Farewell to the Peasantry?

Political Class Formation in Rural Mexico

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Westview Press
A Member of the Perseus Books Group
This book is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my son and great friend
Rodrigo Otero-Ordóñez (1979–1997). His company during and after his
seventeen years of life has been warm and inspiring. Even now, with the deep
pain of his loss, I feel his presence as a strong, invigorating force that has been
essential to my completion of this project, which I dedicate to his life and
surviving spirit.
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About the Book and Author

Farewell to the Peasantry? questions class-reductionist assumptions in certain Marxist and populist approaches to political movements in twentieth-century rural Mexico. Focusing on agrarian social structures, political movements, and state intervention, it studies the political class trajectories of direct producers in three agricultural regions from the 1930s to the present. This study offers an analysis of varying intersections of class relations, political mobilization, and distinctive regional cultural traditions. Following a broader trend, this analysis seeks to transcend unidirectional and single-factor approaches to peasant mobilization and social transformation. The book offers an explanation of diverse political class destinations of agricultural workers in three regions from the 1930s to the present in terms of regional cultures, state intervention, and leadership types. Political class formation is seen as the process by which civil society is constructed and as a vital part in the transition toward a societal democracy.

This book also addresses Mexico's legendary agrarian reform in historical perspective. The author argues that land redistribution in Mexico was the way chosen to develop and entrench capitalism in Mexico while building a basis of support for the modern Mexican state. He provides an account of the global agrarian transitions and the social differentiation process in the Mexican countryside as well as the changes brought about in agrarian policies by the neoliberal reform that has swept Mexico since the mid-1980s. Neoliberalism has increased the insecurity of wage employment in most sectors of the economy, thus bringing about an ironic result in the agrarian social structure: On the one hand, it has created the conditions for an entrepreneurial peasantry to emerge, but on the other, while the middle peasantry shrinks, large masses of the rural population are becoming unemployed or resorting to subsistence production as a survival strategy. An impoverished peasantry thus lives on.

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Index

Agrarian bourgeoisie. See Bourgeoisie, agrarian
Agrarian Code (1972), 42, 139
Agrarian Law (1992), 99
Agrarian movement, 95–96
Agrarian reform
Cardenista reform, 39–40, 57, 78–81, 128–129, 150
end of, 49–55, 129–133
land takeover, 137
origins of, 33–38
redistribution of useless land, 72
union role, 77
See also Neoliberalism
Agrarian structures, 11–13
class reductionism and, 15–18, 16(fig.), 17(fig.)
factions of, 14–15
Agricultural and Livestock Promotion Law (LFA), 50–51
Agricultural direct producers, 23–24, 54, 69
CDIA classifications, 66
class positions of, 11–12
collective coalition, 139–141
collective ejidos. See Ejidos, collective
cultural forms among, 27–29
distribution of, 60(table)
government appropriation of organizations, 69–93
infrasubistence level, 61–62
nonpeasant units, 64–65
poor conditions for, 127–128
social differentiation among, 67(fig.)
state response to, 29–31
stationary and surplus, 63
structural differentiation of, 59–61
See also Entrepreneurs, peasant; Political class formation; Proletariat; Semiproletariat; Sugar industry
Agricultural policies
neoliberalism and, 47
Agricultural Societies of Collective Interest (SICAs), 89–90
Agrosemex, 52
Alavai, Hansa, 29
Alemán, Miguel, 42–44, 90, 106, 130
Alemanismo, 42–43
Alliances. See Coalitions
AMER. See Mexican Association of Rural Studies
Anagasa, 85, 141
Appendini, Kirsten, 68, 70
Arana, Bernabé, 131
Archer, Margaret S., 31(n5)
Atencingo, Mexico, 10, 41, 44, 99–124, 150
collective vs. individual production, 107–112
income from sugarcane, 110(table), 111(table)
objects of peasant struggle, 119(table)
privatization of sugar industry, 113–118
rise of collectivism in, 101–104
socioeconomic outcome of struggle, 121–123
Authoritarianism, 160
Autonomy, 1, 25, 28–29, 41
Avila Camacho, Manuel, 43, 90–91
Azúcar, S.A., 52
Cardenista land distribution, 39–41, 128–129
collective coalition, 139–140
debt of, 80–81
decline of, 43–45, 80
economic fragmentation of, 84
government boycott of, 79–81
government control of, 89–92
La Laguna land grants, 76–78
La Laguna production, 87(table)
self-managed collectives, 104–105
struggle against individualism, 129–133
sugar cane collective, 101–104
sugar cane income, 110(table), 111(table)
See also Coalition of collective ejidos; Collectives

Electoral fraud, 157
Entrepreneur, peasant, 15, 28, 73
classifications of, 64–66
distribution of, 60–61
emerging from Atencingo, 107–112
geographical distribution, 69–71
government expectations, 117(table)
rise under neoliberalism, 49

Environmental issues, 53–55
Erasmus, Charles J., 131

Ethnic groups. See Indian population; Mayo Indians; Yaqui Indians
Ethnicity, as identity marker, 18–19
Exchange relations, 62
EZLN. See Zapatista National Liberation Army

Family
as analytical unit, 7–8
as labor, 15, 117, 123
minimum food requirements, 60–61

Farming
corporate, 75–76, 85
peasant vs. entrepreneurial, 59–61
See also Agricultural direct producers;
Collectives; Ejidos; Ejidos, collective; Haciendas; Production, agricultural

FCI. See Independent Peasant Front
Felix, Faustino, 138
Perra Martínez, Carlos, 137

Fertinex, 85
Feudal system, 34–35
Flores Tapia, Oscar, 95
FNOC. See National Front of Organizations and Citizens
Foreign community, 41–42, 127
"40-69" association, 90, 92–93
Friedman, Harriet, 73(n7)

Gaxiola, Israel, 148(n2)
Geertz, Clifford, 26
General Union of Workers and Peasants (UGOCM), 92, 130–134, 136
Gidden, Anthony, 31(n5)
Gómez Carpinteiro, Francisco Javier, 100

Government, state
agricultural intervention, 20–21, 29–30, 107–112
agricultural subsidies, 48, 51–55, 58–59, 112–113
authoritarian rule of ejidos, 106–107
boycott of collective ejidos, 79–80
controlling collectives, 84–87, 95, 130–133
controlling La Laguna peasantry, 89–93
economic intervention, 46–48
economic production, 156
 ejido dependence on, 49–50
involvement in production, 128–129
productive dispossession, 82–84
state agrarian policy, 20
sugar industry and, 105–106, 112–118, 120, 122–123

Green Revolution, 44, 72
Grupo Escorpión, 113–114
Grupo Genex, 114

Haciendas, 45, 75–76, 75(table)
culture, 75(table)
labor strikes and, 76–78
land accrual, 35–38
post-reform status, 79–81
role in Revolution, 35–38
Hewitt de Alcántara, Cynthia, 19, 43–44, 77, 132, 154

Identity, sociopolitical, 18–19, 116
Imecafé, 52
Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (CIOAC), 134, 136, 155
Independent Peasant Central (CCI), 134, 136
Independent Peasant Front (FCI), 136–137, 143
Indian population, 55(n3), 127
acculturation process, 132
loss of land, 34–35
Mayo Indians, 6, 125–127
warrior tribes, 37
Yaqui Indians, 6, 125–129, 136–137

Industrialism, 129–133
Industrialization, 42–43, 114–115, 129
Infrastructural production, 61–62
Interest representation, 21
International Monetary Fund (IMF), 46
Internet sites, 161(nn 1, 2)
Irrigation, 74–75
as modernization, 43
irrigable land, 79–81
La Laguna, 82(table)

Jaramillo, Porfirio, 104–107, 124(n1), 150
Jenkins, William, 41, 101–104
Juárez, Benito, 37
Katz, Friedericch, 35
Kearney, Michael, 18–19
Kulaks, 32(n6), 64

Labor
agrarian movement and land takeover, 95–96
economics of, 45–46
family as, 15, 117, 123
Indian population, 127
labor disputes, 95–96
libres, 83, 109
state response to struggles, 155–156
surplus of, 47–48, 133–134
See also Agricultural direct producers; Proletariat
Labor disputes, 95–96
Index

Fertimex, 85
Feudal system, 34–35
Flores Tapia, Oscar, 95
FNOC. See National Front of Organizations and Citizens
Foreign community, 41–42, 127
“40-69” association, 90, 92–93
Friedman, Hazlett, 73(n7)
Gaxiola, Israel, 148(n2)
Geertz, Clifford, 26
General Union of Workers and Peasants (UGOCM), 92, 130–134, 136
Giddens, Anthony, 31(n5)
Gómez Carpintiero, Francisco Javier, 100
Government, state
agricultural intervention, 20–21, 29–30, 107–112
agricultural subsidies, 48, 51–55, 58–59, 112–113
authoritarian rule of ejidos, 106–107
coercion, 79–80
controlling collectives, 84–87, 95, 130–133
controlling La Laguna peasantry, 89–93
economic intervention, 46–48
economic production, 156
ejido dependence on, 49–50
involvement in production, 128–129
productive disappropriation, 82–84
state agrarian policy, 20
sugar industry and, 105–106, 112–118, 120, 122–123
Green Revolution, 44, 72
Grupo Escorpión, 113–114
Grupo Gemex, 114
Haciendas, 45, 75–76, 75(table)
culture, 75(table)
labor strikes and, 76–78
land accrual, 35–38
post-reform status, 79–81
role in Revolution, 35–38
Hewitt de Alcantara, Cynthia, 19, 43–44, 77, 132, 154
Identity, sociopolitical, 18–19, 116
Imecafé, 52
Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (CIOAC), 134, 136, 155
Independent Peasant Central (CCI), 134, 136
Independent Peasant Front (PCI), 136–137, 143
Indian population, 55(n3), 127
acculturation process, 132
loss of land, 34–35
Mayo Indians, 6, 125–127
warrior tribes, 37
Yaque Indians, 6, 125–129, 136–137
Individualism, 129–133
Industrialization, 42–43, 114–115, 129
Infrastructural production, 61–62
Interest representation, 21
International Monetary Fund (IMF), 46
Internet sites, 161(nn 1, 2)
Irrigation, 74–75
as modernization, 43
irrigable land, 79–81
La Laguna, 82(table)
Jaramillo, Porfirio, 104–107, 124(n1), 150
Jenkins, William, 41, 101–104
Juárez, Benito, 37
Katz, Friederich, 35
Kearney, Michael, 18–19
Kulas, 32(n6), 64
Labor
agrarian movement and land takeover, 95–96
economics of, 45–46
family as, 15, 117, 123
Indian population, 127
labour disputes, 95–96
libres, 83, 109
state response to struggles, 155–156
surplus of, 47–48, 133–134
See also Agricultural direct producers; Proletariat
Labor disputes, 95–96
Labor extraction, 62
Labor power
bank control of, 83–89
reciprocity of, 60
Laclau, Ernesto, 12, 20
La Laguna, Mexico, 9, 74–98
attack by state agencies, 90–93
Cardenista plan, 78–81
class organizations, 96–98
collective ejidos, 40–41
crop diversification, 87–89, 87(table)
economic fragmentation of, 84
"Ejido Enterprises," 94–96
government loans to, 80(table)
irrigation data, 82(table)
land grants, 76–78
population, 98(n1)
postcapitalist reform, 79–84
pre-Revolutionary condition, 36–37
Land, 1, 154
access to, 2, 15–18, 16(fig.), 17(fig.), 24
certificates of immunity, 129–130
distribution/redistribution of, 38–46,
47–48, 58–59, 80–81, 128–129
ejido land grants, 76–78
expropriation of, 138–139
grants to Yaquis, 127–128
minimum family requirement, 60–61
movement for control of, 133–135
1992 reform and, 46–47
parceling of ejidos, 108–109
pre-Revolutionary ownership, 34–38
purchase by peasantry, 67
reform sector quality, 50
security of possession, 42–43
subsistence needs, 63
takeover of, 95–96, 135–137
unionizational struggles, 155–156
yield vs. quality, 111
See also Campesinitas; Proletariat
Landsberger, Henry A., 77
Land-tenure class, 57(table), 72(n1).
See also Agricultural direct producers
Laifundistas, 35
Law of Agricultural Credit, 42
Leadership
by caudillos, 25, 39
of peasant struggle, 122
political class formation and, 25
types of, 5, 20–21
LeGrand, Catherine, 31(n2)
Leninism, 32(n8)
Leyva Mendivil, Juan, 145
LFA. See Agricultural and Livestock Promotion Law
Libres, 83, 109
Livestock producers, strata of, 64–65
Lombardo Toledano, Vicente, 77, 89
Lomnitz-Adler, Claudio, 29
López, Jacinto, 92, 131
López, Maximiliano, 131, 132
López Portillo, José, 50, 58
Madero, Francisco I., 36
Marx, Karl, 22, 31(n5), 73(n3)
Marxism, 13, 15, 31(n2), 32(n8)
Mayo Indians, 6, 125–127
Mayo Valley, 13, 138–139
Mellousas, Claude, 62
Mexican Association of Rural Studies (AMER), 156, 161(n1)
Mexican Communist Party (PCM), 77,
90–91, 106, 134–135, 148(n1)
Mexican Cotton Company, 85
Mexican Food System (SAM), 12, 50–51,
58
Mexican Peasant Confederation (CCM), 89
Mexican Revolution, 34–38, 99
Mexico’s Second Agrarian Reform
(de Janvry), 48–49
Minifundios, 38, 60, 66–68, 72(n1)
Ministry of Agrarian Reform, 59
Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, 59
Movement organization, 20
Myhre, David, 48–49
NAFTA. See North American Free Trade Agreement
National Action Party (PAN), 140
National Confederation of Popular Organizations (CNOP), 124(n2)
National Confederation of Rural Producers (CNPR), 124(n2)
National Confederation of Small Property Owners (CNOPP), 114, 118, 124(n2)
National Front of Organizations and Citizens (FNOCC), 124(n2)
National Peasant Confederation (CNC), 124(n2), 131, 155
coalitions and, 146
controlling the peasantry, 89–93, 108–109
government control of, 42
Pacto de Ocampo and, 134
parallel “Central Union,” 91
sugar industry and, 120
National Peasant League (LNC), 89
National Revolutionary Party (PNR), 39
National Solidarity Program. See Pronasol
National Sugarcane Commission, 120
National Zapatista Front, 107
Native population. See Indian population
Neocorporatism, 156
Neotribalism, 41–42, 81
Neoliberalism, 46–55, 99, 154, 156–160
decentralization policies, 157
emergence of entrepreneur peasants, 67–68
privatization of sugar industry, 112–118
Oaxaca, Mexico, 157
Obregón Salido, Alvaro, 33, 37, 38,
127–128
Ocaña, Samuel, 143
Oppositional organization, 24–25
Ortigueira, Luis, 98(n3)
Ortiz Morales, Jesús, 98(n3)
Ozacar, Jesus, 132
PAN. See National Action Party
Pare, Luisa, 14–15, 27
Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), 24, 33, 108–109, 124(n2), 131–132
Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM), 39
Peasantry, 11–12, 23–24, 61, 73(n7)
anthropology of, 18–19
geographical data, 69–70
kulas, 32(n6), 64
polarization of, 66–68
pre-Revolutionary, 35–36
See also Peasantization; Struggles, peasant
Pepsi-Cola, 114
Pérez, Manuel, 101–102
“Permanent primitive accumulation,” 14
Plan de San Luis Potosi, 36
PNR. See National Revolutionary Party
Political class formation, 3, 11, 20–21,
24–25, 160
alternative causal model, 21(fig.)
class trajectories, 153(fig.)
elements of process, 149–152
in sugar industry, 102, 118–121
objects of struggle, 110(table)
structural capacity, 22–23
subjective mode of, 151–152
See also Agrarian structure; Atencingo
Political class trajectories, 147(table),
153(fig.)
“Polylabs,” 18–19
Popular-democratic organization, 24–25,
31, 78, 121–122, 150
Popular Party (PP), 92
Popular Socialist Party (PSP), 97, 130–132
Population, 5–6, 56–57
agricultural workers, 133–134
census information, 65–66, 73(n6)
La Laguna, 98(n1)
rural, 69(table)
See also Differentiation, social; United
Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
Porfirista, 34–38, 55(n3)
Postcapitalism, 4, 10(n2), 28, 138
Poverty, 54–55, 68
PPS. See Popular Socialist Party
PRI. See Partido Revolucionario Institucional
}
Private farms, 57–58, 57(table)
Private sector, 44
Privatization, 50, 112–118
PRM, See Party of the Mexican Revolution
Procampo, 52–55, 156–157
Production, agricultural, 23–24, 152
capitalist vs. peasant, 57–59
commercial crops, 70
consumption of surplus, 64
economics of, 45–46
emerging dualism of, 158–159
government subsidies, 48, 51–55,
58–59, 112–113
household production, 73(n7)
productive dispossession, 84–86
replacement, 23–24, 61–64, 152
result of peasant struggle, 120
surplus, 61–64, 73(n3)
See also Agricultural and Livestock Promotion Law; Agricultural direct producers, Mexican Food System; Replacement production; Surplus production
Production relations. See Agrarian structure
Productivism, 129–133
Proletarianization, 28, 62
after neoliberalism, 99–100
struggle for ejido lands, 118–119
See also Differentiation, social
Proletariat, 23–24, 31(n2), 57–58, 86–87, 146–148, 155
as political class, 11–12
class reduction and, 16–18
coincident with cash crops, 70
contradictory class locations, 147
decline in, 68–99, 69(table)
economics of, 45–46
geographical distribution, 69–71
in sugar industry, 102–104
land struggle in Sonora, 133–135
obstacles to unionization, 155–156
political class formation and, 21
political outcomes of struggle, 120–121
regional distribution, 69–71
sugarcane industry and, 107–112
unionization of, 137–138
value of, 72(n2)
Proletarianismo
actions of, 14–15
variants of, 13–15
Pronase, 85
Pronasol, 48–49, 52, 54–55, 88
Pucciarelli, Alfredo, 86–87
Puebla, Mexico, 5, 41, 70(table), 100
class differentiation, 69–71
sugarcane collective, 101–104
Radicalism, 12–13
Ramirez, Guadalupe, 107–108
Reconceptualizing the Peasantry (Kearney), 18
Reformism, 12–13
Rello, Fernando, 77, 85
Repeasantization, 14, 62
after neoliberalism, 99–100
struggle for, 31(n2)
Replacement production, 23–24, 61–64,
152
Revolt. See Cristero rebellion; Mexican Revolution
Ronfeld, David, 106
Rural Bank. See Banrural
Rural development, websites for, 160(n1)
Salinas de Gortari, Carlos, 46, 52, 98,
148(n1)
Salles, Vania Almeida, 68, 70
SAM. See Mexican Food System
Sanderson, Steven E., 30–31, 130–131
San José Teruel, 108, 111
San Miguel ejido, 83–84
San Pedro, takeover of, 136–137
Schejman, Alejandro, 59–60
Scott, James, 28–39
SCP. See Simple commodity production
Semiproletarianization, 59
as a result of differentiation, 56–57
as infra-substance peasants, 61–62
crop type, 70
geographical distribution, 69–71
La Laguna producers, 86–87
land struggle in Sonora, 133–135
opposition movement in Sonora, 135
postcapitalism of, 138
post–1992 reform, 68
role in class conflict, 9
sugarcane industry and, 107–112
Sharecroppers, 76
La sierra, 5
Simple commodity production (SCP),
31(n3), 73(n7)
Slavery, 34–35
Smith, Gavin, 31(n3)
"Social function," 62
Social movements, 158–159
Social productivity, 45–46
Sonora, Mexico, 5–6, 37, 41, 70(table)
attack on collectives, 129–133
class differentiation, 69–71
See also El Yaqui Valley
State government. See Government, state
States, Mexican. See Individual states
Steward, Julian, 26
Stratification, social. See Differentiation, social
Stikes, labor. See Unions, labor
Structuration, 31(n5)
Substrates, 12–13, 39–40
class position and, 27–29
deficits’ movement, 118
objects of, 97(table), 119(table),
147(table)
political and socioeconomic outcomes,
118–123
political class formation and, 22, 24
shaped by culture, 26–29
unionization struggles, 155–156
See also Sugar industry
See also Mexican Food System
Subsistence production, 63, 117
Sugar industry, 41, 79, 99–104, 112–113
collective ejidos, 104–105
collective vs. individual production,
107–112
cultural orientation of growers,
116–117
gross income from, 110(table),
111(table)
growers leaving industry, 116–118,
118(table)
growers’ perception of industry,
116(table)
political class formation in, 102
potential success of growers, 117(table)
privatization of, 112–118
producers vs. mill owners, 114–116
profits from, 122–123
See also La Laguna
Surplus production, 61–64, 73(n3)
Swidler, Ann, 32(n7)
Szelény, Ivan, 32(n6)
Tejeda, Adalberto, 39
Topography, 5–6
UGOCM, See General Union of Workers and Peasants
Unemployment, 48
Unions, labor, 98
for semiproletariat, 137–138
government appropriation of, 89–93
labor strikes, 76–78
land struggle in Sonora, 133–135
obstacles to unionization, 155–156
state controlled, 108–109
See also Coalition of collective ejidos;
National Peasant Confederation
United Nations Economic Commission
for Latin America and the Caribbean
(CEPAL), 69
agricultural direct producers distribution, 60(table)
infrasubsistence level production, 61–62
land study by, 59–61
non-peasants, 64–65
problems with study, 65–66
stationary and surplus producers, 63–64
subsistence level producers, 63
UNORCA, See Coalition of Collective Ejidos
Valdés, Rodolfo Felix, 146
Vazquez, Enrique, 98(n2)
Index

Veracruz, Mexico, 39
Villa, Francisco "Pancho," 34

Wage labor. See Proletariat
Wages, access to, 2, 15–18, 16(fig.), 17(fig.), 24
See also Peasantry; Proletariat
Warman, Arturo, 146–147
Water. See Irrigation
Weber, Max, 31(n4)
Wolf, Eric R., 62
Workers Confederation of Mexico (CTM), 42, 131, 155
World Bank, 46, 157
World Trade Organization (WTO), 47, 53
World War II, 42–43

Wright, Erik Olin, 147
WTO. See World Trade Organization

Yaqui Indians, 6
decimation of, 127
national and land struggle, 128–129
takeover of San Pedro, 136–137
El Yaqui Valley, Mexico, 10, 41, 125–128,
138–139
bank vs. collectives, 13
objects of struggle, 147(table)
political class trajectory, 147(table)

Zapata, Emiliano, 34–38
Zapatista National Liberation Army
(EZLN), 3, 158, 160