REFORM WITH REPRESSION: The Land Reform in El Salvador

By: Edward F. Lehoucq and Harold Sims

Lehoucq, Edward, F. "Reform with Repression: The Land Reform in El Salvador," ISHI Occasional Papers in Social Change, No. 6 (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1982).

Article:

Introduction

We shall seek to analyze two aspects of Salvadoran society-- one prevalent for a long period of time, the other a response more recent in origin.1 First, we will investigate the conditions that have been developing in recent years in the countryside of El Salvador and the ramifications of these developments for the peasantry. Second, we will analyze the political response, namely the land reform that has been formulated and partially implemented in a calculated effort to ameliorate a century-long process of rural stratification and, thereby, terminate rule by a landed oligarchy while frustrating a radical revolution.

The task delineated above becomes important because of the problems currently afflicting El Salvador. In the cloud of misinformation that the U.S. government and the "civilian-military" junta of El Salvador have released in recent months, the virtues of the land reform stand out prominently. It is our view, however, that the actual results of the reform are quite limited at best and brutal at worst. The dismal reality becomes apparent once the reasons for carrying out such a reform are understood. The reform was implemented not so much to relieve the economic distress of the peasants as to "steal" the initiative from the left. The aim of the reform was to create a formidable group of peasants loyal to, and dependent upon, the embattled "civilian-military" junta to counter the threat from the Catholic comunidades de base – inspired by the preachings of liberation theology -- and from the supporters of the "Marxist-Leninist" guerrilla organizations.2 The uncertain effects of this reform, by extension, are to be forced upon the majority of the peasants who do not, and will not, benefit from the much-vaunted land reform. In short, this reform serves a dual purpose: it divided the peasantry internally into a minority who are, or who will become, supporters of the junta and a majority who are not; and in addition, it serves internationally as a symbol of the junta's "moderation."

It is crucial, then, that we analyze the effects of this program, since it has become the centerpiece used by both Washington and San Salvador in their efforts to defend the current junta's chances for producing stability.

Conditions in the Countryside

As two recent analysts have written, El Salvador is burdened by one of the most rigid class structures and one of the clearest income inequalities in Latin America.3 In the early 1970s, El Salvador's income distribution was typical of Central America: over two-thirds of the population received less than 2 percent of the disposable income, while less than 2 percent possessed one-third of the income.4

The current crisis in El Salvador can be said to have taken root over a century ago, in March 1880, when the government outlawed all ejido (communal) land in the midst of an international coffee boom.5 What had been a continuous process since the early sixteenth-century Spanish conquest was accelerated. We refer to a process whereby the largely indigenous population yielded to the interests of the growing export- oriented haciendas. A battle soon developed between subsistence agriculture and export agriculture.6 As a result of the "liberation" of land from the ejido system and the expansion of the coffee oligarchy, "many an evicted peasant was converted into a dispossessed landless wanderer seeking work as a hired laborer on a finca or hacienda."7 This process eventually resulted in the increasing polarization in the countryside that led to the rebellion of the 1930s. In

1932 the growing concentration of land in the hands of latifundistas resulted in a mass peasant/uprising in the north of the country, in which 10,000 to 30,000 peasants lost their lives after the revolt was defeated -- an event which came to be known as "La Matanza."8

The massacre had two wide-ranging effects. First, it left a definite imprint on the minds of most of El Salvador's peasants -- if not all Salvadorans -- that any serious challenge to the power of the oligarchy would be crushed by any means possible. Second, it accelerated the process of land concentration in the hands of a few leading families. For example, by 1971, including all farms with ten hectares or less, 92.5 percent of farms contained just 27.1 percent of the farmland.9 It was estimated in 1961 that just six wealthy families owned 7,923 hectares, or approximately 4 percent of the nation's total agricultural land, and that these six families owned as much land as that worked by roughly 270,000 other rural families, or 80 percent of the entire rural population. 10 The growing concentration of land and the increasing magnitude of poverty are reflected in the following chart.

Distribution of Rural Families and Land by Size of Holding, 1961-1971[11]

Size of Holding (in hectares)	Number of Families			
	1961		1971	
Without land	30,451	11.8%	112,108	29.1%
Less than 1	107,054	41.6%	132,907	34.6%
1-to-1.99	48,501	18.8%	59,842	15.6%
2-to-4.99	37,743	14.7%	44,002	11.4%
5-to-9.99	14,001	5.5%	15,730	4.1%
10 or more	19,597	7.6%	19,591	5.2%
Total	257,347	100.0%	384,540	100.0%

A number of points can be deduced from these figures. In just ten years the number of landless families multiplied more than three times -- an increase of 81,657 family units. Second, the majority of rural families, those with two hectares and less, or nothing at all, numbered 304,857, or 79.3 percent. Third, we can appreciate the increasing process of inequality in the distribution and use of agricultural land. It is clear, then, that the condition of the majority of Salvadorans in the countryside is worsening, to say the least, and that poverty is an endemic condition for much of the rural population. Unfortunately, our data do not adequately measure the degree of land ownership, since the census takers reported only the number and size of the producing units, not their ownership.

Let us next examine the structure of the peasantry itself. The colono, an agricultural wage earner who lives on an hacienda, maintains his family on the estate and traditionally receives the use of a small plot of land on which to cultivate subsistence crops, such as beans, corn, and sorghum. In exchange, he is required to perform labor services on the owner's lands. The number of peasants who are colonos has been steadily decreasing, however, even though the number of peasants has been on the increase in recent years. This is due to two factors: the growing use of labor-saving machinery and, consequently, the switch to landless seasonal laborers to work the estates. As a result, the number of colonaje arrangements fell from a high of 55,000 in 1961 to a low of 17,000 in 1971.12

The tenant or small property holder constitutes asecond type of Salvadoran peasant. Whether renter or owner, he usually has access to between one and five hectares. In this case, two factors must be taken into account: first, the plots of land, whether rented or owned, are insufficient to provide subsistence, and second, they are located for the most part, in areas of poor quality, such as steep hillsides, which are subject to erosion. Because of these factors, land rotation and seasonal wage labor have become economically attractive, if not fundamentally necessary, for El Salvador's tenants and small plot owners. It is not surprising, therefore, that

peaaants with less than one hectare earn 80 percent of their income from non-farm activities.13 In short, the majority of property renting or owning peasants in the 1970s supplemented their incomes by seasonal migration and part-time wage labor in order to survive in an economy in which they could not hope to be self-sufficient or economically independent on the basis of agriculture.

A third category of Salvadoran peasant consists of the ever-increasing numbers of landless agricultural wage laborers. They are rural proletarians in the true sense of the word, wholly dependent upon their labor for wages.l4 As noted earlier, the ranks of the peasants involved in colonaje arrangements and in renting or owning a small plot have been steadily decreasing. By 1975 it was estimated that 40.9 percent of the rural population was trapped within this condition, and recent calculations based on prior figures place the number of landless at 312,000 families -nearly 65 percent of the rural population.15 The past decade has witnessed\ the growth of a large, landless, agricultural, wage-dependent labor force, in El Salvador, one which is becoming increasingly proletarianized.16

In summary, El Salvador has relied upon an antiquated system that is extremely unequal both in the distribution of income and in the control and ownership of land. Moreover, the peasantry has been subject to an increasing process of impoverishment. The rural population has grown in its landless, wage-dependent condition, while it has decreased correspondingly in its colono, mini-tenant, and smallholder aspect.

The Impact of the "Land Reform" on the Countryside

With the ouster of the regime of General Carlos Romero on October 15, 1979, a civilian-military junta was formed. The new government, composed of progressive military officers and center-left civilian leaders, promised to carry out much-needed political, social, and economic reforms. After 50 years of military rule, El Salvador appeared to be on the road to realizing a democratic state. Despite the sincere intentions of the new junta, the promised reforms were never carried out. The few measures that were attempted met with the stiff resistance of the right and failed to cool the demands of the left.17 A political crisis was not long in coming and by January 3, 1980, less than three months after the coup, the government dissolved following the resignation of two of its three civilian junta members and all of the civilians in the cabinet. The crisis occurred because the civilians in the government were powerless to halt the escalating repression, in which prominent members of the security forces were believed to be implicated, and because those same forces seemed committed to the frustration of all attempts at socioeconomic reform. Rightist resistance and military recalcitrance rapidly forced the parties of the center-left into an alliance with the militant left outside the governing junta. A single civilian party, the Christian Democrats, largely absent from the first government, now joined what would be a predominantly military regime.

Relations between the Christian Democrats and the colonels who headed the "new" junta would never be completely harmonious, but the impetus and demand for the earlier promised reforms, including the land reform, would remain under the new political arrangement. Numerous Christian Democrats would depart the government during 1980, while the toll in human life would reach, on the average, a thousand per month, largely at the expense of the opposition. As the members of the first civilian-military junta joined the organized opposition, unified under the banner of the Frente Democrático Revolucionario (FDR), the military sector of the government was driven further to the right in response to the popular threat -- and to the desire of their U.S. supporters that the left be neutralized militarily.

Under these circumstances, the Salvadoran security forces had to choose between two extremes: a restoration of their traditional alliance with the landed oligarchy whom they had served for nearly half a century, or a "new society" resulting from several concessions to the masses, one of which would be the land reform which could be carried out by the security forces in the hopes of "stealing" and crushing the momentum of the political and armed opposition. With the aid of sympathetic civilians and eager officials from the Agency for International Development, the junta, now working ever more closely with Washington, proceeded along this "conciliatory" route. In March 1980 it became clear that the military had decided to adopt the latter course and, in the process, to occupy the countryside. This path pleased both the security forces, in their frantic search for a military

solution to the crisis, and Washington, which by now seemed willing to accept any path that might prove fruitful in the elimination of a "strategic" threat.

It is important to keep in mind that the Salvadoran land reform was initiated and implemented in the atmosphere described above. A "state of siege" was immediately declared and the military occupied the great estates, to the consternation of the peasants as well as former owners. The Carter administration would now have its opportunity to learn whether a revolution could be frustrated by a "reformist" response, financed and directed by the United States.

The land reform, and the analysis which follows, consists of three integrated but separate incremental phases. On March 6, 1980, Phase I, embodied in Decree 153, was announced in San Salvador. Its purpose was the expropriation of all farms of 500 hectares (1250 acres) or more and the creation of peasant-run cooperatives on the expropriated land. Phase II, announced in conjunction with Phase I, was to expropriate all holdings of between 150 and 500 hectares (375-1250 acres). The purposes of Phases I and II were similar in respect to the creation of peasant-run cooperatives. Phase II has yet to be carried out. Its implementation would have a devastating impact upon some sectors of the middle class as well as the oligarchy -- the vast majority of El Salvador's coffee, its major cash crop, is grown on farms of this size. Decree 207, the third phase of land reform, or the "Land to the Tiller" program, was announced on April 28, 1980. Its goal was the conversion of small tenant farmers into owners (in reality, mortgagees) of the plots they previously had rented. We shall consider each of these programs in order to gain perspective concerning the nature of these "reforms" and their features.

It is our contention that the first and the most important measure of a land reform's success should be its wide-ranging effects. The thoroughness of a land reform should be measured by the entent of its integration of the previously excluded sectors of the peasantry, the degree of self-sufficiency of the new plot owners or cooperative members, and the resulting socioeconomic effects.18 A second and looser standard of measurement could be the degree to which a land reform fulfills the objectives set forth by its innovating agent or elite. In this vein, the motivation of the colonels to go ahead with the land reform becomes patently clear. The security forces wished to create both a set of safe refuges in the countryside and a group of peasant supporters in order to conduct an effective counterinsurgency. In other words, the land reform in El Salvador was not meant to be one in which strict criteria of thoroughness would be met, but rather one in which a sector of the peasantry would be enlisted in a conflict, coordinated from above, against the Christian and radical rural proletarian groups that emerged in the wake of the political and economic changes occurring in El Salvador since the early 1960s. It is our contention that the land reform has been "a cruel hoax."19

Phase I

On March 6, 1980, Decree 153 authorized the expropriation of all landed estates in El Salvador in excess of 500 hectares, and the creation of peasant cooperatives on this land. The former owners were to be compensated in agrarian reform bonds with maturations of 20, 25, and 30 years.20 Despite the favorable commentary emanating from officials in Washington and San Salvador concerning this first phase of the reform, it has been complicated by a number of factors since its declaration, and it has proven to be less far-reaching than its promise implied.

First of all, the initial phase of the reform, had it been carried out to the extent originally contemplated, would have affected only 15 percent of El Salvador's total arable land.21 While some of El Salvador's best land was expropriated under this phase, 69 percent of the affected land was used for pasture or was not cultivated at all.22 In addition, most of the country's agricultural wealth still remains in the hands of a few families. More than 85 percent of the coffee, 75 percent of the cotton, and 60 percent of the sugar cane remains untouched.23

Secondly, the land reform has been co-opted, in a sense, by the individuals who have formed the new cooperatives. This is not as favorable a development as it might at first appear. Two types of beneficiaries have been affected by the expropriations: one group has consisted of the managers, bookkeepers, tractor drivers,

mechanics and others who were employed on the old farms; the other group consisted of the colonos, the main peasant Sector able to participate since the formation of the cooperatives.24 Refugees who have fled the military occupation and the growing war in the countryside often report that the ORDEN peasants – the rural poor who have been mobilized by the oligarchy and the security forces to identify potential or actual organizers of Christian comunidades de base and rural peasant unions such as FECCAS and UTC -- have benefited at the expense of legitimate tenants who often flee the approaching security forces and paramilitares.25 Due to the greater material and educational assets of former employees of the estate, the privileged beneficiaries noted above, though they represent by far the smallest sector in the countryside, have managed to shunt aside or at least cow many of the colonos who are members of the new cooperative ventures. An AID official discovered the source of this trend in the course of his investigation of the reform:

> The campesinos living as colonos on large haciendas have traditionally made up one of the most submissive, passive and unorganized segments of Salvadoran society. Living in a state of semi-servitude, they have never been allowed to form unions, cooperatives, or groups of any sort. They assiduously refrain from behaviour that would displease their patrones -- such as demanding higher wages, requesting better services, or organizing groups -- because this would lead to their expulsion from the estate or perhaps even more drastic measures...The cooperative leadership, then, belongs to a different socioeconomic class from the ex-colono cooperative members, and there is...very little two-way communication between them.26

Moreover, there have been instances in which the newly elected cooperative leaders, especially if they were peasant union leaders before the expropriation, have been murdered, together with their entire families, either by the security forces or the paramilitary right.27 In short, the primary beneficiaries of Phase I have often been the groups in rural society who were already better off, not the mass of rural laborers.

Thirdly, this first phase has been marked, since its inception and throughout its implementation, by a lack of planning. Characteristically, both the formulation and the implementation of the reform have been limited, each in its own way. The formulation has been restricted to the highest levels of Salvadoran government and the supporting technicians of the U.S. AID. The peasants, mainly colonos living on the haciendas -- or their peasant unions -- were never consulted or integrated into the reform process. Much the same can be said regarding the implementation of this phase. As even AID admits:

> Preparations for the Phase I takeovers were made quickly after the political decision was taken and its details were very closely held so that opposition would be a minimum. Planning for the reforms and further implementation continues to be insufficient and inadequate... The insufficiency of prior planning has been compounded by changing leadership within the government and by the fact that the reform and related events have moved more quickly than priority implementation needs, such as approval of policies and procedures.28

To summarize, then, the first phase of the land reform -- which has been the only attempt at breaking up the large estates -- has not and cannot be far-reaching in itself. In addition to the fact that its results have not been as extensive as they might have, the policy has been hampered by administrative and implementative problems unforeseen at the outset.

Phase II

Ironically, this is the phase that could make the experiment a radical reform, but it has not been carried out -- nor is it likely to be. While Phase II would only affect 23 percent of El Salvador's total agricultural land,29 it would effectively challenge the power of the rural elite -- the planters of coffee, cotton, and sugar cane. If Phase II were to be implemented, it would expropriate 70 percent of the coffee-producing v, lands, which account for more than 70 percent of El Salvador's total agricultural exports.30

It seems highly unlikely that Phase II will ever be implemented, however, as a recent OXFAM study demonstrates.31 In fact, Colonel Abdul Gutirrez, leader of the junta, went so far as to announce, at a San Salvador press conference on May 14, 1980, that there would be no land reform beyond Phases I and 111.32 The junta's decision in this respect abbreviates the program by at least 50 percent, in terms of the amount of land to be distributed. Needless to say, it limits the potential impact by at least an equal percentage. If Phase II were implemented, it would present a formidable challenge to the state and would require a very different

political climate than that which currently prevails in San Salvador.33 By cancelling Phase II, the Salvadoran junta has guaranteed the most important sector of agriculture against all but the most minimal reform -- a sector which has traditionally provided the oligarchy with its political and economic power. In short, the current regime's political will has not proven sufficiently strong to implement this phase of the reform, and at the urging of the colonels and the middle class the heart of the agrarian program has been set aside. It has not suited the purposes of the Reagan administration, or apparently of the U.S. media, to stress this fact at a time when the public is being asked to assume a greater share of the costs of maintaining the de facto government in El Salvador.

Phase III

On April 28, 1980, the third and final part of the land reform was announced in Decree 207. Phase III was designed, in the words of an AID official, to "immediately convert 150,000 landless peasant families into small owners."34 Christened by its author and advocate, Roy Prosterman, as another "Land to the Tiller" program, similar to the one he attempted in South Vietnam, this hasty effort has drawn more criticism than Phase I. /Professor Prosterman again defended his idea before Congress and, ignoring the warnings of the University of Wisconsin's Land Tenure Center that the plan could be highly disruptive to the Salvadoran economy, Prosterman and Ambassador Robert White pressed ahead with the program, much to the dismay of the Salvadoran military authorities. At least one AID subcontractor believes that it was White who made the final decision in an effort to increase the popular appeal of the junta both at home and abroad.35 A number of critics have argued that the real intent of this phase (or, for that matter, of the entire land reform program) has been to further rural !pacification rather than to provide land to the landless. This motive, which will be dealt with in the latter part of our paper, is only one of the problems plaguing this phase. Despite Washington's presumed "good intentions," Phase III is fraught with difficulties and suffers from having ignored realities that confront its intended beneficiaries.

First of all, as in Phase I, the third phase has been executed without sufficient planning or adequate consultation with the persons affected. Since this phase is directed toward El Salvador's small tenant farmers, whose plots are of varying sizes and qualities, the local authorities (or their U.S. sponsors) should first have conducted studies on how to implement such a reform successfully and should have determined its probable effects before calling the program into existence. In particular, the conditions of tenancy should have been studied carefully before embarking on a measure that was bound to disrupt traditional rural social relations, especially those relations that assured minimal subsistence. Close attention to local experience and opinion might at least have avoided the most damaging disturbances to local networks of subsistence. No such studies were ever carried out, and local authorities were simply told what was to be done. Here again the security forces played a major role in implementation.

The "Land to the Tiller" program converted renters into mortgage-holders without obtaining the opinions of the "beneficiaries" in the matter. Primarily, at least from the U.S. perspective, Phase III seems to have been aimed at strengthening the junta by altering the status of the tenant farmers of El Salvador. It was assumed that they could be counted upon to support the de facto government as a consequence.

In practice, the problems foreseen by the Wisconsin group did indeed come to pass. As the Land Tenure Center had warned:

> The creation of an impossibly complex land registry snarl, as perhaps 200,000 or more parcels suddenly need definition, registry, and mortgage management is a real possibility. Similarly, credit, input delivery, and especially marketing services must be created for the beneficiaries who formerly, in many cases, depended on their patronos for such services.36

The lack of local planning, many analysts believe, resulted from the fact that "Land to the Tiller" was in large part an AID creation. By the late summer of 1980 AID officials had become concerned that Phase III might prove to be a blunder of major proportions. An AID memorandom of August 8 cautioned:

Phase III presents the most confusing aspect of the reform program, and it could prove especially troublesome for the United States, because it was decreed without advanced discussion, except in very limited government circles, and we are told, it is considered by key Salvadoran officials as a misguided and United States imposed initiative.37

In short, the prior planning and eventual implementation of this phase have been woefully inadequate.

Secondly, and as a result, Phase III ignores the system of crop rotation that is traditionally practiced by El Salvador's tenant farmers. More than 80 percent of small tenancy takes place on plots smaller than two hectares.38 Roughly 83 percent of El Salvador's farms are too small to provide the families who work them with income above the absolute poverty level (even when off-farm income is counted).39 Small tenant farmers have devised a system whereby they rotate their plots to compensate for the poor quality of the soil. One plot is cultivated for a few years, then the land is left fallow while the peasants move on to another plot or lend themslves out as temporary agricultural workers. Phase III would abolish V renting as a practice, eliminating a fluid system, however desperate, of land rotation.40 The "beneficiaries" of the program will therefore be tied to plots of land that often are insufficient to provide basic longterm subsistence.

Thirdly, the reactions of the landowners to Phase III has been overwhelmingly hostile, especially among those who possess between 20 and 100 hectares. In many cases associated with the "Land to the Tiller" program, smallholding tenants have been evicted by angry landowners from lands that they traditionally farmed, thereby preventing the tillers from claiming the small plots as their own. In fact, there have been cases of small to medium- sized landowners enlisting lawyers "to write up documents stating that the present renters renounce all ownership rights to the land, and paying off arrendatarios (renters) or forcing them to sing." In addition, legal titles to these small plots have yet to be given to the great majority of the "beneficiaries" of Phase III.41

Fourthly, "Land to the Tiller," as well as the entire land reform program, excludes peasants in two very important ways. First, as noted above, the peasant in El Salvador seldom has been allowed to participate in the design or implementation of any aspect of the reform process. With the exception of the conservative and partially government-supported Union Communal Salvadorena (UCS), all other peasant organizations, including the Catholic FECCAS, have been excluded from the entire land reform process. This has been a reform in which change was dictated from abroad and regulated from the top down. No effort ever was made, either by Washington or the junta, to include the peasant majority in any stage of the process; in fact, peasants who were suspected by the security forces of having been members of nonofficial peasant unions have disappeared or been found murdered.42 A second way in which peasants were excluded concerns the manner in which they were selected for participation in the land reform. It must be remembered that a peasant in El Salvador must be either a colono, and therefore eligible to take part in the formation of a cooperative (Phase I), or a renter of a small plot (Phase III) to take advantage of the reform. By utilizing these criteria only the junta and the AID planners have failed to integrate the majority of the Salvadoran peasants into the reformed sector of agriculture: the landless, wage-dependent, agricultural workers, who constitute 65 percent of the country's peasant population!43

There remains to be considered the burden of military graft and corruption. While this issue has not been discussed by the OXFAM investigators, it is given prominence by former agrarian reform officials who have fled El Salvador during 1980-81. The latter have charged, in fact, that the roughly 500 officers of the Salvadoran security forces now constitute a new elite, having replaced the oligarchs with a new regime, perhaps modeled upon their Brazilian counterpart.44 Former agrarian reform officials testify to the fact that the customary system of distribution of spoils by tanda (military school graduating class) alliances still prevails, unhindered by the token presence of Christian Democrats in government. Leonel Gomez, like Rodolfo Viera before him, insists that overvaluation of properties or even duplicate sales of the same property to ISTA (Instituto Salvadoreño de Transformed& Agraria) have been common, with the colonels and their tandas benefiting from these operations.45 The military occupation of the countryside accompanying the reform clearly involved more than the counterinsurgency effort advocated by U.S. authorities. It amounted to securing

for the officer corps a vital zone of economic interest, commensurate with their new role as the arbiters and principal beneficiaries of the new regime.

Some Conclusions and More Uncertainties

The land reform program supported by those Christian Democrats who have remained in the government -- and survived assassination attempts -and by Washington will not in the least alter the trend of recent years for the landless rural population of El Salvador to grow beyond the capacity of the countryside to support it. We should ask of the junta's supporters who have heralded the land reform as the solution to El Salvador's problems: What problems were you attempting to solve? Apparently, the U.S. government and the junta did not believe the inordinate growth of the landless to be capable of solution or, at least, solvable within the limits imposed by remedies acceptable to U.S. officials. It is our belief that what Washington and the Christian Democrats in the junta were striving to create in this phase, specifically and generally for the land reform as a whole, was a sufficiently large class of landed peasants, at the least cost to the new elite, to guarantee that leftist organizations would lose the ability to create a force for radical reform in the countryside and, in this manner, b denied state power in El Salvador in the future. In the eyes of the State Department and the Carter administration the desired vehicle was a phalanx of yeoman farmers simultaneously cultivating new land and holding off the organizations of the left. It must have been recognized in Washington and in San Salvador that the left would survive among the hundreds of thousands of landless peasants who were excluded from the distribution of spoils.

The point was to build a military and civilian counterforce in the rural areas of sufficient strength to render the organized leftist peasants less capable of mounting revolution. Whether the Reagan administration or the junta can succeed in this endeavor remains to be seen. Judging by the results considered above, we would speculate that they cannot.

In the final analysis, then, for an example of how not to impose a land reform, one need only contemplate the program recently implemented in El Salvador. It is deficient, to say the least, in four broad areas. First, the total combined agricultural lands affected by phases I and III amount to, at most, 40 percent of the arable land, as Roy Prosterman himself concedes.46 None of the major cash crops is affected. More to the point, the land reform excludes nearly two-thirds of the peasantry, including all those who have become landless in the last two decades. Second, the reform program was poorly planned and has encountered numerous problems of implementation, not the least of which is the impact of the military occupation on the countryside. Official after official, both U.S. and Salvadoran, has publicly admitted to frustration and cited the lack of planning which has characterized all facets of the program as a cause of the present state of affairs in rural areas of El Salvador. Third, the land reform has been imposed from the top without consultation with those most affected. "Participation in the formulation of law appears to have been restricted to top ministerial positions and the Supreme Command of the Military," notes the critical study carried out by OXFAM, adding that "The Church, universities, and agricultural technicians were wholly excluded from the process. More important, however, was the complete exclusion of peasant organizations with perhaps one exception, the [UCS]."47

A fourth important area of deficiency, and one that has been cited by several analysts, concerns the program's political goals, which were clearly paramount.48 As Alberto Arene, a minister in the first post-coup government, has argued, "the agrarian reform was implemented to allow hard-line military officers the context in which they could pursue a counterinsurgency war against the opposition at the same time the more moderate officers could promote agrarian reform.49 It was no coincidence, then, that the announcement of Phase I on March 6, 1980 was followed on March 7 by the declaration of a state of siege throughout the country. Moreover, as several observers have noted, Phase III is based upon a similar land reform/pacification program carried out in South Vietnam in conjunction with the infamous "Phoenix Program," under which as many as 30,000 Vietnamese peasants were killed as suspected Viet Cong: here too land reform provided the South Vietnamese army with cover for conducting a counterinsurgency war.50 It is precisely the provinces most affected by "Land to the Tiller" -- Chalatenango, Cuscatlán, Morazán, and Cabanas -- that have experienced the most intense repression, carried out by the Salvadoran security forces.51 This would seem to justify the fears of

many that the land reform program is simply an effort at rural pacification. The chief proponent of that policy in Vietnam, Roy Prosterman, has played a similar role in El Salvador, with the laid of the American Institute of Free Labor Development (AIFLD),an arm of the AFL/CIO, and AID.

In fact, the recent land reform has attempted to halt an explosion of intense warfare in the countryside, provoked by social and political conditions whose origins can be traced back at least a hundred years, but which have intensified during the last two decades. The motivations behind the land reform, then, depend upon the immediate interests of the elite actors involved. The program was implemented primarily for political puroses and was not intended to alleviate the plight of the majority of Salvadoran peasants. As a wealthy landowner has commented, "the purpose of the land reform was not to help the poorest because they were poor, but to keep them from joining the left."52 He might have added that it was not designed to help the poorest of the poor at all, but rather to create a sizeable "yeoman peasantry" to juxtapose to the comunidades de base (organized by missionaries convinced of the evils of capitalism and the virtues of the spirit of community and self-help) and to cut the popularity of the political and armed opposition.

The land reform has served the purpose of advertising the "progressive" side of the policy of the ruling junta (reform), and counteracting the regressive side (repression), with its ugly image of the new order. The land reform also helps to justify U.S. economic and military support. Moreover, it provides the military with a rationale, other than the war against the guerrillas, to occupy the countryside and carry out a purge of its enemies under cover of a humane program. If the testimony of fleeing agrarian reform officials is accurate, and we believe that it is, the security forces have turned the reform into a profit-taking enterprise -- not from the crops but from land deals and from the "beneficiaries" themselves, who must pay their military "patrones" for use of the land as well as "protection."53

Meanwhile, a war of counterinsurgency is underway, principally in the northern and eastern provinces. It is estimated that the guerrillas controlled at least 10 percent of the country by the end of April 1981. Specifically, among the 14 provinces that comprise El Salvador, the FMLN had firm possession of 50 percent of three provinces and 30 percent of one province.54 By July the FMLN could claim an effective control over 30 percent of the countryside and that more than a thousand members of the security forces had died during the first half of 1981.'5 At least 250,000 refugees from the rural areas were in neighboring countries, many of whose camps are seen by local army commanders as inhabited by "guerrillas without weapons."56 It should be obvious that to carry out a genuine land reform in the midst of such a war, while peasants flee from major portions of provinces affected by the violence, would be virtually impossible, unless one's intentions were not primarily to fulfill peasant aspirations. Even if the land reform were not fraught with such misguided policies and hastily constructed measures, it would risk falling into a "too little, too late" syndrome. This obviously is not the most opportune time to attempt such a vital and complex program of rural reorganization. Even in peacetime one would have to deal with the bitter opposition of the landed elite, which would be difficult enough, but this pales in comparison to implementing reform in a battle zone, in the presence of military officers prepared to kill reform officials and peasant leaders alike. In short, the Salvadoran land reform would appear to have sparked a new disaster in U.S. foreign policy -- one which may well prove costly, in lost lives and protracted civil war, for the Salvadoran people, and, in hundreds of millions of dollars, for U.S. taxpayers during the next several years.57

NOTES

1. The authors wish to thank anthropologist Laurel Bossen for her helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay. The term "peasants" and "peasantry" will be used in the broadest sense, as denoting those who work the land with their own hands.
2. See T.D. Allman, "Rising to Rebellion," Harper's, 262:1570 (March 1980), pp. 31-50; R.A. White, "El Salvador: Between Two Fires," America 143:13 (November 1, 1980), pp. 262-66; and "Testimony on Repression in the Province of Chalatenango," in H. Cox, V. Navarro, J. Petras and G. Wald, A Report on the Meeting of the Permanent Tribunal of the Peoples on the Violation of Human Rights in El Salvador (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, 1981), pp.

97, for hints of this division within the peasantry. For an analysis of the comunidades de base and their place within the activist part of the Catholic Church, see I.D. Paredes, "La situación de la iglesia católica en El Salvador y su influjo social," Estudios Centroamericanos (jul.-agosto 1979), pp. 601-14.

3. W.M.LeoGrande and C.A. Robbins, "Oligarchs and Officers: The Crisis in El Salvador," Foreign Affairs, 58:5 (Summer 1980), p. 1084. The U.S. "New Right" has attempted to demonstrate that this is not so. See V. Prewitt, "U.S. Socialism in El Salvador," Washington, D.C., Inter- American Security Council, 1980. This line has also been used by the "Truth in Media"squadstouring the U.S. in 1980-81, in defense of the Salvadoran oligarchy and ultra-conservative foreign policies. The effort is futile, however, since the New Right ignores those factors that alienate Salvadorans from the existing government and society, while focusing on statistical indicators that do compare favorably with those of other Latin American countries. Above all, the New Right ignores the fact that there is a region-wide socioeconomic- political crisis in Central America, focusing instead upon what they take to be the Cuban-Soviet policy and the Carter policy in the region.
4. S. Montex, S.J., "Situación del agro salvadoreño y sus implicaciones sociales," Estudios Centroamericanos (jul.-agosto 1973), p. 470.
5. See "One Hundred Years of Crisis on the Land," Latin American Regional Reports: Mexico & Central America [cited hereafter as LARR:MCA], March 21, 1980, for a brief treatment of this point.
6. See W.H. Durham, Scarcity and Survival in Central America (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1979), pp. 37-46, for a more detailed analysis of this process.
7. Ibid., pp. 42-43.
8. T.P. Anderson, La Matanza: El Salvador's Communist Revolt of 1932 (Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, 1971), is a detailed account of the slaughter and should be consulted for a better understanding of this tragic event.
9. Durham, p. 38.
10. G.E. Karush, "Plantations, Population, and Poverty: The Roots of the Demographic Crisis in El Salvador," Studies in Comparative International Development, 8:3 (Fall 1978), pp. 60-62.
11. Karush, p. 61.
12. E. Colindres,"La tenencia de la tierra en El Salvador," Estudios Centroamericanos (sept.-oct. 1978), p. 466.
13. Ibid., p. 470.
14. For a variety of insightful discussions on this process, see M. Burke, "El sistema de plantación y la proletarización del trabajo agrícola en El Salvador," Estudios Centroamericanos (sept.-oct. 1976), pp. 473-86; E. Richter, "La contradicción capital-suelo como determinante de las formas de explotación de las fuerzas de trabajo en la agriculture," Estudios Sociales Centroamericanos (sept.-dic. 1979), pp. 203-45; S. Ruiz Granadino, "Modernización agrícola en El Salvador," Estudios Sociales Centroamericanos (enero-abril 1979), pp. 71-100; and C. Samaniego, Movimiento campesino o lucha del proletariado rural en El Salvador," Estudios Sociales Centroamericanos (eneroabril 1980), pp. 125-44.
15. L.R. Simon and J.C. Stephens, El Salvador Land Reform. 1980-1981: Impact Audit (Boston: OXFAM American, 1981), pp. 37-38. This is the study par excellence to have appeared so far. It is based upon a careful reading of AID and State Department memos and reports.
16. See Burke, Richter, Ruiz Granadino and Samaniego, all cited above.
17. See LeoGrande and Robbins, for an excellent summary of the previous efforts at reform in El Salvador. For the history of early reformist efforts, in the 1960s and 1970s, see S. Webre, Jose Napoleon Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics, 1960-1972 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), which considers this theme throughout.
18. See J. Chonchol, "Eight Fundamental Conditions of Agrarian Reform in Latin America," in R. Stavenhagen, ed., Agrarian Problems and Peasant Movements in Latin America (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1970), pp. 159-72, for a similar discussion of a genuine land reform's goals and implementation.
19. L.R. Simon and J.C. Stephens, "Salvador Land Reform," The New York Times [cited hereafter as NYT], January 6, 1981.

20. Simon and Stephens, ...Impact Audit, p. 18.
21. R. Bonner, "...But Many Angrily Disagree," NYT, January 11, 1981.
22. P. Shiras, "The False Promise -- and the Real Violence -- of Land Reform," Food Monitor (Jan.-Feb. 1981), pp. 14-15.
23. Bonner.
24. Simon and Stephens, ...Impact Audit, p. 32.
25. See White, and "Surviving on the Borderline," LARR:MCA, June 5, 1981, p. 6. On ORDEN, and its war on the Federación Católica de Campesinos Salvadoreños (FECCAS), a Christian Democrat organization, and on the leftist Union de Trabajadores del Campo (UTC), see Harald Jung, "Class Struggle in El Salvador," New Left Review, No. 122 (July-August 1980), pp. 11-14.
26. N. Chapin, El Salvador: Agrarian Reform Organization Project Paper, Annex IIA, A Social Analysis (Washington, D.C.: AID, June 1980), p. 30, cited in Simon and Stephens, ...Impact Audit, p. 33.
27. P. Wheaton, "Agrarian Reform in El Salvador: A Program of Rural Pacification" (Washington, D.C.: EPICA Task Force, 1980), pp. 17-19, lists several cases in which this has occurred.
28. U.S. AID, El Salvador: Agrarian Reform Organization Project Paper, July 25, 1980, cited in Simon and Stephens, ...Impact Audit, p. 26. Leonel Gómez, who was intimately involved in its administration, has defended Phase I, claiming it "has worked. The oligarchs are off these properties. The traditionally impoverished campesinos (peasants) on those farms cultivated the fields last year and reaped good crop returns." He does not address the issues raised here. See L. Gomez and B. Cameron, "El Salvador: the Current Danger, American Myths," Foreign Policy, No. 43 (Summer 1981), pp. 71-78. Gomez was chief adviser to Rodolfo Viera, the head of the Instituto Salvadoreños de Transformación Agraria (ISTA), murdered in San Salvador, January 1981. Like many former officials at ISTA, Gómez is now an exile in the United States.
29. Shiras, p. 16.
30. Simon and Stephens, ...Impact Audit, p. 41.
31. Ibid., pp. 41, 43, 71.
32. Shiras, pp. 15-16.
33. It is worth noting that the Commander of the Guardia Nacional, Colonel Vides Casanova, is married to a wealthy coffee heiress.
34. Shiras, p. 16.
35. Interview, by H. Sims, of an investigator contracted by AID to evaluate the results of the land reform, Philadelphia, April 1980.
36. Shiras, pp. 16-17. It appears that the consultation with the University of Wisconsin's Land Tenure Center was the only such outside opinion sought by the U.S., and its advise was clearly ignored.
37. U.S. Government Memorandum, AID, August 8, 1980, cited in Simon and Stephens, ...Impact Audit, p. 44 (emphasis added by the authors).
38. N. Chapin, "Difficulties with the Implementation of Decree 207 in El Salvador," Washington, D.C.: AID, 1980, p. 12, cited in ibid., p. 52.
39. The absolute poverty level was defined as a yearly per capita income below $150 (U.S. 1969 dollars). See U.S. AID/El Salvador, Agrarian Reform Sector Strategy Paper, July 21, 1980, p. 2, cited in ibid., p. 55.
40. See ibid., pp. 52-63, for a more extensive analysis of this problem.
41. Acting Under-Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs John Bushnell noted repeatedly throughout 1980 and early 1981 that land titles would soon be forthcoming. The majority of the "beneficiaries," however, are still waiting. For Bushnell's upbeat version of the reform's progress, see "Central American Review," March 5, 1981 (Current Policy No. 261), Washington, D.C., Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs.
42. Wheaton, pp. 17-19.
43. Simon and Stephens, ...Impact Audit, p. 38. Leonel Gómez also defends Phase III, claiming it "has only just begun. Supported by the peasants, it has the potential to improve dramatically the lives of those receiving the land where they had previously worked as sharecroppers." Again, he does not address the doubts raised in our essay and in the OXFAM report. See Gómez and Cameron, p. 72.

44. Gómez and Cameron, pp. 75-76.
45. Ibid.
46. R. Prosterman, "Salvador Land Reform and U.S. Policy," NYT, February 8, 1981.
47. Simon and Stephens, ...Impact Audit, p. 25. The UCS, of course, is a stepchild of the U.S. AIFLD, not a purely home-grown organization.
48. See Wheaton for a passionate but well argued and documented analysis of this point.
49. Sin Censura (New York, Fall 1980).
50. See Wheaton, pp. 18-20; Shiras, pp. 17-18, and Simon and Stephens, Impact Audit, pp. 46-52, for similarities between the two "land reforms."
51. LARR:MCA, October 28, 1980.
52. Bonner.
53. The military officials are charged with pilfering millions of dollars intended for the agrarian reform, while soldiers are said to extort small sums regularly from members of cooperatives by means of a protection racket. See G6mez and Cameron, pp. 75-76.
54. This estimate is based upon reports contained in the Council on Hemispheric Affairs' Washington Report on the Hemisphere (Washington, D.C.: COHA, 1980-81), as well as the Central American Update (Toronto: Latin America Working Group, June 1981), pp. 48-49. See especially LARR:MCA, July 10, 1981.
55. Ibid. See also F. Murphy's report in Intercontinental Press/Imprecor (New York, July 27, 1981), p. 778.
56. See "Surviving on the Borderline," LARR:MCA, June 5, 1981, pp. 6-7. A study conducted by the Central American University (UCA) in San Salvador charged on July 16, 1981 that 300,000 Salvadorans had become refugees as a result of the conflict. (See also Murphy.) An AID estimate placed the cost "from a foreign exchange point of view," at "around one billion dollars over the next five years." Moreover, AID concluded that Salvadoran internal resources would be insufficient to finance "any significant part of the cost." U.S. AID proposes to provide $425 million in "bilateral assistance" over the next five years. They propose granting the Salvadoran government $85 million per year, of which $50 million would be applied to the land reform. These sums would be allocated through Economic Support Funds (ESF) and PL480. The AID/El Salvador Strategy Paper quoted above is discussed in Simon and Stephens, ...Impact Audit, pp. 64-69.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

[Anonymous]
1980 "One Hundred Years of Crisis on the Land," Latin American Regional Reports: Mexico and Central America, March 21.

Allman, T.D.
1980 "Rising to Rebellion," Harper's, 262:1570 (March), pp. 31-50.

Anderson, Thomas P.
1971 La Matanza: El Salvador's Communist Revolt of 1932, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Bonner, Raymond
1981 "...But Many Angrily Disagree," The New York Times, January 11.

Burke, Melvin
1976 "El sistema de plantación y la proletarización del trabajo agrícola en El Salvador," Estudios Centroamericanos (sept.-oct.), pp. 473-86.

Chapin, Norman
1980 El Salvador: Agrarian Reform Organization Project Paper. Annex 11A. A Social Analysis, Washington, D.C.: Agency for International Development, June.

Chonchol, Jacques
1970.
"Eight Fundamental Conditions of Agrarian Reform in Latin America," in Agrarian Problems and Peasant Movements in Latin America, ed. by Stavenhagen, R., Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, pp. 159-72.

Colindres, Eduardo
1976 "La tenencia de la tierra en El Salvador," Estudios Centroamericanos (sept.-oct.), pp. 463-72.
Cox, Harvey; Petras, James; and Wald, George
1981 A Re.ort on the Meeting: of the Permanent Tribunal of The Peoples of the Violation of Human Rights in El Salvador, Washington, D.C.: Committee in Solidarity With the People of El Salvador (156 pp.).
Durhan, William H.
1979 Scarcity and Survival in Central America, Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press.
Gómez, Leonel; and Cameron, Bruce
1981 "El Salvador: The Current Danger, American Myths," Foreign Policy, No. 43 (Summer), pp. 71-78.
Jung, Harald
1980 "Class Struggle in El Salvador," New Left Review, 122 (July-August), pp. 1-23.
Karush, George E.
1978 "Plantations, Population, and Poverty: The Roots of the Demographic Crisis in El Salvador," Studies in Comparative International Development, 8:3 (Fall), pp. 59-75.
LeoGrande, William M.; and Robbins, Carla Anne
1980 "Oligarchs and Officers: The Crisis in El Salvador," Foreign Affairs, 58:5 (Summer), pp. 1084-1103.
Montes, Segundo, S.J.
1973 "Situación del agro salvadoreño y sus implicaciones sociales," Estudios Centroamericanos (jul.-agosto), pp. 458-75.
Murphy, Fred
1981 "Pre-Election Terror," Intercontinental Press/Imprecor, 19:28 (July 27), p. 778.
Paredes, Ivan D.
1979 "La situación de la iglesia católica en El Salvador y su influjo social," Estudios Centroamericanos (jul.-agosto), pp. 601-14.
Prosterman, Roy
1981 "Salvador Land Reform and U.S. Policy," The New York Times, February 8.
Prewitt, Virginia
1980 "U.S. Socialism in El Salvador," Washington, D.C., Inter-American Security Council (32 pp.).
Richter, Ernesto
1979 "La contradicción capital-suelo como determinante de las formas de explotación de las fuerzas de trabajo en la agriculture," Estudios Sociales Centroamericanos (sept.-dic.), pp. 203-45.
Ruiz Granadino, Santiago
1979 "Modernización agricola en El Salvador," Estudios Sociales Centroamericanos (enero-abril), pp. 71-100.
Shiras, Peter
1981 "The False Promise -- and the Real Violence -- of Land Reform," Food Monitor (Jan.-Feb.), pp. 14-19.
Simon, Larence R.; and Stephens, James C.
198la El Salvador Land Reform, 1980-1981: Impact Audit, Boston; OXFAM America (96 pp.).
198lb "Salvador Land Reform," The New York Times, January 6.

Samaniego, Carlos
1980 "Movimiento campesino o lucha del proletariado rural en El Salvador," Estudios Sociales Centroamericanos (enero-abril), pp. 125-44.
Webre, Stephen
1979 Jose Napoleon Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics, 1960-1972, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
Wheaton, Philip
1980 "Agrarian Reform in El Salvador: A Program of Rural Pacification," Washington, D.C., Economical Program for Inter-American Communication and Action (EPICA), Task Force, (21 pp.).
White, Richard Alan
1980 "El Salvador: Between Two Fires," America, 143:13 (November 1), pp. 262-66.
Newsletters and Newspapers
Central America Update (Toronto: Latin American Working Group, 1980-81).
Council on Hemispheric Affairs, Washington Report on the Hemisphere (Washington, D.C.: COHA, 1980-81).
Socialist Workers Party, Intercontinental Press/Imprecor (New York: SWP, 1979-81).
Latin American Regional Report: Mexico and Central America (London: Latin American Newsletters, Ltd., 1979-81).
Latin American Weekly Report (London: Latin American Newsletters, Ltd., 1979-81).
The New York Times (New York, 1979-81). Sin Censura (New York, 1980).
U.S. State Department Publications
"Central American Review," March 5, 1981 (Current Policy No. 261), Washington, D.C., Bureau of Public Affairs.
"Communist Interference in El Salvador," February 23, 1981 (Special Report No. 80), Washington, D.C., Bureau of Public Affairs.
"Statement on El Salvador," March 19, 1981 (Current Policy No. 265), Washington, D.C., Bureau of Public Affairs.