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Problems and Conflicts  
over Land Ownership  
in Bolivia

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## Problems and Conflicts over Land Ownership in Bolivia\*

By RONALD JAMES CLARK \*\*

Current land disputes between Bolivian landholders illustrate the type of problems which arise when the rate of land redistribution to peasants exceeds the capacity of the government to officially sanction such redistribution by delineating boundaries and by distributing and enforcing land titles.

This paper examines two general types of conflict that have resulted from the delay in affording legal title to peasant holdings created by the 1953 land reform. The first kind of conflict arises between displaced landlords and the new owners.

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\* Research for this paper was done in Bolivia during 1966 within the framework of a larger project—an evaluation of the Bolivian land reform experience and an analysis of present problems—which has been undertaken jointly by the Land Tenure Center of the University of Wisconsin, the Inter-American Committee for Agricultural Development, and USAID Bolivia. The Land Tenure Center is financed by a regional contract with AID Washington. Of course, none of the opinions, interpretations, or conclusions is necessarily endorsed by these organizations. Data for this paper have been gathered by the author and by others, especially Katherine Barnes, in ten different regional field sites where case studies have been or are being carried out, and from interviews with agrarian judges, lawyers, peasant union leaders and members, and landlords during many short trips to various areas of Bolivia. All interviews were unstructured and no attempt is being made here to analyze the relative importance of the problems or conditions presented. The major purpose is to show that these conditions do exist. The author would like to impress upon the reader, however, that under no circumstances should the conditions presented here be taken as a general criticism of the social, political, and economic legacy of the Bolivian Revolution of 1952 or of the effects of the Land Reform of 1953.

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Problems of this type occur: 1) when landlords intimidate peasants in order to retain title to, obtain payment for, or reassert traditional labor arrangements on part or all of their former holdings; 2) when peasant unions employ pressure tactics to intimidate landlords and force them to abandon or sell their lands; and 3) when peasants and landlords attempt to work out compromise arrangements.

The second general type of conflict arises between new peasant owners, including such problems as: 1) land-grabbing by more powerful peasants; 2) competing claims to the land of deceased peasants, often based on emotional ties to the land; 3) disputes involving subdivision of individual and common lands; 4) competition between claims based on tradition and claims based on legal title; and 5) intimidation by peasant leaders and government officials.

*The Bolivian Land Reform of 1953.* Before examining these two areas of conflict, it is necessary to survey some aspects of the Bolivian Land Reform of 1953, especially the governmental structures established to implement it.

Before 1953 the land ownership structure in Bolivia was characterized by large extensions of land held by a few, with tenure and labor relations similar to those of feudalism. With the Bolivian Revolution of 1952 and the Land Reform Law of 1953, the Bolivian government began to redistribute the large landholdings to the mass of peasants. A general objective of land reform was to restructure social, political, and economic relations between landlords and tenants.

The Revolution of 1952 brought many social and political changes in the countryside including enfranchisement of the rural population, a rural education program, and formation of peasant unions. These measures were necessary to protect the interests of newly emancipated peasants, to carry out the land reform, to create a political base for the new government, and to provide peasant communities with some minimum of organization after the departure of the landlords and their administrators. Peasant unions and land reform combined to deprive the landholding class of the political, social, and economic prerogatives which it had enjoyed before 1952.

Land reform was carried out quickly in the sense that un-

paid personal and farm labor obligations to landlords were ended almost immediately. In addition, in some areas peasants took immediate possession of land by means of invasion. Generally, however, peasants did not take over the land until after the Land Reform Law passed and landlords began to flee the countryside. The most immediate result of these actions was that an estimated 400,000 peasant families became owner operators of their own farms in a very short period of time.

Quite naturally, there was a good deal of confusion over the legal status of the holdings of the peasants and the ex-landlords. The 1953 law was not followed up with vigorous programs to clarify and enforce its provisions, and, as a result, the confusion persists.<sup>1</sup> Conflicts between peasants and former landlords, and among peasants themselves, are common.

The state is the only entity with the power to maintain order and to define and enforce rights, duties, and obligations involved in exploiting the land. These governmental functions are even more important, but obviously more difficult to enforce, in a situation where there has been an abrupt break with tradition. Bolivia's revolution and massive land redistribution called for an immediate redefinition and institutionalization of property rights. The situation also demanded new legal institutions and topographic services to implement the reform law as quickly and as orderly as possible to minimize

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<sup>1</sup> This does not mean the Bolivian government has not ratified rights to land by distributing some titles. Since 1953, 185,000 peasant families have received 263,000 individual and collective titles (titles to land now held in common by the communities) to approximately 3.8 million hectares of cultivable land, in addition to pasture lands and lands for school areas. However, the process has been slow and erratic, and what has been accomplished to date represents only 45 percent of the peasant families who have been affected by the land reform and who should have received titles. Also, of the 15,322 cases of expropriation initiated to date, only 7,322 have been completed in the 14 years since the Land Reform Law was passed. Most of the remaining cases have averaged eight to ten years since the process of expropriation was initiated and are still not resolved completely with titles distributed to the peasants involved. Besides the 8,000 pending cases of expropriation, there are an estimated 2,000 cases which have not been initiated. The majority of cases of expropriation of large landholdings has not been resolved to date, and the majority of peasant families (estimated at 200,000) who did not live in freeholding communities before 1952 and of peasant unions are still involved in these cases.

conflicts over land. The new government, unfortunately, did not have the resources to carry out these functions immediately after the Revolution of 1952.

*Conflicts Between Peasants and Ex-landlords*

Before the Revolution of 1952, landlords' rights to land and the labor services of their tenants were nearly absolute. Any conflicts among peasants over land on a large estate were settled by the landlord or his administrator. Conflicts among landlords themselves were infrequent, but when they did occur they were resolved by the landlords or taken to court. Such procedures, both customary and legal, for resolving conflicts over land were essentially abolished with the promulgation of the Land Reform Law of 1953 and the exodus of landlords from rural areas. The state was not capable of immediately applying the new legally prescribed procedures, thus giving rise to conflicts over land between peasants and ex-landlords.

*Intimidation by Ex-landlords.* Many current land conflicts between peasants and ex-landlords have arisen because of confusion and inefficiency in the expropriation process, especially in the implementation of the provisions of the law that allows landlords to retain portions of their former holdings.<sup>2</sup> Twenty to 25 percent of landholdings were declared latifundia, and expropriated in their entirety.<sup>3</sup> All remaining landholdings were declared small- or medium-sized properties, and a few were declared agricultural enterprises or cooperatives. In either of the latter cases owners kept substantial portions of the lands they worked before 1953. Major conflicts have arisen on these properties.

In many situations peasants harbor resentment and feel very insecure vis-a-vis the landlord. They remember the power

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<sup>2</sup> See Joseph R. Thome, "Problems Which Obstruct the Process of Title Distribution Under the Bolivian Agrarian Reform," (report prepared under contract for USAID Bolivia), January 1967.

<sup>3</sup> This 20 to 25 percent figure is an estimate for the country as a whole, based only on a partial analysis of the data available. In the Department of La Paz, where data are more complete and where most of the larger landholdings were found, only 21 percent of the properties which have terminated the expropriation process were declared latifundia.

of the landlord in the pre-reform period, and many fear that he will be able to take their lands because they do not yet have clear title.<sup>4</sup>

Landlords often exploit and foster this uncertainty by threatening to repossess their land and by telling the peasants they will never get titles, especially now that ex-President Paz Estenssoro is out of power. In a few cases landlords have disguised peasants and urban residents as soldiers or police and sent them to demand payment for land to which they no longer have legal rights. Sometimes the peasants, confused and bewildered after waiting so long for land titles, are willing to agree to almost anything. As a result, some peasants have purchased their own land—sometimes at inflated prices—in search of the security that a vigorous program of title distribution and enforcement could have provided.

Landlords have actually reassumed control of all or a part of their lands in some areas where peasant unions are not strong.<sup>5</sup> They do this either by going there themselves, or by sending their sons, lawyers, administrators, or other representatives. It is difficult to say how common this is, but it has occurred particularly in regions where landlords lived on or near their farms before the land reform. In some areas landlords remained in the same towns after the land reform, waiting for the chance to re-establish control over their land. Re-occupation has taken place even on some landholdings which were declared latifundia, where supposedly the landlord lost all his land and had no legal right to return or re-establish any control whatsoever over the land. Generally, landlords have not dared to reoccupy their former holdings in areas where peasant unions are strong.

Reassertion of landlord prerogatives has been facilitated by several factors. One was the change of government in Bolivia in November 1964, which raised a new set of expecta-

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<sup>4</sup> This problem is found in all the study areas and generally throughout Bolivia.

<sup>5</sup> Landlords who still have lands have organized and have published their ideas on what the Government of Bolivia ought to do to reestablish "order" in the countryside. Commonly called for are the dissolution of peasant unions, the return of lands to their owners, and disarmament of peasants. Not one has called for a more rapid title distribution program.

tions among landlords. Many believed it represented the long awaited counterrevolution. Even though such was not intended to be the case, many landlords began to re-establish contacts with their landholdings, especially in those cases where they had legal rights to do so. This has taken place in spite of the fact that the present government has pledged its support of the land reform and its continuation.<sup>6</sup>

In most cases where landlords have been able to repossess land, they have worked through older peasants, that is, those who grew up and worked as serfs under the landlord before land reform. In these cases the older people, especially where the peasant union is weak or the community divided, think primarily of two things when the landlord reappears: 1) the power he once wielded, and 2) the rumor that once Paz Estenssoro was out, the peasants would lose the lands. Remembering the pre-reform period and especially the domination of the landlord, the older people of many communities revert to traditional loyalties. They know no other way to respond to the landlord; they have been unable to change their ways of thinking rapidly enough to accommodate themselves to their new legally prescribed emancipation from the landlord.

Many landlords have maintained ties with their former serfs. For example, they may continue to finance in part or appear at the traditional fiesta, or they may become god-fathers of peasants' children, loan money to peasants, or buy agricultural produce from them. These types of relations are especially common where landlords have been left with a part of their former holdings and where they live on or near their farms.

Some landlords, especially the ex-owners of latifundia, have returned to their holdings to try to persuade peasants that they should give up the expropriation process. They point out that the process already has taken eight, ten, or twelve years, that peasants have paid large sums of money to topographers and agrarian judges, and that they have made numer-

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<sup>6</sup> See especially the following Government Decrees: 06949 (November 5, 1964), 07005 (December 22, 1964), 07033 (January 24, 1965), 07046 (January 30, 1965), 07189 (May 24, 1965), 07260 (August 2, 1965), 07442 (March 20, 1966).

ous expensive trips to departmental capitals without much progress. If the community as a whole, or even a part of it, can be convinced of the futility of continuing the expropriation process, landlords, most of the time working through peasant union leaders, usually offer the peasants several alternatives.

One is to work the land on a sharecropping basis. Sharecropping per se is not illegal if the landlord shares the crop evenly with peasants when the landlord furnishes the land, tools, and seed. If peasants furnish the tools and labor, they are entitled to 60 percent. However, on expropriated properties sharecropping arrangements are obviously illegal. Another alternative is for the landlord to offer the peasants a wage. Under the wage arrangement the landlord must furnish all other inputs such as seed, tools, and animals. Peasant benefits under this system are sometimes undermined by a profit-seeking peasant union leader who negotiates with the landlord to establish the daily wage and then pressures peasants to work for less. The difference is collected by the union, supposedly for community development projects. In not all of these cases is the difference appropriated by the peasant union leader.

Still another alternative offered the peasants by landlords is a work contract stipulating the number of days, hours and number of peasants who will work for the landlord. Especially in areas where peasant labor is not abundant, landlords have used peasant union leaders, land sales, and even visits of "government officials" to try to persuade peasants to sign work contracts. Peasants are reluctant to do this if they have sufficient land to keep them employed, and because of past experiences with such contracts: the landlords not meeting the stipulated minimum wage, not covering expenses of accidents, and that the work requirements contracted for usually fall in the same period when peasants want to work their own lands most intensively. In the areas where land resources are scarce, peasants try not to let the landlord return to his lands.

In some fertile irrigated areas, landlords have used a combination of rewards and pressures to obligate peasants to work for them. A typical pattern is for the landlord to sell some

land to peasants, then, by intimidating a weak union, or buying off union leaders, to oblige these peasants to work on his remaining land one day a week for a very low wage. The landlords resort to this as a means of obtaining labor. Because of the scarcity of land in these areas peasants are willing to agree to this arrangement.

On many occasions ex-landlords have told peasants that land titles they have received are worthless without the ex-landlord's signature. As a result, it is common for peasants to go to their former landlords to get them to sign their titles; this occurs even though the President of the Republic has already signed them. The peasants would feel more secure if the landlord would sign the title. Before 1964, peasants also wanted the landlord's signature because they felt this would help them keep their lands if the government should change. It is doubtful that any landlords have actually signed titles, but this does not keep them from using this as leverage to deal with peasants on an individual or community basis in trying to secure payment for their former holdings.

*Intimidation by Peasants.* In many cases peasants will not permit the landlord to return to his lands, work them, sell them, or even to reclaim articles from his house. In several areas of Bolivia, but especially in Cochabamba, there are cases where, although boundaries between peasants and landlords have been established and titles have been distributed, the landlord is kept out by powerful peasant unions. These unions hope the landowner will eventually lose interest in his land and never return. In these areas power of local and regional peasant union leaders surpasses that of the state, making it impossible or politically inexpedient for the government to enforce the legal rights of the landlords.

In other cases peasant union leaders will not allow their members to work for the landlord, nor will they allow the landlord to bring in outside labor. They fear that by allowing the landlord to import labor they may lose potential opportunities to buy the landlord's lands.<sup>7</sup>

As a result of these pressures, some landlords have aban-

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<sup>7</sup> This problem is common throughout Bolivia, found in all the case study areas, but especially in the Departments of Cochabamba, La Paz, and Potosí (in order of frequency).

doned their lands, and these have been occupied by individual peasant families or, more commonly, by peasant unions. This pattern of taking over abandoned land is especially common in areas with high population pressure. To justify these invasions the peasants repeat the slogan made popular during the revolution: "The land is for those who work it."

In areas where the peasant unions are strongest, such as La Paz and Cochabamba, offers of sale of land by landlords to peasants have been refused outright by peasant union leaders in a move designed to discourage the landholder and to get him to abandon it. This occurs even though individual families within the union may want to buy part of the land, and peasant families already may be settled on it and recognize the landlord's rights to it. In such cases there is still little hope for a sale as long as the peasant union and/or its leader remain as strong as they are presently.<sup>8</sup>

*Problems of Compromise.* In some cases both landlords and peasants have waited so long for clarification of their rights that they have given up hope for legal sanction. When this happens, the parties abandon the formal process and attempt to reach an informal agreement. This sometimes happens even when the landholding has been declared a latifundium, in which case the landlord has no rights to any land.<sup>9</sup> In such cases the peasants are so insecure in their present situation that they are willing to pay the landlord for what is no longer his in order to decrease the possibilities that he will try to return.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Such cases have not been found where peasant unions are weak, for example in relatively isolated areas in northeast La Paz, Tarija, Sucre, and parts of Potosí.

<sup>9</sup> While individual cases of this were found in all the study areas, one case was particularly impressive. A regional peasant union leader, frustrated with the process of expropriation, convinced the leaders of at least 25 local peasant unions that they should give up cooperating with the National Agrarian Reform Service and make their own arrangements with their landlords. Even though a majority of the 25 had been declared as latifundia, the peasants went ahead, paying the landlords for all the lands they received, notarizing the transactions, and registering them with the government (Oficina de Derechos Reales). After this, all contact with the National Agrarian Reform Service was dropped. When these sales take place there is no mention of boundaries, and less seldom is the quantity of land sold specified.

<sup>10</sup> When landlords sell land to which peasants are awaiting title,

Some progress is being made in resolving conflict through voluntary sales. It is becoming more common for union leaders and members to buy the lands remaining to landlords on the basis of mutual agreement. This usually takes place after both parties have clear titles, although it sometimes occurs before titles are issued but after the boundaries have been set for the landlord's share.

These sales must be approved by the National Agrarian Reform Service which verifies ownership and sees to it that the price is "fair." If the sale is not approved it has no legal validity. Nevertheless, extra-legal sales are quite common, especially in areas of population pressure. Landlords, in order to sell while they have the opportunity, willingly enter into such extra-legal sales.<sup>11</sup> In these cases, when peasants finally receive titles they usually do not correspond to the actual land distribution in the community for the titles do not include the lands acquired via unauthorized sales. The titles are out of date and cannot be brought up to date because the landlord's sale of land was not approved.

Despite the slowness of the land expropriation process and ratification of peasant rights to land, generally it can be said that the change which Bolivia undertook to carry out in 1953 by expropriating and distributing lands has been accomplished. No longer do a few landlords control the destinies of the mass of peasant families, and no longer do they enjoy

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they are being indemnified for what they lost with the land reform, receiving compensation over and above that contemplated by the law and by the original plans of the government.

<sup>11</sup> These cases are frequent and have been found in all the Departments of Bolivia except the tropical lowlands (Beni, Pando, and Santa Cruz). In spite of their extra-legal nature, these sales appear to work very well—and perhaps should be legalized in cases where the landlord has no interest in returning to the land, especially if the peasants already occupy part or all the land. Also, the National Agrarian Reform Service probably should approve all the land transfers if the two parties involved are in agreement and if no coercion is involved. Of course, when these sales are made one of the original objectives of the land reform law is not being realized; that is, to preserve some large farms. However, in cases where landlords have no interest in working their lands, subdivision and use of the land by peasants is more productive than allowing it to remain idle or to be worked under the traditional, unproductive tenure arrangements involving peasants and landlords.

to the same extent the social, political, and economic prerogatives which accrued to them before from the ownership of land. However, because of difficulty in changing attitudes of older peasant families and landlords toward each other, and because peasant land rights have not been ratified by rapid title distribution and enforcement, conflicts over land and general insecurity vis-a-vis the land of peasants and landlords alike are still very common.<sup>12</sup>

*Problems and Conflicts Among Peasants*<sup>13</sup>

Conflicts among the peasants themselves are also frequent, especially on latifundia where peasants received rights to all the land of the landlord. The most frequent source of conflict is subdivision of the land previously cultivated by the landlord.

*Land-grabbing.* In many cases the more powerful peasant families, usually those who had more land under the landlord, have commandeered larger parcels than they are allowed by the Land Reform Law, which states that these lands should be used to equalize holdings of all peasant families. In the absence of a more rapid program of distributing lands and formalizing individual peasant rights, the de facto land distribution has been sanctioned by the community, but at the price of dissension and conflict within the peasant community.

*Competition for Inheritances.* Conflicts also arise over the land of deceased peasants. When a head of a peasant family dies, other families lay claim to the land, pointing out that at some time in the past they had worked the land under the old system when the landlord was present, or even before. If all peasant families had been fully informed immediately after 1952 that they could, in accordance with the law, claim

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<sup>12</sup> Data do not exist to demonstrate whether peasant abuses of landlords or landlord abuses of their former serfs are more common today in Bolivia. However, on the basis of field work done to date it is the impression of the author that the latter are not only more common, but also more important in terms of delaying the social, political, and economic change that was envisioned as the outcome of redistributing land.

<sup>13</sup> All of the problems and conflicts discussed in this section are common to all the study areas.

only those lands they were working when the Land Reform Law was passed, these conflicts between families would have been minimized.

*Subdivision of Individual and Common Lands.* Most land presently held in common by peasants on former large landholdings was either land previously worked directly by the landlord or pasture land left to the community as a whole for cooperative use. Since 1953 subdivision of common lands has taken place primarily as a result of an increase in population.

Heads of families, elders, and peasant union leaders often have agreed to distribute individual rights to common lands to newly formed landless families. This is always a community decision and enforcement is carried out by the community. Subdivision of common lands, especially arable lands, reflects the peasants' recognition of the lack of alternative employment opportunities for the new families, and it also indicates that they prefer not to work these lands "in common" or "cooperatively," contrary to the hopes of those who drafted the Land Reform Law.

Where there is not enough common land for allotments to new families, individual holdings are subdivided. It is customary for fathers to give each married son a parcel of land. This custom also reflects the lack of alternative opportunities outside of subsistence agriculture. In a futile attempt to avoid such successive fragmentation of land, the Bolivian National Agrarian Reform Service forbids subdivision of individual or common lands.

*Traditional vs. Legal Title.* As a result of the above cases of land-grabbing, competition for inheritances, and subdivision of individual and common lands, a few communities have refused to accept titles when they were finally issued because they did not reflect the de facto distribution of land within the community. Under present agrarian legislation there is no way the peasant community can bring the titles up to date. The community finds itself faced with a legal impasse for which no solution exists as yet.

Most communities and peasants accept titles, no matter how outdated they may be, because titles have a psychological

value to peasants. Receipt of a title demonstrates to peasants that the land reform process has ended, that to some extent they no longer have to worry about losing their land, and that they have less to fear from their former landlords.

Generally, because of the slowness of the land reform and title distribution process, one finds that in some areas families and communities, instead of being able to rely upon legally sanctioned land titles, are reverting to customary procedures, enforced by the community, for granting peasant families access to land. This has been the only alternative open to many communities during the 14 years since the land reform.

*Intimidation by Peasant Leaders and Officials.* The National Agrarian Reform Service has had neither the personnel nor the resources to distribute titles more rapidly. The major expenses for initiating the expropriation process and for bringing the agrarian judges and topographers to divide the lands have been paid by the peasants. Because of poor communications, geographic isolation, low literacy, low incomes, and also because the expropriation process has been long and frustrating, peasants are often in a vulnerable position vis-a-vis their own leaders as well as topographers and agrarian judges. In many individual cases peasant union leaders have overcharged members of their communities for trips to La Paz or other departmental capitals. These overcharges are seldom outrageous, but they are frequent.

The relative strength of peasant union leaders varies from one locality to another. However, some peasant union leaders exploit the expropriation process, with which they have become familiar, to maintain positions of leadership. They know where certain offices are, with whom they should deal in the departmental capitals, and they usually speak Spanish better than other members of the community. Continuing delays in the expropriation process and in title distribution will help some individual peasant union leaders maintain their present positions of power. In some cases peasant union leaders have been turned out of office only to be reinstated later because they were the only ones familiar enough with the expropriation process to continue it.

As mentioned above, peasants have been responsible to

date for the major expenses involved in expropriating large farms. Considering the illiteracy and lack of ability to speak Spanish among the majority of the peasants, as well as the geographic isolation of many peasant communities, it is not surprising that topographers, agrarian judges and other officials involved in the expropriation and title distribution process have used this for their own benefit. Many peasants have paid for the services of these officials, but have not received satisfaction in return. Some communities are bitter about the whole process, leading in some cases to extra-legal arrangements with landlords or to a cessation of contact with officials from the National Agrarian Reform Service, not to mention landlords.

#### *Summary and Conclusions*

Many Bolivian ex-landlords have harbored hopes of returning to their lands and regaining the prerogatives which accompanied land ownership before 1952. These hopes have been nurtured by the slowness with which the land reform process has been carried out, to some extent by the "Revolution of 1964," and by the fact that landlords still have legal rights to a part of their former holdings. In many cases peasants continue to be exploited and intimidated by the landlord. More rapid title distribution and enforcement could possibly have minimized these problems, all of which work against more rapid economic development and social change within the rural sector.

The majority of peasant families affected by land reform originally gained limited access to land during the pre-reform period, that is, they worked land within the tenure system dominated by landlords. With the Revolution of 1952 and the subsequent land reform, the traditional means by which problems and conflicts over land were resolved disappeared on the large landholdings. Because the state has not been able to distribute lands, define boundaries, and enforce the respective rights of the thousands of new owner-operators more rapidly, the majority of peasants have had to rely increasingly on customary practices to define and enforce their respective rights to land.

Among peasants working in the old system, ways of be-

havior, attitudes, and fears of the landlord were deeply rooted. The land reform has been the basic measure taken by the government to change these attitudes and relations between classes. However, attitudes and behavioral patterns do not change quickly. One now finds sharp differences between older peasant families and the new generation, especially in ways of thinking about and treating ex-landlords. Younger peasants really do not know what it was like to work under the old system and cannot understand their parents' fear of and, still in some cases, loyalty to the landlord. However, since the older generation still occupies most positions of authority in many rural communities, landlords have been able to divide, intimidate, and exploit communities by working with and through these older families.

An analysis of the problems and conflicts over lands in Bolivia, 14 years after the Land Reform Law of 1953, gives rise to three general conclusions. First, land title distribution and enforcement should have been carried out much more rapidly and more vigorously. Old institutions governing rights of different groups to land can be abolished quickly, but when this is done the state must act just as quickly to implement and enforce the new institutions which have been legally prescribed. Second, in terms of more rapid social, political, and economic development in the rural sector, it would have been better to expropriate all lands of the large landholders. In the Bolivian case, farm size, level of farm investment, and agricultural practices, as well as pre-reform tenure relations, were used to determine degrees of expropriation. However, the Bolivian experience might indicate that it would be better to compensate landlords for these differences rather than leave them parts of their former landholdings.<sup>14</sup> Compensating those landlords who for one reason or another would have warranted special treatment, and subsequent redistribution of *all* lands to the peasants, would have helped to minimize many of the problems mentioned in this paper, especially

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<sup>14</sup> This implies indemnification only for positive differences, such as the degree to which one landlord has invested in advanced farm techniques, etc. Indemnification would be made only on the margin, as it were, for these differences, and certainly not for the entire value of the landholding, which most countries cannot afford.

problems arising from the continuation and more recently the reassertion of traditional relations between classes.<sup>15</sup>

Third, the role played by peasant unions in effecting land reform, and their relationships to problems pointed out above, cannot be ignored. Clearly, in areas where peasant unions have the strongest leadership, landlords have been intimidated and have not been allowed to return to their properties, even though legally they have the right to do so. In other areas, where peasant unions are not so strong, the landlord has been able to enter once again into the operating functions of the farm, re-instituting to some extent pre-reform farm labor obligations, not to mention pre-reform social relations. In the absence of more effective action from the state in applying the existing agrarian legislation, strong local and national peasant union organizations are still the best guarantee the peasants have against landlords returning to their pre-reform landholdings and creating the conditions under which many of the above problems have arisen.

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<sup>15</sup> One possible drawback to dispossessing all landlords is that some managerial ability may be lost. This might affect the level of agricultural production adversely for a short period of time, but this would be a small risk compared to the risk of long-term difficulty and conflict over land rights. In the specific case of Bolivia, distribution of all lands to the peasants would not have lowered agricultural production any more than actually occurred. To date, in almost all areas of Bolivia, land left to the landlords has not been worked as intensively as neighboring peasant holdings.