

Has Colombia Finally Found an
Agrarian Reform That Works?

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1. Introduction

Like most Latin American countries, Colombia has been characterized by extreme inequality in the distribution of access to agricultural land (CIDA, 1965) and very serious ambiguities around property rights; these related problems have contributed to many other social and economic ills, including most notably the waves of violence which have swept the country periodically during this century and part of the last one.¹ There has been periodic recognition of them as serious problems by observers, political parties and governments and, on occasion, attempts have been made to "reform" the agrarian structure in these or related aspects. Had any of these attempts been successful either in improving the size distribution of landownership or in clarifying land rights in a positive way, Colombia's currently very unhappy state might be quite different (Berry, 1999). Unfortunately, such has not been the case. The range of attempts has been considerable and, at least one initiative--undertaken in the 1930s, appears to have had the potential for a serious positive impact.²

Colombia's agrarian reform history should be viewed against the backdrop of the more general experience. Pressure for reform of an agrarian structure arises out of some combination of perceived problems including poverty, injustice, ambiguity (especially around property rights) and inefficiency. The seriousness of these basic problems and their relative importance varies with the existing agrarian structure, the culture, the scarcity of land, and other factors. So, naturally, do the extent of resulting problems--unrest, violence, policy instability, etc. and the possible "remedies". In very land-scarce situations where land ownership is very unequal and most people work as tenants on others' land, the pressure often takes the form of a "land to the tiller" movement; sometimes it involves something less extreme, e.g. a better contract by which the labour of these people is indirectly or directly purchased, better in the sense of involving a higher implicit wage, greater freedom of action for the workers, a more predictable arrangement, one of greater duration or permanence, etc. In cases where there is not a shortage of land, the issue will be more around who should have the first chance at public land, what infrastructure will be supplied by the state in newly settled lands, whether ownership is independent of exploitation or whether unused land reverts back to the state and hence becomes available to other aspirants, etc. What remedies are feasible depends also on the characteristics and capacities of the government, which may or may not have much power relative to the other actors in the drama.

Effective reforms may take a variety of paths, some more appropriate to some circumstances and others to other circumstances. These possible paths depend on the economics of the agrarian system, administrative issues and the politics. Where there is no way to get land into the hands of the majority of those who need it but to expropriate it from current owners (or holders) a serious political confrontation is likely. Most of the effective reforms undertaken in these conditions have

¹ For a recent, brief commentary, see Tirado Mejia (1998). More extensive reviews are presented by Sánchez (1985) and Ortiz Sarmiento (1994).

² The term "success" must be used carefully in this context, since various actors naturally had different objectives, some to promote one type of change, some to promote another and some to block change. Of those favouring an improved access by the actual or aspiring smallholders, some had as objective simply damping down the sources of unrest in order to preserve stability while others wished for more radical change.

been done quickly, in spite of possibly of high administrative cost³ or of some injustice, e.g. horizontal inequality among former owners, and some inefficiency, as where the redistribution of land does not always get the right land in the right hands. These problems are often alleviated, however, by the fact that the natural recipients are already the tillers so it usually makes sense for them to take over the land they are currently tilling. Another feature of the most successful reforms is the establishment of a land ceiling (or ceilings)⁴, which discourages reconcentration of land and also helps to keep market prices for land down by reducing the potential to invest savings in that asset, which in turn is likely to increase real savings and real investment both in agriculture and in other sectors. The ceilings most often discussed are those governing the amount of land a current owner can retain (e.g Prosterman and Dieninger, 1987, 182-6). Where the pressure for land is satisfied on a "frontier" the main challenge is not how to overcome the political difficulty of getting land away from the current largeholders but of preventing the creation of new large holdings on the frontier, so that all the families in need of land will in fact get it. Countries with successful homesteading experiences (like the U.S. in the West) had laws limiting the size of the newly created farms (in that case to 160 acres) enough to assure a relatively equitable distribution of it and leaving no great uncertainty as to property rights, and provided adequate support via investments in infrastructure (roads, markets, communications, etc.).

Colombia has never been land scarce country in the mode of many Asian nations, so the challenge has been primarily though not exclusively one of how to manage the frontier in such a way as to alleviate pressures and create a satisfactory agrarian structure that way. It is important to note four features of the unfolding pattern of control over land and its use from the time of independence in Colombia (first Gran Colombia).

- i) Ambiguity with respect to who did or should control much land has often been as striking a feature/problem as has inequality in the distribution of that land **per se**. The ambiguity has been due to a combination of situations in which ownership had not yet been defined juridically, of conflicting interpretations of what is correct or legal, and of inconsistency between law and practice.
- ii) The state has been an important actor or potential actor for several reasons, but most obviously because most of the currently exploited agricultural land was once in the public domain⁵ so the state's decisions as to how to alienate that land and under what conditions were central. How the land laws were implemented was partly a matter of governmental administrative capacity. At times the government acted as referee between disputing parties on land and related issues.
- iii) The state was not one consistent actor, partly because different parties and factions had somewhat different views on land questions, but more importantly because local governments systematically favoured the largeholders (or aspirants to that status) while the national governments took a wider range of stances, depending on party, situation and the like.
- iv) Control of land was part of the bigger issue of control of the factors of agricultural production, the other principal factor being labour. Many of the tensions over the years can be seen as tugs-of-

³ Prosterman and Riedinger (1987, 183-4) cite the case of Taiwan, where "an independent cadre of administrators who had fled the mainland after the communist victory created a comprehensive land-records system, which was then meticulously finalized in a plot-by-plot and household-by-household rechecking process and implementation of retention claims was again closely monitored by beneficiary-dominated local committees."

⁴ Or more generally a tendency to allocate land in relatively small parcels.

⁵ As late as 1850, Agustín Codazzi estimated this share at 75% (Legrand, 1989, 6).

war between largeholders and smallholders (or aspirants to those two statuses) but they can also be seen as disputes between labour and land/capital, where those who controlled the bulk of the land also needed access to labour--hence the discussion of vagrancy laws and labour coercion, while the workers who supplied labour wanted better conditions in which to apply it, the best of which was their own land.

The national government was the most likely of these various actors to take a broad perspective which included the welfare of all parties, including the society's general need of an adequate food supply, etc. Accordingly, from early on it was attempting something of a balancing act among interests. Many of the results of its involvement were unplanned or inadvertent, however. Thus a number of its early policies had the effect of concentrating land, including the division of the **resguardos** (reserves for the indigenous populations), which took place mainly between 1830 and 1860 (Safford, 1995, 120). More important in this process of concentration was the wholesale alienation of public land during the 19th century, in return for the purchase of depreciated government bonds; here the main aim was to shore up the finances and the credit of the national government. Public lands were also ceded in large tracts in order to induce foreign immigrants to take them over. Much of the alienated land was not developed however, and when laws making continued ownership contingent on its exploitation, much of it was abandoned. From the time that actual appropriations of such alienated lands began to occur on some scale (in the 1870s with a temporary boom in chinchona bark) these "exploitation laws" were laid down with the intent of protecting the squatters who might be on land claimed by largeholders (Safford, 1995, 121). These laws, however, had little effect, with the powerful usually getting their way.

The unfolding scenario of the 1920s and 1930s precipitated the first and most serious approach to an agrarian reform of significance in Colombia, and the one whose success could clearly have had the greatest impact on the subsequent evolution of the economy had the society.⁶ Events conspired to bring Colombia closer to a real reform than any other country of the region at the time, but then conspired to induce the central government to pull back at the critical moment.⁷ The effort was the result of a combination of chronic inequalities, injustices and tensions; the added tensions associated with fast growth of coffee production and other elements of buoyancy during the 1920s; and the new pressures associated with the reversal of those upward trends as the effects of the worldwide depression reverberated in Colombia in the 1930s. Tension does not always lead to attempts at reform, of course.

International experience shows that the conditions which lead to significantly positive agrarian reforms are rare. In some cases foreign involvement is important; when that is not the case a special combination of internal factors must create the opening. In Colombia the combination as of the early 1930s included a serious level of rural unrest which was of direct concern to political leaders because of its destabilizing impact and which also worried those who saw it as a serious

⁶ For more details, see Berry (2000).

⁷ It is of course true that most agrarian reforms in Latin America have fallen far short of producing the "growth with equity" outcome of a Taiwan. Mexico and Bolivia exemplify the case of partial reform leading to modest benefits but not to a thoroughgoing transformation of the economy and the society. Ironically, perhaps the strongest support for the peasant was that provided by Trujillo's government in the Dominican Republic, beginning in the 1930s (Turits, 1997); but, to put it mildly, the process was not participatory. Each of these experiences had its own special history and limiting conditions, so the resulting outcomes do not imply that there was no hope under Colombia's different circumstances.

impediment to adequate agricultural production⁸, especially of food crops, at a time when the supply of these appeared insecure. At the same time, important figures in the Liberal Party saw the dissatisfied squatters (*colonos*) and smallholders as a political resource on which they might draw.

Several factors contributed to the rural unrest. Inequality cum insecurity/ambiguity of land distribution is a frequent source of conflict and tension⁹, especially when complemented by a conscious sense of grievance by those with little or no land that some of that in the hands of the large holders rightfully belongs to them, as was the case in Colombia. Another specific to the Colombian situation was the inter-party tension and the history of periodic violence, concentrated in the rural areas.¹⁰ Against such a flammable backdrop, whether and when conflict on a large scale breaks out then depends on additional ingredients added to the mix.¹¹ Stagnating or declining incomes related to the world depression and to heightening population pressure on the land were elements of the Colombian brew in the 1930s. By the end of the coffee era (1880-1930) during which that product became Colombia's dominant export, land had become increasingly valuable and the conditions for a crisis of conflict around it had been met. The profitability of coffee exports was the basic ingredient. This precipitated an increase in government revenues and, together with foreign resources, permitted a burst of public investment in infrastructure, which further added to land values and to the demand for labour also. The rapid expansion of the transportation network and the growing demand for coffee led to an appreciation in rural land values and brought large entrepreneurs onto the prowl for land, leading to a great increase in the number of encroachments on squatter-occupied land between 1918 and 1931. A combination of the pressure from the encroachments and increasing confidence that action might now bear fruit (Legrand, 1986, 93)¹² led to a peasant counteroffensive after 1928,

⁸ The idea that the large latifundista was inefficient and/or inflexible, giving rise to food price increases as development proceeds, was one element in the thinking of Latin America's structuralist school (Kafka (1961). Many observers of Colombia commented on the paradox of large farms using good land extensively while smaller ones tried to eke out a subsistence through intensive cultivation of poorer land, perhaps most famously by Lauchlin Currie, who led the World Bank's mission to Colombia in the late 1940s (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1950).

⁹ Lack of clarity to land title is especially characteristic of new frontier areas; conflict arises easily, both because the land is being contested currently and because the state is not strong enough to settle the dispute on its preferred terms. Much Latin American experience over long periods of time fits this category as settlement has moved into previously thinly populated lowlands and jungle areas. Some of the expansion has involved production for the domestic market, but mostly it has been directed at exports. In either case peasant settlers come into conflict with land entrepreneurs.

¹⁰ The antagonism between the two political parties has historically provided a major source of hostility which, together with the often fairly equal strength of these two groups, helps to explain Colombia's high rate of death through political violence over more than a hundred years, in contrast to those countries where a strong military, oppressive as it might be, controlled power so completely that no other forces could do battle with it (Maingot, 1968). Colombia's present wave of violence does not appear to owe much to this factor, however.

¹¹ Brown (1971, 194-5) concludes that "there is probably enough despair, anger, perceived relative deprivation and 'consciousness' to start an uprising in most any traditional rural community in Latin America on any given day.....Thus whenever the local landed elite begins to lose its grip, usually because of larger economic or political circumstances, peasant activism springs up rather quickly, often with little or no initial debt to outside agitation."

¹² Over the period 1870-1920 conflicts had centred on the resistance of peasant settlers to the encroachment of land entrepreneurs. Prior to 1874 the independent **colonos** (settlers) were not in a position to fight, and the process of creation of the great estates appears to have been mainly a peaceful one. After this date the **colonos** resisted that trend with greater frequency. The decisive factor that tipped them in this direction, according to Legrand (1986, 64), was the passage of national legislation supportive of settlers' rights--the **colonos** often referred to the laws of 1874 and 1882, which clarified their right to homestead on national domain and implied that

during which many of the great estates formed earlier were invaded; at this point the public land issue became a major national political problem and induced the government to intervene to clarify the legal definition of private property (Legrand, 1986, xvii).

Meanwhile, the national authorities' concern with agricultural production was related in part to the impact of conflict on output¹³ but also to the longer-run issue of land structure. The government, focusing increasingly on the needs of the industrialization process, was more concerned with agricultural production for the domestic market--most of which came from the small farm sector, and less with exports; this directed their attention to the need for a reform of land policy. Most observers identified the monopoly of land by the great latifundia as the root of agricultural backwardness (Lopez, 1927; Uribe, 1936). Support for small cultivators included the country's first planned colonization programme and a 1926 landmark decision of the supreme court which made it more difficult for large holders to claim ownership of land. The advent of the Great Depression, which ended an economic boom in Colombia, provided an added argument in favour of colonization; the government now provided free rail tickets to get the unemployed back to rural areas. Haciendas, afflicted by falling profits, tried to reimpose the low wages and arduous work conditions of the pre-boom years (Palacios, 1980 and Jimenez, 1986). Many people now struck out to find their own plots and independence.¹⁴ An increasing share, instead of going to the hinterland tried for better located public land or unused portions of large estates.

Once the **colono** movements got under way, the squatters became mobilizable political capital, in particular for the Liberal party which had just returned to power. Accordingly, the issues of violence and productivity came together and the government focused on the need to resolve the land issue. All of the standard arguments in favour of helping and defending the small settlers were aired at this time in Colombia and various approaches were tried to deal with the two problems perceived by policy makers--the conflict and violence associated with competing claims in the frontier areas and the related problem of inadequate agricultural production. A judicial approach through application of the 1926 supreme court ruling would have deprived the landlords of much territory and was hence too radical to have a chance of success.¹⁵ Purchase and parcelization of large properties was widely viewed as both amicable and logical. The purchase of three haciendas in areas of most serious conflict and the provision of free title to **colonos** who had occupied in the late 1920s and early 1930s did calm social unrest but the fiscal cost was high and the government decided that thenceforth the peasants should pay full market value. The programme then failed, as peasants refused to pay for land which they believed to be public and hence legally available to them

the land was legally theirs. Though the laws themselves were generally ineffectual they did influence the settlers' perception of their situation, and provided the incentive to take cases to court collectively--though usually unsuccessfully as the landlords connived with the local authorities.

¹³ Landlords responded to the squatters' initiatives by expelling them, but were wary of bringing lawsuits for fear of losing. The **colonos**, while doing better than before, could not force the landlords to give up their claims and the result was chronic conflict. The landlords were of course increasingly disaffected, fears of class conflict were expressed, and the disturbances appeared to be undermining efforts to raise agricultural production.

¹⁴ Colombia's population growth was accelerating through the first half of the century and was by this time approaching 2% per year.

¹⁵ Madrid (1944, cited by Legrand, 1986, 145) estimated that 3/4 of privately held property would have reverted to the nation had a 1933 proposal (defeated in Congress) been implemented. Its implications were probably not too different from those of the 1926 supreme Court ruling.

(Legrand, 1986, 139). By the time the legislative response finally came in the form of Law 200 of 1936, the balance of power had shifted in favour of the landlords. The **colono** movement had lost some political influence due to cooptation of political leaders, and internal dissention around the parcelization programme. Land struggles continued unabated but the leftist threat they posed gradually receded as the **colonos'** representatives sought accommodation with the party in power. President Lopez was now in the process of building a power base among urban labour. Meanwhile the large holders mounted a sophisticated campaign against his regime by focusing elite hostility against any extension of state power on the land issue, claiming that the government was trying to destroy private property, and warning of the threat of revolution. Lopez became convinced that he could regain political control only by resolving the land issue in favour of the landlords.¹⁶ The government continued to assert the objective of expanding independent peasant properties, and it revoked unused land grants and supported colonization and parcelization projects. But land law 200, commonly thought to favour the settlers (see, e.g. Hirschman, 1965), in fact reinforced the position of the large estate owners; by making it easier for them to claim land as theirs, it took away the argument that such land was still in the public domain. At the same time it put a premium on large scale aspirants to ownership to evict small squatters in order to avoid a conflict over claims. It was also accompanied by a vagrancy law which facilitated the removal of expelled **colonos** (Safford, 1995, 141). All of these factors no doubt contributed to the escalation of rural violence which broke out a decade later. In short, Law 200 did little or nothing to slow the continuing appropriation of public lands in the frontier regions, nor to deal with the underlying tensions between settlers and large entrepreneurs over public lands that were to remain a root cause of social conflict in the Colombian countryside. Failure to resolve the land issue when there appears to have been a chance contributed significantly to "La Violencia," the worst wave of violence to afflict Colombia. Although the earlier and still fairly standard interpretations have tended to treat this as a product of the Liberal-Conservative hatreds, and hence give little weight to its social and economic roots, there seems no doubt that these factors were very important. Rather than improving the situation of aspiring smallholders, Law 200 appears to have backfired by promoting both privatization by large-holders and expulsion of **colonos**.¹⁷ The rate of privatization of public land rose precipitously during La Violencia from an average of 60,000 has. per year over 1931-45 to 150,000 has. over 1946-54 and to 375,000 has. over 1955-59 (Legrand, 1989, 13, citing Diot, 1976) so based on historical

¹⁶ The motivation of Lopez has been the subject of some debate. Some authors (e.g. Cronshaw, 1986) credit him with positive intent to help the aspiring smallholders but lack of execution. Sanchez (1977) and Legrand (1986) are more negative, asserting that Lopez and associates planned the effect to be conservative. While Law 200 proclaimed the social function of property, the fact that its Article 1 made it easier for both the large and the small to claim public lands if they put them to use ultimately worked mainly in favour of that former. Legrand (1986, 141) emphasizes the fact that Lopez promised large holders that the law would help them to validate their titles.

¹⁷ The (presumably) unintended effect of encouraging expulsions through the fear of large-holders that it was dangerous to have **colonos** on the land they claimed. Law 100 of 1944, another effort to bring order to rural society, has often been described as the law to reestablish service tenancy, by calling for clearer specification of the terms established between landowner and tenant through written contracts. this law can also be thought of as designed to mitigate the unintended disasters wrought by Law 200 (Safford, 1995, 141). It did not achieve the objective of reintroducing service tenancy.

The misjudgment of failing to predict the "indirect" effects of legislation was more or less repeated in the 1960s when land rental, especially share-cropping was discouraged, leading to another wave of evictions and another shift in the agrarian structure (see below).

experience one would assume that the incidence of expulsion also increased.¹⁸

In the event this attempt at reform failed to have a major effect on Colombia's agrarian history; it may never be whether it came close to doing so. Motivation was present from various angles. There was a desire to help the **colonos** in their struggle, probably partly out of a sense of fairness but certainly in the expectation that this would help to avoid a food crisis; there was a recognition/belief that the large estates were unproductive and a basic source of production stagnation; there was a fear of escalating violence; and there was the positive political incentive of using the **colonos** as a political support group. Might this have been enough? What sort of reform might have been politically possible? Although there was some recognition that large estates were a source of inefficiency (the research results on this point were, of course, much less complete than they are today), the idea of a fully equalizing reform which would have done away with large farms (as occurred in Japan, Korea and Taiwan) would have been too radical to stand a chance. At that time the only way to equalize the distribution would have been to expropriate at low prices, and this would have created too much resistance, as can be seen from the reaction which **was** mounted within a few years of the landlords perceiving a serious threat to themselves. Some were willing to sell their properties, but the prohibitive fiscal drain of a large program based on this approach is also obvious. So two questions become central. First, could enough have been done in defense of small farmers' rights to affect the overall agrarian structure over the course of time? Second, were policymakers likely to take the right steps to achieve that goal? On the first point, a case can be made in the affirmative. A program which went as far as implementing the **colonos'** interpretation of the homestead laws of 1874 and 1892 would have done the trick, but it would have created much conflict with the large holders who had taken over lands which the **colonos** considered their own. Rectifying much of the past injustice, as defined by the **colonos**, would thus have been a tall order. A more realistic goal would have been to implement **de facto** the homestead provisions to lands in the process of being settled and developed, i.e. to focus the effort on future colonization rather than what had already taken place, in other words to follow a course similar to that of the United States. As of the 1930s, an enormous amount of colonization was still to occur in Colombia. As noted, it has been during this process that so much tension, violence, and injustice has occurred; it would have been impossible to prevent it completely and undoubtedly hard to control it enough to make a major difference. But it, together with modest contributions from redistribution of purchased estates and

¹⁸ The once common view that Law 200 resolved the agrarian conflict of the 1930s until pre-electoral infighting sparked violence in 1946 appears simplistic and wrong. Continuing tensions with tenant labour led large owners to try to buy them out, or failing that to evict and replace them with wage labour; some even shifted cultivated land into grazing to cut down on the number of workers required, thereby making it even more difficult for the peasants to earn a living. Frictions among peasants were common. "La Violencia" of the two decades 1948-65, which left 200,000 dead and 800,000 homeless (Oquist, 1980) was neither simply a political conflict nor simply a peasant war, but a complicated phenomenon with many roots and many mechanisms (Zamosc, 1986; Legrand, 1986; Gilhodes, 1970; Cronshaw, 1986).

Bergquist (1986) argues that the poverty and insecurity of very small coffee producers made them principal victims and actors in La Violencia of circa 1948-65. The violence brought the collapse of state authority and under the resulting anarchy, many forms of warfare broke out. In the frontier zones a lot had to do with the fight for land, probably with little regard for political affiliation. Political violence often forced the small to sell at despair prices, with some others who started small but had good connections being able to accumulate (Safford, 1995, 143).

expropriation of selected haciendas, was probably where the best hopes lay. A determined clarification of and implementation of homestead laws would have established tough groups of homesteaders who would themselves have been a powerful force in defense of their interests and rights. This model could have spread as its feasibility came to be recognized. Had it been possible even to implement something of this sort in say half of the newly settled agricultural zones in the over half century since the 1930s, today's agrarian structure might look very different.

Were policymakers likely to have come up with this solution and to have been able to implement it? I am unaware of anything close to this "vision" having been mooted at the time. One reason that the discussion would not be expected to revolve around such an option is its essentially long-run character, while most policies respond to shorter-term pressures. Even had the vision been there, its implementation would have still been a challenge, both because implementation of laws in frontier areas is a challenge in any context and because Colombia's central government was not at all strong in the sense of its capacity to control the hinterlands effectively. One possible scenario would have been a series of unmet promises, reminiscent of the treaties the U.S. government made with its various indigenous groups, only to systematically break them later. A fully successful strategy of this sort would also have required a reasonable level of public sector support to the new frontier smallholders so that, unlike their neglected ejidatario counterparts in Mexico but like the small farmers in the East Asian countries, their productivity would have risen over time, giving rise to a prosperous smallfarmer agriculture. This condition would probably have been easier to meet in Colombia than the imposition of a homestead law itself. In retrospect Colombia has off and on provided some support of this sort; in the case of coffee it has been important, though admittedly substantially executed through the offices of the Coffee Growers' Federation. Given a starting point at which the government saw a production crisis looming, it had the incentive to move in this direction. The experience of many countries has shown that when a large and reasonably secure and prosperous smallholder sector exists it can put some pressure on governments to provide the research, extension, credit and other types of support which it needs.¹⁹

Whatever were the ex ante possibilities of a productive reform in the 1930s, history took a different course, and the next decades saw the ferocious "Violencia" for which the country became notorious.

4. Agrarian Reform 1960s Style: Law 135 of 1961 and the "Usuarios."

Since the possible "near-miss" in the 1930s, Colombian governments have addressed problems of agrarian structure several times and in different ways, always against a backdrop of high levels of rural conflict and violence. The next period of activity in this area occurred in the 1960s and the early 1970s.

By the 1960s Colombia had entered a period of relatively fast but very dualistic growth in agriculture (3.5% per year over 1950-90), characterized by an expanding commercial agriculture and a generally stagnant traditional (campesino) agriculture, with the latter accounting to the continuing high levels of rural poverty.²⁰ The growth of commercial agriculture, especially in the 1960s and

¹⁹ Hayami and Ruttan (1985) make this point in a famous comparison between the focus of public support for agriculture in the U.S.A. and in Japan.

²⁰ In 1992, some 4.2 million people or 31.2% of the population were in extreme poverty (World Bank, 1994).

1970s, was partly in response to incentives to mechanize and to intensify the use of modern inputs, etc. and partly to the pattern of protection from imports (Jaramillo, 1998, 29). Given this dualistic pattern of growth, labour demand grew slowly, at only 0.6% per year over 1950-87. Commercial agriculture provided only 18% of the new rural jobs over 1950-80 while the campesino crops accounted for nearly 70% (Berry, 1992). It may be reasonably presumed that this exclusionary pattern of growth fed social tensions and violence in the rural areas.²¹

The confluence of forces which laid the conditions for action differed in various ways from those of the 1930s. Internal pressures for reform responded to some of the same concerns as in the 1930s; rural conflict was the key one, since the dramatic "Violencia" episode of the late 1940s and 1950s had only just wound down; the concern with lagging food production and the direct political motive of picking up votes were both present though the former was probably weaker than in that earlier period and the latter did not have the same potential within the structure of the bipartisan National Front. Meanwhile, the growing power of modern commercial farmers represented another important contrast with the 1930s and contributed to the paralysis of agrarian reform efforts (de Janvry and Sadoulet, 1993). Modern, mechanized agriculture had begun to replace extensive cattle raising on the fertile flat lands from around the end of World War II, but especially from the early 1950s on, creating a new pressure group more in tune with the industrial bourgeoisie. Small farmers did not share in the productivity increases of this process, since neither the credit nor the new technologies which fuelled it were generally available to them. Fajardo (1986, 93) and others refer to massive expulsions of campesinos during this period; some was due to the displacement of former workers and tenants on the traditional haciendas as they converted to modern agriculture, and some to the way the "Violencia" played itself out.

As in the early 1930s, there was some recognition that Colombia's agrarian structure was very inegalitarian. Hernán Toro Agudelo, writing in "La Calle", anticipated the evidence on this point thrown up by the 1960 agricultural census. Though in fact the **campesino** sector accounted for a smaller share of food output than in the 1930s²², the overall cost of an unproductive agricultural sector and the associated curtailment of the rural market for the output of Colombian industry were decried. On such points the debate in Colombia tended to run parallel to that of the region as a whole, influenced by the analyses of FAO for Latin America and being reflected in the Punta del Este discussions organized by the Alliance. Despite the impressive growth of modern commercial agriculture, it focused mostly on items other than the chief components of traditional food consumption (except for rice). Population was now reaching its peak growth rate of 3% or a bit higher; when the price of basic items rose at an average of 40% per year over 1955-59 this impressed the politicians.

²¹ Some studies show an association between low rates of employment and/or output growth and intensity of rural violence (World Bank, 1996; Bejarano, 1988), possibly reflecting a vicious circle from violence to low investment to low employment opportunities to violence. Violence may have reduced agricultural GDP in the 1980s by as much as 16%, according to the Colombian Planning Commission (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 1990). Regional evidence points to an impact of violence on private investment in irrigation.

²² On its exact share there was a considerable difference of opinion, reflecting the very weak state of agricultural statistics in Colombia. Whereas Planeación (DNP, 1982b) put the **campesino** share of total food output at 55% in 1975, Siabato (1986) used the national household surveys to come up with a figure of 28%.

Meanwhile, although the National Front plebescite had confirmed strong support for this collaborative arrangement between the two elitist-dominated parties, the Liberal party had become more classist in character, with a decline in the dominance of the elite which had been especially notable historically at the national level (Fajardo, 1986, 96). This fragmentation at the base of the Liberal party presented a threat to the bipartisan arrangement; one manifestation was the rise of the **Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal** (MRL), its timing also bearing a relation to the Cuban revolution and the wave of optimism to which it had given rise. Rural unrest not only remained high but had taken on a rebellious character, searching for autonomy from the two parties and their stifling collaborative arrangement. The most dramatic manifestation of this search took the form of the so-called "independent republics" of which Marquetalia was the principal and the symbol. In general the National Front adopted the same repressive approach as had the dictator Rojas to **campesino** groups who took the "autodefensa" route. Preparations to attack Marquetalia were under way in 1962 but the solidarity of the local population delayed this step.²³

As distinct from the 1930s episode, outside (international) institutions have played a significant role in the unfolding of the more recent attempts.²⁴ Just as the reforms of East Asia had been triggered by the Chinese revolution a decade earlier, the Cuban revolution now awakened U.S. foreign policy to the threat of similar events elsewhere in the hemisphere and US aid to LA became conditional on social reforms, with agrarian reform prominent among them (Perry, 1985, 103). A new attention to social policy and the sources of unrest in Latin America arose among some local politicians as well. In Colombia, Carlos Lleras Restrepo, later president, agreed that fending off the sort of rural-based revolution exemplified by China was not solely a military matter but required improving the living conditions of the rural poor (Lleras R. n.d., quoted by Perry, 1985, 104-105).

The foreign currents, while important, essentially paralleled domestic thinking. Though Colombia's agrarian situation was extreme, Central America had already become a cauldron of conflict, as similar patterns of conflict between the advance of modern commercial export-agriculture and the campesino population became accentuated. In Guatemala a civilian government undertook a land reform, in response to many of the same problems suffered by Colombia, only to be deposed with involvement of the U.S. CIA (Coatsworth, 1994). The reconsideration of the agrarian question in Colombia had already led to a project presented by the Minister of Agriculture to Congress in 1959. The pressures against significant reform were, as usual, very strong. As in the 1930s, the supporters of the status quo were articulate and persuasive in the presentation of their views in the arena of debate. The Sociedad Colombiana de Agricultores (SAC) minimized the idea of extreme inequality in the agrarian structure (at least until the census figures rendered this argument preposterous) and pushed the idea that the real problem of the sector was the lack of

²³ Two years later the absence of such solidarity permitted a heavy-handed takeover with a displacement of people which contributed directly to the guerrilla wars (Fajardo, 1986, 90). The repression on the independent areas like Marquetalia, with their independence from the control of the two parties and their revolutionary ideas contributed to the growing guerrilla strength.mrp

²⁴ Such involvement might in principle be grounds for optimism since external support can help to break local political logjams and since some of the most successful reforms of this half-century have benefitted from such support. Probably the greatest agrarian reform successes from a welfare point of view have been those of Taiwan and Korea. Japan's had less impact on the country's subsequent economic evolution, but a powerful one on political stability, according to most observers (Montgomery, 1984, 116). All three of these reform experiences had the important outside stimulus of American pressure, and in the case of Taiwan, the recognition that failure to deal with agrarian dissatisfaction could lead to revolution, as just demonstrated on the mainland by the new nationalist Chinese rulers.

incentives for investment, the lack of a development policy and insecurity. It argued that private property be respected, pushed for colonization as the way to provide new smallholdings, and even worried that a redistribution of land could flood the markets for agricultural goods (Fajardo, 1986, 105). Lauchlin Currie presented his plan ("Operación Colombia) for an urban-focused development process which saw the solution to rural poverty in the creation of more remunerative urban jobs. Though its details did not accord with the views of most opponents of agrarian reform, it added to the intellectual strength of that side of the debate.

The initial step (Law 135 of 1961 which founded the Instituto Colombiano para la Reforma Agraria--INCORA) was taken by the first National Front government of Liberal Lleras Camargo, with the backing of the Alliance for Progress and its reformist rhetoric. Both the law itself and the way its implementation unfolded reflected its compromise character. Though many members of the industrial bourgeoisie did want a reform, for the various reasons noted above, the power of the largeholders remained high and the natural compromise was to opt for the colonization route (which appeared to hurt no one), while promising to touch private property only in special cases. Tellingly, the prominent Conservative leader Alvaro Gomez Hurtado agreed that Law 135 was indispensable.²⁵ Still, it was a controversial piece of legislation. The big landlords were duly critical on one side and the left on the other.

INCORA began activities in three municipalities in the department of Tolima where conflict had been acute. More than half of its projects and 75% of the titling during the 1960s took place in the "red areas" of intense **campesino** conflict, guerrilla influence and strict military control; its activities were coordinated with those of the armed forces (Perry, 1985, 105-106). Over 1962-1970 the main expenditure categories were land improvement and subsidized credit (both over a quarter) with land purchase accounting for only 8.3%; this reflected the fact that the law was basically designed to undertake directed colonization, with the state supplying the infrastructure, both economic and social.²⁶

Indications that this reform effort would not go far to relieve the country's agrarian crisis were soon apparent. Though on its first projects there was in principal a ceiling of 50 has. this did not apply to those which INCORA took over from the Caja Agraria (Colombia's public sector agricultural credit bank) and other agencies and the rule could be bypassed at the discretion of the Minister of Agriculture in any case. As a result none of INCORA's projects stuck to it. In some cases land concentration was in fact very high in the supposedly "reformed" areas; as of 1975 the two projects in which INCORA had invested the most money were the two with highest levels of land concentration. Frequently, whereas small beneficiaries had to satisfy the letter of the law in paying for the improvements received, on the lands of well connected largeholders such debts would be cancelled (Perry, 1985, 108, citing the somewhat veiled comments in *Planeación*, 1977, Tomo 1, p.14). The cost of the investments in land improvement, financed in part with World Bank credit,

²⁵ Arango et al (1987, 14) see the 1961 episode as a fight between Currie's gran-burgues approach and Lleras' small farm approach. Though the latter won the battle, Mariano Ospina Perez (head of the Conservative party) succeeded in so restricting INCORA's range of action that its activities boiled down to just the reversion of unused land to the state (as earlier decreed in Law 200 of 1936), the titling of public lands, investment in irrigation and other infrastructure and a few purchases in zones of acute conflict.

²⁶ By the early 1970s the evidence from Latin America in general was indicating that directed colonization usually failed to achieve its objectives while spontaneous colonization was typically more successful (Nelson, 1973).

was very high (INCORA, 1970, 20). Obligatory supervised credit and a high level of intervention by INCORA in the selection of crops and use of inputs casts doubt on the validity of the INCORA model of agrarian reform. In any case, this one did not achieve much positive result.²⁷

After the first burst of activity the pace slowed during the conservative government of Guillermo Leon Valencia (1962-66). The more impressive administration of Carlos Lleras Restrepo, whose views have been noted above, took the agrarian issue more seriously. Law 1 of 1968 provided more funding to INCROA, but also established a period of 10 years by the end of which land was to be passed on to sharecroppers or tenants who had applied for it, though establishing difficult conditions which had to be met for such transfer to occur (Fajardo, 1986, 111). Like most legislation touching landlord-tenant relationships, this one backfired, by providing an incentive for landlords to accelerate a process of displacement of tenants. Of the 545,000 tenants inscribed, by June 1974 only 1819 had become owners--2.3%, with some of this occurring at the expense of small or medium owners, according to Vallejo Mejia (1974, 302 and 312). The damage resulting would have been less had the next administration not been hostile to agrarian reform in general, but it had little chance of producing a positive outcome in any case.

The most important potentially positive step taken by this administration was designed to deepen the agrarian reform by promoting campesino organization (the Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos-ANUC), but it eventually also backfired, at least in the sense that it invited harsh repression by the next administration, after escaping the hands of its creators. It was supposed to be a sort of pseudo pressure group for the recipients of government services in rural areas, still essentially under the control of the government.²⁸ Lleras saw the need for campesino involvement to assure that agrarian reform would in fact help them, and realized they would not organize unless its potential was clear to them (Fajardo, 1986, 111). He saw potential value in a worker-campesino alliance for the transformation of the rural areas, and later lamented the lack of organized labour support for the campesino, due in part to the fact that the labour movement was weak at this time, making a clear and continuous presence in the countryside difficult (Fajardo, 1986, 123). In the first two years of its existence ANUC's ideological directions were those of the founders, but the installation of the new Conservative administration of Misael Pastrana in 1970 brought a dramatic shift. Opponents of agrarian reform found a willing ear in the new government, and the repressive response of the administration fostered division within ANUC.

ANUC was from the start a heterogeneous group, with members ranging from small and medium-sized capitalist farms to landless workers. It was thus vulnerable to division, and its internal differences were deftly exploited by the opponents of reform. Nevertheless its influence did rise over a first phase extending into the 1970s. In Fajardo's (1986, 124) view, the costly effects of the development model in place were felt not only by many rural groups but by urban ones as well, lending its goals much legitimacy. Controlling ANUC required a high level of repression, including

²⁷ Perry (1985, 109) reports that by 1966 a third of the settlers in the Tolima projects had abandoned their farms because of poor soil or other negative conditions. He argues that the forced receipt of credit was one of the problems. Arango et al (1987, 19) report that in the DRI projects they studied the ratio of credit to assets was very small, reflecting in part the risk aversion of the producers.

²⁸ ANUC was formed in 1967 under the Ministry of Agriculture. its first Congress in 1970 fixed its objectives and limited its activities to the execution of official programs (Fals Borda, 1982 146). For detailed histories of ANUC, see Zamosc (1986) and Rivera Cusicanqui (1987).

the murder of several leaders (Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos, 1974, 103). The hard line taken by the government radicalized the group, and led to a battle between the moderates and the radicals (Fajardo, 1986, 112). Confrontation with the government and the nature of its development strategy had persuaded many ANUC members that the time had come to push hard for access to land, that invasions were the only route to achieve this goal, and that it was also essential to get control of their own finances and management (Fajardo, 1986, 125). The hard-line group was still a majority; invasions become common. What began as a plausible way to involve the campesinos as pressure group and participant in a process of reform wound up leading to their repression and setting the stage for the next, and quite different, approach to the "campesino problem", mainly during the government of Alfonso Lopez.

To summarize, INCORA's mandate was to provide a palliative rather than a restructuring (Binswanger and Deininger, 1997, 1962-3; de Janvry and Sadoulet, 1990). A major reform was never seriously discussed and too much of what was done was executed badly. Land rental of all forms was discouraged, leading, as in many countries, to the massive eviction of share-croppers (Kalmanovitz, 1978; Binswanger and Deininger, 1997). The lack of any general land ownership ceiling meant that, by the late 1980s of 3.3 million has. titled over the years by INCORA, 60% was in the hands of larger ranchers (Legrand, 1989, 27), reflecting both INCORA's focus on titling and the tendency for small settlers to clear the land, then pass it on to ranchers. The effects of these two serious design errors were compounded by an apparently serious level of inefficiency and corruption within INCORA (Jaramillo, 1998).²⁹ But, whatever the importance of these last weaknesses, it is clear that the programme was too small to have had any lasting impact on the inequality of land ownership. By 1972 only 13,367 families had been granted land apart from that in colonization zones with an average of 18.8 has (Perry, 1985, 111, citing IICA-CIRA, 1970), when perhaps a half million families were looking for it. Thus the reform had virtually no effect on large holdings or the best lands in the country. Land concentration may even have risen.

The 1960s saw the continued advance of modern, capitalist agriculture. Kalmanovitz (1982). The agrarian reform speeded up that development through the fear of expropriation. It was also helped along by the introduction of the export tax exemption (Certificado de Abono Tribunal-CAT) in 1967 and the lower exchange rate made possible by the switch to a crawling peg system.

5. The "Communal Farms" ("Empresas Comunitarias"): A Footnote in the History of Agrarian Policy in Colombia

The final attempt to finesse the dilemma of keeping peasant unrest under control (at this time conflict was particularly acute on the north coast) without either taking land from the largeholders or spending seriously on creating potentially productive small farms took the form of the **empresas comunitarias**. IICA-CIRA supported and provided advice on this initiative, having reached the conclusion that there was not enough land on the agricultural frontier either to significantly increase the land of the existing **minifundia** or to increase their numbers whereas the already existing **empresas comunitarias** showed a high density of families on the land, indicating a greater capacity to

²⁹ Critics argued that INCORA sometimes purchased low quality land at very high prices from largeholders like the Marulandas and against the advice of the lawyer who recommended to extinguish domain presumably because the title was quite doubtful on this land in the department of Cesar (Perry, 1985, 110, citing Tobón, 1972 and IICA-CIRA, 1970).

provide livelihood per unit of land (IICA-CIRA, 1970, 15). INCORA adopted this approach (INCORA, n.d.). Former minister of Agriculture and functionary of IICA-CIRA, Armando Samper G. reported positively on the first efforts along these lines (Samper, 1971), and the "Acuerdo de Chicoral" reached by a bipartisan commission with heavy representation of the longstanding largeholding families, defined this as the replacement for individual allocation of land to smallholders (Perry, 1985, 117). It was enshrined in Law 4 de 1973. The collective element was attractive to many left-leaning observers (Perry, 1985, 117) and soon-to-be President Lopez was also a fan (Perry, 1985, 121-123). INCORA's control over these "empresas" was virtually complete, from the choice of members (beneficiaries) to a close monitoring of its activities and the requirement that it receive supervised credit. As had been anticipated, the land area per family was lower under this arrangement (12-14 has. in the farms created in Sucre, Bolívar and Córdoba--see INCORA, 1974) than the approximately 19 has. under the individual plot approach used previously. By 1974 1177 of these empresas had been created with 11,832 members; most of them collapsed (Perry, 1985, 119). The reasons for failure were easily enough recognized in a 1977 study by the institutions which had promoted them (IICA-OEA e INCORA, 1977), including inadequate amount of land, low quality (reflected in the fact that 60% of the land was used for cattle production), uncertainty of tenure and lack of/untimeliness of credit.

As with each of the various episodes in Colombia's history of policy for the campesino sector, this one had its logic and its honest but informed believers. Communal agriculture does have a place in many countries and should not be disparaged out of hand. But where it works well there is usually a long-established institutional base of collective activity, or such a strong and evident mutual benefit from such activity³⁰ that divisiveness, free-riding and other potential problems are kept to a minimum. Absent those characteristics, it usually fails, especially when the government support is not adequate in level, well thought through and timely.³¹

6. Integrated Rural Development (DRI).

The next stage in Colombia's **campesino** policy, coming in the early 1970s, was a rejection of agrarian reform as commonly understood--a process which changes agrarian structure and access to land, in favour of an attempt to raise the productivity of existing small farms. In principal such a policy has obvious merit; among other things it is the essential follow-up to any land redistribution. Unlike legislating against traditional tenancy forms (earlier) or pursuing a market-based redistribution of land (later) this approach had much to be said for it, even though, like the others it may failed when judged against the criterion of major and lasting impacts on the earnings of poorer members of the agricultural sector.³²

The situation as of the beginning of the 1970s and the inauguration the Pastrana government

³⁰ As is often the case among groups of small-holders who can benefit from an irrigation system, and as was probably the case in most of the existing **empresas comunitarias** in Colombia which provided part of the base of optimism about this approach.

³¹ One of the better studied experiences of this sort is Peru's conversion of the former sugar-producing coastal estates into cooperative farms and their subsequent dissolution into small farms when the opportunity was presented to the cooperative members (Melmed-Sanjak and Carter, 1996).

³² As noted below, opinions on the payoffs from DRI vary, a natural result of the sorry state of agricultural statistics in Colombia, which makes it very hard to evaluate such a program.

was difficult. The stagnation of campesino agriculture, especially notable over 1950-75, was one factor in a resurgence of rural violence; the continuing frustration among **campesinos** was accentuated by the scuttled hopes of agrarian reform, now clearly a failure, and in the judgment of some observers, an increased concentration of land during the decade (e.g. Kalmanovitz, 1974, 95) and a process of proletarianization.³³ ANUC was perceived as being out of control, producing over 800 invasions in 21 departments by 1972 (Escobar Sierra, 1972). In short, the land wars were accelerating again.

Meanwhile, in the Pastrana administration's economic strategy small agriculture was seen as a barrier to rising income levels, which was best circumvented by finding better paid jobs in urban areas, where it was hoped that construction would be a major employment generator (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 1972). At a famous meeting in 1972 the "Acuerdo de Chicoral" was reached; among other decisions taken, the option of expropriation was essentially closed off by the difficult conditions established for it to occur. Steps were taken to improve the supply of credit to the modern agriculture, and to tie it to technical assistance. In the interim before the "four strategies" around which the Pastrana development plan had been built came to full fruition, DRI was initiated by that government, though it was seen by some as inconsistent with the basic logic of the plan, especially with the ideas of Dr. Currie. But it had international support and could be seen as a substitute for agrarian reform--a way of raising the incomes of small farmers without transferring land from larger ones. During the 1960s frustration had been rising among professionals dealing with agriculture and others because the typical agrarian systems in Latin America appeared to be impeding the full flowering of the Green Revolution, whose potential was now clear from the dramatic output increases achieved elsewhere in the developing world. Its benefits were limited to the narrow--at least in terms of the people involved, modern commercial sector. The International Corn and Wheat Centre in Mexico (CIMMYT) and its local partner the Graduate School of Agronomy at Chapingo undertook a pilot project in Puebla (Mexico) in 1967 which demonstrated that the green revolution varietal advances could pay off on small farms provided they were appropriately complemented with credit and that they way they were based on a socio-economic diagnosis of the beneficiaries in order to get maximum impact; the project also highlighted the payoff to institutional collaboration³⁴, the involvement of organized communities, adequate infrastructure and stable prices (de Janvry, 1981, 234). The World Bank came to accept these ideas by the early 1970s. The Chapingo experience became a reference point for rural development agencies; in Colombia the Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario (ICA) was well placed to be the central institution. The three first projects undertaken in Colombia confirmed the Puebla-based conclusions, including the importance of having enough land.

In the Plan Nacional de Alimentación y Nutrición (PAN) strategy of the next administration, that of Lopez Michelson, this policy fit particularly well and was assigned a prominent place. Food shortages had played a role in each of the earlier reform strategies. In this case the importance of an adequate supply of food for all, now buttressed by studies highlighting the nutritional problems of Colombian children, was a focal point in the discussions with the international banks. Meanwhile, a

³³ Figures are inadequate with respect to both of these questions. Fajardo's view on the latter receives some support from the figures presented by Berry (1983).

³⁴ In the land reform efforts of INCORA, that institution tried to provide all encompassing service, which led both to duplication with other institutions and to ill will.

Planeación report (DNP-Dirección DRI, 1979, 58) indicated that the small farmer was losing his hold generally and in the DRI districts.³⁵ The program offered the hope of dealing with both problems. It was structured to focus on food production, relying a lot on increased use of fertilizers together with the better strains, but not on mechanization or (of course) land expansion; another objective was to slow down rural-urban migration. The Lopez government considered this **campesino** initiative to be consistent with the overall agricultural modernization of the larger-scale sector.

The first 5 year phase, programmed to cost 280M of which 170M was foreign, was slowed by administrative inefficiencies and red-tape. The limited decentralization of the national agencies was a problem for execution; in practice their activities at the local level were hard to control (Fajardo, 1986, 137). Still, 1976-1980 was a period of good growth over 1976-80, with the participants chosen according to the criterion of whether they had business potential and provided generously with resources. By June 1979 the programme had reached 207 municipios and 38,000 families, 42% of the goal established for this first phase.³⁶ Problems notwithstanding, the relatively generous level of resources invested (compared to earlier efforts) showed up clearly in "a better and more opportune availability of credit to permit the more intensive exploitation of the farms, a greater supply by government of basic services like education and health, clean water, electricity, and improvement in the access to markets" (DRI, 1982, quoted by Fajardo, 1986, 139). In Planeación's (1982a) assessment, the payoff was greatest when the farmers were not land-constrained, e.g. the project in eastern Antioquia where though the farms were small this was not a binding constraint on output and incomes. This was a relatively well-endowed group, as seems to have been the case in the more successful experiences generally (de Janvry, 1981, 147). For the more subsistence-type farmers in Cordoba (with unstable tenancy) the program did not produce such substantial gains (Arango, et al, 1987).

In this first phase DRI was part of the production strategy of the Development Plan. In a second phase, 1980-82, the campesino came more to be viewed as part of the poverty problem, and a target of social policy. As growth slowed and fiscal problems arose in the early 1980s social spending items lost weight and resources distributed by region and according to clientelistic political criteria (Arango et al, 1987, 16). In 1983-86 DRI was reestablished as a production-oriented project but in a context of quite scarce resources. It has remained a significant element of overall agricultural-rural policy in Colombia, with some ups and downs since that time.³⁷

The most favourable possible assessment of DRI would conclude that it was based on a valid interpretation of the needs of the campesino sector, has grown "from a small, pilot scale operation run by a group of young and dedicated local professionals to a virtually nationwide program"

³⁵ As noted earlier, there was a major difference between the Planeación estimate that in 1975 the campesino (under 20 has) share of food production was 55% and the contrasting figure of Siabato of just 28% (Arango et al, 1987, 20-21). In light of his estimate, Siabato argued that it would make more sense to focus the development programs and the **campesino** effort where it would be most profitable, i.e. non-mechanizable lands and labour intensive products, including some exportables, luxury products, etc.

³⁶ By Dec. 1981 the beneficiaries were listed as 71,051 attended directly.

³⁷ Lacroix (1985, 30) describes the evolution of objectives a little differently from Arango et al, suggesting that the programme was initially conceived with emphasis on raising living standards in the rural areas, albeit mainly through raising production, but gradually moved towards a focus on food production and marketable surplus, with poverty alleviation "a welcome but not necessary, secondary benefit". He notes that by the mid-1980s project areas were being chosen only for their production potential.

(Lacroix, 1985, 33), has learned as it went along³⁸, and has had a significant positive impact on food output and campesino incomes, along with a damping effect on food prices and rural inequality. Such an assessment may in fact be accurate. Lack of adequate data to assess DRI's impact makes it impossible to know whether the overall impact has been large or not. Enough direct local production gains³⁹ have been observed and enough evidence on rising campesino yields accumulated to make this somewhat plausible⁴⁰, though the limited credit coverage would make a large total impact possible only if there had been substantial positive spin-off effects. If such has been the case, the benefits would appear to have been substantially offset by other negative forces acting on Colombia's agricultural sector. If the record has been strongly positive, this would be due to such contributing factors as: the strong cadre of professionals who helped to launch and maintain it; the firm political commitment at the crucial moment of transition from a pilot program to a significantly larger one; the development of technology in response to the real needs of the client small farmers; the fact that many projects worked in long-established communities with some degree of cohesion; and periodic support from international agencies, in particular to help smooth over discontinuities resulting from turnover of personnel in local offices of the public sector agencies (Lacroix, 1985, 33).

An intermediate view would see this as a promising approach which needed more time, resources, and effort (e.g. to improve the institutional performance) to have a large positive impact in the country. Apart for the bureaucratic impediments noted above⁴¹, the decision to focus on food crops diminished the potential benefits to the farmers themselves. The failure to attack the key issue of marketing also limited the benefits. Economies of scale suggest the value of producers associations to contract collectively for the transportation (Arango et al, 1987, 22). Even if these limitations had been largely overcome, its potential impact on the campesino population at large would have been limited by the modest number whose conditions were such as to suggest that they could turn into effective small farmers--perhaps 10% of all campesino families (i.e. about 120,000) (Fajardo, 1986, 148). Perhaps spillover effects would have benefited quite a few other small farmers, but a really broad effect would have required improvement in land access (amount of land and or security of tenure) for the bulk of them.

At the other extreme, some have viewed DRI as nothing more than a general plan favouring large capital, by keeping food cheap, wages down and unrest limited.⁴² Unfortunately the lack of

³⁸ Lacroix (30-32) describes ICA's confronting first the challenge of technical improvements to raise yields and production within the campesinos' existing multi-cropping system (which involved improving extension methods in order to achieve some degree of farmer education in the principles of agronomy), then the related assistance to farmers in getting credit and dealing with marketing, and finally social improvements in the areas of nutrition, health and education. The third type of benefit was, not surprisingly, the hardest to achieve.

³⁹ Lacroix (1985, 32) notes that production increases of some crops were large enough to create marketing problems, confirming the view that possibly too little effort went into planning for such contingencies.

⁴⁰ A detailed review of the experience of one municipality is presented by Zandstra et al (1979).

⁴¹ Lacroix (1985, 30-33) concurs that coordination among the various sectoral institutions involved remained a problem as of the mid-1980s. He also notes that the considerable support the programme has attained among the rural population has been a mixed blessing, in inducing politicians to try to use it to advance other than project-related interests. Jaramillo (1998, 97) notes that political influence has crept increasingly into DRI operations since Colombia's adoption of a new Constitution in 1991, which banned the previous practice of funding political projects of members of Congress who supported the administration.

⁴² Thus, Moncayo (1986) interprets it as designed to consolidate the essential function of the small scale sector--to produce cheap foodstuffs in order to facilitate global accumulation by preventing either the breakdown of campesino agriculture or its conversion

adequate data makes it impossible to get a good reading on the productivity changes of the campesino sector in the wake of the DRI programme. The Mision Agropecuario (Ministerio de Agricultura y Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 1990) concluded that the sector did achieve yield gains over the next decade or so⁴³, but the benefits from this were curtailed by a fall in the real prices of its main crops (Jaramillo, 1998, 33). What increase in income of campesino households did occur came mainly from off-farm incomes, including the participation of females in such activities. These setbacks notwithstanding, there were gains in many dimensions of rural living standards (Berry, 1978; Lopez and Valdes, 1998).⁴⁴ Perhaps they would have been enough to allay tensions in the absence of the disturbing effects of the drug industry, soon to appear on the scene.

7. Market-Based Reform of Land Structure (in the Context of Other Market Friendly Reforms)

By the early 1990s rural violence was again very high, fuelled by a deadly mix of strong guerrilla groups, the drug industry and the paramilitary. The Gaviria administration (1990-94) was launching its "apertura" or opening of the economy to international markets.⁴⁵ The impacts on agriculture and in particular on poorer families in that sector were unpredictable, partly because the country's agrarian structure and agricultural sector were inadequately understood given the dearth of information⁴⁶, and partly because much was also to depend on how international prices moved; previously the protectionist wall provided some buffering from those price movements, now it would be less able to perform this function. By the end of the 1980s Colombian prices of many agricultural items had been drastically reduced by a combination of the high real exchange rate of the late 1980s (a result of capital inflows), the collapse of the international coffee agreement in 1989 and the fall of international commodity prices to historically low levels. The setting was further complicated by the industrial world's recession and a local drought. In Colombia's worst agricultural year of the century, 1992, annual crop production fell by 12.6% in 1992 and overall agricultural output (including livestock) by 1%. A more general shift away from annual crops towards perennials

into small capitalist units. Horowitz (1993) models reform as a strategy by the rich to give a little and backtrack whenever possible.

⁴³ As did Balcazar (1990), who estimates a (perhaps implausibly) big increase in small farm yields over 1973-76 to 1988 of 82% while judging that those on large farms stagnated.

⁴⁴ The ideal information with which to judge the net impact of the various forces impinging on rural life in Colombia over these years would have included an agricultural census to throw light on the changing distribution of land and income surveys to clarify patterns of income distribution. No really useful agricultural census has been taken since 1960, and no demonstrably comparable income surveys in the rural areas are available prior to the 1990s, if then. One of the confusing bits of information for the 1990s is a dramatic reported drop in income inequality over 1991-1995, the Gini coefficient falling from 0.57 to 0.44 (Ocampo et al, 1998). This decline is so rapid as to defy credibility; although it would be almost impossible that such a sharp reduction really happen over such a short span, there is the possibility that, though exaggerated, the data do suggest a decline of smaller proportions.

⁴⁵ The dramatic nature of this change is reflected in the fact that the import to GDP ratio jumped from 15.5% in 1990 to 46.9% in 1997 (Jaramillo, 1998, 124).

⁴⁶ The last few decades saw a rapid expansion of the land frontier, major involvement of the drug lords in rural property holding and significant technological change; as noted above, the information with which to describe the trends in agrarian structure fell behind, to put it mildly.

and livestock over the 1990s is worrisome from the point of view of labour demand and consistent with increasing land concentration, something which cannot be verified statistically due to the lack of data.⁴⁷

The shift towards freer trade as the 1990s began was a natural candidate as contributing factor to a crisis whose severity was greatest for the importable annual crops (Jaramillo, 1998, 83). The large mechanized farm sector lacked the flexibility to adjust quickly to the elimination of credit subsidies; many farms found themselves in a debt trap and the sector responded with a resort to vigorous lobbying (Deininger, 1999, 655). The crisis embittered the relationship between the government and most farming groups and impeded the joint efforts now needed to alleviate it. Under pressure, the government launched a formal recovery plan in early 1993 and a new Agrarian Law in 1994. The liberal trade policy regime was gradually modified by numerous crop-specific support measures. Despite considerable government activity, however, overall farm output continued to stagnate between 1992 and 1997, in the face of declining production of annual crops. This difficult setting provides the context for the most recent effort at land reform in Colombia, via a "market-oriented" approach which reflects the trend of the times towards the use of market forces when possible. An additional factor facilitating the shift from the previous agrarian reform approach was INCORA's loss of its traditional source of finance, a share of duties on agricultural imports, which was eliminated with agricultural trade liberalization. In any case 35 years of the earlier approach had clearly failed to bring about a significant improvement in agrarian structure⁴⁸; too much of INCORA's average annual budget, US\$140 million as of the late 1980s, was spent on a large bureaucracy (Deininger, 1999, 655). The immediate goal of the new programme of "negotiated" land

⁴⁷ The only reasonably complete and useful agricultural census undertaken in Colombia corresponds to the year 1960. Ever since then students of agrarian structure have been forced to rely on cadastral evidence (not comparable conceptually to an agricultural census) or other scattered and always partial sources of information. Given also that the land frontier has been continuously moving, and that in recent years the rural insecurity makes it difficult to even think of gathering such information in large chunks of the country, this adds up to a very defective picture of trends in land structure and concentration. When the latter problem was not present, however, the apparent lack of interest by government in such data, as reflected in the decision not to undertake or follow through on agricultural censuses, raises the question of whether the decision to refrain from doing so may have been in some sense a strategic one.

One comparison has been made between the censal data of 1960 and cadastral data of 1988; it reports a lesser degree of concentration in the latter year (Misión Agropecuario, 1990, 100), after making an adjustment for the fact that a given censal unit tends to be made up of more than one cadastral units. This does not quite end the story since the size-specific conversion ratios developed by CEGA for this purpose may not have been accurate. If one disregards this possibility, the comparison indicates that the 500 Has. and up category has lost ground to the smaller units and the Gini coefficient of land concentration among cadastral units fell from 0.868 in 1960 to 0.840 in 1988 (ibid, 101). A study by Lopez (1986), based on the cadastral figures for 1961 and 1984 showed a slight increase in concentration, but Misión Agropecuario (1990, 102) considers this a doubtful methodology since only 15 million has. were included in the former year. The number included in 1984 is not reported here but was probably at least 30 million, since the total for 1988 was nearly 45 million has.

Between 1960 and 1988 the Misión data indicate that the amount of land registered rose by over 12M has. or 44% of the 1960 base in those regions which were covered by the former census. In the frontier regions not then included--Caquetá, la Guajira and Chocó there were another 5.46 million has. registered in 1988 (Misión Agropecuario, 1990, 98-99). There was thus a major expansion in titled land over this period.

⁴⁸ The Gini coefficient of the distribution of parcels added to the cadastral registry between 1960 and 1988 was 0.773 compared to one of 0.868 in 1960; INCORA's titling and other programs accounted for much of the increase in land area and the distribution of that new land when initially allocated (Misión Agropecuario, 1990, 118). But there appears to have been some reconcentration after the original allocation such that the net decrease in the Gini coefficient was small, as indicated in the previous footnote.

transfer to aspiring smallholders was to subsidize (by up to 70% of the negotiated price of the land) the purchase of 1 million has. to benefit 70,000 families between 1995 and 1998 (Jaramillo, 1998, 93).

It is too early to undertake a serious assessment of this most recent effort to deal with land problems in Colombia, especially given the currently unstable and violent conditions, and the fact that interesting refinements have been made or tested since its launching, whose promise can only be clarified over a period of time. On the one hand it reflects (at least in the experiments in progress in five selected municipalities) a level of design competence far above that of the previous approach (see below). On the other, the magnitude of the challenge is underlined by the record of past failure in Colombia and more generally in Latin American-style agrarian systems. Successful reform is harder in such systems than it was in countries like Japan, Korea and Taiwan, where the new owners were former tenants already cultivating the land and where no major change in the operational side of agriculture was called for. This feature made it easier for the reforms to be effected quickly, thereby avoiding the danger of lack of follow-through. In Colombia the need to spread the reform out over time if it is to have a significant total impact leaves it open to that threat. Further, some design defects of the previous approach were passed along to the new one.

A number of problems appeared quickly. Subsidies for land purchase met with strong institutional and political resistance. Decades of patron-client management, dominated by local politicians, made altering the status quo a difficult task (Jaramillo, 1998, 95; Hollinger, 1998). Implementation procedures had been left undefined by the law and discussions dragged from 1994 to 1997. There were the rather predictable practical difficulties associated with negotiations between poor beneficiaries and powerful landowners. By the end of 1997, 224,000 has. had been distributed, but this was mainly through direct purchases by INCORA rather than the subsidised transactions between current owners and aspiring smallholders which were to be the heart of the new approach: corruption scandals around the acquisition process again came to light (Jaramillo, 1997, 96).

For land reform designed to create a healthy small-farm sector to succeed, various types of public sector support are usually essential. Two important such areas in Colombia are irrigation and research-extension. The institution responsible for irrigation, INAT, has not been able to put together a decent performance record, due to a combination of external and internal sources of inefficiency (a pattern of project selection through patron-client ties⁴⁹, and a strong union respectively) and the design weakness of a too-high level of subsidization to beneficiaries.⁵⁰ Implementation of the new agricultural research policies proposed under the Gaviria administration also moved very slowly. Creation of a new institution, CORPOICA, designed to get the private sector seriously involved in these processes, led to conflicts; by mid-1998 very little financial support had been forthcoming from private sources as the institution continued to be treated by the Ministry of Agriculture as a government agency and was still highly centralized. The performance of a reactivated DRI in the cofinancing of rural development projects also suffered at this time; Colombia's 1991 Constitution had banned the previous practice whereby political projects were routinely funded for members

⁴⁹ The general weakening of the executive under President Samper gave regional power bosses more influence in the selection of projects and beneficiaries.

⁵⁰ The internal resistance was eventually defeated with the dismantling of unions and reduction of employment from 2,500 to 1,000. Getting foreign loans was harder than expected, partly due to INAT's poor implementation record in the 1980s with small irrigation projects funded by the World Bank (Jaramillo, 1998, 96).

supportive of the administration, but it now crept back into operations like those of DRI (Jaramillo, 1998, 97). This broke a tradition of non-interference in DRI and led to confrontations with the World Bank and the Interamerican Development Bank, both major sources of DRI funds; multilateral support ended in 1997 and the "political" projects came to account for over a third of the DRI budget.

Some of the early difficulties plaguing the new attempt at reform reflect weaknesses of complementary programs like those just cited; others reflect design problems or errors in the reform law which may in principle be corrected, and many of which were inherited from the previous approach; a number of refinements have already been made or tested in a five-municipality pilot project. These include⁵¹:

i) creation of a mechanism to facilitate use of grant funds to finance non-land investments, rather than just the purchase of land (as in the law itself).

ii) reduction of the target agricultural income of beneficiaries by a third, based on project specific plans elaborated by them and which include nonagricultural income. Like many reforms, the 1994 one specified a high target income assuming full-time involvement in agriculture, which implied an average plot size of about 15 has. The resulting concentration of the benefits on a relatively few has such political advantages as silencing the criticism that the program is not generous enough and yet getting to the 10-15% of the peasantry which is well organized and collaborates with INCORA (Deininger, 1999, 660). But it is not socially or economically defensible.

iii) a shift of responsibility for approval of land reforms grants from INCORA headquarters to regional offices and of resources to local communities, and the requirement that the municipal council must be functioning for a municipality to be eligible for such grants.

iv) insistence on a transparent public process or project approval, with monitoring, etc. in the hope that this will put beneficiaries in a better position both to negotiate and to effectively use the land they get. Before these pilots, beneficiaries were often picked in an arbitrary and **ad hoc** way. Despite the new guidelines INCORA continued to act in a case by case selection mode and in secrecy. Selection committees were often stacked with former workers on the farm up for sale; though it would have been possible to add many new farmers on some formerly large farms, the opposite tended to happen (Deininger, 1999, 657, 669).

v) a greater attempt to identify potential demand, to familiarize the public with the Agrarian Reform Law and to get data on the characteristics of potential beneficiaries, including a means test; such information is checked for consistency (not part of INCORA's earlier practice), resulting in the elimination of many non-qualified applicants; names of those accepted and those rejected are posted publicly, which seems to have increased accountability and improved understanding of the scope of the reform. A beneficiary training program helps to choose beneficiaries according to their willingness and interest.

vi) laying the groundwork for an effective market, which entails identifying supply in a more orderly way than before, based on ecology, availability of larger farms, etc. To limit upward pressure on land prices municipalities must provide evidence that the existing land supply is at least three times the amount to be transacted under the reform.

vii) much greater attention to meeting the conditions for economic success by the beneficiaries. This includes a heavy focus on their developing plausible farm projects as part of the overall process;

⁵¹ This section is based mainly on Deininger (1999).

according to Deininger (1999, 659) the elaboration of model farm projects has proven to be critical. The identification of local NGOs which can provide technical assistance and of financial institutions other than the state agricultural bank (Caja Agraria) is also central. Municipal plans must include a list of qualified technical assistance providers and possible credit sources.

viii) related to previous points, an attempt to integrate the land reform with other municipal development priorities, encouraging elaboration of productive projects. In all five municipalities alternative programs have been started to address the needs of families who are not selected as land reform beneficiaries. e.g. microenterprises, etc.

Negotiated land reform requires considerable initiative on the part of the beneficiaries (like spontaneous settlement), group formation, selection of viable farm plans, analysis of the productive potential of various farms, negotiation, and arrangement for credit. Most aspirants need help with at least some of these steps. In the five pilot municipalities, a quarter of those pre-selected were illiterate, 70% had agricultural experience and many were in a great rush to get land (Deininger, 1999, 660). Many came in pre-formed groups but the groups had little evident capacity to solve problems, resolve conflicts, etc. In the pilot experience it turned out that nearly all of these pre-formed groups disbanded and were replaced by others with more commonality of interest. So an in-depth training program for those pre-selected (about twice the ultimate beneficiaries) was developed, including some general ideas on developing cooperative behaviour and on economic analysis. The prior fear of a lack of local skills has not in fact been a big problem, given local universities, NGOs, farmers organizations and government agencies (including INCORA). Administrative costs of US\$ 1,800 per family are less than a third of what INCORA was previously spending and quite reasonable in absolute terms. Prices paid for land may be as much as 40% less than what INCORA was paying for comparable land under the previous regime (Deininger, 1999, 660).

Clearly, the new approach as refined in the five pilot projects alluded to has much to be said for it, both in elements of design which better reflect agrarian realities (in particular the need for both an initial subsidy and assistance in making the new farm productive⁵²) and in a serious attempt to control the corruption and inefficiency which plagued the previous approach. What is its potential, if carried out as well as might be hoped? Because it relies openly on a set of conditions which are neither automatically nor easily met--effective local administration, serious agricultural planning and availability of technical assistance and credit, the speed with which it can deal with the needs of aspirants across Colombia is much less than in the "East Asian" style of reform. Starting with those municipalities which meet the conditions and then proceeding to others, gaining experience en route, is a promising tack. Assuming it can stick to this plan, four other issues will then determine how far

⁵² Binswanger (1987, 1091) alludes to the "fundamental financing problem of poor people", the fact that to borrow money to buy land with all markets perfect and scale neutral technology requires curtailing consumption below what one could earn on the labour market. New small farmers may be too indebted or otherwise close to the margin of security such that a substantial share will lose the land again. In other words, smallholders who might easily enough retain their land if they once owned it may require a very high subsidy and/or a good support system in order to move permanently from landless to landed; failure to recognize this fact can imply much lower survival rates of the small beneficiaries than the "market reformers" expect. Allowing for market imperfections which make labour cheaper on family farms, Carter and Mesbah (1993) find that very small units may survive because the land is worth a lot to guarantee employment in an unpredictable labour market with unemployment, but above the size range where this effect is important the reservation price of land falls sharply with size because of the capital constraints on using additional land.

this reform approach goes: funding, political will, the supply of land which for voluntary sale, and the share of municipalities in which the "conditions" for going ahead will eventually be met. If, to take a very round number, it were hoped to improve land access to 400,000 families (60% more than the number of units titled by INCORA over 1960-88 (Misión Agropecuario, 1990, 114) and the costs were say US\$10,000⁵³ then the total of four billion dollars cannot be considered at all excessive. It would correspond to over 25 years of INCORA spending at the rate of the late 1980s, and to a small share of the current cost of dealing with the insecurity which has been plaguing the country. If land availability and the other conditions can be met, the annual budget should be raised so that the number of beneficiaries per year was increased from the 15,000 per year implicit in the above figures. Flagging political will is more likely to be a real impediment than are genuine fiscal constraints. Though the traditional opposition from those afraid of being expropriated will be absent or less than in the previous efforts at reform, there is a different set of opponents--those losing nepotistic control over the "reform" process, etc. What will be needed is a significant level of positive political support, based on an understanding of the programme's potential and the lack of alternatives for dealing with rural problems. This will be needed, since coverage of reforms whose implementation is slow face the risk of cancellation or winding down at any time that political conditions become a little less favourable.

A major unknown is the amount of land which will be available for purchase. Under current conditions of insecurity, it is possible that it will exceed expectations. On the other hand, if security and the health of the rural economy both improve, land prices will rise, making the program more expensive and harder/more expensive to implement. Also unknown is the potential coverage of a reform like this one, which may be inapplicable in a given region for lack of any of the conditions discussed above. Since, however, it appears to offer promise in some settings, this need not be a great worry at this time; the main thing is to refine the approach and keep up its momentum as long as it is yielding good results.

The evidence reviewed in the literature on market-based agrarian reform confirms a need for caution. When complemented by traditional confiscatory reform, the new approach may have more promise, partly through the "threat effect" which can make landlords more flexible in the face of expropriation and lower land prices. Removal of legal constraints on land subdivision is a minimal enabling device (Lipton, 1993a, 651). Credit schemes may need ceilings to become operative. Removal of subsidies favouring large farmers or their crops can be a valuable supportive device for credit or land laws to help the poor, and can be nudged along both by fiscal stringency and by dedication to making reform work. Lower subsidies help to discourage the rich from subverting reforms since the reforms are less costly to them in the absence of those subsidies.⁵⁴

It would now be too late to get the sort of mileage out of a restructuring of rural land that was achieved in the major success stories of Asia, or which could have followed a significant reform in Colombia in the 1930s. On the other hand there is the advantage that later in the development process the previous owners can in fact be bought out with a smaller share of GDP than would have

⁵³ Deininger (1999, 660, 668) reports that average administrative cost in the five pilot municipalities has been running at US\$1,800, or less than a third of that in the previous approach where such costs mounted to about half of the total land reform budget of US\$15,000 per beneficiary in the early 1990s. If the cost of land were to continue at about \$8,000, the total would be 10,000. It depends, of course, on the amount of land provided.

⁵⁴ This was the experience in Northeast Brazil (Lipton, 1993).

been the case earlier. Colombia's current condition is critical enough, so that any step which could significantly reduce rural poverty, tension and violence would be worth-while.

7. Lessons From the Colombian Experience

Efforts to change agrarian structure are political processes whose outcomes depend mainly on the balance of political power between contending forces. Thus the first and most important question to ask about the experience in any given country is the nature of that balance. In Latin America it has seldom left much opportunity for conditions favourable to the traditional approaches to land redistribution to develop. Still, there have been better outcomes and worse ones in the history of such attempts, and the difference between them can also reflect factors like the stances taken by relevant international institutions and the technical understanding of the country's agrarian structure and of the implications of alternative structures. Colombia's twentieth century history of land policy points to a number of lessons, most of them consistent with the more general experience of developing countries.

In terms of what features make a reform effort most likely to achieve positive results if implemented, several points emerge:

- i) The program must be large enough to have an aggregate impact on land structure and hence on poverty; programs whose objective is a short-run quelling of the most severe unrest or poverty are thus a bad bet.
- ii) Ceilings on the amount of land which can be retained by present owners and the amount to be allocated to beneficiaries must be low enough to assure a large impact; in cases like Colombia where land redistribution in the settled parts of the country was historically warded off, the absence of a way to prevent concentration in the frontier settlements became even more pivotal.
- iii) Effective support to small farm beneficiaries of reform are almost always important and often essential for their effective development.
- iv) Non-reform support for small farmers can achieve much if carried out in an effective way, and probably has made a significantly positive contribution in Colombia through DRI. But to live up to its potential it must involve a substantial flow of resources, a good understanding of what is needed and a high level of continuity. Given that the initial understanding of what will work best is usually not very good, a capacity to learn, modify and refine becomes very important.

If one accepts that a major redistribution of land could never have occurred in Colombia, then the best alternative would probably have been an equitable development of the frontier as it was gradually brought under cultivation, essentially a preventive step rather than a curative one.⁵⁵ This

⁵⁵ The importance of preventing land concentration in the first place is particularly pertinent to future events in Sub-Saharan Africa. Although the recent agrarian history of Colombia is less parallel to that of SSA than are those of some other regions of Latin America (e.g. much of Central America where communal land systems were extinguished by the intruding Iberians) the current threat in SSA is certainly that as communal systems give way to Westernized property rights a Latin American style concentration will take place, with ultimately similar results. The details of the process of concentration are eerily similar. There is a legitimate debate on the relative merits on grounds of efficiency of traditional land rights systems in various parts of SSA and of the extent to which they could be maintained even if this were desirable. But there can be no debate on the looming threat of land concentration through a combination of unhealthy political and economic processes. What is quite clear is the need, there too, for a system of land ceilings which would remove the threat of such concentration, provide greater security to smallholders, and, not inconsequentially, face governments with the fact that their task is to interface with and support the smallholder. In many countries this will be done with dedication only when there is no apparent alternative.

option should in principle have been easier than redistribution of land already claimed or controlled by largeholders since that group was an already existing vested interest whereas the future largeholders who got land on the frontier did not yet constitute a pressure group. But this alternative required that several difficult conditions be met: first, a degree of foresight to recognize that over the decades much new land would be brought into production and that its distribution would thus gradually affect the overall level of inequality of access to land in the country; second, a recognition that the level of support to new small farmers would be high, given the usually low or modest land quality and the need for infrastructure; third, an understanding of why most directed colonization efforts in Latin America have failed whereas spontaneous ones are more likely to succeed, such an understanding being necessary in order for the state to provide its support in the right ways--usually non-paternal and market-friendly ones; and finally enough political power and administrative capacity at all times to prevent the predictable incursions of aspiring largeholders into the frontier.

At this time, with much less frontier remaining than was the case forty years ago, the "negotiated" reform now being tested may well be the best option available. It too appears to have considerable potential if implemented in a professional and dedicated way.

The lessons of a more political nature from Colombia's experience, apart from the obvious fact that there will always be powerful status quo opposition to proposals for major reform, and the important corollary that the conditions which might permit a serious reform which faces strong opposition will usually be transitory, include:

- i) The fact that, even within a generally elite-dominated polity, the differences in agrarian policy between political parties and administrations has been substantial. The steps taken or contemplated by the Lopez Pumarejo administration in the 1930s would not have been very likely under a Conservative administration. The fostering of ANUC by the Lleras Restrepo administration would not have been considered by the previous or the succeeding Conservative governments.
- ii) The above being the case, the cost for agrarian policy of the alternation of the Presidency between the two parties under the National Front (and of the squeezing out of other political voices) may have been high. Short-lived administrations provide one more reason, among many, why successful reforms are usually done quickly.
- iii) Some forms of political non-continuity imply that the chance for reform itself is fleeting. Others, which involve more generally accepted policies or programmes already entrenched, impose their costs through policy discontinuities, which prevent or impede institutional learning by doing and refinement of programmes. Machado (1986, 9) bemoans the inconsistencies and lack of clear policy of in the agrarian policy area in general, the lack of studies of that policy and the difficulty in getting hard data on which to assess such policy.
- iv) Though ex-post events have had little chance to demonstrate it in Colombia, it is probably true as Lleras Restrepo believed, that empowerment of the rural poor is ultimately essential to the consolidation of a healthy agrarian structure if not to its establishment.⁵⁶
- v) Also hard to assess quantitatively but very persuasive in general is the hypothesis that the failure to successfully confront rural poverty and dissatisfaction through astute agrarian policy has provided a base of strength for the guerrilla groups (Fajardo, 1985, 90) and a fertile ground for the illicit drug

⁵⁶ In the context of Japan's successful post-war land reform, this was the firm belief of General MacArthur based on the advice of the famous expert Wolf Ladejinsky (????).

industry (Barragán, 1999), a *raison d'être* for the paramilitary forces and ultimately the single main explanatory factor of Colombia's current social, political and economic crisis.

vi) Economic policy in all its dimensions has taken on an international dimension which was much less in evidence during the first half of the century, partly due to the presence of the World Bank, the IMF and other such institutions, partly to the increase in industrial country concern with the possibility of social revolutions after those of China and Cuba, and partly due to the greater flow of ideas across countries. Accordingly, there has been an important international involvement in all of the reform-related activities of the Colombia government during the last half-century. Because of the relatively free and rapid flow of ideas, it is usually hard to sort out the net influence of these international actors, either through their beliefs or through their money. Undoubtedly the biggest failure of the international agencies over the last quarter-century during which they have directed considerable attention to poverty has been their eschewing of involvement in agrarian reform processes until the World Bank's recent support for market-based reforms. Such failure parallels that of national elite. As Christodoulou (1990, 187-192) points out, the World Bank has traditionally skirted this most important of all desirable "structural adjustments" for reasons which are essentially political. Prosterman, Temple and Hanstad (1990, 4-5) suggest that another reason why land reform is not the subject of consistent or coherent attention by aid donors or policy-makers in countries where landlessness is acute may be the invisibility of the poor, so that "the issue arises in conspicuous form in only a handful of countries each decade where revolt or famine grabs the attention of media, the public, and governments. Now, with greater acceptance of the idea of reform *per se*, the benefits will likely be limited due to the dedication to the market approach.

How agrarian issues are understood by the key actors matters.

Many mistaken or at least somewhat misguided views have been held and espoused over the period under review, and they appear to have had an impact on outcomes. These include:

- i) The always widespread impression that small farmers are less efficient economically than large ones, notwithstanding a wealth of evidence pointing in the opposite direction or which at least requires one to have a very nuanced view on this matter. Though a few prominent actors like Lleras Restrepo had a generally positive view of the potential of small farm systems, this view was never widespread, even among agronomists (who tend, like many others) to confuse labour productivity and modern technology with economic efficiency.
- ii) A faulty understanding of the implications of various landlord-tenant contracts, which often, as in Colombia, led to naively designed legislation against certain forms and/or to their being treated as criteria affecting the possibility of land expropriation, with the effect of encouraging landlords to displace tenants. For such steps to have a chance of success if they are desirable in the first place (usually a complicated matter), they must usually be undertaken quickly to forestall impending tactics, evasion, etc. not to mention to guarantee that the next administration will not cancel the legislation, as essentially occurred in Colombia between the Lleras and the Pastrana governments.
- iii) The tantalizing idea that cooperative farming had a lot to be said for it, without a solid understanding of the conditions under which that might be the case, led policy-makers down another primrose path.
- iv) When information on agrarian reality is quite limited the general tendency to lean on simplistic models thereof is accentuated. Rigid Marxist views have guided some interpretations of the **campesino** world in Colombia which rigid neo-classical views

have guided others. Both are probably pretty distant from the truth.

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