

## COMMENTARIES

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For one who lacks the knowledge, as well as the wish, to challenge Andrew Pearse's account of the facts of the Latin American rural scene, the only useful form of comment is to raise questions and perhaps thereby to express some minor doubts concerning the inference he makes from the facts. It might be most useful to start from the end opposite Pearse's. He has looked at the evidence, crystallized the diversity of the changes he sees into a discrete set of trends, illustrated them with illuminating and convincing details, and tentatively forecast their implications. Instead, let us start at the other end with a question that rests on a clear value premise, and ask whether the trends Pearse indicates are "for the better" or "for the worse." I would choose the question: "what chances are there of a substantial and sustained increase in agricultural production?"

It may be necessary to justify the propriety, first of framing academic discussions in terms of such questions in general, and second in terms of this question in particular. As for the general question, I would say only that it is virtually impossible for research in rural Latin America not to be in some sense policy-oriented—if only implicitly in the choice of subjects for study—both because the rural poverty of Latin America challenges the conscience of the well-off people who do the research, and because so much of the research done is sponsored by policy-making bodies. On the second point, I would justify the particular choice of the economic question on the assumption that an increase in the productive efficiency of agriculture is a pre-condition for most of the other objectives that people hold—improved levels of rural living, an enhancement of individual dignity, cultural enrichment, the creation of peaceful and just political communities, etc.

This last assumption could be easily challenged. "Seek ye first the political kingdom" has been the slogan of many others beside Nkrumah, and perhaps it has a particular appeal to politically conscious Latin America whose mediterranean version of the humanist tradition often involves a contempt for the pedestrian realities of economic fact. And, indeed, it may well be that a mere abolition of what Pearse calls the "estate-like" social distinctions of the traditional areas would of itself immensely enrich the lives of the service-tenants and dependent labourers. Provided that they can say, in the words of the much-quoted Bolivian peasant, "Ahora somos gente," their lack of new clothes and transistor radios might conceivably cease to hurt very much. This itself is a subject amenable to empirical study. Is the liberated Bolivian estate worker a

notably more satisfied individual now than he was ten years ago even though his achievement of first-class citizenship has not yet (one gathers) brought him more to eat? It is a question that needs answering, and I think one might enter a legitimate gripe against Pearse for (see footnote 1) putting it out of bounds for the purpose of this article. The exclusion from his scope of the areas of post-colonial settlement seems eminently justifiable since their problems are rather different, but the equal exclusion of post-reform Mexico, Bolivia, and Cuba is a loss to this discussion because there are some questions about the structure and problems of the traditional societies and their possible alternative forms of evolution that can only be answered by looking at examples of similar societies which have gone through the process of revolutionary reform.

Let us return to the question: what are the chances of improving agricultural productivity? Apropos of the estates Pearse discerns two sets of trends—changes in the attitude and managerial behaviour of estate owners, and an increasing proto-revolutionary rejection by the subject workers of the subordination and humiliation of their position. Of the two he sees the second as more important in its likely influence on future developments since (his implication seems to be) not enough estate owners are likely to change fast enough to accommodate the change in their workers before the latter reach a pitch of explosive tension.

There is one question here. Of his three types of modernizers, Pearse discounts the importance of the first—the inheritor of a traditional estate who tries to transform its structure both technically and socially—as being too rare a swallow to presage a summer, and he offers a pithy catalogue of the reasons why he should be so rare. On the prospects for expansion of his third type—the rationalized mono-crop plantation—he offers no forecast, but, presumably, trends in the export markets will be the major determinant here. One wonders, however, if his second category—the small-to-medium capitalist farmer who acquires rather than inherits land by purchase or by lease—is adequately represented by the banana producers of El Oro, and whether he does them justice in dismissing them as the kind of nine-days wonder Latin America has often seen, destined probably to extinction the next time the market falls or a new disease invades. As the exploding urban population demands more food, is it not this kind of small-to-medium capitalist farmer whose share in production is most likely to expand in response? This does, indeed, seem to be the implication of Pearse's own penultimate paragraph.

Is it the case, however, that these capitalist farmers are all going to be ex-urbanites as this penultimate paragraph suggests? Or is it possible that a fair proportion of them will emerge from within the small-holding communities which form the subject of the second half of the paper? Pearse suggests a number of very plausible reasons why the cards are stacked against such a pos-

sibility. Only one of his reasons seems to me to need qualifying. The peasant who gets capital is most likely to use it, he suggests, to escape from his peasant status. Granted, provided he gets enough capital. But the capital he gets is likely to come in such small lumps that, apart from the probability that he will just consume it, he might use it to become a better peasant because he has no better alternative. Although Pearse sees little chance of a great burst of innovative enterprise in these traditional communities, he does, at the end, mention the well-off peasant and speaks of differentiation between favoured kulaks and the rest as a common result of government efforts at improvement. "Kulak" is a fighting word, and it is clear that Pearse considers divisiveness within the community and the disorganization of the subsistence sector as unfortunate consequences of the kulak's emergence.

For many Latin American countries, however, it might be about the best one could hope for, if for no other reason than that most of the other solutions depend on conditions not likely to be fulfilled. Consider some of them. For the estate sector: a left-wing revolution which turns the estates into collectives or state farms? A not improbable eventuality, perhaps, but an improbably successful one unless revolutions take place simultaneously in most Latin American countries thus largely blocking the escape routes of the middle classes. Otherwise there is likely to be, as from Cuba, a wholesale exodus of the scarce people with the agronomic, managerial, or accounting skills necessary even to maintain, let alone expand, production. A more paternalistic Fabian type of reform, perhaps, by which governments attempt a large-scale reproduction of the Peruvian Vicos experiment, taking over estates intact and at first preserving their traditional authority structure, but using that authority for education instead of for exploitation? Again a remote possibility. The political and social upheaval needed to produce governments capable of energetically willing such action would probably have to be so great that the situation would not wait for gradualist reform, and so great, also, that the authority patterns on the estates which it is sought to utilize would already have been destroyed. It probably remains true that the most likely pattern of upheaval in the estate sector is the Bolivian one—the creation of new small-holder communities.

As for the small-holder communities themselves, I would agree with what I take to be Pearse's preference—that the creation of cooperatives and the raising of the farming capacities of whole communities are preferable to the creation of a kulak class. But the chance of finding a sufficiently large corps of extension workers and cooperative managers with the necessary abilities is remote, and the chance of finding them with both abilities and the necessary missionary devotion even remoter.

This last circumstance is not one which can be changed by political fiat—a point that Pearse obviously does not need telling; witness his remarks on the

effectiveness of welfare legislation. It is thus likely that the development of a kulak class is probably the best to be hoped for, even from a revolutionary change. Consider the following quotations:

The peasants, . . . the men of the forest and of the plain, I know not by what excitement . . . held councils by twenties, by thirties, by hundreds . . . and have sworn together that never by their own freewill shall they have lord of bailiff. . . . Daily the peasants go with great grief, in pain and in toil; last year was ill, this year is worse; daily their cattle are taken for taxes or for services . . . They can have no warranty against their lord or his servant, who keep no covenant with the peasant; "son of a whore" they say. Wherefore then do we let them harm us; let us shake ourselves free from their domination! We, too, are men as they; limbs we have like theirs, and our bodies are as big and we can endure as much; all that we need is only a heart.<sup>1</sup>

The passage might have come from a novelist's account of contemporary Latin America. In fact it comes from Normandy at the beginning of the 11th century. It was nearly eight centuries before murmurings such as these added up to a wholesale revolutionary change, and when it did come it was the Eugenie Grandets who prospered. It would be the worst kind of historicism to suggest that the same sequence must repeat itself in Latin America. But there is a more proximate and relevant model. Mexico has had the revolutionary change that swept away the estate systems of the kind that Pearse describes, and Mexico has recently had the fastest agricultural growth rate in Latin America (if we can believe the statistics) for which, it appears, the small capitalist farmer is largely responsible. One of the most interesting questions concerns the identity of these men. How many of them are ex-urbanites, how many of them kulaks who have pulled themselves under the stimulus of urban influences (for one must surely grant Pearse's central point; agrarian change is for the most part provoked by exogenous factors) at least a head and shoulder above the mass of their fellows? We must look forward to the ICAD study to throw some light on this question, and also on the further important question of the social role of the kulaks, if they can properly be described as such. Are they making a positive contribution to, say, the development of rural education? Are their sons likely to be the trained agricultural administrators who might raise the general level of farming in the next generation? Are they providing links with the metropolitan centres which integrate the villages into the national market and the national polity? It is at least a possibility, for the rich farmer-small landlord *has* been known to contribute to general rural development in this way (in 19th century Japan, for instance). True, it would need a good deal of hard evidence to dispel the prevailing scepticism that such a possibility might be realised again in Latin America, but one can at least say that here again is an example of the way in which the study of Mexico might illuminate possibilities inherent in the other countries of Latin America.

At any rate, one and a half cheers for the kulak. One cheer for his potential contribution to the spurt in agricultural production which can provide a sound base for industrial development and without which, as Pearse so rightly concludes, there can be no final solution to the misery of rural Latin America. And a tentative half-cheer for the possibility that, there being little hope of mobilising enough administrative resources to engineer wholesale change in the countryside, he might, in the course of his self-aggrandizement, contribute to the improvement of the condition of his fellows.

NOTES

1. Quoted from L. Delisle, "Etudes sur la classe agricole en Normandie au moyen age," (1851), in G. G. Coulton, *Medieval Village, Manor and Monastery*, (Harper Torchbook edn.) 111.

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Pearse describes the changes taking place in rural areas as being "provoked by the essential incompatibility between rural social systems and the growing industrial urban systems diffused from the larger cities, whose values, organization norms, ideologies, economic practices, money and technical means impinge upon the rural sector in such a way as to upset rural routines and structures throughout the continent." It is worthy of note that the author advises that he concentrates his attention, in fact, on the rural areas of South America and the islands of the Caribbean.

Moreover, it appears that although Pearse mentions the *haciendas* of the Andean Highlands and the cattle raising *estancias* of Tierra del Fuego, his excellent discussion is, with rare exception, confined to the tropical and temperate regions in which such products as sugar, bananas, cotton, and coffee prosper.

One assumes that Pearse is postulating two ideal—typical—types of estate labor force: one (plantations) which was once slave but is now free, and continues its associations with monocultural market-oriented production; the other is characterized by a perduring attachment to an (non-plantation) estate which is brought about by such means as debt servitude, "forfeits" service in payment for the use of lands, and deprivation of alternative means of subsistence, all in association with production of one or more crops and characterized more by an effort to secure power over people and land than by the profit motive. Still left unanswered, however, is why the former slave labor force of the plantation has not now evolved into the share- and tenant-service labor force which characterizes the non-plantation estates.

It is clear that in colonial times the combination of a need for a reliable labor supply, an absence of an indigenous labor force, and the demands of intensive monoculture destined for a world market led to a negro slave work force

on plantations. On the other hand, it is not clear why, if the economic demands of the contemporary monoculture plantations remain the same, the former slave labor force has not been transformed into a share- and tenant-service labor force for which non-plantation estates provide appropriate models. That monocultural plantations depending upon such a force prove viable is attested by the coffee *fincas* of coastal Guatemala and Mexico (in which the *enganche* is a prominent technique for securing a labor force) and the tobacco plantations of the pre-revolutionary Papaloapán Basin in the Mexican states of Oaxaca and Vera Cruz (to which the labor force was partly attached by means of debt servitude and, in part, by share- and service-tenure relationships with both private and corporate haciendas).

Pearse's discussion of changes in small-holders' communities seriously considers George M. Foster's concept of the "Image of Limited Good," which refers to a belief that there exists only a limited amount of the good things of life, and, consequently, the proportion of good things that any peasant family obtains deprives a fellow villager's family in equal measure. Foster's insight is not prompted by explicit statements volunteered or elicited from peasants but, instead, by the tendency of peasants to act *as if* they conceived of the world as containing a finite amount of good. The two devices that help make this "covert" aspect of culture explicit to anthropologists and others is the salient presence of two "levelling mechanisms," one of which is commonly known as envidious sanction (Foster: 1965; Rubel: 1966a and b; Erasmus: 1961), the other as the re-distribution of wealth by means of the acceptance by individuals of financially onerous obligations (*cargos*) to the community (Cancian: 1965). That "re-distribution pressures" are not as drastic nor effective in non-Indian as in Indian societies is a less surprising fact than that they are effective at all. Quite unlike the closed corporate Indian community in which the two levelling devices (*envidia* and cargo systems) have generally been considered most effective (Wolf: 1957), there appears so little "sense of community" in the small-holder villages and towns of Latin America, that it is preferable to speak of them as "societies" rather than "communities" (Reichel-Dolmatoff: 1961; Foster: 1963; Rubel: 1966 a; Joseph Spielberg: n.d.; Liselotte Stern: n.d.).

Yet despite the absence of community in these small-holder societies, *envidia*, nevertheless, functions as an economic and social levelling device in much the same way as it does in the closed corporate Indian communities of the region.

In both Indian and non-Indian peasant groups, *envidia* functions to maintain an egalitarian equilibrium, but whereas in the corporate Indian community belief in *envidia* helps direct individual wealth towards the commonweal, in the non-Indian, small-holder societies, *envidia* seems to be completely dysfunc-

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tional, inhibiting peasants from aspiring to better the lot of themselves, their families, or their small local societies.

Mr. Pearse is to be honored for this stimulating discussion of "Agrarian Change Trends in Latin America" for he has taken into account economic, social, historical, and cultural factors which, together, help to resolve the question: What is happening and why in the countrysides of Latin-America?

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I feel that this article makes a considerable contribution to the sociological analyses of periods of change and transition. It is true that the Latin American picture, like those in other regions, shows a traditional agrarian system, which fails to react to demands for increased production but which is being penetrated by new entrepreneurial elements in certain areas. We are witnessing in Latin America and other regions a total attack on the traditional systems, and I agree with Andrew Pearse when he emphasizes the incompatibility of the traditional rural system and the extending modern society.

I believe that Andrew Pearse's hypothesis that the major factors initiating changes in rural social systems are external to them, and that the subsequent

processes converge with and tend to overwhelm the slower processes of endogenous changes, is correct for some stages of development but not necessarily for all. I am even doubtful if his hypothesis is correct for the whole of Latin America in the first part of the 20th century, and we should be able to give some very different explanation concerning the changes in the traditional system of Mexico in the first decades of this century. The waves of nationalism and the identification of nation and land, the hostility to foreigners and political interference have frequently contributed to the initiating of changes in traditional agrarian systems. This does not of course detract from the truths of Andrew Pearse's analyses for some countries in the Latin American region where town areas have already developed a polarity to the traditional agricultural areas, and I feel that his examples are here very convincing.

I believe that Andrew Pearse could strengthen his article by supplementing table No. 6 by subdividing the group "smallholders" into two columns—owner-cultivators and tenants. Also it would be very interesting to obtain a fuller explanation of the statements made in the first paragraph of page 66, where Andrew Pearse states that "adoption took place independently of extension," and in particular, where he later mentions that at the end of the period of adoption the peasant was poorer than he was before. Could the reason be the lack of extension services?