

**EVOLUTION OF LAND DISTRIBUTION IN RURAL MEXICO:**

**CÁRDENAS TO ZEDILLO**

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**ABSTRACT**

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Successful societies require a means for securing political order because political order is a necessary condition for economic and political development. Consider for example the United States, which the institutional foundations were in the Constitution and a stable, well-specified system of economic and political rights that together provided the credible commitment that was a necessary prerequisite to efficient economic markets. In

contrast countries like Mexico, after independence disorder prevailed for decades revealing the utter absence of institutional arrangements capable of establishing cooperation among rival groups.

There is other aspect that changed the fate of Mexico, the public policies in the distribution of rural landownership. In the case of the United States awarded small landholdings to people who would settle and farm the land for a specified period. In contrast, Mexico awarded large landholding to developers. This policy difference led to extreme differences in the degree of inequality in rural landownership in these two countries.

In other words in Mexico a small minority of households owned all the land. In contrast, in the United States a big percentage of heads of household in rural areas owned the land.

The combination of bad policies supported for the lack of strong institutions with a consistent political and economic program supported the political order had as consequence a path of stunningly poor performance of Mexico in comparison to the United States.

This thesis is a chronology of Mexico's presidents and their policies of the land distribution in rural Mexico. Although was for some of them important part of theirs mandates and speeches, was not sufficient, and for the

contrary brought as a consequence a huge disparity in Mexico. This work is about how the Mexican politicians knowing that the countryside has been one of the most explosive political sectors in Mexico's history, they until today can not provide them with a political order for an individual as requiring three fundamental aspects of personal security; for one's life, family, and source of livelihood. The latest manifestation of this situation was the uprising of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) on New Year's Eve of 1994 reconfirmed the effervescence of rural Mexico.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Agrarian modernization has come and come again in Mexico, either through brief, convulsive legal and political upheavals or, more patiently if no less devastatingly, through long-drawn-out processes of transformation driven by economic forces. The Ley Lerdo of 1857 was clearly an example of the first sort. The liberal architects of the reform, which divested both the church and peasant communities of their lands, hoped to lay the basis for a society of yeoman farmers on the model of the United States. They thought that there was land enough for everyone, but in the end there was only enough for themselves and their peers. Peasant communities were stripped of their patrimonies and peasants reduced to *minifundistas* on the margins of expanding haciendas (Foley, 1995: 59).

The modernizers, who followed the generation of the *científicos*, extended the process in the name of economic rationality, attracting foreign investors to build

railroads, expanding and modernizing ancient irrigation systems, and building modern sugar refineries to service plantations grown fat at the expense of peasant communities like Emiliano Zapata's Anenecuilco. The effects of the Ley Lerdo reforms and the agricultural modernization of the Porfirian period were devastating for peasant agriculture and for peasant communities. Sustained peasant insurrection appeared only when sparked by the revolt of the Constitutionalists, but in the civil war (Mexican revolution) that followed, the principles of agrarian reform on behalf of Mexico's peasants were imprinted upon the political system in a way that has bedeviled efforts at counterreforming, top-down "modernization" ever since (Foley, 1995: 60, n. 1).

The latest round of state-driven modernization, initiated with the drastic liberalization of agricultural trade undertaken in 1990 and extending through the revisions of Article 27 of the Constitution and the laws which implement it in early 1992, has not abolished the agrarian question in Mexican politics.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Concentration of landed property in the hands of a few constituted a fundamental socio-economic problem in Mexico even before the conquest by the Spaniards. The social and economic history of the country is, in essence, the history of land tenure and of the struggles for the possession of land.

In the time of the Aztecs, the dominating tribe in Mexico when the Spaniards arrived, the land had become almost the exclusive property of the privileged classes. The lower classes worked the land for their benefit and could use only very small areas for cultivation. This situation was the result of an increasing of *latifundio*<sup>1</sup> in the hands of the King, the nobility, and the warrior and the ecclesiastical group-that is to say, the superior social strata of those times. The land tenure system was well organized. The towns were divided into sections, each

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<sup>1</sup> A latifundio is a large landed estate in Latin America, like a latifundium in ancient Rome.

having communally owned lands for cultivation, called *calpulali*; these were divided into lots for the individual use of the families. Other kinds of lands not for cultivation were designated for communal use. Called *altepetlali*, they were for such uses as for hunting, fishing and taking of wood (Fernandez, 1943: 219).

Yet, with the increasing of the population the lands of *calpulali* and *altepetlali* came to be insufficient. Moreover, the tribes that were dominated by the Aztec Empire were obliged to pay large tributes. This situation was well exploited by the genial Hernán Cortés, who played upon the feelings of dominated tribes and threw them against Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Empire. In this way one of the first of the great paradoxical events of the history of Mexico took place: the conquest of New Spain was performed by the native Indians. This fact has great importance from a social viewpoint. Mexico's birth as an Indo-Hispanic nation was by the union of two races, and not by the displacement of one race by another, as in the case of the United States. The Indian chiefs, who helped with the conquest, received honors, titles of nobility, and lands from the Spanish King (Fernandez, 1943: 219).

The Spanish colony thus rearranged the system of property only slightly, conserving the prevalent forms of

land tenure. Instead of the *calpulali* they created the *lands of communal distribution*; in the place of the *altepetlali* they created the *ejido* (communal lands not for cultivation); and coexisting with these forms were individual ownerships of the Spaniards and of a few Indians. There were legal provisions, not only with respect to the lands possessed by the Indians before the conquest, but also for granting lands to the new villages formed by the Indians or the Spaniards (Fernandez, 1943: 220).

At the end of the colonial period, there was notorious discontent among the masses on account of the land situation. When Hidalgo's movement broke out, the Viceroy, to stop the revolution, ordered a distribution of lands among the Indian villages. But it was too late. The great commander of the independence war, Don José María Morelos, who wrote the Declaration of Independence, was a radical agrarian leader. He broke up the great plantations to create numerous family-sized farms (Fernandez, 1943: 221).

After independence, hacienda land passed from *peninsulares* to Creoles and Mestizos, all person of European descendent. Some land was transferred by government grant; other occupation was less formal. With their communities now formally ended, Indians had no place other than to work on the haciendas. Hence they became a

source of cheap labor. Their remaining states were declared to be public lands (Powelson, 1988: 227).

The Reform, of Alvarez, Comonfort and Juárez in the 1850s, was a set of institutions borrowed from England and the United States, to be planted in hostile soil. The Reform echoed the Constitution of Cádiz of 1812. It was directed primarily toward parliamentary democracy and the abolition of privilege, especially that of the Church. But it also favored individualized, private property. After civil war and the defeat of European Intervention (Maximilian), the Reform had won. Slavery was abolished, monopolies prohibited; and Mexico was declared to be democratic and republican. Corporate property, both Indian-owned and Church, were confiscated and sold at auction (Powelson, 1988: 228).

This movement had preceded the Reform. A law of 1856 had empowered the government to take over 15 million pesos value of Church property. But Santa Anna repealed this. After his overthrow in 1854, the new governments of Alvarez and Comonfort resumed the confiscations. By the Law of *Desamortización*, all lands of civil or religious corporations (except those for use in the functions of those organizations, such as for church buildings) should be confiscated and sold to tenants at their capitalized

values (calculated at 6%). If there were no tenants, land would be sold at auction. Such land could not be again sold to any religious corporation. *Ejido* land was exempt. By the Constitution of 1857, no civil or religious corporation might hold land not for public use (Powelson, 1988: 228).

In 1863, Benito Juárez passed a law modeled after the U.S. Homestead Act, permitting settlers to claim up to 2,500 hectares of public land each, provided that one person occupied every 200 hectares, and occupancy was continuous for ten years. The act of 1863 had little impact in its first years, but ultimately much idle land was settled (Powelson, 1988: 228).

### **The Porfiriato**

Yet the Reform did not achieve its goals of widespread, small-scale private property owned by Indians. Church states in mortmain<sup>2</sup> were indeed broken up and sold, but so also were communal lands of Indians, contrary to original intent. As planned, first option was given to tenants. But the bias of the reformers is reflected in the explanation by McBride (1923: 133): "Their object was not

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<sup>2</sup> Mortmain Law, perpetual ownership of real estate by institutions such as churches that cannot transfer or sell it.

to despoil but rather to stimulate and even force the economic development of the large Indian element in the nation by removing it from the lethargic atmosphere of communal life and by offering the incentive of individual proprietorship." But Indian villagers opposed the reforms. *Ranchos* grew, in both size and numbers, as educated *Mestizos* bought properties from the Indians, and some of them became haciendas (Powelson, 1988: 228).

Many records had been destroyed during the Maximilian-inspired northern retreat of the Juárez government, and legal means had to be devised for awarding these properties. Thus the greatest perversion occurred when speculators and other engrossers declared title to Indian communal lands because they were more sophisticated, more knowledgeable of the law.

Although nurtured in the same ideology as Juárez, Porfirio Díaz (president 1876-1880: 1884-1910) quickly oriented to the opportunities of the day. The hacienda was engrossed and even strengthened, as educated sophists gained the land that was to have gone to the small farmer. Some of the lands being gobbled up were *baldíos*, or waste, in the national extremities. A law of 1883 enjoined the president to appoint surveying companies to locate *baldíos*, receiving as reward one-third of the lands so discovered.



Another law, in 1894, divided all public lands into four classes: (1) *baldíos* (never occupied); (2) *demasías* (occupied lands within the boundaries specified in deeds but greater than quantities mentioned); (3) *excedencias* (lands occupied for twenty years or more but outside the boundaries specified by deeds); and (4) *nacionales* (*baldíos* that were either discovered and measured by public commissions or for which claims were declared illegal or abandoned). The first three categories might be settled by any inhabitant of Mexico. The 2,500 hectare limit of Juárez' 1863 law was removed (McBride, 1923: 74). Since all these categories were subject to interpretation by officials, and since officials were subject to monetary persuasion, those with financial means and knowledge could take lands from those who were less prepared. More and more, the Indian was pushed off his own traditional land. At least until 1905, the Díaz era appeared to be one of economic growth, railroad building, and industrialization. But, landowning became more concentrated (Powelson, 1988: 228).

Incipient industrialization, railroad construction, and the development of commerce brought a great scarcity of capital and some lack of manpower. Haciendas began to disintegrate from lack of capital and, to put a stop to the

increases of wages the semi-slavery conditions in the haciendas were strengthened. A powerful aristocracy of landlords-many who diverted their money and attention to industry, banking, and commerce to the neglect of the management of their states- were at the top of the social, economic, and political structure. Discontent among the people became tremendous. The government at last understood the situation and, to prevent an explosion, founded the Bank of Loans for Irrigation and Agricultural Developments, and began to lay plans for an agrarian reform (Fernandez, 1943: 221).

Even as it grew, the end of the hacienda was nevertheless in sight. Four forces helping bring it about, two of them long-term and two more immediate. First were the railroads, which provided a means of transport previously unknown to the Indian. Now it was possible to jump aboard a slow freight and disappear into the night. Second was the industrialization and even new opportunities in mining, both of which supplied jobs for the migrating Indians. The hacienda depends on a labor force with no alternative opportunities; and this at least was being eroded. Third, a financial panic in 1907, and fourth, a freeze in 1909 depleted the assets of *hacendados*. By the

time the revolution struck in 1910, many haciendas were virtually bankrupt (Powelson, 1988: 229).

### **Revolutionary Mexican Factions**

The revolutionary movement coalesced in different ways in the various regions of Mexico. In central Mexico, the main social rift was between the expropriated Indian communities and the *hacendados*. In the North, revolution was led by the *hacendados* who were excluded from political power during the *Porfiriato*. They formed a broad and unlikely alliance with their own peons, small farmers, ranchers, and urban middle classes. In Morelos, south of Mexico City, Indian peasants had been organized to oppose the *Porfiriato* since 1908, before Francisco I. Madero had even called for a revolt against Díaz. Unlike the broad alliance in the North, which was represented by *hacendados* (like Madero), the Morelos peasantry named their leader from among their own community, Emiliano Zapata.<sup>3</sup> Followers of Zapata decided to ally themselves with Madero and the northern *hacendados* because an effort to air their grievances had been repulsed at the state level (Otero, 1989: 279).

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<sup>3</sup> Zapata earned his livelihood from training horses on a hacienda in exchange for a wage. Thus, strictly speaking, he was not a peasant. Yet, he was a respected member of the community, a farmer with property of his own.

By the time of the Zapatista uprising, sharecroppers and poor farmers were ready to join with the revolutionary movement. *Péones encasillados* (peasants resident on haciendas) preferred their current lives to the uncertainty of revolt: "Only rarely did they [the Zapatistas] recruit rebels among the *gente de casa* [resident peons], who anyway preferred their bonded security, and nowhere evidently did they excite these dependent peons to rise up and seize the plantations they worked on" (Otero, 1989: 279). The most militant and combative of Zapatistas were poor peasant producers and share tenants.

The pre-Revolutionary situation in the North was distinct. La Laguna, located in the north central region, was settled only in the nineteenth century; it did not harbor an extant, sedentary Indian population as did so much of the highlands of central Mexico. In contrast to peons from central haciendas who tended to remain loyal to their patrons and spurn the revolution, peons and *hacendados* in the North rebelled together against the central government. Madero, a *hacendado* from the state of Coahuila, led the rebellion. This was partly due to the fact that, in the North, debt servitude had lost its sway since mid-nineteenth century because of the development of mining and even some industry which offered alternative

employment opportunities. Even *tiendas de raya*<sup>4</sup> (hacienda store) were different in the North. In the North peons were not forced to purchase goods at the *tienda de raya*. Indeed, *hacendados* generally sold products there at lower prices as an additional incentive to attract labor. In the center of the country they were the *hacendado's* instrument to keep peons indebted and thus attached to the hacienda. Likewise, in La Laguna, agricultural wages were the highest in the country (Otero, 1989: 280).

In the state of Chihuahua, communities of colonists were established specifically to defend the frontier against Apache incursions. They had a greater internal autonomy and felt that they had not only the right but also the duty to be armed to defend themselves against Apache attacks. Although they were not a large percentage of the rural labor force, they did get land from President Benito Juárez in 1864 after helping him fight against the French invasion. Later on, during the *Porfiriato*, the La Laguna colonists struggled with livestock *hacendados* who had deprived them of water by altering the flow of the Nazas river. Considering that the colonists had lost their land under Porfirio Díaz, it was not surprising that they became

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<sup>4</sup> The workers residing on the hacienda are paid not in cash, but in kind, in the use of a small plot of land, in the reduction of a debt, or in scrip redeemable only at the *tienda de raya* (hacienda store). To supplement abysmally low wages, the *tienda de raya* provides credit far beyond the peasants' ability to repay. Since they cannot leave the hacienda until their debts are paid, peasants become effectively tied to the place (Horton, 1968: 13).

combative in the revolution and were among the first land reform beneficiaries in 1917. In Chihuahua, compared to ordinary peasant communities, colonists had become accustomed to privileges usually accorded Spaniards and Creoles. While colonists, they were land proprietors and could sell their land. But, by 1910, they had been dispossessed of their land and deprived of municipal autonomy. These aggrieved colonists were easily organized for combat (Otero, 1989: 280).

Another important revolutionary group developed in the northwest state of Sonora. Most of the leaders of the constitutionalist movement, in fact, came from Coahuila and Sonora. Initially headed by Venustiano Carranza, a former governor of Coahuila, the Sonora group seized control of the revolutionary state by 1920. Generals Adolfo de la Huerta, Alvaro Obregón Salido, and Plutarco Elías Calles are closely associated with the triumph of this faction of the revolution; they helped to legitimize the emerging agrarian bourgeoisie of the North. But at the same time the differences of the backgrounds and ideas of the revolutionary Mexican factions, as the *Table 1* shows, also to political and ideological differences.

**Table 1**  
**Revolutionary Mexican Factions**

Actor	State to which belongs	Group of interest	Comments
Emiliano Zapata (farmer)	Morelos (south-central Mexico)	Inhabitants of village communities (peasants), both Indians and mestizos, who had lost many of their lands to large sugar plantations as a result of the building of railroads and of Mexico's rapid economic development.	November 28, 1911 in the village of Ayala, proclaimed what could be considered the most famous agrarian document of the revolution, the Plan de Ayala. It called for the immediate return of expropriated properties to the communities to which these lands had belonged
Francisco "Pancho" Villa <sup>5</sup> (semiliterate former peon)	Chihuahua (northern Mexico)	State's middle classes and peasantry. In December 1913 he managed to gain control of the state, and his commanders appointed him governor of Chihuahua.	He decreed that all properties belonging to the state's <i>hacendados</i> be placed under the control of the state until the victory of the revolution. The revenues from these properties would be used to finance the revolution, to help the widows and orphans of soldiers, and once victory was achieved, the lands confiscated from villages communities would be returned to them. The remaining hacienda lands would be granted to Villa's soldiers.

<sup>5</sup> The real name of Francisco Villa was Doroteo Arango, but for defending the family honor he got into some disputes, and he changed his name and he moved to Chihuahua. Doroteo was born in a small village in Durango (a state immediately south of Chihuahua).

**Table 1 continued**  
**Revolutionary Mexican Factions**

Actor	State to which belongs	Group of interest	Comments
Francisco I. Madero and Venustiano Carranza (hacendados)	Coahuila	Liberal <i>hacendados</i> .	Not only were these leaders not interested in land reform, but on the contrary, they felt that a massive transfer of property from <i>hacendados</i> to peasants would destroy Mexico economically by replacing cash crops, which Mexico had to export to modernize, with subsistence agriculture.
Adolfo de la Huerta, Alvaro Obregón Salido (small farmer), and Plutarco Elías Calles (well-off merchants)	Sonora	<i>Hacendados</i> or the class of prosperous capitalist farmers and ranchers.	These three generals held the presidency of Mexico between 1920 and 1928. They embodied the spirit and the character of what today is the northern agrarian bourgeoisie.

Source: Katz (1996) and Otero (1989).



## CHAPTER 3

### MEXICAN LAND DISTRIBUTION

Despite these conditions, few members of the political elite emerging after 1910 recognized the urgency of the agrarian problem. In December 1912, Luis Cabrera proposed a law entitled "The Reconstitution of the *Ejid*os of the Villages as a Means of Ending the Slavery of the Mexican Rural Worker." Cabrera envisioned the *ejido*, which later became the basis of Mexico's agrarian reform, as a complement to the wages the rural worker would earn on large farms; this initiative was one of many proposed that year, but it is especially important because some of its concepts were later incorporated in the first agrarian legislation, the Decree of January 6, 1915, and in the Constitution of 1917. But political chaos prevented the immediate development of an agrarian ideology or legislation, and those who finally gained control of the government did not actively promote a solution to the land problem. Venustiano Carranza's Plan de Veracruz (1914) promised to break up the *latifundio* and to encourage small

rural properties; but early agrarian legislation was concerned only with the restitution of lands that had been illegally taken from the *campesinos*. Consequently, many types of villages were ineligible to receive lands under the Decree of January 6, 1915, and under the subsequent Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917. In fact, not until the promulgation of the Agrarian Code of 1934 did the *peones acasillados* -residents of the *haciendas*- receive the right to petition the government for land (Markiewicz, 1980: 1). The National Agrarian Commission, established in the Decree of January 6, 1915, mainly to distribute land, took charge of *ejido* organization because no other agency of the government was interested. In October 1922, the Commission published Circular 51, which stated that the Commission was responsible for the welfare of the *ejidos* after the villages received land. Circular 51 also established the Revolutionary precedent for the organization of the *ejidos* as production cooperatives, or collectives (Markiewicz, 1980: 2).

It is important to clarify what is meant by the terms "cooperative," "collective," and "organization." The term "cooperative" can refer to a whole range of group undertakings with a number of purposes. Cooperative organizations may originate on the consumers' side.

Consumers cooperate to try to absorb certain stages of the marketing process, to obtain better consumer prices for themselves, moving toward the producers along the continuum as intermediaries are eliminated. In cooperative theory, the organized consumers keep moving in this direction until they reach the producers, who are also absorbed; this transforms economic life, which is now governed by the principles of solidarity, no profit, and the elimination of competitive struggle; capitalism comes to an end (Markiewicz, 1980: 2, n. 8).

Cooperatives may also originate with the producers, who may either advance into the marketing process (for example, to sell their products) or move backward into the production process (organizing part or all of the production in common, to increase productivity and/or implement technological improvements). Those cooperatives which advance into the marketing process are known as service cooperatives. Those that organize the process of production at various stages are called production cooperatives. A group that organizes cooperatively all of its economic activities - production and services - is called an integral cooperative, or collective. Theoretically, collective organization in agriculture offers many advantages, particularly in poor countries

where land is fragmented into small holdings. These include economies of scale in production, mechanization, experimentation with crop rotation, efficient allocation and use of labor, water, and inputs, and bulk purchasing and marketing of products (Markiewicz, 1980: 3, n. 9). In practice, collectives have met with many problems, some of the most troublesome being lack of necessary government support, internal organization and member commitment (Markiewicz, 1980: 3, n. 10). Aggravation of unemployment has also been a problem where mechanization and other labor-saving measures have been introduced without the provision of alternate sources of employment.

In Mexico, the term "collective *ejido*" is applied to an *ejido* that farms its lands in common; ideally, this would include group receipt and use of credit, the cooperative sale of farm products, industrialization and/or processing of goods, and cooperative purchase of consumer items, although all of these elements have not usually been present. The term "semicollective" refers either to the farming of part of the *ejido* lands collectively, or to the performance of part of the community's agricultural tasks collectively. Some specialized cooperatives have been formed, mainly associations of *ejidatarios* required by the government to qualify for official credit. Such

organizations have been considered necessary because the *ejidatario* cannot legally rent, mortgage or sell his land, so that the only guarantee he normally has for a loan is the promise of a forthcoming harvest - usually an insufficient guarantee on a private or individual loan. Also, administrative costs in granting each small loan separately would be very high (Markiewicz, 1980: 3).

The purpose of the Circular 51 was not to create "communal life" on the *ejidos*, but rather to bring to the villages the benefits of mechanization and modern agricultural technology, where it was practical (Markiewicz, 1980: 4, n. 11). Nevertheless, some factions of the government objected to the emphasis of Circular 51, because they believed that collective organization favored communism in the rural sector and that individual "ownership" of *ejido* parcel would help to do away with insecurity among the *ejidatarios* (Markiewicz, 1980: 4, n. 12). The Law of *Ejido* Patrimony, promulgated in December 1925, dealt with these objections by requiring the parcellation of *ejido* lands as soon as the villages received them (Markiewicz, 1980: 3, n. 13).

This early schism among the Revolutionary leaders, reflected in the difference in emphasis between Circular 51 and the Law of *Ejido* Patrimony, caused an ambiguity in the

*ejido* system of production. This ambiguity results from "political and ideological conflict with respect to the ownership of land and its function in Mexico's development (Markiewicz, 1980: 3, n. 14)." Within the *ejido* system, this ideological difference became manifest as a conflict between those favoring individual exploitation of *ejido* parcels with minimal organizational effort by the government and those favoring cooperative production where feasible. The former group believed that private property was essential for national progress; they thought of the *ejido* as an intermediate, learning stage for *campesinos* who would theoretically "graduate" to privately owned, family farms. Those favoring cooperative production emphasized the importance of limiting the right to private ownership for the social good; they saw the *ejido* as an integral and permanent part of Mexican agriculture, and so viewed cooperative organization as necessary for the productivity and social well-being of both the *ejido* and the agricultural sector as a whole (Markiewicz, 1980: 4).

The "private property" philosophy characterized the ideologies of all the early Revolutionary presidents. Lands were distributed at only moderate rates until the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). Cárdenas revived the philosophy, typified in Circular 51, that the *ejido* had

a permanent role to play in Mexico's development; during his tenure, more lands were distributed than during all preceding periods combined see *Table 2*.

**Table 2.**  
**Land Distributed and Number of Beneficiaries in Different Stages of the Mexican Agrarian Reform**

Time-period	Area		Beneficiaries		Annual Averages	
	Hectares (thousands)	Percent	Thousands	Percent	Hectares (thousands)	Beneficiaries (thousands)
1915-1920	382	.5	77	2.8	66	15
1921-1934	10,639	14.1	870	31.2	760	62
1935-1940	20,137	26.7	776	27.8	3,356	129
1941-1958	17,182	22.6	458	16.4	954	25
1959-1969	27,229	36.1	607	21.8	2,475	55

Source: Markiewicz, Dana. *Ejido Organization in Mexico 1934-1976*, ed. Ludwig Lauerhass, Jr. (Los Angeles: University of California for Latin American Center Publications, 1980).

Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution was designed to fulfill the demands of the many peasant farmers who had been dispossessed during the *Porfiriato* while preserving the possibility of private landownership. Indeed, the land reform article to the Constitution was a reformist compromise. One of its central features was that it declared all land to be owned by the nation. The nation, in turn, had the right to transmit its land to individuals and to constitute "private property." Also, the nation had the right and the obligation to expropriate any private property when the land was deemed necessary for "public

use." This article provide the post-revolutionary state with the legal instrument to carry out land redistribution (Otero, 1989: 281)

Finally, to summarize the legal efforts in the matter of land distribution in times of the Mexican Revolution, Table 3 shows some of these legal instruments elaborated before Lázaro Cárdenas having been President.

**Table 3.**  
**Legal instruments to land distribution before Lázaro Cárdenas.**

Date	Promoter	Name	Content
December, 1912	Luis Cabrera	The Reconstitution of the <i>Ejid</i> os of the Villages as a Means of Ending the Slavery of the Mexican Rural Worker	This initiative is especially important because some of its concepts were later incorporated in the first agrarian law,
January 6, 1915	Venustiano Carranza	Agrarian Law or Decree of January 6, 1915	Established mainly to distribute land, took charge of <i>ejido</i> organization because no other agency of the government was interested. Law that created agrarian commissions and gave governors and local officials the right to return lands confiscated from communities and to expropriate lands for the benefit of landless communities, sharply receded.



**Table 3 continued**  
**Legal instruments to land distribution before Lázaro Cárdenas.**

Date	Promoter	Name	Content
1917	Venustiano Carranza	Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917	Was designed to fulfill the demands of the many peasant farmers who had been dispossessed during the <i>Porfiriato</i> while preserving the possibility of private landownership. Its most basic provision was that large states were subject to expropriation to create either small properties or communal properties. That expropriation was not to take place without compensation was based on the tax value of the properties which represented only a fraction of their real value, and the owners would be repaid in 5 percent bonds during twenty years.
October, 1922	The National Agrarian Commission	Circular 51	Stated that the Commission was responsible for the welfare of the <i>ejidos</i> after the villages received land. Circular 51 also established the Revolutionary precedent for the organization of the <i>ejidos</i> as production cooperatives, or collectives.

**Table 3 continued**  
**Legal instruments to land distribution before Lázaro Cárdenas**

Date	Promoter	Name	Content
December, 1925	The National Agrarian Commission	The Law of Ejido Patrimony	This Law required the parcellation of ejido lands as soon as the villages received them.
February 10, 1926	Plutarco Elias Calles	The Law of Agricultural Credit	The beneficiaries of the land redistribution should receive credit and technical assistance.
1926	Plutarco Elias Calles	The Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola (BNCA)	The beneficiaries of the land redistribution should receive credit and technical assistance, and had invested the first public money in irrigation projects.
March 16, 1926	Plutarco Elias Calles	The Law of Ejido Agricultural Banks	The Ejido Banks were allowed to operate only with Cooperative Societies formed by ejidatarios and, in some cases, small farmers who had social and economic ties with the ejidos.
January 12, 1931	Plutarco Elias Calles	The Law of Agricultural Credit (repealed the Law of Agricultural Credit of February 10, 1926).	Created a single agricultural credit system combining the functions previously delegated to the BNCA and the Ejido Banks.

Source: Markiewicz (1980) and Mogab (1981)

The transformations in the agrarian landscape of Mexico that the revolution produced were by no means limited to the areas where the radical revolutionaries had emerged. The revolution had decisively weakened the forces

of the old regime. The Porfirian state, its army, its judiciary, and its police had been dissolved and destroyed. While the new revolutionary army was frequently corrupt and at times was suborned by *hacendados*, it never had the coherence and the commitment to the landowning classes that its Porfirian predecessor had. Although many *hacendados* recovered their lands, they never recovered the political and economic power that had been theirs prior to 1910. Their political power was weakened by a new revolutionary elite, some of it of peasant origin that emerged after the revolution, while the economic power of the *hacendados* had greatly suffered as a result of the fact that for many years their haciendas had been expropriated and much of their holdings had been either destroyed or used to finance the revolution. Above all, the revolution had created a new consciousness among Mexico's peasants of the rightfulness of their demands, which gained a large degree of legitimacy thanks to Mexico's revolutionary Constitution. The clear consequence of this massive weakening of the *hacendados'* power and the effect of popular mobilization that the revolution brought about was that between 1934 and 1940 Lázaro Cárdenas could carry out a massive redistribution of lands in Mexico's *hacendados*, who were so weakened that

they were unable or unwilling to offer any effective resistance (Katz, 1996: 33).

## CHAPTER 4

### LÁZARO CÁRDENAS' S SYSTEM

The 1917-1935 period was one of economic reconstruction and ruling group consolidation. Because the "revolutionary family" was becoming fragmented, especially after the assassination of Obregon in 1928, Calles, in 1929, sponsored the union of all revolutionary forces into a political party called the National Revolutionary Party (*Partido Nacional Revolucionario*, PNR), a precursor of the PRI. The outstanding features of the 1920-1935 period were a leadership based on caudillos, an ideological radicalism expressed in heavy anticlericalism, and a halt to land redistribution. Anticlericalism led to the Cristero rebellion in west-central Mexico, while the absence of significant land redistribution led to a radical agrarian movement in the state of Veracruz headed by Governor and General Adalberto Tejeda. These two threats, one from the right and the other from the left, explain the 1933 choice of Lázaro Cárdenas as its presidential candidate by the Congress of the dominant PNR. Calles, the "Jefe Máximo" of

the revolution, agreed to nominate Cárdenas because he proven loyalty to him, and his feeling that Cárdenas's record as an agrarianist while governor of Michoacán would offset the pressures from radical Tejedismo in Veracruz (Otero, 1989: 283).

The economic depression of 1929 began just as Mexico was starting to recover from the decade of political and economic upheaval caused by the revolution. The economic crisis, however, had affected all sectors of Mexican society; capitalism was discredited, and the workers and peasants, who had in reality gained little since the armed struggle, became restive (Markiewicz, 1980: 9, n. 3). Cárdenas was charged with improving social conditions; he realized that political chaos would be renewed if he did not. These circumstances contributed to changes in Mexican politics under Cárdenas, and -in particular- to the radicalization of agrarian reform during his administration (Markiewicz, 1980: 9).

The economic difficulties which prompted calls for social change and which aided the candidacy of Cárdenas, a known reformer, also contributed to a shift in the emphasis of agrarian politics. Under the impact of the economic crisis, some elites began to see the necessity of industrialization and consequently the need for an expanded

internal market -impossible given the state of poverty of most rural families, many of whom had no contact with the market economy. It also may have been true that sharp drops in agricultural production between 1929 and 1932 temporarily weakened one principal argument against land redistribution; those only large landholdings could produce efficiently enough to provide the agricultural growth Mexico needed (Markiewicz, 1980: 11, n.8).

Cárdenas campaigned for the presidency on the basis of familiar Revolutionary ideals; the land should belong to those who worked it; furthermore, the breakup of the *latifundia* was necessary in view of their notorious productive inefficiency (Markiewicz, 1980: 11, n. 9). This program did not ostensibly contradict the views of earlier presidents, who had also professed loyalty to the principles of the Revolution but had done little to break up the hacienda system. There was nothing new in Cárdenas's insistence that the beneficiaries of the land redistribution should receive credit and technical assistance; even Calles had recognized the need for those services, by creating the Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola in 1926, and investing the first public money in irrigation projects (Markiewicz, 1980: 11, n.10). And Cárdenas's view of the ejido as a permanent, intrinsically

valuable institution in Mexican agriculture, which, given proper government nurturing, could produce at levels superior to the *latifundia*, was one of the two main tendencies in Mexican agrarian thought (Markiewicz, 1980: 11).

If the ideals with respect to agrarian reform expressed in his campaign were not particularly new, Cárdenas's application of them certainly was. Land was distributed at an unprecedented rate. In this transformation of the agricultural sector, Cárdenas was aided by the Six-Year Plan which had been adopted by the PNR (Partido Nacional Revolucionario) in Querétaro in 1933. The Plan promised to reform agrarian legislation in order to simplify the process a village had to go through to get land; this was accomplished in the Agrarian Code of 1934, which unified for the first time the scattered fragments of agrarian law and which established the right of the haciendas' resident peons to receive land (Markiewicz, 1980: 11, n.11)

In order to consolidate the power of his office against Calles, who attempted to retain his informal rule even after the election, Cárdenas organized the peasantry and the working class by incorporating their organizations into the official party, which became the Party of the



Mexican Revolution (*Partido de la Revolucion Mexicana*, PRM). This obviously required making several concessions. Cárdenas encouraged workers - within certain limits - to struggle with the other "factor of production" (that is, the capitalists) to attain an "equilibrium." His intention was not to promote rifts between classes but to encourage a "class conciliation" in which the state was the "impartial" mediator (Otero, 1989: 283).

The *ejido* was the preferred post-reform tenure for beneficiaries of land distribution after the revolution. The *ejidatario*, holder of such land title, is not a fee-simple proprietor as in English Common Law; this "owner" reaps the usufruct<sup>6</sup> of the land and has the right to work the land individually. The *ejidatario*, however, is not legally enabled to transfer those rights to heirs (Otero, 1989: 282). The *ejidatario*, is a producer without dependency relations with large landowners. Like the *minifundista*, the *ejidatario*, may transform himself into a capitalist or may become proletarianized, may accumulate or lose his means of production, and may maintain himself in the market or be eliminated. The process of social differentiation of the peasantry in Mexico has resulted

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<sup>6</sup> A civil law term referring to the right of one individual to use and enjoy the property of another, provided its substance is neither impaired nor altered. The legal right of using and enjoying the one's own property fruits or profits of something belonging to another.

predominantly not in full proletarianization<sup>7</sup> but in depeasantization<sup>8</sup> (Otero, 1989: 282).

Before Cárdenas's administration, most land in the agrarian reform had been distributed to *ejidatarios*, with individual plots to each *ejido* member. But Cárdenas confronted, for the first time, the need to distribute the land of highly productive haciendas in irrigated regions where the agrarian movement was intense; he felt there were economies of scale that needed to be recognized. In order to preserve the productivity of large units and to maintain an uninterrupted flow of agricultural raw materials and wage goods to industry, Cárdenas's policy was to create "collective" *ejidos*, which appeared very similar to producer cooperatives. Ultimately, about 12 percent of all *ejidos* assumed this collective form of organization (Otero, 1989: 283).

Although Cárdenas obliged the large-acreage ex-owners to transform themselves into capitalist agriculturists, he also respected the principle of "small private property ownership." Each time a farm was expropriated, the owner

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<sup>7</sup> Proletarianization is a concept in Marxism and Marxist sociology. It refers to the social process whereby people move from being either an employer, self-employed or unemployed to being employed as wage labor by an employer. In some cases, this would mean downward social mobility but in other cases an improvement of social position, insofar as the income from wage labor was better than from self-employment or unemployment.

<sup>8</sup> Depeasantization is the process by which direct producers become separated from their means of production regardless of the land-tenure system. Thus, they are forced to rely on other economic activities, namely, wage labor, to supplement their incomes.

could retain the hacienda core, not to exceed 150 hectares of irrigated land: In land reform jargon, which often involves a euphemistic turn of phrase, this is a "small property" or *pequeña propiedad* (sometimes called a *rancho*). An important number of latifundistas, frightened by the climate of violence in which agrarian reform was being carried out, divided their lands themselves and sold them as "small properties." In some cases, this was done through trusted prestanombres ("name lenders"). The prestanombre might be a family member or a former employee. These cases usually implied that the original owner retained control of land that was formally "sold." At the end of this presidential mandate, Cárdenas had granted more land to the peasants than all of his predecessors combined: 17,891,577 hectares were distributed among 814,537 peasants (Otero, 1989: 284).

The *ejido* sector grew under Cárdenas from 13.4 percent to 47.4 percent of the total cropland in Mexico and from 46.8 percent to 50.2 percent of the total number of plots, as we can appreciate in Table 4. This growth was a consequence of Cárdenas's belief that the *ejido* could and should be transformed into the economic, as well as the social backbone of Mexican agriculture.

**Table 4**  
**Amount of Land in Private Farms and *Ejid*os, 1930-1960**  
**(Thousands of hectares)**

Year	Total		Cropland		Irrigated Cropland	
	Hectares	Percent	Hectares	Percent	Hectares	Percent
<b>1930</b>						
Private Farms	123,150	93.7	12,577	86.6	1,458	86.9
<i>Ejid</i> os	8,345	6.3	1,940	13.4	219	13.1
<b>1940</b>						
Private Farms	99,826	77.5	7,826	52.6	738	42.6
<i>Ejid</i> os	28,923	22.5	7045	47.4	994	57.4
<b>1950</b>						
Private Farms	106,623	73.2	11,137	55.9	1,220	50.2
<i>Ejid</i> os	38,894	26.8	8,791	44.1	1,212	49.8
<b>1960</b>						
Private Farms	124,587	73.7	13,478	56.6	1,991	58.4
<i>Ejid</i> os	44,497	26.3	10,329	43.4	1,418	41.6

Source: Markiewicz, Dana. *Ejido Organization in Mexico 1934-1976*, ed. Ludwig Lauerhass, Jr. (Los Angeles: University of California for Latin American Center Publications, 1980).

There was substantial precedent in Mexican agrarian law and politics for Cárdenas's efforts to expand and organize the *ejido* sector. Yet many leaders believed that the *ejido* was incapable of commercial success; they feared that *ejidos* distributed in areas dominated by large-scale agriculture would deteriorate into subsistence farms, bringing economic disaster to the nation. Labor disputes in several areas, however, led to the expropriation during Cárdenas's presidency of large commercial enterprises,

which produced much for the domestic market and for export. To deal with fears of economic failure, Cárdenas required collective production on the *ejidos* distributed in the aftermath of the expropriations. He believed that preventing the division of the land into small parcels would permit the maintenance of high productivity through the use of mechanization and technology and the provision of government credit and technical assistance. Table 5 gives some basic information about the principal groups of collectives created by Cárdenas.

**Table 5**  
**Principal Groups of Collective Ejidos Created by Cárdenas**

Group	Date	Principal crops	Hectares distributed	Number of beneficiaries	Hectares/Beneficiary	Number of ejidos
La Laguna	1936	Cotton, wheat	447,516	34,743	12.9	296
Yucatán	1937	Henequen	336,000	34,000	9.9	384
Yaqui Valley, Sonora	1937	Rice, wheat, cotton	53,000	2,160	24.5	14
Lombardia and Nueva Italia, Michoacán	1938	Rice, cattle, lemons	61,449	2,066	29.7	9
Los Mochis, Sinaloa	1938	Sugar	55,000	3,500	15.7	28

Source: Markiewicz, Dana. *Ejido Organization in Mexico 1934-1976*, ed. Ludwig Lauerhass, Jr. (Los Angeles: University of California for Latin American Center Publications, 1980).

As the table shows, collective *ejidos* were established in clusters. In general, each collective *ejido* was worked separately from the other *ejidos* in a cluster, although there were some forms of organization, which involved

various *ejidos* within a given cluster. These included the *Sociedades de Interés Colectivo Agrícola* (SICA), the *Uniones de Sociedades Locales de Crédito*, and the *Uniones Centrales*. The SICA were established in the 1934 Agricultural Credit Law to promote construction of silos, dams, canals, factories, and other permanent works for the agricultural development of the group, also under their purview were electrification in the countryside, improvement of land quality, water and drainage, and improvement of housing in rural communities (Markiewicz, 1980: 17, n. 27). The *Uniones de Sociedades Locales*, established in the 1926 Agricultural Credit Law with indifferent success, were resurrected in the 1934 law with the purpose of obtaining credit for large works for their members from regional banks or the *Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola* (Markiewicz, 1980: 17, n 28). The *Uniones Centrales* were established in the 1942 Agricultural Credit Law as an attempt at regional organization. They were to consist of four *Uniones de Sociedades de Credito* (Markiewicz, 1980: 17, n. 29). Later on the 1955 Agricultural Credit Law (in effect until 1975), the SICA and the *Uniones de Sociedades de Crédito* were abolished (Markiewicz, 1980: 17, n. 30).

Cárdenas's decision to establish the collective *ejidos* cannot be separated analytically from his policy of rapid land redistribution - without it the circumstances for collectivization would not have existed. Nor can it be separated from his overall efforts at the political organization of the rural sector, which led to increased rural unrest and demands for the application of labor and agrarian laws in the areas of commercial agriculture where the collectives were created. The creation of the collective *ejidos* may therefore be seen as the logical outcome of Cárdenas's ideological preference for limiting the prerogatives of private ownership for the social good, which led to his emphasis on the lasting importance of the *ejido* sector in Mexico's agricultural development (Markiewicz, 1980: 19).

In terms of economic organization, the collectives extended the familiar concept of agricultural cooperation. Technical reasons were given for this, farming the land in large units with modern inputs and machinery would maintain yields and production. But Cárdenas also realized that the *ejidos* created in commercial areas were special and very visible cases, and he wanted to prove his belief that they were capable of maintaining, even surpassing, previously high commercial yields. They were consequently given

special technical and financial support (Markiewicz, 1980: 19).

**The Collective *Ejid*os: La Laguna, El Yaqui  
Valley, and Atencingo.**

The creation of the collective *ejidos* may therefore be seen as the logical outcome of Cárdenas's ideological preference for limiting the prerogatives of private ownership, which led to this emphasis on the lasting importance of the *ejido* sector in Mexico's agricultural development. In terms of economic organization, the collectives extended the familiar concept of agricultural cooperation. Technical reasons were given for this: farming the land in large units with modern inputs and machinery would maintain yields and production. But Cárdenas also realized that the *ejidos* created in commercial areas were especial, very visible cases, and he wanted to prove his belief that they were capable of maintaining, even surpassing, previously high commercial yields. They were consequently given special technical and financial support.

The Cardenista plan for La Laguna's collective *ejidos* set the example for future collectivization in other regions of modern capitalist agriculture; it was



imperative, via this demonstration, for the government to show both the political viability and the economic superiority of collective farming as compared to private property. Furthermore, enough popular strength had to be mobilized to offset the reaction of *hacendados* when their farms were threatened with expropriation. After land redistribution, beneficiary producers had to maintain a solid organization to both resist attacks from ex-*hacendados* and produce at an exemplary level (Otero, 1989: 284).

The plan was aimed at achieving self-management by *ejidatarios*. In La Laguna, this goal was to be achieved through the organization of beneficiaries into fifteen regional unions, which would eventually substitute for the Ejidal Bank (*Banco Ejidal*, a state credit-granting agency). The fifteen unions would be coordinated by the Central Union of Collective Credit Societies, which was intended to perform the *ejido's* economic and marketing functions (Otero, 1989: 284).

This plan was proposed and elaborated through the interaction of the *Ejidatarios'* Central Union and government technicians. The initial impetus for the fifteen regional unions and the Central Union came from beneficiary producers; Cárdenas not only approved the plan but helped

to convert the organization into a legal entity. President Cárdenas was so impressed by the La Laguna organization that he thought all future collectives should adopt a similar pattern. After months of preparation and labor mobilization, La Laguna agricultural workers finally were awarded *ejido* lands grants on 6 October 1936. The total grants consisted of 468,386 hectares, of which 147,710 were irrigated. This meant that 31.2 percent of total cropland, which included 77 percent of total irrigated land in La Laguna region, was granted to *ejidatarios*. The number of beneficiaries totaled 38,101 *ejidatarios*, who were organized into 311 *ejidos*. In the first few years, the La Laguna collectives were well supported by government agencies. Thus, their productivity was comparable and, in many cases, superior to that of former capitalist haciendas. This productivity lasted only through 1947 in La Laguna (Otero, 1989: 284).

As in La Laguna, the collectives organized in the Yaqui Valley of southern Sonora also illustrate that production in the initial period was satisfactory. Established later than in La Laguna, agricultural workers at El Yaqui got 17,000 hectares of irrigated land in 1937, on which they cultivated rice, beans, wheat, corn, cantaloupe, and some vegetables. About 2,000 landless

workers obtained land in the process. Private holders kept the remaining 27,638 hectares of irrigated land in the valley. This meant that productivity in both sectors could easily be compared (Otero, 1989: 285).

Productivity tendencies in the Yaqui Valley were similar to those in La Laguna. Availability of credit, technical assistance, and water resources in the first few post-reform years was reflected in superior yield per hectare in collective *ejidos* when compared to private farms.

A collective *ejido* was also organized in Atencingo, Puebla. But here the story differs from that in the North. Those pressuring for land were not landless agricultural workers who lived as resident peons on haciendas, they were peasants like those who had rebelled in Morelos under Zapata. In Atencingo, peasants were still demanding redress for the dispossession of communal lands which occurred in the late 1800s.

Sugarcane-producing lands in question in Atencingo included nine villages, which belonged to William Jenkins, former U.S. consul in Puebla. Indeed, he had built an agro-industrial sugar empire of sorts the harvested cane was destined for a sugar mill which he owned. In order to end the struggle of the Zapatistas, Jenkins decided to

circumvent the problem by "donating" his cropland to the *peónes encasillados* on his farm. A total of 8,268 hectares, of which 8,076 were irrigated and 192 seasonally cultivable, were allocated to 2,043 of the eligible peons in Atencingo (Otero, 1989: 286).

The new *ejidatarios* were obliged to produce sugarcane and sell it to Jenkins's mill, thus guaranteeing him a continued supply and, perhaps, a more comfortable living than before. *De facto*, then, the Atencingo *ejidatarios* continued to be the mill's peons, as Jenkins played fast and loose with loopholes in the law. They were hired and fired as before and had no real rights over the new collective *ejido*. Interestingly, the Atencingo *ejido* produced profits for the first time only in the 1947-1952 period, after the *ejidatarios* freed themselves from Jenkins's control and when their elected representatives ran the cooperative. Because internal divisions were threatening productivity, however, the government authorities imposed a military manager on the cooperative in 1952 as a way to assure a continued supply of sugarcane to Jenkins's mill (Otero, 1989: 286).

These three cases of collectivization serve to illustrate how the sociocultural differences in various parts of Mexico shaped the reform's outcome. In La Laguna,

the state eventually controlled most *ejidal* production, mainly through the Ejidal Bank. In El Yaqui, the agrarian bourgeoisie was consolidated, aided by huge infrastructure was largely denied to *ejidos*. Atencingo was the only collective *ejido* in the entire state of Puebla. It represented a sort of capitalist island within a sea of subsistence, peasant-production units, most of which were farmed with only family labor (Otero, 1989: 286).

The 150 irrigated hectares left to the former owners at the time of reform were the best on the ex-haciendas. They left the proprietors with a precious enclave, complemented by latent contracts with at least some of the agrarian reform beneficiaries. It did not take long, therefore, for many landlords to renew their patron-client domination. Additional leverage was provided to them by the fact that *ejidatarios* often lacked the infrastructure, resources, and credit which, for a price, the *pequeños propietarios*, could supply. This sometimes resulted in so much landlord domination that some observers have labeled the phenomenon "neo-latifundismo" (Otero, 1989: 287).

Thus, Cardenismo did not really mean an end to the agrarian bourgeoisie; it did mean a restructuring of the power bloc. In a sense, Cardenismo created an opening into which the industrialists stepped with their investment

capital; they were abetted by an agreeable state. The state adopted its contemporary form and structure at that time. Personalistic politics of yesteryear were left behind in favor of more impersonal and institutional forms. For example, the man wearing the presidential sash could have extraordinary power, but that power would last for only six years (Otero, 1989: 287).

## CHAPTER 5

### DECLINE OF LÁZARO CÁRDENAS'S SYSTEM

After 1938, the consolidated Mexican state geared up in earnest to promote industrialization. Because this meant acquiring large quantity of foreign exchange, agriculture had to be modernized rapidly; crops were to be exported to pay for industrial machinery, raw materials, and technology. The consolidation of this industrial power bloc was one of the new features of the two administrations which followed that of Lázaro Cárdenas, especially that of Miguel Alemán.

In summary the legal instruments to land distribution during Lázaro Cárdenas administration are in the next *Table 6*. Likewise the legal instruments after his administration are presented in *Table 7*.

**Table 6**  
**Legal instruments to land distribution of Lázaro Cárdenas's system**

Date	Promoter	Name	Content
1934	Lázaro Cárdenas	The reform of the Agricultural Credit Law	The need for special government support for the ejidos grew as the ejido sector grew, leading to the reform to provide for the creation of the Banco Nacional de Credito Ejidal (Ejido Bank) in December 1935. Established Sociedades de Interés Colectivo Agrícola (SICA), the Uniones de Sociedades Locales de Crédito, and the Uniones Centrales.
1934	Lázaro Cárdenas	The Agrarian Code	Unified for the first time the scattered fragments of agrarian law and which established the right of the haciendas' resident peons to receive land.
1937	Ejido Banks	The reform to the Agrarian Code	The access to credit and technical assistance.

Source: Markiewicz (1980), Mogab (1981), and Otero (1989)



**Table 7**  
**Legal instruments to land distribution Post-Lázaro**  
**Cárdenas's system**

Date	Promoter	Name	Content
December 31, 1942	Manuel Avila Camacho	The Law of Agricultural Credit. The Agrarian Code	Altered the structure of the ejido credit system somewhat to include Central Unions (Uniones Centrales), which were to be composed of Unions of Local Societies of Ejido Credit. As an attempt at regional organization.
1947	Miguel Alemán	Reforms to the Agricultural Credit Law	The formation of a social fund, and reserves covering unguaranteed loans, were eliminated. This represents another of the innumerable adjustments to the original 15% provision in Circular of the National Agrarian Commission.
December 31, 1955.	Ruiz Cortines	The Agricultural Credit Law (replacing the agricultural credit law of 1942)	Altered the financing of the institutions and changed some of the BNCE's functions. The areas of major change were in relation to the organization of the local Societies of Ejido Credit and their relationship to the <i>ejido</i> village. The changes in the structure of the <i>ejido</i> credit system were in the elimination of the Unions of Local Societies of Ejido Credit and the Societies of Collective Agricultural Interests.

Source: Markiewicz (1980), Mogab (1981), and Otero (1989)

As it's appreciable in the *Table 6*, the emphasis in the subsequent administrations were to decrease the property of issues related to the agrarian situation. Likewise, Cárdenas's reformism was limited by negative foreign reactions to the expropriation and nationalization

of the petroleum industry and the resultant discontent of the internal bourgeoisie (Hamilton, 1982).

In spite of indications that the first collective *ejidos* met with some economic and social success, the year 1940 saw the beginning of their decline. Many collectives disintegrated into semicollectives and later into individually cultivated parcels; the gradual disintegration of cooperative production was accompanied by the decline of all forms of economic organization in the ejido sector (Markiewicz, 1980: 25).

By 1940, domestic and international circumstances were causing major political changes in Mexico. Cárdenas's politics of social reform had increased social conflict (Markiewicz, 1980: 25, n. 1), the onset of World War II in 1939 helped generate a political climate where "Revolutionary language was toned down... Talk of the struggle between revolutionaries and reactionaries was now replaced by references to the unity of all Mexicans... The important thing was to increase production ... above all of agricultural products, so that Mexico could contribute to the victory of the Allies" (Markiewicz, 1980: 25, n. 2).

The need for industrialization was now stressed, as was the importance of agricultural production to satisfy growing foreign and domestic demand caused by the recovery

of the world economy and expansionary fiscal policies under Cárdenas (Markiewicz, 1980: 25, n. 3). Within the agricultural sector, there was a de-emphasize on the *ejidos*, since it was felt that they were holding back the country's agricultural progress. While deference was still shown to the idea of the distribution of land to the masses, priority was actually given to medium and large private farms. Conservatives considered the collective *ejidos* a "communist" experiment, and government support for them was withdrawn (Markiewicz, 1980: 25, n. 4).

The political changes that took place after 1940 were not the sole reason for the demise of the collective *ejidos*, although they were a major factor. Many problems facing the collectives were caused by elements present since their creation or before. These included technical difficulties in the planning of the *ejidos*, which in turn had their sources in legal obstacles, lack of trained personnel, excessive optimism regarding the collectives' potential for flexibility once formed, and haste in distribution of land necessitated by political unrest and the impossibility of interrupting agricultural cycles (Markiewicz, 1980: 25, n. 17).

In the late 1940s, the government's productivity drive was combined with a commitment to individualism.

Collectivism was equated with the "threat of communism," an epithet of the Cold War era. This was a global change and, reflecting it, "the National Peasant Confederation (*Confederación Nacional Campesina, CNC*) took an increasingly individualistic position toward land tenure and exploitation during the 1940s, even joining with private property-owners in some states to pressure the regime for stabilization of land tenure" (Sanderson, 1981: 138).

All of this was anticipated by two *ejidal* policy laws in 1942 which sanctioned the individualistic tendencies: the Agrarian Code and the Law of Agricultural Credit. The former placed great emphasis on granting *ejidal* title (which fell short of full ownership and a fee-simple title) to each beneficiary (Otero, 1989: 288).

The emphasis on security of possession and on titling accompanied bourgeois pressure for government to extend *certificados de inafectibilidad* (certificates of immunity) to landlords. These certificates were guarantees that holders would never be expropriated. To protect the livestock industry, owners of large acreages got certificates for "enough grazing land for 500 head of cattle" (or the equivalent in smaller livestock) or for "land without irrigation." When they eventually improved

their land, the immunity certificates still held, leaving some with substantial farms. Providing these certificates was central to the free-market spirit of the government of Miguel Alemán (1946-1952). Clearly, several paragraphs of the Agrarian Code were amended to promote commercial agriculture. For this reason, Alemán's presidential term has been called the "period of counterreform." His initiatives were further strengthened in later administrations (Gutelman, 1974: 115-119).

Under Alemán alone, 11,957 certificates of immunity were granted to private landholders and safeguard over 1,000,000 hectares of cropland for their owners. Also, 336 certificates were granted to protect 3,449,000 hectares of grazing land. During the same period 56,108 peasants received 3,000,000 hectares, much of which was marginal and infertile (Otero, 1989: 289). Although the legal strictures meant to dismantle collectives were in place at the end of 1942, government agencies did not begin their campaign against them until 1947, at the beginning of Alemán's term (Hewitt de Alcántara, 1978: 174).

Mexico's World War II involvement resulted in its forging close economic and political ties with the United States. This took place during the wartime administration of Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946). It was his successor,

Alemán, however, who carried out the Cold War's extension in Mexico. The manner in which this hardening of ideological position was affected in Mexico's agrarian structure was dramatic. Not only was financial and technical support withdrawn from the collectives, but the *ejidos* efforts to become self-managing enterprises were ignored by the government. During this period, there was heavy federal expenditure for irrigation infrastructure (much of it to transform former pastureland into cropland), large-scale capitalist agriculture was given strong impetus under Alemanismo. Irrigation was chosen as a primary vehicle for modernizing agriculture, it was the infrastructure most needed by the strongest agricultural pressure group in the country, the entrepreneurs of northwestern Mexico. Alemán's policies consolidated the private-sector orientation which still prevails in Mexico, though there was a brief hiatus (1970-1976) during the administration of Luis Echeverría (Otero, 1989: 290).

Thus, the agrarian reform has not been able to solve the problems of the rural poor in Mexico. Capitalist development in agriculture expelled a large number of workers, while industrial growth was not sufficient to absorb them. In fact, the optimistic expectations that politicians had in the 1940s about industry and employment

never materialized at the required levels. Large numbers in the countryside have been forced to confront counterreform and an industrialization process incapable of absorbing their labor power productively. The net result has been social polarization (Otero, 1989: 291).

Echeverría's program of rural organization had to contend with this legacy, and with the heritage of dependent industrialization of the fifties and sixties. Rural organization in the seventies was to help bring relief to an agricultural sector troubled by the contradictions of "stabilizing development,"<sup>9</sup> it bore little resemblance to collectivization under Cárdenas. There was relatively little land left to distribute, so that organization programs had to take place on noneconomic, fragmented *ejidos*. Government control of the rural sector was self-indulgent by the seventies, the proliferation of new *campesino* political organizations in the late fifties and during the sixties reminded Echeverría that the *campesino* still set store by the ideals of Emiliano Zapata, and that those ideals were no longer a viable means of rural pacification. This was an uncomfortable transition period. New strategies had to be formulated, but they

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<sup>9</sup> Stabilizing development refers to a program that was based on promoting industrialization through import substitution, heavy subsidies of industry, mobilizing domestic savings, directing state credit toward priority investment projects, and maintaining low inflation by suppressing real wages.

needed old-style legitimacy, which the image of Lázaro Cárdenas provided (Markiewicz, 1980: 75).

In spite of the differences between the 1930s and the 1970s, many problems that had previously kept the *ejidos* from benefiting from cooperative organization were still present. Lack of administrative or accounting knowledge, lack of work incentives, underemployment, and corruption in the bureaucracy on the *ejidos*, intermediary profits: all were still present, doubtless exacerbated by the government neglect of the 1940s and 1950s. The government renewed efforts to impart needed expertise to the *ejidos*, with varying success. The rental of *ejido* parcels, especially in the irrigation districts, and their illegal sale - post-Cárdenas phenomena- showed that it was economically more rational for *ejidatarios* to collect rent and dedicate themselves to other activities than to farm their own land. This was attributed to the scarcity of credit and inputs and to the economic power of the *neolatifundio*.

Along with rapid population growth, the exodus from rented *ejido* lands implies that the importance of the underemployed rural worker continued growing in the seventies and eighties. As a consequence, the organization of the *ejido* sector was more necessary, and less effective.



### Ultimate Stage of the Land Distribution in Rural Mexico

When Luís Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976) came into office, he argued that in regard to land reform, "we have to protect and stimulate, within terms of the Constitution and the law, forms of tenancy and organization that have achieved high productivity" (Foley, 1991: 46, n. 18), namely the commercial *latifundios* of the Northwest. During 1975 and 1976, land invasions took place in Sonora, Sinaloa, Chiapas, the Federal District, Oaxaca, Veracruz, and Yucatán, and in the last days of "Echeverrismo," confrontations erupted in a half-dozen other Mexican states as well (Foley, 1991: 47, n. 19). Most dramatic were the land invasions in Sonora, where federally subsidized water had fed an enormous expansion of large-scale agriculture in lands owned by a few privileged families. Despite repeated military actions to clear invaded land, the regime initiated expropriations. Almost one hundred thousand hectares of irrigated and pasture lands in the Yaqui and Mayo valleys of Sonora were expropriated and divided among *campesino* claimants on 18-19 November 1976, and more than six hundred *ejidos* were collectivized nationwide. On November 30, the last day of his presidency, Echeverría granted nearly five hundred thousand additional hectares to

*campesinos* throughout the nation (Foley, 1991: 47, n. 21). Even before these expropriations, however, the business community and private farmers had joined forces in denouncing Echeverrismo, accusing the president of leading the country toward communism. The Consejo Coordinador Empresarial (CCE) attacked "the unjust aggression of the authorities against small private property, action that is oriented toward its extinction through the pulverization of the land" (Foley, 1991: 48, n. 22).

During Echeverría's term office, the foreign debt grew by a factor of five. A short break followed when large oil reserves were discovered in 1977. And, from 1978 to 1981, Mexico experienced growth rates of about 8 percent on the basis of its "oil boom." Unfortunately, this boom was short lived, and it was the basis for further foreign indebtedness. In mid-1981, oil prices began to fall at a time that oil constituted close to 75 percent of Mexico's exports. The beginning of a series of major devaluations in Mexican currency occurred on February 1982 (Otero, 1989: 300).

When José López Portillo (1976-1982) came into office, the cries of the business leaders and commercial farmers were heard, although the new president was careful to present a façade of continuity with the previous

administration (Foley, 1991: 48, n. 23). The growers' demands were met by final indemnification for expropriated land, and repression was endorsed as the proper response to further land invasions. More pertinent to the subject at hand was a subtle shift in political discourse: the López Portillo regime declared that the land reform must be complete to provide the foundations for a more modern, productive agriculture (Foley, 1991: 48).

The president's main formula for the countryside, however, was his so-called alliance for production in which demands for social justice would be met by raising standards of living and stimulating new investment. In contrast to the rhetoric of the Cárdenas years, "social justice" in the new rhetoric was conceived of not in terms of property or the access to a better standard of living that land tenure could give peasants but only in terms of income or basic needs: assuring everyone of enough to eat, access to consumer goods, suitable housing, the protection of the social security system, and education (Foley, 1991: 48, n. 25). These goals would be met, López Portillo, argued, through a general alliance of the state, the business community, and the working classes. The alliance was soon to be funded by the Mexican oil boom and, given the failure of the Mexican state to exact the required

fiscal reforms, through a disastrous commitment to foreign borrowing (Foley, 1991: 48, n. 26).

One scholar wrote, "The error of the politicians (demagogues) has consisted in believing that the solution to the agrarian problem is redistribution of land" (Foley, 1991: 49, n. 27). The Echeverría administration had stressed the structural obstacles to enhanced welfare for Mexican *campesinos*, while López Portillo emphasized questions of production. Both put much effort, rhetorical and real, into improving the infrastructure of transportation, commercialization, and social services available to *campesinos*. Echeverría had spoken of exploitation by caciques and corrupt local officials, moneylenders, and intermediaries who marketed peasant crops, but the López Portillo administration focused on technical problems. The first analysis led to expanding the government buying agency (CONASUPO) and emphasizing collective and cooperative forms of organization. The second pointed in very different directions: increased agricultural extension work, a Mexican food-system project (the Sistema Alimentario Mexicano, or SAM) that openly elicited the support of the intermediaries - commercial producers, buyers, distributors, processors, and merchants; and increasing emphasis on commercial arrangements between

the social (*ejidal*) sector and private farmers that generally favored more powerful farmers and agribusinesses (Foley, 1991: 49, n. 28). The shift was momentous. In practice, it meant abandoning land reform as a platform for the PRI and replacing it with a program designed to enhance rural life even while bolstering the forces that have undermined the viability of peasant agriculture (Foley, 1991: 49).

The new Ley de Fomento Agropecuario passed by the López Portillo administration in 1980 legalized contracts permitting the use of *ejidal* lands by private enterprises, a widespread practice even before the legal revision and one that effectively turned *ejidatarios* short on resources for farming their plots into day laborers on their own land. López Portillo's vision for the countryside, it appears, was not at all that far from that of one economist who proposed a "neoliberal" solution: opening up *ejidal* lands for sale within the *ejido*, allowing concentration in the hands of more successful campesinos, and reducing the rest to rural or urban laborers (Foley, 1991: 50, n. 30). But that proposal was not one that a Mexican president could openly embrace at that time.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE END OF THE LAND DISTRIBUTION IN RURAL MEXICO

Nevertheless, a marked shift occurred in the discourse of the PRI regarding agricultural affairs. The extent of the shift was made clearest under the government of Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado (1982-1988), when budgetary constraints and economic problems scarcely glimpsed under López Portillo dominated all other concerns. While compelled to continue López Portillo's promises to *campesinos*, albeit under new names, the de la Madrid administration demonstrated in its early years a wholesale abandonment of the rhetoric of social justice for a rhetoric of social welfare, a shift modified only when the economic crisis deepened and the PRI faced shift electoral competition in 1988. Thus de la Madrid administration argued that "just as the *latifundio* was the initial challenge for agrarian reform, now the chief problem to resolve is the continuing fragmentation of the land, the inadequate use of resources, and in the extreme, the waste of resources." Thus the "integral agrarian reform" that the

administration put in the place of both the old agrarian reform and López Portillo's "alliance of production" took as its mission "the reorganization of the use of resources ... to achieve, in the end, a modernized and technically sophisticated agriculture, which would maintain sustained growth to supply the internal market with food and raw materials and to obtain foreign exchange that can contribute to modernizing other branches of production" (Foley, 1991: 50, n. 31).

The agrarian policy of the Mexican government since López Portillo's administration has again come almost militantly to favor the private sector. De la Madrid had officially ruled out land distribution as a solution to Mexico's agricultural problems. Government rhetoric talked of a "higher stage" of agrarian reform, referring to the need for increasing productivity on the land currently available to *ejidatarios*. Meanwhile, the right wing was exerting pressure to do away with the legal barriers which *ejidos* impose for investment. Some barely disguised their antipathy to reform. For instance, the Mexican Confederation of Employers (*Confederación Patronal Mexicana*, COPARMEX) advocated giving the *ejido* land to those who work on it in private ownership (COPARMEX, 1985: 6). COPARMEX proposed that the only way to generate food

self-sufficiency and foreign exchange from agriculture was by privatizing all land. The true solution, said COPARMEX, "consists in giving peasants the land in private ownership to avoid the *latifundio*" (COPARMEX, 1985).

**Reform of Article 27 of the Constitution under Carlos  
Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994).**

The initiatives of the Salinas administration precede and go well beyond the revision of the constitutional provisions on rural property. In what was probably the most thoroughgoing and radical revision of agrarian relations since Cárdenas, the Salinas initiatives encompass both economic and legal reforms. The economic reforms began with Mexico's entry into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986, but they reached agriculture directly with the liberalization of agricultural trade in 1990, when tariffs on most products were dropped or drastically lowered, subsidies and inputs (including credit) were withdrawn or sharply reduced, and the guarantee price was eliminated for all crops but maize and beans. The government's crop insurance program (ANAGSA), was abolished, and the rural development bank (BANRURAL), announced that it would no longer service commercial



growers and would target loans, at market rates, only to peasant growers whose operations were judged profitable (Foley, 1995: 62).

The constitutional reform proposed by President Salinas on November 7, 1991, was presented as a necessary step, in the light of contemporary realities, to "complete the agrarian reform" underwritten by the promises of Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917. In reality, its roots go back to the Ley Lerdo of 1857, whose creators saw in the inalienable landholdings of church and peasant community a fundamental obstacle to the modernization of Mexican agriculture and the Mexican economy. In this respect, the Liberal and neo-liberal reformers of Mexico differ little from one another or from the "progressive" enclosing landlords of 18<sup>th</sup>-century England, despite the century-long gaps between them. For Salinas, however, legal reform had to strike both agrarianist and modernist chords. It was to "sustain the full exercise of liberty" but also to "construct effective measures to protect the life of the community." It would both "capitalize the countryside and open productive options" and "juridically protect" peasant and communal property, simultaneously extending both "justice and liberty" (Foley, 1995: 64).

Despite the problems and irregularities that became apparent with the delivery of land, by the end of 1991, approximately 100 million hectares, which make up half of the national territory, were in the hands of communal landowners and joint owners (Ibarra, 1996: 54).

The legal measure that established the end of the distribution of lands constitutes a far-reaching event that can have various social, political, and economic consequences. It also frees the government from its historic commitment to distribute land to the peasants who do not possess it. The official perspective justifying the end of the distribution of communal lands is centered around the possibility of granting judicial certainty in the countryside, and in the nonexistence of land that can be distributed to satisfy the demand that has been increased by demographic dynamics (Ibarra, 1996: 54).

The agrarian reform, understood as the distribution of land, comes to an end, demolishing a fundamental pillar of the peasant movement and governmental legitimization, in exchange for security in the tenure of the land. In spite of the judicial cancellation of the distribution of rural land, a legal problem arose that is defined by the existence of more than seven thousand files submitted to

the agrarian authorities, all of which contained petitions for land.

Because of its importance, this situation was considered in the third transitory article to the reforms of Article 27 of the Constitution, which maintains the activities and functions of the agency of the previous agrarian administration in force, so the peasants might know about matters transacted in the distribution of land. Once the handling of the files has been concluded, they will go to the Agrarian Commission, so the lawfulness or refusal regarding the delivery of the land can be determined. This measure presents a change in the rules of the agrarian procedures, by establishing the agrarian commissions as the main authorities for these cases instead of the president of the republic (Ibarra, 1996: 54, n. 2).

Despite the announcement of the end of the distribution of land, due to the persistence of groups of petitioners pressing for the distribution of land, the federal government has granted resources for the purchase of rural lots for individuals and incorporated them into the agrarian land system.

The reforms to Article 27 of the Constitution are part of the project for modernization of the federal government that includes a decrease in its presence in the economy and

in society in general. An increased participation of private individuals and the announcement of a new way of negotiating with the peasants, based on their autonomy, are essential parts of the actions undertaken (Ibarra, 1996: 53).

The reforms to Article 27 of the Constitution were passed at the beginning of 1992. The basic aspects of these constitutional reforms are:

1. The distribution of rural lands that had started at the beginning of the agrarian reform is ended.
2. The prohibition for companies (civil or mercantile) to become owners, through stocks and bonds, of rural lands dedicated to farming is lifted.
3. The foundation is laid for communal lands and communities to reach autonomy in their internal affairs, mainly in regard to their forms of representation and organization.
4. The foundations are laid for the mechanisms and requirements for the nucleus of the *ejidal* and communal lands and the communal landholders to exercise their subjective rights as to the disposal of the communal property.

5. The organizations and authorities in charge of resolving controversies and administering and procuring justice in agrarian matters are reorganized.

The new Agrarian Law that is regulated by Article 27 of the Constitution encompasses the principles and categories of private law, which transform traditional agrarian law. The apparent changes are given on issues such as the autonomous practice of the *ejidal* and communal landholder to name successors in the disposal of communal land rights, in giving his plot of land as guarantee, in the freedom to establish associations, as well as in the use of the terminology and the implementation of procedures belonging to civil and mercantile law (Ibarra, 1996: 53).

Critics of the reform immediately responded that it was a recipe for the wholesale privatization of the landed communities. It would lead to the rapid concentration of land as poor peasants sold their plots, and the consolidation of large-scale capitalist farms. The conventional rhetoric spoke of the return of the *latifundios* whose expropriation was supposedly one of the positive achievements of the 1910 Revolution. The critics tended to combine this emotional theme with equally emotional talk of a massive new wave of migration to the cities – eleven million people thrown onto an urban labor

market in which job creation was not even keeping pace with the existing urban birth rate.

Advocates of the reform retorted that this was hysterical nonsense. In the first place, the legislative changes did not even lead directly to the abolition of the *ejidos* and the transformation of land into individual private property. The first step of the reform was a program of certification of individual rights to farm plots, common land and urban lots, the PROCEDE (*Programa de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales y Titulación de Solares Urbanos*), which was put in the hands of a new federal government office created for the purpose, the Procuraduría Agraria. After certification, there would have to be a majority vote in the *ejidal* assembly before proceeding to full privatization with the registration of the plots with the National Agrarian Registry (RAN). Secondly, advocates of reform argued that the new legislation freed peasant agriculture from the dead hand of state intervention which had manifestly failed to produce genuine "development." Farmers could now engage in joint ventures with foreign as well as domestic agribusiness companies which would provide either the capital or the jobs which the farmer had been starved for so long. Thirdly, from the point of view of the nation as a whole, including low income urban and rural

consumers, it was quite obvious that many peasant farmers were not productive, so that a certain degree of triage seemed beneficial to a society in which they were now only a minority (World Bank, 2001: 1).

The attempt to remove the legal basis for land redistribution has proved much more controversial than was anticipated because it became strongly entangled with the issue of the rights of Mexico's indigenous peoples. The catalyst for this was, of course, the Chiapas rebellion of January 1994, but the issue is much broader than Chiapas. The low intensity war which characterized Chiapas throughout the period of dialogue with the government has now spread to the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero and the Huasteca region of San Luis Potosí, Hidalgo and Veracruz.

Elsewhere in Chiapas, and in parts of Oaxaca and the Huasteca, agrarian conflict is, however, more directly related to the coexistence of indigenous communities and disguised *latifundios*. President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de Leon (1994-2000) had repeatedly claimed that the backlog of unresolved agrarian disputes throughout the country will be resolved before the end of his period of office. But this claim needs to be taken with a considerable grain of salt. There is a discrepancy between the number of outstanding cases of land claims that Zedillo cites and figures issued

by the Ministry of Agrarian Reform. The reduction in the Ministry's figures has largely been achieved by passing the cases to agrarian tribunals, this administrative sleight of hand enables the government to declare cases solved which are in effect still unresolved on the ground, it also obscures the fact that almost half the cases that have been decided by agrarian tribunals during his period of office have been decided against the peasant claimants (Correa, 1997)



## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

The transformations in the agrarian landscape of Mexico that the revolution produced were by no means limited to the areas where the radical revolutionaries had emerged. The revolution had decisively weakened the forces of the old regime. The Porfirian state, its army, its judiciary, and its police had been dissolved and destroyed. While the new revolutionary army was frequently corrupt and at times was suborned by *hacendados*, it never had the coherence and the commitment to the landowning classes that its Porfirian predecessor had. Although many *hacendados* recovered their lands, they never recovered the political and economic power that had been theirs prior to 1910. Their political power was weakened by a new revolutionary elite, some of it of peasant origin that emerged after the revolution, while the economic power of the *hacendados* had greatly suffered as a result of the many years their haciendas had been expropriated and much of their holdings

had been either destroyed or utilized to finance the revolution.

Above all, the revolution had created a new consciousness among Mexico's peasants of the power and justice of their demands, which gained a large degree of legitimacy thanks to Mexico's revolutionary Constitution. The clear consequence of this massive weakening of the *hacendados'* power and the effect of popular mobilization that the revolution brought about was that between 1934 and 1940 Lázaro Cárdenas could carry out a massive redistribution of lands in Mexico's *hacendados*, who were so weakened that they were unable or unwilling to offer any effective resistance. In other words, the agrarian reform of the 1930s was possible because of committed political leadership, an organized and mobilized peasantry, and a weakened sector of large landowners.

By the 1970s and 1980s, political leaders had become uninterested in agrarian reform, the peasantry had become largely co-opted and controlled by the dominant political party, and large landowners had become politically and economically powerful through the successful development of commercial agriculture

Even when Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) was about to proclaim the end to agrarian reform, he did not

slight its role in Mexican History, claiming that changes were necessary not because agrarian reform has failed, but because of the social, demographic, and economic dynamic the reform generated. Although land distribution provided a cloak of national symbolism and was often referred to in reverential terms, as a practical measure it prevented peasant unrest in the countryside and, from time to time, provided an excuse for repression. Without land reform, peasant pressure would surely have instigated the destabilization of more than one modern-day Mexican government and caused the unraveling of its economic development aspirations.

In summary the Mexican agrarian reform had the following major strengths:

1. It served as an incentive for those who held *pequeñas propiedades agrícolas* to intensify and commercialize their operations.
2. It held some peasants to the land who otherwise would surely have migrated to cities, where they would have been unemployed.
3. By vesting them with some resources, it helped to give dignity to a generation or two of participating peasants.

4. It provided supporters for successive PRI governments and deterred rural unrest, allowing the remainder of the economy to develop.
5. It allowed its beneficiaries to become major producers of staples in the country.
6. Agrarian reform helped create a more equitable distribution of resources for a short period of time.

On the other hand:

1. Some marginal land containing natural resources that should have been conserved, preserved, or restored was put at the disposal of farming.
2. Slow government title provisions and late and inadequate input, credit, and technical assistance delivery left the sector with many disillusioned beneficiaries and short of its production potential.
3. Some landlords were untouched by land reform because of political connections or subterfuge, giving an undercurrent of unfairness to the process.
4. Land delivery was used as a form of patronage, often functioning to keep peasants "in their place."

Many peasants did not benefit from the land reform (those already belonging to Indian communities, for example), and many peasants were placed on a "waiting list."

### **Findings**

Mexico is paying a high price for many years of bad policies and weak institutions. The growing inequality, and the lack of political order for individuals is a consequence of two issues of great magnitude: (1) the deterioration in Mexican-United States relations as a result of increasing immigration in recent years, (2) the huge possibility of a return to those years of populism and a closed economy, if the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) wins the coming election.

The Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) was created in the late 1980s by Lázaro Cárdenas's son, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. This party has been welcoming ex-members of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). Its ideology is center left and one of the supporters of the PRD presidential candidate is the President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez.

The political and economic future of Mexico is quite uncertain. The polls are very close between the three main parties; PRI, which was in power for more than 70 years, President Fox's party PAN, and the new PRD based on old leftist ideologies.

The Mexican population who supports the PRD does not think other parties did enough to address their economic concerns. The political platform of the PRD is full of promises to improve the economic sector of the society, especially the private enterprise sector.

A major problem that arises here is that of education. The lack of education is a reality in Mexico, and one of the worst consequences is that it hinders informed political discussion. Mexico needs to invest in more and better education for everyone.

Along with the reforms to Article 27 of the Constitution and the issuance of the Agrarian Law, different mechanisms have been established for the disposal of communal land rights. The government is making an effort to set limits on and to regulate the tenure of communal land through the PROCEDE program (Ejido Land Certification and Urban Parcel Titling Program), which seeks to formalize the possession of communal land so that there are no problems in the disposal of communal property rights.

In order to complete the PROCEDE successfully, the capacity for conflict resolution, especially through alternative mechanisms and out-of court settlements, needs to be strengthened, and opportunities for reducing the costs of the program need to be sought. One option would be

to have a survey of the nature of boundary conflicts, the value of the conflicts, and the scope of resolving them, before moving ahead with the program. Better awareness of the nature of the conflicts will provide information that can be used to adapt the program and allow smoother implementation.

The new administration might take into account, the significant impacts the legal and institutional changes have had since 1992. To ensure the benefits in poorer areas adjoining large cities and in natural resource-rich *ejidos*, some adjustments in program scope, design, and implementation, as well as in the legal procedures will be needed. Moving ahead in this direction should help to put the communal sector on an equal basis with private producers and thus make a positive contribution to many of Mexico's poorest groups.

Finally, in the foreign relations area, any incoming administration must be careful about taking new positions. If Mexico embarks on drastic change, the consequences will be paid, as always, by the Mexican population.

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## **VITA**

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