veer away from rural development programmes that included agrarian reform, to those designed to expand the production of export crops to service external debts”. This point was also made in a recent document of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, entitled **Towards a Better Distribution of Land: The Challenge of Agrarian Reform**. The document questions the further concentration of lands in the hands of a few large farmers, agro-industrial concerns and export-growers at the cost of small growers producing traditional farm products, often through violence, intimidation and a climate of terror (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 1997:18). The expropriation of the land of indigenous populations is also denounced, with the Council arguing that land is more than just a commodity for those who live off it: “In the culture and spirituality of indigenous populations, land is seen as the basis of every value and as the unifying factor that nourishes their identity” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 1997:17).

In addition to some grassroots activities by indigenous, landless and semi-landless peasants, a worldwide concern for a more appropriate land use has been expressed by those concerned with ecology and the future of humankind. The link between

¹ This report is based mainly on field research and advisory work for the International Labour Organization during the 1960s and early 1970s, especially from data on Mexico, Bolivia, Brazil, Japan, Indonesia and the Philippines. Other material has been derived from literature or field visits in relation with academic research or NGO activities, particularly involving data on Russia, China, India, Cuba and Zimbabwe. More extensive collections of most of those data, plus sources and bibliographies, are presented in Huizer 1967, 1972, 1980 and 1991.

environmental deterioration and large-scale commercial agriculture is increasingly coming under scrutiny. Furthermore, new appeals are being made to governments and enlightened elites to show the “political will” to transcend vested interests for the benefit of humanity. Thus, even in the moderate United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report (the so-called Brundtland report), it was stated:

In many countries where land is very unequally distributed, land reform is a basic requirement. Without it, institutional and policy changes meant to protect the resource base can actually promote inequalities by shutting the poor off from resources and by favouring those with large farms, who are better able to obtain the limited credit and services available. By leaving hundreds of millions without options, such changes can have the opposite of their intended effect, ensuring the continued violation of ecological imperatives (WCED, 1987:141).

But this report did not critically assess the effects on local peasants of the growth of agri-business interests in many areas. And the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, conspicuously de-emphasized measures that might interfere with such interests (Chatterjee and Finger, 1994), which were well represented by the Business Council on Sustainable Development, a lobbying group of transnational corporations (Schmidheiny, 1992). Though there is a growing concern in these circles, it is from non-profit and non-governmental organizations that serious (though not always effective) action is being undertaken toward ending the unsustainable exploitation of the earth’s resources. In this context, Korten speaks of “the ecological revolution” (1995:261). Recent UNRISD studies (Barraclough and Ghimire, 1995:195–200) emphasize that small cultivators often use their scarce land resources more intensively and sustainably than large landholders, using this as an argument in favour of land reform.

In his study on food policy, Barraclough (1991:207) pointed out that when peasant movements have reclaimed land alienated from them by colonial settlers or large-scale farm enterprises, they can be classified as ecology movements. These movements were mostly forms of resistance against destruction of local “life support systems” (either communal land or small farm units) and their replacement with large-scale, often ecologically and socially harmful commercial farms or plantations producing for the world market. As Barraclough (1991) and several others (Huizer, 1967; Wolf, 1969; Landsberger, 1969) have shown, movements of peasants to defend, conserve or recover their ancestral land and livelihood have proliferated during this century as a reaction to aggressively advancing large-scale modes of production. However, it appears that during the last few decades not much progress has been made by such movements, due to the resilience of commercial landed interests and the state acting in their support.

After having studied and worked with peasants and their small or large-scale organizations for many years (see Huizer, 1967; 1972; 1980; 1991), I have the impression that a considerable misunderstanding about peasants’ human, political or even revolutionary potential prevails. In spite of empirical evidence to the contrary, many policy makers and scholars (mainstream as well as Marxist) consider materially poor peasants to be passive, apathetic and fatalistic or, on the other hand, spontaneously or almost irrationally rebellious when their life becomes unbearable. Rarely is attention or appreciation shown toward the rational and

pragmatic approaches of relatively powerless and apparently submissive peasants and women to the often irrationally brutal ways powerholders (landlords, merchants, money lenders, party cadres, development bureaucrats) try to control peasant behaviour and to maintain the peasants — generally with the strong support of army and police — in an exploited state. This is well documented by the late Ernest Feder (1971). In spite of this disadvantage — or perhaps due to it — peasants and their movements have been able to bring about drastic or even massive revolutionary social and political changes in a number of cases.

In this regard, Korten (1995:293–94) sees in the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico a hopeful trend toward “an awakened civil society” and considers it “the first revolution of the twenty-first century”. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) came dramatically to the foreground on 1 January 1994, the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) officially went into effect. A number of small towns in Chiapas were occupied by indigenous peasant rebel forces to demonstrate that they would no longer tolerate brutality and land usurpation by local landlords and politicians, which were made possible in part by the recent changes in agrarian legislation and Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution that formerly protected communal land possession but now — as part of the NAFTA agreement — favoured large-scale privatization. Many cases of violent dislodgement of peasants, and assassination of their leaders, had been reported, but the situation only worsened. Armed resistance — though more symbolic than real, but well propagandized on the internet — appeared to be the only way to get attention and justice. The rebel action had been prepared carefully and had cultural aspects, rooted in the Maya indigenous spirituality with an ecological and earth conservationist component. Will it inspire other similar social movements?

The relationship between social mobilization and land reform has been an issue for discussion (and some experimentation) in United Nations circles, including some specialized agencies, since the 1950s. And during the past decades, considerable progress has been made in some countries, while elsewhere stagnation in these areas of concern has caused the emergence or continuation of social tensions and “agrarian unrest”. In fact, the World Land Reform Conference, organized in Rome in 1966 by the United Nations, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), based on a careful reporting of successes and failures in this field from many countries over the course of years, concluded the following:

It was observed that, in some countries, legal obstacles and sometimes violent oppression against peasant organizations had impeded any movement of this nature. In some countries, the peasants relied on such dramatic action as hunger marches or peaceful invasion of expropriable land. Obstacles impeding the formation and activities of peasant organizations needed to be removed, and complete liberty for independent peasant organizations to unite in their best interests needed to be guaranteed.

The orderly mobilization of peasant communities was recognized as an important element in national development. The need for training in relation to peasant organizations was thus particularly emphasized. Various experiences were related where such organizations had fostered the spirit of self-help, local initiative, and collective action (United Nations, 1968:15).

A main question related to the United Nation's increasing interest in popular participation in agrarian reforms during the 1960s was: Why do social movements emerge and become large-scale and effective in some places and not in others? An even more pragmatic and important question was: How exactly do they emerge, and what can be done to stimulate or support them?

From various studies sponsored by the ILO and the FAO in those years (many of which are summarized in Huizer, 1972 and 1980), it became clear that in rural development, a pre-condition for some kind of popular participation is the political will to give a certain influence to underprivileged groups. This often depends on the institutional set-up prevailing in a country or region, or the orientation of international agencies. The main issue, however, is not whether people can participate, but how — in what form — they will participate. Will people effectively participate in (and share in the results of) development, will they participate in passive or active resistance, or will they revolt against developments that frustrate their expectations or are disadvantageous to them? In the last case, they may try to change the institutional set-up of rural or overall development through a radical reform movement, or even revolution. They may be ready for active participation in social mobilization on their own behalf.

Popular participation in reform and development, and sharing in the benefits thereof, are increasingly acknowledged to be strongly interlinked. The concept of popular participation has been defined many times in different ways. UNRISD researchers have identified more than a dozen ways in which the concept "participation" has been employed in the development literature. These concepts were to some extent overlapping and sometimes contradictory. UNRISD researchers accepted the following working definition for popular participation (related to the poor, in particular): "... the organized efforts to increase the control over resources and regulatory institutions in given social situations, on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control" (Barraclough, 1991:135). Especially during this century, such efforts have proved to be effective in several cases. The most spectacular and effective movements taking place in different parts of the world will be dealt with in the following pages in a more or less chronological order.

POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL MOBILIZATION: CASE STUDIES

A decisive and revolutionary shift in power and control has preceded agrarian reform in some countries — such as Mexico (1910–17), Russia in 1917 and China in the late 1940s — largely as a result of organized peasant mobilization of some kind. Later, this also was the case with the reforms in Cuba. There, a revolutionary government came to power, which, in its emergence, had depended heavily upon the support of the poor peasantry of the Sierra Maestra. Land reform in Algeria, where many peasants participated in the movement that brought about the country's independence, could also be seen as a case in point. Japan in the 1940s and 1950s also illustrates how government has responded to potential threats from peasantry. Bolivia and Indonesia during the 1950s and early 1960s were two of the many examples where land reform legislation was enacted by governments

responding to peasant mobilization. In a few cases, land tenure issues gave the principal impetus to a national liberation struggle, civil war or other conflict that cost hundreds of thousands of lives. In Mexico and Algeria, about one million people (almost 10 per cent of the total population at the time) were killed. Historians continue to debate the huge numbers of victims of the Russian, Chinese, and Indonesian reform and counter-reform efforts, not to speak of Viet Nam, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala and other countries where rural violence has been endemic for long periods and, in some cases, has lasted to the present day.

In a more theoretical approach to analysing peasant mobilization, Teodor Shanin (1971) makes a distinction between (i) independent class action; (ii) guided political action; and (iii) fully spontaneous amorphous political action, including riots as well as passive resistance. Under the first category he sees such movements as the Russian peasant unions of 1905, those in China of 1926, and the Zapata rebellion in Mexico, and Shanin recommends that these examples be compared “to understand the mechanics of peasant action” (1971:257). Shanin is well aware that such authentic peasant mobilization can, in a later stage, be supported and enhanced by external organizers, such as Lenin or Mao Ze Dong, for political purposes that go beyond the original peasant demands.

The peasant revolution led by Zapata in Mexico (1910–19) continued beyond the promulgation of a new constitution and land reform (redistribution) in 1917. It did not bring fundamental change in Mexican society, though reformist and populist governments since the revolution have distributed land and promoted industrial development, as well as some measure of equitable distribution of benefits. More or less at the same time, peasants in Russia mobilized in protest against worsening exploitation. Following moderate reform measures in 1905, which mainly benefited better-off farmers, a large-scale movement of poor peasants helped Lenin come to power on a promise of radical land reform. Even more radical and spectacular was the peasant revolution and its aftermath in China, which brought the Communist Party to power in 1949. Although neglected or ignored in most current rural development literature, the Chinese peasant revolution probably had a considerable impact on rural and other development policies after the Second World War, particularly in Japan, the Philippines, India and Indonesia. This also included reforms fostered by Western countries, thus putting land reform and the role of popular participation in its implementation forcefully on the national and international agenda.

This paper considers more or less successful social mobilizations for the promulgation of agrarian reform laws, and their implementation, in Mexico, Russia, China, Japan, Bolivia, Cuba, Indonesia and Zimbabwe. Cases where effective reforms did not come about, such as the Philippines, Brazil and India, are also dealt with. Case studies of these movements are presented to show the dynamic processes involved in their emergence and growth, and in their success or failure.

◆ Mobilization in Mexico

One of the first and most important peasant movements for land reform was the rebellion headed by a Tlaluican Indian villager, Emiliano Zapata, between 1910 and 1919 in the Mexican state of Morelos. The aggressive expansion of sugar

plantations (*haciendas*) disowning traditional peasant communities from their life support system (the communal *ejido* lands) provoked a reaction, which, after several years of collectively organized struggle, achieved a recovery of lands by the *ejidos*. This process began as a collaboration between village committees from Zapata's village and others for the legal recovery of lands that had been usurped.

On 12 September 1909, at the age of 30, Emiliano Zapata was chosen to be president of the village defence council. Elders of the council had decided that he, though still a relatively young man, had the capacity to guide the struggle to get back village lands. He was initiated by the elders in week-long ceremonies in the local church, which explored the traditional uses and spiritual value of ancestral lands.

Villa de Ayala and Moyotepec joined the defence council headed by Zapata. Legal action for recovery had been tried in vain (most judges were landlords themselves), and land was recovered when peasants from those villages took down the fences that had been put up illegally by the *hacienda*. Landlords and (para)military reacted violently to this land "invasion", causing the struggle to escalate. Weapons were taken from the nearby *hacienda*, Chinameca, by the peasants. After one month, the group had grown to about 1,000 men. Zapata refused to accept money and other favours offered by the new government to bribe him and calm the peasant movement.

The operation of Zapata's troops can be compared with modern guerrilla tactics. When government troops came close to the guerrillas, the latter disappeared, either going into hiding or merging with the local population, which was possible because they had no uniforms. When government troops least expected an attack, the armed peasants would appear and strike.

In every town conquered by the peasant troops, all records of land ownership were purposely destroyed. Most of the lands of the State of Morelos, 53 *haciendas*, farms and ranches, were returned to the peasants. This success explains the strong local-level support received by Zapata's troops, as well as the strong opposition of groups in Mexico City that had allied themselves with the new government. Meanwhile, the armed peasants defended the lands they occupied and were cultivating when government troops came to evict them. The rebel groups were not organized in a single army but in dispersed groups, ready to be called upon at any moment.

Zapata and his collaborators recognized that a positive statement clarifying to the world what the peasant movement really stood for was a necessary defence against accusations of banditry. The need for such a statement was especially crucial because the government itself had been unwilling to fulfil the condition under which the Zapatistas would have given up armed resistance: promulgation of an agrarian reform law. The peasant generals (including one Protestant minister) and other villagers gave their opinions about what the document should contain. The local school teacher, Otilio E. Montaña wrote these ideas in a notebook, and based on these notes Zapata and Montaña drafted what became known as the *Plan de Ayala*. The final text was signed in Villa de Ayala on 22 November 1911, and was ratified by all the peasant generals in the guerrilla mountain camp of Ayoxustla. The local priest made the first type-written copies.

The *Plan de Ayala* proclaimed that the people should take immediate possession of the lands they had illegally been deprived of and for which they could show title. Those with difficulty proving their title could receive lands from the expropriation of one third of the *hacienda* lands after indemnification of the landlords. Small properties were respected by the Zapatistas. In addition to the distribution of land, a credit programme was initiated for the peasants in 1915 and 1916. To appease the peasant armies that had sprung up in various parts of Mexico, certain elements of the *Plan de Ayala* regarding the restitution of communal lands (*ejidos*) to peasants, were included in Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution in a Constituent Assembly at Aguascalientes.

The various federal governments that came to power after the revolution did not honour the promise of effective land redistribution. Some of the distributed *ejidos* were later taken back by government troops. Palacios (1960:257) describes how the journalist William Gates, officially nominated in 1919 by US authorities to study the revolutionary movement, was surprised to find the peasants in arms, simultaneously defending and cultivating their lands. Gates spoke of a “true social revolution”. Palacios (1960:321) reports indications that similar opinions of Zapata and his movement were expressed by such statesmen as Wilson, Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Lenin.

The movement also had certain spiritual overtones. As Eric Wolf (1958) describes, and as is visible in a newly created museum in Anenecuilco, Zapata and the rebels (like the peasants in the struggle for Mexico’s liberation from Spain in the 1820s) fought under the emblem of the Virgin of Guadalupe. To the Indians, the symbol also represented the earth and fertility goddess Tonantzin, and gave hopes of salvation from oppression, as well as the prospect of the “promised land”. It is also notable that women played such an important role in the rebellion and the armed struggle.

The movement began to suffer setbacks after 1917 because of the severe measures undertaken by government troops. Whole villages were eliminated in order to cut off support for the movement. Zapata was treacherously assassinated by an infiltrator, an officer from the army, on 10 April 1919. His prestige among the peasants was so strong that some continued to believe that he was still alive. He has been called the “apostle of the peasants”, or the “Christ of the Americas”. His teaching can probably best be summarized by a slogan reported by the American observer Tannenbaum (1966), who visited Morelos four years after the death of the peasant leader. Tannenbaum found the following inscription, carved on a post with a machete in Cuernavaca, dated 11 April 1919, one day after Zapata’s assassination: “Rebels of the South, it is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees” (Tannenbaum, 1966:178).

During the following two decades the legal provisions for land reform were implemented only in those areas where peasants created militant organizations on their own behalf — mostly in spite of considerable oppression — in the states of Vera Cruz, Michoacan and Yucatan. By the mid-1930s, the government of the reformist general Lazaro Cardenas was relying heavily on the peasant organizations for defence against military coups staged by conservative forces opposed to his moderate, but firmly reform-oriented, policies. The agrarian reform programme had an especially strong impact during his government (1934–40), when almost 18 million hectares of land (many irrigated) were distributed among

770,000 peasants. Because of often violent opposition to the distribution, peasant organizations were strengthened by the government, which provided them with weapons for self-defence. This government also took a strong stand regarding the country's natural resources, such as oil, and it nationalized foreign oil interests, including those belonging to Standard Oil and Royal Dutch Shell.

It should be noted that during the Cardenas years, there was not only a mobilization of popular support, but new forms of popular participation as well. Peasant organizations and labour unions were brought together in the Confederación Nacional Campesina (the National Peasant Federation) and the Confederación de Trabajadores de Mexico (the Mexican Workers' Federation) respectively, both of which were integrated into the official national political party and which, under different names, remain in power to this day.

The period of intense land reform ended in 1940, and the spirit of mobilization gradually disappeared thereafter. Political power came under the control of sectors of the middle class, which were not interested in pursuing the vigorous programme of social change and reform. The official peasant organization put up only verbal opposition to this trend. Various observers have noted that, in response, discontent and unrest among the peasantry increased, and many peasants turned to non-official channels and organizations. In 1958, an independent peasant organization led by Jacinto Lopez, the Union General de Obreros y Campesinos de Mexico (UGOCM), gained sufficient strength to stage massive demonstrations and symbolic land occupations, particularly those possessed by large landholders in circumvention of the law. Occupations took place mainly in the Pacific-northern states of Mexico, where the government had encouraged the cultivation of cash crops on relatively large commercial farms on newly irrigated lands. These were the same lands claimed by the landless peasants under the land reform legislation.

But the reform process has stagnated, and general unrest, at times leading to acute turmoil, has continued in Mexico to this day, as illustrated by the Zapatista movement in Chiapas.

◆ Mobilization in Russia

In the transformation of Tsarist Russia into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), peasant mobilization played a decisive role (Owen, 1937; Wolf, 1969). At the time of the 1917 revolution, the peasantry made up about 80 per cent of the population, and although the most spectacular aspects of the revolution occurred in the cities and were brought about by intellectuals, workers and soldiers, the revolution was only consolidated into a new regime after the peasantry had joined in a massive way.

The peasants in Russia lived under appalling semi-feudal conditions until their "emancipation" in 1861. They lived under a system in which they had to pay, over the course of a number of years for their liberation and a plot of land. As Wolf noted:

In 1861 the serfs were freed in a major agrarian reform stimulated by the fear voiced by Tsar Alexander II that 'it is better to liberate the peasants from above' than to wait until they took their freedom by rising 'from below' (1969:55).

After emancipation, peasants became subject to the demands of the village commune, the *mir*. Though viewed as a “kind of collective superego” with “a truly religious aura” (Wolf, 1969:62), the *mir* showed considerable internal tension, with a minority of better-off peasants often dominating the rest, as well as most of the land. Thus, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, a group of wealthy farmers was able to grow considerably at the cost of the old nobility and the poor peasantry. This trend created new rural contrasts and conflicts, since most peasants continued to cherish egalitarian communal ownership.

One consequence of the dissatisfaction among the mass of poor peasants was the emergence in 1905 of the Peasants’ Union. Intellectuals as well as peasants participated in the preliminary meetings. Because peasants believed they had a natural right to the land, a radical agrarian reform programme based on land expropriation was proposed. Peasant assemblies in the villages spread, and this idea was increasingly discussed. Many peasants had worked at times as migrant workers in more developed areas, or in the mines, and they brought new and sometimes revolutionary ideas back to their villages. The unpopular war between Russia and Japan in the Far East added to the dissatisfaction. In 1905 there began:

. . . a general peasant rising which, during October, November and December embraced 300 districts of 47 provinces. More than 1,000 manorial houses were ravaged and burned. In many places tax payments were withheld and the cantonal authorities were displaced (Owen, 1937:20).

The movement was crushed at the beginning of 1906, after concessions had deprived it of some of its impetus. One major concession was participation in the legislative process by representatives of the people, including the peasants. It was hoped that the peasants’ views on property rights would be changed by means of the individualization of property through the dissolution of the communal villages, via Land Settlement Commissions. Minister Stolypin’s legislation of 1906–11 formed the framework for this approach.

The various stages of legislation enacted by Stolypin represented an effort to strengthen the government by supporting the wealthier farmers, or “betting on the strong” as the expression went (Owen, 1937:49). The peasants who cultivated small plots on communal lands could become proprietors of these plots through the new laws. Farmers who cultivated larger plots could become owners of theirs. As a result of this process, a certain amount of protection of the weak that had resulted from communal cultivation and from common grazing lands was lost.

During this period, four million people left their villages looking elsewhere for work. Better-off farmers were able to survive this change and benefit from it, but for the majority of small peasants securing a livelihood became more difficult. This increasing insecurity and dissatisfaction found expression in the acute unrest of March-October 1917. Furthermore, in many areas there was not enough land outside of the estates to supply plots sufficiently large to sustain individual peasant families.

These developments were a key reason why most of the peasants, especially the peasant-soldiers who returned from the war, supported the 1917 Revolution. They were accompanied by rural school teachers and urbanites who wished to fulfil a

social duty by working in rural areas (Wolf, 1969:72). Thus the *mir*, with its egalitarian socialist millenarianism, was revived in a resurgence of customary land tenure (Wolf, 1969:90).

After the fall of the Tsar in February 1917, local (village and cantonal) committees took over national power and staged or tolerated seizures of estate land, often by violent means. In some areas, actions were undertaken against farmers who had separated from the communal villages. Peasant assemblies, also called “agrarian soviets”, and their executive committees began taking control over most of rural Russia. In March 1917, in some areas, the cantonal committees were mainly composed of local intellectuals, but within a month they were exclusively of peasant membership. Elections were taking place in the villages and in cantons nationwide. In the province of Penza, a peasant congress accepted a resolution to expropriate all privately owned land. The resolution was enforced by the committees. Similar actions took place in other provinces, for the central government had little authority and was unable to undertake counter-measures. Peasant soldiers who deserted and came back to their villages often had a radicalizing influence in the cantonal committees. In many areas, seizures of estates, and at times of smaller private plots, continued, sometimes led by the cantonal land committees. Elsewhere, small landowners and efficiently cultivated estates were not touched. In general, the initiatives of local peasant committees could not be limited by any authority except the villagers themselves, who became increasingly radical and violent. Soon cantonal committees were in control of virtually all of rural Russia.

Assemblies and conferences were held frequently to decide on local policies and to consider candidates for the Constituent Assembly or the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Delegates. At this congress, in November 1917, Lenin, in a charismatic speech, proposed the Land Decree and thus obtained the massive support of the peasantry for his government (Reed, 1977). This was a decisive occurrence in the Russian Revolution. The Land Decree confirmed what was already effective in many areas of the country: private property of the estates was abolished. Land could no longer be sold, bought, leased or otherwise alienated. It would be distributed according to local needs among those who desired to work it with their own hands. This distribution would be by local committees, the soviets of peasants’ delegates, who would effectively control land use. This approach rallied the peasantry behind the government during the crucial years of the Civil War (1917–21) and foreign intervention. Although it was adjusted to the needs of national economic policy several times, the Land Decree of November 1917 formed the basis of the agrarian policy of the USSR in the first years after the Revolution.

As Wolf Ladejinsky (1977:25) has pointed out in an essay on collectivization of agriculture in the Soviet Union, Lenin was well aware that the continuous support of the peasantry for the social revolution was crucial. However, this support became problematic after a decade because agricultural production by rich (*kulak*) and middle peasants did not keep pace with the requirements of rapid industrial growth. The relatively low price paid by the state for grain was an important reason. Also, agricultural exports (to pay for imports of machinery) declined precisely when the new Five-Year Plan required an increase. The Communist Party Congress thus decided that small-scale agriculture had to be replaced by large-scale mechanized agriculture (Ladejinsky, 1977:27).

In effect, all agriculture was collectivized by a decree in support of extremely rapid industrialization. And under Stalin, popular participation was not only abolished but effectively destroyed at the cost of many lives. Although there was considerable resistance, highly oppressive measures prevented any kind of social mobilization of the peasants.

◆ Mobilization in China

China provides a particularly interesting case in which to study the ups and downs of the relationship between the population and the land. With about 9 per cent of the world's arable land, over the centuries China has more or less managed to feed its millions, which at present account for over 20 per cent of the world's population. Though the struggle for land between small peasants and landlords (and gentry) has been endemic in Chinese society for centuries, in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth the influence of world markets exacerbated existing contradictions. While European traders and missionaries had for centuries respected the sophisticated political and religious structure of the Chinese Empire, through the Opium Wars (1839–42) British trading interests broke Chinese resistance to the free import of opium and textiles. This made China more dependent upon the industrial world, opening treaty ports (like Hong Kong), ruining the Chinese treasury and harming the peasantry by upsetting the existing balance (Wolf, 1969:116–117). Furthermore, the already exploitative rural elite made “common cause with foreign businessmen involved in world trade” (Reitsma and Kleinpenning, 1985:256).

During the 1920s, when about half of the peasantry was landless or semi-landless and exploitative relationships had become more blatant because of corruption and regional power struggles between the so-called warlords, peasant movements emerged that would result in outright revolution, or “liberation” as the Chinese themselves called it. Resistance, with the founding of the Communist Party and the first peasant associations, began in the south near Canton (now Guangdong) in the areas where the anti-imperialist Taiping Rebellion (1850–65) had originated. Nationalist sentiment played a role in these efforts from the outset (Wolf, 1969:143).

Considerable rural unrest and local social movements were encountered by Mao Ze Dong when he returned to his province of origin, Hunan, after his efforts to rally the Shanghai working class for a communist revolutionary movement had been ruthlessly crushed by Chiang Kai-Shek's Kuomintang government in 1926. Mao's report on an investigation of the peasant movements in Hunan (Mao, 1971) shows the strength of the movements and also the surprise of its author in finding peasants organizing on their own behalf, when, according to his theoretical Marxist conception, the urban proletariat should be the class to take such an initiative.

Learning by trial and error from and with local people, Mao Ze Dong followed the age-old folk tradition of mostly Taoist-inspired people's rebellions in Hunan as he helped the peasants and their secret societies to become better organized. Thus the Red Army was gradually created. In his strategic writings about organization and guerrilla tactics, Mao used Taoist and folkloric texts as much as those of Marx and Lenin (as shown by Freiberg, 1977).

One of the great feats of more than 20 years of struggle by the Chinese peasant guerrilla armies was the Long March in 1934–35, in which the communist army escaped total annihilation by the overwhelmingly superior armies of Chiang Kai-Shek by withdrawing to isolated areas of Yenan (now Yunan) province. Here, the numerically weakened but spiritually and morally strengthened communist army could establish a base, distribute land to the tillers and build a society based on what the visiting journalist Edgar Snow, in **Red Star over China**, called “rural equalitarianism”, which served as a base for the conquest of all of China in the late 1940s (Snow, 1972).

The peasant mobilization, in order to be successful, had to use a sophisticated strategy of alliances between different classes of peasants and other parties. As Mao Ze Dong pointed out in his strategic writings, the peasant movement had to be developed while taking into account a great variety of contradictions in interests. In order for mobilization to be effective, it was necessary to study, in each local situation, the prevailing class contradictions and to distinguish between those which were fundamental and those of secondary importance. Mobilization could often be achieved along the lines of the most fundamental contradiction — for example, against the “enemy” provoking the most widespread or acute opposition.

The “enemy” could be the local gentry (rich farmers), or the middle farmers or foreign interests. But the poorest members of society and their interests were always the basic point of reference in a stratification consisting of:

- rich farmers (those who own large properties and do not themselves work the land);
- middle farmers (those who have more land than they can work themselves and need to hire labour);
- subsistence farmers (those who own enough land for family subsistence without a need to work for others);
- semi-landless (those who do not have enough land and work part-time for others); and
- landless (agricultural labourers).

Such strategic study-cum-action regarding local, national and (later) international contradictions advanced the cause of the Chinese peasants. Local circumstances and the broader economic and political context (including, after 1937, anti-Japanese struggle) also contributed to the success of the peasant movements.

Mao was aware that if the rebellion was to become a true revolution, he had to ensure the participation of women. Women had played a considerable role in rebellious or revolutionary movements in China’s past. As Wolf notes, most of the secret societies which had opposed Confucianism in the past centuries in China “. . . were strongly feminist, contrary to Confucian thinking which asserted the male yang over the female yin; the secret societies tended to accord equal status to women” (1969:112). These societies facilitated the growth and orientation of the Communist Party. Judith Stacey (1979) noted that women in the liberated areas derived significant benefits: land reform granted them equal rights to land, which was a first condition for peasant women’s economic independence.

The social movements of the Chinese peasants increasingly became a militant political organization not merely struggling for concrete benefits and abandonment

of unjust practices, but with the objective of gaining state power to achieve those goals for the country as a whole. Thus a social movement that had resisted state power for over two decades took up state power itself, and became able to bring about the reforms that the peasants and women had been agitating for. The most important results were the land redistribution policies, giving all tillers access to land, and later, in the mobilization initiated from above, movement toward the gradual formation of co-operatives and collectives in rural areas to support rapid industrialization. As the World Bank observed in its report on the first stages of China's "socialist economy":

The land reform effected a major transfer of assets and income from the rich to the poor and, together with peace and stability, contributed to recovery and rapid growth of agricultural production in the early 1950s. But the initial land reform made little impression on what was probably a substantial cause of inefficiency, namely the fragmentation of cultivation across numerous tiny parcels of land — the result of centuries of inheritance, subdivision, and purchase and sale of small lots. Moreover, the assets to be redistributed included important quantities of tools, equipment and draft animals, whose efficient use was problematic at the level of the 2–3 acre holding of the newly-enfranchized poor peasant. The land reform campaign was therefore quickly followed by vigorous attempts to promote agricultural cooperatives (World Bank, 1983, vol. II:28).

The establishment of co-operatives, and later collectives and communes, not only enabled more efficient use of land resources but also created the conditions for collective soil conservation and flood control. However, as industrialization became the main target of the communist government, the people were victims of disastrous experiments, such as the Great Leap Forward, and famine. Because of the increasingly absolutist rule of the Communist Party and internal policy struggles, the Chinese population suffered intensely and many lives were lost, as described by Stiefel and Wolf (1994:117–118).

The idea that bureaucratization and routinization of the Communist Party cadres and the state, economic and educational bureaucracy could be halted and reversed by mobilizing the students and youth in a Cultural Revolution was a dramatic policy shift by Mao and Lin Piao, which ultimately destroyed the lives of millions of people. History can be made by social movements and revolutionary upsurges guided by charismatic leaders, but overconfidence in the malleability of society can turn a liberating process into its opposite. However, as Stiefel and Wolfe conclude, some participatory space continued to exist locally.

The extent to which this participatory space, which varied according to regional conditions, was used by local peasant communities and units depended to a large extent on the quality of the local peasant leadership and on the historical experiences of collective struggle and the peasants' memory thereof. These factors — quality of leadership and political sophistication and confidence in collective action — both based in previous experiences of collective struggle, determined to a large extent the vitality of local units and their resilience in the face of bureaucratic interference and contradictory authoritarian commands from above (1994:53).

This explains the sudden upsurge in agricultural production after the rigid communal agrarian structures were relaxed or abolished in 1978.

The World Bank has observed that in spite of the tremendous ups and downs in China, industrial growth averaged about 10 per cent yearly between 1950 and 1980 and was accompanied by a reasonably equitable distribution of income, with the result that — after all — life expectancy for Chinese in 1979 was 13 years above that in India and 17 years above that in Indonesia (1983, vol. III:26). Thus a basis for dynamic overall development was laid.

◆ Mobilization in Japan

The Chinese revolution also indirectly influenced rural and industrial development in some neighbouring countries. Wolf Ladejinsky, main advisor to the United States occupation forces in Japan, described in 1951 how General MacArthur “stole communist thunder in Japan with democratic land reforms, our most potent weapon for peace” (1977:151). He referred to the fact that even before the triumph of the Chinese peasant movements, the land reform implemented in the areas under their control had a strong radiating influence in Japan, where semi-landless peasants, mainly tenants, had been organizing since the First World War to achieve better tenancy conditions and reforms.

In Japan, the First World War had brought about changes in the rural areas that were mainly favourable to the landlords. Land prices rose, and landowners had new opportunities for profitable speculation, while many small farmers lost their lands through indebtedness, partly as a result of inflationary tendencies. Absentee landlordism increased and tenant farmers were forced to pay higher rents in kind. Because of this trend, some tenants had insufficient rice for their own survival. The result was a large, spontaneous peasant revolt, the Rice Riots of 1918, which spread to more than 30 prefectures and lasted 42 days.

At the same time, rapidly increasing industrialization created greater opportunities, causing people to migrate from the rural areas to the cities. The bargaining position of urban labour and of the peasantry improved somewhat, and the formation of labour unions accelerated along with the occurrence of strikes. Because of the relative labour shortage, tenants were able to threaten landlords with non-cultivation of the land if rents were not decreased.

After the First World War, industrial crisis led to the dismissal of many workers. When they returned to their already overcrowded villages, rural unrest grew. Tension increased rapidly as the backward conditions in which tenants generally lived were more acutely felt by those who returned. The organizing experience they had gained in industry was soon applied to bargaining for better conditions. Formally organized tenant unions began to develop in the areas around the new industrial centres, particularly Nagoya. The first local tenant organizations were reported around 1916 in the prefectures of Aichi, Gifu and Mie, followed by those of Osaka, Hyogo and Okayama, and a few years later in several prefectures of Kyushu, where there were many former industrial workers from the city of Fukuoka.

Local unions generally grew spontaneously at the *buraka* (hamlet) level, around rent disputes. Workers who had been dismissed because of union activities and had

to return to their villages were particularly influential in these activities. Several workers became effective peasant organization leaders. The need for an organization at the national and prefecture levels was increasingly felt but did not materialize until 1922, when increasing acceptance of Christian, democratic and socialist ideas by certain Japanese intellectuals, and the spread of these ideas in many circles, helped to pave the way. A group of intellectuals, journalists, a missionary and a labour leader took the initiative in creating the Japanese Peasant Union (*Nihon Nomin Kumiai*, abbreviated *Nichinó*).

By 1926, *Nichinó* claimed a dues-paying membership of about 68,000 peasants. Its chief aim was still to reduce rents, but it also had political goals, such as legislation to protect tenants, as well as the rather vague objective of “socialization of the land”. After universal suffrage was introduced in Japan in 1925, and the number of voters rose from 3 million to 14 million, *Nichinó* became more politically influential. *Nichinó* leaders invited the 28 labour federations with more than 1,000 members to form a Workers and Peasants Party. Such increasing involvement in political and ideological issues led to splits and mergers among peasant organizations and political parties. One divisive point was whether to include all peasants and small landowners, or tenants only. Another was between those who saw the tenants’ struggle against the landlords as a class struggle directed toward overall social change, and those who were more in favour of compromise and the achievement of concrete benefits for tenants specifically. It was observed that:

These differences were primarily differences between leaders. Which national organization a particular local tenant union was federated with depended more on personal connections with particular leaders than on ideological attachment to one doctrine rather than another. And, indeed, in their practical activities the various federations differed little from each other. Their chief function was to assist tenants engaged in disputes, to encourage the formation of local tenant unions in districts hitherto unorganized, and to direct and co-ordinate the formulation of tenants’ demands (Dore, 1959:77).

Whatever occurred nationally, the main function of tenant unions at the local level was in rent disputes with landlords. Many of these disputes had been taken up by *buraku* unions before the national organization was created, but the local-level struggle was made more effective through the national union and its officials.

In the campaign to spread the movement, those *burakus* were chosen where the most severe and acute problems existed. Very large landowners were helped by police repression of tenant organizations; smaller landowners used their traditional paternalistic control to pressure tenants against joining a union. Kin relationships, favours and threats to force people to pay their debts were used to exert pressure on tenants. These obstacles could only be overcome by the immediate organization of a union. Potential activists (*org*) had to be recruited and a *buraku* meeting to be organized with their help. Once a meeting began, it was continued until a union had been created — with the election of a president, vice-president and treasurer, and the payment of dues. Sometimes such meetings lasted a day and a night or even two days.

As peasant unions spread through the country and became better organized, their demands changed. Initially, demands were mostly for postponement or reduction

of rent payments when harvests were bad, or other emergencies. Later, demands for permanent rent reduction of 30 per cent were increasingly heard.

Landlords often tried to evict peasants when they started to organize unions. Rather than being solved through negotiation, more and more disputes were brought to the courts, which generally ruled in favour of the landlords. Peasant organizations thus became increasingly aware of the need for political action at the national level. Radical views on the need for drastic social structural change in order to improve the life of the peasants found an increasingly positive response. The leftist Workers' and Peasants' Party, on the whole supported by the *Nichinó*, won considerable influence during the 1928 elections to the Diet.

The government, alarmed by the rising tide of radicalism in the peasant and labour movement, ordered nationwide arrests of movement leaders in the so-called 3-15 event (15 March 1928). This was a serious blow to the *Nichinó*, which had most of its top leaders at the national and some prefectural levels imprisoned. Some, such as national leader Tokuda, remained in jail until after the Second World War. However, local action continued in spite of increasing difficulties, showing the strength of the needs and demands of the tenants.

In September 1931 an explosion engineered by the Armed Forces near Mukden in China was used as a pretext for the occupation of Manchuria. This action considerably increased the authoritarian tendency of the Japanese government and the influence of the armed forces, and marked the beginning of a period of serious repression. It is striking that in spite of all the repressive measures, the number of disputes continued to increase. Most tenancy disputes were apparently waged by local *buraku* groups, independent of any direct support by a national peasant or political organization.

This provides some indication of how serious the land tenure problem was, and makes it understandable that reform legislation was on many occasions proposed by the more enlightened politicians, albeit in vain. This prepared the way, before and during the Second World War, for land reform that was finally carried out in 1946, which was relatively radical as a result of the revived peasant pressure.

After the defeat of the Japanese army in 1945, the peasant movement was still alive, although many of its leaders had spent years in jail. The movement was quickly reactivated and pressed for land tenure reforms similar to those tried in some areas in China. The Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) pressured the post-war Japanese government to abolish feudal-type relations in the countryside and avoid the risk of peasant rebellion. Between 1946 and 1949, almost all land property in excess of one hectare of irrigated paddy was redistributed among the tillers, mainly through purchase and resale. Organized peasants played a crucial role in this process, together with the rich farmers and landlords. The redistribution proceeded with the close supervision and advice of the technicians of the occupation authorities, and Wolf Ladejinsky (cited above) played a crucial role in this process. The opposition of the landlords was largely overcome by providing them with institutional forms of expression and a stake in industrialization. Village (and town) land committees played an important role in the implementation of agrarian reform. These committees consisted of five tenant members, three landlords and two owner-farmers, with each group electing its representatives. Although some land committees continued to be dominated by the

landlords, institutionalization of the dealings between landlords and tenants in village land committees limited the number of incidents involving some kind of violence during the crucial years of the reform to 110.

The institutionalization of the peasants' participation in the land reform process through the land committees constituted an important adult education programme through which 150,000 people received leadership training (Ladejinsky, 1977:133). It has been estimated that from 10 to 40 per cent of the village leaders after the reform had achieved their leadership positions thanks to the reform. The land redistribution had a favourable effect on the rapid development of the post-war Japanese economy, as noted by Korten (1992).

◆ Mobilization in the Philippines

Like most of Latin America, the Philippines was colonized by the Spanish, who utilized and strengthened the existing feudal power structure, inter-marrying with local chiefs and creating a class of so-called *caciques*. After a largely agrarian revolt in 1898 threatened to overthrow the colonial regime, the United States took over the Philippines from Spain. However, they did not fundamentally change the *cacique* system. In fact, the frustration of the peasants was more acute by the emphasis placed on the need for democracy and education, without doing much to realize these ideas. Tenants, who formed the majority of the agrarian population, particularly in the densely populated areas of Central Luzon, depended almost completely on the landlords. Tenants often rented buffaloes and houses from the landlord, and in some areas paid a tenancy rate as high as 90 per cent of the harvest. Permanent indebtedness was common.

Commercial agriculture, introduced under US colonial rule, caused a serious deterioration in conditions for the peasants. An increasing amount of land was dedicated to commercial crops, particularly sugar and tobacco, which could be exported to the United States. Land ownership became increasingly concentrated as a result. In addition, a more business-oriented approach was introduced on the new plantations, modifying the paternal relations that had existed on the traditional estates. Absentee landlords became increasingly common — the paternalism that had helped to maintain some appearance of benevolence in the old system disappeared, and landlords became hated strangers (Jacobi, 1961:199–201). Average tenancy rates went up from 38 to 60 per cent between 1903 and 1946. Especially in Central Luzon, in Nueva Ecija and Pampanga, the situation of the *inquilinos* (cash tenants) and peasants under the *kasama* system (share tenants) became unbearable.

An additional source of frustration for the peasantry was “land-grabbing”, by which large owners claimed adjacent small holdings and won their case in the courts because of their influence and ability to pay lawyers. Thus thousands of once independent and self-sufficient farmers were reduced to the status of tenants and landless farm labourers (Jacobi, 1961:201). Several local and more or less spontaneous uprisings of peasants took place.

By 1919, a sharecroppers' union had been created by a communist leader, Jacinto Manahan, which became known as the National Union of Peasants in the Philippines (Katipunan Pambansa ng mga Magbubukid sa Pilipinas, KPMP) in 1924. The main leaders in the following years, Juan Felco and Mateo del Castillo,

were directly or indirectly related to the Communist Party, and for that reason the organization was later forbidden. Nevertheless, the union maintained strong roots among the peasants.

In 1930, a socialist party leader, lawyer and wealthy landlord in Pampanga, Pedro Abad Santos, created the League of the Poor Labourers (Aguman Ding Maldong Talapagobra, AMT), which became strong in the Pampanga area by organizing strikes and protest demonstrations. One of the important collaborators helping Abad Santos to spread his movement was Luis Taruc, the son of a peasant, who had acquired some education. Such collaborators went to live in the villages, where they organized meetings and explained the purpose of the organization. Taruc describes his approach, which he learned by trial and error, as follows:

. . . I first sounded out the people about their problems and grievances, and then spoke to them in their own terms. Instead of carrying out a frontal assault on the ramparts of capital, I attacked a case of usury here, an eviction there, the low crop rate elsewhere. These were things which our organization could fight, and around which the people could win small, but enormously encouraging victories” (Taruc, 1953:37–38).

The peasant organizations generally used non-violent methods, such as demonstrations and sit-down strikes. If there were any arrests, they went together as a group into jail. Dramatic stage presentations and cultural activities were used to teach the peasants about the labour struggle and to turn the strikes into public manifestations. By 1938, 70,000 members participated to some extent in the AMT. The socialist peasant group had good chances to develop during the 1930s, while the communist KPMP was officially prohibited. Landlords organized armed groups, such as the “soldiers for peace”, to oppose and clash with the socialists, which led to considerable violence in the rural areas of Central Luzon. When the socialists were prohibited from holding meetings, the organizers used any kind of gathering, such as Protestant religious meetings, to make propaganda for the peasant cause.

In 1939, shortly before the Communist and Socialist parties merged, the AMT joined with the stronger and better organized KPMP. As a reaction to the Japanese occupation on 29 March 1942, the united peasant organizations created the People’s Army against the Japanese, or Hukbalahap (Hubko ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon). The aims of the Huk movement were expressed in a manifesto emphasizing opposition against and expulsion of the Japanese, co-operation with the Allied armies, apprehension and punishment of traitors and collaborators with the Japanese, complete independence for the Philippines, and the establishment of a democratic government with land reform, national industrialization and guarantees for a minimum standard of living (Salmon, 1968:12).

Beginning in 1942, the peasant organization accepted the use of military means, with many peasants carrying arms and forming squadrons of approximately 100 men each. Thus the armed struggle against the Japanese was initiated. The armed units operated in the areas around the homes of members. Support for the units was organized in the villages through the Barrio United Defence Corps (BUDC), in order to guarantee a food supply and other necessities. BUDC councils created in the villages where the resistance movement spread brought forms of democratic decision making to the villages, which had traditionally been dominated by the *caciques*. The BUDC councils formed the local government in the areas controlled

by the guerrilla forces. This system functioned particularly well in the areas where the peasant organizations had gained strength before the war.

The Huk movement rallied many people and became so strong that it controlled whole areas of Central Luzon, which the Japanese could not enter. In those areas, *de facto* political control and local government were in the hands of the resistance forces, which had their base in the peasantry. The lands of many landlords who collaborated with the Japanese and lived in the towns were taken over by the Huks in the areas they controlled, and harvests were no longer handed over. Landlords who supported the Huk movement were allowed to remain on their land, but had to accept a fixed rent. Huk leaders were elected governors in some provinces in the December 1944 elections.

Although the efforts of the Huks facilitated the US army's liberation of the Philippines from the Japanese, relations between the Huks and the Americans were never good. It was feared that the Huks would radically change the social order in the Philippines if they had the opportunity to do so.

A few months before he died in 1948, US-supported president, Roxas, outlawed the Huk organization. His successor, Quirino, attempted to negotiate an amnesty, inasmuch as Roxas' policy of armed repression had failed. Reconciliation was attempted, with the minimum demands presented by the Huks mainly peasants' demands. They were: (i) division of estates and resale to tenants with government assistance; (ii) migration from overcrowded to less crowded areas; (iii) laws establishing a fair sharing of the crop by landlords and tenants; (iv) curbs on usury; and (v) a minimum wage scale. A 70–30 Rice Share Tenancy Act in favour of the peasants was soon promulgated, but implementation was very defective, and no truce between the government and the Huks actually resulted.

The armed Huk resistance flared up again and gained increasing strength between 1948 and 1950. The possibility of overthrowing the government by armed force was seriously considered by the Huk leadership, and the organization's name was changed to HMB (Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan, or People's Army of Liberation, although they also remained known as Huks). Some of the leaders, including Taruc, only half-heartedly agreed with this change in approach, which was actually made for doctrinaire reasons.

As Taruc reported (1953:67–99), the show of force that the Huks made by occupying several towns and besieging others scared the government enough to reorient its policies, with help from US advisory teams. There was a cleaning up in the government ranks and Ramon Magsaysay became the new Secretary of Defence in 1950. He was given the responsibility of reorganizing the army and modifying its approach. The Philippine Constabulary (PC) — that is, the police force — was integrated into the army and personnel were shifted to ease tensions. Cases of abuse were investigated and arbitrariness was punished. Magsaysay's experience during the Second World War and the pressure from the US advisory missions were factors contributing to this new approach.

Magsaysay's 1953 presidential campaign and the reforms that were promised, particularly land distribution, also helped to appease the peasants. The possibility of a peaceful solution to agrarian and other problems seemed to emerge. Divisions of opinion between Taruc and the more doctrinaire leaders came into the open.

Taruc surrendered in 1954 under a pledge of amnesty by President Magsaysay, although the pledge was not kept. Taruc was jailed for many years. In the meantime, the peasants took a wait-and-see attitude, and the Huks had to withdraw due to decreasing support among the peasants and the increasing effectiveness of the army. Between 1952 and 1954 several institutions and programmes were created to deal with the peasant problem in various ways, as an alternative to the violent struggle in which the peasants had become involved.

One programme was the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM), a private community development agency, sponsored by Dr. Y.C. James Yen of the Joint Sino-American Commission on Rural Reconstruction, which had been active in mainland China before 1949 and later carried out rural development activities in Taiwan. The PRRM was called on by President Magsaysay to help with pacification and counter-insurgency activities in the centre of the Huk movement, the municipality of San Luis in the province of Pampanga (the birthplace of Luis Taruc). Specially trained village-level workers were stationed in San Luis to try to win the confidence of the people and wean them from their support of the Huk rebels. Since the reform programme was not extended to the country as a whole, efforts to revive the peasant struggle flared up time after time and a considerable number of Huk guerrillas remained active in Central Luzon.

Another effort to neutralize radical peasant mobilization was the creation of the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) in 1953 by a group of Catholic laymen, headed by Jeremias Montemayor, a lawyer and lecturer at the Institute of Social Order in Manila. The Institute was created and headed by Jesuit priests, with the goal of guiding the social action of the Catholic Church, particularly in the field of unionization. Initially, the growth of the FFF was facilitated by the active support of President Magsaysay. FFF leaders had easy access to the presidential offices to have concrete cases of farmers' problems and complaints resolved. The problems were generally local, without much impact on government policy as a whole. In a relatively favourable climate, the FFF enjoyed a rapid growth to over 36,000 members by March 1957, particularly in Central Luzon. After the death of Magsaysay in March 1957, the situation became more difficult, but the FFF was able to consolidate its organization.

The role of the parish priest as facilitator was often crucial to the establishment of an FFF organization in a village. The fact that an increasing number of local parish priests became favourably inclined toward the FFF was a key reason for the organization's spread into many areas, particularly in Mindanao. Although the FFF published a booklet ("Land to the Tiller", drafted by Fr. Mauri, its — former — religious advisor) containing a number of radical suggestions for agrarian reform, the FFF undertook very little political pressure or action to influence the drafting of land reform bills.

The president of the FFF, Montemayor, was a member of the committee created by President Macapagal to draft the 1963 Agricultural Land Reform Code, but Montemayor later recognized that this law was too elastic and left much to be desired:

. . . the Philippine land reform program is one of the softest land reform programs that have been undertaken after the Second World War. First of all, the program has no definite timetable. It has no deadline whatsoever. The pace of the program, therefore, depends almost entirely on the

policies of every administration. Secondly, the retention limit given to the landlords is among the biggest in the world. It is 75 hectares, compared to 1.5 hectares in Japan and 3 in Taiwan. In other words, no matter what happens, the landowner shall be able to keep for himself at least 75 hectares of his agricultural land. Thirdly, the requirements of expropriation as well as the schedule of priority of the lands to be expropriated are such that under present circumstances, no large scale program of land redistribution will be possible (Montemayor, 1969:154).

Because of the resistance in influential circles to even moderate land reform, the FFF gradually became more openly radical. At times it organized public demonstrations in which a great number of individual cases were brought together and given wide publicity. At such events, student sympathizers played an important role. A whole series of individual cases was resolved after a spectacular demonstration was staged in Manila in September-November 1969. The demonstration consisted of a marathon picket of almost two months in a park (the Agripina Circle) in front of the Bureau of Lands, and sometimes extended into the lobby of the building itself.

The assassination of several local FFF leaders also had a radicalizing influence. It did not stop other, more radical, peasant organizations from emerging until President Marcos declared martial law in 1972. Many organizations were banned, and went underground to join the outlawed Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA) (Karunan, 1992:72). This organization, led by José Maria Sison, waged an armed guerrilla struggle along Maoist strategies. During the 1980s, NPA had about 3,000 fighters and a considerable base in the wider population. However, internal divisions, due to policy changes in China, have weakened the NPA's influence.

Land reforms promulgated under Marcos in the 1980s were directed toward "betting on the strong", including multinational agribusiness corporations. The World Bank-supported agrarian reform programme of the Aquino government, which came to power on a wave of protest in 1986, was also disappointing. But peasants continued to organize, in the Kilusang Magnubukid ng Philipinas (KMP, National Peasant Movement in the Philippines), and under the leadership of Jaime Tadeo, became increasingly vocal in favour of more radical land reform (Karunan, 1992:88ff).

◆ Mobilization in Bolivia

Up to 1952, the agrarian structure of Bolivia was similar to Mexico's before the Mexican Revolution. But the exploitation of the Quechua- or Aymara-speaking peasants (a majority of the country's population) by the small, white, Spanish-speaking landowning aristocracy, allied with the "tin barons", was perhaps even more intense. Indian serfs (*colonos*) who lived on *haciendas* had the right to farm small subsistence plots (*sayañas*) for their own use, in return for which they had the obligation to provide free labour to the *hacienda* owner three or four days a week, either on the *hacienda* itself or at the owner's town residence. It was thus not uncommon for the peon to sharecrop his plot with another, even lowlier peasant, and to mobilize the members of his family in order to fulfil his labour obligations.

Scattered peasant revolts have occurred in Bolivia for centuries, as a reaction to the abuses of the prevailing system of servitude. The Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay (1933–35), related to a conflict over oil-concessions between Standard Oil and Royal Dutch Shell, fuelled such rebellion, because it exacerbated the disintegration of the traditional system, as thousands of Indian soldiers left the *haciendas* for the first time and entered into contact with the outside world. Bolivia's defeat left many frustrations and much political bitterness.

In the aftermath of the war, peasant unrest increased in many areas of Bolivia. In 1936, a rural syndicate was formed in Ucureña, in the temperate, fertile Cochabamba valley, one of the country's most prosperous agricultural regions. In this area, the Santa Clara monastery was leasing some of its land to local large landholders, and the lease included the right to the services of the resident peasants. The latter organized a union in order to rent the land from the monastery themselves, and thus avoid the onerous labour obligations that were imposed upon them. Their efforts encountered strong opposition from various local landowners, who saw in the peasants' initiative a direct threat to their customary rule. These landowners thus bought the land from the monastery and evicted the peasant families who had been living and working there for years, destroying their homes and forcing them to leave the area or to revert to serfdom. A young radical peasant leader, José Rojas, whose father had been dispossessed in this fashion, had to escape to Argentina, where he worked as a labourer and acquired a political education. He returned secretly to Bolivia a few years later and revived the peasant movement in Ucureña, becoming its undisputed leader.

In 1944, an Indian leader, Luis Ramos Quevedo, had been able to interview President Villarroel in the National Palace about the possibility of organizing an Indian Congress, and when Quevedo received a vague promise from the President, he began a campaign to bring together Indians from all parts of the country. In 1945, the creation of the first Bolivian Indian Congress increased national consciousness about the peasant problem.

The key points of the agenda of the Congress, which opened on 10 May 1945, included the abolition of compulsory services that peasants had to render to landlords (*pongueaje*), education, regulation of agricultural labour and formulation of general agrarian policy. No particularly radical measures were proposed by the peasants' delegates. Rather, they emphasized adjustments that would improve their lot, directed against the most abusive forms of servitude and the lack of educational facilities. Government decrees concerning the abolition of servitude and the obligation to establish schools in the large *haciendas* were issued a few days later. Land reform as such was not dealt with.

During this period, the many spontaneous peasant strikes and uprisings against the landholders, and also the struggles between indigenous communities over territorial boundaries, abated. But as a result of the negative reaction of the landlords after the Indian Congress, sit-down strikes recommenced with greater vigour, covering large areas of Tarija, Oruro and Potosí. By refusing to perform traditional compulsory services, the peasants were in fact complying with the decrees issued in May 1945. Indian peasant organizers, especially those who had experience as miners or who had been jailed for their political activity, travelled in many areas, mobilizing the peasantry. But when the moderately reformist Villarroel

Government was overthrown on 21 July 1946, the reform measures were revoked and steps were taken to reintroduce traditional order in the rural areas.

The peasant protest movements that occurred in subsequent years were not met by conciliation as before, but by armed force. Many peasant leaders, particularly those who had participated in the Indian Congress, were jailed. Revolts protesting these repressive actions began in late 1946. In Ayopaya, Cochabamba, several thousand peasants invaded large landholdings and assassinated some of the landlords who had tried to reintroduce compulsory labour obligations. Soon many areas of the country were in turmoil. Most of the peasant movements now became violent, with the peasants taking up arms, whereas their earlier approach had generally been non-violent. Rural estates, and even some provincial capitals, were threatened or effectively attacked. Dynamite, with which peasants who had worked in the mines were well acquainted, was frequently used in the struggle. Miners and workers occupied important leadership functions in these movements.

The peasants' goals at this stage went beyond mere changes in the working conditions to include radical alterations in the political and social structure of the country. The intransigence of the rural elite had apparently awakened the peasants to their real interests. Workers from La Paz helped to organize the peasant protest movements in the Altiplano. Several of the labour leaders who were active in this field were also jailed.

In 1947, movements in various parts of the country were repressed by large-scale army intervention, and peasant concentrations were bombed by air force planes. A special rural police corps was created, and in parts of the country civil militias were formed. Over two hundred peasant leaders were confined in a concentration camp (*colonia fiscal*) created in Ichilo, one of the isolated tropical areas of the country. This agrarian revolt, which involved several thousand soldiers and many thousands of peasants, was finally crushed by the end of 1947. The landlords, several of whom had fled to the towns, returned to their estates.

In the meantime, the urban middle class became increasingly dissatisfied with the traditional oligarchical control based on landed and mining interests. They initiated a number of political movements, which culminated in a revolution under the leadership of Paz Estenssoro's MNR (National Revolutionary Movement) with the widespread support of the urban and mining proletariat and the organized peasants. On 9 April 1952, the army and other defenders of the conservative government who had tried to prevent the electoral victory of the MNR were defeated by a short, bloody revolutionary movement, directed by the MNR in La Paz and other towns. The power of the landholding elite, which depended on army support, came to an end.

In the power vacuum created in the rural areas by the disappearance of the forces which traditionally supported the landowners, new power relations took shape. Peasant syndicates were organized all over Bolivia, virtually taking over local government functions. New leaders were elected in massive peasant concentrations or community meetings. The newly formed Ministry of Peasant Affairs and leaders of the MNR directed this drive. One of the strongest centres of organization of this movement was Ucureña, in Cochabamba, where the movement grew rapidly when rumours circulated that conservative forces were trying to regain control. Many *haciendas* were invaded, and buildings burned down. The movement pressured the

government to take radical land reform measures. Partly as a reaction to the growing violence of the movement in Cochabamba, President Paz Estenssoro appointed a commission to study this question in January 1953, and on 2 August 1953, the Bolivian agrarian reform was officially launched by presidential decree in a public ceremony in Ucucreña attended by thousands of peasants. One of the chief functions of the peasant syndicates, in newly formed federations in all departments and united at the national level in the National Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia (CNTCB), was to petition for land for members under the new land reform programme. An armed peasant militia was created to support the government and the peasants against counter-revolutionary violence. Many landlords fled their estates, and the *de facto* distribution of *hacienda* lands by the organized peasants often took place well in advance of the slower legal proceedings.

The Bolivian land reform was partly inspired by the Mexican agrarian reform. As in the latter, the Bolivian reform affirmed the nation's original ownership of its natural resources and established the right of landless peasants to ownership, and Indian communities to restitution, of land through the expropriation of *haciendas*. The principal achievement, however, which profoundly affected the Bolivian social and political structure, was the abolition of the *colono* system, whereby the peasants have been freed from their forced labour obligations to the landowners.

After the mid-1950s, the rate of implementation of land reforms declined. Benefits for the peasantry were largely neutralized because land property was mostly privatized, and the market remained under control of rural elites. The reforms, however, were effective enough to prevent the peasantry from joining a "focus" of revolutionary guerrillas created by Ernesto Guevara in Bolivia in the mid-1960s. The official national peasant federation institutionalized by the government in 1952 continued to have a certain political impact, partly through the Ministry of Peasant Affairs (see Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994).

◆ Mobilization in Cuba²

As in other Latin American countries and the Philippines, the peasant struggle against large estates and corporations in Cuba goes back to the colonial epoch. In Cuba, peasants began mobilizing after the introduction of railways, around 1830. This had made the cultivation of sugar cane profitable, and as a result the owners of sugar estates began to extend their lands aggressively at the cost of the small tobacco producing farms, and through eviction of peasants and usurpation of the plots they cultivated.

Peasant resistance was initially sporadic and isolated, but when armed struggle for independence flared up in 1868 the peasants joined the movement. This rebellion was repressed, but many peasants in the Mambi army participated in the revolution of 1895 against the Spanish regime, in which 400,000 Cubans and 80,000 Spaniards lost their lives (Wolf, 1969:254). Peasants were "concentrated" in closed villages by the colonial regime in order to counter their guerrilla tactics, and as a reaction to this form of eviction, the peasants joined the liberation struggle in

² Most of the data on Cuba were collected by this author in 1973 through interviews with peasant leaders of the Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños and documentation supplied by them.

ever greater numbers. When the fighting ended, due to US intervention, the United States took more and more power in Cuba, replacing the colonial forces. Instead of institutionalizing the armed forces of the liberation as a national army, as was proposed by the Cubans, the United States created the *guardia rural* (rural guards), members of which were not identified with the peasantry. With the support of the *guardia rural*, peasants were evicted from communal lands and small private plots in order to create plantations for US companies or individuals. Thus sugar production and cattle rearing became the dominant activities in Cuba (Wolf, 1969:255). By 1905, there were 13,000 US-owned properties in Cuba, covering almost 10 per cent of the total surface of the country. Moreover, the promises made to those who struggled in the liberation war to obtain uncultivated land were not kept. Many of the veterans went to Oriente province and occupied uncultivated lands, which officially was made possible by a law in 1904. However, large landowners later took those lands from the peasant settlers, who protested sporadically.

Between 1910 and 1920 the peasant struggle in Cuba was influenced by the growing urban labour movement and by socialist and communist ideas. But it was not until large estates began expanding rapidly between 1915 and 1925, mainly in Oriente province and Camagüey, that the peasant struggle became more effective and increasingly radical. Thousands of peasants were evicted and pushed into the mountains, or forced to work as labourers on estates or in sugar factories often owned by foreign companies. These companies collaborated closely with the Cuban government. President Garcia Menocal, for example, was linked to the Cuban American Sugar Company, the second largest US sugar enterprise in the country. In 1923, there was a massive mobilization of peasants against land seizures by a US-owned company in Caujeri, Oriente province. In this situation, peasants proved willing to defend their lands by armed force. The same resistance took place in Sagua de Tánamo.

Although peasants often tried to claim their rights through legal action in the courts, they also used more radical means, because many of them were veterans of the independence struggle. Unrest continued for years in one part of the country or another. In 1928, the peasants mobilized to retrieve lands or prevent usurpation by the United Fruit Company. In several places along the north coast of Oriente province, the company received help from the *guardia rural*. By 1933–34, the peasants had become more formally organized. One outstanding leader, a veteran of the 1895 revolution, was Lino Alvarez. Particularly at the beginning, his strategy was to try all legal means possible to defend the peasants' lands. More radical leaders denounced Alvarez's "excessive legalism", but it provided time to organize the peasants effectively and mobilize them into big demonstrations when it became clear that the legalistic approach was failing dismally. The peasants then felt better prepared to initiate more radical and extra-legal actions, such as land invasions.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the sugar workers were also organized through the Confederacion Nacional Obrera de Cuba (National Workers Confederation of Cuba), guided by the Communist Party, which had been created in 1925. Sugar workers and cane-cultivating peasants worked together in the struggle against the sugar mill and plantation owners, such as the United Fruit Company. This struggle became especially acute when the repressive Machado regime was overthrown through a general strike in 1933. The peasants had their own increasingly radical

demands, such as “land to the tillers” and “schools for the children”. At the Second Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba in April 1934, the slogan “Agrarian and anti-imperialist revolution” was proclaimed and mass meetings of peasants, at times supported by rallies or movements in the towns, were organized around this slogan. Trade union leaders and Communist Party cadres who went into the rural areas, such as the mountainous areas of Oriente province, were surprised by the strength of the peasant movements.

In some areas, such as Camagüey, the peasant struggle initially took the form of the creation of pro-school committees. Such joint efforts, as well as some difficulties encountered, had a solidifying and radicalizing effect on these groups. These committees, supported by the Communist youth organization, held the First National Peasant Congress in 1937 to co-ordinate peasant activities around the country. After this congress, which was held in Havana, peasant committees and associations were created in various provinces. For instance, in 1939 the Peasant Federation of Oriente was created at a peasant congress there.

The struggle everywhere for concrete and moderate goals encountered strong negative reaction from landowners and companies, leading the peasants to realize that those forces were practically their class enemies. As a result of this awareness, the small local groupings saw the need to become more strongly and rationally organized and to give a more radical content to their demands. Thus an organized struggle gradually emerged. At the Second National Peasant Congress in Havana in 1941, in which over 800 peasant delegates participated, the *Asociación Nacional Campesina* (National Peasant Association) was created. The chief struggle of this association and its affiliates was against the numerous evictions of peasants by the large landowners and multinational companies. In the following years, the efforts of estate owners and companies to evict peasants and usurp their lands became increasingly violent. Many peasant houses were destroyed, and several peasant leaders who headed the resistance against such activities were assassinated. By 1944, according to the *Asociación Nacional Campesina*, about 40,000 families were threatened with eviction. In response, mass meetings and demonstrations were organized in several parts of the country.

The need for fundamental changes in rural social structures, such as broad agrarian reform, rather than small gains, was increasingly felt by the peasant associations. During the 1940s, government promises about land reform were made and some weak steps in that direction were taken. Efforts to neutralize the increasingly radical peasant movement and the increasing demands for structural change were also made through the creation of an alternative organization, the *Confederación Campesina de Cuba* (Peasant Confederation of Cuba), led by persons related to the government. The *Banco de Fomento Agrícola e Industrial de Cuba* (BANFAIC, Agricultural and Industrial Development Bank of Cuba), created in 1950, also tried with some success to give the impression that a new reform-oriented policy had been initiated. The producers of certain products, such as tobacco, also created another institution with that purpose, with obligatory membership. Although at the village level these organizations were sometimes led by small farmers, nationally they were dominated by the large producers. However, members of the radical *Asociación Nacional Campesina* took over more and more leadership roles in these organizations, rather than struggle against them.

After the coup d'état that brought Batista to power in 1952, the peasant struggle became more vocal again as a reaction to the increasing demands of large landowners and companies. The Asociación Nacional Campesina organized many meetings and pro-land reform committees were created in many sugar producing areas. An attack on the Moncada barracks by young revolutionaries headed by Fidel Castro on 26 July 1953, had a considerable effect on the militancy of the peasants and workers. The sugar strike of 1955, which paralyzed over 100 sugar mills, was an expression of the trend toward radicalization. The confrontation between peasant associations and the King Ranch (from Texas) when it usurped lands for livestock rearing in Adelaide, Camagüey province, in 1954, and the Francisco Sugar Company, which seized land in 1958, provide other examples. After the peasants were imprisoned when they tried to prevent these companies from taking their lands, women took over the efforts to halt the bulldozers destroying their houses and crops. Similar activities were taking place in Oriente province. When the small group of revolutionaries headed by Fidel Castro started a guerrilla struggle there, they found the peasantry in the Sierra, the highlands in the East, ready for insurrectionary action. The resistance against the violence of the large landowners and companies had radicalized the peasants to such an extent that they were prepared to support or even to join the guerrilla forces. The trade unions of sugar workers and the Communist Party initially were hesitant to support the rebellion in the Sierra (Wolf, 1969:268–273), but once the effort was succeeding, they joined it, together with anti-United States elements of the middle classes.

Repressive actions of the Batista regime, as it tried to concentrate the rebellious peasants in areas where they could give no support to the guerrillas, further radicalized peasant resistance. The careful way in which the guerrilla forces approached the peasants in the areas they dominated, along with the reform measures they encouraged, received immediate support from the local peasant associations. Particularly Law No. 3 of the Rebel Forces, which gave up to 26 hectares of land to its cultivators free of charge, helped to mobilize the peasantry behind the revolutionary forces and ensure their victory.

Soon after the revolutionary regime came to power, a land reform law was promulgated (17 May 1959) which prohibited the possession of land beyond 30 *caballerías* (about 390 hectares). More than 100,000 tenants, sharecroppers and other precarious cultivators thus became proprietors of their plots without any obligation to pay for the land. The large estates (many of which were foreign-owned) were expropriated and transformed into co-operative or state farms.

After the reform, about one third of those working in agriculture were small cultivators, working some 42 per cent of all farmland. More than 150,000 small farmers were organized into local associations and co-operatives. In 1961 these were brought together into the National Association of Small Cultivators (ANAP), an intermediary in the supply of credit and in the sale of products at fair prices. ANAP has been particularly effective in channelling credits, providing 4 per cent interest to small farmers in a system which gives the supervisory task mainly to the local organization. Requests for credit are made to the bank through a local co-operative organization which guides, approves and supervises the cultivation plan of each member. In addition to organizing the peasants' participation in credit and other agricultural promotion efforts, ANAP forms part of a wider system of popular mobilization through the so-called mass organizations.

One result of the Cuban reform programme was the fear of the United States that it might serve as an example to other Latin American countries. This led the Kennedy administration (after the failure of its Bay of Pigs invasion to overthrow the Cuban revolutionary government) to promote land reform programmes all over Latin America in the context of the Alliance for Progress. Most Latin American governments were pressured to adopt land reform legislation that stipulated measures to correct grossly inequitable land tenure situations, mostly dominated by latifundia. This legislation, in most cases, remained a dead letter, but in some countries it gave an impetus to grassroots organizations to pressure or bargain for redistribution of some latifundia lands to semi-landless peasants. This happened particularly in Brazil, Peru, Chile and Colombia. However, one after the other these social mobilizations were blocked, frustrated or deradicalized by a variety of forces (see Barraclough, 1991; Stiefel and Wolfe, 1995).

◆ Mobilization in Brazil

In the coastal belt of the Brazilian north-east, after the few indigenous communities had been extinguished, the best lands were occupied in the colonial period by rapidly expanding sugar plantations (*engenhos*) producing for the world market. The dryer inlands were occupied by large cattle ranches. When the traditional sugar estates could no longer compete effectively on the world market, many workers were dismissed. The marginal areas, where land of inferior quality was still available for subsistence farming, were soon occupied, and peasants moved farther west into the remaining areas in the dry *sertao* region. Also, many people migrated to the south, to find work in the newly created coffee estates, or in the growing urban centres. The extension of the estates in the north-east continued in spite of the decadence of the old estates, the *engenhos*. Modern sugar factories (*usinas*), often built with foreign capital, were introduced and the government took measures to protect the sugar industry.

Occasional droughts in the marginal areas aggravated the already precarious land tenure situation. A religious movement headed by Father Cicero in one such area, Juazeiro, from 1872 onward aimed to support the peasants, attempting to solve the basic issues of land tenure through the construction of a "Holy City". The drought of 1877–79 in particular had a tremendous impact, resulting in movements that took the form either of small bands of rural bandits (*cangaceiros*), rebellious groups without a clear cause, or large-scale rebellions of *fanaticos* (as occurred in Canudos, 1893–97, and Contestado 1912). The movements of *fanaticos* had religious and messianic overtones, but were also partly a reaction to the increasing pressure on the land.

The social "banditry" that occurred in Brazil has been noted by Hobsbawm (1959) as one of the more "primitive" ways through which peasants have protested under such circumstances. This phenomenon should be viewed against a background of the overall lawlessness existing in the rural areas where power holders imposed the laws at will. Although messianic movements, *jacqueries* or social banditry were not the most effective means of defending the peasants' fundamental interests in conserving their lost land, in view of the lawlessness imposed by the landed elites, the peasant reaction seems understandable. In fact, it was extremely difficult to

find an appropriate response to the violence with which capitalist systems of land use, property and economic activity were introduced.

Later, large peasant movements emerged in the heavily populated areas in Brazil's north-east. *ligas camponesas* (peasant leagues), organized in 1955 by peasants on the Galileia sugar estate, formed an association to raise money to purchase from the landlord the estate on which they worked. This was considered undesirable by the landlord, who tried to evict the peasants from the land. A socialist lawyer and charismatic leader, Francisco Juliao, sympathized with the peasants and defended them in the courts. Soon the idea emerged to extend this local initiative to the state of Pernambuco, then all of north-east Brazil. As the movement gained strength and became more radical in reaction to the landlords' opposition, competing unions were established by the Catholic Church. These groups became increasingly convinced of the need for radical reform. A programme of *concientização* introduced by Paulo Freire, which aimed through literacy to assist the peasants to express their needs, supported this. During the early 1960s, the left-of-centre Goulart government began promulgating agrarian reform legislation that could have largely satisfied peasant demands. Probably as a reaction to the growing strength of the overall reform movement, in which the peasant leagues and some church-sponsored unions participated, the army staged a coup d'état in April 1964. Under the military government the peasant leagues and other groups were ruthlessly oppressed. The grassroots movement, originally sponsored by the Catholic Church to compete with the leagues, soon allied with them after it also faced the intransigence of the landlords. This later became known as the "theology of liberation".

After the military coup, peasant mobilization became very difficult. Peasant leaders were harassed and others killed, and yet others fled into exile in other countries. While the radical peasant leagues were thus practically eliminated, the agricultural workers union (CONTAG, Confederação dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura), which had been created under the Goulart regime, was placed under government "intervention". Afterwards, CONTAG played a double role, on one hand giving some legitimacy to the policies of the military and, on the other hand, trying to defend the interests of agricultural workers within certain limits. With support from the progressive wing of the Catholic Church, radicalized after the coup, the local CONTAG unions could maintain some degree of independence in some areas. The unions gradually regained strength and, in 1980, organized a massive strike by sugar workers. Altogether CONTAG membership grew to eight million by 1985, including more and more independent small peasants as a result of its militancy at the local level and as part of the gradually recovering trade union movement (Fatheuer 1997:71).

In the hope that some redistribution of land would take away the motive for peasant mobilization, the military did legislate land reform in 1964: the *Estatuto de Terra*. This reform did not affect the underused land of large estates; it was designed to encourage resettlement on virgin land in Rondônia, in Amazonia. At the same time, in the south, commercial agriculture (*soja*) was stimulated on large estates.

In 1979, as a reaction to this modernization and commercialization in the southern states, many small-scale peasants who had been dislodged or had lost their tenancy began the "landless movement", through which they sought to defend their land or

occupy what they were entitled to. This took place in isolated cases all over Brazil (Mançano, 1996:66). The peasants were often supported by the Comisao Pastoral de Terra, (CPT), created by the Catholic Church to deal with the increasing injustice. The contribution of liberation theologians such as Leonardo Boff and Oscar Beozzo, as well as various social scientists, to the struggle was highly appreciated by the leadership (Stedile, 1994:12). Church-sponsored grassroots communities (CEBs) were the “spaces of freedom” where spiritual reflection on a more just and egalitarian relationship between human beings and “the promised land” was widely practised, often leading to organizational efforts. Some of the priests involved were persecuted.

The peasant movement continued to gain strength and created, in 1984, the Movimento Sem Terra (MST), which had its first national congress, with 500 participants, in 1985 (Fatheuer, 1997:73). The movement intensified its increasingly militant and at times confrontational policy of occupying lands, thus achieving *de facto* land reform in many different local situations. Wide publicity regarding invasions of mostly underused land gained considerable support among the peasantry and public opinion. One of the key leaders, Joao Pedro Stedile, was in favour of collective ownership so that economies of scale could be practised, with the use of tractors, in order to compete with capitalist farmers.

As Grzybowski (1994:289) points out, the movements have experienced crises, partly due to internal differences but mainly to the oppressive measures of the government and the ruthless violence of the landlords. About 2,000 peasants have been killed in massacres during land occupations, but 140,000 peasant families have obtained land through these activities since the 1980s.

The intensified use of violence by the landlords was related to the rapidly increasing concentration of land in a few hands. The concentration took place not only in the south, but particularly in Amazonia where several latifundia of over a million hectares were created (Mançano, 1996:39). As a reaction to the aggressive occupation of huge tracts of land in the latter region by foreign companies (such as Volkswagen) and commercial farmer settlers, the local population, seeing its life-support system threatened, gradually began to mobilize. Encroachments were resisted with some measure of success by rubber-tappers (*seringueiros*), who had long lived and worked sustainably in Amazonia. These traditional producers — often considered to be backward — became the vanguard of the movement for the conservation of tropical forests. The rubber-tappers’ movement gained worldwide recognition after the assassination of its leader, Chico Mendes, in 1988 (Fatheuer, 1997:72). By that time, the movement had created a national organization and was receiving considerable support from environmental and other NGOs to defend peasants’ rights and set up sustainable projects going beyond land reform as such.

Movements that have emerged in Brazil over the past two decades have in common a struggle for real democracy and against the neoliberal model of development prevailing in the country. There are different ideas about possible alternatives, but as José Rainha, one popular leader of MST, recently stated: “We don’t want a revolution, land reform today means to reform capitalism to give everybody a chance” (Fatheuer, 1997:79).

◆ Mobilization in Indonesia

One of the most spectacular peasant mobilizations in Asia was the Indonesian Peasant Front, (BTI, Barisan Tani Indonesia) created and directed by the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party), after Aidit became its secretary-general in 1953. The communists tried to arrive at a united front policy and to build up a mass organization, particularly among the peasants, following to some extent the Chinese grassroots mobilization model in a generally peaceful manner.

In the first place, the survivors of feudalism in Indonesia were denounced. Emphasis was given to the need to organize peasants, taking as a point of departure their most strongly felt demands and grievances. It was suggested that local organizations be created around such demands, adapted to each particular village or area. Party cadres were instructed to identify the most acute problems in each particular area or community. A policy of “three together” was followed, whereby PKI activists had to “live together, eat together and work together” with the peasants. They also helped solve all kinds of practical, day-to-day problems, such as rent payment, etc. Such “small but successful” actions were seen by the PKI and BTI cadres as the best way to be accepted by and mobilize the peasantry. It was emphasized, however, that such actions should be accompanied by stimulating among the peasants the awareness that the basic solution to their problems could come only with the end of their exploitation by landlords, and that this had to be achieved through organized struggle. Actions that directly affected the relationship with the landowners were not to be undertaken, however, until local-level organizations had gained enough strength. Then demands for joint land rent agreements, lowered interest rates on loans or lowered land rents could be brought up.

It is surprising that the spread and development of the BTI and its activities in Java came about in a society still dominated by tradition and respect for harmony (*rukun*) and established leadership, although the first signs of a decline in customary relations were there. It was a big step to systematically undermine the hold of traditional wealthy leaders over their villages and to bring the people to the point of opposing that leadership on crucial issues such as land tenure.

It would be an exaggeration to say that clear-cut class struggle emerged, but there were certainly elements of one. By bringing up examples of existing but hidden grievances against those in power, people were made aware that the harmony in their villages was disappearing — or had not really existed. As cases of abuse and usury under the modernization process and increasing absentee ownership became known, peasants gained increasing awareness of being exploited. The BTI used this awareness as a means to organize the peasants as a “special interest” group.

Strong new local leadership was needed to rally the people against traditional elites in addition to mobilizing them to oppose the deteriorating land tenure situation. Identification with the fate of poor peasants was the initial step to gain their adherence and admiration. Loyalty to charismatic and particularly able or courageous leaders brought together the Javanese peasants in their struggle for improvement and change. Such leaders also took on the “fatherly” role traditionally played by landlords and wealthy farmers among the peasants in their village. Once traditional patronage was undermined and new leaders enjoyed sufficient prestige, it was possible to compete successfully with old leaders in elections for *lurahs* (village-heads) and even higher positions in local government. In several areas, particularly in Central Java, BTI and PKI leaders were thus

gradually taking over official positions from the established local elite. In the process, the activists often used Javanese mythological elements and spiritual practices that were cherished by the masses as the characteristics of a just society (Adas, 1979:93ff). In this effort, the activists sought to gain the collaboration of the local *dukuns* (healers) and traditional *wajang* puppet players.

In spite of the difficulties typically faced by organizers in highly traditional rural areas, the BTI was the most impressive of all the communist-oriented mass organizations in Indonesia. At the end of 1953 it counted several hundred thousand members, and 8.5 million in September 1964. The growing strength of the communist and communist-oriented mass organizations provoked a strong response from the armed forces. A PKI Party Congress planned for 1959 was initially forbidden by the army but was later allowed, due to support from President Sukarno. However, the scheduled elections of 1959, which could have given the Communist Party a majority in parliament or made it the most influential party, were not held. Instead, presidential rule or “guided democracy” was initiated and President Sukarno tried to keep a balance between the army, the Communist Party and other forces.

The bargaining position of the BTI as a mass organization was, however, strong enough to take up the land reform issue successfully at the national level and obtain the promulgation of a land reform law in 1960. According to this law, landowners who had more than the official ceiling of five hectares of irrigated paddy land had to make the surplus available for redistribution to the landless.

But this reform was only slowly and inefficiently implemented, leading the BTI and PKI to step up their activities and become more militant, and risking the harmonious collaboration that existed at the national level between them and various other political forces. Ladejinsky, (1977:340–352), who visited Indonesia in 1961 and 1963, complimented the Indonesian government for its legislation. But he severely criticized the slow and ineffective implementation in a letter to the responsible minister, Dr. Sadjarwo, after having made some field trips. One problem was the very low price which owners received for surplus land, compared to the market value (Ladejinski, 1977:346), which created much resistance to land sales.

In order to speed up the reform programme, in 1963 Aidit endorsed a “unilateral action movement” (*Gerakan Aksi Sefihak*) of the peasants. The tactic most frequently used was occupation of the lands to which landless peasants were entitled under the law. By occupying certain parcels, the peasants involved indicated which lands were to be distributed.

It is difficult to assess whether the “unilateral action movement” was instigated by the BTI or PKI leadership or was a spontaneous response by the peasants to doubtful practices and unilateral actions by landowners, such as distributing surplus land to their own relatives or eviction of possible claimants. While such actions by the landowners were an effort to avoid land distribution or prevent peasants from claiming their new rights, the unilateral actions of the peasants were directed toward the initiation and acceleration of the land distribution process.

In August 1964 President Sukarno also endorsed the unilateral action movement, and during the second half of 1964 drastic steps were taken to accelerate the

stagnant land reform programme. This suggests that the unilateral action movement grew to considerable proportions, and may indicate how effectively the BTI and PKI had organized the peasants. Actually, militancy is generally not considered a characteristic of the Javanese peasants. The fact that, in a good many instances, local harmony was abolished shows how far the process of “de-traditionalization” had progressed. On the whole, local people took the new course of events for granted, with about half a million peasants benefiting from land reform in a relatively short time during the second half of 1964.

There is evidence that during the period of rapid land distribution little violence occurred. A ferociously violent reaction came, however, in October 1965. After an abortive coup, allegedly by leftist officers, a military regime came to power. Sectors of the army, together with the youth of the largely Islamic rural elites, assassinated more than half a million peasants and peasant leaders, as well as other communists or alleged communists. After this massacre, the BTI was virtually non-existent. According to Ernst Utrecht (1975), certain representatives of traditional Javanese cosmology (shamans, *dukuns*), played an important role in the BTI campaigns for more egalitarian land distribution. This probably ensured that the fire of resistance would smoulder for decades to come.

◆ Mobilization in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is one of the most interesting cases in which traditional cosmology, folk religion and spiritual forces played a crucial role in the struggle for land and liberation, which culminated in 1980. Traditionally, the ties between people and land in Zimbabwe, as in many other African countries, are not only material but also religious or spiritual. The land belongs to God, ancestors and, particularly, to the founders of a lineage, clan or tribe who have been buried there. Some of the most important landmarks — certain hills, ponds or trees — are named after ancestors whose spirits are honoured there. These are thought to be powerful spirits who guide many aspects of the daily life of the tribe in order to keep harmony with the natural environment. Every descendant is entitled to enough land to survive with his family. Land is allotted mostly by the chief, who is the most direct descendant of the founders of a clan and thus possesses considerable power (Schoffeleers, 1978).

African religions thus continue to play a crucial role in modern rural development, in spite of a century of colonial penetration and missionary activity. The former Tribal Areas of Rhodesia Research Foundation observed, in a report in 1974, that an important factor in traditional life in rural areas continued to be the role of the spirit medium (*svikiro*) of the “tribal spirit” (*mhondoro*) (Hughes, 1974). The tribal spirit is that of the founding father of a chiefdom and is distinguished from the ordinary ancestor spirits. Tribal spirits are contacted through a human medium who goes into a trance and then speaks with the voice of the spirit. Such *mhondoros* are particularly concerned with the land from which their descendants derive their subsistence. As the report noted on rural development projects: “Any planner of such a project would be wise, therefore, to acquaint himself with the position with regard to these spiritual influences in the areas in which the project is planned to operate” (Hughes, 1974:294, 297). This report specifically recommended special investigation of the roles of these spirit mediums in local development, as they could affect specific development plans, particularly those

related to land use. Recent research (Daneel, 1993) has confirmed the usefulness of this approach.

Most local cosmologies in Zimbabwe accept Mwari as the all-embracing High God, the source of all life and problem solving. Mwari is active and immanent, the creator of mankind, the invisible supreme being who can be approached only through lower-level intermediaries. He manifests himself in volcanic eruptions or lightning, and sometimes by speaking directly to the living as a voice heard mostly in caves. Ranger considers his worship an “esoteric cult” (1967:22). The highest guardian spirits held in common by many tribes are called upon only in times of national disaster, such as severe droughts or the advance of white settlers. The influence of the Mwari cosmology showed itself most strikingly in the turmoil that occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a result of British colonization and the struggle for independence.

During the second half of the nineteenth century the Ndebele, under King Mzilikazi, fled from the Zulu ruler Shaka and, after being driven away from Transvaal by the Boers, established themselves in the western part of what is presently Zimbabwe, subjugating the various Shona peoples there. After considerable turmoil, orderly and peaceful relations evolved between the Ndebele and Shona and prevailed under Mzilikazi’s son Lobengula, who became king in 1870. The Ndebele integrated with many of the local people, respecting and partly adopting local cosmological traditions and shrines relating to the land they now inhabited. Rainmaking was an important element of these traditions.

In 1888, representatives of Cecil Rhodes’s British South Africa Company (BSAC) obtained mining concessions in Matabeleland and Mashonaland from King Lobengula, with the help of Reverend John Moffat, the son of a famous missionary. But the concessions were suspended after the company’s deceit became apparent: Rhodes was plotting to overthrow Lobengula and break up the military power of the Ndebele (Martin and Johnson, 1981:42–43). The plot was foiled, but the Pioneer Column headed by L.S. Jameson, one of Rhodes’s collaborators, occupied Mashonaland in 1890. The Pioneer Column did not encounter resistance. The Shona people may have expected the whites to offer protection from possible Ndebele raids — it did not occur to them that the whites would steal their land. Once the Shona realized that the whites had come to stay, taking land, “an uprising was inevitable, and in this the spirit mediums — the link between the dead and the living — were to play a vital role” (Martin and Johnson, 1981:45). The uprising took place after the Ndebele had been subdued by the overwhelming firepower of the whites, in 1894. After the surrender of the Ndebele, the Mwari priest Mkwati fled and found refuge with paramount chief Mashiangombi in western Mashonaland, where he continued to incite resistance against the whites. The actions of the Shona were more concerted than the whites expected.

Both the Mwari religious officers and the spirit mediums were influential. The first were effective in the areas strongly influenced by Mwari beliefs, in western and south-western Mashonaland. In central, northern and eastern Mashonaland, the spirit mediums were more influential. In the spirit hierarchy, junior ancestor spirits were less important than spirits of dead tribal kings, and all were subordinate to the spirits of Chaminuka, Nehanda and other supra-tribal founding ancestors, the whole forming a kind of “spiritual brotherhood”. There was co-ordination between

Mwari priests and mediums of the Chaminuka-Nehanda hierarchy. The spirit medium of Nehanda, a frail old woman, had a particularly strong influence on the rebellion.

Various efforts have been made to explain the relatively strong impact of the Shona uprising as compared with rebellions elsewhere in Africa. Ranger (1967:352–4) ascribes it to charismatic leadership and religious enthusiasm, combined with a utilitarian and disciplined approach. Thus European goods were not looted but promptly delivered to the servants of Mwari. There is also evidence of millenarian elements in the movement, based on prophetic warnings against the seductions of the white man's way of life and goods. Although the millenarian and supra-tribal impact of the movement are debatable, its strength was obvious, as it took the BSAC's two armed columns, entering from Beira and Bulawayo, more than a year (to December 1897) to gain control — and this happened only after the two most important spirit mediums had been captured. In the rebellion, 400 whites were killed, about 10 per cent of the settler population at that time (Martin and Johnson, 1981:49).

After the 1896–97 rebellion was put down, relative peace seems to have prevailed between the white minority and the great majority of black people. Ncube, a contemporary Mwari high priest, pointed out (during an interview with the author in December 1983) that as long ago as King Lobengula's days, spirits had told the king that whites would rule, and that they knew many secrets about the minerals. Although Mwari generally favours peace, harmony and unity, violent resistance would be allowed if the whites broke the rules of decent behaviour, as they did in the 1890s. Thus it was to be expected that the spirits would intervene again if the whites committed additional injustices, especially in relation to land possession. As early as 1898, 38 per cent of the total population of Matabeleland had been forced into reserves, and the whites had expropriated 15,000,000 of the country's total of 96,000,000 acres (Martin and Johnson, 1981:51–3).

After the Second World War the white population doubled to about 150,000, and more Africans were expelled from their lands. There was rising discontent among the Africans, as many had served in the war yet on their return were again treated as second-class citizens. Trade union activity, which had been almost impossible previously, emerged in 1945, and in 1948 resulted in a general strike (Astrow, 1983:7). In 1951, the Native Land Husbandry Act forced rural families to reduce their cattle herds and change land tenure practices. This contributed to radicalization, which was further enhanced by the fact that in the early 1960s, many African countries gained independence. But whites in Rhodesia resisted pressures from Great Britain to give the Africans a greater share in the government and, under leadership of Ian Smith, declared themselves unilaterally independent from Britain.

In the meantime, a sector of educated Africans was gradually emerging, often through missionary schools. Their aspirations were blocked by white supremacy, as were the goals of the trade unions and their leaders, such as Joshua Nkomo. Together with intellectuals such as the Rev. Ndabaningi Sithole and Robert Mugabe, Nkomo initiated the nationalist movement. The movement emphasized winning concessions from the white government regarding political participation. In 1961 the ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union) was formed, with Nkomo as leader, but a year later the nationalist organization was banned. Leaders were

jailed or fled into exile. Members of ZAPU who were dissatisfied with Nkomo's leadership created ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union), led by Sithole. This organization soon founded the ZANLA (Zimbabwe Nationalist Liberation Army) and sent recruits to China in 1964 for training in revolutionary warfare.

The upsurge of the African nationalist cause also brought a revival of the Mwari cosmology. In 1954, trade unionists from Bulawayo visited the Matonjeni Shrine for consultation, as did Nkomo's wife after he was jailed in 1965. Many others did the same. According to Daneel, Mwari seemed well-disposed to the African Nationalist cause, but was suggesting peaceful "negotiation" as a better way than violence. Various authors have suggested that the oppression of the nationalist movement helped revive the influence of spirit mediums (Daneel, 1970:71-3; Fry, 1976:107-23).

Following the example of FRELIMO, the Mozambican liberation movement, a guerrilla war began in Zimbabwe in 1972, with attacks organized from guerrilla positions in Mozambique. The important role of the traditional spirit mediums was soon acknowledged by both the nationalist organizations and the Rhodesian government. In his first serious reaction to the guerrilla struggle in January 1973, the Prime Minister Ian Smith commented that the local population was being intimidated and that "they found a few witch doctors of doubtful character and of little substance, and succeeded in bribing them to their side" (Martin and Johnson, 1981:74). These witch doctors were, in fact, the spirit mediums who were helping ZANLA.

Some of the ZANLA leaders, most of whom were Marxists, were initially circumspect about the powers of the Nehanda and other spirit mediums. Tungamirai, one of ZANLA's top leaders, was among them. His scepticism arose from his Catholic background and his political education, although he changed his mind when he became acquainted with the spirit mediums. He stated: "There must be some science in this. Some time we must really go deeply into this because there are some wonders being made by some of those people" (cited in Martin and Johnson, 1981:77-8; Lan, 1983:303-4).

The Rhodesian government was swift in its reaction to the guerrilla uprising. In one study, it was noted that the Rhodesian Ministry of Internal Affairs took the spirit mediums seriously enough to employ an advisor on African customs, just as the CIA station chief in the Philippines had ordered a study of the "superstitions" of the local peasants, such as their lore, witch doctors, taboos and myths. (As a result of these studies, the CIA in the Philippines broadcast curses in Tagalog from small aircraft flying low over villages supporting Huk peasant rebels.) Similarly, the Rhodesians dropped pamphlets from the air in guerrilla areas, pretending that they were anti-nationalist instructions from local spirit mediums (Frederikse, 1982:146).

In 1973, shortly after the beginning of the liberation war in Rhodesia, instructions were given to control the spirit mediums. Some of them were shot by government forces. Others were persuaded by gifts and respectful treatment to collaborate with the government, as many of the traditional chiefs had been. Two were killed by the guerrillas because they co-operated with government forces (Lan, 1983:37-8).

Lan has studied the role of spirit mediums in Dande, an area of Zimbabwe into which the ZANU guerrillas made incursions from Mozambique. He noted that the guerrillas were originally considered heavily armed foreign conquerors by the inhabitants of Dande, but because of their efforts to merge with the people and their environment and to fight for the recovery of ancestral lands, they were soon accepted as natives (1983:196). Lan explains the importance of the spirit mediums as a way of creating a link between the guerrilla forces, entering from Mozambique, and the local peasantry in Dande. The ZANU forces used the Maoist model of a liberation war, in which combatants seek the support of the local population through political education, as well as mobilizing and defending them, extending the “liberated zones” (Lan, 1983:11), but avoiding possible confrontation with the technically superior military forces of the state. In order to gain a real acceptance among the peasants, the guerrillas could not rely on — and in fact had to replace — the traditional chiefs. The latter had lost much of their authority, because they had been integrated into the colonialist system of indirect rule. Here the spirit mediums were to play an important role (Isaacman, 1979:313), facilitating the transfer of authority from the chiefs to the guerrillas by representing the *mhondoros*, spirits of the ancestors of the chiefs. Of course, the guerrillas’ assertion that they were fighting for the reclamation of the land, the rightful owners of which had been dislodged by the white farmers, was also important. The guerrillas duly observed certain ritual prohibitions in order to be accepted as adopted descendants of the *mhondoros*, the tribal guardian spirits and protectors of the land. Though *mhondoros* are generally against killing, the guerrillas were allowed to do so because of the cause, liberation of the land, although the spirits insisted that the killing be kept to a minimum (Lan, 1983:283).

The struggle resulted in considerable changes in relations between the generations in the rural areas. The guerrillas were all young, but enjoyed great authority as descendants of the *mhondoro*. This reflected on the local youth brigades of ZANU helpers, *mujebas*, which were created immediately after a guerrilla group entered an area. After the war in Dande, under the leadership of the *mhondoro* Chiwawa-Ponday, democratically elected village committees introduced by ZANLA replaced the influence of the chiefs. The influence of the spirit mediums was so important that it was officially recognized and honoured by the newly elected Prime Minister, Robert Mugabe, at the independence celebrations in 1980.

Recovery of much of the ancestral land by the peasantry, however, was postponed by the Lancaster House Agreement, which was signed by the liberation forces and the colonial government before independence became official. Although land reform was recognized as a key reason for the social mobilization, the agreement stipulated (under international pressure) that a radical redistribution would not take place during the decade following 1980. Recently, within the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union/Popular Front (ZANUPF), pressure has been building to finally return much of the land to its original African inhabitants. After years of waiting, a first spectacular return of peasants to “the land of their grandparents”, organized by ex-guerrillas on white farms in the fertile Marondera area, was reported in **The Economist** (9 June 1998) as a sign of growing “peasant revolt”.

Over the years, droughts and other worsening ecological trends in Zimbabwe have resulted in an interest by some ZANLA ex-combatants together with spirit mediums and local chiefs to continue the social mobilization for the reconquest or

maintenance of the quality of the ancestral land. In 1988, they created the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists (AZTREC), dedicated to ecological conservation, such as tree planting, wildlife preservation and the protection of water resources. In the Masvingo area, the guardian spirits of the land and the deity Mwari now support the afforestation of communal lands where the threat of desertification was greatest (Daneel, 1993:161). During 1990–91, half a million trees were planted. As Daneel points out, the African Independent Churches are following suit by creating an Association of African Earthkeeping Churches (1993).

◆ Mobilization in India

In India, social mobilization of peasants for agrarian reform was also an integral part of the nationalist liberation movement from the beginning. As Sen described, Congress Party-leader Gandhi was crucial in mobilizing tenants against *zamindari* land tenure and tax systems imposed by the colonial government:

What needs to be noted is that Indian peasants, who lived in scattered villages, became politicized in the wake of the nationalist movement. The general spirit of defiance of authority generated by the nationalist movement from 1920 onwards and Gandhi's charisma surely promoted the growth of peasant movements almost throughout the country (1982:28).

Gandhi's mobilization techniques included meetings, processions, signature campaigns and *satyagraha* (soul force through passive resistance), mostly to achieve rent reduction and abolition of feudal dues. Tenant's unions (*Kisan Sabhas*) sprung up in many areas, and became particularly strong in Bihar. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, a Brahmin and disciple of Gandhi, attracted large audiences and was able to express peasant grievances effectively. As Das observed:

He achieved that status by a remarkable ability to speak to and for the peasants of Bihar; he could communicate with them and articulate their feelings in terms whose meaning neither peasant nor politician could mistake. He was a Swami, which gave him a tremendous charisma (1983:100–101).

Working from his Bihta ashram, Swami Saraswati took a leading role in the creation of a central organization, the All-India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), in 1936. One of the organization's demands was the abolition of the *zamindari* system of feudal landownership. The Congress Party's national leadership was not in favour of this trend because the party championed landlords and rich farmers. Socialists and communists had an increasingly strong influence in the AIKS (Sen 1982:73), while few Congress leaders were part of it. Intellectuals, including Swami Sahajanand and N.G. Ranga, many of them with a Marxist orientation, held leadership positions in the AIKS. The AIKS formed peasant cadres, who in turn mobilized at the local level. In 1938 AIKS had 500,000 members. A ban on the Communist Party and jailing of many of its leaders brought a setback, but after the ban was lifted in 1942, the organization quickly recovered (Sen, 1982:77).

As a reaction to the 1943 famine in Bengal in which many peasants died, the *tebhaga* movement emerged against landlords. The movement demanded that two thirds of the crop be remitted to the cultivator, as recommended but not implemented by the 1940 Land Revenue Commission. The *tebhaga* struggle was

supported by the Bengal Kisan Sabha, which organized massive demonstrations in 1946. Because of the strong influence of Communist leaders in the movement, the Congress Party leadership responded with severe police repression. This caused the collapse of the movement but radicalized the peasantry even more, indirectly strengthening the Communist Party in Bengal. Thus, the base was laid in West Bengal for the coming to power through regular elections in 1967 of a United Front government, dominated by the communists, which later carried out moderate but effective land reform in that state. A similar transition had occurred in 1957, through an elected United Front government in the state of Kerala.

The AIKS also had a considerable impact — although it was unable to achieve reform — in the Telengana region in Andhra Pradesh. In the colonial period, this state was ruled by Nizam and Muslim elites. The feudal conditions prevailing in the rural areas were challenged in the 1940s when a class of rich peasants emerged and supported the nationalist cause. When the Nizam declared independence for Hyderabad in 1947, the Congress Party joined the radical agrarian struggle against the Muslim feudal elite. In areas where the Communist-oriented AIKS had gained peasant support, the Muslim elites mobilized a paramilitary force that killed or jailed thousands of peasant militants (Sundarayya, 1979:545ff).

The peasant mobilization achieved a short-lived land redistribution (of over a million acres), and local village committees abolished feudal servitude. In 1948, however, the Indian army moved in to “pacify” the Telengana area and integrate the state into the Indian union. This action, as well as internal divisions over the strategy to follow — insurrectional armed struggle, as in China, or parliamentary politics — brought an end to this peasant movement in 1951 (Karunan, 1992:42–44).

During the 1960s, Maoist-oriented communists came to the foreground in India. The growing contradictions between rich and poor in rural areas led them to initiate rebellions (partly among tribal communities) under the guidance of their ideologue, Charu Mazumdar, in Naxalbari (Darjeeling district) and Srikakulam. These “Naxalite” rebellions remained rather isolated, and when they became increasingly violent they were isolated by army and police intervention (Sen, 1982:212ff; Karunan, 1992:47ff). But rural unrest remained endemic in most of India in spite of, or partly as an unforeseen result of, top-down rural development efforts.

One effect of years of agitation in different parts of India was some measure of tenancy reform, mainly in the areas where peasant organizations had been active in the late 1940s. However, these reform efforts remained relatively localized or were not systematically implemented. The evaluation by the Indian government of its tenancy reform programme presented at the 1966 World Land Reform Conference (United Nations, 1968) stressed that tenants should be encouraged to organize themselves into unions or co-operatives in order to enforce the reform measures. Little or nothing was done about this in practice, however. In fact, after the Tenancy Act of 1950, peasants were illegally evicted in several areas of India, because there was no check against this practice. In some areas, violence was used against the tenants; elsewhere peasants gave up their tenancy rights “voluntarily”.

The lack of progress in land reform in India during the 1950s and 1960s has been described extensively by Wolf Ladejinsky (1977) who, after his role as US land

reform advisor in occupied Japan and Taiwan, was called upon to study the situation in India for the Ford Foundation and later the World Bank. India's situation was complicated by the fact that each state government had its own policies, which were not always the same as those prescribed by national legislation. During field trips in 1952, Ladejinsky was struck by the fact that rental rates for tenants were very high, mostly far above 50 per cent of their yields. As a consequence, in the district of Tanjore in Madras state, the communists had taken up the land reform issue: "They didn't create the grievances; in the absence of any effort by the Madras government to correct the maladjustments breaking into the open, the Communists articulated the grievances to the obvious satisfaction of large groups of non-political farmers" (Ladejinsky, 1977:165). This led to considerable losses for the Congress Party, but not to effective reforms, even though the communist-organized peasant organization had 200,000 members.

Ladejinsky's recommendation to the Ford Foundation was to stimulate Indian intellectuals to promote the land reform issue: "It is this group that I think should be and could be induced, with little difficulty and, incidentally, with not too much money, to constitute themselves as a group that would study, write, publish, lecture and deal with all these issues" (Ladejinsky, 1977:197). However, in his assessment for the World Bank (carried out in 1965), Ladejinsky wondered if reforms in India continued to be "subverted" because of lack of political and social consciousness: "The reforms in India are not a result of popular demand but rather the brainchild of the intellectuals of the Congress Party. . . . They stopped short of going one step further by seeing to it that the peasants shared in the process" (1977:383).

To appease the peasantry, other, less radical, rural development strategies were designed in India. Thus community development emerged as an internationally sponsored strategy in the early 1950s, with support from the Ford Foundation and the Indo-American Technical Cooperation Fund. This approach was soon adopted on a large scale and in a few years became a nationwide programme widely presented as "meeting the Communist challenge", as the US ambassador to India at that time, Chester Bowles, indicated (1954:2).

Thus in most of India, social mobilization was not spontaneous, but a gradual approach of (planned) popular participation via "trickle-down" processes, practised on a large scale through the National Community Development Programme. As part of this strategy, community development and agricultural extension workers generally accepted that "communicating" new ideas via established leaders in the villages would automatically benefit the whole community. Information about improved technology, such as better seeds or fertilizers, was given to the more advanced farmers, the "opinion leaders", who were prepared to adopt new practices. The expectation was that the other farmers would eventually follow their example. But this approach completely ignored the uneven distribution of land and other resources in rural areas. It strengthened the economic position of those who were already better off, widening the gap between poor and rich at the village level. Thus, the community development strategy actually sharpened the contradictions and the potential for social conflict in the villages. Based on a number of evaluations of community development in India, Wertheim (1964:259ff) has referred to this approach as "betting on the strong" — favouring the well-to-do farmers — and he has noted similarities with the Stolypin reforms in pre-revolutionary Russia.

This rich-poor polarization was accelerated by the Green Revolution, which was also initiated “to prevent a red one” as Das pointed out (1983:216ff). The introduction of high yielding varieties of grains through credit-worthy farmers to increase food production was strongly supported by the Rockefeller Foundation and other Western donors and agribusinesses. A disadvantage of this approach was that an important minority sector of the peasantry could benefit, but large, often majority sectors did not share in this process and remained behind (Dasgupta, 1975; Palmer, 1976). Although food production increased considerably, growing contradictions between rich and poor led to social discrepancies, tenant displacement and increasing landlessness, enhancing unrest in many rural areas (Ladejinsky, 1977:472ff).

According to Sharma, the percentage of rural households living below the extreme poverty line rose from 38 per cent in 1960 to 53 per cent in 1968 (1973). It is estimated that landlessness among Indian peasants increased from 20 per cent to about 50 per cent between 1950 and 1980. Increasing frustration and deprivation led to greater participation by underprivileged groups in forms of resistance or outright rebellion, leading to what an official inquiry called “agrarian unrest”. This report of the Ministry of Home Affairs concluded:

The problem, in other words, has to be tackled on a wide front effectively and imaginatively. Failure to do so may lead to a situation where the discontented elements are compelled to organize themselves, causing the extreme tensions building up within the ‘complex molecule’ that is the Indian village to end in an explosion (1969:102).

Field visits that I made as member of an ILO mission in 1977 confirmed these alarming observations. About 50 of the 550,000 villages in India were visited, in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, so only general observations can be given. However, some impressions were so strong in practically all cases (and were confirmed by the literature) that it seems worthwhile to note them, albeit with reservations. Official statistics indicating a gradual increase of agricultural labourers, a decrease in the number of small farmers, tenants and sharecroppers, and a decreasing level of living, were amply confirmed by many dramatic life histories, told by peasants and women in the villages. In almost all villages visited, there had been recent cases of violent evictions, sometimes resulting in deaths. One sign of increasing frustration was that, in several villages, people did not see much use in answering questions. Their sense of grievance was so strong, however, that they spoke quite frankly about their problems and, when they realized that they were attentively listened to, talked with considerable insight as well as bitterness (for details see Huizer, 1977).

Januzzi (1994:140) pointed out that the shattering of Congress Party dominance in the 1967 elections demonstrated that formerly submissive peasants were beginning to act on their own behalf, contrary to the expectations of the landholding elite. He also noted that only in the state of Kerala, where beginning in 1957 the Communist Party was repeatedly voted into power, was effective land reform implemented, abolishing tenancy and thus creating conditions for “genuine democracy and protection of human rights at the local level” (1994:134ff).

In his assessment, Januzzi did not deal with the various peasant movements or organizations that have emerged in different parts of India during recent decades but have never achieved the national unity and determination that characterized the

Chinese peasant movement. Similarly, Ladejinsky did not go into detail about social mobilization and reforms in Kerala. He noted, however, that as a reaction to the discrepancies and dislocations caused by the Green Revolution, leftist parties helped peasants organize “land seizure” or “landgrab” movements in several states, but that these were harshly oppressed and an estimated 20,000 political activists were placed under arrest (Ladejinsky, 1977:486).

Agrarian unrest has continued in the Indian countryside, often including atrocities committed by the wealthy against the restless poor. Reitsma and Kleinpenning have explained how the Green Revolution increased rural unemployment and unrest, and how land reform efforts were effectively sabotaged by the local landlords: “So successful were they that the large majority of India’s rural population remained victims of the traditional pattern of social injustice” (1985:330). They suggest that, as a result, India has not been able to create a dynamic internal market that could stimulate rapid industrialization.

Januzzi observed that land reform for India as a whole has been a lost opportunity, but that, for electoral reasons and because of growing tensions and contradictions, future governments of India will have to deal with it: “Early in the twenty-first century, if not sooner, any remaining proponents of agrarian reform and land reform may finally have their day, and meaningful steps may be taken to resolve India’s persistent dilemma in its agrarian sector” (1994:215).

CONDITIONS FOR THE “ORGANIZABILITY” OF PEASANTS

Generalizing from the case studies above, one could say that extreme frustration has caused peasants to take the risk of mobilizing or joining a peasant organization. The areas where important regional or nationwide movements began were not necessarily the poorest and most marginalized, but were those where “development” had created growing discrepancies. This was true of the sugar plantation area in Morelos where the Zapata movement began, and of the Department of Cochabamba, one of the richest agricultural areas of Bolivia. Hunan province in China and the areas relatively close to cities in Central Luzon, Japan and Java had similar problems. Another shared characteristic of these areas is that they were not isolated — most of them had easy access to urban centres — and that, with increasing absentee landownership, rigid traditional, feudal relations were modified. The case study areas were also densely populated. More recently, while rapid urbanization — often entailing migration of the rural poor to city slums where their chances of survival are supposedly better — may have relieved some acute landlessness, movements often emerged in areas with relatively good communications with urban centres, such as mines and industrial centres (such as the Zapata movement, the Bolivian movement, and the Chinese and the Japanese movements).

In most areas, the erosion of the *status quo*, generally through economic development, caused the peasants to organize. A change for the worse in their living conditions often incited them to defend what little they did have. This occurred, for instance, in the area where the Ligas Camponesas began in Pernambuco, Brazil. The desire of the landowners to introduce sugar cane

production on lands that, for years, had been cultivated on a tenancy basis for subsistence and commercial crops, and the efforts to achieve this change through violent means, provoked the peasants to organize and defend their interests.

In Java, commodification and increasing absentee landownership signalled worsening conditions for the rural population. In Japan, the economic crisis affecting industry and agriculture at the end of the First World War caused rural tension. In Morelos, Mexico, at the beginning of this century, it was not the question of balance between *latifundios* and indigenous communities, but the usurpation of the land of those communities by the land-hungry sugar estate owners, and the despoliation of indigenous peasants, which set off what may have been one of the bloodiest revolutions in modern history. And in Cuba, the aggressive extension of plantations and eviction of peasants set in motion an increasingly effective peasant organizational effort.

An important side effect of the trend toward “modernization” and concentration of land in the hands of mostly absentee landowners was that the traditional bond between landlords and peasants changed. Exploitative aspects of the traditional system became clearer. One result of increasing absentee landownership was a decline in the paternalistic style of control (or patronage) that the landlords traditionally had over the peasantry. This patronage was based to a large extent on continuous personal contact and mutual obligations sanctioned by tradition and by social control of the village society as a whole. The relationship of absentee landowners with their tenants was revealed as blatantly exploitative, increasing the chance of class conflict in the rural areas.

Furthermore, the increasing exigency of economic powerholders or their resistance to improvement initiatives, or rising expectations among peasants, sometimes created the conditions for the rise of militant movements. For instance, the wish to turn back the clock in land tenure conditions in Ucureña, Bolivia, transformed a small peasant organization into a radical, large-scale movement. In China, the exploitation caused by increasing commercialism and warlord influence incited peasants to rebel.

The cases also show that rigid, negative reactions of landholders to moderate peasant demands have contributed significantly to the awakening of the peasants, revealing the peasants’ basic interests. Meanwhile, increasing terror was often used to maintain the old order, though this was frequently in vain, unless regional or national political and often military forces supported the landowners. Such occurrences stimulated and revealed feelings of injustice that had previously existed among the peasants living under oppressive conditions, but had never been expressed.

In such frustrating, oppressive situations, small emancipatory efforts of different types played an important role. Sometimes, when moderately successful improvements were frustrated, spontaneous development efforts were undertaken by the peasants themselves. Examples include the syndicate in Ucureña, which had rented the land from the Santa Clara estate, and the commercially oriented peasants who worked the lands of *engenho* Galileia. Many self-help and community development programmes that did not purposely avoid a “trickle down” approach or “betting on the strong” (including co-operative organizations, agricultural extension, supervised credit) contributed to peasant frustration and

laid the foundation for peasant mobilization for broader reform. In most areas of India, for example, too frequently the entrenched interests obtained such a large share of the benefits of “development” programmes that the latter lost their appeal for small peasants and marginalised them in the end. This also happened, to some extent, in Russia after 1905.

Although there is great differentiation within the peasantry, from landless rural proletariat to indigenous *comuneros*, the case studies suggest that effective organization was possible among most types once the condition of frustration existed. The only group that appeared difficult to organize was the most destitute peasants — those who lived below subsistence level, were highly dependent on their “patron” or lived in isolated conditions or as migrant workers. Such peasants only joined a movement when their fate became unbearable, at which point a violent explosion often resulted without much organization.

Yet considerable differences in “organizability” do emerge among various categories of peasants. For example, tenants or sharecroppers, who had a certain degree of independence and managed their own plots, were relatively more likely to feel frustrated and to take the initiative to organize than other types of landless peasants. Despoliation of tenants without reimbursement for the improvements to the land they brought about, insecurity of tenure related to arbitrariness of the landowners, and excessive rents or their frequent increase were major causes of frustration. Absentee landownership, and the knowledge that a large share of the produce or cash surrendered to the landowner was in most cases conspicuously wasted in the cities in a luxurious lifestyle, often contributed to feelings of frustration.

Often some “precipitating event”, a concrete case of strongly felt injustice, suddenly bolstered the unity of the peasants, who had been attempting to organize, for some time, a common action of protest. Zapata was a clear case. In other cases protest actions came about more gradually. For example, the desire for recovery of ancestral land has been a basic motivational force in many peasant movements. This would come into the open, however, only after the peasants had gained some strength through united action around smaller issues, thus gaining confidence that their deeply felt aspirations could be realized.

In Mexico and Russia the strong communal land tenure tradition and community organizational capacity with certain spiritual undercurrents favoured peasant mobilization. This was also the case in Zimbabwe, where the spiritual component (the role of a hierarchy of ancestor spirits as guardians of the land) has been the subject of considerable research.

LEADERSHIP

Charismatic, or at least solidarity-inspiring, leadership among the peasants has been highly important to the organization of peasants sufficiently to confront elites. A characteristic of such leaders is that they have been able to express clearly the sometimes vague frustrations felt by the peasantry. On one hand, this capacity of the leader helped the peasants in their process of “conscientization”. On the other hand, it facilitated a strong identification with the leader through which the peasants developed horizontal solidarity among themselves.

In most peasant mobilizations, initially, vertical ties of admiration with the leader were important. The leader had to replace in his followers the sense of security that was formerly inspired by the landlord (patron), who often was a father figure to “his” peasants. When the father image could not be maintained any longer and the landlord took on the characteristics of a tyrant, the possibility for replacement increased. Strong personalities among the peasants could then take up this role. Sometimes such personalities inspired respect as a result of their skill and experience (because they had worked in a nearby town, for example). They helped the peasants to break the traditional patronage system and the hold the landlord had over them, not only economically but psychologically as well. Thus several peasant organizations were the result of the almost accidental presence of a gifted leader among the peasants themselves. Zapata, José Rojas and Luis Taruc were cases in point.

But it was not always necessary to wait until such a leader appeared. Under certain conditions, other figures fulfilled important leadership functions. The Japanese, Indonesian and Zimbabwean peasant movements were largely built up by organizers from an urban background who went “down” to the villages. These organizers generally encountered resistance and distrust initially, but became respected leaders if they managed to overcome this distrust through their personal qualities and the methods they employed. Villagers often (and with considerable justification) passively rejected outsiders. Once an activist had proved to be trustworthy, however, their non-peasant background and dedication to the peasant cause could command more respect than a peasant background would. This explains the considerable success of Aoki in Japan and the organizers of the BTI in Indonesia, many of whom were former students who won the people’s hearts by going “down” to the villages and devoting themselves to the peasant struggle. But simply identifying with the peasants was not enough. For organizers to become leaders, they had to prove able to stand up to the powerholders against whom the grievances or demands of the peasants were directed. Such leaders could not be easily intimidated, and at times had to take the risk of going to jail or facing threats on their lives from the landlords or local authorities.

When the leader of a peasant organization took on a paternal role because of his personal qualities, the danger existed that the organization could become dependent on that specific person. In such cases, when the strong and dynamic leader disappeared or was eliminated, the organization collapsed because no one person or group of persons could replace the leader. This happened to Zapata’s movement after his assassination in 1919, and to the Huk movement after Luis Taruc gave up under pressure. The continuation of an organization in the face of “decapitation”, imprisonment, or elimination of its main leader(s) could be ensured only when a core of replacement leaders was available. In the process of creating a peasant organization, it was therefore essential for the initial leader(s) to stimulate leadership qualities in potential successors, and, more generally, to stimulate the self-confidence of all members.

Thus the common idea that all peasant movements and organizations are created by agitators who come from outside, particularly from urban areas, is a misconception. Most of the movements referred to in this study were started by leaders from the peasant class, who had certain special experiences which qualified them for leadership of an organized movement. Emiliano Zapata had

army experience and had worked in the city, José Rojas of Ucureña had trade union experience in Argentina, and Luis Taruc in the Philippines had received more education than the majority of the peasants.

But the studies also suggest that once a rudimentary organization existed, sympathetic urban political leaders — such as Mao in Hunan province, Lino Alvarez in Cuba and Francisco Juliao in the north-east of Brazil — could help the organization gain regional or even national impact by assuming the overall leadership. On other occasions, in Ucureña and Morelos, authentic peasant leaders (Rojas and Zapata) received important assistance from more urbanized personalities, such as school teachers, lawyers and politicians, but they retained control of the organization. In Japan, Indonesia and Zimbabwe, outsiders with some kind of political agenda (electoral support or national liberation) were, from the outset, the crucial mobilizers. In Zimbabwe and, to some extent, Indonesia, they had to rely on close collaboration or support from local spiritual leaders or shamans.

It may be argued that the emergence of a certain type of leader was problematic for some organizations. For example, in many cases the influence of a leader over his followers was personal, more or less charismatic, while the organization might have benefited from a more rational and institutional type of leadership. It was thus not infrequent for a union to transform itself into the “following” (or clientele) of one specific leader. As a result of this phenomenon, struggles between potential leaders arose at some stage. Each leader had his own internal following, and each worked for domination of the organization as a whole. This obviously led to divisions within, and sometimes to the break-up of, the organization. It was not always easy to find a proper balance between strong leadership and solid institutional structure, so that a change in leadership would be possible without threatening the organization’s existence.

In many countries, the lack of democratic traditions made disciplined, orderly organizational effort a hazardous undertaking. Autocratic remnants of a feudal or colonial society could be detrimental to active participation in organized groups. But the cases illustrate that unions could function effectively at the local level, with a high degree of participation.

In summary, the quality of leadership was one of the most important factors determining an organization’s success. Especially in the early stages of organization, the most successful leaders appear to have been the charismatic ones. This type of leadership was also important in times of great activity and crisis. But as an organization grew, group discipline for strategic moves, inspired by a leader who encouraged active and sustained participation, became equally or more important than allegiance to a charismatic leader.

SOCIAL MOBILIZATION STRATEGIES

The examples in this paper suggest that peasant movements generally developed only when there was a concrete event or acute conflict about which people became

excited. It seems that even if conditions were bad and growing worse, peasants were mobilized only when there was clear-cut conflict. Moderate demands, however, could sometimes lead to such a conflict because of the intransigence of the elite. Peasant organizers often sought sensitive issues at the local level if a clear, rallying issue was not immediately obvious. In Java, for example, this strategy was utilized consistently and successfully, introducing clearer awareness of existing, but often hidden, local contradictions and conflicts (between rich and poor, for example) in a society in which *rukun* (harmony) was highly appreciated. This also happened in Japan and the Philippines.

In introducing such conflict awareness, it was important to determine the kind of peasants on which the organization would base its strength. In countries where there was a clear polarization between rich landlords and poor tenants, organizations represented the tenants' interests. They rallied the peasants in the villages or on the *haciendas* around such issues as security of tenancy, better tenancy legislation, sharecropping arrangements more favourable to tenants (e.g. 40–60 sharing instead of 50–50), or even land reform as a final or principal demand. Land reform *per se* came up especially when landlords persistently rejected other, more moderate demands or took illegal measures, such as eviction.

Where the land tenure pattern was more complicated, it was more difficult to determine the most appropriate kind of organization. There were often sharecroppers who tilled land not belonging to large landholders but to slightly better-off neighbours and relatives — who themselves had only a small plot and let part of that to the sharecropper, more to help him than to exploit him. To organize such sharecroppers in their own exclusive interest would have been extremely difficult; many peasants who leased a part of their plot would have opposed this approach. In such cases, whenever the differences between tenants and the lesser landlords were minor, both could be united into one organization that benefited the small owners in such a way as to enable them to give more favourable sharecropping or tenancy conditions to the tenants.

The degree to which certain tenure patterns, or changes in such patterns, occurred in a particular area or village (even more than in a clear-cut landlord-tenant-division) also merits careful investigation. For example, it appears that the approach of the BTI in Indonesia was successful, preceding organization and action by research into the various class contradictions in the villages. Such action-research has been rare or non-existent in most other cases, but in countries with complicated land tenure structures, it seems crucial to any organizing effort that possible contradictions be evaluated.

Once a peasant organization had come into existence, a process of consolidation generally followed. Many leaders and organizers recognized that obtaining concrete benefits through struggle was the best way to consolidate and strengthen an organization. For example, cases of abuse argued successfully in the courts, and mass demonstrations and public meetings held to support petitions for justice or land, often served to increase support for an organization. Initially, only steps to obtain justice were undertaken, as intended by the existing laws. This process has been followed in all of the cases described here. Meetings were held and a petition, with or without the support of a sympathetic or paid lawyer, was presented to the competent authorities. Often, however, authorities remained aloof, or openly chose the side of the large landholders, despite the fact that the peasants had the law on

their side. Continuous frustration experienced when following the slow course of legal procedure prepared the ground for more radical peasant action, such as civil disobedience.

The way in which peasant organizations presented their demands, and demonstrated the bargaining power to back them up, were also important to bringing about change. Generally, some form of direct action from the peasants made it clear to the authorities, as well as to landholding groups and other vested interests, that the demands were serious. Among these forms of direct action, the peaceful occupation, or invasion, of land considered to be expropriable was probably the most effective, as well as the most generally practised.

Land reform tended to occur only after such direct, usually non-violent, action by peasant organizations. “Unilateral actions” in Java, the occupation of estates by Bolivian peasants in 1952, and the activities of MST in Brazil are examples. Some such actions were symbolic, designed to draw public attention or exercise pressure. In some other cases, they did lead to immediate changes in the system of cultivation or property relations.

Effective or symbolic occupation of land, bringing it into cultivation or organizing a “sit-in” on it, should not be considered violent, if violence is understood to be intentional damage to lives or goods. In order to understand the implications of cases of land invasion, a clear understanding of the term “violence” is required. According to Gurr, civil violence is “All collective, non-governmental attacks on persons or property, resulting in intentional damage to them, that occur within the boundaries of an autonomous or colonial political unit” (1968:247). Thus according to this definition, when uncultivated lands are peacefully occupied by landless peasants and brought under cultivation, there is no question of intentional damage, and the term “violence” does not apply. Yet such peasant actions have often been branded “violence” by the press and the authorities. Conversely, the eviction of squatters from formerly unused lands which they have cleared and cultivated for years does often fall into the category of “violence”, although it is ignored as such by press and authorities in most cases. One frequently used method of dislodging peasants has been burning their houses. This is “intentional damage” and should thus be considered civil violence.

An interesting lesson from India is that sophisticated forms of struggle, such as the boycott and other forms of civil disobedience (*satyagraha*) that became known worldwide through the activities of Mahatma Gandhi during the first decades of our century, were already practised in villages in the first half of the nineteenth century. The same is true for such forms of struggle as guerrilla tactics, which have been used in peasant revolts for centuries. It has been suggested that such occurrences have been seriously distorted by generally urban or colonial reporters but also — with few exceptions — by historical accounts and studies (Desai, 1979). If such events were reported, the violence was often exaggerated (particularly that used by the peasants) and pictured as outrages or crimes, while violence unleashed by the authorities or powerholders was not pictured as such. These occurrences have been conspicuously neglected in academic social sciences until recently.

In some countries orderly occupation of uncultivated land is not considered illegal. Thus, one observer of the Latin American scene justified occupation of lands as a possible form of civil disobedience:

. . . for a peasant movement, constantly seeking representational access to decision-makers, and having exhausted procedural remedies, to occupy unused lands, held in private property only for purposes of speculation, may be a most suitable political tactic. This is particularly true where a strong legal presumption in favour of the 'social function' of property exists (Anderson, 1965:38).

While the peaceful occupation of unused or underused land has been employed frequently by peasant organizations as a means of pressure, such acts cannot always be considered a form of civil disobedience. Several countries have laws allowing squatters on unused land to claim property rights after they have worked the land for a number of years. This generally involves land in areas of scarce population where property rights are poorly defined. The situation becomes more complicated when such land is registered in the name of large landholders, who either leave the land unused or use it extensively or partially, in areas where many landless peasants live under marginal conditions. In such areas, landless peasants are often allowed to cultivate the land in small plots for their own subsistence in exchange for a fee or for work on the landlords' holding. The trouble arises when the owner wants to extend his operations and starts dislodging the peasants who have been in possession of the land for some time. The peasants are then perceived as invaders, and the police, army or hired gunmen are called in to dislodge them. Such actions often provoke resistance from the peasants, who come back in numbers to reoccupy the lands which they have been cultivating. The Cuban situation before 1959 and that in Brazil are cases in point.

Indigenous communities and "tribal" groups in many countries have effectively recovered lands (through occupation) to which they have age-old titles, after many years of unsuccessful litigation in the courts. Occupation may consist of building symbolic living quarters on the "recovered" lands, plowing the land or grazing cattle on it. Branding such acts "violence" and trying to restore the *status quo* with the aid of the police or the armed forces has cost the lives of many indigenous peasants and does not solve the basic problem. Human rights activists and NGOs have sometimes stepped in to denounce such actions and pressure authorities to implement the law. Yet severe repression of peasant actions may create the belief among the peasantry that self-defence, weapons in hand, is the only means left to defend their fundamental human rights. Thus a strong revolutionary consciousness may emerge, with peasants demanding radical changes in the rural, and even national, power structure. The Zapatista movement is a clear example.

Legal authorities in the rural areas of most countries generally interpret the law in favour of the landlords — or other powerful groups — even if this means circumvention or violation of the law. Peasants may resign themselves to this situation and abandon their efforts to improve their lot, often in a resentful or embittered way. But when the legitimacy and acceptance of the prevailing system is seriously undermined by the way the system attempts to maintain itself, a relatively small effort may be sufficient to transform the new awareness of repression among the peasants into a strong revolutionary consciousness.

The peasantry traditionally holds great respect for law and order as a guarantee of their security. As was seen in the cases in Cuba, north-eastern Brazil, Mexico and the Philippines, when landlords used illegal means to terrorize peasants, the latter initially tried to find a solution by appealing to the appropriate authorities. Only after insistent demands to qualified authorities to enforce the laws failed to produce results did the peasants begin to see the landlords as an opposite “class”, as their “enemy”.

A tolerant and benevolent attitude by the authorities toward the peasants’ efforts is very helpful, as illustrated by the Cardenas period in Mexico, the MNR-stimulated movement in Bolivia in 1952–64 and Sukarno’s tolerance of the Communist-supported BTI. In cases where the authorities used public forces to defend the peasants, or armed the peasants themselves when the landowners violently opposed implementation of the laws, the peasantry reacted constructively to the benefit of political stability in the country.

There were thus considerable variations in the dynamics of mobilizations. Some organizations began in one place at a certain moment and then spread into surrounding areas where essentially the same conditions prevailed, as in the State of Morelos and around Ucureña. It also happened that attempts to organize occurred spontaneously in scattered communities or areas in a country. Such attempts could at times be included in a nationwide movement being created by political leaders to gain mass support for a reform programme. Mobilization began this way in Cuba and to some extent in Brazil, with the remainder of the country’s peasants then organized by activists. The first type of process is predominantly horizontal, while the other is largely vertical. Most mobilizations combine the two approaches, with the vertical approach often following the horizontal one after it has been successful in a given area.

A creative use of existing or growing contradictions between classes or categories has been another main force in organizing strong peasant movements. This is often a complicated affair — in most countries there exist not only powerful landlords and poor peasants, but subcategories of peasants that can be played against one another or be organized into alliances against a common enemy. Mao Ze Dong, and to some extent the BTI in Indonesia, searched among locally existing differences and contradictions for the most fundamental and antagonistic ones. This proved to be effective, but was also risky.

In addition to overall economic conditions (and usually their deterioration), another important precondition for organizing peasant movements was the effect of deterioration on the various classes of peasants, and the contradictions that arose among these classes as a result of those processes of change. Most peasant leaders were well aware that hardly any general rules could be found concerning the utilization of such contradictions. Activists had to carefully assess in each particular village or region the existing contradictions, taking a view from below, with the poorest class as the main frame of reference, as Aidit advocated and the BTI effectively implemented in Indonesia.

OBSTACLES

Characteristics of power structures that impede organizational processes also deserve special attention. There is considerable evidence that certain strategies used by large landowners are often supported by the state to prevent peasants from organizing when the conditions are ripe. Irrespective of legislation regarding freedom of association, large landholders may use their authority and economic power to hinder popular mobilization. This was often accomplished by firing agricultural workers or evicting tenants who were potential or actual leaders and who took the initiative to organize the peasantry. When such measures did not have the desired effect, or were impossible, potential leaders might be offered money or privileges in exchange for moderating or halting the organizing efforts. And if this did not work, threats of arrest or persecution for “subversion” or similar alleged acts might be employed. It should be stressed that such approaches were used regardless of the existing legislation, which was possible because the application of the law in rural areas was often influenced or controlled by the large landholders. If such actions did not prevent an organization from emerging, the assassination of the most important leader(s) has, in the worst cases, been used to block the organization process. In spite of such severe, often systematically applied counter-measures and human rights violations by landowners and their supporters, peasant movements have been able to survive and grow, and even be successful. The moral courage of leaders who have consciously risked their life for the cause of social justice in the rural areas is well worth special attention.

All case studies indicated that the human rights situation, particularly regarding freedom of association and the formation of representative organizations of peasants, left much to be desired in most countries. This remained true even following ratification by most countries of at least one of the International Labour Conventions designed to deal with various aspects of such basic freedoms. Peasants and workers in the countries that have ratified one or more of the conventions related to freedom of association have not necessarily enjoyed better conditions, because too often these conventions have remained a dead letter.

There is evidence that in some countries, at the national level, there is a certain willingness or determination to apply laws concerning human rights and freedoms, but the lack of an effective apparatus at the local level makes implementation difficult. In Brazil and India, for example, laws accepted at the federal level are not necessarily approved at the state level, or are applied at that level only after much delay and considerable weakening of their possible positive impact.

The fact that oppression continues may be due to the fact that illegal acts can be committed in remote areas where the national government leaves control in the hands of local government agencies, which may be dominated by or at the service of landowners. In the cases studied, other reasons for oppression were that judicial powers at different levels were in the hands of those who benefited from a traditional and rigid social structure, thus interpreting the laws in ways unfavourable to peasants demanding social change. Many observers have noted discrepancies between the spirit of national legislation and the spirit of those who are responsible for watching over its implementation. In the course of the struggle of the MST in Brazil and in actions against Chico Mendes’s movement, human rights were seriously violated.

Another strategy sometimes used by landowners and their local elite allies or the state to prevent peasant organizations from consolidating and bargaining for

essential structural changes was the creation of parallel unions that restrict their range of activities to petitioning for limited improvements, such as higher wages, better housing and more appropriate tenancy rates, etc. On several occasions, unions that work toward such limited goals have been purposely stimulated in order to undermine those pressuring for more fundamental structural changes. For example, the Free Farmers Federation in the Philippines and the church-sponsored unions in Brazil in the early 1960s competed in this way with the Huk movement and the Ligas Camponeses respectively. Ironically, these parallel movements sometimes became considerably radical considerably because of the landlords' opposition to even their moderate demands.

It often occurred that the "obstacles" placed in the way of peasant organization became counter-productive in the long run, sometimes forcing initially moderate movements into greater cohesiveness out of self-defence. There is considerable evidence that where the landholding elite most violently and harshly opposed orderly peasant organization and bargaining for legitimate demands, the peasants, with or without urban political support, sought to strike back most drastically. Zapata's movement, the occupation of *haciendas* in the Cochabamba valley in 1952–53, and the cases described in Russia, China and Cuba illustrate how elite intransigence caused revolutionary movements to grow.

At the same time, radical politicization of movements sometimes became an obstacle to the effectiveness of peasant organizations, although the pros and cons of being strongly linked with a certain political party or ideology are difficult to weigh. In China and Indonesia, a strong, sustained link with the Communist Party was essential to consolidation and effectiveness. In other cases, a close tie to the government and its official party seems to have been favourable to the peasant cause at certain stages of organizational development, such as in Mexico during the Cardenas regime. As the organization became increasingly consolidated, however, this tie facilitated a deterioration of its militancy and effectiveness. This happened when the political party in control came increasingly under the influence of groups that did not place a high priority on the peasants' interests. While the influence of leftist political groups, in most cases, strengthened peasant organizations, in other cases, the strong counter-forces provoked by such radical political groups led to the destruction of potentially powerful movements. This happened in India and, finally, in Indonesia. In some cases, such as in Japan, India and the Philippines, ideological division within the political party supporting the movement weakened its effectiveness.

The financing of organizations can also be a hurdle. In some cases membership fees play a minor role, but some strong, cohesive groups managed their own affairs without outside support. Some did this through the management of various types of co-operative enterprises, with profits used wholly or partly for the union. Most organizations received financial support from political parties, urban unions or federations with which the peasant organization was directly or indirectly affiliated. These sources included the Ministry of Labour or other government agencies, international organizations, foundations or NGOs. Top leaders in permanent service to certain organizations were sometimes paid by outside supporters. This situation all too often suggested that the paying institution had a great deal of control over the organization, leading to goals which did not necessarily coincide with those of the peasant membership. In some cases, competition between financing agencies and other interests trying to gain control

over peasant organizations led to organizational rivalry and to the buying off of leaders between organizations.

On various occasions, when a peasant organization became strong and commanded increasing influence, the government or a political party tried to gain control in order to benefit from the group's voting power. Sometimes such control was used to strengthen the peasant organization against opposing forces, such as those of the large landholders, as occurred under Cardenas in Mexico. In other cases, however, agrarian reform was kept in a slow rhythm, as the middle class and new elites developed increasing influence and feared that peasant demands for radical measures could disrupt society as a whole. This occurred in Mexico after Cardenas. Because they felt betrayed by such changing allegiances, sectors of the peasantry sometimes turned to more radically oriented, independent movements that could be controlled only through violent government action. This happened in the 1950s in the north-west of Mexico, and gave rise to considerable social tension.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LAND REFORM

As noted above, it was not infrequent for rather specific, initially modest demands related to tenancy improvement or higher wages to be gradually transformed into demands for a drastic change of the social order at the local, regional or even national level, with emphasis placed on land distribution. Most of the cases studied suggest that the concerns related to specific grievances brought the peasants of a certain area together, and then launched most regional or even nationwide movements. This was true of the Zapata rebellion, the Japanese movement, the Huk movement in the Philippines, the BTI in Indonesia and the Bolivian and Cuban peasant federations. For sophisticated leaders, either from the outside or originating from within the movement itself, it was relatively easy to take an organization beyond its initially limited objectives, since the wider purpose of social justice in the possession of land was implicitly present long before it was expressed openly.

In most cases land redistribution was the most strongly desired objective. This was especially so in areas where large *latifundios* or plantations had recently been established or extended to land that belonged to local or indigenous peasants. The more recent the despoliations and usurpations, the more strongly injustice was felt. And when tension was high, small acts of provocation by the landlords could bring the whole issue of "recovery" of formerly lost lands into the foreground in a dramatic way.

Some form of direct action from the peasants often served to make clear to the authorities, as well as to other vested interests and landholding groups, that peasant demands were serious. As was shown by the MST in Brazil and Gerakan Aksi Sefihak in Indonesia, the occupation or invasion of lands considered to be expropriable were the most effective direct actions, and the most frequently used.

There are abundant examples of reforms won by militant peasant organizations through the direct action approaches noted above. But such steps frequently threatened social and political stability, and occasionally came at the cost of many lives, particularly on the side of the peasants. Although most militant movements

employed less radical approaches first, the fact that this often led nowhere made them adopt more extreme tactics. The stubborn resistance of the landholding elites often made more peaceful and orderly approaches impossible.

When land reform was effectively being implemented, the role of peasant organizations took various forms. According to the law in Mexico, Bolivia and Japan, community-level peasant unions or commissions had to present a petition for land. A minimum number of members was generally required, and a representative or executive committee with which the land reform agency could deal had to be elected. After land was distributed, this committee (or a newly elected one with a different structure) generally played an important role in the management of the land received by the members of a community. Through this body, credits and technical assistance were also channelled.

An important function of these peasant unions or commissions after land distribution was to fill the vacuum created by the disappearance of the large landowner as the central figure in or behind local power structures. Specifically, the leader of the local peasant organization took over part of the former landowner's role. And because the leader was generally democratically elected, he depended on the membership for his support. Thus, a democratization of the local government was often a result of agrarian reform. This was obviously the case in Mexico, Japan, Bolivia and Cuba. There is considerable evidence that where the struggle for agrarian reform encountered many obstacles, peasant organizations achieved greater cohesiveness and strength. This proved to be an important asset in overcoming subsequent difficulties related to improving the agricultural productivity of the newly obtained lands.

There are many indications that where a peasant organization played a role in the distribution of land (and the preceding struggle), post-reform measures and programmes — such as the formation of a co-operative or a credit society, or a community development initiative — could be carried out much more easily. Where local leaders had considerable experience in dealing with official agencies and harnessing support from the peasantry, post-reform initiatives tended to be more successful. This was especially obvious in China after 1949, and to some extent in Bolivia and Mexico. This was also the case in Japan, where the peasantry gained considerable political clout at local and national levels.

When a peasant organization (such as in China, Japan, Mexico and Bolivia) was tied to the political party running the government (and its land distribution programme), the distribution also functioned as a kind of proselytizer for the party. Since peasants were generally obliged to be members of a union or committee affiliated with the predominant peasant federation, this could lead to political control over the peasantry. It sometimes happened that the newly elected leaders abused their power in ways reminiscent of the former *hacendado*. More recently, especially in Mexico, the *caciquismo* has taken on considerable proportions, sometimes to such a degree that peasants have seen little difference between the pre- and the post-reform situation. Such acute frustrations may lead to new radical movements, such as the Zapatistas in Chiapas.

After the period of intense struggle ended and reforms were being implemented, some peasant organizations became increasingly bureaucratized, stifling the organization's effectiveness in continuing agrarian reform, especially when the

communication of the base with the top of the organization became sterile and routinized. This appears to have occurred in Bolivia.

An intangible but very important effect of militant peasant organizations that have achieved reforms or other benefits was the respect that the organized peasants gained from their opponents, as well as from other peasants. This psychological factor has received far less attention than it deserves. The enthusiasm and will to change which are part of this phenomenon are human resources that can make a valuable contribution to development efforts when they are channelled toward constructive goals. The development fever that seems to have existed in Morelos while Zapata ruled that state at the height of peasant pressure indicated such important, untapped human resources. Also, in the first stages of the post-revolutionary land reform process in China, Japan and Cuba, peasants made considerable development advances. Extreme confidence in such militancy in China, however, led to such disastrous policies as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.

Summarizing these strategic aspects of peasant action, one could say that initially the means used to present the demands were generally very moderate: petitions, lawsuits and complaints to the courts or the labour inspector. But since these legally established channels rarely provided satisfactory results, wherever peasants had some organizing experience or could count on support from people with such experience, more radical means were tried. Whether a growing peasant organization initiated its more radical activities with a struggle for civil rights against illegal practices of the landlords, or for economic improvements, or for agrarian reform, depended on the local situation. After moderate demands had met with the intransigence or even violence of the landed elite, an escalation of the demands occurred, generally accompanied by an escalation of the means used to pressure for those demands. Direct action was then more frequently used; land invasions, either as a form of civil disobedience or as a legally allowed strategy, are an example of such action. The invasions were generally explicitly peaceful and non-violent.

Violence generally came first from the landlord or government in this process of escalation. Usually, peasants only became willing to use violence once they were actually suffering it, out of self-defence. Consistent use of the non-violent strategy could thus bring peasants into revolutionary action because of the intransigence and rigidity of the elites.

SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT SOCIAL MOBILIZATION

It is remarkable that in the increasingly abundant literature on rural development over the years and, more recently, on NGOs hardly any attention has been paid to militant rural organizations created by underprivileged people on their own behalf, such as the peasant or tenant unions presented in the case studies above.

For many years the image prevailing in academia (positivist and Marxist) was of peasants as apathetic and fatalistic, as highlighted by well-known anthropologists

such as George Foster (1965) and Charles Erasmus (1961, 1968). This misconception has long stood corrected, with both authors shown to have conspicuously ignored large-scale peasant mobilizations that had taken place (Huizer, 1970). Yet this inaccurate image still seems to have considerable influence on policy makers, though it is increasingly challenged.

In the 1970s, it was suggested that peasants' distrust or apparent apathy was part of the "subsistence ethic" (Scott, 1976) and of a rational and, under the circumstances in which most poor peasants live, necessary "safety-first" approach. Scott dedicated a thoughtful chapter to the potential for rebellion of subsistence peasants who see their conditions deteriorate. His observations confirmed the cases of militant peasant movements described in this paper. Scott also clearly showed that poor peasants generally have a rather clear and demystified view of their deplorable situation, and that they begin to draw organizational consequences from this view as soon as the repressive, exploitative conditions they have faced diminish for some reason. Using the 1969 Naxalbari example in India, Scott (1976:228–229) showed that when a populist government appeared less prepared than its predecessors to maintain the *status quo* at all costs, peasants soon became ready to seize the opportunity to effect change, getting organized in a militant way in areas where tension over land was slumbering. This partly contradicts a more recent study by the same author, in which he evokes contrast between "everyday resistance", which is hardly confrontative, and more open "rebellion" (1989:6). The case studies in this paper suggest that many radical movements emerged out of "everyday resistance" when such resistance was frustrated by landlords or the state. This dialectical process of escalation was sometimes used strategically, as occurred to some extent in Japan, Cuba and Indonesia. One could even say that such movements evolved from what Marx called "class in itself" to "class for itself".

However, in mainstream rural development literature, radical land reform and social mobilization leading to redistribution of assets to disadvantaged groups is virtually ignored as an option, in spite of successes in China and Japan. The literature also ignores the fact that in many countries (such as Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, the Philippines and India) peasants or peasant leaders, organizing for such reforms, have been persecuted or even assassinated (with a certain regularity, and to the present day) because their emancipatory and empowerment activities endanger the *status quo*. This may be related to Gurr's observation that:

. . . many political scientists tended to regard violent civil conflict as a disfigurement of the body politic, neither a significant nor a proper topic for their empirical inquiries. The attitude was in part our legacy from Thomas Hobbes' contention that violence is the negation of political order, a subject fit less for study than for admonition. Moreover, neither the legalistic nor the institutional approaches that dominated traditional political science could provide much insight into group action that was regarded by definition as illegal and the antithesis of institutionalised political life (1968:245).

However, "anti-participatory structures" have received some attention (Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994). Some policy-oriented academic thinking has confronted this controversial interpretation, leading to an awakening in the face of alarming rural contradictions and conflicts. David Korten's (1995) radical reassessment after

many years of working with the officially sponsored approaches is a recent example.

In a similar vein, some scholars who formerly emphasized the importance of a peasant “subculture” as a main hindrance to modernization have expressed insights into peasants’ reasons for not accepting modernizing influences. Thus Rogers (1976:135) admitted his earlier inattentiveness to the need for social structural change as a precondition for development and offered, as a result of some of his rethinking, a definition of modernization and development that differed from his earlier view. He described “. . . a widely participatory process of basic social structural change in a society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement of the majority of the people through means that foster equality, freedom, and other valued qualities” (Rogers, 1975:358). However, in this new definition, certain aspects of modernization, such as the creation of contradictions where harmony appeared to exist and the mobilization of different categories of peasants against newly emerging common powerful enemies, were not highlighted.

A fear of dealing with the reality of conflict has also been evident in discussions of the term “movement”. In an early attempt to face this issue, Landsberger (1968:19–28) defined a peasant movement as “any collective reaction by rural cultivators to their low status”. One could agree with this definition in part because it emphasized the element of “reaction to”. One could debate, however, whether peasants react to “their low status” as such, or to any group that tries to impinge upon their status, to threaten it, or to change it for the worse. The fact that other people have a higher status does not appear to be of great concern to most peasants. It is a forced worsening of their conditions, or a lowering of their status, that may cause ill feelings and a need to react. This is particularly the case if the lowering of status is considered unjust. Deal, following Borton (1968), defined peasant rebellions as: “protests made by peasants against injustices which affect the normal pursuit of (their) occupation” (1975:416), noting at the same time that peasant demands sometimes transcend the normal pursuit of their occupations. In order to find a way out of the debate on definition of peasant movement, Deal opted for the term “agrarian rebellion”.

While some study has been made of the relationships between certain production structures and the chances of agrarian rebellion (Paige, 1975), little is known about the dialectical relationship between a change in production structures and the dynamics of peasant mobilization in reaction to these changes if they are felt to be detrimental. It cannot be emphasized enough that in the cases studied it was the frustration about a change for the worse, or the threat of change for the worse, that made all kinds of peasants react. At times they reacted strongly, if the changes were disastrous to subsistence. This happened to both relatively well-off farmers, whose survival was threatened by modern agribusiness corporations, as well as small tenants who lost the right to their plot.

Most of the case studies in this paper suggest that a key precondition for peasant movements has been the introduction of large-scale private holdings of land of a modern capitalist type, which implied that land was considered a commodity that could be sold. As this form of ownership was introduced in many societies, privileged minorities of *hacendados*, *zamindars*, sheiks, *hadjis* and other types of landlords benefited at the cost of large numbers, generally majorities, of poor agriculturists who lost traditional rights and security of a minimal subsistence.

This transformation of the human relationship with land spread, from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, in Latin America, Asia and later in Africa, provoking a great deal of protest and rebellion. It could be observed that the most vigorous peasant protest movements occurred not among consistently poor peasantries, but precisely in those areas where such forms of modernization and commodification had taken hold. This form of “development” did not benefit but instead harmed the majority. Such integration into the modern economy, the world market, was mostly related to the introduction of cash crops — sugar and tobacco first, then coffee, tea, cocoa, bananas and raw materials such as cotton, rubber, sisal and palm oil (Paige, 1975). Most reactions against these modernization processes were in vain, however. (Re-)study of colonial history during the 1970s provides indications of the ruthlessness with which these processes were implemented. The heavy toll in human lives caused by the overwhelming military power required to crush the movements of unarmed or badly armed peasants testifies to the potential of poor peasants to stand up for their interests and refutes some scholarly suggestions as to their political incompetence (Wolf, 1969; Davidson, 1974). It is somewhat surprising that Paige (1975:41), refers to the approach through which the *hacienda* system maintained itself as “upper-class terrorism”, suggesting that because “all but the strongest peasant movements” were repressed the cultivating class under that system, which lasted for ages, was “politically incompetent”.

There is evidence that consistent oppression over very long periods — centuries — as with the serfs on the *haciendas* of Latin America, led to certain forms of (apparent) apathy. This apparent apathy can, however, be broken relatively easily by any significant change, for the worse or for the better, as has been shown by a team of Cornell University scholars in the Vicos project with Andean Indian peasants in Peru (Holmberg, 1959). This experimental project has not achieved much attention in the mainstream literature.

Even the path-breaking books of some development professionals, such as **Rural Development: Putting the Last First**, that do not ignore contradictions between “the poor” and “the elites” in rural areas remain within the Western paradigm, with the “political feasibility” of development and reform being introduced by outsiders (Chambers, 1983:160–167). The idea that radical change may be achieved by organization and mobilization of the poor on their own behalf did not seem likely enough to be considered. When discussing strategies of the poor, Chambers confirms the old prejudices and ahistorical views of most scholarly works on peasants:

Nor are rural people a uniform mass, nor are their strategies all the same. Even in the same locality, there can be a big contrast between the strategies of those with some land and those who are landless. All, however, tend to share the characteristics described in the last chapter, being, besides poor, also physically weak, isolated, vulnerable and powerless (Chambers, 1983:142).

It is also remarkable that in the literature dealing with voluntary action and people’s participation (Chambers, 1983; Friedman, 1992; and particularly Korten, 1992, which provides a useful overview of “voluntary action and the global agenda”), hardly any reference is made to locally emerging voluntary action, such as the peasant movements for land reform in China or Japan, or any other of the

many protest movements that have occurred during the past decades on all continents.

In chapter 10 of his study, “From relief to people’s movement”, Korten does address some NGO-sponsored community development programmes or projects that aim to “empower” local people. However, movements in which people empower themselves are not included in the chapter. As regards China, Korten (1992:124–136) describes only the Mass Education Movement, a literacy initiative which started in the 1920s and 1930s and was later reinforced by the creation of the Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction, a counterforce to the rapidly emerging Communist peasant movements. Korten’s neglect of these movements is remarkable because the radical redistributive development model resulting from people’s movements in China was — as noted above — followed in Japan with strong government and US support.

One reason for the relative academic neglect of the organizability and revolutionary potential of the peasantry could be that most analysts of people’s participation (or non-participation) in development take for granted the prevailing institutional *status quo* and consensus, studying possibilities within that context. If they observe certain radically innovative alternatives, they do so with doubt and hesitation. Thus Uphoff recognized that where social stratification is “serious”, it may be useful to create “alternative organizations” with a membership restricted to the “less advantaged”, to complement the regular institutional set-up. This is particularly so where land tenure is a problem, as he notes: “Unfortunately, agriculture relations between landless and landed are more likely to be zero-sum and competitive than in other areas of rural development activity” (Uphoff, 1986:156). He also points out that local institutional development, though not completely dependent on the “political will” of governments, does need support from the centre (1986:219). He does not reflect upon the possibility that people sometimes create their own local institutions and bargaining organizations without external support and — if necessary — against the “will” of governments. But the cases of small and large-scale peasant mobilization described in this paper testify to this capacity. In spite of the strong recommendations of the FAO and the ILO to that effect in the mid-1960s, most development agencies and literature have not taken into account such forms of authentic peasant interest articulation and have mistaken a lack of participation as a form of “resistance to change” (see Huizer, 1970).

Non-participation as a form of passive resistance may be a sign of considerable political competence resulting from the fact that peasants view their frustrations in historical perspective. While development planners take the *status quo* as the logical point of departure for drafting plans and projects, peasants may see it as unjust compared to the past. Their most strongly felt need may not be obtaining new inputs, but righting the injustices of the rich and powerful, and a restoration of their former rights (regarding land use and ownership, for example). Peasants know (better than researchers and planners) how their situation has worsened and how potential for improvement has declined due to economic forces. Such forces, including the market economy and certain development programmes, have had detrimental effects on the peasantry, causing indebtedness and loss of land.

When passive resistance is applied consciously and systematically by peasants (and women) it can upset powerholders considerably. It is the counter-power of

“not doing” (see Scott, 1989). Social researchers also face this kind of counter-power of “not doing”, which is represented by the subjects of their research giving irrelevant information.

Wertheim suggests that some forms of non-participation can be interpreted as “counterpoints” to the value system prevailing in rural areas (1964:chapter II). While they may overtly accept their fate, peasants express a certain resistance against the repressive system. This can be found in folk humour about the fatherly role of the landlords, when this role is accepted (when there is no alternative) but questioned at the same time. Other forms of resistance against the prevailing value system can be found in folk tales and folk songs of better days in the past when the land belonged to the community, and memories of legendary heroes of the peasant struggle.

Such resistance may also find expression in popular religious practices as an alternative to institutionalized religion (which often confirms the established order). Except for specific millenarian (or chiliastic) peasant movements, little attention has been given to religious influence in peasant movements. The case studies in this paper illustrate the importance of this influence in some movements. Traditional spirituality is often — though not always — tied to slumbering forms of resistance that existed as a “counter-culture” or as “counterpoints”, and made it possible for peasants to endure and keep alive a sense of dignity under exploitative or humiliating conditions.

As discussed in the case studies, some important elements of the social mobilization of peasants for land reform relate to spiritual or religious aspects of the relations between people and their land. Convictions about the role of Mother Earth in nourishing her people and containing the remains of ancestors, not to be alienated or usurped for other purposes, were crucial to Zapata’s training early this century and also in the more recent liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. Traditional Taoist views were operative in Mao’s strategy to enhance peasant organization and (less explicitly) in the campaigns of the BTI. The Zapatista rebellion of Maya Indians in Chiapas and the recent land conservation movement in Zimbabwe also have strong components of traditional cosmology related to the Earth.

In the 1970s, several “liberation theologians” studied the potential of popular (Christian) religiosity to contribute to militant and revolutionary grassroots organization (Gutierrez, 1978). Understanding and strengthening such signs of potential resistance sometimes disguised as passive religiosity were found to be a potential starting point for more open resistance and organized protest. The MST in Brazil is an example of this trend. It is not surprising that priests in some countries (such as Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Brazil and the Philippines) have proved to be important allies of the peasantry. Their principal advantage over other intellectuals is that they tend to live permanently in their village parishes and know the indigenous language. If they are ideologically prepared to represent the voice of the peasantry against their oppressors, they can almost naturally become revolutionary cadres, as indicated by one Maryknoll priest (Melville and Melville, 1971; see also Lernoux, 1982).

The case studies in this paper confirm Davidson’s findings in Africa. He enumerated five characteristics of successful peasant struggles in the former Portuguese colonies: (i) the effort must not be a military adventure but must stem

from acutely and locally felt political oppression and exploitation; (ii) mobilization of mass sympathy and support for a resistance struggle must evolve into effective mass participation; (iii) participation of peasants can only be achieved by those who share their lives and closely understand them, including their habits, languages, hopes and fears; (iv) while the struggle develops participation, the feeling of people that they fight for themselves as well as their neighbours must remain a dominant factor; and (v) the leadership must remain in close contact with the base (1974:279–282). Similar characteristics have also been observed by policy-oriented scholars such as Huntington, who has indicated that the Chinese peasant revolution was different from earlier peasant revolts not because the peasants were different but because the intellectuals leading them had a long-term and solid commitment to their cause. Moreover, this commitment and identification was of a “dialogical” nature, with intellectual cadres learning as much from peasants as the peasants learned from them (1968:303–304).

For years there has been debate on the peasants most likely to assume local leadership roles. The case studies in this paper suggest that peasant movements are most likely to be initiated by middle peasants (see also Alavi, 1965; Wolf, 1969), but this does not mean that, on the whole, middle peasants have more organizational or even revolutionary potential than poor peasants. While some middle peasants, particularly those whose subsistence is threatened by rich peasants or market forces, may be eager to ally themselves with the underprivileged and initiate a protest movement, others who are more successful may prefer to seek personal advancement within the prevailing system — thus becoming a conservative force against changes that would benefit poorer groups.

But such a purely materialistic explanation for the behaviour of middle peasants in this context — acting either as allies of the poor or seeking individual advancement perhaps at the cost of the poor, is not adequate. Middle peasants may take their own ideology and interests as a frame of reference when they assume leading roles in a broadly based peasant movement, or they may not. If they do not, their choice may be based on the insight that siding with poor peasants may ultimately lead to more definitive solutions of agrarian contradictions. Or the choice may be influenced by the ideology of the urbanized political allies guiding the overall movement (Communist or Socialist Party activists, for example). If the overall leadership comes into the hands of reformist parties, the orientation of middle peasants proper, or even rich peasants, may guide the movement as a whole. Some movements have taken this latter course after reformist urban allies helped to carry through land reform that resolved the most extreme contradictions in the rural areas (between feudal landlords and peasants of any type, for example). This has been the dilemma of the stagnated land reform in India.

Huntington (1968:380–396) recommended land reform (partial redistribution of large landholdings) as a way to create or strengthen a class of middle peasants, although he was aware that such reform is difficult to carry out without seriously — but temporarily — destabilizing the societies concerned. In most Third World countries where land reform is considered necessary for long-term stability and investment security, the government or the legislature is in the hands of or dominated by landowning interests. Peaceful but sufficiently radical reform is thus unlikely. Past land reform has rarely come about under such circumstances except where outside pressure has been overwhelming — such as that of the United States in Japan.

In spite of the potential for popular participation in land reform to contribute to economic development after the Second World War, few countries have followed the example of the newly industrializing countries (or “tigers”). This is particularly so because, as shown by former FAO official Riad El-Ghonemy (1990), Western development agencies have not been willing to provide consistent support for such reforms, or have only made token efforts (as in the Philippines), in spite of significant mobilization.

There is considerable evidence that half-hearted reforms, such as those in India after Independence or the Philippines in 1953 and following years, may in the end be counter-productive from the government’s point of view. Such reforms may neutralize peasant protest for some time by dividing the peasantry, but may ultimately cause more radicalized peasant movements to (re)emerge. Evidence suggests that the principal effect of inconsistent land reform was that it did not benefit the majority of the landless but a new class of rich and middle peasants, with the resulting growth of new forms of polarization in the rural areas. Reform of a system that entails compensation of a relatively small rich class may be difficult, but “if, on the other hand, land reform requires the dispossession of a much larger class of medium sized landowners or *kulaks*, the problems confronting the government are much greater” (Huntington, 1968:385).

To what extent could such programmes be seen as an elite strategy to neutralize the potential leadership (often middle peasants) of movements of the poor. If such a strategy existed, its effect could be uncertain. In the first place, only a small percentage of the middle peasantry might benefit from the (unlimited) means of the agencies concerned. Moreover, a division within the middle peasantry between those who make it and the rest, probably a majority, who stay behind, may widen (as occurred in Russia before 1917). Second, if rich peasants and landlords — the main beneficiaries of rural development programmes — were not constrained by radical land reform or other measures, the free market (which generally favours the strong) would only allow a small percentage of the benefiting middle peasants to improve their livelihood considerably. The rest would become increasingly frustrated. These are puzzling questions for further research.

McNamara summarized the situations in many countries, observing that the decade of rapid growth had been accompanied by greater maldistribution of income in many developing countries, with the problem most severe in the countryside. He added that an increasingly inequitable situation would pose a growing threat to political stability (1973). McNamara’s statement echoed what he had already said in **The Essence of Security: Reflections in Office**. After noting that the World Bank had divided the world’s nations into four categories, rich, middle-income, poor and very poor, McNamara observed that, especially in the latter categories, a great deal of violence was occurring because of increasing poverty. He then shared his thoughts regarding the need for people’s peaceful participation in development:

Only the developing nations themselves can take the fundamental measures that make outside assistance meaningful. These measures are often unpalatable and frequently call for political courage and decisiveness. But to fail to undertake painful but essential reform inevitably leads to far more painful revolutionary violence (1968:152).

Unfortunately, in spite of such recommendations and statements, the World Bank has done very little to help governments stimulate effective and peaceful participation in such “painful but essential reform” (see Ladejinsky, 1977:474–75). Riad El-Ghonemy gives a prudent account of the “operational ideologies” that lead to inconsistencies between the World Bank’s official statements and actual policies (1990:59ff). In 1980, when the Republican Party (the Reagan administration) came to power in the United States, policies in the World Bank shifted toward “a market mechanism freed from government intervention and planning for development” (Riad El-Ghonemy:61). This meant a move away from equality-promoting reforms toward “betting on the strong”. According to Stiefel and Wolfe, this neoliberal policy “delegitimized most organized efforts by groups and movements to increase control over resources and institutions”, while “promoting the individual pursuing his or her own interest” (1994:182).

It seems logical that continuing absolute or relative deprivation among small and increasingly landless peasants may again lead to what McNamara called “painful revolutionary violence”. In fact, violence is slumbering (and at times open) in rural India, as well as in Mexico (the Zapatistas particularly), Brazil and the Philippines. Although the capacity of many governments to suppress such movements has increased considerably, often with international support, the awareness among civil society groups (supported by greater information about atrocities committed) that peaceful and just solutions have to be found to the growing inequalities is also on the rise, as the contemporary Zapatista and MST movements show.

While the case studies in this paper demonstrate that peasant movements need the support of non-peasant allies and leaders in order to gain sufficient organizational strength, the same can be said of the landed elites. The oppression of peasant movements would not be possible without the support of the state apparatus (including police and armed forces, and at times strong international backing. As Paige observed (without drawing appropriate conclusions) in the introduction to his study of rebellious and revolutionary peasant movements:

In Peru, Angola and Vietnam and many other areas, the United States has chosen to side with the landlords and plantation owners against the peasants, sharecroppers and agricultural laborers who took up arms against them. American military alliances, American trained officers, American military aid and equipment, and, finally, American armed forces have been used either singly or in combination against the peasant of the Peruvian *sierra*, the contract laborers of northern Angola, and the tenant farmers of the Mekong delta of Vietnam. This book cannot and does not explain why we chose to help the landlords rather than the cultivators, although it does attempt to explain the landlords’ desperate need for outside military aid (1975:x).

In view of such tremendous risks of state or international intervention, peasant’s distrust of certain self-styled urban revolutionary leaders as potential allies (perhaps as much as they distrust other urban agents such as merchants, development workers or government administrators) should be considered evidence of the down-to-earth intelligence of the peasantry. Peasant distrust of what is presented to them as “development”, “foreign aid” and even induced “participation” also appears to be justified.

The reasons behind apparent inconsistencies in the policies of the main rural development agencies are difficult to discover. Ernest Feder (1975), a renowned critic of the policies of the World Bank, claims that the programmes of this agency were purposely designed to avoid solutions that would challenge the dominant capitalist entrepreneurial system prevailing or being promoted in most Third World countries. In view of the alarming rise of rural pauperization of peasants in many Third World countries, as noted by McNamara (1973), it is not surprising that the World Bank and similar development agencies — in addition to their traditional “betting on the strong” policies — have designed programmes for the individual advancement of the middle peasants. This trend was critically evaluated by Riad El-Ghonemy (1990). The policy appears to have been consciously followed in India and Brazil, leaving the issues of increasing landlessness, poverty and (potential) rebelliousness unresolved, as can be seen from the case studies above. Will this eventually lead to radicalization?

The Russian, Chinese, Indonesian, Bolivian and Cuban movements demonstrate how peasant movements can become radicalized. The peasants reacted to elite intolerance or resistance by becoming a class-conscious, revolutionary force at the national level. This occurred not because the peasantry was, by nature, revolutionary, but in spite of its prudent, traditional and evolutionary approach. Movements in these countries had considerable success because they were not violent explosions of peasant discontent, repressed as quickly as they developed. With few exceptions, the movements all began with a careful grassroots organization that took up the most strongly felt grievances of the peasants — the “counterpoints” within the dominant traditional system — and slowly built strength around those grievances. Only by proceeding carefully, and remaining well within the rules of the game, were the first steps taken toward creating representative interest groups working against the heavy weight of traditional patronage and economic and political repression. And only after the rural elite reacted to minor peasant demands and organizational success in ways clearly counter to prevailing laws (often including violence), did the peasant organizations become more radical. It is quite probable that at any stage during the process of radicalization and the escalation of demands, peasant organizations would have accepted a compromise if the rural elite had been willing to give them a fair chance. Elites generally did not do this. Elite intransigence, more than anything else, was the reason that peasant organizations finally took a revolutionary stand, demanding the radical overthrow of the system as a whole. It is surprising that in view of so much historical evidence, elites have followed the same fatal course to the present day. Is this because they form part of and are supported by the trend of globalization of the capitalist economy? There is actually a growing awareness and some mobilization around this dilemma. In this connection, it is remarkable that some current, strongly agitating peasant movements, such as the Zapatistas, the Philippine KMP and the Brazilian MST, came together in a joint effort with other farmers’, indigenous peoples’ and women’s organizations and NGOs in the First Conference of the Peoples’ Global Action against “Free” Trade and the World Trade Organization (in Geneva, 23–25 February 1998). This seems to indicate a social mobilization for “globalization from below” in reaction to imposed “globalization from above”.

In his classic study on peasant movements, Wolf commented on “the world-wide spread and diffusion of a particular cultural system, that of North Atlantic capitalism. . . . The guiding fiction of this kind of society — one of the key tenets

of its ideology — is that land, labor, and wealth are commodities, that is, goods produced not for use but for sale” (1969:276–277). This fiction has gained considerable impact, but there is always some hope. As Wolf pointed out years ago in a prophetic manner:

The peasant’s role is thus essentially tragic: his efforts to undo a grievous present only usher in a vaster, more uncertain future. Yet if it is tragic, it is also full of hope. For the first time in millennia, human kind is moving toward a solution of the age-old problem of hunger and disease, and everywhere ancient monopolies of power and received wisdom are yielding to human effort to widen participation and knowledge. In such efforts — however uncertain, however beset with difficulties, however ill-understood — there lies the prospect for increased life, for increased humanity. If the peasant rebels partake of tragedy, they also partake of hope, and to that extent theirs is the party of humanity. Arrayed against them, however, are now not merely the defenders of ancient privileges, but the Holy Alliance of those who — with superior technology and superior organization — would bury that hope under an avalanche of power. These new engineers of power call themselves realists, but it is a hallmark of their realism that it admits no evidence and interpretation other than that which serves their purposes. The peasantry confronts tragedy, but hope is on its side; doubly tragic are their adversaries who would deny that hope to both peasantry and to themselves. This also is America’s dilemma in the world today: to act in aid of human hope or to crush it, not only for the world’s sake but for her own (1969:301–302).

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