
Farewell to the Peasantry?

Political Class Formation in
Rural Mexico

Gerardo Otero

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

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.

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Copyright © 1999 by Westview Press, A Member of the Perseus Books Group

Published in 1999 in the United States of America by Westview Press, 5500 Central Avenue, Boulder, Colorado 80301-2877, and in the United Kingdom by Westview Press, 12 Hid's Copse Road, Cumnor Hill, Oxford OX2 9JL.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Otero, Gerardo.
Farewell to the peasantry? : political class formation in rural Mexico / Gerardo Otero.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8133-3645-7

1. Peasantry—Mexico—Political activity. 2. Political leadership—Mexico. 3. Social classes—Mexico. I. Title.

HD1339.M4089 1999

322.4'4'08863—dc21

99-10741
CIP

The paper used in this publication meets the requirements of the American National Standard for Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials Z39.48-1984.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Notes

1. This information comes from various founding ejidatarios interviewed several times since 1988 (their names could be made available to other researchers). Ronfeldt (1973) recounted that Jaramillo's administration was sabotaged during its last two years, but he did not mention the important role played by the *Jaramillista* Communist affiliation.
2. The CNC is one of the corporatist pillars of the ruling PRI, along with the CTM, its labor counterpart, and the *Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares* (CNOP, National Confederation of Popular Organizations). The latter, which includes teachers, government bureaucrats, and a host of other urban groups, also includes "small" property owners in the CNPP (National Confederation of Small Property Owners). In contrast to the CNC, the CNPP is supposed to articulate non-ejidatario agricultural producers, which include the whole spectrum from small peasant proprietors to the agrarian bourgeoisie. The latter, however, tends to be organized in other lobbying organizations (de Gramont 1990, 1996b; Mares 1987). In 1993 CNOP changed its name to FNOC (*Frente Nacional de Organizaciones y Ciudadanos*, or National Front of Organizations and Citizens) and CNPP became CNPR or National Confederation of Rural Producers (*Confederación Nacional de Productores Rurales*), which, in line with the 1992 Agrarian Law, tends to erase the former distinction between ejidatarios and small property owners.
3. This did not prevent an important number of growers to affiliate with a Neocardenista organization in the region after the tainted national elections of 1988. For the most part, though, growers retain their forced membership in one of the official organizations, and use them more as economic than political tools.
4. During my first visit to Atencingo, a few days after its sale had been announced, its management personnel was unusually helpful. I had access to financial statements, industrial personnel, payroll, retirements, and agricultural data for several years with virtually no restriction. Such openness progressively diminished in subsequent visits, and disappeared by 1995, when more adversarial relationships had developed with cane growers.

7

El Yaqui Valley: Toward Self-Managed, Democratic Production

Northwestern Mexico is usually regarded as the region where capitalism has developed most thoroughly in agriculture. This chapter focuses on southern Sonora, specifically the Yaqui Valley. We will follow a complex set of class trajectories for both the subordinate as well as the ruling classes. A central concern will be with the formation of a ferocious agrarian bourgeoisie that violently separated direct producers from their means of production. This process, initiated at the turn of the twentieth century, involved moving the Mexican frontier farther northwest, toward the United States, and crushing the Yaqui and the Mayo Indians who were in the way. Many of these Indians were converted from peasant producers into an agricultural semiproletariat. Although some land was distributed through agrarian reform during the Cárdenas administration (1934–40), the land-hungry bourgeoisie did not hesitate to run roughshod over the *ejido* to expand its agricultural production in one of the most fertile valleys of the country.

Located in the southern part of Sonora, the Yaqui Valley is adjacent to the Mayo Valley. These two valleys are named after the Indian tribes that used to inhabit the region and the two main rivers that irrigate their lands. Both the Mayos and Yaquis valiantly combated every attempt by the central government of Mexico to dispossess the Indians of their land throughout much of the nineteenth century. The histories of these two tribes diverged significantly in the 1880s, however, in the midst of the Porfirian expansion toward the Northwest.

By the mid-1880s, the Mayos were finally "pacified." They accepted the military, political, economic, and, eventually, cultural victory of the rising capitalism in Mexican society. Indeed, the Mayos entered a quick process of acculturation that dovetailed with their proletarianization. As workers, they were an extremely valued labor force. The Yaquis were regarded equally highly, except that their

I greatly benefited from thoughtful critiques and suggestions from David Barkin, Roger Bartra, Barry Carr, and Nora Hamilton, who were reviewers of a previous article (Otero 1999b) on which this chapter is based.

stubborn concern for autonomy led them to resist colonization much more tenaciously than did the Mayos. They were to carry out a war of resistance for decades at a very high cost. They were massacred—almost exterminated—and deported to distant regions of Mexico (Oaxaca and Yucatán). Some fled to Arizona (Hu-DeHart 1984; Spicer 1969a, 1969b, 1980). Eventually many of these exiles went back to their land in the mid-1920s to establish Yaqui communities and rebuild their culture. The Yaquis also benefited from agrarian reform in 1937, during the Cárdenas administration.

As was the case in La Laguna, by the 1970s the bulk of agricultural direct producers were heavily, though not completely, proletarianized. The seasonal character of agricultural production made it impossible for most of them to get permanent wage labor; therefore, they had to complement their income with commercial activities or with marginal odd jobs. The structural position that predominated here was thus proletarian or semiproletarian for close to 75 percent of the agricultural labor force (Hewitt de Alcántara 1978, 228). Given the long experience of capitalist cooperation in agricultural labor processes of this region, the agrarian struggles of the 1970s were postcapitalist in character (see Chapter 1).

Although the central demand in Sonora was precisely land, it was accompanied by demands for machinery, installations, and, more importantly, control of the production process. The demand for land thus shed its peasant skin in evolving toward a postcapitalist character.

State interventions have been dominated by the disproportionate strength of the agrarian bourgeoisie in southern Sonora. Therefore, the class organizations that arose had an oppositional character, although from the late 1940s to the early 1970s they were heavily repressed and largely dismantled. It was not until the mid-1970s that the agricultural semiproletariat was able to organize itself to confront the state and the powerful agrarian bourgeoisie.

As this chapter shows, the resulting Coalition of Collective Ejidos of the Yaqui and Mayo Valleys (*Coalición de Ejidos Colectivos de los Valles del Yaqui y El Mayo*) today offers exemplary organizational lessons, both political (democratic and independent) and economic (productive), for the agrarian movement in Mexico and elsewhere. Although its model may not have been precisely reproduced elsewhere, other regional movements in Mexico have turned to the coalition not only to provide enthusiastic solidarity but also to learn the lessons of its experience. Clearly, the coalition itself has built on the previous lessons of the Mexican postrevolutionary agrarian movement. What follows is a more detailed account of its political class formation centered on the structural, political, and cultural changes in the Yaqui region of southern Sonora.

The Agrarian History and Cultural Setting

Before the rule of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1910), the distant geographical position of Sonora allowed the Yaquis, Pápagos, Seris, and Mayos to be cut off from the re-

public for most of the nineteenth century. But the stakes changed as capitalism sought to expand into the fertile lands of Mexico's northwest. Moreover, the Indians became a potential labor force.

Of the five principal rivers in Sonora (Magdalena, Sonora, Metape, Yaqui, and Mayo), only the Yaqui flowed year-round (Aguilar Camín 1977). This fact might explain the dramatic, recurrent struggle to control the Yaqui valley's lands and water. And it may also explain some of the cultural differences between Yaquis and Mayos. In contrast to the Mayos, the Yaquis were able to sustain an independent economy for a longer period of time after the first contacts with Mexican society. Conversely, the Mayos, owing to their weaker material basis for social reproduction, began to sell their labor power before the 1850s in mining concerns at Alamos, one of the first white urban settlements in the Mayo area (Hu-DeHart 1981, 1984).

The pacification of the Mayos laid the foundation for the proverbial Sonoran industriousness (Aguilar Camín 1977), providing the emerging bourgeoisie with the hardest working and most hardiest labor force in the state. After their pacification, a few Mayos were granted small plots of land by the federal government, although the majority worked for wages in ranches, mines, and haciendas. This small favor (land and jobs), along with the relentless repression they had endured previously, turned the Mayos into a relatively docile labor force.

This process of primitive accumulation separates the direct producers from their means of production. Once this process is complete, direct producers have no way to sustain themselves except by selling their labor power (Marx 1967). In North America such a process is intimately related to the expansion of U.S. capitalism toward its southwest (Mexico's northwest). In 1900 U.S. settlement companies began to enter Sonora under the auspices of the government and the mediation of influential local politicians who had close family ties with the rising agrarian bourgeoisie. The Sonoran bourgeoisie was interested in inviting foreign companies in order to promote the immigration of industrious capitalists who would stimulate the state's economy. Immigration was accompanied by heavy penetration of investment, technology, and the entrepreneurial culture that characterized the U.S. southwest. The central concern was for profits, which were pursued with a voracious single-mindedness (Aguilar Camín 1977, 55–59).

By the time of the Mexican civil war (1912–20), the vast majority of the Yaqui Indians had been either killed, deported, or forced into exile by the army of Porfirio Díaz. Those who stayed were eventually recruited by the revolutionary army of Alvaro Obregón with the promise of restoring their land. It was not until the early 1920s that the deported Yaquis were allowed to return to their tribal territory. Obregón was forced to live up to his promise during his presidency (1920–24). The powerful capitalist interests, however, were stronger than Obregón's willingness to fulfill his promise. After their return from exile or deportation, the members of the tribe were reduced to the northern bank of the Yaqui river, i.e., outside the fertile valley lands. When they went to Obregón in protest, the Mexican army immediately occupied the Yaqui townships.

After more than two decades of massacre, deportation, and wage labor, however, the returned Yaquis restored a peasant economy centered on subsistence crops such as corn, beans and squash. Besides the Yaqui land grants, some *ejidos* were formed prior to the *Cardenista* period (1934–40), but they were mostly symbolic. The thirty-eight *ejidos* that existed held 188,055 hectares of marginal land, which was farmed by 4,071 *ejidatarios* and their families. Because of the poor quality of these lands, many Yaquis and other mestizo workers had to sell their labor power in the region to supplement their income.

By 1935 conditions had worsened for direct producers. Farm workers were paid only Mex\$1.56 daily, compared to Mex\$2.33 in 1929. The polarization of land-tenure distribution was profound. Of 10,409 plots registered by the first agricultural census in 1930, 5,577 (or 53.6 percent) were under ten hectares each, and they controlled a mere 0.3 percent of the land! There were only thirty-eight *ejidos* of fifty hectares or more, controlling 0.4 percent of the land. Finally, the latifundia sector (with more than 1,000 hectares per plot) controlled 89 percent of the land and represented only 8.8 percent of the private holdings (Sanderson 1981, 91–93). This sector would soon be shocked by the *Cardenista* agrarian reform in Sonora.

Cardenismo: the End of Agrarian-Bourgeois Hegemony?

In 1937 17,000 hectares of irrigated land were distributed among 2,160 landless workers. The remaining 27,638 hectares of irrigated land were divided among 840 landowners, in compliance with the legal maximum surface of one hundred hectares permitted by *Cardenista* legislation. Another 36,000 hectares of arid lands were also distributed to *ejidos* in 1937, and a similar amount was given to landowners in compensation for the 17,000 irrigated hectares that were distributed to *ejidatarios*. The proportion of land held in *ejidos*, however, declined sharply in the following decade to 17 percent because of an unprecedented expansion of the agricultural frontier through the development of irrigation infrastructure by the state (Siles-Alvarado 1968).

With the *Cardenista ejidos* land distribution, the organization for production in most of the irrigated land was collective, and the Ejido Bank became a major presence in credit and technical assistance. Created by Cárdenas to financially and technically support the new collective *ejidos*, the Ejido Bank was crucial in the early years of agrarian reform in attaining good productivity levels. In the first few years (1938–43), the average yields from collective *ejidos* were higher than the regional average for all farms (Sanderson 1981, 146).

At this time (1937) the Yaquis were not only struggling for land in a typical peasant fashion; they were also struggling for their nationality. Nevertheless, when the state distributed land to them, they had to accept the state's rules of the game, which included the heavy involvement of its economic apparatuses in organizing agricultural production. Therefore, the Yaquis' newly reconstructed

peasant economy was now converted into collective farms closely supervised by the Ejido Bank. This development left the new *ejidatarios* in quite a vulnerable position, in relation to both the state and the agrarian bourgeoisie.

Indeed, for the Yaquis at least, the successful struggle for land resulted in a definitive defeat in their national struggle. Henceforth they had to submit to the Mexican national state under its own terms; the state gained the initiative in the future of agrarian development in the region. The conditions were thus established for a full integration of the Yaquis into national life—namely, an integration into the process of capitalist development. This was also the condition for a gradual transformation of Indian-peasant struggles into popular-democratic and postcapitalist struggles. Yet it took more than three decades for this type of struggle to emerge.

End of Agrarian Reform and Attack on Collective *Ejidos*

The end of Cárdenas's agrarian reform dates from 1938, when productivism set in at the end of his administration. Overall state policy was geared toward stimulating the industrialization process, and agriculture became subordinated to this goal. After World War II the ideology of the Cold War came to dominate the Mexican government. The CNC and CTM were converted into powerful political arms of the state to control peasants and workers. As in La Laguna (Chapter 5), the collective *ejidos* were major targets, not only because they had become strongholds of opposition and socialist organizations, but also because they were seen by private capitalist firms as an ideological threat, an example that might spread. The productivist drive in economic policy was thus combined with a commitment to individualistic ideology that clashed with the collective *ejidos*.

In fact, this individualism and individual title went along with bourgeois pressure for the government to extend *certificados de inafectabilidad* (certificates of immunity), which constitute a warranty that holders of such certificates are not subject to land expropriation for twenty-five years. This guarantee was touted as an incentive for agricultural entrepreneurialism to develop fully. Between 1938 and 1950 the landowners in Sonora were granted forty-one certificates of immunity covering 598,460 hectares (Sanderson 1981, 147). Although most of this land was initially earmarked for grazing, it was eventually made arable through large government investments in irrigation infrastructure, and the certificates of immunity would still hold.

The new Credit Law bolstered the individualistic thrust by reducing collective exploitation to a mere alternative under the law rather than the officially preferred mode of agrarian organization and

by dropping the requirement that *ejidos* use medium- and long-term infrastructure credit communally [or collectively]. Later, in 1947, ejidal credit organizations were subsumed under the control of the Ejidal [sic] Bank, which assumed full authority

for the capitalization, development, marketing and credit functions of the ejido, at the expense of local societies (Sanderson 1981, 144–145).

At this point the Ejido Bank became the actual employer of the *ejidatarios* by turning them, in effect, into state workers in a peasant disguise and appropriating their production process. Although the legal tools and political atmosphere for dismantling the collectives were established by the end of 1942, government agencies began a tenacious campaign against them only at the start of Miguel Alemán's administration in 1946. State policies had thus shifted clearly in favor of the agrarian bourgeoisie and against the *ejidatarios*.

In response to adverse state policies, *ejidatarios* began to form oppositional organizations. Many joined the General Union of Workers and Peasants (*Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México*, or UGOCM), referred to in Chapter 5. This mass organization was linked to the newly formed *Partido Popular* (PP, eventually called Popular Socialist Party, *Partido Popular Socialista*, or PPS), led by Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the former secretary-general of the CTM during *Cardenismo*.

During the Cárdenas administration, the members of collective *ejidos* were affiliated with the official *Confederación Nacional Campesina*, CNC, and the CTM (Carr 1986). The state had established a popular alliance with peasants and workers, and their leaders could even be active in the Communist Party and still hold executive posts (to which they were democratically elected) in the CNC or CTM.

When Miguel Alemán came to power, along with the Cold War and anticommunist ideology, such allegiances were no longer possible. Communist leaders were quickly purged from the CNC and CTM. Both of these organizations began to assume an entirely different character: From being actual representatives of their constituency, they became corporatist state apparatuses for the political control of workers and peasants. Sensing these global changes, "the CNC took an increasingly individualistic position toward land tenure and exploitation during the 1940s, even joining with private property owners in some states to pressure the regime for stabilization of land tenure" (Sanderson 1981, 138).

The Ejido Bank also became a major state weapon against collective *ejidos*. It granted them credit only under absolute certainty of recovery. This in itself did not have too adverse an effect. But by 1949 those who wanted to retain a collective organization of their *ejidos* faced great difficulty in obtaining credit at all, and midterm loans were completely suspended for them, thereby hindering their ability to keep pace with mechanization and other technological advances. Conversely, the bank showed a strong disposition to help *ejidatarios* realize profits if they were in turn willing to fragment their collective *ejidos* into individual plots. But this helpful attitude of the bank toward the individualists only lasted through 1950. By then most collective *ejidos* had been dismantled (Sanderson 1981, 175–78).

Steven E. Sanderson quotes a revealing statement from an editorial of *El Im-parcial*, a daily newspaper of Sonora, which appeared on June 21, 1950; the piece

stated that the federal government had decided to attack the strongholds of the PP with a "powerful weapon: economics." The editorial then goes on to explain the political logic of such attack:

The Ejidal[sic] Bank entered the game to reorganize not only the ejidal Union, but the credit societies that depend on it, liquidating once and for all everything that smells of the Partido Popular in order to give entry . . . to the flag of the CNC, an adherent . . . of the PRI (cited in Sanderson 1981, 141).

The history of the relationship between the bank and collectives in El Yaqui and El Mayo Valleys is astonishingly similar to that in La Laguna (see Chapter 5). The bank clearly appropriated the *ejidos*' productive processes and precipitated their economic failure, thereby accomplishing the state's goal of weakening the power base of UGOCM and PPS, the oppositional organizations that timidly challenged PRI hegemony.

As regards the operation of *ejidos*, Charles J. Erasmus provides a description as of 1959. He says that the sole source of credit for collectives is the Ejido Bank. And in all cases it is the Bank

which determines the crops to be planted, oversees the work, and sells the harvests. The Bank may buy farm machinery for a collective or pay contractors to clear, plow, plant, and harvest. In this area it seldom finances anything but mechanized operations. To maintain members of collectives between harvests, the Bank advances them a daily wage later deducted from the harvest profits (Erasmus 1961, 214–15).

Inaugurated in 1939, the Central Union, the economic organization created by direct producers for the self-management of their collective farms and other agricultural activities, remained under their control until 1953, as was the case with its counterpart in La Laguna. It managed a machinery center, a shop for the sale of machinery parts and tires, a gas station, a commercialization department for crops and inputs, and even a suburban bus line. Moreover, the Union gave its member *ejidos* a leading edge in bargaining their crops at higher prices than those obtained by private entrepreneurs (Hewitt de Alcántara 1978, 181–82).

Like its counterpart in La Laguna, the Central Union in El Yaqui maintained political links with what eventually became UGOCM and the PPS. The local leadership had also been part of CNC or CTM until it became clear, under *Alemanismo* (1946–52), that these organizations offered no possibilities of carrying on the Cardenista plan for collective *ejido* development. Maximiliano R. López, who led the agrarian struggle in the 1930s, was director of the Central Union in the 1940s, as was Arturo Orona in La Laguna. López remained with CTM up to 1947. But once the *Alemanista* counterreforms began, he allied himself with several other regional peasant leaders—Jacinto López, Ramón Danzós Palomino, Bernabé Arana, and Arturo Orona—to form UGOCM. This mass organization eventually established

links with Lombardo's PPS. UGOCM was set up as an alternative to oppose CNC and CTM, while the PPS combated the PRI itself.

The state rewards to those *ejidatarios* who deserted collectivism, however, also meant reducing the membership of the Central Union. By 1953, the government attack on this economic organization included stealing machinery from the union-run enterprises. When Maximiliano López went to Mexico City to file a protest, he was assassinated. This was the last blow to the Central Union. After his murder the regional organizations that made up the Central Union were not much more than paper organizations.

According to Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, the state of economic, political, and cultural disarray in which the *ejidos* were left after the official boycott is exemplified by the village of Benito Juárez, typical of the Yaqui and Mayo valleys in the early 1970s. Life had been highly secularized and monetized, and hardly any community life remained. Organized participation in community affairs was limited to a meeting of students' parents once or twice a year, called by the only teacher in the village school. The members of the *ejido* as such had not met in years to talk about their common problems. This was of course understandable since the four credit societies there were dominated by a single rich man who rented land from his colleagues. There was not even a yearly celebration to commemorate the anniversary of agrarian reform in the Yaqui Valley. In the Benito Juárez village,

once collectivist, there is no community spirit. On the contrary, intrigues and mistrust abound, like in the whole valley after the terrible decade of the fifties. . . . It is the logical extreme which has resulted from a long and systematic campaign to disorganize the valley ejidos. Not even religion has been useful to cure the wounds of this society: As one of the inhabitants of Benito Juárez said, . . . "in this place there is no more God than [money] bills." One Catholic priest appeared two or three times in the village but never came back because nobody would attend his services (Hewitt de Alcántara 1978, 226).

The process of acculturation has been widespread among both the Yaqui and Mayo Indians, but through different processes. The Mayos are more integrated with whites and mestizos even though 50 percent of the population in the Mayo region is Indian. In contrast, the Yaquis (about 12,000 in 1959) live mostly isolated from non-Indians except at Vicam station, where there are more whites (Erasmus 1961, 191). This difference might be due to the many conflicts between the Yaquis and the larger white and mestizo society throughout Mexican history, which has led the Yaquis to maintain greater solidarity and cultural identification than the Mayos have (Hu-DeHart 1981, 1984).

By the 1960s the agrarian bourgeoisie had consolidated its economic and political power to the extent that the *ejidos* established during *Cardenismo* succumbed to its insatiable drive for capitalist penetration in Sonoran agriculture. The legal impediments to capitalist penetration were not enough to keep the Sonoran

bourgeoisie out of the fertile lands that were granted to *ejidatarios*, whether Indian or mestizo. By the mid-1960s, 80 percent of *ejido* land was rented out to capitalist cultivators, and the holders of *ejido* titles often worked for a wage on their own plots (Hewitt de Alcántara 1978, 193).

The systematic economic boycott against collective *ejidos* was coupled with a policy of divide and conquer by which the state rewarded some *ejidatarios* in order to integrate them into the mass organizations it controlled. The UGOCM and the PPS were tremendously weakened or never really achieved significant strength. At the same time, the extension of capitalist relations of production resulted in a significant deterioration of Mayo and Yaqui cultures. With the ebbing of a strong ethnic identity, many Indians opted for acculturation as an individual strategy to try to adapt more effectively to the new rules of the market. Unfortunately for the agrarian bourgeoisie, this deterioration of Indian-peasant culture was wedded to a new culture emerging from the very capitalistic production process to which direct producers were increasingly exposed as wage workers. This combination had an important effect on future agrarian struggles in which demands for land were accompanied by demands for other means of production and democratic control of the production process.

The New Agrarian Movement: Toward Self-Managed and Democratic Production

The boycott against collective *ejidos* in the period from 1947 to 1954 period was followed by a tremendous expansion of the agricultural frontier in Sonora. This process greatly strengthened the agrarian bourgeoisie and provided plenty of employment opportunities for the expanding labor force. In fact, the irrigated surface in the state increased from 150,000 hectares in 1940 to 552,000 (368 percent) in 1960. Even though agriculture in Sonora became increasingly mechanized, the expansion of the frontier allowed for the growth in employment opportunities until the early 1970s. The economically active population in agriculture grew from 61,500 in 1940 to 133,700 (217 percent) in 1960, a much slower growth rate than that of the irrigated surface. By 1970 just over 100,000 people were employed on roughly 700,000 hectares of irrigated surface (Ferra Martínez 1987, 4-5).

Sonoran agriculture began to experience the effects of the capitalist crisis by the early 1970s (described in Chapter 4). The formerly highly successful credit unions run by the agrarian bourgeoisie entered a phase of heavy losses in the 1971-74 period (Quintero 1982). Declining prices in cotton led many entrepreneurs in the Yaqui valley to shift a large portion of land to wheat, which is an intensely mechanized crop. About 96 days/men are required for each hectare of the cotton crop, in contrast to roughly 7.5 for wheat. In Sonora a reduction of 108,436 hectares of cotton caused unemployment for 36,166 day laborers in 1975 (Canabal Cristiani 1984, 219). Between 1974 and 1975, the number of day laborers displaced from agriculture nationwide reached 7,233,366.

In 1970, 73 percent of the economically active population in Sonora's agriculture was made up of rural workers, while 1 percent of that population owned 42 percent of the arable land. Meanwhile, the capital-intensiveness of agricultural operations had been accelerating. According to some estimates, while in 1940 investment in machinery constituted one-third of the investment in wages, twenty years later investment in machinery exceeded payrolls by 50 percent (Jiménez Ricárdez 1976). These changes have created a reserve labor pool that reduced wages and thus further increased capitalist profits until the overproduction crisis set in.

Thus, by the mid-1970s three factors had influenced the emergence of a combative social mobilization for land and the control of the production process: (1) increasing unemployment and deterioration of the material condition of the masses, (2) a general process of radicalization in the nationwide class struggle as a result of the deepening of capitalist and peasant agricultural crises, and (3) interbourgeois infighting over the 1976 presidential succession.

By 1975 the agricultural proletariat and semiproletariat were largely unorganized or were affiliated with the official CNC, the Independent Peasant Central (*Central Campesina Independiente*, or CCI), or UGOCM-Jacinto López, all of which had signed the *Pacto de Ocampo*, a deal with President Luis Echevarría by which those organizations agreed to maintain social peace in the countryside. UGOCM had suffered severe repression and several splinters by this time. Two of them kept the same name and could be distinguished only by their last name. Thus, UGOCM-Jacinto López fell under bourgeois-hegemonic sway and state control by joining the *Pacto de Ocampo*. The Agrarianist Mexican Council (*Consejo Agrarista Mexicano*, or CAM), also signed the pact (Ferra Martínez 1982; Sanderson 1981).

The left faction of the UGOCM, however, initially became UGOCM-PPS, linked to the *Partido Popular Socialista*. But this organization later became UGOCM-PPM, reflecting a splinter in the PPS itself. Whereas the PPS had become almost a left appendage of the official PRI, the PPM represented a return to its traditionally *Lombardista* positions. The UGOCM-PPM thus belonged to this nationalist left tradition, with a Stalinist background.

Moreover, the CCI also had some influence in Sonora, but this organization had undergone division by 1975 as well. The CCI-Garzón joined the progovernment *Pacto de Ocampo*, while the CCI-Danzós became the Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (*Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos*, or CIOAC) in 1975. The name CIOAC reflected new debates within the Communist Party (PCM) in which *proletarista* authors such as Roger Bartra and Sergio de la Peña were having an important influence in characterizing the changes in the Mexican agrarian structure. As we saw in Chapter 2, these analyses tended to see great promise for socialism with the increasing presence of an agricultural proletariat. Consequently, the CIOAC began to favor a struggle

for unionization over the traditional struggle for land in the countryside. CIOAC was led by members of the PCM, which continued to espouse a Leninist, *proletarista* strategy until 1982.¹

In the early 1970s, though, under organizational conditions dominated by *proletarista* conceptions on the left and official control of most mass organizations, the struggle for land actually lost momentum in Sonora. Both official and oppositional organizations dedicated their greatest efforts to unionize day laborers (Ferra Martínez 1982). But this narrowly economic leadership was soon challenged from below, by the masses themselves. They would pose a new objective for the struggle: the demand for land, yes, but accompanied by the demand for the rest of the means of production and the democratic control of the production process.

1975 Land Takeovers

On October 19, 1975, land petitioners (groups of people formally organized to demand land and registered at the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, as provided by Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution until 1992) affiliated with the CAM and CCI-Garzón occupied three plots close to the village of San Ignacio Río Muerto in Sonora. Most of them were residents of this village. The local and national media gave widespread publicity to the incident, while the organizations of landowners demanded energetic action from the governor of Sonora, Carlos Biebrich, accusing him of weakness.

On October 23 Biebrich sent the Judicial Police backed by army troops to evict "the invaders." The occupants were evicted "peacefully" from two of the plots, but their eviction from the one owned by the Dengel family was quite violent: Seven occupants were killed, thirty were wounded, and many more were arrested, despite the fact they had already agreed to leave the land. As a result of this bloody measure, Biebrich was forced to resign his gubernatorial post on October 25 and was replaced by an old politician, Alejandro Carrillo Marcor (Oswald, Rodríguez, and Flores 1986).

The October 1975 land occupations took place in the context of interbourgeois and interbourgeois conflict over the presidential succession of 1976. Biebrich had been an important figure within the PRI promoting the candidacy of Mario Moya Palencia, then secretary of the interior and a favorite of Mexican bourgeoisie. By the time of the land takeovers, though, a different official candidate was announced: José López Portillo. Thus, the events in Sonora were exploited for revenge among different PRI factions. But this fact alone certainly does not explain the rise of agrarianist mobilization in Sonora. The agricultural semiproletariat acted because of the economic crisis in Mexico and because they had struggled for land through official channels for so many years with so little result. Because the state constantly refused to intervene in its favor, this semiproletariat generated an oppositional movement.

From Spontaneous Mobilizations to an Alliance of Oppositional Organizations

After the October massacre, direct producers began to carry out other land takeovers outside the framework of official organizations. Even independent organizations such as the UGOCM-PPM and the CIOAC were left behind, for they, too, initially believed the October events had resulted merely from bureaucratic infighting, and they resolved to remain neutral.

Toward the end of 1975, regional leaders of land-petitioning groups, most of whom had been affiliated with the CNC, the CCI, or the UGOCM-Jacinto López, began to hold secret meetings to decide upon the future tactics of their struggle. Most of these leaders had already broken with the official organizations of the *Pacto de Ocampo*; the masses were no longer willing to go along with the government's collaborationist pact.

On April 3, 1976, at daybreak, about eight hundred land petitioners took over block 407 (each "block" consisting of about four hundred hectares of land), a property called San Pedro that belonged to the Bórquez Esquer family. Located in the heart of the Yaqui Valley, about ten kilometers from Ciudad Obregón, San Pedro had several buildings densely surrounded by trees that formed a natural protective barrier against armed repression by the state (Sanderson 1981, 191). The land occupiers took several precautions. They dug ditches in the two access roads, leaving room only for their own vehicles to cross over, and they set explosives in strategic places in case these entrances had to be suddenly blocked. Also, they had powerful lights to illuminate the two access roads at night, and they prepared armed groups for self-defense (Ferra Martínez 1982, 15–16).

The Bórquez family was one of the most prominent landowning families in the region, and its influence with the government was considerable. Its members had followed the usual methods for avoiding legal constraints on private land tenure in the agrarian reform legislation, registering four hundred hectares under the names of the four Bórquez brothers. With each new birth in the family, they would buy more property and register it under the new child's name. "By 1975, the Bórquez family, counting 97 members, had amassed nearly 27,000 hectares of land" (Benjamin and Buell 1985).

A few hours after the land takeover, the army surrounded block 407. On April 6 the government sent two representatives from the Ministry of Agrarian Reform to negotiate. Although the land occupants decided to accept mediation, they also took the representatives hostage until the government withdrew its forces from the vicinity of block 407.

With the army present, the land occupants received broad support and solidarity from other groups of land solicitors, relatives, Yaqui Indians, and students. Many of these supporters camped outside the military site in a show of solidarity.

In the meantime, the land petitioners established a formal organization to represent their interests known as the Independent Peasant Front (*Frente Campesino*

Independiente, or FCI). Despite the language of its demands, they were clearly more proletarian and postcapitalist than peasant in nature:

- handing the latifundia to collectively organized peasants, giving first priority to the agricultural workers of the expropriated plot
- expropriation of *latifundia* without compensation
- nationalizing of private banks
- reduction of the maximum allowance for private property [from 150] to 20 hectares
- peasant control of crop commercialization and natural resources
- right to unionization and to strike for agricultural workers
- derogation of the right to *amparo agrario* [the right to stop implementation of agrarian reform by the state] for *latifundistas* [large landowners]
- formation of peasant brigades and self-defense groups
- annulment of all "certificates of immunity" protecting agricultural and grazing land
- democratic representation of the peasants
- cheap credit and provision of machinery for poor peasants (FCI document, cited in Ferra Martínez 1982, 22)

Clearly, this program calls for reforms that go well beyond a "peasant" view of how land should be administered. Nevertheless, many left observers call the agents of this struggles peasants because land remains a central demand. My argument in this regard is that the demand for land takes on a qualitatively different character once it is posed alongside the other demands specified above. The overall character of such demands lead toward the construction of an alternative hegemonic project with a popular-democratic content, one in which production units would assume a postcapitalist character.

Peasants, Proletarians, or Semiproletarians?

Ferra Martínez (1982), Quintero (1982), and Canabal Cristiani (1984) document the fact that up to 80 percent of the land solicitors were temporary or permanent wage earners in agriculture or agroindustries and that some of them were sons of *ejidatarios* or landless day laborers living in *ejido* villages. In his conclusions Ferra Martínez maintains that the struggles for land and unionization were becoming increasingly complementary. Nevertheless, he does not distinguish between different contents in the struggle for land itself. Clearly, the FCI program (quoted above) contains a profoundly popular-democratic and postcapitalist character in its global demands. Amazingly, even Roger Bartra (1982) talks about the Sonoran "peasantry."

The actors in these struggles should be properly considered agricultural semiproletarians, not peasants, in their production and reproduction relations. They occupy several "class positions" during the year, like Michael Kearney's (1996)

"polybians," but quite likely most of their income comes from wage employment. Given the temporary nature of wage employment, however, struggling for unionization is probably not the best strategy for this semiproletariat. Their job experience tells them that salaried jobs are not very stable in agriculture and are rather hard to come by in industry. Neither provides them with much economic security. From this point of view, then, struggle for land may offer a longer-term payoff in employment and security.

Economically, the struggle of the semiproletarians of northwest Mexico has a postcapitalist content. As wage workers, they have been immersed in relations of capitalist cooperation for several generations, a fact that naturally gives them a preference for organizing production cooperatively. Because commodification has taken hold in most spheres of life in the region, the preferred orientation of production is toward the market. They struggle not only for land, but also for the other means of production, for a cooperative organization, and for democratic control of the production process. Their struggle resembles that of a factory takeover by industrial proletarians (in a restricted sense). Such a struggle is postcapitalist in the sense that agents are resisting proletarianization as a permanent or temporary way of life: They actually want to transcend a proletarian condition by gaining full control of the overall production process. This struggle establishes the conditions for the appearance of a popular-democratic project.

In sum, land as an object of struggle does not in itself determine the economic or political character of struggles in the countryside. Aside from the demand for access to land and other means of production, other elements of the political class character of struggles include (1) the method of organizing production (household or cooperative), (2) the character of class organizations vis-à-vis the state and the bourgeoisie (oppositional or collaborationist), and (3) the degree of autonomy of the organization and the alliances it establishes with other left or popular (or right) organizations. As shown below, the Sonoran struggles resulted in a progressive postcapitalist and popular-democratic struggle on all of these counts.

The Land Expropriation

A few days before Echeverría's presidential term came to an end, on November 19, 1976, nearly 100,000 hectares of land were expropriated in the Yaqui and Mayo Valleys. Close to 37,131 hectares were irrigated land, and the remainder were for grazing. Three-fourths of the irrigated land belonged to twenty-one families, several with close kinship relationships among them. Almost 75 percent of the grazing land was held by only four persons, one of them Faustino Félix, ex-governor of Sonora. Some 40 percent of the privately held irrigated land in the Yaqui Valley was affected (Benjamin and Buell, 1985). The lands of seventy-two families were expropriated; many of these families also represented industrial and commercial interests. This measure was taken immediately following the second devaluation of the peso that year (after twenty-two years of a stable exchange

rate), when capital flight, fears, and rumors were at their peak. One of the rumors suggested the imminence of a military takeover led by Echeverría himself.

Once the FCI and the other opposition organizations forced the state to expropriate lands of the most productive agrarian bourgeoisie, the state struck back at the FCI by including only a small percentage of its members in the new *ejidos*. In these cases, members of the same group of land petitioners were split up and assigned to different *ejidos*. Then the *Pacto de Ocampo* organizations immediately moved in to reap the benefits of the struggle and to try to control the situation politically because most of the beneficiaries were members of the group (Ferra Martínez 1982; Castellanos and Terrazas 1982).

But this time, however, the constituency of those organizations had learned an important lesson from the FCI. They realized that their having received land was not due to the intervention of the CNC, CCI, CAM, or UGOCM-Jacinto López but the result of their own independent mobilizations. Thus, most of them soon withdrew from those corrupt and corporatist organizations (Canabal Cristiani 1984, 174).

Sonora's agricultural semiproletariat had been immersed in the climate of oppositional struggle waged by the FCI. Although most of its individual members were not given land grants, their consciousness had already transcended their individuality and subjectivity to become the collective consciousness of the semiproletariat in the region. The lessons of combativity, solidarity, and independence from the state had been learned, and the collaborationist role of the *Pacto de Ocampo* organizations had finally been uncovered. These organizations would no longer be able to hide their true character: Political apparatuses of the state, acting mostly to control the masses and usually stepping on their interests to favor bourgeois hegemony.

In the process of land redistribution, Echeverría violated his own Agrarian Code of 1972 on two counts. First, the land distributed allowed for only five hectares of irrigated land for each new *ejidatario*, when the law specified a minimum of ten. This allotment severely limited the employment capacity of the land for each *ejidatario*. Second, the dam in the Yaqui valley already stood at capacity. Thus, Echeverría proposed to "extend a water district already plagued by drought and perennial water-storage shortages." (Sanderson 1981 194)

In spite of the material problems involved in these violations of the law, the new *ejidatarios* confronted the situation successfully. In fact, they have surprised all sectors of Mexican society with their exemplary work in economic (productivity) and political (democratic) terms.

Appraisals of the Coalition of Collective Ejidos

Before, the government told us what we could and could not do. Now, we tell them what to do for us.

—A farmer of the Coalition of Collective Ejidos of the Yaqui and Mayo Valleys
(quoted in Benjamin and Buell 1985)

All of the evaluations of the experience of the *Coalición de Ejidos Colectivos de los Valles del Yaqui y El Mayo* suggest that it has been highly successful for direct

producers and even for the nation. An investigative reporter from *Unomasuno*, a Mexico City daily, specifically highlighted the achievements in both productivity and political independence after eight years of the land takeovers (Coo 1984a, 1984b). He interviewed the local president of the right-of-center National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, or PAN) and even he had to concede, "Those friends have attained a very interesting productivity and besides working the land very well, they have invested their profits in equipment and agroindustries, which gives their work a very interesting dimension [emphasis in original]." (Quoted in Coo 1984a).

Another aspect discussed in the *Unomasuno* article is the direct producers' substantial degrees of independence from the state and the bourgeoisie in constructing their own organization (Coo 1984b, 7). This successful story is an outgrowth of the adverse state interventions that direct producers had to confront. If the state eventually intervened in their favor, it was because the politically organized agricultural workers imposed those policies on the state, just as they imposed land redistribution. This might be called the "subjective moment" in political class dynamics, in which a subordinate class, once politically formed, is able to successfully determine the direction of certain state policies in its favor while maintaining its political independence from the state.

In the summer of 1985, the Institute for Food and Development Policy of San Francisco, California, sent a reporter to the Yaqui valley. A brief account of her visit was published in the institute's monthly newsletter *Food First News* (1985). The reporter describes the coalition experience as exemplary, providing many positive lessons for other popular struggles in Third World agriculture. The institute's full report appears in Benjamin and Buell (1985).

Because favorable state interventions resulted directly from the initiative and political strength of direct producers, such interventions did not coopt their organizations. On the contrary, the workers were the collective actors, the subject of the process, so that new successes resulted in further strengthening their class organizations. In this "subjective moment" the subordinate classes had the upper hand; hence the epigraph of this section: "Before, the government told us what we could and could not do. Now we tell them what do for us." This new position involved, of course, gaining greater degrees of autonomy from the economic apparatuses of the state, namely from the Ejido Bank and a democratic leadership (Gordillo 1985a, 1985b, 1988). (This bank was renamed the *Banco Nacional de Crédito Rural*, or simply Banrural, in 1975.)

The Coalition's Program and Performance

Besides struggling to obtain the full ten hectares that the *ejidatarios* were entitled to by law, the coalition's program also included (1) the struggle against merchant capital for better marketing conditions, (2) the self-financing of *ejidos* and the independence from the bank through a credit union, (3) establishing other pro-

ductive activities such as dairy operations and textile enterprises from their cotton crop, and (4) constructing urban units to provide adequate housing to *ejidatarios* close to their work sites and to foster closer relationships in the community. Many of these activities were designed to provide more employment opportunities to *ejidatarios* and their sons and daughters, while also strengthening their organization economically and politically (Canabal Cristiani 1984, 215).

Table 7.1 shows yields per hectare in the coalition *ejidos* for wheat, soybeans, and corn as compared with the *ejido*-sector and private-sector average yields and the Yaqui valley's average yield. Only the three most important crops for the coalition were chosen for comparison. Wheat is the most important crop, with over 50 percent of coalition land surface usually dedicated to it. The other crops occupy from 2.5 to 30 percent of arable land. This pattern of land use is similar in the *ejido* and the private sector as well (Oswald, Rodriguez, and Flores 1986, 282).

Except for 1980-81 and 1985-86 in wheat and 1982 and 1985 in soybeans, the coalition crop yields were always higher than the regional average. They followed the productivity of the private sector very closely and usually had higher yields in corn production. The coalition has not had yields equal to or higher than those of the private sector for all crops because it has an explicit policy of cost savings based on eliminating agrochemicals. In fact, coalition technicians have determined that the cost of high-priced agrochemicals is not sufficiently offset by increased yields. Therefore, the minimum yield differentials between the coalition *ejidos* and the private-sector farms involve reduced costs for the coalition and practices that are less damaging to the regional environment, especially reduced dependence on agrochemicals.²

As a formal organization, the coalition was inaugurated in May 1978 after the successful struggle against Banrural's retention of *ejido* profits to pay affected landowners. This was the first victorious battle that the new *ejidatarios* waged against unfavorable state intervention. The lesson learned was that they would need to consolidate their class organization not only to defend themselves against the state's impositions but also to propose concrete alternatives for productive organization. The technical department of the coalition was established immediately after this struggle (Castaños 1982).

The next major battle was waged to gain financial independence from Banrural, when the *ejidatarios* decided that they did not want to pay the insurance fees to the government-run *Aseguradora Nacional Agrícola y Ganadera*, S.A. (Anagsa). Anagsa only protected the bank's credits and failed to make an allowance for lost profits by the producer. As an alternative, the coalition created its own common fund with the fees formerly paid to Anagsa, and it provided broader coverage than Anagsa did: 100 percent of crop losses instead of Anagsa's 70 percent. Banrural immediately opposed this initiative, threatening to withhold credit for the coalition if it did not insure with Anagsa. Through the combative mobilization of direct producers, the battle was won by the coalition. Although the common fund was started with no capital (except the funds provided by the Bank's loans for agricul-

TABLE 7.1 Yield per Hectare of the Principal Crops of the Yaqui Valley by Type of Productive Organization, 1980-1986 (in metric tons)

Agricultural Cycle	Wheat			Regional Average
	Coalition	Ejido Sector	Private Sector	
1980-81	4.351	4.579	4.613	4.403
1981-82	5.314	5.215	5.465	5.190
1982-83	5.008	4.864	5.106	4.941
1983-84	5.243	4.988	5.312	5.121
1984-85	4.876	4.744	5.009	4.861
1985-86	4.543	4.408	4.837	4.595

Agricultural Cycle	Soybeans			Regional Average
	Coalition	Ejido Sector	Private Sector	
1982	2.009	2.054	2.188	2.108
1983	1.826	1.646	1.838	1.710
1984	1.644	1.545	1.689	1.608
1985	1.978	2.013	2.180	2.092
1986	2.154	2.114	2.127	2.119

Agricultural Cycle	Corn ^a			Regional Average
	Coalition	Ejido Sector	Private Sector	
1981-82	3.944	4.033	4.341	4.136
1982-83	4.163	3.801	4.044	3.914
1983-84	4.153	3.908	3.900	3.905
1984-85	4.244	4.069	4.236	4.113
1985-86	4.714	3.896	4.078	3.958

^a Data for the coalition are for the summer cycle in each year; those for the other sectors are for the winter cycle. Therefore, some of the yield variations may be due to differences in the agricultural cycle.

SOURCES: Based on data from the *Departamento de Asistencia Técnica, Coalición de Ejidos Colectivos de los Valles del Yaqui y El Mayo* (supplied by Israel Gaxiola, Coordinador), for Coalition yields; and on data from the *Departamento de Estadística Agrícola, Distrito de Riego 148, Cajeme, Sonora, Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hídricos* (information on District 41, Yaqui Valley), for ejido, private sector, and regional average yields.

tural insurance), by 1982 it had a capitalization of Mex\$41,876,787 (\$1,820,730 at the current exchange rate). With Anagsa, the *ejidatarios* never knew the destination of their payments.

The struggle for independence from the Banrural, however, had to go further. The coalition decided to create its own credit union, along with a marketing de-

partment, for thus far the bank had been in charge of marketing its crops. The credit union began operations in 1979. By 1982 there were forty-three member *ejidos*, organized in three *ejido* unions; others joined later.

News of the coalition's credit union spread through the state of Durango and all the way to Chiapas in Southeastern Mexico. A peasant group in Durango requested membership and in 1981 started operations with very satisfactory results. The Union of Ejido Unions in Chiapas requested a concession to form their own credit union from the Ministry of Finance in 1981 (Coalición 1982).

In addition to gaining the marketing advantages through the department of marketing, this department has been instrumental in purchasing farm inputs. For instance, under a contract with Fertilimex, a state-run company, fertilizers have been purchased at bulk prices.

The initial bottom-up, democratic organizing drive of the FCI has been carried over to the coalition. Its internal organization allows and encourages the direct participation of all its members. Of the seventy-six *ejidos* that were constituted after the 1976 expropriation, fifty of them now form part of the coalition. There are monthly assembly meetings of each *ejido*, with 70 to 90 percent of their members attending. Each *ejido* elects new leaders to the *comisariado ejidal* (*ejido* commissariat): a president, a secretary, and a treasurer, every three years. Election for consecutive terms is prohibited in order to prevent the entrenchment of personal power (Benjamin and Buell 1985).

The tendency of most agrarian movements in Mexico to elect the most charismatic personalities has shifted to favor those *ejidatarios* with the best executive abilities. An intermediate steering committee, made up of the representatives from each *ejido* (presidents of the *comisariado ejidal*) meets monthly, and there is a president of the coalition as a whole. In addition, various other departments are dedicated to special functions, such as the technical department and the department of marketing.

The coalition has hired a large technical staff, but the farmers have been very careful that these professionals do not make decisions for them. They are only supposed to provide *ejidatarios* with the information to make decisions for themselves, within their democratic organization.

Because the initial land grants did not include land for housing facilities, most *ejidatarios* have widely dispersed living arrangements, usually some distance from their work sites. The coalition thus had to struggle to acquire additional land for an *ejido* urbanization project. It finally received support from the governor of Sonora, Samuel Ocaña, and obtained 410 hectares for urban zones throughout the Yaqui and Mayo Valleys: "By 1985, the *ejidos* had built 12 urban zones. With 5,600 homes, as well as local schools, daycare centers and recreation facilities, it is the largest peasant housing project in all of Mexico" (Benjamin and Buell 1985, 9). The project seeks to bring the *ejidatarios* closer together into urban communities, closer to the agricultural work sites; reduce unemployment; and, of course, provide housing for families. The last aspect is highly regarded by *ejidatarios*,

most of whom did not own a house before the urbanization project. Given the very hot temperatures of the Yaqui region, all the *ejido* houses were provided with air conditioning units in at least one room. This feature is unthinkable for peasant- or working-class housing in other hot regions of Mexico.

The cultural traits that have developed in the coalition's experience place a great emphasis on a strong work ethic, efficiency, collective work, solidarity with other members of subordinate groups and classes, and independence from the state. In a survey conducted in 1981 with a sample of 5 percent of the membership of each *ejido*, 76.5 percent responded that they preferred the collective over the individual or household form of organization. This is a very high percentage, considering the extent to which individualist ideology was promoted in the 1950s and 1960s. Even though 32 percent gave qualified support (e.g., "as long as we maintain a good organization and no divisions arise," or "as long as we all share the work equally," and so on), a large majority supports the collective organization. As regards participation, 64 percent of the respondents said they assisted in determining what crops, seeds, fertilizers, and other inputs should be used by their *ejido*, and 51 percent said they participate in establishing the internal rules of their *ejido* (Camarena Castellanos and Encinas Terrazas 1982, 124–38).

Some of the new cultural traits, which favor collectivism, solidarity, and participation, are evident in the following description of what the coalition considers to be two of its central commitments:

We want to make it quite clear: the Coalition of Collective Ejidos has a double commitment: with itself, that all the collective ejidos which constitute it develop economically, but that they must struggle for betterment in all other aspects; that they have a greater participation in the solution to their problems; that the ejido general assembly in each ejido constitutes a force which prevents the entry of reaction; that they do not seek to solve their problems through personal solutions or by sectoralizing or dividing the ejidos but, instead, that they analyze and propose the best solutions as a single unity, putting the collective interest forward, over personal interest and prestige. With regard to all the struggling peasant and working-class organizations of the country: we owe what we have achieved to the fact that we are not alone. We form part of a unity of peasants, workers, and committed professionals. . . . We want to seal this commitment: we put what we have at the disposition of the Mexican workers' struggle. Our experience, as in the case of Chiapas, for the constitution of a Credit Union; our association, as in the case of Durango, to be open for the entry of new members. With these we strengthen our political and economic unity (Coalición 1982, 21–22).

This declaration was made at the 1982 annual meeting in support for the Sonoran collective *ejidos*, a gathering sponsored by the coalition along with dozens of other organizations of workers, peasants, and professionals. These yearly meetings have been part of the demonstrations of solidarity that vast sectors of the

Mexican left and democratic organizations have offered to the coalition, having made the coalition's struggle part of their own struggle.

Epilogue

The past two decades have been marked by recurrent economic crisis in Mexico and currency devaluations, which have made imports almost prohibitive in a context where most of the industrial enterprises and modern agricultural operations depend heavily on the import of machinery and raw materials. The *ejidos* of the coalition are no exception. Mexico's economic problems are severely affecting the coalition, which relies greatly on the imports of machinery from the United States, specifically from International Harvester, Ford International, and Allis Chalmers (Benjamin and Buell 1985, 10).

At a meeting of scholars and agrarian leaders in Culiacán, Sinaloa, in 1987, Juan Leyva Mendivil, former president of the Coalition, presented a paper as a representative of the Northwestern Peasant Alliance (*Alianza Campesina del Noroeste*, or ACN), which includes *ejidos* from Sonora and Sinaloa. The paper is dedicated to an economic analysis of the effects of the debt crisis of the 1980s on agricultural production in their *ejidos*. Such an analysis is still relevant at the end of the crisis-ridden 1990s.

Production costs, for instance, far exceeded wheat prices. From 1980 to 1986, prices increased by 1,633 percent compared with cost increases of 2,528 percent. In terms of kilograms of wheat, in 1980 it took 2,110 kilograms to cover costs per hectare; in 1986 *ejidatarios* had to produce 3,270 kilograms for the same purpose. Conversely, in 1980 profits were 2,390 kilograms per hectare, in contrast to only 1,230 kilograms in 1986. The difficulties of keeping up with technical change and replacing machinery are evident in the following figures. In 1982 the *ejidos* needed 306 metric tons of wheat to purchase a threshing machine; by 1986 they needed 965 metric tons to replace it (Leyva Mendivil 1987).

Given the relatively small amount of land per *ejidatario* received in 1976 (5 hectares), the producers are still obliged to seek external employment. In a study conducted in 1982 by a group from the National Agricultural University, Chapingo, among 5 percent of the *ejidatarios*, 60 percent of current income came from *ejido* employment, and 40 percent from selling labor power outside the *ejido* (Quintero 1982).

One of the problems for the coalition has been that not all of its agroindustrial enterprises have functioned properly. The most dramatic example of a poor economic decision was the purchase of a cotton gin from Anderson Clayton in the mid-1980s. This purchase took place in the context of decreasing attention to cotton cultivation in the region and when the gin was in virtual bankruptcy. As a result, the coalition was facing great economic difficulties in paying for the gin by the late 1980s and required a loan of \$214,600 to sustain its overall operation.

In 1987, in the midst of such difficulties and the impending presidential elections in Mexico, Governor Rodolfo Felix Valdéz and his functionaries strongly pressured the coalition to formally join the CNC of the PRI. Despite the fact that the coalition president, Juan Díaz Leal, seemed to be willing to proceed in exchange for economic help, the masses prevented him from taking such a step. They were not willing to compromise their strategic political autonomy for conjunctural help. Later on, forty-four presidents of *comisariados ejidales* met with the governor to explain the coalition's statutory position to remain autonomous from all political organizations. Nevertheless, one of the three *ejido* unions that make up the coalition, the Nineteenth of November, which is the most active and best organized, formally joined the CNC in early November 1987.

It was rather curious to observe during field work that although most of the coalition leaders have personally rejoined the CNC and the PRI, all of those I interviewed in November 1987 thought that the coalition as such should *not* join the official corporatist organizations. It was probably strategically fortunate for the coalition that it has developed democratic mechanisms to prevent such a possibility, even when its president may have been willing to give up the fight for political autonomy. For the coalition, the economic future depends largely on its own political strength and mobilization.

El Yaqui: Theoretical Recapitulation

It is hard to see how either *campesinistas* or *proletaristas* would have predicted the surprising outcome of agrarian struggles in Sonora. As a matter of fact, the outcome of these struggles was somewhat of a disillusionment for *proletaristas*. Roger Bartra (1982), for example, interpreted this agrarian movement as a last resort of "technocratic populism" seeking to forestall agrarian unrest. In contrast, Arturo Warman (1980) celebrated the fact that even agricultural workers were fighting for supposedly "peasant" demands.

In his article on the problem of the agricultural proletariat, Warman, after noting that workers in Sonora had been separated from their means of production for three or four generations, states, "This proletarian group has recently organized around strictly agrarian demands and not [around demands] of a working class character, with all their implications" (1980, 172). There are two fallacies in Warman's treatment of the problem. First, he identifies the demand for land as a "strictly agrarian," i.e., peasant, demand. As I have argued in this and other chapters, one must look at the totality of demands in order to assess the character of agrarian struggles. Furthermore, the analysis of the objects of struggle must be supplemented with the analysis of class organizations. Only with these two criteria in mind can we adequately determine the political class character of a social movement.

Second, when Warman deals with "permanent agricultural proletarians," he says that they usually ally with rural capitalists. I wonder whether Warman is ac-

TABLE 7.2 Political Class Trajectory and Objects of Struggle in El Yaqui Valley

Moment	Agents	Objects	Outcomes
Time One 1938-47	Noncapitalist cooperative producers	Land, nationality	Self-managed collective <i>ejido</i> ; popular-democratic
Time Two 1947-65	Same as above, but breaking down into individual production	Maintaining self-managed production (e.g., credit)	Fragmentation of collective <i>ejido</i> peasantization formal subordination to state; bourgeois-hegemonic
Time Three 1965-75	Semiproletarians, more proletarianized than in La Laguna	Credit and water for viable peasant production	Renting out of <i>ejido</i> land further fragmentation of collectives; bourgeois-hegemonic
Time Four 1975-76	Semiproletarians, more proletarianized than in La Laguna	Land, collective production, self-management	Self-managed democratic and cooperative production; popular-democratic
Time Five 1976-97	Postcapitalist producers	Fair prices for inputs and crops, trying to withdraw from petrochemical dependency and imported inputs	Self-managed democratic and cooperative production; popular-democratic, with trend toward new corporatism by some leaders

SOURCE: Elaborated from the analysis in this chapter.

tually talking about proletarians or wage workers who occupy what Erik Olin Wright has called "contradictory class locations" between capital and labor (1978, 1979). At least for Sonora, it is quite likely that permanent workers have supervisory positions, i.e., contradictory class locations. Hence it is not so surprising that they should ally with their employers rather than with other wage workers.

Bartra's interpretation is also flawed for at least two reasons. First, he labels the class agents as "peasants," attending merely to their demand for land (like Warman), when they were actually a semiproletariat highly dependent on wages (if we retain a production-based, structural concept of economic class). Second, he assumes that the initiative for land redistribution came from the state (as did Sander-

son in 1981), when it was actually the opposite: Given the regional correlation of class forces, the movement imposed on the state the policy of land redistribution. (see Table 7.2 for an Historical Summary)

Capitalist development in the Mexican countryside has resulted in a process of "depeasantization without full proletarianization" (Chapter 4). Strictly speaking, then, the new economic subjects that emerge are semiproletarians: They cannot rely solely on wages to fulfill their reproduction needs. Therefore, the rest of the social relations into which they enter to attain economic reproduction might be conducive to the preservation or formation of noncapitalist cultural elements, even if many of these develop within a market context. Given the structural heterogeneity of countries like Mexico, we must go beyond an economic class-reductionist analysis in the study of political class formation. I have suggested the importance of three other determinants: regional cultures, state intervention, and leadership types.

Notes

1. At this time, the PCM began a series of transformations, reflecting both changes in the Communist camp as well as a greater influence from Eurocommunism. The latter favored an electoral route to socialism, rather than the traditional Leninist-inspired revolutionary route. The PCM first turned into the Unified Socialist Party of Mexico (*Partido Socialista Unificado de México*, or PSUM) in 1982, and in 1987 it became the Mexican Socialist Party (*Partido Mexicano Socialista*, or PMS). In the 1988 elections the PMS supported a broad coalition's presidential candidate, Cuahutemoc Cárdenas, the son of former President Lázaro Cárdenas. He was widely believed to have won the 1988 elections, but the PRI still imposed its candidate, Carlos Salinas. The PMS was in turn dissolved in 1989 to form the new Party of the Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, or PRD), which still exists today representing a broad coalition of former communists, Maoists, Trotskyists, former PRI members, and other nationalists.

2. Personal interview with Israel Gaxiola, Coordinator of the Technical Department of the Coalition, Ciudad Obregón, Sonora, 11/23/87.

8

Conclusion: Farewell to the Peasantry?

The purpose of this concluding chapter is threefold. The first section synthesizes this book's main argument. In the second section I recapitulate the chief issues in the Mexican debate on the agrarian question and point out some research and political problems that remain to be solved. Drawing on a review of recent literature, the last section discusses the political implications of neoliberalism in rural Mexico.

Concepts and History

I have argued that in rural Mexico the process of political class formation has been mediated by the prevailing forms of regional cultures, state intervention, and leadership types; I have also argued for a causal link with the position of class agents in production relations. In addition, I have placed the semiproletariat, rather than the proletariat or the peasantry, at the center of agrarian struggles in contemporary Mexico.

Political class formation is a complex and overdetermined process that is impossible to gauge by looking at production relations alone. I have proposed that this process is constituted by two fundamental elements: (1) object(s) of struggle and class organizations and (2) their relative degree of independence from the state and the ruling class. Regional culture and state intervention, while undoubtedly linked causally to production relations, are more useful in predicting political class formation: Prevailing regional culture generally defines the object(s) of struggle; state intervention shapes the character of class organizations. Furthermore, leadership types help to determine the extent to which class organizations remain independent from the state and autonomous from other political organizations.

Thus, in order to understand political class formation, one must examine the interactions of its components. When studying the object(s) of struggle, we must also inquire into the forms of productive organization that arise after successful struggles for land: whether the organization centers on individual or cooperative production, and whether it is nonmarket- (subsistence) or market-oriented (cash

crop). With regard to class organizations, one must ask whether they are oppositional, bourgeois-hegemonic, or popular-democratic. This aspect is determined by the kinds of alliances established with other class and political organizations.

Economically, it is not as important whether productive organizations are cooperative or individually based, as long as class agents have some degree of autonomy in constituting the political character of their organization as popular-democratic. Politically, the expansion of popular-democratic class organizations represents a strengthening of civil society against the state. Such organizations gain the power to shape state interventions in their favor.

In our case studies, the Sonoran Coalition established alliances and solidarity relations with the most democratic and progressive forces in Mexico. Throughout the three regions under study, we also saw several instances of agrarian struggles that assumed a postcapitalist character in production and were politically popular-democratic. Even Atencingo was the scene of the embryonic formation, however ephemeral, of a semiproletariat waging a postcapitalist struggle. This was the case during Porfirio Jaramillo's popular administration of the cooperative (1947-52). Its short duration was due to the fact that the direct producers' object of struggle was actually different from that of their own leaders: Rather than producing cooperatively, however democratic their leadership was, they chose to struggle for the individual parceling of land. The prevailing peasant culture in the region was a major determinant of this outcome.

On the other hand, except for Jaramillo's administration, it was always the case that class organization in Atencingo ended up being integrated into bourgeois-hegemonic discourse and politics: All winning factions remained loyal to their corporatist affiliation. Oppositional factions were coopted as soon as they gained administrative control of the *ejido's* affairs, or somehow were favored by state intervention. The step toward a "subjective moment" in political class formation was not taken. Such a subjective moment requires that favorable state interventions emerge bottom-up from the very initiative of direct producers rather than from the state.

The initial phase of collectivization in both La Laguna and El Yaqui also represented instances of a political class formation with a postcapitalist and popular-democratic character. In both cases nonmarket peasant cultures had been severely undermined for two to three generations, but the agricultural proletariat and semiproletariat nevertheless participated in a noncapitalist culture: They were democratically assuming control of a postcapitalist production process. What prevented this economic and political formation from consolidating was not a clash between leadership and constituency over demands, but the overwhelming attack and boycott by the state.

Although initially favoring the postcapitalist organization of direct producers, the *Cardenista* agrarian reform actually set the institutional conditions for a shift in the character of state interventions that affected future struggles. After land redistribution and the formation of collective *ejidos*, the new *ejidatarios* had to submit to

the rules of the game imposed by the Mexican state. In particular, they had to submit to the state's most forceful economic apparatus for dealing with the *ejido*: the Ejido Bank. Although the bank underwent a democratic phase in the beginning, promoting the self-sustaining economic independence of collective *ejidos*, it was eventually used to destroy this mode of organization. Indeed, the state appropriated, so to speak, the organization of Yaqui Valley and La Laguna *ejidatarios* by controlling their production process. In the Yaqui Valley the effect was an accelerated process of deterioration of the *ejido* economy with a simultaneous strengthening of private capitalist agriculture. In La Laguna there emerged a proletarianization process in which the state became the new employer. In both cases wage labor became widespread, although it was unable to account for the full reproduction of direct producers.

Strictly speaking, then, the new economic subjects who emerged from these processes were structurally semiproletarians: They could not rely solely on wage labor to fulfill their reproduction needs. Their need to engage in other relations of reproduction has been conducive to the preservation or formation of noncapitalist cultural elements. In the context of increasing commercialization and the deepening of capitalist production relations, the semiproletarian condition presupposes two interrelated ways of life: (1) collective work within the labor process of capitalist agriculture, which involves cooperation; and (2) reliance on social relations of reciprocity, kinship, and solidarity to achieve reproduction during times of unemployment. These social relations and their associated values might be conducive to shaping a noncapitalist or even a postcapitalist object of struggle as in Sonora (and Batopilas in Coahuila, both in the 1970s): cooperative, self-managed, and democratic production.

One of the crucial findings in this study deals with the subjective moment of political class formation. Although I have, for the most part, posited political class formation as a dependent variable, once certain classes become politically formed, they also become independent variables that have an effect on the very process of their future formation and/or consolidation as an economic and political class. That is to say, once classes build and/or gain control of their organizations of struggle, they can wrest state interventions favorable to their interests, even as their practices reinforce the cultural values that shaped their struggles in the first place. In this book, we saw embryonic cases of this subjective moment in the three regions during the late 1930s and early 1940s. But the clearest example of this finding emerged from the case of the Coalition of Collective Ejidos in Sonora (Chapter 7).

The political class trajectories described in Chapters 5 through 7 addressed, among other things, one crucial puzzle that I have attempted to solve in this book: Why have class agents that started out in the same structural position in the 1930s, that of agricultural workers, followed different political class trajectories and ended up at diverse destinations in each of the case studies? My analysis of Mexican regions lead to the conclusion that class position by itself is not a sufficient

predictor of class destination in the process of political class formation—regional cultures, state intervention, and leadership types play a critical mediating role as well. A schematic representation of my model of political class formation appears in Chart 8.1.

Peasant entrepreneurs, subsistence peasants, proletarians and postcapitalist producers are all equally likely to develop along either coopted, bourgeois-hegemonic, oppositional, or popular-democratic lines. No single political orientation inheres in structural class position and processes. One must allow for the complicating influences of regional cultures, the character of state intervention, and the leadership in shaping political outcomes.

I in no way entirely discount the impact of class structure and processes on political outcomes. In fact, the alternative model of causality I propose in Chapter 2 makes it clear that class structural processes themselves are causally linked to regional cultures, state intervention, and leadership types. But social structure is not the whole story, only part of it. Each realm of society has its own relative autonomy, even when influenced by others (Archer, 1996). Because the temporal qualities of class structure, regional culture, state interventions, and leadership are usually quite different, one must allow for complex causal interactions, not unidirectional economic schemata, in analyzing the complexities of political class formation.

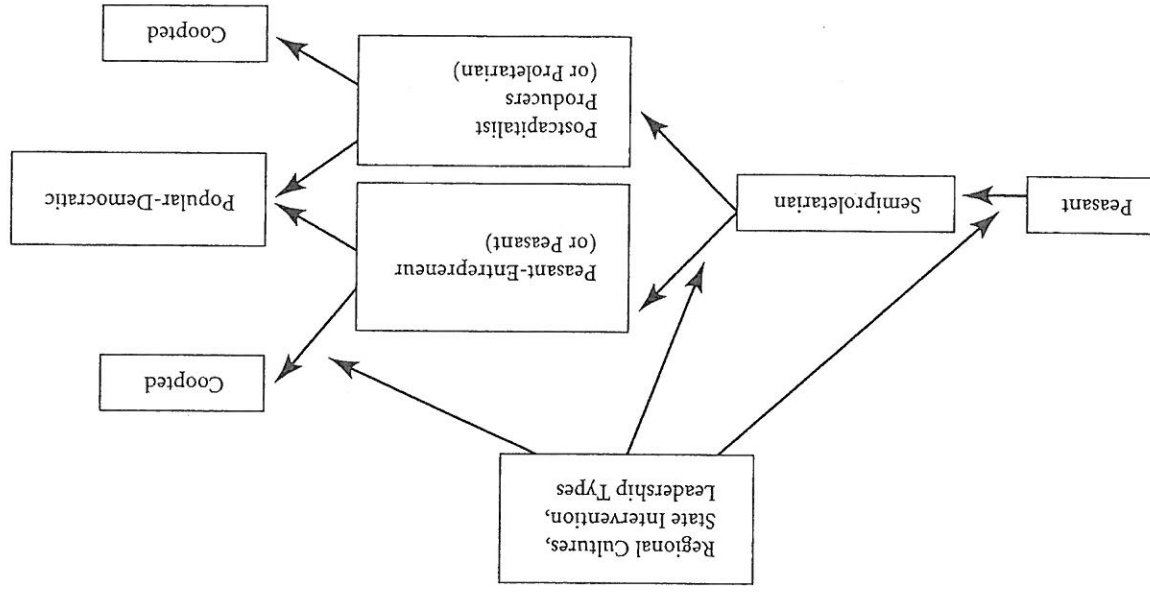
Another distinguishing feature of this study is that I have given more importance to class structural *processes* than to class *positions* per se. The latter are encompassed by the former. Yet class structural processes also include the social relations of *reproduction*. And it is precisely this sphere that I consider most crucial here in shaping regional culture. Without a doubt, class position also enters the picture, to the extent that reproduction is largely determined by class position. But, at least analytically, it is necessary to separate the two spheres of class structural processes: relations of production and relations of reproduction. In exploitative relations, production refers predominantly to the relations between exploiters and exploited; reproduction, in contrast, refers predominantly to the social relations among the exploited. This distinction between the two realms of structural processes has important and lasting effects on regional cultures.

Transcending the Mexican Debate

In this section I will first restate the main positions in debate about the agrarian question in Mexico. I will then point out the main tenets that have been challenged in this analysis and outline some of the problems that remain to be solved by future research and political practice.

It will be remembered from Chapter 2 that both *campesinista* and *proletarista* scholars usually draw political conclusions from the economic analysis of class structure. This is one crucial feature of this polemic. Another one is that most authors have generalized their propositions for the entire country, usually on the

CHART 8.1 Multidirectionality of Political Class Trajectories in a Nonreductionist Model



basis of field work in one particular region, as Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara has pointed out (1984, 178). Both of these features have resulted in inadequate formulations of political programs. Neither the struggle for unionization (stressed by *proletaristas*) or the struggle for land (stressed by *campesinistas*), therefore, can be seen as adequate policies for all of rural Mexico. In order to devise better policies for the subordinate groups and classes of rural Mexico, one must pay attention to all the constitutive elements of political class formation.

The formal ending of agrarian reform in 1992 has created greater obstacles on the struggle for land; semiproletarianized producers with continued access to land are obliged to struggle for the improvement of institutional assistance to peasant production since, as we saw in Chapter 3, neoliberal reform has largely dismantled most of the state institutions that used to provide such assistance. In some ways, given the extent of bureaucracy and corruption in state agencies, this trend can be seen as a positive development for rural Mexico. But new institutions with a new logic must be created. Organizations of subordinate groups and classes in the countryside could play a vital role in determining the nature and course of such institutions from the bottom up (Fox and Aranda 1997).

This study concentrated on those regions where agrarian reform resulted in the organization of collective *ejidos*, which represent about 12 percent of the *ejidos* created after the revolution. This focus corresponds to a methodological choice: It is an explicit attempt to focus on the most capitalistic operations before the reform, for it is there that one might expect to find the most proletarianized agricultural direct producers. Such a methodological choice maximizes the possibility of falsifying the *proletarista* theses with which I sympathized before starting my research. And in fact, the case of Atencingo demonstrates how, despite a profound proletarianization of direct producers, their central demands revolved around peasant concerns. If such was the case under proletarianization—within peasant cultural surroundings, to be sure—what can we expect from struggles of direct producers who are in merely semiproletarian or peasant positions? Class reductionism, therefore, is clearly inadequate.

Regions with more peasant or semiproletarian class structures, then, will likely focus their struggles on production-related matters and the individual organization of production. Whether such producers will be basically oriented toward subsistence or the market will depend on the degree of commodification and capitalist development and the prevailing regional cultures. A related issue is the extent to which these kinds of direct producers can construct and sustain oppositional class organizations. Will their organizations inevitably veer in a bourgeois-hegemonic direction, or can they establish alliances with other oppositional and left organizations to forge an alternative popular-democratic project?

Peasant struggles have been tremendously important in Mexico's postrevolutionary history throughout the twentieth century. But it was usually the state apparatus that capitalized on this reality: In fact, the stability of the Mexican political system can be largely explained by the capacity of the state to integrate peasant

struggles into its "mediation structures" (R. Bartra 1978). Of course, this state-peasantry alliance has evolved in contradictory ways, combining favorable repressive interventions with repressive measures. But the essence of Mexican reformism has consisted of articulating democratic demands that were absorbed and partially satisfied by the state apparatus while avoiding the constitution of a popular-democratic pole that would antagonize the bourgeois power bloc (R. Bartra 1978).

Therefore, two crucial facts should be highlighted. On the one hand, after the *Cardenista* agrarian reform, the peasant economy and capitalism were able to live together and grow. This fact is fatal to the radical *campesinista* thesis that peasant demands are intrinsically revolutionary. On the other hand, the severe deterioration of the peasant economy since the mid-1960s confirms the real cleavages and contradictions of its development within a capitalistic context. The deterioration of the peasant economy led to semiproletarian land seizures and demands for land (A. Bartra 1979a; 1979b). But we have seen that the character of the struggle for land varied with the articulation of associated demands and the kinds of class organizations that emerged.

Most *proletarista* authors consider wage payments as a sure sign of proletarianization. Given the long history of wage labor in the Mexican countryside, these scholars have not hesitated to prescribe unionization as the central tactic of struggle. Because they view the process of differentiation as extremely advanced, *proletaristas* generally discard the possibility that struggles for land have any revolutionary potential; any struggle for land is characterized as "peasant" and therefore "petit bourgeois" and conservative in content (Posadas and García 1986, 182). Moreover, no distinctions are made among the proletarianized producers of different cultural regions. Their unionization prescription might not be adequate for all regions, given their vast diversity.

In fact, while some advancements have been achieved through unionization—shortening the working day and the payment of minimum wages—the experiences of labor struggles in rural Mexico have often been disastrous. Even when those short-term demands were achieved, the cost was severe repression against the leadership (Posadas and García 1986). The battle for unionization has met with a rather simple response: When workers threaten to strike, the agrarian bourgeoisie resorts to one or more of the following: repressing the leadership, hiring new workers from the nearly unlimited supply of agricultural labor power, or increasing mechanization (de Grammont 1986).

The Mexican state has most often refused to grant legal recognition to the unions sponsored by independent organizations (such as the CIOAC). Therefore, workers have no protection from labor legislation. Even the CTM and the CNC, which also have labor organizations, have had problems in getting their coopted unions legally registered. And wage laborers who have chosen to join these coopted unions have generally been condemned to submission to the corrupt cadres doing the state's bidding.

I am not suggesting that unionization, and labor-type struggles generally, should be ruled out in rural Mexico, especially now that the agrarian reform is legally over. There are a few cases where rural workers actually succeeded in signing collective bargaining agreements with agricultural enterprises, but they have generally been affiliated with official organizations (de Grammont, 1986). The adverse conditions for implementing a unionization tactic, therefore, should be very clear: a nearly limitless pool of agricultural workers to serve as strikebreakers; the typically responsive response of the state and employers to unionization; and the seasonal character of most wage-employment positions, which undermines organizational efforts that must cope with continual changes in employers and fellow workers (Salazar and Paré 1986). Therefore, labor struggles are viable in a rather limited and localized number of situations, mostly in northern and northwestern Mexico.

Class Organizations, Civil Society, and Neoliberalism

Some of the emergent political issues brought about by neoliberalism in Mexico's countryside are addressed by three articles in Randall's *Reforming Mexico's Agrarian Reform* (1996). These may be summarized as follows: First, the uprising in Chiapas, discussed by Neil Harvey (1996b), highlights the vast heterogeneity of Mexico's agrarian structure. In Chiapas the law and public institutions largely represent the interests of the ruling classes. Introducing democracy in this context, therefore, requires a structural reform of significant proportions. These themes are further elaborated in Harvey (1998a).

Second, Armando Bartra argues that the state's role in economic production is declining significantly in rural Mexico, even as it grows more direct, paternalistic, and client-efficient in electoral terms (1996, 174). In other words, traditional corporatism, channeled through organizations such as the National Peasant Confederation (*Confederación Nacional Campesina*, CNC) is being replaced or supplemented by a neocorporatism represented by Pronasol and Procampo. The money distributed by these agencies in 1994 had a clearly electoral goal for the PRI government, with about 3.5 million rural families receiving money. This means that about "10 million or 15 million voters went to the polls duly rewarded and with reason to thank the official party" (A. Bartra 1996, 183).

Finally, Jonathan Fox's contribution to Randall's collection supplements these analyses with a discussion of electoral information from the 1994 presidential contest, using the Federal Electoral Institute (*Instituto Federal Electoral*, or IFE) and *Alianza Cívica* as the main sources. The focus is on whether voters can exercise the right to a secret ballot or whether they face pressure; it also examines the presence of opposition political parties in rural areas. Fox first confirms some of the information provided by A. Bartra regarding the distribution of Procampo funds. More than 2.8 million checks were distributed within two weeks of the 1994 elections (in violation of the government's promise to stop check distribution two weeks before the elections). He then notes that it is impossible to

measure the degree to which access to the state's new rural development programs' funds was conditioned on electoral support. But looking at the degree to which ballot secrecy was violated is an indicator of "the pool of voters who were vulnerable to efforts to condition access to the reform programs" (Fox 1996b, 190). Other background information presented in this study is that Mexico's rural vote is clearly tilted toward the ruling PRI: "In 'very urban' areas [Zedillo] reportedly won only 34 percent, but in 'very rural' areas he received 77 percent of the votes counted" (Fox 1996b, 191).

Violations of ballot secrecy in the 1994 presidential elections varied considerably: not having screens, having someone watching the voting, voters showing their ballot to other people. Such violations responded to a clear pattern consistent with *Alianza Cívica*'s assertion that "the 1994 presidential elections involved two distinct election-day processes, one 'modern' and relatively clean, the other filled with irregularities, including widespread violation of ballot secrecy and direct pressures by local bosses on voters." (Fox 1996b, 205) These irregularities were clearly more rampant in places where opposition parties could not be part of the executive committee administering the balloting place. Because the opposition parties were least capable of sending representatives to the most indigenous municipalities, these were the least likely to have guaranteed access to a secret ballot.

Fox and Aranda's book *Decentralization and Rural Development in Mexico* (1996) is an important pioneer study of the new World Bank policy that is supposed to address poverty alleviation, environmental issues, gender, and the concerns of indigenous peoples. The authors raise the right questions about how to increase both the government's and the bank's accountability for their development decisions. Some key conditions for reducing the gap between policy targets and practice are increasing community-based participation and access to information before implementing projects, and creating adequate institutional channels for investigating complaints by affected "stake holders."

According to Fox and Aranda, neoliberalism has brought about two policy trends related to decentralization. One is to move away from traditional clientelism and toward combinations of community participation, job creation, community implementation, and oversight of projects. The second trend is a decreased bias against the poorest municipalities in disbursing transfer funds. Several municipal reforms since 1983 have given municipalities an increased responsibility for service delivery, and town councils have been created to decentralize municipal administration. Where these policy trends converge, as in the case-study location of Oaxaca, the result is an increase in the municipal government's capacity to respond to development needs with greater efficiency and accountability. Alternatively, if decentralization is countered by persistent authoritarianism, then accountability is doomed to failure. The key message of this book is, therefore, that a bottom-up and democratic approach in designing and implementing development projects is the most promising for rural communities.

Finally, Hubert Cartón de Grammont, in his *Neoliberalismo y organización social en el campo mexicano* (1996a), has put together another fine collection of essays that analyzes the new challenges for rural social organizations. He has been one of the most active producers and promoters of rural studies in Mexico in the past two decades (1986, 1990, 1995; de Grammont and Tejera Gaona 1996). In fact, he was the key organizer of the first meeting of the "Red de Estudios Rurales" in Taxco, Guerrero in 1994, and then its second meeting in Querétaro in February 1998. In this second meeting the network became formally organized into the Mexican Association of Rural Studies (*Asociación Mexicana de Estudios Rurales*, or AMER) which will meet periodically as a professional association.¹

In his introduction, de Grammont argues that there is a new dualism emerging in the countryside: On the one hand, there is a gradually shrinking group of viable producers who can play successfully within the new market-led rules and remain eligible for official and private lending; on the other, there is a growing group of "the poor," at best eligible only to receive help from government-assistance programs, which cannot help much in production.

One of the key contributions of de Grammont's collection is that it implicitly clarifies what civil society is all about in rural Mexico. By addressing the complexity and heterogeneity of rural producers and their organizations, de Grammont and contributors give the reader a much better idea than the rather simplified version of civil society popularized by the EZLN (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*). The latter seems to imply that civil society is made up primarily of organizations of the subordinate groups and classes. If this were the case, expanding civil society would be tantamount to changing the balance of power between the state and society. De Grammont's own contribution describes the organizations of private cultivators in rural Mexico. As it turns out, even if private-sector organizations are not monolithic, their organizations have been key players in influencing the policy change toward neoliberalism and the promotion of NAFTA.

Now, if some organizations of the private sector, whether big, medium, or small, are becoming more militant, it is because the corporatist channels for exerting pressure on agricultural policy have become very ineffectual. In this new rise of activist citizenship, three types of social actors emerge: individuals, organizations by type of peasant or cultivator, and social movements. Increasingly, social movements are acquiring the character of broad fronts made up of local or regional organizations that take a distance from political parties; they want to preserve their autonomy. They may nevertheless be linked to any of the existing political parties or even to the state apparatus, or they may be independent from the state. While such social movement organizations may be described as "multi-party" because their members may also be militants in several different parties, their loyalty is primarily to their social organization rather than to their party.

While the peasant movements of the 1960s and 1970s centered on the demand for land (A. Bartra 1979a, 1979b), the new focus of rural struggles since the 1980s has shifted toward a number of concerns related to productive organization (de

Grammont 1996b). Moreover, rural social movements have struggled for self-management and democratic production (Otero 1989b), the appropriation of the productive process in general (Gordillo 1988), territorial control and autonomy (Moguel, Botey and Hernández 1992; Rubio 1996), and the struggle for the appropriation of social and political life (Harvey 1996c). With the EZLN uprising, finally, the democratic reform of the state cannot be postponed any longer (Harvey 1996c, 1998b).

The new social movement organizations also engage in new forms of social action and forms of expression. Direct action and intense mobilization and struggle have largely replaced negotiation and political subordination. Therefore, the weakest link of traditional corporatism is that between social organizations and the ruling PRI. This is why new mobilizations are completely overflowing the traditional channels of representation and policy making.

De Grammont's article (1996b) addresses primarily the organization of the private sector, from small cultivators to large agroindustrial corporations, and describes their internal contradictions. While private-sector organizations agree that land should be privatized, there are those who favor a private agrarianism of small cultivators, some state support, and opposition to NAFTA; others, mainly the best-positioned for agroexports, largely support and indeed promote the neoliberal reform. De Grammont profiles the changing relations of private-sector cultivators with the state. The two groups went from a rather cozy relationship to the status quo in the currently belligerent situation. In de Grammont's view, beligerence, even within the private sector, is due to the fact that only the largest and most productive can hope to survive in the neoliberal context.²

De Grammont's collection uses primary sources and ethnographic material to provide a wealth of factual information on new organizational processes.

From the new dualism posited by de Grammont, one might anticipate that the wealthiest and most productive cultivators and agroindustrialists will be most successful in exerting pressure on the state. Indeed, they might be creating a new form of more autonomous and effective corporatism for their interests. The middle and poor producers, however, will find such relationships increasingly frustrating, and many will be forced out of agriculture altogether. But before this happens, we are likely to witness a much greater growth of a subordinate but combative part of civil society of the sort so often praised and addressed in EZLN communiqués.

From these texts we can see that progress toward democracy in Mexico is slow, heavily constrained, and largely limited to liberal democracy. Where participation is promoted or allowed, however, as in some development projects, then results can be more encouraging (at least at an economic level). It remains to be seen whether people will be content with achievements of this nature or continue pushing for a more significant form of political transition, one that might allow them to steer the development model itself in a more equitable direction.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this study, I argued that political class formation is related to the emergence of civil society insofar as it refers to the building of voluntary associations of direct producers. To the extent that independent and autonomous class organizations emerge and consolidate, so, too, does civil society. In this sense civil society is also a terrain for democratization. Until 1994 political parties had achieved a minimal advancement in electoral democratization that focused on political society or the state. Thus, the majority of the electoral reforms resulted in changes that left the authoritarianism of Mexico's political system virtually intact. If anything, they accomplished the modernization of authoritarianism, which legitimated the continued domination of the PRI (Otero, 1996a).

An advancement of democracy in political society will be significant only to the extent that it goes hand in hand with a consolidation of subordinate groups and classes in civil society. Only thus can the EZLN's political principle "command by obeying" ("*mandar obedeciendo*") be turned into reality. That is to say, with an invigorated civil society, leaders and popular representatives will actually have to respond to the wishes of the electorate and their constituencies—to command by obeying. In this view of democracy, those officials who are not accountable to the popular will have to abandon their posts through some recall mechanism. This process would lead to a tremendous increase in the development of democratic leadership. To command by obeying, then, presupposes not only the democratization of electoral political processes; it also presupposes the consolidation of an organized civil society that is able to demand clear accountability from its representatives and enhances the development of a democratic culture. The objective of this new popular-democratic paradigm is to advance toward a fair and transparent electoral process, yes, but also toward the organized consolidation of subordinate groups and classes in civil society.

The era of globalization and neoliberalism has blossomed with the demise of state socialism and the Cold War. Accordingly, future struggles by subordinate groups and classes must take on a democratic character. A new hegemonic project, not explicitly socialist but rather geared to popular-democratic struggles, has to seek the reformation of capitalism. The recent movement toward democratic transition in Mexico demands that political parties adopt a new attitude toward the mass organizations of subordinate groups and classes. Rather than trying to coopt them as in the past and turning them into "conveyor belts" of party politics, political parties will have to respect the independence and autonomy of such organizations and to command by obeying them. As Judith Adler Hellman has argued (1994), mass organizations also would do well to give up their traditional mistrust of political parties and establish tactical alliances with them while zealously guarding their independence from the state and their autonomy from political parties. The alliance of popular-democratic parties and class organizations might not overthrow capitalism, but only such an alliance can curb its exploitative excesses and perhaps even push it toward a societal democracy.

Notes

1. AMER's web page may be consulted at <http://serpiente.dgsca.unam.mx/piisecam-rer>. The electronic discussion network, Scholars for Rural Development (or MRD) also has a web page and is a major internet source with many useful links to sites on rural Mexico: <http://anthap.oakland.edu/anthap1/mrindex.htm>.
2. Other contributors to de Grammont's volume address the relationship of the corporatist CNC and the new peasant movement (Horacio Mackinlay 1996), the role of independent organizations (Blanca Rubio 1996), rural work and labor organizations (Sara Lara 1996), the new forms of representation brought about by the *Unión Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas* (UNORCA) (Neil Harvey 1996c), the indigenous movement for autonomy (Sergio Sarmiento Silva 1996), other forms of productive organization for commercialization (Juan de la Fuente and Joaquín Morales 1996), women's productive groups (Rosa Aurora Espinosa G. 1996), and expressions of resistance against the new Agrarian Law (Adriana López Mojarín 1996).