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The New Agrarian Movement

Self-Managed, Democratic Production

by
Gerardo Otero*

One of the most heated debates in Mexico during the 1970s was over its agrarian structure, peasant differentiation, and the character of struggles in the countryside. This issue has been in the forefront of Latin American discussions of the agrarian question. Scholars from other countries have frequently turned to the Mexican case for theoretical inspiration in pursuing analyses of agrarian classes and political processes in their respective homelands.

The seeming paradox which ignited the debate is this: In some regions rural workers seem to behave as peasants while in other areas peasants seem to behave as workers.¹ According to Leninist theory, workers are supposed to struggle for wages, better working conditions, unionization and, ultimately, for socialism. Authors in this tradition saw the need for a "vanguard party" to lead the workers in line with their class position in production relations. Others, inspired by Chayanov, thought that rural workers were really peasants by virtue of their general access to land. In Mexico the two positions have been labeled, respectively, *proletarista* (or *descampesinista*) and *campesinista*. Each tends to assign a central revolutionary role to either the agricultural proletariat (proletaristas) or to the peasantry (campesinistas). They stress either wage labor or access to land as the main determinants for the character of struggles — proletarian or peasant.²

My own interpretation of the process of political class formation is that the process of political class formation is mediated by prevailing forms of culture and state intervention in addition to the causal link with class positions in production relations. Moreover, it is the agricultural semiproletariat which has been at the center of agrarian struggles rather than the proletariat or the peasantry themselves. It is the semiproletariat

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which finds itself in the most unstable condition in relation to its material basis for economic reproduction. Because the semiproletariat currently constitutes the largest proportion of the rural population (Bartra and Otero, 1987), it becomes crucial to determine what kind of struggles it actually engages in, given its diverse cultural and political background (Otero, 1986).

This essay focuses on southern Sonora, specifically the Yaqui valley, the region where capitalism has developed most thoroughly in Mexican agriculture. We will follow a complex set of class trajectories for both the subordinate and the dominant classes. A concern will be 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 century, involved moving the frontier toward the United States and crushing the Yaqui and the Mayo Indians in their way, converting them from peasant producers into an agricultural semiproletariat.

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 find permanent wage employment, and they had to supplement their income with commercial activities or with odd jobs. The structural position which dominated was nevertheless proletarian or semiproletarian for nearly 75 percent of the agricultural labor force, characterizing the agrarian struggles of the last decade as "postcapitalist."

The term "postcapitalist" describes a situation in which semiproletarians successfully resist proletarianization with a form of production centered on self-management and the democratic control of the work process. It is a form of cooperative production in which conscious attempts are made to gain substantial degrees of independence from both the state and private capital. In a sense, it is a "free association of direct producers" (Marx) which must deal with the capitalist market, but its own organization posits itself as the seed for a postcapitalist form of organization of all economic activities: self-management and democratic control of production.³

Although the central demand in Sonora was for land, it was accompanied by demands for machinery, installations, and, more importantly, control over the production process. Thus the demand for land ceased to exhibit a peasant character by assuming a globally postcapitalist one.

State intervention had been dominated by the disproportionate strength of the agrarian bourgeoisie in southern Sonora. Therefore, the

class organizations which arose had an oppositional character, although from the late 1940s to the early 1970s they were heavily repressed and by and large dismantled. It was only in the mid-1970s that the agricultural semiproletariat was able to organize itself to confront the state and the powerful agrarian bourgeoisie.

As this article shows, the resulting *Coalición de Ejidos Colectivos de los Valles del Yaqui y El Mayo* (Coalition of Collective Ejidos of the Yaqui and Mayo Valleys) today provides exemplary organizational lessons in both political (democratic and independent) and economic (productive) terms for the agrarian movement in Mexico and 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.

FROM PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION TO THE NEW DOMINANT ALLIANCE

Before the rule of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910), the geographical position of Sonora allowed the Yaquis, Pápagos, Seris, and Mayos to be cut off from the rest of Mexico. But the stakes changed as capitalism sought to expand to the fertile lands of its northwestern frontier, where the Indians became a potential labor force.

Of the five principal rivers in Sonora (Magdalena, Sonora, Metape, Yaqui, and Mayo), only the Yaqui flows year-round (Aguilar Camín, 1977). This might explain the dramatic history of recurrent struggles to control the Yaqui valley's lands and water, as well as some of the cultural differences between the Yaquis and Mayos. The former were able to sustain an independent economy for a longer period of time after the first contact with the new Spanish and Mexican societies. Conversely, the Mayos, owing to their weaker basis for economic reproduction, began selling 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 resistant labor force in the state. After their pacification, a few Mayos were granted small plots of land by the federal government although a majority worked for wages, in ranches, mines, and haciendas. This small "favor" (land and jobs) followed upon the relentless repression they had to endure, and left the Mayos as a relatively docile labor force.

This process of "primitive accumulation" is intimately related to the expansion of U.S. capitalism toward its southwestern territories and northwest Mexico. In 1900 U.S. settlement companies began to enter Sonora, under the auspices of official sympathy and with the mediation of 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 mentality which characterized the U.S. southwest. The central concern was for profits, which were pursued with a strict and voracious rationality (Aguilar Camín, 1977; 56-59).

By the time of the Mexican civil war (1912-1917), the vast majority of the Yaqui Indians had either been killed or deported 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 deported Yaquis were allowed to return to their tribal territory. Obregón was forced to live up to his promise during his presidency (1920-1924). However, the powerful capitalist interests 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, that is, *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 proletarianization, the Yaquis restored a peasant economy centered on subsistence crops such as corn, beans, and squash. This experience of repeasantization would not go undisturbed by expanding agrarian capitalism for long.

Besides the Yaqui land grants, some *ejidos* (community-based lands dedicated to agriculture or cattle production) were formed prior to the Cardenista period (1934-1940), but they were mostly symbolic. The 38 *ejidos* that existed comprised 188,055 hectares of marginal land and were 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.

By 1935 conditions had worsened for direct producers. Farm workers were paid only 1.56 pesos daily, compared to 2.33 pesos in 1929. The polarization of land-tenure distribution was also profound. Of the 10,409 plots registered by the first agricultural census in 1930, 5,577 (or 53.6 percent) were under 10 hectares, and they controlled a mere .3 percent of the land! There were only 38 ejidos of 50 hectares or more controlling .4 percent of the land. Finally, the latifundia sector (with more than 1,000 hectares per plot) controlled 89 percent of the land, but 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 100 irrigated 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. This land distribution increased the ejidal sector's share of land to 40 percent. This proportion, however, would sharply decline in the following decade to 17 percent due to an unprecedented expansion of the agricultural frontier through the development of irrigation infrastructure by the state (Siles-Alvarado, 1968).

With the Cardenista ejido land distribution, the organization for production in most of the irrigated land was collective, and the Banco Ejidal had a major presence in credit and technical assistance. Created by Cárdenas to financially and technically support the new collective ejidos, the Ejidal Bank was crucial in the early years of agrarian reform in attaining good productivity levels (Otero, 1989). In the first few years (1938-1943) 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, but they were also struggling for their nation-

ality. Nevertheless, when the state distributed land to them, they had to accept the state's rules: a heavy involvement of its economic apparatuses in organizing agricultural production. The Yaquis' newly reconstructed peasant economy was now converted into collective farms closely supervised by the Ejidal Bank. This left the new ejidatarios in quite a vulnerable position, both in relation to the state and to 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 as to the future of agrarian development in the region. The conditions were thus established for full integration of the Yaquis into national life and all its implications, namely integration into the process of capitalist development. This was also the condition for a gradual transformation of Indian-peasant struggles to postcapitalist struggles. Yet it would take more than three decades for these types of struggles to emerge.

THE END OF AGRARIAN REFORM AND THE ATTACK ON COLLECTIVE EJIDOS

The end of Cárdenas's agrarian reform may be traced to 1938 when productivism set in toward the end of his administration. Overall state policy was geared toward stimulating the industrialization process, and agriculture became subordinated to this goal. The imminence of World War II called for a policy of "national unity," and Cárdenas's own reformism was limited by the recent foreign reactions to the expropriation of the oil industry and the increasing discontent of the internal bourgeoisie (Hamilton, 1982). After World War II the working class and mass organizations generally were demobilized and controlled by the state apparatus. In particular, the Confederación Nacional Campesina (National Peasant Confederation, or CNC) and the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (Mexican Workers Confederation, CTM) were converted into powerful political arms of the state to control peasants and workers. One of the targets for destruction was precisely the collective ejidos, partly because they had become strongholds of opposition and socialist organizations, and also because they were seen as a threat to private capitalist firms.

The productivist drive in economic policy was combined with a commitment to individualistic ideology against collective ejidos. The latter were equated with the "threat of communism." It was the postwar conjuncture when Mexico's northern neighbor was beginning its Cold War against the Soviet Union. This new geopolitical situation was internalized in the form of a vigorous attack on anything that could be associated with the ghost of communism.

Two laws appeared in 1942 which sanctioned the individualistic tendencies of the new ejidal policy, the new Agrarian Code and the Law of Agricultural Credit of December 31, 1942. The former emphasized entitlement of each ejidatario, supposedly to give security of land possession to each individual title holder. In fact, this emphasis on 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 25 years. This was touted as a condition for agricultural entrepreneurialism to fully develop. Between 1938 and 1950, the landowners in Sonora were granted 41 certificates of immunity covering 598,460 hectares (Sanderson, 1981: 147). Although most of this land was initially 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 enhanced 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 (G. O.)]. Later, in 1947, ejidal credit organizations were subsumed under the control of the Ejidal Bank, which assumed full authority for the capitalization, development, marketing and credit functions of the ejido, at the expense of local [credit] societies (Sanderson, 1981: 144-145).

At this point the bank became the actual employer of ejidatarios by turning them into a form of state workers under a peasant disguise. The bank appropriated their production process and simultaneously alienated direct producers.

Although the legal structures and general orientation toward dismantling collective ejidos were established at the end of 1942, government agencies began their tenacious campaign against them only at the start

of Miguel Alemán's administration in 1947. Representatives of the Ejidal Bank, the Ministry of Agriculture, and other government officials tried to convince ejidatarios that they could earn more by working their own plots individually, without having to pay ejido functionaries or contribute toward a social fund for the purchase of machinery (Hewitt de Alcántara, 1978: 174). State policies had thus shifted clearly in favor of the agrarian bourgeoisie and against the ejidos.

In response, ejidatarios began to form opposition organizations. Many joined the Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos Mexicanos (General Union of Mexican Workers and Peasants, or UGOCM), a mass organization linked to the Partido Popular (Popular Party, or PP), formed in 1947 by Vicente Lombardo Toledano, former secretary-general of the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (Confederation of Mexican Workers, or CTM) during Cardenismo.

During the Cárdenas administration, the members of collective ejidos were affiliated with the official Confederación Nacional Campesina (National Confederation of Peasants, or CNC) and the CTM (Carr, 1986). During this period 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 in the CNC and CTM to which they were democratically elected.

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 a wholly different character: from being actual representatives of their constituency, they became 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 Ejidal Bank also became a major state weapon against collective ejidos. It would grant 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 mid-term loans were completely suspended for them, decisively hindering the possibilities of keeping up with mechanization and technological advances in general. Conversely, the bank showed a strong disposition to help ejidatarios realize profits when they were in turn willing to fragment their col-

lective ejidos into individual plots. But this attitude of the bank only lasted through 1950, when most collective ejidos had been dismantled (Sanderson, 1981: 175-178).

Sanderson quotes from an editorial in *El Imparcial*, a daily newspaper of Sonora, which appeared on June 21, 1950, revealing that the federal government decided to attack the strongholds of the PP with a "powerful weapon: economics":

*Thus, the Ejidal 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*⁴ (cited in Sanderson, 1981: 141).

Inaugurated in 1939, the Unión Central, the economic organization created by direct producers for the self-management of their collective farms and other agricultural activities, remained under direct producers' control until 1953. It managed a machine center, a shop for the sale of machine parts and tires, a gas station, a department dealing with the commercialization of 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.

The state's rewards to those who deserted collectivism also meant reducing the membership of the Unión Central. By 1953, the government attack on this economic organization included stealing machinery from the union-run enterprises. When Maximiliano López, the union's director, went to Mexico City to file a protest in 1953 he was assassinated. This was the last blow to the Unión Central. After López's murder, the regional organizations which made up the union were little more than "paper organizations."

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 existed. 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 of the ejido

were dominated by a single rich man who rented land to his colleagues. There was not even a yearly celebration to commemorate the anniversary of agrarian reform in the Yaqui valley. In Benito Juárez:

once collective, there is no community spirit. On the contrary, intrigues and mistrust abound, as 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 afterwards because nobody would attend his services (Hewitt de Alcántara, 1978:226).

The process of acculturation has been widespread although somewhat different between the Yaqui and Mayo Indians. The Mayos are more integrated with whites and mestizos although 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 more whites were seen (Erasmus, 1961). This difference may be explained by reference to the many conflicts between the Yaquis and the larger white society throughout Mexican history, which has led them to maintain solidarity and cultural identification to a greater extent 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 would succumb to the 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, Indians, or mestizos. By the mid-1960s, 80 percent of ejidal land was rented out to capitalist agriculturalists, and the holders of ejidal titles often worked for a wage on their own plots (Hewitt de Alcántara, 1978:193).

In sum, Alemán's policies consolidated the orientation toward industry and the private sector which would prevail in the Mexican state until the 1970s, and which continues today even after significant land redistribution during the Echeverría administration (1970-1976). Alemán shifted rural credit from the ejido to the private sector; invested heavily in large-scale irrigation projects rather than in small irrigation works; initiated the seed- and-yield improvement centers that would become

the foci of the Green Revolution — which resulted in great productivity increases, but was also highly polarizing socially and regionally (Wade, 1974; Cleaver, 1972); and he redirected the emphasis from domestic food production to production for export. All of these policies were consistent with the consolidation of the hegemony of the industrial bourgeoisie in close alliance with its agrarian counterpart.

The systematic economic boycott of 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 Partido Popular 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, for acculturation provided Indians with better individual capacities to play according to the rules of the market. Unfortunately for the agrarian bourgeoisie, this deterioration of Indian-peasant culture would have an important effect on future agrarian struggles in which demands for land would be accompanied by demands for other means of production and the democratic control of the production process at large.

THE NEW AGRARIAN MOVEMENT: TOWARD THE APPROPRIATION OF THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

“Before, the government told us what we could and could not do. Now, we tell them what to do for us” (farmer of the Coalition of Collective Ejidos of the Yaqui and Mayo Valleys, quoted in Benjamin and Buell, 1985).

The boycott suffered by collective ejidos in the 1947-1954 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 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 in 1960, reflecting a much slower growth rate than the

growth rate of irrigated surface. By 1970, with over 700,000 hectares there were only slightly more than 100,000 people employed in agriculture (Ferra Martínez, 1987:4-5).

By the early 1970s, Sonoran agriculture began to experience the effects of the capitalist crisis. The formerly highly successful credit unions run by the agrarian bourgeoisie entered a phase of heavy losses in the 1971-1974 period (Quintero, 1982). Declining prices in cotton at the end of the 1960s had led many entrepreneurs in the Yaqui valley to shift a large proportion of land to wheat, which is an intensely mechanized crop. About 96 man-hectare days are required for the cotton crop, in contrast to roughly 7.5 for wheat. In Sonora, there was a reduction of 108,436 hectares of cotton, which caused unemployment for 36,166 day laborers in 1975. Between 1974 and 1975, the number of day laborers displaced from agriculture nationwide reached 7,233,366 (Canabal Cristiani, 1984:219).

In 1970, 73 percent of the economically active population in Sonora agriculture were rural workers, while 1 percent of that population owned 42 percent of the workable land. Meanwhile, the organic composition of capital had become increasingly high. According to some estimates, in 1940 constant capital (machinery) constituted one-third of variable capital (wages), and 20 years later constant capital exceeded wages by 50 percent (Jiménez Ricárdez, 1976). These changes created a reserve labor pool, with the effect of reducing wages and further increasing capitalist profits until the overproduction crisis set in.

Thus by the mid-1970s three factors influenced the emergence of a combative mobilization: (1) increased 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 capitalist and peasant agricultural crises; and (3) interbourgeois infighting about the 1976 presidential succession.

By 1975, the agricultural proletariat and semiproletariat were largely unorganized or were affiliated with the official CNC, the Central Campesina Independiente (Independent Peasant Confederation, or CCI) or the 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. The UGOCM had suffered severe repression and several splinter groups had formed by this time. Two of them kept the same name, and they had to be distinguished by their last name. Thus, the UGOCM-Jacinto López became integrated under the state's control by joining the Pacto de

Ocampo. The left faction was the UGOCM-PPS (Partido Popular Socialista), which later became the UGOCM-PPM (Partido del Pueblo Mexicano),⁵ reflecting a splinter in the PPS itself. Whereas the PPS became almost a "left" appendix of the official PRI, the PPM represented a return to its traditionally "Lombardista" positions. The UGOCM-PPM thus belonged to this left social democratic, nationalistic tradition.

Moreover, the CCI also had some influence in Sonora, but this organization had undergone division by 1975 as well. The CCI-Garzón joined the officialist pact, while the CCI-Danzós was renamed the Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos (CIOAC) in 1975. The name CIOAC reflected new debates within the Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM), in which *proletarista* authors such as Roger Bartra were having an important influence in characterizing the changes in the Mexican agrarian structure. Their analyses tended to see great revolutionary promise in the presence of a proletariat in agriculture. Consequently, the CIOAC began to favor a struggle for unionization over the traditional struggle for land in the countryside. The CIOAC was led by members of the PCM, which in 1982 became the Partido Socialista Unificado de México (Unified Socialist Party of Mexico, or PSUM), and still later it became the Partido Socialista Mexicano (Mexican Socialist Party, or PMS) in 1987. Another organization with some presence in the region was the officialist Consejo Agrarista Mexicano (CAM), which was also a signing member of the Pacto de Ocampo (Ferra Martínez, 1982; Sanderson, 1981).

Under these organizational conditions, dominated by proletarian conceptions on the left and official control of most mass organizations, the struggle for land had actually lost momentum in Sonora by the early 1970s. Both official and opposition organizations were dedicating their greatest efforts at unionizing day laborers (Ferra Martínez, 1982). But this narrowly economic emphasis would soon be challenged by the masses themselves, who would posit a new object of struggle; demand for land, but accompanied with the demand for control over the rest of the means of production and democratic control of the production process at large.

LAND TAKEOVERS OF 1975

On October 19, 1975, land petitioners (groups of people formally organized to demand land and registered at the Ministry of Agrarian

Reform) affiliated to 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 land-owners demanded energetic action from the governor of Sonora, Carlos Biebrich, accusing him of weakness.

On October 23, Biebrich sent the judicial police, backed by military 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, 30 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).

SPONTANEOUS MOBILIZATIONS BECOME AN ALLIANCE OF OPPOSITION ORGANIZATIONS

After the October massacre, the 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 these too initially believed the October events had resulted merely from bureaucratic infighting, and they had 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. The majority of these leaders had already broken with the official organizations of the Pacto de Ocampo, because the masses were no longer willing to go along with the collaborationist pact with the government.

On April 3, 1976, at daybreak, about 800 land petitioners took over block 407 (each "block" consisting of about 400 hectares of land), a property called San Pedro, belonging to the Bórquez Esquer family. Located in the heart of the Yaqui Valley, about 10 kilometers from Ciudad Obregón, San Pedro had several buildings, densely surrounded by trees, which formed a natural protective barrier in case of armed repression by the state (Sanderson, 1981:191). The land occupants took several additional precautions. They dug ditches in the two access

roads, leaving only room for their own vehicles to cross over, and 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, 1982:45-47).

The Bórquez family was one of the most prominent landowning families in the region, and their influence with the government was considerable. They had followed the usual method to avoid the legal constraints of private land tenure in the agrarian reform legislation, registering 400 hectares under the names of the four Bórquez brothers. As children were born, the family would buy more property and register it under the 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 military 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.

During the army's presence the occupants received broad support and solidarity from other groups of land petitioners, their relatives, Yaqui Indians, and students. Many of these supporters camped outside the military site to show their solidarity. Standing by a truck with 50 Yaqui Indians, one of their leaders warned; "If one of our men is touched by the army, our whole people will take the offense and respond accordingly."⁶

After the army's withdrawal, an impasse was reached, and the land takeover continued until July without favorable resolution by the state. By this time considerable negotiation had taken place among officials of the Echeverría government, the land occupants, and the agrarian bourgeoisie. The latter was offering to cede 20,000 hectares while the state demanded 80,000.

In the meantime, the land petitioners established a formal organization to represent their interests known as the Frente Campesino Independiente (Independent Peasant Front, or FCI). Its program clearly reflected a class character much beyond that of the peasantry:

Handing over the latifundia to collectively organized peasants, giving first priority to the agricultural workers of the expropriated plot.

Expropriation of latifundia without compensation.

Statization 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 *amparo agrario* to latifundistas.⁷

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 (Ferra Martínez, 1982: 48).

Clearly, this program calls for reforms which go well beyond a "peasant" view of how land should be administered. Nevertheless, many left observers call the agents of these struggles "peasants," on the basis that land remains a central demand. The argument here is that the demand for land takes on a qualitatively different character once it becomes associated with the other demands specified above.

PEASANTS, PROLETARIANS, OR SEMIPROLETARIANS?

Ferra Martínez (1982), Quintero (1982), and Canabal Cristiani (1984) document that up to 80 percent of the land petitioners were temporary or permanent wage earners in agriculture or in 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 postcapitalist character in its global demands. Amazingly, even Roger Bartra (1982) talks about the Sonoran "peasantry."

In my view, the actors in these struggles should be properly considered agricultural semiproletarians, not peasants, in their production relations. They occupy several "class positions" during the year, but quite likely most of their income is derived from wage employment. Nevertheless, given the temporary nature of wage employment, strug-

gling for unionization is probably not the best strategy for this semi-proletariat. 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.

Furthermore, determining the structural position of classes in production is not enough to discern their political formation. There are two basic elements which, in my view, constitute classes politically: (1) the objects of struggles or movements, that is, the set of demands formulated by social agents; and (2) the character of organizations constructed in the struggle. The first element determines the class character of the movement, and the second defines its relationship with respect to the state, the ruling classes, and other subordinate groups and classes. The latter aspect is of great importance. It does not matter greatly whether agents in struggle are peasants or proletarians, because neither class is intrinsically revolutionary or conservative. It is rather the relationships which their organizations establish with other groups and classes that define their political autonomy (or lack of it). Thus the political character of classes is defined and redefined in struggle.

Politically, the struggle of the semiproletarians of northwest Mexico has a postcapitalist content, rather than a proletarian one. They have been immersed in relations of capitalist cooperation for several generations, which naturally gives them a preference for organizing production cooperatively. Because commoditization 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 not necessarily proletarian but postcapitalist, in that agents are resisting proletarianization by gaining full control of the overall production process. This struggle establishes the conditions for the appearance of a "free association of direct producers."

In sum, land as an object of struggle does not itself determine the class character of struggles in the countryside. In addition to successfully gaining access to land and other means of production, other elements of the political class character of struggles include: (1) the organization for production which is preferred and constructed (household or cooperative), (2) the character of class organizations vis-à-vis

the state and the bourgeoisie (oppositionist or collaborationist), and (3) the alliances with other left and popular (or right) organizations. As shown below, the Sonoran struggles resulted in a progressive post-capitalist struggle on all of these counts.

LAND EXPROPRIATION

A few days before President Echeverría's 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 37,000 hectares were irrigated land and the remainder were for grazing. Three-fourths of the irrigated land belonged to 21 families, several with close kinship relations. Almost 75 percent of the grazing land was held by only four persons, one of them Faustino Felix, ex-governor of Sonora. A total of 40 percent of the privately held irrigated land in the Yaqui valley was affected (Benjamin and Buell, 1985). The lands of 72 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 22 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, in order to continue his rule.

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, given that most of the beneficiaries were formally among their membership (Ferra Martínez, 1982; Camarena Castellanos and Encinas Terrazas, 1982).

By this time however, the constituency of those organizations had learned an important lesson from the FCI. They realized that if they received the land it had not been due to the intervention of the CNC, CCI, CAM, and UGOCM-Jacinto López, but the result of the independent mobilizations, and most of them soon withdraw from those corrupt and corporatist organizations (Canabal Cristiani, 1984:174). Sonora's agricultural semiproletariat had been immersed in the climate of oppo-

sitional 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 autonomy 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 as state apparatuses, acting mostly to control the masses, usually stepping over their interests to favor the state and the bourgeoisie.

In the process of land redistribution, Echeverría violated his own Agrarian Code of 1972 on two counts. First, the land distributed allowed for only 5 hectares of irrigated land for each new ejidatario, when the law specified a minimum of 10. This 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 surprised all sectors of Mexican society with their exemplary work in economic (productivity) and political (democracy) terms.

RECENT APPRAISALS OF THE COALITION OF COLLECTIVE EJIDOS

All of the evaluations of the experience of the Coalición de Ejidos Colectivos de los Valles del Yaqui y el Mayo (Coalition of Collective Ejidos of the Valleys, henceforth referred to as Yaqui and Mayo "coalition") suggest that it has been highly successful for direct producers and even for the nation. A reporter from *Unomásuno*, a Mexico City daily, specifically highlights the achievements in both productivity and political independence (Coo, 1984a, 1984b). He interviewed the local president of the rightist Partido de Acción Nacional (National Action Party, 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" (quoted in Coo, 1984a; 8, emphasis in original).

Another aspect discussed in the *Unomásuno* article is the autonomy for direct producers in constructing their own organization, with important degrees of independence from the state and the bourgeoisie (Coo, 1984b;7). This successful story responds to a great extent to 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 had imposed land redistribution. This might be called a "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.

More recently, 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).

Since favorable state interventions resulted directly from the initiative and political strength of direct producers, such interventions did not coopt their organizations. On the contrary, since the workers were the collective actors, the subject of the process, 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 to do for us." This new position involved, of course, gaining greater degrees of autonomy from the economic apparatuses of the state, namely from the Ejidal Bank (Gordillo, 1985a, 1985b, 1988). (After 1976 this bank was renamed the Banco Nacional de Crédito Rural, or simply Banrural.)

THE COALITION'S PROGRAM AND PERFORMANCE

Besides struggling to obtain the full 10 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 independence from the bank through a credit union; (3) establishing other productive activities such as dairy operations and textile enterprises from their cotton crop; and (4) con-

structing urban units to provide adequate housing for ejidatarios close to their work sites, and to facilitate the formation of community relations in their everyday lives. 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).

Since the beginning of its operation, the coalition managed to produce higher yields than the Yaqui valley's average. This accomplishment is noteworthy, for it places the coalition in direct competition with the local landowners, traditionally considered the most efficient of the Mexican agrarian bourgeoisie. The coalition's productivity has exceeded the regional average in wheat, cotton, soybeans, corn, sorghum, sesame, and garbanzo beans (see Table 1).

Table 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 sectors as well (Oswald, Rodríguez, and Flores, 1986: 282).

Except for 1980-1981 and 1985-1986 in wheat, and for 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 the coalition 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 compensated for by sufficiently increased yields. Therefore, the minimum yield differentials between the coalition ejidos and the private sector farms involve reduced costs for the coalition and a practice less damaging to the regional environment, by reducing their dependence on agrochemicals (Gaxiola, 1987).

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 battle that the new ejidatarios waged—successfully—against unfavorable state intervention. The lesson learned was that they would need to build a strong class

TABLE 1
Yield per Hectare of the Principal Crops of the Yaqui Valley, by
Type of Productive Organization, 1980-1986 (in metric tons)

<i>Wheat</i>				
<i>Agricultural Cycle</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Ejidal Sector</i>	<i>Private Sector</i>	<i>Regional Average</i>
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

<i>Soybeans^a</i>				
<i>Agricultural Cycle</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Ejidal Sector</i>	<i>Private Sector</i>	<i>Regional Average</i>
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

<i>Corn</i>				
<i>Agricultural Cycle</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Ejidal Sector</i>	<i>Private Sector</i>	<i>Regional Average</i>
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

^aData for the coalition are for the summer cycle in each year; those for 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, Coordinator), for coalition yields, and on data from the Departamento de Estadística Agrícola, Distrito del Riego 148, Cajeme, Sonora, Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos (information on District 41, Yaqui valley), for ejidal, private sector, and regional average yields.

organization not only to defend themselves against denunciations but also to propose concrete alternatives for production and 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 insurance fees to the government-run Asegurador Nacional a Agrícola y Ganadera, S.A. (National Agricultural and Livestock Insurance Company, 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 all those fees, and it provided broader coverage than ANAGSA did: 100 percent of crop losses instead of ANAGSA's 70 percent. The bank immediately opposed this initiative by threatening to withhold further credit to 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 agricultural insurance, by 1982 it had capital of 41,876,787 pesos. With ANAGSA, the ejidatarios never knew the destiny of their payments.

The struggle for autonomy from Banrural, however, had to go further. The coalition decided to create its own credit union, along with a marketing department, for thus far the bank had been in charge of marketing its crops. The credit union began operations in 1979. By 1982 there were 43 member ejidos, organized in three "unions of ejidos," and 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 Ejidal Unions in Chiapas requested a concession to form its own credit union from the Ministry of Finance in 1981 (Coalición, 1982).

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

The internal organization of the coalition allows and encourages the direct participation of all of its members. Of the 76 ejidos that were constituted after the 1976 expropriation, 50 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 (in the comisariado ejidal), a president, secretary, and treasurer,

every three years. Election for consecutive terms is not permitted, in order to avoid 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 representatives from each ejido (presidents of the *comisariado ejidal*) meets monthly, and there is a president of the coalition. In addition various other departments are dedicated to special functions, such as the technical department and the department of marketing.

The coalition employs 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 necessary to make decisions for themselves, within their democratic organization.

Since the initial land grants did not include land for housing facilities, most ejidatarios had widely dispersed living arrangements, usually some distance from their work sites. Thus the coalition had to engage in a struggle to acquire additional land for an ejido urbanization project. It finally received the support from the governor of Sonora, Samuel Ocaña, and the coalition 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, day-care centers, and recreation facilities, it is the largest peasant housing project in all of Mexico" (Benjamin and Buell, 1985: 9). The project has implications for bringing the ejidatarios closer together into urban communities, closer to the agricultural work sites, reducing unemployment, and, of course, providing housing for their families. The latter aspect is very highly regarded by ejidatarios, most of whom did not own a house before the urbanization project. Given the very high 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 which have developed from the coalition's experience emphasize a strong work ethic, efficiency, cooperative work, solidarity with other subaltern classes, and independence from the state. In a survey conducted in 1981 of 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," etc.), a large majority supports the collective organization. With regard to 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: 124-138). A 1984 survey showed 68 percent giving unqualified support to collective organization (Oswald, Rodriguez, and Flores, 1986: 363)

Some of the new cultural traits, which favor collectivism, solidarity, and participation, are manifested 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 general assembly in each ejido constitute a force which prevents the entry of reaction; that they do not seek to solve their problems through personal solutions or by sectorializing 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 of the Sonoran collective ejidos, sponsored by the coalition itself, 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 the their own struggle.

EPILOGUE

The current economic crisis in Mexico, marked by continued, sharp devaluations of the peso, has made imports almost prohibitive in a context where most of the industrial enterprises and modern agriculture 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 imports of machinery from the United States, specifically from International Harvester, Ford International, and Allis Chalmers (Benjamin and Buell, 1985: 10).

At a recent meeting of scholars and agrarian leaders in Culiacán, Sinaloa, Juan Leyva Mendivil, former president of the coalition, presented a paper as a representative of the Alianza Campesina del Noroeste (Northwestern Peasant Alliance, or ACN), which includes ejidos from Sonora and Sinaloa. The paper is dedicated to an economic analysis of the effects of the current crisis on agricultural production in their ejidos.

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 thresher; by 1986 they needed 965 metric tons to replace it (Leyva Mendivil, 1987).

Given the relatively small amount of land per ejidatario obtained in 1976 (5 hectares), external employment continues to be a requirement. In a study conducted (in 1982) by a group from the National University of Agriculture, Chapingo, among 5 percent of the ejidatarios, 60 percent of current income comes 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 a couple of years ago. 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

currently faces great economic difficulties in paying for the gin, and requires a loan of 500 million pesos (about U.S. \$214,600) to sustain its overall operation (Díaz Leal, 1987).

In 1987, in the midst of such difficulties and the electoral conjuncture in Mexico,⁸ Governor Rodolfo Felix Valdéz and his functionaries were strongly pressuring for 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, 44 presidents of *comisariados ejidales* met with the governor to explain the coalition's statutory position to remain independent from *all* political organizations. Nevertheless, one of the three unions of *ejidos* which 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 that although most of the coalition leaders have personally rejoined the CNC and the PRI, all of those interviewed in November 1987 thought 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 strength and political mobilization.

THEORETICAL SUMMARY

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, they were somewhat of a disillusionment for proletaristas. Roger Bartra (1982), for example, interpreted this agrarian movement as a last resort of "technocratic populism" to hold down agrarian unrest. To the contrary, 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 3 or 4 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 paper, one must look at the totality of demands in order to assess their character. Furthermore, the analysis of the objects of struggle needs to be supplemented with the analysis of class organizations for struggle. Only with these two criteria 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. My question in this regard is whether Warman is actually 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 labeled the class agents as "peasants," attending merely to the demand for land, when they were actually a semiproletariat highly dependent on wages (if we maintain a production-based, structural, concept of economic class). Second, he assumes that the initiative for land redistribution came from the state, when it was actually the opposite: The movement imposed on the state the policy of land redistribution, given the regional correlation of class forces.

Capitalist development in the Mexican countryside has resulted in a process of "depeasantization without full proletarianization" (Bartra and Otero, 1987). Strictly speaking, the new economic subjects which emerge are semiproletarians: They cannot rely solely on wages to fulfill their reproduction needs. Therefore, the rest of the relations they enter to attain economic reproduction may 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 for the study of political class formation. I have suggested the importance of two other mediating determinants: Culture and state intervention.

NOTES

1. Martínez-Alier (1977) noted this for the Peruvian peasants and agricultural laborers. The former struggled for unions and the latter for land.
2. For an intellectual history of the Mexican polemic, see CEPAL (1982), Harris (1978), and Hewitt de Alcántara (1984).
3. I use this term as an "ideal type." In some cases we will find collective *ejidos* which tend to hire significant amounts of wage labor, beyond the labor power of their members. In these cases, the ejido will be closer to a capitalist cooperative than to a postcapitalist one.
4. The PRI refers to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (or Institutional Revolutionary Party) which has been in power since 1929 (with various names).
5. PPS is the new name of the Partido Popular Socialista, formed in 1947. The PPM is a splinter of PPS, the break occurring in 1975.
6. Information provided by Carlos Ferra Martínez in personal interviews with the author in Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico, January 13-16, 1987.
7. The right of amparo guarantees a powerful legal weapon to landowners against action under the agrarian law.
8. Presidential elections held in July 1988.

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