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**A FEW COMMENTS ON LAND TENURE
AND THE COURSE OF AGRARIAN REFORM
IN EL SALVADOR**

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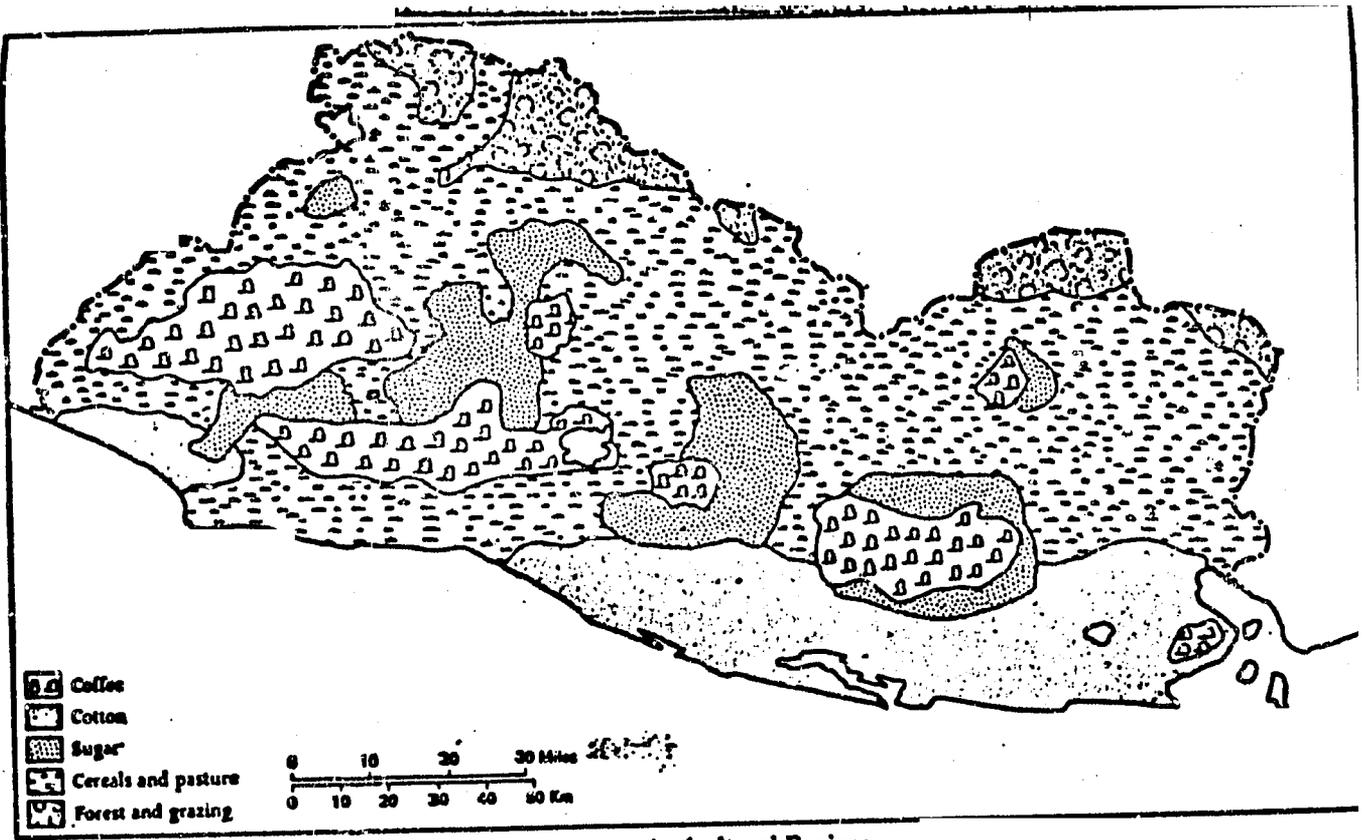
The need for drastic land reform measures in El Salvador has been brought about by the convergence of two factors: (1) rapid population increase on a small and non-expandable land surface, and (2) an extremely skewed pattern of resource distribution. According to the 1971 census, 4,317,666 people were spread across 21,041 Km.2, giving the country an average population density of slightly more than 200 people per Km.2. This constitutes the highest population density in Latin America. Against this demographic background there exists an acutely unequal distribution of resources. At the top end, slightly more than 1% of the total number of farm exploitations hold close to 50% of the agricultural land.⁽¹⁾ In 1961, there were 125 estates of more than 1,000 has. (White 1973:33). At the bottom extreme, 70.7% of the total number of farms were smaller than 2 has., and 86.7% had less than 5. has. of land. To these figures must be added the large population of rural landless poor. They have increased in number from 11.8% of the total rural population in 1950 to 40.9% in 1975 (Burke 1976:480).

The pressures on available resources have reached the point where El Salvador's traditional economic structures have been pushed to the breaking point. Poverty, nutritional deficiencies and un- and underemployment have been accentuated beyond the human tolerance level for the bulk of the country's population, and the result has been escalating socio-political tensions and widespread open conflict. The present Agrarian Reform project is an attempt to rectify this rapidly deteriorating situation -- although it is the bleak opinion of many Salvadorans that it has come 20 years too late.

THE AGRARIAN PICTURE

El Salvador's Agricultural landscape is dominated by large haciendas of coffee, sugar cane and cotton which cover the most fertile lands of the central volcanic ridge and the flat plains running along the coast (see map, Pg. 2). These estates, which vary greatly in size and level of technological sophistication, are generally run in an autocratic fashion by a patrono who employs a permanent body of managerial and service personnel along with a sizable number of agricultural workers called colonos. Colonos live within the boundaries of the estates with their families, performing the bulk of the agricultural labor, in exchange for wages and services offered by the patrono. Until recently they were remunerated for their work with small plots of land on which they could plant subsistence crops, and other miscellaneous benefits the patrono would offer. This system, however, has been modified in recent years and cash payment for colono services has largely supplanted the more traditional types of transactions.

(1) The concentration of land is even more severe if it is realized that single people and families frequently own several properties. Furthermore, this is usually the best agricultural land in the country.



Agricultural Regions

from Browning 1971:248

Best Available Document

In 1965, government legislation designed to fix minimum wages for rural laborers attempted to abolish colonaje (or colonia) and all other forms of tenure arrangements which were considered "feudal" (Browning 1971:261). Colonos are now paid wages for their work, and in some cases they are charged a flat rate - which may be either cash or part of the harvest - for the use of small plots of land, usually no more than 1 or 2 manzanas, for subsistence crops. On a number of farms which have expanded cash crops considerably over the past few decades there is little unused land for colonos, and this practice has stopped almost entirely. But there is a strong desire among colonos to farm their individual plots and throughout most estates they can be seen carving out their milpas and planting on steep hillsides bordering the productive land used by the patrono for his cash crops. The legislation of 1965, while at least partially ignored on some of the more traditionally run estates, has had the effect of reducing the number of colonos throughout most of El Salvador. Browning, writing only a few years after the law was passed, noted this trend, and during the intervening years it has continued. Before 1965, it was no great burden for the estates to carry more people than needed to satisfy labor requirements. But this practice became untenable when cash wages were stipulated, and most patronos have reacted by cutting the number of colonos to the minimum, and seeing to the harvest with unattached landless laborers and small farmers from the surrounding countryside. Although statistical data are weak, the official census of 1971 noted a drop in the number of colonos from 55,769 to 17,019 over a ten year period (Burke 1976:66). The number of colonos in Usulután, which is a region of large cotton farms, has been reduced over the past two decades by 94.3% (Rodríguez McCall and Reyes 1979:3). This flushing of colonos from the large (and medium sized) estates has been a prime factor in the increase of El Salvador's landless poor.

The land not encompassed by the large estates is taken up by an assortment of medium-sized farms interspersed with a staggering number of micro-plots belonging to small property owners and renters. Land used by these two latter groups can be seen everywhere dotted about the hill slopes of El Salvador. In fact, just about everywhere that cash crops have not been planted -- in other words, on marginal agricultural land - the hand of the subsistence farmer, be he owner, renter or squatter, can be seen.

The three phases of the government's agrarian reform program will bring about a drastic modification of the economic and social life of El Salvador's rural population, rich and poor alike. The process has already begun, and in a very real sense it is "irreversible", as its promoters claim. This is not to say that it will move forward smoothly, or even stumblingly, to an adequate solution of El Salvador's present problems, which are numerous and profound. But things have already changed, and to attempt a clearer understanding of the difficulties being faced and how they are being and might be dealt with, it would be wise to explore El Salvador's agrarian panorama in a bit more depth. (1)

(1) For a much more thorough treatment of this subject, the interested reader should consult Browning 1971, Colindres 1977 and White 1973.

COFFEE

Coffee is found stretching across the higher reaches of El Salvador's central volcanic chain, with the most extensive cultivation in the western departments of San Salvador, Santa Ana, Sonsonate and La Libertad. In 1931, coffee represented 95.5% of El Salvador's total exports. Although coffee's importance has dropped since then - in 1971 it made up only 40.5% of the country's exports - it has been a thoroughgoing economic factor behind El Salvador's economic development in this Century (Browning 1971:222;

Coffee was king: it earned the country's foreign exchange, paid for its imports, provided the revenue for central and local government, financed the construction of roads, ports and railways, gave employment -- permanent or seasonal -- to a large part of the population and made the fortune of few (Browning 1971:222-223).

Despite its decline in relative importance, coffee is still the major agricultural crop in El Salvador. In 1969, 14,439 coffee farms were recorded (Colindres 1977:68), with an average size of 3.8 has. per farm (White 1973:116). This latter figure, however, does not take into account the extremely unequal distribution of land among coffee farmers. Over 50% of El Salvador's coffee is produced on farms of over 100 has., and a mere 90 producers individually sell 5,000 quintales and above annually. At the other end, close to 10,000 of the country's 14,439 coffee growers produce 25 quintales or less (Colindres 1977:68).⁽¹⁾

Farms of less than two or three has. cannot adequately support a family of 6 people; and throughout the coffee regions of El Salvador many of these farms harbor two or even three families. As the population grows, the small farms are becoming even more fractioned. Most of these people are forced into the seasonal labor market to supplement their incomes, and they commonly rent small plots nearby to plant basic grains, wherever land is available (land for coffee production itself is only rarely rented; what spare land that remains in coffee areas is usually unsuitable for coffee, and is thus extremely marginal). The labor employed on these small farms is usually familial; only occasionally, when the family is unable for one or another reason to provide the needed labor inputs, neighbors in a more precarious economic predicament are hired.

(1) The inequality of benefits is even greater than these statistics indicate. White notes that "It is the large estate owners who are also coffee processors and exporters; and the processors lend working capital to the smaller producers. At the bottom end of the scale, the smallest growers are very often forced by their poverty to sell their future crop before the harvest for a price well below what it will fetch at harvest time, often for as little as half the price. (Sometimes less than half the normal price). The buyer is usually a large grower or processor." (White 1973:123).

Coffee farms of medium size - 20 to 100 has. - are generally worked with paid labor, and usually have a small number of colonos living on the property to guard the crop and to carry out year-round tasks. Extra help at harvest time is picked up from nearby small farmers and landless laborers. The owners of these farms only rarely live on the property, preferring to reside in nearby cities, and in some cases, in San Salvador. Parts of these farms which are not apt for coffee may be rented to local people for the cultivation of basic grains.

The largest haciendas, some of which stretch across several mountain tops, are invariably owned by absentee landlords, many of whom spend a good deal of their time abroad. (This fact made it relatively easy for ISTA to take over many large farms without difficulty. Had more of them been in El Salvador, they may have put up more active resistance). The largest coffee haciendas -- some of which also grow sugar cane in the lower sections of the farm, and have pasture for cattle -- cover a diverse range with regard to physical and social conditions. Some are equipped with modern, sophisticated coffee processing plants (beneficios), an efficient management system of upward of 100 employees, and relatively adequate living quarters for the colonos. Others are semi-medieval, with ancient, rundown machinery, inadequate management personnel, and deplorable facilities for the colonos. Where the patrono spends a good portion of his time on the hacienda, usually on weekends and during the harvesting season, his living quarters (called the casco) are often opulent and well maintained. Many coffee haciendas, however, are only infrequently visited by the patrono and his family, and his interest in the estate is limited to the products he extracts. Kept in minimal working conditions, the physical installations receive poor maintenance and are often semi-antiques. The colonos, who are always kept some distance from the patrono's reach, are of little concern as long as they behave themselves and get along with their work.

Although there have been attempts to eliminate the system of colonaje (or colonia), and the number of colonos has been substantially reduced over the last 15 years, they are still very much in evidence throughout the coffee regions. One change, already mentioned above, has been that they are now paid wages, for the most part, rather than food and certain fringe benefits.

Throughout the coffee regions, with the large and medium size estates dominating the landscape, there are increasing numbers of micro-minifundistas and landless people. Many of these people were former colonos who have been dismissed from the estates; many are the result of run-away population growth and the consequent fragmentation of already small farms. The central highlands comprise the most densely populated region of El Salvador, and with the lack of good land in other sections of the country, they are often forced to stay where they are, adding to the demographic crunch each year. Lining the roads skirting the large-estates are colonies of desplazados (displaced people, families without land) living in sub-human conditions and without hope. These people, who are lucky to gain occasional permission to rent land on the adjacent haciendas, depend almost entirely on seasonal labor which leaves them without more than occasional scraps during a large part of the year.

SUGAR CANE

Sugar cane is grown throughout the central highlands, encroaching on the north and the south along flat land and rolling hills that are too low for coffee. Some haciendas in this region grow both coffee and sugar cane, each crop being adapted to its respective elevation. In 1971, 17.5% of all the land cultivated with sugar cane was held by farms under 10 has., a decline of 3.75% from 1961 (Colindres, 1977:74). Virtually all of these small farms are owned property; sugar cane takes more than a year to mature and may be cropped several times before being replanted, and is thus semi-permanent. (White 1973: 157, footnote 35). Sugar cane grown on small farms is not as profitable as coffee, and much of it is grown solely for family consumption. It may be processed at a traditional trapiche (sugar mill), which is either driven by motor or oxen; but this technology is disappearing, and small producers now occasionally sell what little they grow to the commercial refineries.

The large sugar estates often have a processing mill standing on the focal point of the hacienda. Many of these are relatively modern, as sugar cane has only become important in El Salvador since the early 1960's (White 1973:131). These installations, if they are large, are run by a permanent body of laborers, who receive help during the harvest from workers picked up from the neighboring countryside. The permanent laborers occasionally belong to a union, and are active, if local circumstances allow, in campaigning for better working conditions and high pay.⁽¹⁾ In contrast to the Ingenio* laborers are the colonos of the estates and the agricultural workers taken in during seasons of peak labor demand. They form a class apart from the unionized employees (where these exist), and do not participate in the right to organize themselves in unions.

In conformance with the countrywide trend to decrease colonaje over the past 15 years, there are fewer colonos on the sugar cane plantations than before. As in the coffee areas, these ex-colonos have formed clusters of houses lining the roads around the estates. In one area a short distance from San Salvador, long, semi-continuous strings of houses made from every conceivable scrap of cast-off material can be seen running a precarious line along the borders of three contiguous estates (all of which have been intervened by ISTA). They are separated by barbed-wire fences from the estates, leaving the families that occupy them a strip barely 25 feet wide on which to live. Most of the older people were once colonos; some have drifted from other, more economically precarious zones of the country. Few have access to land they can rent to plant corn, beans and sorghum. They live hand to mouth, working on the plantations when there is a chance; they sometimes migrate to the larger population centers to find jobs; and many -

(1) The workers in these sugar mills are not classed as agricultural laborers, and are therefore legally permitted to form unions. Even so, "...only about ten percent of El Salvador's non-agricultural workers (Rural and Urban) are unionized." (Department of State 1980:320).

especially the women - pick up extra cash from occasional odd jobs. It is not known how many Salvadorans live in such tenuous conditions, although it is evident that their number has been increasing steadily in recent years.

COTTON

Cotton is grown exclusively on the coastal lowland strip, with the greatest concentration of farms lying in the central and eastern regions. While cotton has been cultivated for centuries in El Salvador, it only began to gain importance in the national economy during the years preceding the Second World War (Browning 1971:229). The late economic blossoming of El Salvador's coastal region, which was at the turn of the century carpeted with luxuriant jungle growth, (1) was made possible by the development of insecticides (which gave man control over the coast's large insect reserve) and drugs that effectively kept diseases such as malaria and yellow fever in check (Browning 1971:229-230).

The amount of land in cotton has grown rapidly during the past 30 years; in 1964-65, over 120,000 has. were planted with cotton (Ibid:234); and in 1971 cotton made up 12.7% of El Salvador's total exports (Colindres 1977:66). At the same time, however, the area planted with cotton fluctuates radically from year to year, following world cotton prices, and since the late 1960's the excessive and irresponsible use of insecticides -- which from 1965 - 1967 comprised up to 45% of total production costs (White 1973:129) -- has been cause for serious alarm. (2)

In the early 1960's, only about 5% of the cotton crop was grown by farmers with less than 10 manzanas, most of which was rented land. At the other extreme, 55% of the cotton was produced on farms of 100 manzanas or larger (White 1973:133). Labor requirements are low for cotton, while capital inputs are high, a fact which effectively excludes most small producers who have difficulty securing credit. Another consequence is a smaller number of permanent colonos on the cotton estates than on those devoted to coffee and/or sugar cane.

As cotton plantations expanded along the coast, they pushed out cattle ranchers and small subsistence farmers, altering the social organization and economy of the area. According to Browning:

- (1) Today, virtually all of this vegetation has disappeared, and all that remains is an occasional isolated tuft of jungle.
- (2) In the areas of heavy spraying, much of which is done by small planes, the people living on or near the farms are constantly exposed to poisonous insecticides. As this situation is seldom publicized, it is not known how many human lives are lost as a result of the spraying. There is, however, always an abundance of rumors of death, blindness and other ailments in the cotton region, and the people are generally unable to keep animals around their homes.

Changes of land use were accompanied by changes in the function and character of the hacienda. The coastal hacienda's traditional organization, based on cattle and tenant farming, was replaced by a monocultural plantation system operated by permanent paid workers and hired seasonal laborers. As the operation of a cotton plantation, apart from picking the fiber, is generally fully mechanized, the labor requirement is for a small, semi-skilled, resident work force. The practice of allowing a colono to use a piece of land on the estate in part exchange for his labor was discontinued, and the tenant-farming of subsistence crops decreased as the value of land increased and the area of unused land diminished. Leases to present cultivators were not renewed and squatters were evicted. The majority of these dispossessed and landless families are unable either to continue their accustomed subsistence cultivation or to become cotton growers: in the 1965-6 season the total number of cotton farmers with less than seventeen acres was only 1,142. For most the only opportunity to earn a meagre income is during the short cotton picking season. Those that remain in the area are obliged to settle where they can and form scattered groups of straw huts or caseríos (1971:235-36).

While cotton is predominant on the central and eastern region of the coastal strip, many other crops can be grown there on a commercial scale. One large hacienda near Usulután, with over 3,500 has. and upwards of 2,000 colonos scattered about the estate in 7 or 8 campamentos, (sections) is a good example of how a diversity of crops, many of which are permanent or semi-permanent, can successfully be grown. The hacienda has large plantations of bananas, plantains, cacao, rice and cotton; (1) corn is being grown this year for the first time, although on a modest scale; and there are also small groves of citrus and achiote. The farm includes a herd of over 2,500 cows (most of which are dairy cattle), several large ponds stocked with tilapia and other fish, a chicken farm, and a colony of bee hives. Beyond this, the patrono has built a complex network of salt extracting pools and wooden warehouses to store the crude salt.

The patrono, aside from his restless quest for new enterprises, (2) has also built up over the years a complex management staff and a huge squadron of machines of all sorts, including tractors, planters, sprayers, and harvesters (over 100 mechanics are employed to keep them in running order). A large force of colonos lives permanently on the hacienda, to work in the diverse activities of the enterprise; labor requirements, even with the high degree of mechanization, are much greater than on neighboring plantations specializing only in cotton. The colonies of the workers are generally made up of clusters of adobe

(1) Actually, cotton is the dominant crop on this farm, taking up over 2,000 manzanas of the estate.

(2) Perhaps the most bizarre feature of the hacienda is a zoo which includes pumas, ocelots, crocodiles, and African lions. The people now in control of farm, which has been intervened by ISTA, don't know exactly what they will do with these animals. They are presently feeding and caring for them as they had before the agrarian reform took place.

and brick homes with asbestos or tile roofs; they are much more elegant than their counterparts on most of the haciendas in El Salvador, although they could still see improvements. Added to this is a school, located next to the core of buildings in the center of the estate, with classes going up to the ninth grade.

Whether it was done consciously or not, the hacienda provides permanent employment for a large number of people by cultivating a variety of crops needing year-round attention. At the same time, social improvements for the employees and colonos have been made, at least on a reasonable scale in comparison with most other haciendas; and with the potential for large and more or less steady income from the estate's enterprises, these services can be expanded under the direction of ISTA.⁽¹⁾ If it indeed comes to pass that the present ex-colonos, who have until now been excluded from the hacienda's management decision-making processes, begin to take a more-active role in economic and social matters, the living conditions of all can be substantially improved. Farms of this sort may serve as models of how coastal enterprises of phases I and II of the Agrarian Reform might be modified to meet the needs of their members. A shift away from cotton would, among other things, increase employment opportunities and simultaneously decrease the use of harmful insecticides.

AREAS OF CATTLE AND SUBSISTENCE CROPS

Much of the land in El Salvador, however, is unsuited for commercial plantations of coffee, cotton, and sugar cane due to poor soils and inhospitable topography. Marginal land is generally covered with expanses of cattle pasture or the tiny plots of subsistence farmers, which are seen everywhere carved out of steep hillslopes. This is the predominant pattern of land use throughout the northern strip of El Salvador. Traveling out of the central volcanic ridge north to the Honduran border, one moves through rolling plains -- where sugar cane is sometimes grown -- into largely infertile, uneven hills cut by rugged gulleys. Browning describes the characteristic features of the northern reaches of El Salvador vividly:

The landscape across the northern highland gives ample evidence of over population and the total failure of attempts to check spontaneous settlement or to regulate its primitive forms of land use: denuded hillsides of bare rock and stone continue to be scratched each year by the peasant's stick and hoe; blackened stretches of burnt forest where scattered maize plants are grown between the skeletons of dead trees; emaciated cattle grazing withered clumps of grass on unwatered slopes; and valleys where riverbeds are choked by the debris of unchecked erosion. (1971:256-257).

(1) Even at this early date in the reform, several steps have been taken in this direction.

An assessment made of Morazán's agricultural potential by the OAS several years ago, may be taken as characteristic of much of northern El Salvador:

..... hilly terrain, which because of its broken topography and in many cases rockiness, and low depth of its soils, is not suitable for agriculture, except in very limited areas, and with very primitive methods... (most of this land has) serious problems of erosion, produced principally by the cultivation of short cycle crops such as corn and sorghum (OAS Study, quoted in Grant 1978:23).

Not surprisingly, this is an area of few large haciendas. Those which do exist concentrate on cattle, basic grains, and, in the few places where possible, sugar cane. These haciendas are "tradicional" and unsophisticated in comparison to the more highly mechanized operations of coffee, cotton and sugar cane to the south. What physical structures they have are rudimentary and few in number, consisting of little more than a central home for the patrono- which is often quite elegant - corrals for cattle, and a collection of crudely built, rustic offices and storehouses for materials and harvested crops.

Because of the inhospitable terrain, most of the landscape of the North is in the hands of small and small-medium farmers. In fact, the number of small properties has increased in some departments during recent years at the expense of the larger estates (Browning: 1971:267). Most of the farming on these small plots is carried out by simple slash-and-burn, shifting cultivation techniques, with the principal crops being basic grains. Although the population of the North is not as dense as in the Central highlands, there is severe pressure on the land - determined in part by the poor quality of the soils and the ruggedness of the land surface - and as many as 50% of the small farmers are renters.

The situation of El Salvador's small farmers and landless poor, whether they be found in the marginal lands of the northern border, interspersed among the large estates of the coffee and sugar cane regions of the central mountains, or along the flat coastal plains, is tenuous by any standard of measure. Throughout El Salvador the rural peasant is increasingly forced to marshal a variety of strategies to keep his family alive, and it is common for small property owners to rent additional plots for basic grains and spend part of the year in search of paid labor. According to White (1973:135):

Campesinos cannot be neatly classified into categories as owners, share croppers, renters, colonos, and laborers. They do not remain permanently in the same category, and they often work one piece of land under one arrangement and another under another, within the same season. Indeed, many express a preference for variety, at least from time to time, and this is probably part of the reason why much of the work force is highly mobile, almost "nomadic".

Seasonal wage labor has become an integral part of the subsistence strategy of most of El Salvador's poor rural population. A vast majority of

the small farmers work their subsistence plots from May through August or September, and spend the remaining months of the year as wage laborers on the large estates or scrounging for work in the cities and towns. The harvest taken from a farm of 2 or 3 manzanas is simply not adequate for a family of between 5 and 10 people, and must be supplemented with money or produce from other quarters. Furthermore, where rented land is paid for with money, and fertilizer and improved seed are used, the need for cash is even greater. At the present time, more than half of El Salvador's rural population depends on wage labor for over 50% of its total income; and this figure would be much higher if greater employment opportunities existed (Burke 1976:480). The implications of this pattern of migrant wage labor for the Agrarian Reform program will be discussed later in the report.

RENTERS (ARRENDATARIOS) - Beneficiaries of Decree No. 207

One of the most striking features of El Salvador's agrarian landscape is the extraordinary number of farmers who work on rented land. It is estimated that more than 50% of small farmers rent land each year to plant basic grains (although there is a small amount of land on the coast where small renters plant cotton). No reliable statistics exist on the number of agricultural renters. It is being said by some that there are approximately 150,000 people in El Salvador who rent land for farming. However, according to the official census of 1971, which included several different categories of renter (including colonos), the number of rented properties was 117,815 (Colindres: 1977:34).⁽¹⁾

Confusion on this matter is understandable. Few rental contracts are formalized in writing, and it is probable that many would easily escape the census taker's attention. Rental agreements are generally made verbally between renter and land owner a month or two before the planting season; and payment for land use rights, whether in cash, promise of part of the harvest (called censo), or some other form, is only rarely legalized with a written receipt. Furthermore, there is such a variety of possible rental arrangements that many could easily be missed by even the most alert investigator. Some rural people make cooperative agreements with neighbors, taking part of the harvest in return for their labor; others exchange services or goods for land use rights. It is also common for farmers to "borrow" land from relatives. Some small renters use land belonging to neighbors with plots of no more than 2 manzanas; some rent on medium-sized estates; and others rent land on the large haciendas. It is entirely possible that renters on the large estates would either be missed altogether or lumped with the colonos working the same type of land. In any case, it is likely that the census figures are lower than the reality. All that can be said is that the number of renters is high, and it has been increasing rapidly over the last two decades.

The average size of rented plots in 1971 was less than 2 has.; but this figure is deceptive, for it includes a number of agricultural operations renting farms in excess of 50 has. -- and sometimes much larger -- for the production of cash crops such as cotton and rice (a pattern common on the coastal plain). In reality, most renters have access solely to very small plots of land. For example, in a study of a rural municipality in Chalatenango it was found that

(1) Note that this figure is somewhat bloated because it includes colonos (which the 1961 census excluded). At the same time, it does not include a variety of rental and squatting arrangements which, if included, would raise the total substantially. This gives an indication of the confusion existing in census statistics.

the average size of rented plots was slightly over 1 manzana (0.7 ha.); and fully 2/3 of all farm land in the area was rented (Lardé and Jacio 1980:24). In another study of the Región Oriental (comprising San Miguel, La Unión, Morazán, and Usulután) it was discovered that 62% of the renters worked plots ranging from 1/4 to 1 ha. (Rodríguez McCall and Reyes 1979:11). My findings, which were collected in several Departments of differing agricultural potential, crops, and farming systems, indicate that this general pattern of small rented plots of 1 ha. or less is extremely widespread throughout the country.

Among the group denominated "renters" there are various terms, some of which reflect regional linguistic variation, others of which refer to the nature of the rental arrangement and/or the status of the renter.⁽¹⁾ The custom of paying for land use rights with part of the harvest has declined to some extent in recent years, as more and more peasants work their way into the cash economy. Many campesinos still make censo transactions, but most of those I talked with said they preferred paying outright in cash, for that terminated their obligations to the landlord. The broadest term for renter is arrendatario -- although this usually refers to someone who pays cash for rental. For the sake of clarity, I will use this term in the following pages, with the understanding that I also mean to include aparceros, cencistas, and medieros. The term colono, which has already been discussed, is a separate category and is therefore excluded.

The renters who will be most strongly affected by the "Land-to-the-Tiller" component of the reform (Decree 207) are those I have broadly called arrendatarios. They are not tied permanently to estates, and customarily plant basic grains during the agricultural season (roughly from May through August-September) and perform wage labor during the remaining months of the year.

Small arrendatarios - who make up the vast majority of renters - pay for the use of a tiny plot of land for a single planting season in cash, with a portion of their expected harvest, or by means of some other arrangement. Rental contracts, as mentioned above, are only occasionally written; they seldom consist of more than a verbal agreement, and no signed receipt of the transaction is made. Although the government has made several attempts to regulate the price paid for rented land by means of official legislation, there has been widespread neglect of these measures. The price is generally set by the landowner, regardless of what the law might say. Furthermore, there are no standardized regulations governing the relationship between renter and property owner, and the renter has no guarantees or rights which can be negotiated legally. Agreements made between renters and neighboring minifundistas are,

(1) Some of these terms are terrajeros, aparceros, cencista and mediero. Aparcero (from parcela: "plot") is generally translated as "sharecropper", as he traditionally pays for land use rights with part of his harvest. Cencista is similar; he pays with censo (a portion of the harvest) - as is mediero, who pays with half (media) of his harvest.

of course, dictated largely by personal and social factors. But where small renters make contracts with larger landowners the matter of power - political as well as economic - must be added to the equation. Whenever disputes arise, even if the renter were backed by the law, it would be naive to suppose that he could emerge victorious in a legal suit. In truth, no small arrendatario would ever think of taking such a course of action. for the cards would be stacked against him from the start.

Virtually all the land farmed by small arrendatarios is of marginal agricultural value. (1) It is generally land which is unsuited for commercial crops, either because of poor soil quality or topography inaccessible to farm tractors. Throughout El Salvador during May of each year steep slopes of as much as 60 to 70 degrees can be observed with irregular patches burned clear of vegetation in preparation for planting. On only a limited number of small farm plots planted with basic grains are plows employed to prepare the ground, and these are generally owned rather than rented. Rented land is very seldom planted with permanent crops such as coffee, because of the tenuous nature of the rental agreement.

The marginal quality of most rented farm land makes for a situation in which a system of rotation is predominant. Plots are first cleared of their scant vegetation in April, and when the vegetation has dried sufficiently it is burned. With the first May rains, the initial crops are planted; after these begin to germinate, other crops are added and the field is periodically weeded. Harvesting takes place from late July through September, at which time the field is abandoned. In some of the richer agricultural land of El Salvador, where thick volcanic soils predominate and the topography is not too hilly, crops are planted more or less continuously, year after year on the

(1) Note that 56.7% of El Salvador's land is officially categorized as V, VI and VII class soils. "Some of these (in class V) are in coastal plains and not subject to erosion but require drainage, are subject to flooding, have a high water table or are too shallow to bedrock. Others (in classes VI and VII) are steep, eroded, rocky, or have other limitations to the extent that bringing them into cultivation is impractical and not economical. These are best suited for forestry, pasture and natural vegetation."

24.4% of the land falls into class IV. The land capability of class IV is either:

"Medium quality soils suitable for limited cultivation but subject to erosion. Most require erosion control practice.. Best for perennial crops."
or

"Mostly very steep. Subject to severe erosion, already heavily eroded or rocky. Not suitable for intensive cropping. Adequate for perennial and tree crops, pasture and forest. Some might be used for cultivated crops on a limited basis with the use of terracing, strip cropping, diversion ditches, etc. "(Agricultural Sector Assessment: El Salvador, AID 1977:2)

The vast majority of El Salvador's arrendatarios are farming, IV, V, VI and VII class land.

same plot. But in many areas - such as the bulk of the country to the North - this practice is impossible, and the land must be left fallow for a minimum of one or two years. (According to older informants, fallow periods used to be longer, of at least four or five years; population pressure has cut this period drastically in recent times over large areas of El Salvador, and the general result has been increasing erosion and falling productivity.) In any case, it is apparent that few renters farm the same plot two years in succession.⁽¹⁾ This fact, as will be seen later, has significant implications for the "Land-to-the-Tiller" component of the Government's Agrarian Reform project.

One important feature of land rental in El Salvador is that small farmers rent land from owners of properties of all sizes, ranging from very small holdings of 1 to 2 manzanas to huge estates of several thousand has. Unfortunately, statistical information on this variable is entirely lacking. All that can be said is that there are numerous arrendatarios who make rental agreements with relatives or "neighbors" who are themselves poor. It is common, for example, for older property owners who are themselves unable to farm their land to rent out half of their few manzanas to others. At the other extreme, some of the large hacendados (hacienda owners) rent land to non-colonos who live nearby and occasionally do wage labor for them during times of peak labor demand. It would be hazardous to guess what the proportions among the different rent/property size distinctions might be; but numerous examples of all of them were found during recent field visits.

Arrendatarios frequently rent two or three plots in different locations, although these are usually on the property of a single land owner. Also, when they rent plots on larger properties they favor making the rental contracts with the same landowner year after year. This makes for greater stability, and allows the renter to build a personal relationship with the landowner which may bring him highly valued fringe benefits. At times he is rewarded with better land; he may also be given tacit permission to plant more land than is paid for. As one renter from Chalatenango described his patron: "He is considerate. He knows that no matter what, I hold up my end of the bargain. If my harvest is poor, he will lower the price (of the rent)." (Larde and Jacir 1980:58).

Although there is doubtless variation throughout El Salvador, few renters receive institutional credit. In the Región Oriental it was found that only 5.8% of the renters receive credit through government institutions and 3.2% borrow from private money lenders. The rest - over 90% - have no access to credit whatsoever (Rodríguez McCall et al 1979:16). It must be said, however, that many farmers - it is not known even roughly how many, although the practice appears to be common - borrow money or are given seed and/or fertilizer with the promise to repay the debt with part of the harvest.

(1) Rodríguez McCall and Reyes found that in the Eastern end of El Salvador the majority of the renters had been farming the same plots for more than five years continuously (1979, Table 32). However, a large proportion of the farmers interviewed in their study were working flat coastal lands or valleys (personal communication). The situation is very different in the more mountainous parts of El Salvador, which cover most of the Central and Northern areas of the country. Interviews with renters in these regions showed a heavy predominance of shifting cultivation.

As would be expected, the cash value of the products given by the farmer to cancel the debt far exceeds the amount borrowed. Questioning on this matter in a number of regions of the country leads to the conclusion that the lender generally makes a profit of at least 300% from the transaction. Because of their limited access to credit, arrendatarios make infrequent use of improved seed varieties, inorganic fertilizer, or insecticides. In the Región Oriental, for instance, fewer than 12% of the renters use store-bought seed; 14.7% use inorganic fertilizer; (1) and only 5.2% use insecticide (Rodríguez McCall and Reyes 1979:16).

Small arrendatarios generally make up the poorest and most severely disadvantaged group among El Salvador's rural population. They suffer most acutely from mal- and undernutrition, receive virtually no basic services (such as potable water and electricity), and have severely limited access to school facilities. With regard to the latter variable, it was recently found that in the Región Oriental close to 95% of the renters were functionally illiterate (Rodríguez McCall and Reyes 1979:9).

In summary, more than 50% of El Salvador's rural population rents land each year, usually for the planting of basic subsistence crops. The rented plots they farm are small, averaging less than 2 has. in size; but a large percentage of these plots are of one manzana or less. Rented plots are also predominantly situated on marginal land with poor soils and unfavorable topography. Rented land is invariably found where cash crops cannot be grown. Credit to arrendatarios is negligible, and there is a consequent absence of improved seeds, fertilizer and insecticides among the farmers.

THE PROGRESS OF DECREE 207

It is too soon to present statistical information on the percentage of arrendatarios who will emerge in the coming months as owners of the plots they are now renting or rented last year. Decree 207 has just been announced. However, the initial reactions of both arrendatarios and property owners who rent out land are being strongly voiced, and these reactions, taken as a whole, are rather disquieting. It has been noted above that rental arrangements in El Salvador are extremely varied in nature and are made on properties of all sizes, ranging from tiny properties of a couple of manzanas to estates of over 1,000 has. Problems have been occurring among virtually all of the different possible combinations of arrangement.

First, numerous arrendatarios rent small plots from neighbors or relatives who themselves are poor and have little land. Some of these renters pay for land use with cash, but it is clear that many operate with payments

(1) It should be noted that inorganic fertilizer is increasingly used by small farmers when it can be afforded. There is some use of animal manure, but this is usually applied on more intensive, year-after-year plots on flat ground near the farmer's home. The hillside milpas seldom, if ever, receive manure. Furthermore, few renters have animals to produce it.

of part of the harvest, labor, or some sort of cooperative arrangements. Renters of this sort who were questioned in several Departments said that although they had heard the law announced on the radio they would find it extremely difficult to claim the property from the owner. Some said they could not possibly take the land; the owners were poor themselves, and the renters felt pity for them. Some arrendatarios were renting from men too old to work the land themselves, or from widows. As the rental payments were the land owners' primary source of income, it would be unjust to take land from them, for such an action would leave them destitute. From the other side, the small property owners who have been renting out land are understandably strongly opposed to the law. Either the land is their security and brings them a small but steady income, or they use money taken from rental to help finance what they grow themselves. People in this category who were questioned either expressed defiance or despair. The ISTA office in San Salvador has already been visited by several tearful small landowners who had been renting out land. (It might also be noted that El Diario de Hoy has published a number of articles over the past weeks presenting cases of small property owners being affected by this law. One such article described a widow with 5 manzanas who rented out 3 manzanas. The thrust of these articles has been to point out the injustice of the law.)

To date, most of the rental arrangements among arrendatarios and small property owners have apparently continued as if the law had never been announced. The contracts had generally been made in April, and the land has been prepared and planted. What will happen remains to be seen. If the renters attempt to make good on their rights, there will doubtless be disputes.

Traditionally, there are two ways of resolving land disputes between small campesinos in El Salvador: through the courts, or by violence. The latter is by far the most common practice. Even in more tranquil times, El Salvador is a violent country, with one of the highest rates of homicide in the world (in 1973, for example, it was ranked number one in the World Almanac). Beyond this, the majority of El Salvador's armed violence - which is usually carried out with machetes and knives, although guns have recently figured more predominantly in the weaponry employed - occurs in the rural areas, and a large proportion stems from disputes over land.

This matter deserves some explanation. In 1974, I visited a Municipality of some 7,000 people (including rural cantones) located a short distance from San Salvador, to look into the matter of rural violence. At the local Juzgado de Paz I found a series of largely incomplete crime records running back into the 1950's. In 1953, which was the only year with full records, there were 86 cases of armed assault, with more than half of these resulting in the death of at least one of the participants.⁽¹⁾ In the course of detailed questioning on specific cases - many of which were lucidly recalled by the older men in the office - it was ascertained that at least 1/3 of the assaults were provoked by disputes over land. There were several examples of relatives

(1) It can be assumed that the population of the area was considerably less than 7,000 in 1953.

fighting over land inheritance; another common theme was conflict over real or imagined land encroachment resulting from difference of opinion on boundary markers.⁽¹⁾ With increasing population pressure on an already over-used land surface, it is not difficult to see why land is such an emotional issue.

The question still remains, however, as to why the campesinos attempt to solve their disputes with violence rather than through the courts. To find an answer, I visited the government office in San Salvador that handled the Municipality's legal problems, which were all referred there from the local Juzgado de Paz. The lawyer in charge said that yes, many of the cases he received dealt with disputes over land. But he added that as many as 60% of these disputes - as a conservative estimate - were settled among the campesinos themselves, and never reached his attention (except, of course, in the form of assault and murder charges). Why? Quite simply, the legal process in El Salvador is so complex and confusing⁽²⁾ as well as time consuming and costly, that few poor campesinos can undertake legal action. In order to present a case before the San Salvador Law Court, a lawyer must be retained. At least three witnesses from the community must be brought along to testify, and they have to be paid for their transportation, food, and services (to make up for work-time lost).

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- (1) Land in El Salvador is registered by means of a document which describes boundary markers and distances; no survey maps are used. Browning gives an example of one such document in 1965:

The southern boundary is contiguous with a deep ravine. Leaving this through a pass called Talpetate one continues in a right hand direction until reaching a spring called Chupadero. From here one follows a ditch across broken ground, named Quiebracha, up to a pass on the hill Calavera, along the ridge as far as the the summit of another hill, then down to a valley where there is a ujuste tree. (1971:258, footnote 50)

As if this weren't confusing enough, "with the transfer of property, new descriptions are made and the confusion increases. In addition to the boundaries of the property being poorly defined, the fact that the land itself is often claimed on the basis of the principle of prescription (i.e. possession as the legal basis for ownership), may encourage rival claims to the same area of land." (Ibid.:258-259).

- (2) Again Browning (1971:264-5) can be tapped for an instructive example, in this case for a taste of Salvadoran Legalese. For "Rights to Possession of Land: Article 747":

Possession may be regular or irregular.

Regular possession is that which proceeds from a fair title that has been acquired in good faith; even if good faith does not continue after acquiring possession. Consequently it is possible to be a regular possessor in bad faith, just as vice versa a possessor in good faith may be an irregular possessor. If a title deed is transferred, tradition is also necessary.....

Article 752

Irregular possession is that which lacks one or more of the pre-

Documents are then made up and various legal stamps attached to them. All of this takes several trips to the capital, and the entire process frequently stretches out for months. "And", added the lawyer, "it has to be said that most of these cases are ultimately decided by bribes". (This, incidentally, is the primary reason poor campesinos only rarely pursue legal battles against large and medium sized farmers, even if their case is 100% certain in the legal sense.) Given this situation - the costly and time consuming nature of legal suits -- it is perhaps easier to understand why disputes among campesinos are often resolved by violent means rather than through legal channels. Furthermore, winning a legal suit does not ensure that there will be no violence over the issue in the future.

In presenting the foregoing observations, I do not mean to suggest that Decree 207 will inevitably open the gates to massive bloodshed between small arrendatarios and the small property owners from whom they rent. There has been no evidence of violence of this sort since news of the law came over the radio. Most of the renters are moving forward with their planting as usual. Everyone - renters and landowners alike - is waiting to see what the coming months will bring, to see how things develop and what others will do.

But only a portion of the arrendatarios rent from small property owners. Although it is not known how many rent from medium-sized and large land owners, (1) their number is considerable. On the largest haciendas - most of which are now in ISTA hands - the immediate effect of the law has been mixed, with two general patterns in evidence: either the arrendatarios have been thrown off the land (even though they had in many cases already paid for land use rights) or they have been allowed to stay and finish out this year's crop cycle. There is presently a good deal of confusion as to whether or not Decree 207 affects all lands, regardless of size, or only those under 100 has. The latter interpretation is usually accepted; and even those arrendatarios who have been allowed to stay on ISTA-intervened haciendas and lands to be taken during Phase II of the Reform (land from 100-150 to 500 has.) are not seen as legally able to claim the land they are using. The outcome of claims to rented lands on Phase I and Phase II land will be decided when the law is more clearly stated.

The reaction of landowners with from 20 to 100 has. who rent to small farmers has thus far been overwhelmingly hostile. Many of them are furious, and have already taken steps to evict arrendatarios who had earlier made rental arrangements with them. In every Department I visited there were numerous reports of owners returning rent money to the renters and throwing them off the land (legally, this is not correct; in practice, the renters are now without land). Some medium-sized landowners have enlisted lawyers to write up documents stating that the present renters renounce all ownership rights to the land, and paying off the arrendatarios or forcing them to sign. Others have used a more direct form of coercion. In an area of Ahuachapán, for example, 25 arrendatarios had made rental arrangements with a medium-sized landowner, paid him, and received written receipts (which is rare). They had already begun

(1) This is one variable no one has ever considered in the surveys that have been carried out. Quite clearly, it is extremely relevant to the implementation of Decree 207, and it should be looked into as soon as possible.

preparing the ground for planting when Decree 207 was announced. The landowner promptly sent his son to plow up the land they were using, and threw the arrendatarios off. When they persisted, the owner confronted them with a group of national guardsmen (the renters said there were 50) from the local cuartel, and told them to leave on the grounds that his farm did not fall within the present agrarian reform program. It was also indicated that if they tried to farm the land, the national guard would be forced to take "drastic measures". The owner even refused to return their rent money to them. (1)

The eviction of small arrendatarios from medium-sized properties is apparently widespread, although it must be said that I also found a number of cases in which no action has been taken by either renter or landowner. The arrendatarios have not talked to the owner, who is frequently living someplace else, and are continuing as if Decree 207 did not exist. In one case, I spoke with three men who were renting land along with 40 some-odd other farmers. When asked if they would take legal action to get the rental plots for themselves, one of them answered: "What can we say? It's up to the patrón. We can't do anything, we are low in stature (somos de baja categoría)." I found this general attitude everywhere among arrendatarios renting on medium-sized and large properties. When they are thrown off the land, there is little they feel they can do. When they are allowed to stay on, they are cautious. It is not likely that they will pursue their rights, granted them in Decree 207, on their own. (2)

Thus far ISTA officials in the capital have received a limited number of visits from arrendatarios and affected land owners from around the country. The people working in the Sección Jurídica of the San Salvador office have responded vaguely. They are not sure how the law should be interpreted, and last week were telling people to return in a few weeks, when the law would be - they hoped - clarified. Technicians in the field (on intervened haciendas)

(1) These particular small arrendatarios were not as submissive as most. They first approached one of the ISTA technicians on a nearby intervened hacienda to ask for help, but he was not anxious to become involved. So they took their case directly to ISTA leaders in San Salvador. Their case was heard, and a phone call was made to the Comandante of Ahuachapan's National Guard headquarters. This could be done because the ISTA official knew the Comandante personally. He asked that the arrendatarios be left free to farm the land, and explained their rights under the law. They were allowed to return, and according to one of the local ISTA technicians they have not had further problems. It need not be mentioned that there should be a more efficient way to resolve these cases.

(2) Furthermore, if they don't claim their rights this year it is doubtful they will have a chance next year. Of course, no land will be rented out for the next crop cycle.

have been approached by numerous arrendatarios and landowners, but they are generally very reluctant to become involved. They already have more than they can cope with adequately on the intervened estates, and the Decree 207 disputes are "like mosquitoes", as one remarked. At the present time, few ISTA officials - technicians or otherwise - know what sort of paperwork should be used or how to deal with the volumes of small individual cases, most of which have no written contract or receipt for land rental, and reflect every imaginable shade of rental agreement.

Beyond this, many of the ISTA technicians were opposed to Decree 207 from the start. First, while they find no ethical difficulties with expropriating Phase I haciendas, and even those which fall into the Phase II category, they generally believe that it is wrong to take land from small land holders. Clearly, it is easier to justify taking land from a person with 75 has. than from a poor property owner with 5 has.; but there is a strong tendency on the part of ISTA technicians and non-ISTA critics alike to decry the across-the-board rigidity of the law, which states that any rented land, regardless of size, is subject to claim by the farmer working it.

Second, it must be noted that many people in ISTA and MAG have viewed Decree 207 suspiciously since it was announced because it was designed virtually in its entirety by Americans, and slipped into legislation without their being consulted.⁽¹⁾ In this light, "Land-to-the-Tiller" is seen as a political move on the part of the U.S. Embassy and the State Department. I have heard it said on several occasions that it is a "symbolic" measure which was proposed because it would look good to American politicians, and not necessarily because it would be beneficial or significant in the Salvadoran context. Whether or not they are correct or fair in their assessments is another matter. All I am saying is that quite a few ISTA and MAG employees perceive things in this light, and they are the ones who must put their unalloyed support behind it if it is to be successfully implemented.

Third, Decree 207 is viewed by many as unable to provide much more than token benefits to present arrendatarios. As noted earlier in this report, most renters work plots of less than one or two manzanas. Even if it is conceded that ownership will be much preferred to renting, those affected will

(1) In a memorandum to USAID/El Salvador (dated 3/27/80), William Thiesenhusen and Don Kanel of the Wisconsin Land Tenure Center stated:

The "land-to-the-tiller" program (Decree 207) is an important one but one should recognize that with the situation of tenancy so mixed and complex, one must thoroughly understand it before opting for the program or against it. Given this situation we feel that the government, without foreign interference, must make the necessary judgment.

This advice was not followed. AIFLD essentially wrote the 207 legislation and handed it to the Junta, bypassing the Minister of Agriculture. This fact is known and resented by many ISTA officials.

still be minifundistas of the most diminutive order. A family of six cannot support itself on one or even two manzanas of land, and will need to supplement its income with seasonal wage labor. Life for these people will be just as precarious as ever. Decree 207, the reasoning goes, is not a terribly important measure because it offers scant benefits, if any, to the majority of El Salvador's arrendatarios.

Finally, there are potentially significant agronomic difficulties with Decree 207. It has already been mentioned that most renters who cultivate basic grains use land of marginal agricultural quality. The most common farming technology is a slash-and-burn system in which existing vegetation is first cut with a machete, then burned off for planting. Although a few renters are fortunate enough to gain rights to plots which have rich volcanic soils and favorable topography, and can be farmed continuously, year after year, most renters are forced to change their farm plots each season.⁽¹⁾ After they harvest their crop, they abandon the land; the following year they select another site which has been left fallow for a minimum of one or two years (and longer if possible). If they were to cultivate a single plot with poor soil on a steep slope for three years in succession, it would be converted into a sterile desert. It is entirely possible that these arrendatarios-transformed-into-owners will rapidly lose interest in continuing purchase payments on a useless piece of land. Furthermore, they are now blocked from renting new plots this coming year, and thus rotation will be impossible.

Of course, it is true that small farmers in some parts of the world, such as the Far East, employ farming techniques which enable them to cultivate the same piece of land continuously without draining the soil of its nutrients. Often their farms are located on steep slopes not unlike those in El Salvador. But it must be realized that these intensive cultivation systems have evolved over hundreds of years and have become fixed as traditions in the minds of the farmers that use them. Salvadoran peasants, equipped with slash-and-burn techniques, would have to be instructed in entirely new cultivation practices. Even if this could be done rapidly, the question of where this technical expertise would come from and what form it might take has not, as far as I know, been addressed.

SUGGESTIONS RELATING TO DECREE 207

1) An increase in media propaganda. The law went into effect on April 28 of this year and was publically announced in newspapers and over the radio. Virtually everybody, even the most remote campesino, has heard about it. But follow-up propaganda in which the substance and legal mechanics of the decree are clearly and forcefully explained has been lacking. I have heard some AID officials claim that the details of the law are clear and simple. This may be true. The fact remains that few campesinos understand Decree 207, and there is even a good measure of confusion among ISTA personnel. There have been a few articles dealing with Decree 207 in the newspapers of widest circulation (La Prensa Gráfica, El Diario de Hoy), and some of those which have

(1) There are no statistics on the number of renters who do not cultivate the same plot of land each year. However, I would venture that the majority of arrendatarios fall into this category.

been published have attacked it as unjust. With more media coverage of an educational, instructive character some of the misconceptions and confusions could be laid to rest. It would also serve to underline the Government's serious intent -- which is widely questioned at the moment -- of actually implementing the reform.

2) The development of simplified procedures for transferring title to arrendatarios. The key to a peaceful and orderly transfer of land depends heavily on the ability of ISTA or some other agency to come up with simplified legal procedures for establishing users' rights and formalizing them. Titling should be done free of charge or for a nominal fee. If the campesinos are faced with the traditional tangles of legal counsel, witnesses, and documentation -- all of which are costly and time consuming -- they will either give up their claims or take matters into their own hands. If the past sheds any light on what may happen in the future, frustrated rights to the land could easily unleash a good deal of unneeded conflict and violence.

3) A special brigade of technicians, either from ISTA or some other Agency, with a good understanding of the details of Decree 207 and the paperwork involved, must be deployed throughout the countryside to aid arrendatarios in making claims to land they have been using. At present, ISTA technicians on intervened haciendas have no time for people seeking assistance on Decree 207 land. The Sección Jurídica of ISTA is now the only place people affected by the law can be helped, and it is located in the central office in San Salvador. Legal assistance must be taken into the countryside, and a special team should be created with the sole responsibility of working with Decree 207 cases. Furthermore, it is essential that the authorities stand firmly behind the execution of this law. This type of support will be enlisted with difficulty, as it will signal a radical break with tradition.

4) Technical assistance and credit should be made available to Decree 207 beneficiaries. Thus far MAG and ISTA have been so involved in trying to run and organize the Phase I haciendas that little thought has been given to the arrendatarios. Quite simply, they have insufficient personnel even to deal with what they are now doing. However, because of the agronomic problems facing most beneficiaries on small Decree 207 plots, technical and financial assistance are not only desirable, but a necessity. With the central government tottering on the edge of bankruptcy and most existing credit being funnelled into the Phase I haciendas, the outlook for small Decree 207 beneficiaries doesn't look bright. These people are not organized into farmer associations or cooperatives at present; either they should be organized into credit groups to facilitate the process (which would demand even more government personnel), or the loans should be handled independently. In either case the task would be massive to put it mildly. With regard to agronomic technical assistance to Decree 207 beneficiaries, the problems are even more severe.

THE PHASE I HACIENDAS

Most of ISTA controlled haciendas were intervened on or shortly after March 6, the date Phase I of the Agrarian Reform went into effect. ISTA personnel were accompanied by Salvadoran Army troops -- not National Guardsmen -- to ensure that the takeover would take place in orderly and pacific fashion. Taken as whole, the haciendas were entered peacefully, without violence or disrespect for the rights of the people living on the estates.⁽¹⁾ The soldiers behaved with restraint, staying around for a short time to make sure things were secure, then leaving. Some of the estates are now being guarded by small groups of policías de hacienda; but the amount of violence has been minimal.

The people living on the estates were first gathered together and the reason for the intervention was explained. They were told that the patrono was now out of the picture and they were the new owners of the estates. The basic design of the Reform was outlined, a consejo directivo consisting of president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and vocales was elected on the spot, and a cooperative was formed. ISTA representatives made it clear that they were anxious to maintain as much continuity as possible in the farming operation to avoid disruption of the production cycle. Although there could be more radical shake-ups in farm administration and operation in the future, existing managerial staff should be retained wherever possible. In the end, however, the new cooperative members were given opportunities to decide who would remain and who would be sent packing. When the dust had cleared, some of the more unpopular administrative staff were told to leave, but most of them have stayed on.

Three months have passed since the first farms were intervened, and while there are numerous individual differences in the course taken by each estate, several general comments can be made.

1) On the whole, the technicians and the people on the intervened farms appear to be getting along very well. Cooperative leaders, as well as ordinary members, almost universally speak highly of the technicians and the promoters; and many of the technicians and promoters have become strongly committed to the people of the enterprises they oversee. It is apparent that the hacienda groups need to rely on ISTA personnel for credit and inputs, institutional support, and legal protection. In an atmosphere saturated with fear and uncertainty, the technicians and the cooperative members have in many cases clearly become allies in the battle to keep the haciendas functioning as smoothly as possible, to pry loose credit and needed materials from the convoluted ISTA/MAG bureaucracy, and to block the forces pressuring for the return of estates to the former owners. In the main, the technicians feel a strong sense of responsibility to the people on their haciendas because they

(1) There were several instances of armed confrontation during the takeover process; these were apparently provoked by groups from outside the estates who occupied buildings before being run out.

live with them, have made promises to them, and now have a commitment to do all they can to deliver the goods. For many of the technicians the Agrarian Reform has become a genuine "cause"

2). The major frustrations of the technicians have not been with the cooperative members, but with the central offices of ISTA and MAG. On May 6th, a small group of technicians called for a general strike, citing fourteen points which should be considered and resolved. Within a short time the strike had gained in force, bringing several hundred technicians into the ISTA offices in San Salvador. Some of the demands reflected personal interests (salary hike, life insurance policy); but the majority were aimed at gaining more effective institutional support and maintaining the integrity and freedom of the hacienda enterprises and their campesino members. For example, they asked for: (1) The immediate disbursement of credit to the haciendas, (2) "respect for the physical and moral integrity of rural workers throughout the country", (3) an end to steps -- legal or quasi-legal -- to return the intervened farms to their original owners, (4) provision of adequate supplies of gasoline so the technicians could carry out their work, (5) decentralization of decision-making, so that the technicians could act with more-autonomy, and (6) "elimination of the administrative bureaucracy in the Agrarian Reform process."⁽¹⁾

a.) The need for credit was central to their demands. With the planting season for basic grains (May) and cotton (June) upon them or looming only a short distance off on the horizon, credit was still blocked at the Ministry level. Seeds, fertilizer and insecticides had not yet arrived on the farms, and the cooperative members, who were doubtful of the sincerity of the government's intentions from the start, were becoming even more suspicious as time dragged on and all they received was promises. But while credit and inputs were the most important immediate needs, they were only part of a package of things which stemmed from the cumbersome, over-centralized bureaucracy in ISTA and MAG.

Many of the most minor decisions - such as buying gasoline or a part for a broken tractor - could not be made by the technicians on the farms. Requests for materials invariably had to be sent to San Salvador, where they became caught in the confused bureaucratic corridors of the central offices. In short, things simply weren't moving, the people on the haciendas were becoming restless, and the technicians were caught in the middle. The strike, which the technicians initiated with some risk of losing their jobs, was seen as entirely justified by most of the technicians⁽²⁾; and in the end it did serve the purpose of speeding up the

(1) Obviously they didn't mean to "eliminate" the bureaucracy altogether. They simply wanted to streamline it so it would function.

(2) The hacienda members also backed it by signing documents asking that the technicians not be punished for undertaking the strike.

the flow of credit and materials, and making gasoline more readily available. Although the bureaucracy still maintains virtually all of its exasperating unwieldiness intact and decision-making continues largely in the central offices, the immediate needs are being at least partially met and the hacienda enterprises are edging forward with the expected activities. The strike has formally ended and most of the technicians have returned to the field. But the success of this phase of the Reform depends heavily on the willingness and ability of MAG and ISTA to continue giving - and improving - its support to the technicians on the haciendas.

b.) Estimates differ on the number of intervened properties that have been returned to their patronos. The most commonly quoted figure is 12. It is also rumored that as many as 40 other haciendas are being considered by a special government commission that was formed to handle the matter; and there is talk of returning all of the sugar mills and coffee processing plants (on the grounds that the former owners will be able to run them most efficiently). All of this action and talk has served to deepen the already existing suspicion of the hacienda campesinos that the Agrarian Reform will be put in reverse and they will end up with nothing. They are also afraid that they will be severely castigated if the patrono is reinstated. There is an oppressive atmosphere of uncertainty, insecurity and fear among the people on intervened farms throughout the country. It is present, to a greater or lesser degree, on farms that are small as well as those that are large, on farms in politically "hot" zones as well as farms in areas that are relatively calm. But it must be stressed that it is present everywhere, and it is having a significant negative impact on the Agrarian Reform process. If additional haciendas - along with sugar mills and coffee processing plants - are given back to their original owners, the existing atmosphere of uncertainty, insecurity and fear is clearly going to become more intense. Another cause of these widespread emotions will be discussed in the last section of this report.

The haciendas taken during Phase I of the Agrarian Reform differ widely in size, technological sophistication, and complexity of internal organization. Cursory descriptions of four ISTA haciendas are presented below to give some idea of the range of defining characteristics and prospects for future development.

(1) Hacienda A: located on the flat coastal strip toward the Eastern end of El Salvador, Hacienda A encompasses an area of approximately 750 manzanas. 200 manzanas will be planted this year with cotton, as had been done the year before; between 12 and 20 manzanas, which were formerly used for cotton, will be planted with the basic grains, primarily corn; virtually all of the hacienda's

remaining territory is thick forest and, along the coast, stands of mangrove.⁽¹⁾ The forest is presently being protected by El Salvador's Natural Resource Division and it is not known by anyone on the farm if they will now be able to exploit the lumber and open up the area for cultivation. The farm is being assisted by a single ISTA technician who does not live on the property, but off in the departmental capital half an hour distant. The nucleus of the campamento (a term used for farms or discrete chunks of farms in cotton areas) consists of no more than four crudely constructed wooden buildings, most of which are used as storage deposits. The former administrator, who lives in one of the buildings, has been retained to manage the operation and supply the store of technical knowledge relating to cotton he has built up over the years. The hacienda enterprise now has 50 members, all of whom are ex-colonos living in a ragged line of shacks running along one end of the property. The administrator is not a member of the enterprise; he was kept on as a salaried employee. The leaders of the cooperative were selected from among the ex-colonos. In sum, the infrastructure and the administrative staff are minimal, and the ex-colonos themselves fill the slots in the cooperative leadership. The internal organization of the farm is extremely simple and straightforward.

Everything is running more or less according to schedule, with most of the cooperative members working in the fields (the day of our visit they were repairing a barbed-wire fence). They lack a tractor for plowing, and are forced to rent one: the former owner had taken his away just before ISTA arrived to take the farm. They have some fertilizer stored in the depot, but need more of what they have and some sacks of a different type; they have also been unable to receive credit yet. Although the hacienda is located in an area replete with "popular organizations"⁽²⁾ (mostly BPR and FAPU), the hacienda members have had no problems with them. Several farms in the area had been occupied and/or sabotaged, and there had been minor "confrontations" between national guard forces and grupo members. But on Hacienda A the only visible signs of grupo activities exists in the form of political graffiti on the walls of the buildings, and the day we visited the area the campamento was overlaid with a peaceful, almost drowsy atmosphere.

The members of the cooperative have not yet taken an active role in decisions relating to credit, management of the farm, or their own role in the enterprise. The ISTA technician has thus far run things with the aid of the administrator. For example, arrangements to obtain credit are being made by the

(1) The cultivation of cotton was begun 6 years ago; the cleared land had formerly been pasture for cattle.

(2) The term "popular organization" or "popular group" is commonly used among campesinos throughout El Salvador. They seldom speak of "leftists", "extremists" or "subversives". Often they simply say "Los grupos". These semantic distinctions - and their implications - will be explained more thoroughly later in this report.

technician; the cooperative members know little more than the fact that he has gone to the BFA to present the paperwork for credit. They have no idea of how the financial end of the cooperative will function, nor how or when the farm's benefits will be divided up. For the time being they are continuing as before - as wage laborers - quietly grumbling that their salaries are too low (¢7.57 a day, which includes basic wages and money for food). The technician told them at the start that all crops on the farm would be worked collectively, including the basic grains. They have spoken among themselves about laying hands on individual plots for corn, beans, etc., but haven't as yet mentioned the matter to the technician.

(2) Hacienda B: Hacienda B encompasses approximately 420 has. of rich flat land near the Guatemalan border. (1) 400 has. are cultivated for improved seeds, primarily corn. The farm was well equipped before the ISTA takeover, but during the first days of the intervention the owner arrived and slipped his best farm machinery across the Guatemalan border, to another of his farms. (ISTA officials finally cut the robbery short and a few tractors, etc., were salvaged). 400 families of colonos have remained on the farm as cooperative members, and no new families have been absorbed from other quarters. All farming is being done collectively; there is no land for subsistence crops, at least this year.

As on all intervened farms, the leadership of the cooperative was formed the same day ISTA took the land. Since then, three of the seven leaders have resigned and left. One of the present leaders was formerly a member of the BPR, but he has since left his politics behind and is working well with the group. (2) However, violence, some of it surely political, has been something of a problem. While no one has yet been killed, several weeks ago a group of armed men grabbed the cooperative president and his family, threatened to kill them, and stole 800 colones. The thieves said they were members of the UGB (Unión Guerrera Blanca, an ultra-rightist group), but the people doubt this. They don't know who they were. They could have been leftists, men sent by the former owner, or free-lance thieves.

Everyone on the farm, including the technicians, is afraid that the left will start something, the National Guard will come in, and they will be caught

- (1) Although less than 500 has., -the owner has other farms in El Salvador for a total of several thousand has. This makes the 420 ha. farm eligible for expropriation.
- (2) The fact that he was affiliated with the BPR did not bother the technicians as long as he stayed out of politics and worked on the farm enterprise. In fact, many ISTA technicians said they they would like to work with members of the Groups -- but they are presently blocked from doing so by the stance of the Armed Forces.

in the cross-fire. Their fear of the national guard troops is greatest because they tend not to discriminate when bullets begin flying.

Shortly after the hacienda was taken the former owner appeared with an ISTA lawyer, who explained to the people that the farm had been expropriated illegally, and would have to be returned. The owner tried to convince the cooperative leaders to sign a document, but they refused. The leaders then went in a commission to the ISTA offices in San Salvador to gain official support, and the farm stayed in their hands. (A nearby farm was returned to the owner. The same tactic, with an ISTA lawyer, was used, and the campesinos timidly acquiesced. The technicians were forced to pack up and leave.) Recently the patrono has returned again in an attempt to take back 100 has. under the Derecho de Reserva clause. (Decree 153, Article 36). The cooperative leaders and the ISTA technicians have turned him away, thus far with success, and are now planting the entire area of the farm. (1)

80 of the 400 workers are presently working for salaries paid by ISTA. Each group works 2 weeks, then another group takes its place, and so on. No fertilizer or credit has arrived at the farm, but they went ahead and planted anyway, in spite of the risks (quite clearly, improved seeds need fertilizer). It was simply a question of planting or not planting. Another problem will fall on them when the harvest comes in. The seeds must be processed, and the most efficient processing plant, which belongs to the same owner as the farm, is located near San Salvador. If they can't use this plant they will be in trouble; (2) they are presently trying to convince ISTA to purchase it.

As with Hacienda A, the ex colono cooperative members have not been participating in the decisions to date. They still regard themselves as salaried workers, and the idea that they actually own the hacienda is still quite remote.

(3) Hacienda C: Hacienda C is a 900 hectare farm located in one of the most politicized regions of El Salvador. In the surrounding countryside there are numerous groups of the BPR, and the Armed Forces have been active with periodic operativos (large military maneuvers) and rastreos (sweeps) throughout the cantones of the area during the past three or four years. About a month ago a large hacienda nearby, which was not intervened by ISTA, was occupied by a group of farmers belonging to the UTC (Unión de Trabajadores del Campo, part of

(1) This provision which gives the former owner the right to reclaim 100 (or 150) has. of his estate one year after it has been expropriated, will cause serious problems. If the cooperative members have been planting the area claimed under the Derecho de Reserva, they will surely be less than anxious to give it up.

(2) CENTA has a processing plant they could use, but it is apparently not very reliable.

the BPR). They were flushed out by an invasion of troops that left 25 dead campesinos in its wake. (1) The people from Hacienda C will not go near the place.

145 members are cultivating 450 manzanas of cotton, 150 of corn, and a small section of corn interplanted with rice. Most of the rest of the farm is pasture for cattle. They will farm collectively because that is the way the ISTA technicians said they should work. They are not sure this will function -- they have never done it before -- but will give it a try. Their preference is for individual plots for basic grains. (2) During our visit, 28 men were working for wages (out of 145). But there were no seeds or fertilizer yet so there wasn't much to do, and there was a limit on the amount of ISTA money for salaries. Money is a very emotional issue with them, and when I was there they laid out a long and passionate complaint about how the last few payments had been late.

The former administrator has been kept on, and the same cooperative leadership that was formed during the intervention has remained. The president and vice-president were small farmers and wage laborers before they took their positions. As the hacienda was poorly maintained and unsophisticated organizationally, there were few salaried employees and no more than a handful of colonos. Most of the new members have come from outside the estate. They like the ISTA technicians, and have had no complaints about them. At the same time, the technicians note that the people tell them little about what they really think, or what is going on in the area; trust is a scarce commodity in this region of El Salvador. The technicians are presently working to obtain credit, fertilizer and seed, and have thus far made all of the important decisions in loose conjunction with the cooperative leaders. As on the other farms, the other members of the cooperative are completely outside the sphere, and have little idea of how things will turn out.

The main cluster of houses is rudimentary, dishevelled, and littered with dismantled and rusty pieces of machinery. In January, just before the farm was taken by ISTA, the BPR burned one of the main buildings and a couple of pieces of machinery. But since the farm was intervened, the BPR and other grupos -- whose presence is noted by prolific painted slogans covering every wall in the area -- have caused them no harm. On the other hand, the people are very afraid of the National Guard (and are scared to even bring up the topic). During my visit one of the technicians told the story of a group of National Guardsmen who recently rolled into the grounds asking for the names,

(1) The campesinos said a helicopter first flew over them, peppering them with machine gun fire. Then over 1,000 troops came at them from all sides.

(2) Campesinos everywhere prefer to plant basic grains on individual plots. Their attitudes toward group and individual plot farming will be discussed below.

ID numbers, and positions of all cooperative members and technicians. They refused to give them the information, and later appealed to the regional ISTA representative to have all such enquiries stopped. (1)

(4) Hacienda D: located in an area of fertile land stretching out along gently rolling plains and up the side of a mountain, Hacienda D is large (about 3,000 has.), complex, and modern. The two most important crops are coffee (on the slopes of the mountain) and sugar cane (along the flat lands). The main cluster of buildings has a sugar mill (ingenio) and a coffee processing plant (beneficio); a row of administrative offices, workshops, and apartments for employees; and a plush, neatly maintained house for the patrono. Behind these is what amounts to a small village laid out in a grid pattern. The houses, in which most of the permanent employees live along with a few colonos, are of adobe and brick, and generally well made. Beyond this cluster are several colono settlements scattered about in distinct corners of the property. These homes are generally hovels made of scraps of odd pieces of cardboard, boards, plastic sheets and sticks.

The whole operation is extremely complex, with the sugar mill, the coffee processing plant, twelve "properties" of coffee, and six of sugar cane. Almost all of the over 100 permanent employees -- including administrators, clerks, bookkeepers, work bosses, mechanics, carpenters and hacienda guards -- have remained, along with some 500-600 families of colonos. The cooperative leadership is made up of employees (who have stayed at their old positions in the hacienda organization). The ex-colonos do not figure in the decision making machinery of the farm; they are physically and mentally removed from the central core of things, although on a few occasions they have been gathered together for talks by the ISTA technicians and promoters, and the leaders of the cooperative.

Credit is a problem, as it is on virtually every ISTA farm, but the hacienda labor routine appears to be moving forward without having skipped a beat. The former owner has not caused trouble (although he has come to take away a large cache of last year's coffee); and there is insecurity among the cooperative leaders because it is rumored that the sugar mill and the coffee processing plant will be returned to him. (Rumors that this will happen on a generalized scale are causing confusion and doubt throughout the country). At first glance hacienda D appears to be one of the better operations in El Salvador: modern, complex yet well articulated, and smoothly run.

But there is another aspect of the organization of the hacienda which is somewhat less attractive: namely, the position in which the ex-colono laborers find themselves. Driving into the bowels of the farm, I discovered them in groups among the coffee and spread across the cane fields, working at the same tasks they had been assigned to before the reform had taken place. In fact, they themselves perceived little change in their lives, except that they felt very insecure about the future. They had merely changed one patrono for another, they said; and the new patrono was perhaps worse than the

(1) While the technician related the story the campesinos looked on quietly with non-committal expressions on their faces. After a short pause, one man said softly "Así es". And we began talking of other matters.

old one because he talked pura promesa y paja ("pure promise and bull ____"), and nothing had come of it. Their principal complaint concerned the low wages they earned (just over 7 colones a day). They had heard that workers on another hacienda nearby were earning more than 9 colones, and thought their wages should be at least the same. The brief explanation by the technicians about how they would receive dividends next year seemed to them highly unlikely -- another "promise". Some people from the BPR had told them not long ago that they should be getting around 14 colones, but they didn't want to get mixed up with the grupos (or at least that is what they told me). They were concerned that the escalating violence in other parts of the country would soon spread to the hacienda, and they were firmly convinced that the Agrarian Reform would not be carried through. They had heard that other haciendas had been returned to their former patronos, and thought it was merely a matter of time before this one was taken back.

(3) CAMPESINO ORGANIZATION

It is the stated goal of ISTA to foster cooperative farm enterprises based on active member participation in planning and running the hacienda activities. There is talk about "raising the consciousness" (concientización) of the campesino members, "waking them up", educating them, and bringing them to the point where they themselves have a hand in the management of the enterprise, understand how things are being done, and are able to voice their opinions without trepidation.

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. On the estates of a few of the more benevolent patronos they are supplied with relatively adequate housing, health facilities and schools; but on most estates they are treated with a steady diet of neglect. They stay, bound to the patrono, because leaving would simply place them out among the numerous desplazados, or landless rural poor, that cluster around the periphery of haciendas throughout the country. They assiduously refrain from behaviour that would displease the patrono -- such as demanding higher wages, requesting better services, or organizing groups -- because this would rapidly lead to their expulsion from the estate, or perhaps even more drastic measures. In the face of such overwhelming pressures, they have quietly - if resentfully - done what they are told to do and submissively accepted their lot.

Over the years, most colonos have had their personalities moulded by the set of circumstances just described. Many have been born on an estate and, except for short forays to the outside, the estate constitutes their universe. During March of this year, when the haciendas were intervened by ISTA and the army, the colonos were told that the ground rules had suddenly changed: they were now free men, the farm lands and everything on them were theirs, and they would henceforth run them in cooperative fashion. Neither this nor any

other phase of the Agrarian Reform was planned or directed in anyway whatsoever by the campesinos, a state of affairs contrary to the Agrarian Reform envisioned by certain campesino organizations and Agrarian Reform advocates in the past (see Guerra 1976:243: Memoria del Primer Congreso Nacional de Reforma Agraria 1970:121-354). As one ex-colono put it, "All of this simply fell on us. We didn't ask for it, but here it is".

It would be unreasonable to expect even a moderate change in colono (now ex-colono) attitudes and behavior so soon after the intervention of Phase I farms. Three months into the new arrangement they still refer to themselves as colonos, although some of the technicians are trying to purge this word from their vocabulary. They also still conceive of their ties to the hacienda as those which have traditionally defined colonaje: they are salaried workers, they must respect the hacienda hierarchy, they have to abide by the same restrictions. They find it difficult to voice their opinions, and the idea of taking an active role in cooperative management and decision making is simply not part of their conceptual world. In other words, the colonos have changed little - if at all -- either behaviorally or psychologically.

This is at least in part due to the fact that in many cases the haciendas themselves have changed very little. To keep production from faltering, the ISTA technicians have attempted to make as few modifications as possible in the administrative and labor structure of the hacienda enterprise. They have tried to retain as many of the former management and service employees as possible. The colonos are being dispatched on labor assignments around the farms more or less as had been done in the past. The same hacienda hierarchy, the same rules and restrictions, and the same system of salaries (for employees) and daily wages (for colonos) have been kept in place with few modifications. All of this was wise, and even necessary, to preserve continuity in the farm operation and to avoid disastrous disruptions of the production cycle. At the same time, however, maintenance of the traditional structure -- especially on the larger farms -- has left most of the agricultural laborers with the feeling that aside from a change in patronos, their position within the structure of the hacienda has in reality remained substantially the same.

With regard to the degree of active participation and understanding of the new farm enterprises, three classes of people must be kept in mind: the cooperative leaders, the managerial and service employees, and the large mass of ordinary members, or socios. It is further necessary to consider the various types of hacienda enterprises, which range all the way from small, relatively traditional operations with few salaried employees (such as Hacienda A) to large complex operations with huge bodies of administrative and service personnel (such as Hacienda D).

On several small, unsophisticated haciendas I visited the cooperative officers were campesinos who were undifferentiated from their companions except by the possession of certain leadership qualities and/or their ability to write

and keep records. They worked in the fields with everybody else, undoubtedly shared the same needs and aspirations, and belonged to the same socio-economic class. On two farms, the administrators, who had been kept on, were in close touch with the thoughts of the cooperative leaders and the ordinary members. (1) Communication among them existed, although the hacienda members were still without a sense of group consciousness and hesitant to assert themselves. On the small farms the cooperative leaders and members had not voiced many of their concerns - such as higher wages and improved housing, which topped the list in all haciendas - to the technicians, who were essentially making all major decisions in collaboration with the administrators and, to a very limited extent, the cooperative leaders. The campesino members on these small farms clearly lack technical knowledge of cooperatives and farm management; in the past they have never had an opportunity to carry such responsibilities. In this they will need technical support. At the same time, however, if the campesino members are given the freedom to develop the farm enterprise without outside interference, there is tremendous potential for genuine democratic, "popular" participation by all. (2)

The large haciendas - like hacienda D - present a very distinct structural pattern with very different organizational consequences. Social composition of these farms is marked by what can be termed a socio-economic class hierarchy: the wealthy patrono (now the Government in the guise of ISTA), a "middle class" of permanent salaried employees (administrators, clerks, bookkeepers, vigilantes, mechanics, and carpenters), and a "lower class" of unskilled agricultural laborers. On most of these haciendas the employees - in several cases over 100 of them - have been kept on, and the cooperative leaders have invariably been selected from their numbers. The cooperative leadership, then, belongs to a different socio-economic class from that of the ex-colono cooperative members, and there is - at least in the cases I saw - very little two-way communication between them. It was also clear that the employees were very concerned with protecting their own interests. This, of course, is understandable. In such an atmosphere of insecurity and fear, everyone is trying to hold onto what he now has. All of the major decisions on the haciendas are made by the ISTA technicians, the administrators, and the cooperative leaders. The agricultural laborers have been excluded entirely. Although they have been gathered together for several "general assemblies", they have been presented with little more than general speeches on how things will work and what benefits they will receive. There has been virtually no place for discussion or questions. Of course, their ingrained timidity also contributes heavily to their reluctance

(1) This was clear from questioning administrators and socios independently.

(2) A good model for the type of cooperative which might result is found in a number of UCS operations around the country. Those that I have seen are genuine campesino organizations, and very homogenous with regard to socio-economic class and aspirations.

to speak up. The ex-colono members I questioned⁽¹⁾ had no idea of how the new cooperative would function, how the money would be handled, or what special benefits they would lay hands on or when they would be given out. They continue seeing themselves as wage laborers. In short, they are still colonos trapped at the bottom of the hacienda hierarchy, and they are almost unanimously convinced that this situation will not change.

The large administrative staff of these haciendas already has experience in running the farm operation, keeping books, and handling money. They will need little assistance in this regard. But it will be extremely difficult to incorporate the masses of agricultural laborers - which in some cases number 1,000 to 2,000 members (not families) - into the cooperatives as active participants with opinions that are taken seriously. At present they are passive and submissive; they are excluded from all planning and decision-making not only by their ingrained sense of powerlessness and apathy, but also by a group of people who have taken over the control of the switchboard of the hacienda. In Hacienda D, I had the impression that the administrative employees were so concerned with protecting their own status that they cared little for the miserable living conditions of the ex-colono laborers. If in fact the ex-colono agricultural laborers are blocked off from participation in the hacienda enterprise, and their needs and aspirations are not adequately dealt with, a very dangerous situation could easily develop.

There is, however, at least one example of an hacienda on which the needs of the laborer-members have been perceived and are being at least partially satisfied. This is occurring on the coastal hacienda, mentioned earlier in this report, which has a wide variety of crops (plus a zoo with African lions and crocodiles). When the old patrono had controlled things, salt could not be bought from the farm, although it had a huge salt extracting operation; all of the crops, including bananas, plantains and coconuts, were sold commercially; and no colonos were allowed to fish in the three lakes stocked with tilapia or in the wide, mangrove bayou near the coast. This has now changed. A small tienda de consumo has been built and is now offering salt, eggs (from a chicken

(1) I always made an attempt to talk with them alone, away from employees, cooperative leaders and technicians. This was easy, for they could be found everywhere, working in groups or about the colono settlements. They were very reluctant to talk about their attitudes toward the hacienda organization, their relations with the employees, the former patrono, and the ISTA technicians. But this was usually the case only during the first ten or fifteen minutes. After that, they began to loosen up and bit by bit some of their feelings and concerns came out. On several occasions they began discussing topics of a rather sensitive nature - such as "popular groups" and the national guard - among themselves, almost as if I hadn't been there. When I was accompanied by ISTA personnel and cooperative leaders from the larger estates, the ex-colono laborers would say very little unless encouraged by the ISTA officials.

raising project just begun), beans, bananas, plantains, and so forth - at approximately half the usual commercial price. Fishing, although regulated, is being allowed for the first time, and a wage increase of ¢0.50 is slated for this coming month. And the hacienda's carpenters and bricklayers are being deployed throughout the ex-colono settlements to build and repair houses. While these measures may be seen as minor - even token - they are of vital importance to the cooperative members; and most important, they are an indication that the demands of the masses are being heard and acted upon.

But this hacienda, which has a massive collection of permanent employees, differs from Hacienda D in a very significant way. It has an excellent school with a large staff of teachers who offer courses up to the ninth grade. Because of this school, many of the former colonos know how to read and write, and the cooperative leadership is composed of a mix of permanent employees and ex-colono laborers. As one of the technicians told me: "These people are difficult to work with. They are educated and have ideas of their own." It might be ventured that they are "difficult to work with" because they are not ignorant, submissive, and without "ideas of their own". This should not be seen as a problem, but rather as a positive foundation on which to build a cooperative enterprise that may be able to run itself smoothly and satisfy the most fundamental needs of its members. If this goal is not achieved, on the other hand, the haciendas will be nothing more than State-run operations (like most of the pre-Reform ISTA farms) and the root cause of El Salvador's present social economic and political crises will not be eliminated.

(4) PHASE I IMPLEMENTATION AND COLLECTIVE VS. INDIVIDUAL PLOT FARMING

ISTA has followed a general strategic plan with the Phase I haciendas, but it is clear that the technicians were unprepared to handle many of the operational details of the project. The circumstances of each hacienda vary enormously and often must be dealt with on an individual basis; few of the technicians, except for some who had worked on ISTA farms before, ⁽¹⁾ have had experience of the sort now demanded; and there was little time to prepare them for their present tasks. Much of the action on the haciendas has been improvised, characterized by stop-gap responses to immediate crises. There has been a marked lack of coordination at all levels; technicians on one farm are imposing policies that are substantially different from those pushed by technicians on other farms; occasionally conflicting orders have been given by technicians working on the same hacienda. There seems to be a general lack of a coherent plan. Even the improvised responses have been crippled by the torpid bureaucratic machinery of ISTA and MAG in San Salvador, and the over-centralized decision-making apparatus. One central cause of the confusion stems from the apparent - and sometimes real - ambivalence of MAG leadership.

(1) And it should be remembered that there are significant differences between the old ISTA and its new incarnation.

The reform laws are being modified as the months pass (note especially Decree 207), and there are rumors of even more drastic tinkering in the works.

There has been a general policy of organizing the hacienda enterprises according to collective principles. As commercial crops such as coffee, sugar cane, and cotton had formerly been cultivated on haciendas as single, extensive plantations, it was decided to keep them intact and farm them collectively. The ex-colono members have always worked with these crops in collective fashion (although as wage laborers rather than as "owners"), and it seemed best to continue the practice. The matter of basic grains is somewhat different. Only on a few haciendas are corn, beans, and sorghum grown on a commercial basis. Where this practice exists, a collective strategy may be successful. But attempts to impose group farming on plots of basic grains for family subsistence are meeting some resistance from the ex-colono hacienda members.

Traditionally, colonos and small farmers generally have shown overwhelming preference for their own individual plots of basic subsistence crops. They have seldom, if ever, attempted collective farming with these crops. On the haciendas, colonos have always striven to lay hands on whatever land they could, however small, to supplement wages and other benefits with food crops. The primary reason for this preference is security: if their cash income is temporarily cut off, at least they will have something on their farm plots to keep them from other ruination and starvation. This is an especially important consideration at the present time, for the hacienda members are acutely uncertain about the course events will take over the coming months. If the hacienda enterprises are not successful; if credit and inputs do not arrive on schedule and planting is disrupted; if the already widespread violence intensifies and spreads to become a generalized civil war; if the farms are returned to their former owners -- at least they will be able to salvage something from their individual plots.

The ISTA technicians have universally held that all commercial crops will be farmed collectively; but there has been variation on the way basic subsistence crops should be grown. Some have promoted the collective approach; some have established one collective exploitation along with a scattering of individual plots; others have provided each member with small parcelas dotted about the farm lands not suitable for commercial crops. In some cases, the individual plots are given out free of charge; in others they are paid for with a minimal sum, which is deposited in the cooperative treasury. Few hacienda members I have talked to wanted to cultivate subsistence crops in groups; those who said they would try it were doubtful that it would work. The decision to farm these crops collectively was always made by the technicians, not by the hacienda members.

The matter of whether or not commercial or subsistence crops should be farmed collectively or by individual farmers should be looked at very closely over the coming months. It is my opinion that subsistence crops should be grown largely, if not entirely, on an individual basis because the farmers see them as a source of security in an atmosphere of intense uncertainty. The organization of commercial crops such as coffee, sugar cane and cotton - as well as manioc, bananas, plantains, etc., etc. - should probably be maintained as a collective system for the time being. But at the same time the technicians should be in close touch with the thoughts of the cooperative members on the

matter, and be open to difficulties affecting productive efficiency that stem from the collective approach. It must be stressed that Salvadoran peasants have virtually no experience with group farming - except as laborers on haciendas, which is quite distinct from their expected role under the new system. It may develop that the haciendas will function more efficiently, with less internal conflict and higher production levels, with a system of individual farm exploitation backed up by cooperative administration of credit, inputs, processing, and marketing. The most viable arrangement will undoubtedly differ from hacienda to hacienda and be determined to some extent by the types of crops grown. Many variables must be looked at, and it is very difficult to say how things will look a year from now. It is clear, however, that close attention must be paid to the reactions of hacienda members, and a flexible attitude be taken by ISTA and MAG officials at all levels. |

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