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# Farewell to the Peasantry?

Political Class Formation in  
Rural Mexico

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Gerardo Otero

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

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

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## About the Book and Author

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

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

Gerardo Otero is associate professor of sociology and Latin American Studies in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada (otero@sfu.ca). He obtained a *licenciatura* from the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (1975), an M.A. at the University of Texas at Austin (1977), and a Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. His work has been published in several edited collections and scholarly journals including the *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, *Rural Sociology* and *Sociological Forum*. He is the editor of *Neoliberalism Revisited: Economic Restructuring and Mexico's Political Future* (Westview 1996). He is currently doing research on the globalization of capitalism and the biotechnology revolution as it affects Latin American agriculture; he is also studying economic restructuring, employment, and competitive strategies in the sugar industries in NAFTA countries under neoliberalism.

# Index

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

- Baldío laws, 34–35  
 Banks. *See* Banrural; Central Union; Ejido Bank  
 Banrural, 80, 98(n2)  
   changing role of, 51  
   control of *ejidos*, 44  
   *ejido* independence from, 88–89, 141–143  
   transformation from Ejido Bank, 94–95  
 Bartra, Roger, 13, 14, 31(n1), 68, 92, 146, 156  
*El Barzón*, 118  
 Batopilas, Mexico, 95–96  
 Benito Juárez (village), 132  
 Biebrich, Carlos, 135  
 Botquez family, 136  
 Bourgeois-hegemonic organization, 24–25, 121, 122, 150  
 Bourgeoisie, agrarian, 127–129, 133  
 decline of collectivism, 129–133  
 in El Yaqui Valley, 125–126  
 restructuring of power, 41–42  
 security of possession, 42–43  
 Calles, Plutarco Elías, 37, 38–39  
*Campesinismo*, variants of, 12–13  
*Campesinistas*, 155  
   as political class, 11–12  
   class reductionism and, 16–18  
   outcomes of struggles, 118–121  
   *See also* Entrepreneurs, peasant;  
   Peasantry  
 Canabal Cristiani, Beatriz, 137  
 Capitalism  
   as obstacle to democracy, 3–4  
   Cárdenas and, 39–40  
   effect on peasant culture, 26–29  
   in La Laguna, 74–75  
   pre-Revolutionary, 35–38  
   state intervention in, 29–31  
   *See also* Postcapitalism  
 Cárdenas, Cuahutemoc, 148(n1)  
 Cárdenas, Lázaro, 6–7, 39–41, 59, 76–79, 89, 102–103  
*Cardenismo* (agrarian reform), 39–41  
 La Laguna distributions, 78–82  
 land distribution of, 128–129  
 outcome of, 150  
 policy regarding collectives, 121  
*Cargos*, 64  
 Carr, Barry, 37  
 Carranza, Venustiano, 33  
 Carrillo Marcor, Alejandro, 135  
*Caudillos*, 25, 39  
 CCI. *See* Independent Peasant Central  
 CDIA. *See* Center of Agrarian Research  
 Center of Agrarian Research (CDIA), 66  
 Central Union (of Collective Credit Societies), 78–81, 83–84, 89–93, 131–132  
 CEPAL. *See* United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean  
 Charismatic-authoritarian leadership, 5, 25  
 Chayanov, Alexander, 2  
 Chiapas Revolt, 1  
 Chihuahua, Mexico, 37  
 CIOAC. *See* Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants  
 Civil society, 3–4, 158, 160  
 Class culture. *See* Culture  
 Class formation, 31(n2)  
 Class organization, 96–98  
   government control of, 89–93  
   types of, 24–25  
 Class position, 23–24  
 Class reductionism, 11–12, 15–18, 16(fig.), 17(fig.), 27–29, 31(n1). *See also* Political class formation  
 Class structural processes, 20–24, 152  
 Class structures, 70(table), 156  
   heterogeneity of, 9  
   political class formation and, 3, 25–26  
   regional effects of capitalism on, 69–71  
   *See also* Agrarian structure;  
   Differentiation, social  
 CNC. *See* National Peasant Confederation  
 CNOP. *See* National Confederation of Popular Organizations  
 CNPP. *See* National Confederation of Small Property Owners  
 land distribution of, 128–129  
 outcome of, 150  
 policy regarding collectives, 121  
*Cargos*, 64  
 Carr, Barry, 37  
 Carranza, Venustiano, 33  
 Carrillo Marcor, Alejandro, 135  
*Caudillos*, 25, 39  
 CCI. *See* Independent Peasant Central  
 CDIA. *See* Center of Agrarian Research  
 Center of Agrarian Research (CDIA), 66  
 Central Union (of Collective Credit Societies), 78–81, 83–84, 89–93, 131–132  
 CEPAL. *See* United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean  
 Charismatic-authoritarian leadership, 5, 25  
 Chayanov, Alexander, 2  
 Chiapas Revolt, 1  
 Chihuahua, Mexico, 37  
 CIOAC. *See* Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants  
 Civil society, 3–4, 158, 160  
 Class culture. *See* Culture  
 Class formation, 31(n2)  
 Class organization, 96–98  
   government control of, 89–93  
   types of, 24–25  
 Class position, 23–24  
 Class reductionism, 11–12, 15–18, 16(fig.), 17(fig.), 27–29, 31(n1). *See also* Political class formation  
 Class structural processes, 20–24, 152  
 Class structures, 70(table), 156  
   heterogeneity of, 9  
   political class formation and, 3, 25–26  
   regional effects of capitalism on, 69–71  
   *See also* Agrarian structure;  
   Differentiation, social  
 CNC. *See* National Peasant Confederation  
 CNOP. *See* National Confederation of Popular Organizations  
 CNPP. *See* National Confederation of Small Property Owners  
 cash crops, 48, 56–58, 70, 84  
 farmers' choices of, 51  
 Procampo and, 52–53  
 subsistence, 56–57, 70  
*See also* Corn; Cotton; Sugar industry;  
 Wheat  
 Crop yields, 141, 142(table)  
 CTM. *See* Workers Confederation of Mexico  
 Culture, 149  
   analysis of, 29, 31(n5)  
   effect on *ejido* coalition, 144  
   hegemonic, 28  
   influence on action, 32(n7)  
   noncapitalist, 27–29  
   political class formation and, 25–26  
   regional, 20–21  
   role of state in, 30–31  
   social structure of, 26–29  
 Dairy industry, 88  
 Danzós Palomino, Ramón, 131  
 Davidson, Alastair, 32(n8)  
 Deforestation. *See* Environmental issues  
 De Grammont, Hubert Cartón, 103–104, 158  
 De Janvry, Alain, 19, 48–49, 68  
 De la Huerta, Adolfo, 37  
 De la Madrid, Miguel, 58, 112  
 Democratic leadership, 5, 25  
 Democratic theory, 3–4  
 Depeasantization, 9, 14, 57–58  
   political class formation and, 21–23  
   without proletarianization, 62  
 Díaz, Porfirio, 1, 34–38, 127  
 Díaz Leal, Juan, 146  
 Díaz Ordáz, Gustavo, 58–59  
 Differentiation, social, 56–59  
   of agrarian producers, 8, 67(fig.), 70(table)  
   1940–1970, 57–59  
   1960–1994, 59–61  
   1990–1994, 66–68  
   proletariat in Atencingo, 102–112  
   regional differentiation, 69–71  
   result of peasant success, 121  
   in sugar industry, 99–101, 112–118  
 CNPR. *See* National Confederation of Rural Producers  
 Coahuila, Mexico, 5, 37, 69–71, 70(table), 75, 77–78, 98(n1)  
 Coalition of Collective Ejidos, 96, 151  
 crop yields, 142(table)  
 independence from Banrural, 141–143  
 obstacles for, 145–146  
 performance of, 139–145  
*See also* Ejidos; Ejidos, collective  
 Coca-Cola, 114  
 Cold War, 42–43, 129  
 Collectives, 6–7, 39–40  
 dismantling, 83–84  
 transition to individual production, 107–112  
*See also* Ejidos; Ejidos, collective  
 Collectivism, 42, 150  
   attack by state, 83–84  
   at La Laguna, 78–81  
   in sugar industry, 102–106  
   struggle to maintain, 129–133  
 Colonists, 37  
 Comarca Lagunera, 98(n1)  
 Communists. *See* Mexican Communist Party  
*Compañías deslindadoras*, 34–35  
 Conasupo, 51–52  
 Confederation of Small Property Owners (CNPP), 108–109  
 Conflationism, 31(n5)  
 Constitution, Mexican, 33, 38, 49–50  
 Corn, 58  
 Corporations, 75–76, 85  
 Corporatism, 156  
 Corruption, 51, 92, 95  
 Corrupt-opportunistic leadership, 5, 25  
 Cotton, 75, 80, 84, 133  
   bank control of, 87–89  
   irrigation data, 82(table)  
 Craig, Ann, 44–45  
 Credit Law, 79, 129–130  
 Cristero rebellion, 39  
 Crops, 128  
   assigned production, 82–83  
   bank control of, 84–89

- Direct producers. *See* Agricultural direct producers
- Distortions, market, 51–52
- Durango, Mexico, 5, 69–71, 70(table), 77–78, 98(n1)
- Echeverría, Luis, 30, 44, 51, 93–94, 119–120, 139
- Eckstein, Shlomo, 77
- Economics, 45–46
- credit to *ejidos*, 79–81
- “40–69” organization, 92–93
- market distortions, 51–52
- political affiliations and, 109–110
- recent Mexican crisis, 145–146
- subsidies, 48, 51–55, 58–59, 112–113
- sugarcane production, 110(table), 111(table)
- under neoliberalism, 47–49
- See also* Banrural; Credit; Ejido Bank
- Ejido Bank, 40–41, 44, 84, 128–129, 151
- as threat to collectivism, 129–133
- disappropriation of producers, 82–84
- dismantling collectivism, 79–84
- La Laguna loans, 80(table)
- “Ejido Enterprises,” 94–96
- Ejidós*, 6–7, 38, 55(n3)
- authoritarian control of, 106–107
- classification of debtors, 80
- collective. *See Ejidós*, collective
- crop yields, 142(table)
- government loans to, 80(table)
- 1992 reform and, 46–47
- possession laws of, 42–43
- production of, 57(table)
- proletarianization of *ejidatarios*, 102–104
- social differentiation of, 66–68
- state dependence of, 49–50
- sugar-producing, 100–101
- under neoliberalism, 48–49
- See also* Atencingo, Mexico; Sugar industry
- Ejidós*, collective, 10(n2), 104–105
- banks and, 84–89
- Batopilas *ejido*, 95–96
- Cardenista land distribution, 39–41, 128–129
- collective coalition, 139–140
- debt of, 80–81
- decline of, 43–45, 80
- economic fragmentation of, 84
- government boycott of, 79–81
- government control of, 89–92
- La Laguna land grants, 76–78
- La Laguna production, 87(table)
- self-managed collectives, 104–105
- struggle against individualism, 129–133
- sugarcane collective, 101–104
- sugarcane income, 110(table), 111(table)
- See also* Coalition of collective *ejidos*;
- Collectives
- Electoral fraud, 157
- Entrepreneurs, peasant, 15, 28, 73(n7)
- classifications of, 64–66
- distribution of, 60–61
- emerging from Atencingo, 107–112
- geographical distribution, 69–71
- government expectations, 117(table)
- rise under neoliberalism, 49
- Environmental issues, 53–55
- Erasmus, Charles J., 131
- Ethnic groups. *See* Indian population;
- Mayo Indians; Yaqui Indians
- Ethnicity, as identity marker, 18–19
- Exchange relations, 62
- EZLN. *See* Zapatista National Liberation Army
- Family
- as analytical unit, 7–8
- as labor, 15, 117, 123
- minimum food requirements, 60–61
- Farming
- corporate, 75–76, 85
- peasant vs. entrepreneurial, 59–61
- See also* Agricultural direct producers;
- Collectives; *Ejidós*; *Ejidós*, collective;
- Haciendas; Production, agricultural
- FCL. *See* Independent Peasant Front
- Felix, Faustino, 138
- Ferra Martínez, Carlos, 137
- Fertimex, 85
- Feudal system, 34–35
- Flores Tapia, Oscar, 95
- FNOC. *See* National Front of Organizations and Citizens
- Foreign community, 41–42, 127
- “40–69” association, 90, 92–93
- Friedman, Harriet, 73(n7)
- Gaxiola, Israel, 148(n2)
- Geertz, Clifford, 26
- General Union of Workers and Peasants (UGOCM), 92, 130–134, 136
- Gidden, Anthony, 31(n5)
- Gómez Carpintero, Francisco Javier, 100
- Government, state
- agricultural intervention, 20–21, 29–30, 107–112
- agricultural subsidies, 48, 51–55, 58–59, 112–113
- authoritarian rule of *ejidos*, 106–107
- boycott of collective *ejidos*, 79–80
- controlling collectives, 84–87, 95, 130–133
- controlling La Laguna peasantry, 89–93
- economic intervention, 46–48
- economic production, 156
- ejido* dependence on, 49–50
- involvement in production, 128–129
- productive disappropriation, 82–84
- state agrarian policy, 20
- sugar industry and, 105–106, 112–118, 120, 122–123
- Green Revolution, 44, 72
- Grupo Escorpión*, 113–114
- Grupo Gemex*, 114
- Haciendas*, 45, 75–76, 75(table)
- culture, 75(table)
- labor strikes and, 76–78
- land accrual, 35–38
- post-reform status, 79–81
- role in Revolution, 35–38
- Hewitt de Alcántara, Cynthia, 19, 43–44, 77, 132, 154
- Identity, sociopolitical, 18–19, 116
- Imcafé, 52
- Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (CIOAC), 134, 136, 155
- Independent Peasant Central (CCI), 134, 136
- Independent Peasant Front (FCI), 136–137, 143
- Indian population, 55(n3), 127
- acculturation process, 132
- loss of land, 34–35
- Mayo Indians, 6, 125–127
- warrior tribes, 37
- Yaqui Indians, 6, 125–129, 136–137
- Individualism, 129–133
- Industrialization, 42–43, 114–115, 129
- Infrastubistence production, 61–62
- Interest representation, 21
- International Monetary Fund (IMF), 46
- Internet sites, 161(nn 1, 2)
- Irrigation, 74–75
- as modernization, 43
- irrigable land, 79–81
- La Laguna, 82(table)
- Jaramillo, Porfirio, 104–107, 124(n1), 150
- Jenkins, William, 41, 101–104
- Juárez, Benito, 37
- Katz, Friederich, 35
- Kearney, Michael, 18–19
- Kulaks*, 32(n6), 64
- Labor
- agrarian movement and land takeover, 95–96
- economics of, 45–46
- family as, 15, 117, 123
- Indian population, 127
- labor disputes, 95–96
- libres*, 83, 109
- state response to struggles, 155–156
- surplus of, 47–48, 133–134
- See also* Agricultural direct producers;
- Proletariat
- Labor disputes, 95–96
- 181

- Direct producers. *See* Agricultural direct producers
- Distortions, market, 51–52
- Durango, Mexico, 5, 69–71, 70(table), 77–78, 98(n1)
- Echeverría, Luis, 30, 44, 51, 93–94, 119–120, 139
- Eckstein, Shlomo, 77
- Economics, 45–46
- credit to *ejidos*, 79–81
- “40–69” organizations, 92–93
- market distortions, 51–52
- political affiliations and, 109–110
- recent Mexican crisis, 145–146
- subsidies, 48, 51–55, 58–59, 112–113
- sugarcane production, 110(table), 111(table)
- under neoliberalism, 47–49
- See also* Banrural; Credit; Ejido Bank
- Ejido Bank, 40–41, 44, 84, 128–129, 151
- as threat to collectivism, 129–133
- disappropriation of producers, 82–84
- dismantling collectivism, 79–84
- La Laguna loans, 80(table)
- “Ejido Enterprises,” 94–96
- Ejidós*, 6–7, 38, 55(n3)
- authoritarian control of, 106–107
- classification of debtors, 80
- collective. *See Ejidós*, collective
- crop yields, 142(table)
- government loans to, 80(table)
- 1992 reform and, 46–47
- possession laws of, 42–43
- production of, 57(table)
- proletarianization of *ejidatarios*, 102–104
- social differentiation of, 66–68
- state dependence of, 49–50
- sugar-producing, 100–101
- under neoliberalism, 48–49
- See also* Atencingo, Mexico; Sugar industry
- Ejidós*, collective, 10(n2), 104–105
- banks and, 84–89
- Batopilas *ejido*, 95–96
- Cardenista land distribution, 39–41, 128–129
- collective coalition, 139–140
- debt of, 80–81
- decline of, 43–45, 80
- economic fragmentation of, 84
- government boycott of, 79–81
- government control of, 89–92
- La Laguna land grants, 76–78
- La Laguna production, 87(table)
- self-managed collectives, 104–105
- struggle against individualism, 129–133
- sugarcane collective, 101–104
- sugarcane income, 110(table), 111(table)
- See also* Coalition of collective *ejidos*;
- Collectives
- Electoral fraud, 157
- Entrepreneurs, peasant, 15, 28, 73(n7)
- classifications of, 64–66
- distribution of, 60–61
- emerging from Atencingo, 107–112
- geographical distribution, 69–71
- government expectations, 117(table)
- rise under neoliberalism, 49
- Environmental issues, 53–55
- Erasmus, Charles J., 131
- Ethnic groups. *See* Indian population;
- Mayo Indians; Yaqui Indians
- Ethnicity, as identity marker, 18–19
- Exchange relations, 62
- EZLN. *See* Zapatista National Liberation Army
- Family
- as analytical unit, 7–8
- as labor, 15, 117, 123
- minimum food requirements, 60–61
- Farming
- corporate, 75–76, 85
- peasant vs. entrepreneurial, 59–61
- See also* Agricultural direct producers;
- Collectives; *Ejidós*; *Ejidós*, collective;
- Haciendas; Production, agricultural
- FCI. *See* Independent Peasant Front
- Feix, Faustino, 138
- Ferra Martínez, Carlos, 137
- Fertimex, 85
- Feudal system, 34–35
- Flores Tapia, Oscar, 95
- FNOC. *See* National Front of Workers and Peasants (CIOAC), 134, 136, 155
- Organizations and Citizens
- Foreign community, 41–42, 127
- “40–69” association, 90, 92–93
- Friedman, Harriet, 73(n7)
- Gaxiola, Israel, 148(n2)
- Geertz, Clifford, 26
- General Union of Workers and Peasants (UGOCM), 92, 130–134, 136
- Gidden, Anthony, 31(n5)
- Gómez Carpintero, Francisco Javier, 100
- Government, state
- agricultural intervention, 20–21, 29–30, 107–112
- agricultural subsidies, 48, 51–55, 58–59, 112–113
- authoritarian rule of *ejidos*, 106–107
- boycott of collective *ejidos*, 79–80
- controlling collectives, 84–87, 95, 130–133
- controlling La Laguna peasantry, 89–93
- economic intervention, 46–48
- economic production, 156
- ejido* dependence on, 49–50
- involvement in production, 128–129
- productive disappropriation, 82–84
- state agrarian policy, 20
- sugar industry and, 105–106, 112–118, 120, 122–123
- Green Revolution, 44, 72
- Grupo Escorpión*, 113–114
- Grupo Gemex*, 114
- Haciendas*, 45, 75–76, 75(table)
- culture, 75(table)
- labor strikes and, 76–78
- land accrual, 35–38
- post-reform status, 79–81
- role in Revolution, 35–38
- Hewitt de Alcántara, Cynthia, 19, 43–44, 77, 132, 154
- Identity, sociopolitical, 18–19, 116
- Imecafé, 52
- Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (CIOAC), 134, 136, 155
- Independent Peasant Central (CCI), 134, 136
- Independent Peasant Front (FCI), 136–137, 143
- Indian population, 55(n3), 127
- acculturation process, 132
- loss of land, 34–35
- Mayo Indians, 6, 125–129, 136–137
- warrior tribes, 37
- Yaqui Indians, 6, 125–129, 136–137
- Individualism, 129–133
- Industrialization, 42–43, 114–115, 129
- Infra subsistence production, 61–62
- Interest representation, 21
- International Monetary Fund (IMF), 46
- Internet sites, 161(nn 1, 2)
- Irrigation, 74–75
- as modernization, 43
- irrigable land, 79–81
- La Laguna, 82(table)
- Jaramillo, Porfirio, 104–107, 124(n1), 150
- Jenkins, William, 41, 101–104
- Juárez, Benito, 37
- Katz, Friederich, 35
- Kearney, Michael, 18–19
- Kulaks*, 32(n6), 64
- Labor
- agrarian movement and land takeover, 95–96
- economics of, 45–46
- family as, 15, 117, 123
- Indian population, 127
- labor disputes, 95–96
- libres*, 83, 109
- state response to struggles, 155–156
- surplus of, 47–48, 133–134
- See also* Agricultural direct producers;
- Proletariat
- Labor disputes, 95–96



- Private farms, 57–58, 57(table)  
 Private sector, 44  
 Privatization, 50, 112–118  
 PRM. *See* Party of the Mexican Revolution  
 Procampo, 52–55, 156–157  
 Production, agricultural, 23–24, 152  
   capitalist vs. peasant, 57–59  
   commercial crops, 70  
   consumption of surplus, 64  
   economics of, 45–46  
   emerging dualism of, 158–159  
   government subsidies, 48, 51–55, 58–59, 112–113  
   household production, 73(n7)  
   productive disappropriation, 84–86  
   replacement, 23–24, 61–64, 152  
   result of peasant struggle, 120  
   surplus, 61–64, 73(n3)  
   *See also* Agricultural and Livestock  
   Promotion Law; Agricultural direct  
   producers; Mexican Food System;  
   Replacement production; Surplus  
   production  
 Production relations. *See* Agrarian  
   structure  
 Productivism, 129–133  
 Proletarianization, 28, 62  
 after neoliberalism, 99–100  
 struggle for *ejido* lands, 118–119  
*See also* Differentiation, social  
 Proletariat, 23–24, 31(n2), 57–58, 86–87,  
 146–148, 155  
   as political class, 11–12  
   class reductionism and, 16–18  
   coincident with cash crops, 70  
   contradictory class locations, 147  
   decline in, 68–69, 69(table)  
   economics of, 45–46  
   geographical distribution, 69–71  
   in sugar industry, 102–104  
   land struggle in Sonora, 133–135  
   obstacles to unionization, 155–156  
   political class formation and, 21  
   political outcomes of struggle,  
   120–121  
   regional distribution, 69–71  
   sugarcane industry and, 107–112  
   unionization of, 137–138  
   value of, 72(n2)  
 Proletarianismo  
   actions of, 14–15  
   variants of, 13–15  
 Pronase, 85  
 Pronasol, 48–49, 52, 54–55, 88  
 Pucciarelli, Alfredo, 86–87  
 Puebla, Mexico, 5, 41, 70(table), 100  
   class differentiation, 69–71  
   sugarcane collective, 101–104  
 Radicalism, 12–13  
 Ramírez, Guadalupe, 107–108  
*Reconceptualizing the Peasantry* (Kearney),  
 18  
 Reformism, 12–13  
 Rello, Fernando, 77, 85  
 Repeasantization, 14, 62  
 after neoliberalism, 99–100  
 struggle for, 31(n2)  
 Replacement production, 23–24, 61–64,  
 152  
 Revolt. *See* Cristero rebellion; Mexican  
   Revolution  
 Ronfeldt, David, 106  
 Rural Bank. *See* Banrural  
 Rural development, websites for, 160(n1)  
 Salinas de Gortari, Carlos, 46, 52, 98,  
 148(n1)  
 Salles, Vania Almeida, 68, 70  
 SAM. *See* Mexican Food System  
 Sanderson, Steven E., 30–31, 130–131  
 San José Teruel, 108, 111  
 San Miguel *ejido*, 83–84  
 San Pedro, takeover of, 136–137  
 Schejtman, Alejandro, 59–60  
 Scott, James, 28–29  
 SCP. *See* Simple commodity production  
 Semiproletarianization, 59  
 as a result of differentiation, 56–57  
 Semiproletariat, 2–3, 17–18, 23–24, 27–29  
 as infrasubistence peasants, 61–62  
   crop type, 70  
   geographical distribution, 69–71  
   La Laguna producers, 86–87

- land struggle in Sonora, 133–135  
 opposition movement in Sonora,  
 135  
   postcapitalism of, 138  
   post-1992 reform, 68  
   role in class conflict, 9  
   sugarcane industry and, 107–112  
 Sharecroppers, 76  
*La sierra*, 5  
 Simple commodity production (SCP),  
 31(n3), 73(n7)  
 Slavery, 34–35  
 Smith, Gavin, 31(n3)  
 “Social function,” 62  
 Social movements, 158–159  
 Social productivity, 45–46  
 Sonora, Mexico, 5–6, 37, 41, 70(table)  
   attack on collectives, 129–133  
   class differentiation, 69–71  
   *See also* El Yaqui Valley  
   State government. *See* Government, state  
   States, Mexican. *See Individual states*  
 Steward, Julian, 26  
 Stratification, social. *See* Differentiation,  
   social  
 Strikes, labor. *See* Unions, labor  
 Structuration, 31(n5)  
 Struggles, peasant, 12–13, 39–40  
   class position and, 27–29  
   debtors’ movement, 118  
   objects of, 97(table), 119(table),  
   147(table)  
   political and socioeconomic outcomes,  
   118–123  
   political class formation and, 22, 24  
   shaped by culture, 26–29  
   unionizational struggles, 155–156  
   *See also* Sugar industry  
 Subsidies, 48–49, 51–55, 58–59, 112–113.  
*See also* Mexican Food System  
 Subsistence production, 63, 117  
 Sugar industry, 41, 79, 99–104, 112–113  
   collective *ejidos*, 104–105  
   collective vs. individual production,  
   107–112  
   cultural orientation of growers,  
   116–117  
   gross income from, 110(table),  
   111(table)  
   growers leaving industry, 116–118,  
   118(table)  
   growers’ perception of industry,  
   116(table)  
   political class formation in, 102  
   potential success of growers, 117(table)  
   privatization of, 112–118  
   producers vs. mill owners, 114–116  
   profits from, 122–123  
   *See also* La Laguna  
 Surplus production, 61–64, 73(n3)  
 Swidler, Ann, 32(n7)  
 Szelényi, Ivan, 32(n6)  
 Tejeda, Adalberto, 39  
 Topography, 5–6  
 UGOCM. *See* General Union of Workers  
   and Peasants  
 Unemployment, 48  
 Unions, labor, 98  
   for semiproletariat, 137–138  
   government appropriation of, 89–93  
   labor strikes, 76–78  
   land struggle in Sonora, 133–135  
   obstacles to unionization, 155–156  
   state controlled, 108–109  
   *See also* Coalition of collective *ejidos*;  
   National Peasant Confederation  
 United Nations Economic Commission  
   for Latin America and the Caribbean  
   (CEPAL), 69  
   agricultural direct producers  
   distribution, 60(table)  
   infrasubistence level production, 61–62  
   land study by, 59–61  
   non-peasants, 64–65  
   problems with study, 65–66  
   stationary and surplus producers, 63–64  
   subsistence level producers, 63  
 UNORCA. *See* Coalition of Collective  
   Ejidos  
 Valdéz, Rodolfo Felix, 146  
 Vazquez, Enrique, 98(n2)

- Veracruz, Mexico, 39  
 Villa, Francisco "Pancho," 34
- Wage labor. *See* Proletariat
- Wages, access to, 2, 15–18, 16(*fig.*), 17(*fig.*), 24  
*See also* Peasantry; Proletariat
- Warman, Arturo, 146–147
- Water. *See* Irrigation
- Weber, Max, 31(*n4*)
- Wolf, Eric R., 62
- Workers Confederation of Mexico (CTM), 42, 131, 155
- World Bank, 46, 157
- World Trade Organization (WTO), 47, 53
- World War II, 42–43
- Wright, Erik Olin, 147
- WTO. *See* World Trade Organization
- Yaqui Indians, 6  
 decimation of, 127  
 national and land struggle, 128–129  
 takeover of San Pedro, 136–137
- El Yaqui Valley, Mexico, 10, 41, 125–128, 138–139  
 bank vs. collectives, 13  
 objects of struggle, 147(*table*)  
 political class trajectory, 147(*table*)
- Zapata, Emiliano, 34–38
- Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), 3, 158, 160