

BOOK REVIEWS

GENERAL

The Agrarian Question and Reformism in Latin America. By ALAIN DE JANVRY. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. Tables. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xvi, 311. Cloth. \$27.50. Paper. \$8.95.

From Peasant to Proletarian: Capitalist Development and Agrarian Transitions. By DAVID GOODMAN and MICHAEL REDCLIFT. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981. Table. Figures. Notes. Indexes. Pp. xii, 244. Cloth. \$25.00.

Over the past decade there has been a steady increase in the number of works dealing with agrarian structures in Latin America from either a Marxist or a multidisciplinary point of view. Both books reviewed here represent the first trend, and the Goodman and Redclift volume represents the second as well.

The product of the joint efforts of an economist and an anthropological sociologist, Goodman and Redclift's volume, *From Peasant to Proletarian*, takes as its point of departure a critique of the legacy of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Marxist theory, as developed in the European context and in the light of contemporary European realities. It then explores the nature of capitalist development in the periphery through various theoretical positions, including the classical Marxist emphasis on the progressive role of capitalism and the neo-Marxist approaches of André Gunder Frank and the Latin American dependency school. This is followed by an examination of the role of agricultural surplus in economic growth and a questioning as to whether the class configurations required to pose the "agrarian question" in its classic form will emerge in peripheral societies. From there the book moves on to a comparison of different theoretical accounts of agrarian class structure, and examines some case-study material on forms of small commodity production in Latin America, focusing principally on Brazil and Mexico.

The approach is a welcome antidote to the unilineality of classical Marxism as well as to the tendency by Gunder Frank and other neo-Marxists to explain everything in terms of the single factor of dependen-

cy. In the view of Goodman and Redclift, the problems of development derive from both exogenous and endogenous factors. They note that the major interest of thinkers like Laclau is exploitation *within* modes of production, whereas the major interest of thinkers like Gunder Frank is relations of surplus appropriation *between* economic systems. Both, the authors argue, enable the ruling classes in the more powerful core states to protect their privileged position in the international division of labor and to perpetuate the unequal distribution of the surplus produced in the world economy. And both help perpetuate a situation in which accumulated capital, including human capital, is rewarded at a higher rate than “raw” labor power.

The basic weakness that Goodman and Redclift see in most theories of Latin American dependency is that they fail to specify the mechanisms of dependency and their operation in concrete terms. They argue, and this reviewer strongly agrees, that the development of capitalism must be understood not only in terms of its world scale, but also in terms of its varied courses in different societies. They also argue that exploitation of labor is by no means limited to the capitalist system.

In many ways Alain de Janvry addresses the same questions as do Goodman and Redclift. In his *The Agrarian Question and Reformism in Latin America*, de Janvry concerns himself with the dilemma of unequal development. He sees it as a direct consequence of two of the cornerstones of capitalism: the class society and the unplanned economy. The picture he paints of our present situation is far from rosy. Peasants, he argues, have almost become a thing of the past; most have long since been proletarianized. He sees in the sixty-year history of land reform in Latin America a variety of forms and functions. Some reforms have redistributed land to peasants within a precapitalist or a capitalist agriculture, some have induced a transition from precapitalist to capitalist agriculture along either the Junker or the farmer road, and some have promoted a shift from the Junker road to the farmer road. None has solved Latin America's basic rural problems, for these derive from the nature of the class structure and the particular process of capital accumulation that it undergoes.

De Janvry argues that the world economy is moving into the period of *metanationalization*—the ultimate divorce between capital and nation-state. In his words, “while the multinational corporation returns profits to the home-base country and the transnational corporation repatriates profits to the group of mother-countries, metanational corporations accumulate a large fraction of profits in offshore banking centers.” As a result, the accumulation of surplus no longer assures economic benefits for the center countries, a fact that explains in part why, in countries

such as our own, there have been: a slowdown in industrial growth, stagnant real wages, increasing inequality in the distribution of income, inflation, deficits, and conflicts among factions of the bourgeoisie and among classes.

Included in the many pieces of information with which de Janvry assails the reader is the statistic that, for the period 1969–76, Latin America's growth rate was 4.8 times higher than that of the United States and its rate of gross fixed capital formation an impressive 28 times higher (p. 57). Does this mean that Latin America is finally improving the lot of its impoverished? Not so, says de Janvry. The area and the world are characterized, as never before, by massive poverty, malnutrition, and extraordinarily unequal distribution of income. In Latin America the per-capita production of basic foodstuffs has been dropping, while the production of export crops has been increasing. The majority of the rural poor are proletarianized and more dependent on employment and wages for their subsistence than on agricultural production. Disarticulated growth has become the order of the day, and the market for luxury goods continues to expand as a direct function of an increasing regressivity of income distribution.

De Janvry concludes that reform and development of the agrarian sector can never solve these problems; their solution can come only through "social and structural changes at the level of the total social formation." His conclusion is far from encouraging or satisfying: "social and structural changes at the level of the total social formation" would seem to be little more than a euphemism for "basic social revolution," yet de Janvry fails to tell us just what that revolution would be like or how it may come about.

Goodman and Redcliff are more empirical and more optimistic. At the close of their book they state that "in place of one agrarian transition, with a clearly distinguishable outcome, we are faced with several." Yet even they give the reader only the foggiest of predictions.

Both books suffer from an overemphasis on structure and taxonomies, and both would have benefited from a larger dose of functional theory and microanalyses. Terms such as "capitalism," "Marxism," and "dependency," all of which have multiple referents, represent a dizzying variety of real relationships. Should the functions underlying and deriving from these relationships and their application at the local level ever be fully understood, the antipathy of classes, countries, and systems so disturbing to us all may prove more illusory than real.

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