THE AGRARIAN QUESTION IN MEXICO

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LA BATALLA EN EL MÉXICO RURAL. By GUSTAVO ESTEVA. (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1980. Pp. 243.)

MEXICO'S AGRICULTURAL DILEMMA. By P. LAMARTINE YATES. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1981. Pp. 291. $19.95 cloth, $8.95 paper.)

¿ES MÉXICO UN PAÍS AGRÍCOLA? UN ANÁLISIS GEOGRÁFICO. By ATLÁNTIDA COLL-HURTADO. (Mexico City: Siglo Veintuino Editores, 1982. Pp. 214.)

EL FIN DE LA AUTOSUFICIENCIA ALIMENTARIA. By DAVID BARKIN and BLANCA SUÁREZ. (Mexico City: Centro de Ecodesarrollo and Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1982. Pp. 207.)

EL COMPLEJO DE FRUTAS Y LEGUMBRES EN MÉXICO: TRANSNACIONALES EN AMÉRICA LATINA. By RUTH RAMA and RAÚL VIGORITO. (Mexico City: Instituto de Estudios Transnacionales and Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1979. Pp. 344.)

TABAMEX: UN CASO DE INTEGRACIÓN VERTICAL DE LA AGRICULTURA. By JESÚS JÁUREGUI, MURILO HUSCHICK, HILARIO ITRIAGO, and ANA ISABEL GARCÍA TORRES. (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones del Desarrollo Rural and Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1980. Pp. 380.)

MAÍZ: POLÍTICA INSTITUTIONAL Y CRISIS AGRÍCOLA. By CARLOS MONTAÑEZ and HORACIO ABURTO. (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones del Desarrollo Rural and Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1979. Pp. 249.)

THE SISTEMA ALIMENTARIO MEXICANO (SAM): ELEMENTS OF A PROGRAM OF ACCELERATED PRODUCTION OF FOODSTUFFS IN MEXICO. By CASSIO LUISELLI. Research Report Series no. 22. (La Jolla: Center for U.S.–Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1982. Pp. 24. $3.00.)

STATECRAFT AND AGRICULTURE IN MEXICO, 1980–1982: DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY CONSIDERATIONS IN THE MAKING OF MEXICAN AGRICULTURAL POLICY. By JOHN J. BAILEY and JOHN E. LINK. Working Papers in U.S.–Mexican Studies no. 23. (La Jolla: Program in United States–Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981. Pp. 40. $3.00)

DEVELOPMENT POLICYMAKING IN MEXICO: THE SISTEMA ALIMENTARIO

MEXICANO (SAM). By MICHAEL R. REDCLIFT. Working Papers in U.S.–Mexican Studies no. 24 (La Jolla: Program in United States–Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981. Pp. 26. $3.00.)

A distinctive relationship has existed in Mexico during the twentieth century between the state and the countryside.[1] The state has projected a model of agricultural development, dominated by the uneasy coexistence of private and social (that is, *ejido*) property, in which the state pursues an active regulatory role by supplying or subsidizing inputs for producers and by distributing agricultural commodities to consumers. This relationship between state and countryside has suffered severe problems, including bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption, peasant resistance, entrepreneurial speculation and usury, private landowners' pressures for expansion, drought, and international market fluctuations, among others.

Undoubtedly, the unique aspect of the relationship between the Mexican state and the countryside is the ejido. The Constitution of 1917 established the ejido as a legal person.[2] Since this date and especially since the agrarian reform, the Mexican state has taken the responsibility of directing the destinies of those peasants who obtained usufruct rights as *ejidatarios*. Some observers of Mexican society and history have argued that the ejido is Mexico's ultimate hope. Of course, they disagree as to the advantages of the ejido. There is growing recognition that control of the land itself does not guarantee development or well-being because the ejidatarios are subjected to vertical manipulation through financing and marketing. Most observers cling resolutely to the belief that the advances conquered by the agrarian reform should not be rolled back. The salient message emanating from rural Mexico, as perceived by the urban working and middle classes, may well be the threat posed by the "privatization" of the countryside, a process of transformation that arouses nationalistic opposition.

Throughout most of this century, Mexicans have managed to feed themselves and to produce surpluses for export to other countries, primarily the United States. In recent years, however, the cumulative legacy of Mexican agrarian problems has become critical. A series of poor harvests, combined with massive importations of food from the United States, has created a gloomy agricultural outlook. With the onset of the petroleum era in the mid-1970s, public awareness of the agrarian crisis has increased dramatically. Because the United States is both Mexico's primary market for petroleum exports and the source for the foodstuffs that replace sagging domestic production, Mexicans have come to realize that they are trading a nonrenewable patrimony, petroleum, for food that they historically were able to produce for themselves. The image of a

direct exchange of Mexican oil for American grain has become a national nightmare.

The petroleum era has also witnessed bold changes in Mexican agricultural policy. Under López Portillo, Mexico witnessed its first comprehensive agricultural policy, the Sistema Alimentario Mexicano (SAM), as well as the portentious Ley de Fomento Agropecuario. Oil-rich Mexico embarked upon a daring path, strewn with risks and adversaries, and was watched closely by other countries that have the potential to feed themselves but, for various reasons, do not. One consequence of these changes in agricultural policy is that many of the commonplace assumptions used in discussions of Mexican agriculture—about the nature of the peasantry, capitalism, and the state—require reexamination. This essay aspires to contribute to such a reexamination by reviewing a number of books and reports that represent the nexus of scholarship on the Mexican agrarian question published between 1979 and 1982. As a body of literature, these sources demonstrate a sophistication in approaching the agrarian question in Mexico that would be difficult to match in any other country in Latin America.

In calling this issue "the agrarian question," rather than "the peasant question," I am asserting that the crisis in rural Mexico is not limited to the peasantry or even to those who deal with peasants. Furthermore, the logic of referring to Mexico's ejidatarios and small landowners as peasants strikes me as less salient than it did a decade ago. "The agrarian question" more precisely focuses discussion and poses the problem of appropriate terminology. The issue is fundamentally the control of not only land but also its products, from financing to production and marketing, matters that affect all Mexicans whether they reside in the countryside or the surging urban areas.

Anthropologist Arturo Warman has explored the important distinction between *política agrícola* and *política agraria*, using it as a counterpoint to evaluate the trajectory of Mexican agricultural policy since the Revolution of 1910.[3] Política agrícola connotes a technical orientation, stressing productivity, mechanization, and the concentration of landed resources. Política agraria connotes a social orientation, emphasizing the redistribution of land, so that land plays a specific social function not associated with private property. This distinction is not between capitalism and socialism, even though the adherents of each side sometimes portray it as such; and although the distinction hinges upon the issue of what ends agriculture should serve, it would be too simplistic to state that política agrícola means subjecting politics to economics while política agraria is the obverse. It is more to the point to assert that política agraria and política agrícola exist in a dialectical relationship, each implying and setting limits upon the other.

Gustavo Esteva, author of *La batalla en el México rural*, is described by Michael Redclift as "Mexico's most articulate Neo-Populist thinker." Under President Luis Echeverría (1970–76), Esteva was director of CONASUPO (Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares), the state agency charged with distributing subsidized food in areas not adequately served by commercial markets; currently, he is a professor of rural sociology at UNAM. In 1980 Esteva was vice-president of the Mexican organizing committee for the Fifth World Congress of Rural Sociology, which convened in Mexico City and for which this book was prepared.[4] Of all the works reviewed in this essay, only *La batalla en el México rural* serves as a suitable introduction to the agrarian question in Mexico, prepared as it was for both foreign and national readerships. Esteva's book breaks no new ground on the Mexican agrarian question, but it offers an intelligent overview of rural Mexico that cannot be found elsewhere.

The book is organized into three sections. In the first on "the field of battle," Esteva provides an overview of Mexico's social and economic conditions, drawing incisive comparisons with other Third World and Latin American countries. He also describes the agrarian reform ("frustrated dream, unfinished nightmare, incipient project"), evaluates the green revolution as being opposed (rather than complementary) to the agrarian reform, and traces the history of relations between the state and the countryside ("the story of an impossible love"—"tormented romance, marriage of convenience, divorce due to impotence"). The second section of chapters concerns the protagonists in rural Mexico, human and nonhuman. Esteva discusses not only agriculturalists, cattlemen, and agribusinesses, but peasants and rural proletarians as well as the different agricultural commodities produced in contemporary Mexico's varied regions.

The third section, "Denouement and Perspectives," confirms Redclift's judgment: Esteva is an articulate phrasemaker, in a class with perhaps only Roger Bartra, and he is an inveterate populist (in a general, descriptive sense, referring to the tendency to argue in parables that emphasize the moral themes of state guidance, collectivism, and local initiative). For example, Esteva writes in defense of utopic alternatives: "At the current crossroads, only the utopias—the systems that still have no place in the world—appear possible. The only impossibility is maintaining the conventional trajectory . . ." (p. 185). At another point, he declares that the rural people of Mexico are left with no "other path than to construct their own option" (p. 209).

Esteva defends the populist streak in the Mexican state, dismisses Marx for his ill-cited statement about French peasants being a "sack of potatoes," and ends the book predictably with an exchange between Emiliano Zapata and Francisco Villa in 1914, in which Villa assures Za-

pata that the people really rule and will see who are their true friends (p. 219). In terms of Warman's distinction between política agrícola and política agraria, *La batalla en el México rural* is unabashedly *agrarista*, coming down strongly in support of enlightened state influence in the countryside for social and political reasons. Esteva believes that Mexico still is predominantly a peasant society and that this peasant force is critical in determining the directions that Mexico will take in the following decades.

Lamartine Yates's book, *Mexico's Agricultural Dilemma*, is the most explicitly technical of the books reviewed here.[5] An economist, Yates boasts over a quarter-century as an adviser to the Mexican government as well as extensive experience with the Food and Agriculture Organization and other international institutions. *Mexico's Agricultural Dilemma* contains the chapters expected in a book on agricultural economics—the demand for food, the availability of land, irrigation, livestock, finance, employment, and so on; but the book apparently was not written to convince other agricultural economists that Mexico is in trouble. Numerous tables and illustrations notwithstanding, Yates's book is not a staid monograph, but an impassioned act of advocacy, as is Esteva's, but from a markedly different perspective. Yates argues that to resolve "the Mexican dilemma," the state must undertake a serious, efficient, and honest agricultural policy (read: política agrícola) that would subordinate politically motivated social concerns to tough-minded economic facts. The consequence for the country of continuing current policies will be catastrophic, he predicts. In support of his argument, Yates presents fifty tables and illustrations and discusses many of their implications. Some of his observations are matters of common sense that are obvious to anyone familiar with the foibles of Mexican agriculture, while other observations are artifacts of a particular view of society, agriculture, and the contemporary world.

The technical part of the book is contained in the first six chapters and in several subsequent ones. But when he ceases dealing with "livestock expansion" and "land availabilities" and starts dealing with "farm people" and "a new agrarian reform," Yates discloses the ideological argument that is less explicit earlier in the book. In chapters 7, 8, and 11, the reader discovers what kind of política agraria flows from Yates's política agrícola.

A key element of Yates's ideology is veneration of the risk-taking, modernizing agricultural entrepreneur (read: capitalist farmer) and a corresponding disregard for Mexico's ejidatarios and *comuneros*. For Yates, the comuneros (who possess in usufruct 40 percent of the nation's agricultural land) include many who are inept and undedicated, some of whom would prefer to be relieved from the yoke of subsistence agriculture if they had reasonable alternatives. While it would be easy to pick

out quotations and phrases that demonstrate Yates's prejudices toward the ejidatarios and comuneros, such a list would obscure the essential point that Yates is hostile to any group or institution that inhibits the expansion of capitalist agriculture.

Although this book is not about capitalism per se, its argument clearly favors the iron triad of productivity, mechanization, and the concentration of land. Yates's reluctance to employ or at least refer to the Marxist argot that is more familiar to his Latin American counterparts would be understandable, were it not for the fact that his own ambiguous language leaves the reader ignorant of the social and historical context of Mexico's agrarian question.[6] To expropriate the term *agrarian reform* and use it to advocate what amounts to a reforma agrícola is to write the ejido and the communal villages out of Mexican history and substitute a poor imitation of North American capitalist agriculture.

A basic problem in assessing the Mexican agrarian question is the peril of viewing any recent year or period as a "watershed" before which agricultural conditions and policy differed qualitatively from those that followed. By the time the statistics catch up with the rapidly evolving Mexican economy and society, the salience of the "watershed" may well have disappeared. For example, widespread consensus exists that the 1970s were critical for Mexico, marked as they were by the contrasting presidential styles of Echeverría and López Portillo. A related problem is attempting to compare different sets of data for the same period, ritually cleansing the data so that they are useful for up-to-the-moment comparisons. The various official documents that give statistics of one kind or another are not only inconsistent with regard to definitions and coverage, they often contradict one another. Gustavo Esteva has written that the "search for information on rural Mexico is in good measure a metaphysical exploration" (p. 9).

These problems are confronted in different ways in Yates's *Mexico's Agricultural Dilemma* and Atlántida Coll-Hurtado's *¿Es México un país agrícola?* Yates harbors no false hopes about the quality of Mexican agricultural statistics. With a set of largely implicit assumptions about Mexico and (capitalist) agriculture, he revises the census and other official data sources to derive his own estimates, for example, of how many farm families there are. While none of the procedures he employees seems ill-advised in its own right, the final estimates (for example, 3.3 million farm families) do not seem sufficiently grounded for the political usage for which Yates devised them. Esteva's comments on the metaphysics of data on rural Mexico might easily be applied to Yates's calculations.

Coll-Hurtado, in contrast, depends entirely upon the 1970 census in *¿Es México up país agrícola?* She provides ninety-six illustrations and graphs and forty-eight tables of statistical data to support her discussion.

Unlike Yates, Coll-Hurtado is less concerned with revising the census reports than with generating new information from available sources in order to facilitate an evaluation of contending theories, especially Marxist theory. She therefore gives estimates of variable and constant capital, according to type of land tenure, and related tables.[7]

In fact, most of the book consists of data that have been manipulated to prove useful information about Mexican agriculture, especially in the form of comparison between the states. There is enough documentation in this book to fuel numerous debates about the Mexican economy at the time Luis Echeverría became president.

The unequivocal answer to Coll-Hurtado's title question about whether Mexico an agricultural country is given in the last page of text. "Mexico is not an agricultural country: it is a country in which a very small group of producers ever increasingly concentrates land, capital and also men" (p. 137). Since the book appeared in 1982, shortly before the anticipated publication of the 1980 census results, one wonders what question it has answered. If Mexico was not agricultural in 1970, what is it now? The problem with *¿Es México un país agrícola?* is that it is a body of serviceable data in search of a question. If Coll-Hurtado means that Mexico is not agricultural because fewer and fewer Mexicans are involved directly in agriculture, she did not need to provide such exhaustive documentation. If she means that Mexico is not agricultural because so few people control land, credit, inputs, and so on, I would have to object on definitional grounds. Her book, in the last analysis, is a geographical analysis, with a fair dosage of Marxist theory thrown in to show the relevence of the data.

The four volumes published by Editorial Nueva Imagen on specific aspects of agriculture in Mexico represent very sophisticated approaches to the country's agrarian question. *El fin de la autosuficiencia alimentaria* by David Barkin and Blanca Suárez is an updated version of an earlier book with a more telling title, *El complejo de granos en México*, that was published in typescript by the Centro de Ecodesarrollo (CECODES), copublisher with Nueva Imagen of the present volume. The Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Transnacionales (ILET) copublished the book by Ruth Rama and Raúl Vigorito, *El complejo de frutas y legumbres en México: transnacionales en América Latina*. The other two books concerning tobacco and corn were copublished by Nueva Imagen and the Centro de Investigaciones del Desarrollo Rural (CIDER).

For me, *El fin de autosuficiencia alimentaria* is the most impressive book of the titles reviewed here. The definition of key terms, such as "the internationalization of Mexican agriculture," are sharp and convincing. I particularly like the emphasis upon "agroindustrial complexes," which features a manageable level of abstraction between microcosmic studies by anthropologists and the macrocosmic studies by economists. This

approach also offers an alternative to regional analysis, which has come into vogue.

The center of the analysis is CONASUPO, which not only buys grains and other agricultural products from cultivators at guaranteed prices, but also sells the same to consumers, either directly through its stores or indirectly through commercial markets and industrial processors. Depending upon how it is directed and supported, CONASUPO is potentially the key institutional link in any Mexican agricultural policy.

Of course, the history of CONASUPO and its precursors to a large degree is the history of recent Mexican agricultural policy, implicitly or explicitly. From the early efforts by Cárdenas in the 1930s to arrest the effects of inflation and scarcity to López Portillo's Sistema Alimentario Mexicano of the 1980s, these agricultural policies have defined a role for the state in adjusting the disequilibria of supply and demand, especially through pricing mechanisms. These mechanisms, in turn, have reinforced the chronic conflicts between rural and urban Mexico, between those who sell at controlled prices and those who buy subsidized food. In this sense, CONASUPO's shifting fortunes reflect new urban priorities more than any innovative vision of the Mexican countryside.

When CONASUPO emerged in 1961, it was limited to purchasing maize, beans, wheat, and other basic agricultural commodities at guaranteed prices. It did not distribute these products in rural areas, only in the growing urban centers. CONASUPO's role changed in the second half of the 1960s in the face of higher prices in the world market, when guaranteed prices no longer propelled agricultural production in Mexico. Instead, this period witnessed the florescence of capitalist agriculture, twentieth-century style, especially for export and for the consumption of those social classes that benefited from the modernization of Mexico. By the end of the decade, the country was riding an impressive tide of exports that quickly ebbed.

Echeverría used CONASUPO in an attempt to recover national self-sufficiency in food production. He augmented the functions performed by CONASUPO, many of which were applied directly at the community level, but eventually his policy of "stabilizing development" (*el desarrollo estabilizador*) ran up against the accumulated crises of Mexican economy and society, as well as unpropitious external conditions.

When López Portillo took over late in 1976, he turned away from many of the policies of his predecessor, particularly those regarding CONASUPO and other interventionist agencies of the state. By 1980, however, López Portillo picked up the theme of national food self-sufficiency and assigned CONASUPO a vital role in a network of state institutions and policies. The extreme inequality within Mexican society and the country's proximity to the vast U.S. market make it highly unlikely that Miguel de la Madrid will dispense with massive state regulation of

the market for basic foods, at least to the extent that the public treasury can sustain this involvement. The recent increases in controlled prices represent less a change of policy than an adjustment to shrinking state revenues.

Barkin and Suárez also provide the most convincing rationale for food self-sufficiency that I have read, one that avoids a narrow focus on the fallacy of comparative advantages. Their discussion mentions the Sistema Alimentario Mexicano only obliquely, but could be taken as a basis for future policies of a similar bent.

In a book that should be read with Barkin and Suárez's study of grains, Ruth Rama and Raúl Vigorito focus on the role of transnational corporations in what they call "the complex of fruits and vegetables in Mexico." Their book is more fully documented than the one on grains, and the authors take more pains in drawing out the implications of transnational capitalist agriculture. Also employing the perspective of agroindustrial complexes, Rama and Vigorito demonstrate which areas of Mexico's agricultural economy are dominated by transnationals, how this domination was achieved, and what the consequences have been.

Their purpose in identifying a transnational complex in Mexican agriculture and industry is to be able to specify how the elements of the complex respond differently to the maneuvers of capital and the state when compared with other complexes that are not controlled by transnational firms. Rama and Vigorito are concerned with the assignment of risk in the contracts given out by the transnationals, the displacement of traditional food crops, and the implications for rural employment, as well as with the manipulation of taste reflected in advertising for these products within Mexico.

The distinction between "transnational" and "national" corporations is difficult to maintain, partly due to Mexican law regarding foreign investment but in larger part due to the complex character of international finance. Capital *is* international—that is, it respects no national boundaries but is appropriated at different levels within the capitalist world system. Mexican banks, for example, belonged (before López Portillo nationalized them) to international consortia, which took Mexican assets and offered them as loans, along with the assets of other foreign banks, to the Mexican state, which in turn often assists national firms in obtaining credit. At what point does a firm cease being national and become transnational? If a national firm succeeds in holding a share of the domestic market, will its relations of production differ decisively from those of the transnational firm? Ultimately, and unhappily, this distinction finally falls back upon cultural factors rather than the social factors that ostensibly are the focus of inquiry.

Tabamex: un caso de integración vertical de la agricultura is the first published report on a program of research carried out primarily in the

state of Nayarit on the "state agroindustry" of Tabacos Mexicanos. This volume details the relations of production in tobacco cultivation, processing, and marketing. Subsequent volumes are planned to deal with the functioning of the production units and with the salience of the domestic units that pertain to tobacco cultivation.

Tabamex is a state agroindustry (as contrasted with "agribusiness") that converts the capital advanced by national and international tobacco corporations into production goals, quotas, and other determinants of the cultivators' livelihood. It also places their surplus tobacco on the international market. In this sense, Tabamex is an intermediary that maintains partial state regulation of an industry that is otherwise subject to the vagaries of the vast international market in tobacco. It guarantees the quality and quantity of tobacco needed by the corporations and at the same time asserts a vital role for the state in the production of this nonfood crop. The state's participation helps generate foreign exchange and prevent the loss of foreign exchange that would occur if Mexico imported tobacco.

One reason why *Tabamex* is important for those who organize their scholarship in terms of social-class categories is that the tobacco cultivators are ejidatarios who are provided quotas, credit, inputs, and technical assistance. All the steps of cultivation are strictly regimented. This militaristic agricultural regime is not unique to tobacco in contemporary Mexico, but applies to sugarcane, coffee, and other crops as well. In this regime, the ejidatarios produce little if any of their own subsistence, dedicating their lands to the cultivation of a nonfood crop, which the state as intermediary regulates for growers, processors, and consumers. It is difficult to perceive any *agrarismo* in the relations between the state and the ejidatarios, who have much less space for maneuvering in bureaucratic channels than do the food producers, who are given relatively strict guidelines and schedules for planting, applying irrigation, fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, and harvesting.

Is Tabamex the exception or the rule in Mexican agriculture? Formerly it was possible to distinguish between the kinds of roles for the state, one as intermediary (as in tobacco) and another as price guarantor (as in maize), but in recent times the distinction between these two roles has become difficult to maintain. What are we to call the contemporary, specialized, usufruct cultivators who provide food and nonfood agricultural commodities to various organs of the state for processing and marketing? Are they "peasants"? If so, this term appears to lose any specificity that it might have. Are they "proletarians"? I would resist any analogy that holds that the state is to the peasant as the capitalist is to the proletarian. The problem cannot be finessed with reference to hybrids like "peasant-proletarians." More than any other issue discussed here,

this question reflects the necessity of recasting fundamental concepts of the Mexican agrarian question.

Another issue dealt with intelligently in *Tabamex* is the relation between agriculture and industry. The book makes its most significant contribution through the concept of the "vertical integration of agriculture," by which the authors mean the superimposed levels from financing to cultivatation, processing, and marketing within the world market.[8] Caribbeanists may debate Jesús Jáuregui and his coauthors over how original this concept is, as if generations of studies of contemporary plantations did not exist. In any case, by judiciously combining Marxist theory with their own data, the authors demonstrate the relative constraints of agriculture upon industry and vice versa.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of *Tabamex* is that its authors are anthropologists. First of all, anthropologists typically are not inclined to undertake such conceptually sophisticated, tightly organized, and profusely documented studies of agroindustries. Second, anthropology as an intellectual tradition has had little to add to any serious study of agroindustry beyond what Julian Steward, Eric Wolf, Sidney Mintz, and the other contributors to *The People of Puerto Rico* said almost thirty years ago.[9] In the first sense, the book should give North American anthropologists some ideas about what they might do in studies of "peasants," "markets," and similar topics. Regarding the second sense, there is a great deal of anthropology in *Tabamex*, principally in the methodology employed.[10] The theory, however, is Marxist. One of the accomplishments of *Tabamex* should be to demonstrate that the pursuit of explanation is not devoid of content in Marxist scholarship.

No other agricultural product better symbolizes Mexico's past and present than does maize. It is therefore appropriate that a monograph on maize has been published among the recent studies of Mexican agriculture in the late 1970s and early 1980s. *Maíz* consists of three essays, two by Carlos Montañez and one by Horacio Aburto, that were originally written independently but were considered sufficiently related by CIDER to be published together as a monograph. Unfortunately, *Maíz* is not on a par with the other monographs reviewed here. Montañez's contributions include an obligatory essay on the state and another on the policy of guaranteed prices. Montañez claims that his essays were prepared for didactic purposes, but it is hard to see how they accomplished that purpose. They are not adequately focused, nor do they advance an argument original enough to warrant almost two-thirds of the text of this book. The essay on the state pales in comparison with other essays on this topic and hardly mentions maize.

The contrast with Aburto's essay on "production, consumption and pricing policy" could not be sharper. Aburto presents a well-

documented, point-by-point analysis of agricultural policy regarding maize and its principal competitors (such as sorghum) during the period 1950–76. Using the year 1966 as the turning point in the decline of maize cultivation, Aburto reveals how the theory of comparative advantages led to disincentives for maize cultivators. This exercise is important in terms of the distinction made by Arturo Warman between política agraria and política agrícola because it reveals how the switch to comparative advantages in agricultural policy was based upon false assumptions about the consumptive behavior of Mexicans in the post–World War II era, maintaining for example that development would mean a decline in the consumption of maize. Aburto's reasoning is precise and evokes a sense of the gradual changes that suddenly left Mexico an importer of basic foodstuffs in the 1970s, facing a major crisis. The documentation consists of a progression of graphs and tables that is a model for the use of official statistics. Aburto's calculations of the consumption of maize by different categories of cultivators are more convincing than, say, Yates's calculations of the number of farm families.

In summary, *Maíz* would have been a much better book had it included only the essay by Aburto, expanded to explore more fully some topics that he could only mention. Apparently, we will have to await the publication of reports based upon Warman's study of maize for a fuller treatment of this most basic of foods.

Although these books are among the most recent to be published on Mexican agriculture, they cannot deal adequately with the last two years of López Portillo's administration, which ended in December of 1982. In addition to his nationalizing the banks and presiding over a series of disastrous currency devaluations, López Portillo will be remembered for innovative agricultural policymaking, especially with regard to the Sistema Alimentario Mexicano (SAM) and the Ley de Fomento Agropecuario (LFA). As Fernando Rello observed, these two programs are the most important programs of the López Portillo *sexenio*.[11]

The basic idea behind SAM was to use the revenues from exported petroleum to finance in a massive, but coordinated, way the salvation of Mexican agriculture so that Mexico would not remain vulnerable to pressures from food exporters—mainly the United States—to exploit its national patrimony. The name for SAM is significant in several ways. In contrast to earlier master plans for agriculture, SAM employs the perspective of systems theory, even if this theory is applied with a technical, rather than a social, orientation. The acronym itself is noteworthy: it wryly exploits the nickname of the United States to refer to Mexico's attempt to reestablish food self-sufficiency, introduced at a time when "food power" and U.S. hegemony are virtually synonymous.

Although not all of SAM's aspects were immediately disclosed, its principal components were firmly stated. SAM was aimed at increasing

the production of staples (especially maize, beans, and wheat) by means of subsidies, price supports, and crop insurance in order to "share the risk" between the state and the peasantry. SAM also included an educational nutrition program based on the concept of the basic food basket, or *canasta básica*.

SAM obviously was controversial from the outset, although it also enjoyed widespread support. The left was somewhat optimistic because several members of the left served as advisers in drafting SAM, and even the agribusiness community came out in support of SAM after it became obvious that money could be made by all. It has occasioned some confusion and hostility, however. Lamartine Yates, for example, writes: "If SAM is really pursued with vigor, it will represent a triumph of the demogogues, who preach self-sufficiency in 'basic foodstuffs,' over the economists mindful of comparative costs who advocate the importation of animal feeds, so as to achieve a greater output of milk and meat, thereby giving more employment and improving the levels of human nutrition" (p. 262).

Confusion over what SAM really entailed is not limited to those who are opposed to it. Levy and Székely observe that "a rather atypical relationship emerged between the state (as employer) and the peasant (as wage earner)."[12] The analogy between the alliance established in SAM and the relationship of employer to employee only obfuscates the immense change in Mexican society attempted by the López Portillo administration through SAM and LFA.

The Ley de Fomento Agropecuario was oriented toward increasing the penetration of private capital in the countryside, conceptualized as the "recapitalization" of agriculture, in response to the flight of capital from the rural areas to the cities or to the exterior, with consequent ill effects upon production and employment. Perhaps the most important aspect of the LFA was the creation of newly defined "production units," in which ejidos, or communal landholding units, are encouraged to associate with small landowners (because by definition there are no large landowners in Mexico) or with other ejidos for the purpose of soliciting credit, enjoying favored status for low-interest loans and other state-sponsored supports. The LFA in effect creates another level of land tenure, incorporating private and social property, supposedly without affecting either. The immense significance of the new production units is that they bring to a stark end the agrarian reform of the postrevolutionary era and usher in a new era of technical solutions. Indeed, many observers saw SAM and the LFA as contradictory, as if they were oriented toward mutually exclusive goals.

The Research Report Series of the Center for U.S.–Mexican Studies at the University of California at San Diego provides three important documents for comprehending SAM, one by a Mexican directly involved

in devising and executing SAM and two by foreign analysts.[13] Cassio Luiselli, as Coordinator-General of the National System of Evaluation, served in López Portillo's cabinet and was the principal architect of SAM. His report represents an evaluation of SAM at its first anniversary, early in 1981, when the state had obtained some feedback on SAM's successes and failures and López Portillo still had almost two years remaining in his administration.

Luiselli traces the history of SAM and explains its components. He insists that SAM is a "strategy" rather than a "program" because it represents "an attack on poverty itself," not "on the problem of nutrition or on the crisis in food production" (p. 4). According to Luiselli, the attack on poverty involves the difficult process of establishing a national consensus, in which it is necessary to "renew the alliance between the State and the rural population":

> I believe that today there is a real and a legitimate basis—not just a rhetorical one—for rejuvenating the old alliance which gave the Mexican Revolution its distinctive political character. The State must be able to count on the participation of the rural population in the effort to rescue Mexican agriculture. And the State must provide that population with a new role in the protection of national sovereignty. We must initiate a new kind of relationship between the rural population and the State. (P. 5)

Luiselli's emphasis on the alliance between the state and the rural population in the attack on poverty raises some fundamental questions about SAM. In the first place, there is sufficient novelty in contemporary Mexican agricultural policy to confound the notion that the new alliance is consistent with the one established seventy years ago during a civil war. What does the new alliance portend for Mexico's small-scale cultivators, including the ejidatarios? Will they still exist?

More importantly, one cannot attack poverty without attacking its counterpart, wealth, specifically capitalist wealth. In no way does SAM represent an attack upon capitalism. It does envision the elimination of intermediaries, who add cost but not value to agricultural commodities. Intermediaries, however, do not comprise the essence of agrarian capitalism.

SAM is, as Luiselli insists, a strategy, introduced at a particular moment in Mexican history and subject to the discontinuities of successive presidential regimes. For this reason, some Mexicans have called it "conjunctural," meaning that it will not survive the historical moment of its insertion. The Ley de Fomento Agropecuario, on the other hand, is not a strategy, but a law. It is still subject to the vagaries of the sexenios, but because it instituted legal mechanisms that are more durable than "strategies," it undoubtedly will have a greater impact upon Mexican agriculture than SAM. Unfortunately, the LFA has not yet generated as much interest as SAM has. For example, John Bailey and John Link's

Statecraft and Agriculture in Mexico, 1980–1982 barely mentions the LFA, even though it was enacted during the period covered by their analysis and was being actively discussed for a longer period.

Bailey and Link are concerned with the relative weighting of national and international political forces upon the López Portillo administration in forging SAM. They predict that Mexico will not be able to achieve self-sufficiency in food by the middle of this decade, as envisioned in SAM, and that the country will come to a fundamental decision about the role of the state in the national economy. Bailey and Link's prediction of SAM's fate derives from their comparatively technical reading of Mexican political economy as well as Mexico's relations with the United States. For example, with reference to Mexico's vulnerability to American food power, Bailey and Link describe the concern of the Mexican leadership as "misplaced," although "helpful" to it in dealing with internal dissent. They evaluate Mexico's "administrative capacity, productivity, and land use" in terms of "political choice, will, and time," rather than in such terms as the logic of the state and of international capitalism as matters of class conflict.

Bailey and Link emphasize heavily the discontinuities associated with Mexico's sexenios, looking ahead (in 1981) to a change in presidents that would result in a corresponding change in agricultural policy. In the case of SAM, what has set back the goal of food self-sufficiency at least temporarily was the oil glut of 1982, when Mexico could not sustain the level of revenue necessary for floating programs like SAM. This comment is not meant to outguess Bailey and Link after the fact, but to indicate that what proved critical were circumstances that had nothing to do with Mexico's internal political situation. By 1982, Mexico had taken great strides toward reestablishing food self-sufficiency, according to María Elena Montes de Oca, a presidential adviser on SAM,[14] but then came the oil glut. What remains to be seen is whether Mexico will attempt another program (or strategy) for self-sufficiency in food if and when its current economic crisis abates.

If Bailey and Link's report leans toward a technical interpretation of SAM, Michael Redclift's *Development Policymaking in Mexico: The Sistema Alimentario Mexicano (SAM)* is more sanguine about the social issues of agricultural policy. Redclift calls attention to López Portillo's timing in announcing SAM in 1980, on the anniversary of the expropriation of foreign oil companies by Lázaro Cárdenas (18 March 1938). At the same time, López Portillo made two other important announcements: that Mexico would not join the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which would have made Mexican industry vulnerable to foreign imports, and that Mexican oil production would remain at a level below that sought by foreign clients, particularly the United States. SAM thereby became associated with other nationalistic issues, such as the

control of the national patrimony and the resistance to international capital.

Whereas Bailey and Link emphasize the continuity between SAM and earlier agricultural policies, Redclift notes that the resources committed to SAM were immense, without comparison in Mexican history. Redclift more cogently raises the complex question of why SAM was proposed as it was when it was, and he evaluates some of the differing interpretations of SAM, especially with regard to those groups that had stakes in SAM's success or failure.

The difficulty in interpreting SAM correctly early in 1981 was that the Ley de Fomento Agropecuario (LFA) had not been put into effect, so that it would have required an act of futuristic legerdermain to anticipate how SAM and the LFA would interact. SAM as a strategy and the LFA as a law cannot be compared directly, but they must be considered in tandem, as a complex political package. My reading is that when taken together, these policies emphasize that production must occur, in whatever units can get the job done. Even if noncapitalist production relations in the ejidos produce a large share of the country's staples, the industrial and marketing complexes that use these products remain in hands, whether private or state, that are committed to a more modern, capitalistic Mexico. SAM was a declaration of Mexico's political and economic independence from the United States: the LFA was a less-publicized tool to guarantee that result.

Early in 1981, López Portillo opened a public debate concerning the role of private property in Mexico. In his opening sally, he suggested that Mexicans reevaluate the "social function" of private property, ostensibly saying that if the people so desired, Mexico could eliminate all private property. In the multisided debate that followed, it quickly became apparent that what was at stake was not private property, but social property, particularly the ejido. The debate seemed to suggest that Mexico could no longer afford the foolish luxury of the ejido. Debates like this one usually subside, only to recur when the circumstances are ripe. It is not inconceivable that current President de la Madrid will reopen, in one way or another, this debate as Mexico, in its most difficult hour, again confronts the legacy of the agrarian question.

NOTES

1. Part of the discussion of Mexico's agrarian crisis, especially the role of SAM and the LFA, comes from my *Peasants, Capitalists and the State: Mexico's Changing Agricultural Policies and the "Hungarian Project,"* (Latin American Institute Research Paper No. 10, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, 1982, mimeograph). A Spanish version was published as "Campesinos, capitalistas y el estado: la cambiante política agrícola mexicana y el 'Proyecto Húngaro'," *Relaciones* 12 (1982): 67–90.
2. Several important recent texts on the ejido that are not part of this review essay are *El ejido mexicano* by Romeo Rincón Serrano and *El desarrollo agrario de México y su marco*

jurídico by José Luis Zaragoza and Ruth Macías, both published in Mexico City in 1980 by the Centro Nacional de Investigaciones Agrarias.

3. Arturo Warman, "Frente a la crisis, ¿política agraria o política agrícola?" *Comercio Exterior* 28, no. 6 (June 1978): 681–87.
4. An English version of this book has been published by J. F. Bergin, but I did not have the opportunity to consult the translation for purposes of this essay.
5. His book originally was published in Spanish in 1978 as *El campo mexicano*.
6. I maintain that we should evaluate North American writing about topics such as Mexico's agrarian question with a critical eye toward how well grounded these writings are in the national literature to which they pertain. Yates cites only technical reports and a few older "agrarian" writings and does not refer directly to more recent writers, such as those whose work is addressed in this essay.
7. The least satisfactory of her appendices is the third, which merely lists the headlines of newspaper articles about Mexican agriculture in the years 1978 to 1981. Intended to bring the analysis more up to date, this appendix merely underscores the necessity of waiting for a rigorous analysis of the 1980 censal reports.
8. This review essay might leave the impression that credit is not on the Mexican research agenda. Two recent books that focus on credit are: Jorge Echenique's *Crédito y desarrollo agrícola en México (1940–1978)* (Mexico City, 1981) and Thierry Linck's *Usura rural en San Luis Potosí: un acercamiento a la problemática de la integración campesina* (Zamora, 1982).
9. Julian Steward, Eric Wolf, Sidney Mintz et al., *The People of Puerto Rico* (Urbana, 1956).
10. The anthropological approach is amply demonstrated in the text and in the appendix, which presents the themes investigated in the other parts of the study.
11. Fernando Rello, "Política agrícola y lucha de clases," *Nueva Antropología* 17 (May, 1981): 5.
12. Daniel Levy and Gabriel Székely, *Mexico: Paradoxes of Stability and Change* (Boulder, 1983).
13. For those interested in SAM and the LFA, the special number of *Nueva Antropología* (17, May 1981) dedicated to the "agricultural crisis and food strategy" is indispensable. In it one finds not only a statement of the objectives and the strategy of the Sistema Alimentario Mexicano (taken from a much longer report of limited circulation) and the text of the Ley de Fomento Agropecuario, but commentary by Gustavo Esteva, Fernando Rello, Raúl Olmedo, and others.
14. María Elena Montes de Oca, conversation with author in February of 1982, Albuquerque, New Mexico.