

AGRARIAN CLASS STRUCTURES
AND STATE POLICIES:

Past, Present, and Future

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- AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND COLLECTIVE SELF-RELIANCE IN THE CARIBBEAN.* By W. Andrew Axline. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1986. Pp. 134. \$17.50.)
- PEASANTS, ENTREPRENEURS, AND SOCIAL CHANGE: FRONTIER DEVELOPMENT IN LOWLAND BOLIVIA.* By Lesley Gill. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1987. Pp. 246. \$26.50.)
- AGRARIAN REFORM POLICY IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: LOCAL ORGANIZATION AND BENEFICIARY INVESTMENT STRATEGIES.* By Ana Teresa Gutiérrez-San Martín. (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1988. Pp. 280. \$26.50.)
- LAND REFORM IN LATIN AMERICA: THE DOMINICAN CASE.* By Carrie A. Meyer. (New York: Praeger, 1989. Pp. 142. \$37.50.)
- OUR DAILY BREAD: THE PEASANT QUESTION AND FAMILY FARMING IN THE COLOMBIAN ANDES.* By Nola Reinhardt. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988. Pp. 308. \$35.00.)
- PEASANTS AND CAPITAL: DOMINICA IN THE WORLD ECONOMY.* By Michel-Rolph Trouillot. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988. Pp. 344. \$35.00.)
- COFFEE AND DEMOCRACY IN MODERN COSTA RICA.* By Anthony Winson. (New York: St. Martin's, 1989. Pp. 195. \$45.00.)
- THE DEATH OF RAMON GONZALEZ: THE MODERN AGRICULTURAL DILEMMA.* By Angus Wright. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. Pp. 337. \$29.95.)
- RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND SURVIVAL STRATEGIES IN CENTRAL PARAGUAY.* By E. B. Zoomers. (Dordrecht, The Netherlands, and Providence, R.I.: FORIS Publications, 1988. Pp. 230.)

Despite the primacy of economic crisis and democratic consolidation in scholarship on Latin America during the past decade, concern about the agrarian sector continues to yield research and analysis. The questions that capture scholarly attention are not new. They have featured

in academic work since the 1960s, when issues of rural reform and democratic participation were central, and the 1970s, when scholars debated the impact of economic dependency and state policies on rural economic and political relationships. Scholars in the late 1980s continued to ask the same questions. What role do forms of landownership play in the historical structuring of economic and political relationships? How are Latin America's rural areas affected by the region's incorporation into capitalist structures at international and national levels? Is the peasantry, as a class, doomed historically to disappear? What is the role of state policy in shaping production and accumulation in agriculture?

In the books under review here, considerable commonality emerges in responses to these persistent questions. For example, in treating the issue of land, these works indicate that rural class relations are determined not only by patterns of landownership but by relative power relations between the rural landowners and the developmental state and by the economic options available to subordinate classes in the countryside. These analysts also agree that capitalism (not feudalism or semifeudalism) is currently the dominant mode of production in agriculture and that it presents the major challenge to peasant agriculture. Authors are most unanimous in recognizing the historical persistence of the peasantry and the importance of looking beyond relationships to the land to explain this persistence, particularly at the tenacity and variability of peasant survival strategies and changes over time in forms and outcomes of peasant accumulation. With less consistency, these books also demonstrate the impact of interventionist states on production and accumulation in the countryside, recognizing the state as a major actor in the agrarian sector.

These nine publications together provide insight into the past, present, and future of the agrarian sector in Latin America. Historical analysis emphasizes the situation-specific outcomes unleashed by general processes of economic change. The past is illuminated by studies that explore the incorporation of Latin America's agricultural production into world markets and the consequences of this incorporation for crop production and control over land and labor relations. Such economic changes introduced constraints but also opened up opportunities for accumulation and technological advancement by large landowners and peasants. Changing relations of production allowed some individuals to take advantage of opportunities to acquire land, to migrate to newly exploited regions, and to diversify their economic base. Studies that illuminate present conditions in rural areas are most insightful in exploring the diversity of ways in which peasant households develop strategies for managing economic stress and exploitation and, at times, for improving their conditions. Several intriguing cases explore how such strategies have encouraged peasant modes of production that can compete in the market with capitalist forms of production. In other cases, authors indicate that organizational

forms broader and more inclusive than peasant households are necessary for such competitiveness to exist. In considering the future of rural Latin America, the books under review here are at their best when they explore the scope and direction of state policies—including agrarian reform and regional integration—that could produce greater economic growth and equity in the countryside.

The Shadow of the Past and Contemporary Realities in Rural Latin America

“The wonder about ‘peasants’ is their continuing existence” (p. 1). It is this conundrum—the failure of peasant agriculturalists to become fully absorbed into capitalist wage labor—that Michel-Rolph Trouillot sets out to explain in *Peasants and Capital: Dominica in the World Economy*. The case he selects is an interesting one. In Dominica, as in many other Caribbean countries, a peasantry emerged after the expansion of capitalism had incorporated the island into the world economy. This class emerged in the wake of the emancipation of slaves in 1837 and the changing fortunes of a plantation economy linked to boom-and-bust commodity cycles. Thus from the beginning, the existence and persistence of a peasant economy in Dominica challenged the traditional Western view that peasant modes of production emerge in feudal and semifeudal societies and are destined to disappear as capitalism forces proletarianization on those with subsistence ties to the land.

Trouillot explores the history of the emergence of Dominica’s peasantry from the eighteenth century, linking the decline of slavery and the emergence of a smallholding peasantry to the dominance of various commodities—coffee, sugar, limes, and ultimately bananas—in the island’s relationship to the world economy. In this historical process, the rural poor are encapsulated in international and national economic relationships. They adapt household production and consumption to these economic exigencies but resist full subordination to them, most notably by making tenacious claims to the land (claims that eventually destroy the plantation economy) and by producing cash crops that also meet consumption needs. This history is told first through an exploration of Dominica’s national economic history, then through a history of its incorporation into a world capitalist system, and then at the level of the history of specific villages. Trouillot’s objective is to link macro- and micro-level studies within the context of theoretical debates about peasant societies. Peasants, he insists, are characterized by a particular agricultural labor process in which a unit of production and consumption (the household) has control over land and uses a minimal amount of mechanical technology. Trouillot seeks to explain “how a type of work, atypical of the capitalist process of production, can be nonetheless a functional element

of capitalism" (p. 8). The "surplus" generated through the peasant labor process is systematically extracted to serve the interests of capital.

Peasants and Capital is most illuminating in analyzing how peasants persist, cope, and adapt to national and international economic realities and how such behavior influences wider processes of capitalist accumulation. Trouillot goes on to suggest that state policies may be central to considering how Dominica's peasants can escape from their present poverty and vulnerability and gain greater control over their economic futures. In the final chapter, he recommends that Dominica turn its agriculture to the goal of self-reliance as a way of saving its peasantry from exploitative surplus extraction. Unfortunately, Trouillot fails to assess this recommendation in light of his previous perspective on the class-based nature of state policy. Moreover, although claiming both sympathy and admiration for the tenacity of Dominica's poor, Trouillot does much to obscure their reality through an unnecessarily abstract and ponderous academic style.

Nola Reinhardt also explores the "peasant question" and its relationship to the expansion of agrarian capitalism in a closely researched economic history of regional development, *Our Daily Bread: The Peasant Question and Family Farming in the Colombian Andes*. Are peasants as a class doomed historically to disappear? In responding to this question, she is less concerned than Trouillot with the international context of peasant incorporation and more focused on the changing constraints and opportunities within peasant households. The "peasant question" entails a series of assumptions about the nature of peasant household farming and the expansion of capitalist agriculture in terms of motivation and use of land, labor, and capital. Reinhardt carefully explores these assumptions, first by reviewing theoretical orientations drawn largely from Marx and A. V. Chayanov and then by analyzing empirically the Dagua region in Colombia and El Palmar, a village within it. She finds that peasants are not necessarily doomed to elimination because of historical forces unleashed by the expansion of capitalism, but she also finds that persistence is not an easy alternative. Rather, peasant destinies are specific to location, historical process, and technological conditions. It is interesting that Reinhardt finds possibilities for persistence embedded within the competitiveness of the technological conditions of peasant-based family farming. Family farming is not innately superior or inferior to capitalist agriculture. These forms of production coexist and develop over time as location-specific solutions to the economic challenges of adapting land, labor, and technology to market conditions for particular crops. Such factors at times make peasant production competitive with capitalist enterprises; in other cases, it cannot be.

The region of Dagua began to develop in the late nineteenth century as transportation networks improved and encouraged migration to the area. Reinhardt traces the histories of these migratory movements and

explores through family case histories the decision to migrate and decisions about where to settle and how to invest in land and productive activities. She is able to link such decisions to internal dynamics of the peasant household—the influence of patriarchal relations and the desire to escape them—and to the markets for land and labor that constrain or encourage investment decisions. For example, Reinhardt shows how migration is stimulated by the “pull” of new opportunities in access to land but also by the “push” of patriarchal relations that encourages sons in particular to seek independence and establish their own patriarchal units.

Reinhardt explores the emergence of small-farm coffee production through the 1920s and the resulting tension over access to land as migration and large-scale farming increased. Drawing on her household case studies, she is able to demonstrate how peasant families adjusted to often dramatic changes in commodity prices and how they cautiously adopted technological improvements such as use of fertilizer and pesticides in order to remain competitive with larger producers. Reinhardt provides useful insight into counterintuitive realities such as the emergence of a thriving land market in the Dagua region despite the lack of legal title to the land (this market developed around the price of improvements to the land rather than around the price of land itself). She then explores how the region, the village, and peasant households responded to the challenge of increasingly modern capitalist production and exchange in the decades following World War II.

Reinhardt also considers how the Dagua region was affected by government policies on developing infrastructure from the nineteenth century on, by agrarian reform legislation of the 1930s, and by government rural-development policies in the 1970s. These state policies are part of the story of how peasant production—increasingly squeezed by land scarcity and capitalist production—remained competitive. She provides detailed analysis of the modernization of many family farms in the 1960s and 1970s through use of inputs and credit, by then available from government programs.

Similarly, Reinhardt shows how peasant destinies and market relations are affected by economic development. Thus the question of access to specific amounts of land is often muted because of opportunities for off-farm employment. That is, land-poor households are not necessarily doomed to destitution because an expanding economy enables household members to contribute to family livelihood through increased earnings in off-farm activities. Reinhardt disaggregates her cases by age group and size of landholding and demonstrates the range of survival and development strategies that emerge from the interaction of these variables, the regional economy, and national policy.

Our Daily Bread is closely argued and rich in details provided by

interviews with peasant households and historical research. Reinhardt avoids the straitjacket of traditional analytic categories of peasant, petty capitalist, and capitalist modes of production by showing shifts in peasant destinies over time that are related to age, land, population density, technology, and markets. Her analysis is solidly based in relevant theory. For these reasons, *Our Daily Bread* is an illuminating major addition to work on peasant survival and accumulation.

Lesley Gill moves into more contemporary history to analyze the “peasant question” in *Peasants, Entrepreneurs, and Social Change: Frontier Development in Lowland Bolivia*. This study recounts the experience of elite landowners, small farmers, and peasants in the tropical lowlands of the department of Santa Cruz and explores the nature of their responses to new economic opportunities and modes of class exploitation that followed the Revolution of 1952. Like Trouillot and Reinhardt, Gill concludes that peasant producers are not doomed to disappear into the ranks of the proletariat. Instead, many diversify into wage labor while maintaining a base in subsistence production. Others who are able to take advantage of greater economic opportunities through access to capital, land, or commerce emerge as small-scale capitalists and entrepreneurs in agriculture and trade. Gill’s study thus demonstrates that capitalist expansion produced considerable social differentiation in Bolivia’s frontier region, a finding corresponding to that of Reinhardt in Colombia.

Gill indicates that capitalist landowners benefited from government policies for subsidized credit, land, and infrastructure that they were uniquely able to exploit. These landowners thus were able to dominate the economic and political development of the tropical lowland frontier. Agro-industrial development in Santa Cruz was also fostered by the investments of international agencies, and the power of the agrarian bourgeoisie was consolidated by military governments and cocaine trafficking. According to Gill, this class has been effective in maintaining a subordinate class of peasant producers who are available for seasonal wage labor. To do so, the capitalist landowners have resisted accumulating all the available land and forcing full proletarianization of the peasantry. Thus peasants survive, but only because their survival is rational for agrarian capitalism in this region. According to this analysis, Gill’s peasants are considerably more vulnerable as a class than those studied by Reinhardt.

Inequalities and structural constraints on peasant agriculture, as well as biases in state policies that discriminate against peasants, are oft-told tales in the history of rural Latin America since the 1930s and 1940s. Yet Gill provides additional insight into the way that personal networks and relational ties are used to promote the fortunes of the elite and protect the livelihoods of the poor. *Peasants, Entrepreneurs, and Social Change* also illuminates the process of migration from the highland and valley regions of Bolivia to the tropical lowlands and demonstrates how settlement often

entails considerable hardship for peasant families, particularly during the first years of clearing land and establishing crops. The book further explores changes experienced in the region under military dictatorship, the impact of cocaine, and the devastation caused by economic crisis in the 1980s. It is perhaps not surprising that the combination of severe economic crisis and consolidation of democratic government has strengthened peasant associations in this region.

Capitalist development since 1952 has caused social differentiation and has altered class relations of exploitation in eastern Bolivia. In contrast to other analyses of peasant destinies reviewed here, however, Gill is less convincing about the capacity of peasant producers to survive over the longer term. Referring to a set of comparative studies would have helped place this study within a larger dynamic and allowed Gill to explore how state policies or class-based political actions might encourage a result that is less desperate for the peasantry of lowland Bolivia.

In *Coffee and Democracy in Modern Costa Rica*, Anthony Winson moves from discussing rural class relations to interpreting the origins of democratic government. Looking comparatively at other Latin American countries, particularly those in Central America, he asks, what made Costa Rica different? How did a country with a powerful agrarian elite that fully controlled the state until at least 1930 become transformed into a pluralist democracy with a strongly interventionist and relatively autonomous state? Winson finds the answer to this question in part in the characteristics of the coffee bourgeoisie that dominated economics and politics—their relationships to land, labor, processing, finance, and markets. But even more central to the Costa Rican exception was the nature of the historic compromise struck in the late 1940s between a weakened agro-export class and the coalition of forces brought together under the leadership of José Figueres.

According to Winson, the depression of the 1930s significantly weakened the power of the coffee oligarchy, a trend that was exacerbated by World War II and popular mobilization. But the “organic crisis of the oligarchy” was not sufficient to ensure the emergence of political pluralism. Costa Rican democracy was implanted because a coalition of urban and intellectual “modernizers” led by Figueres was able to agree on a pact about the rules of the game for political contestation. The group was also able to impose this agreement on society along with a program of government that incorporated a vision of an interventionist and equity-enhancing state as the basis for capitalist development. Through this process, the coalition and its leadership established a basis of political support that was independent of the former dominant class. By no means vanquished from economic and political power, the coffee bourgeoisie essentially traded control over instruments of financial power for the right to avoid agrarian reform and to remain central in policy-making on coffee production and

processing. As part of this historic compromise, the growers and processors also benefited from state investment in infrastructure. The bargain they struck was thus to trade political power for economic advantage. What was gained by the state—autonomy—is critical in accounting theoretically and empirically for the emergence of liberal welfare democracy. In Costa Rica, the coffee bourgeoisie was not eliminated as a class but was subordinated to the state.

Winson has written a concise and readable analysis of the historic development of Costa Rican democracy from the perspective of the interaction of class interests and the state. He successfully assesses the lessons of the Costa Rican case from the perspective of theoretical literature on landlord capitalism in Europe and Latin America. But what distinguishes *Coffee and Democracy in Modern Costa Rica* from other such efforts to map the class basis of state power is Winson's insistence on the importance of leadership, statecraft, and ideological vision at critical moments in history. Thus Figueres and a group of social democratic intellectuals around him are credited with engineering the historic compromise and the new developmentalist or welfare state that emerged in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Their perspectives and actions, as unique individuals rather than as representatives of class interests, are central to Winson's explanation. Although he does not develop the case for leadership from a more comparative perspective and refers to it as a "conjunctural factor" in the case of Costa Rica, Winson found it necessary to step outside his class-analytic framework in order to account more fully for Costa Rican exceptionalism and for the role of development ideologies in successfully imposing new structures of economic and political power. His analysis, like those of Trouillot and Reinhardt, convincingly explains current reality through the lens of historical process.

Current Conditions and Future Possibilities in the Countryside

Historical analyses often leave unanswered the question of what is to be done to improve the potential for economic growth and equity in rural regions. While such studies often point to the key role of the state in shaping rural economic relations and linking rural areas to regional, national, and international economies, they often fail to indicate how specific policies emerge and what impact they have, or can have, on agricultural and rural development. Case studies of specific policies thus provide greater insight into the capacity of purposive state action to alter present realities and to lead to more productive and equitable futures. Several recent studies provide insight into the promise and limitations of state policies in achieving such results.

E. B. Zoomers's *Rural Development and Survival Strategies in Central Paraguay* focuses on rural development policies and seeks to assess their

impact on agriculture and conditions of land tenure and poverty experienced by the rural poor. She demonstrates that such policies and attendant colonization projects can result simultaneously in both success and failure. For example, they can result in impressive gains in aggregate agricultural output without actually improving the land tenure situation or conditions of life for their purported beneficiaries. Zoomers's evaluation of twenty-five years of colonization experience in central Paraguay demonstrates how much can be learned from well-designed research, careful analysis of data, and balanced assessment of accomplishments and failures in government programs.

Congested conditions in rural areas near Asunción, caused by a finite amount of land and increased population pressure over time, resulted in shrinking landholdings and increased minifundization and also in a search by the rural poor for survival via a variety of non-farm and off-farm income-generating activities. Then in 1963, a colonization policy introduced another option for the hard-pressed peasants in central Paraguay. Zoomers departs from the traditional concerns of those who assess colonization policies, which focus on what occurs in the pioneer or frontier zone, to consider also the impact on the sending area. She asks, did opening opportunities for migration lessen the pressure on the land and resources used by peasant farmers in the long-settled rural areas? In Paraguay, the answer was no. Migration was not an attractive option for many peasants because it meant foregoing opportunities for wage labor and informal-sector activities that made it possible for them to persist as peasants. They therefore preferred to remain in the densely settled zone rather than assume the risks of migrating to the frontier.

More generally, Zoomers explores three possible survival strategies that the poor in central Paraguay can adopt: a "vertical" strategy of intensifying labor and technical inputs into agriculture on small plots; a "horizontal" strategy of migrating to the frontier; and a "diagonal" strategy of diversifying income-generating activities. She finds that the third strategy offers many peasants the least risky alternative, although its adoption limits the success of the colonization strategy for alleviating congestion in the sending area. *Rural Development and Survival Strategies in Central Paraguay* also traces the origin of rural congestion to two possible sources: high farm density or unequal distribution of land. The analysis suggests that both are important causes, but their utility as explanations varies by area within the region studied. Zoomers also documents the difficulties experienced by migrants to the colonization zones and explores the reasons why title to land alone is not sufficient for productive agricultural enterprises at the household level. Credit, markets, and technology are also essential, a lesson that has been learned almost universally with agrarian reform, colonization, and rural development programs.

Rural Development and Survival Strategies in Central Paraguay is a well-

documented study of the promise and disappointments that attend colonization programs. It explores the actual implementation of one such program but also addresses the economic assumptions underlying state policies and household decision making. More theoretically oriented readers, however, will find little on the origin of the policy itself or on any political debates that may have surrounded its formulation. *Zoomers* offers instead a set of policy-relevant recommendations about how governments might deal with the issue of rural congestion and poverty by considering seriously the basis for decision making by peasant households.

As with colonization programs, experience with land-reform initiatives in Latin America is extensive and generally disappointing in terms of achievements. In *Land Reform in Latin America: The Dominican Case*, Carrie Meyer analyzes one case of reform to argue that the associational forms in which beneficiaries are organized can have a significant impact on the productive performance of small-scale farms. She takes the traditional debate between individual and collective ownership as a starting point to demonstrate empirically and in formal analysis that associations of the type characterizing some Dominican land reform settlements are superior to individual and collective forms of organization in their ability to stimulate sustained investment in farm production. According to her analysis, associations are superior because they overcome two obstacles: the economic weaknesses inherent in individual production on small plots by producers with extremely limited resources; and the “free-rider” incentive problems of collective efforts. The associations in the Dominican Republic reserve land titles and cultivation for individual households, while providing for voluntary association among beneficiaries for credit, input supply, and marketing.

To make this argument, Meyer considers the literature in micro-economics, particularly that relating to risk, contracts, and organization, and applies it to agrarian reform settlements in the rice sector in the Dominican Republic. In doing so, she provides a history of the agrarian reform effort in the Dominican Republic and its institutional context. This setting was notable for the complex relationships of beneficiaries to state agencies, often characterized by protracted negotiation. In this context, association provided beneficiaries with a stronger position vis-à-vis the state while not infringing on their control over land and labor. *Land Reform in Latin America* deals centrally with conditions of risk and incentives where beneficiaries, managers, and state agencies are all players. It does not, however, deal with the political economy of land reform or provide much insight into rural class relationships or the survival strategies of peasant smallholders. Rather, given a reform initiative and a settlement scheme, Meyer asks what organizational arrangement “can provide scale benefits without destroying individual initiative” (p. 114). This question is not a trivial one, she argues, because of its fundamental relationship

to the capacity of small farmers to increase production and household income.

Ana Teresa Gutiérrez–San Martín is also concerned with how local organizational structures encourage or inhibit beneficiary investment in agricultural production. She pursues this interest in *Agrarian Reform Policy in the Dominican Republic: Local Organization and Beneficiary Investment Strategies*, an in-depth study of three Dominican agrarian reform settlements. Like Meyer, she seeks to understand the differential impact on settlement performance of officially sponsored collective organizations for production and a cooperative associational form favored by many beneficiaries. Gutiérrez–San Martín finds that organizational form makes a significant difference to the agricultural success of reform settlements. In some cases, *parceleros* use the security, credit, and other assistance derived from the agrarian reform and its implementing agencies to make long-term investment in land, increased agricultural productivity, and the community. In other cases, peasants use reform-acquired resources to reap quick, but agriculturally destructive, profits from the land and then invest them in efforts to migrate from the community. Gutiérrez–San Martín characterizes both sets of actions as survival strategies, but decisions to invest in one or the other are determined by the peasants' rational appreciation of returns to the household in agricultural investments. She concludes that "what the peasant 'loves' is not the land but survival" (p. 221).

Whether beneficiaries of agrarian reform choose to invest in the land or in activities that allow them to escape from it is central to Dominican development, Gutiérrez–San Martín argues. The agrarian reform, which affected about 20 percent of the rural population and 4 percent of the agricultural land, will significantly affect domestic production of rice and other staple crops in the future. If organizations indeed make a critical difference to peasant investment decisions, as both Gutiérrez–San Martín and Meyer argue, then considerable attention needs to be directed to such organizations. Meyer finds that land quality, prices, and markets are less important in making investment decisions than organizational intangibles like trust, group homogeneity, commitment, and leadership. Group orientation to the community and its future is fostered by these characteristics. According to this analysis, the fact of organization is less important than the internal dynamics of organizations. Gutiérrez–San Martín carefully distinguishes between policy variables, which can be affected by agrarian reform institutions, and less manipulable variables. Regarding policy variables, she suggests actions that can be taken to encourage communication, group identity, and collective action. In the less malleable category are the availability of leadership and the participatory experiences of group members, factors that are less amenable to influence from outside the specific context of household and community life.

Peasant destinies are also linked to policies at national and interna-

tional levels in a study by Angus Wright. *The Death of Ramón González: The Modern Agricultural Dilemma* begins in an arresting way by asking, who killed Ramón González? This question stimulated Wright's search through the agricultural fields of Culiacán, the halls of bureaucracies in Mexico and the United States, and villages in Oaxaca to comprehend the use of toxic chemicals in modern commercial export agriculture in Mexico. The author thus endeavored to discover the reasons behind the death of a young migrant field-worker in Culiacán from the village of San Jerónimo Progreso in Oaxaca. Wright suspected that the cause was the toxic chemicals used in the vegetable fields where González worked. In the course of this search, readers learn much about various aspects of the situation: the characteristics of toxic chemicals and why they are preferred to ones that are less dangerous to agricultural workers; official indifference to the harm caused to poverty-stricken migrant field-workers and their families; the arrogant behavior of venal growers who use thugs to silence any questioning of their farm-management tactics; markets for winter fruits and vegetables in the United States and their consumers; the reasons that force poor villagers to migrate to find work; and alternatives to the use of toxic chemicals in agriculture.

The Death of Ramón González seeks to parallel Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in alerting public attention to the death and destruction caused by using toxic pesticides in the fields of Mexico's highly remunerative commercial agriculture. Wright's exposé portrays a system devoid of ethics or morality in which pesticides are selected because they decompose prior to consumer use even though they are highly toxic at the point of application. Unprotected and unsophisticated use of these chemicals by poorly educated field-workers causes rashes, respiratory illnesses, and even death. Wright explores the reasons why manufacturers find a ready market for these chemicals in Mexico, even though they are highly regulated or forbidden in the United States, and why growers turn a blind eye to the health hazards. He journeyed to the field-workers' region of origin to find out why they migrate, why they are not better protected from chemical hazards, and why they do not protest more. Wright also shows how migration patterns become embedded in the life of the community of origin. The book thus presents a multifaceted explanation of modern agricultural practices in describing the logic of a system that disregards the health and safety of workers so blatantly.

The Death of Ramón González also attempts to provide social scientists with greater understanding of Mexico's agricultural experience and the lot of its poor and indigenous peasants. For example, the book includes insights into traditional forms of community decision making among the Mixtecs of Oaxaca. Wright interviewed agronomists and reviews the history of the development of the Green Revolution in Mexico. He also provides insights into transnational agribusiness and the role of consumers in encouraging the use of chemical pesticides.

Unfortunately, however, Wright tries to educate his readers on far too many topics for his main themes to survive clearly. While his account is interesting and at times even compelling, he finds it difficult to stick to a theme and rambles into byways of thought and instruction that leave the readers still wondering at the end of the book who killed Ramón González.

The last book reviewed here focuses on the potential of regional integration to stimulate greater productivity in the agricultural sector. In *Agricultural Policy and Collective Self-Reliance in the Caribbean*, Andrew Axline seeks to explain why agricultural policy has not been more central to regional integration efforts in the developing world. Selecting the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) as a case study, he demonstrates that economic development goals encourage developing countries to focus on industrialization as the objective of regional economic integration, despite the fact that most countries have overwhelmingly agricultural economies. Axline compares this tendency to the experience of the European Community, which has generated a complex agricultural policy for its member states. In Europe, however, the goal has been economic growth, while most developing countries are seeking development by restructuring their economies. Axline indicates that despite lack of interest in agriculture in the regional integration efforts of developing countries, successful agricultural policies are sometimes introduced. Industrialization policy, in contrast, is frequently so fraught with economic and political controversy that no success is possible.

This has been the case with CARICOM. Axline demonstrates the relatively poor showing of this organization in achieving any movement toward the goal of industrialization. But he also explores how the much less politically salient area of agricultural policy has generated some successful initiatives, particularly in the area of agricultural marketing. Axline is thus able to consider the reasons why agriculture tends to get ignored as a priority for regional integration but also under what conditions success in its development can be expected.

Axline places his case study of CARICOM within a larger context of regional integration efforts and presents a useful set of observations about the political and economic issues that typically emerge and often doom such initiatives to failure. He focuses on the level of institutions and countries, indicating the motives and concerns of countries as actors, rather than delving more deeply into the engineering of policies by committed integrationists or the actions of their opponents. Thus the politics of regional integration initiatives are recounted at the international rather than the domestic level. *Agricultural Policy and Collective Self-Reliance in the Caribbean* is a thoughtful analysis, and Axline does a good job of educating his readers about CARICOM while also providing them with lenses through which to view other such initiatives.

Past, Present, and Future Reconsidered

These nine books span the horizon of agriculture and rural development from the level of peasant households to that of international policy regimes. They are often rich in insights and analysis. Read together, they tend to illuminate common processes as well as case-specific variability in the history and current condition of rural inhabitants, domestic and international economic structures, and state policies. Among the studies, one finds considerable divergence in theoretical approaches and analytic frameworks. They range from fairly mechanistic applications of Marxist and dependency theory to somewhat atheoretical project evaluation exercises, with a number of thematically interesting and nuanced interpretations falling in between. The studies certainly vary in the quality of presentation—from clear and accessible to turgid and exclusionary, and from carefully edited text to highly faulty production. Although all the books reviewed here present interesting cases and some insight into the structure and process of agrarian change, Reinhardt's *Our Daily Bread* and Winson's *Coffee and Democracy in Modern Costa Rica* can be especially recommended for their scholarship and insight into the past and present of Latin America's rural areas. In future years, researchers will do well to consider the kinds of empirical descriptions and analyses presented by these two works and to emulate their standards of research.