Peasant Organizations in Democratic Development
Rickard H. Hough

This essay essentially provides a framework for the development of democratic peasant organizations. The writer has relied primarily on his own cumulative experience the past two-odd decades working with and observing a wide array of rural politico-economic development programs in many third world countries. The views expressed are the distillation of the experience of the practitioner more than the systematic findings of a field researcher. Particularly -- and there is a certain discount value here that is readily admitted -- more than a little of the experience that is drawn upon is from Central American examples where the writer has been recently involved.

I.

There is considerable skepticism among respectable commentators as to the wisdom and practicality of United States seeking to support the development of democratic institutions within non-Western countries. Among some, there is opposition to what is considered a misplaced ideological approach to nation-state relations. The core of the argument relates to differences in political culture. Democratic institutions as they evolved in the West in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were built on, and nurtured by, concepts of plural representation of diverse social interests, the linkage of individual and group freedoms to impersonal law, and the authority of government legitimized only through constitutionally defined responsibilities to the body-politic. The Lockean ideal was that unity and the common interest emerged -- or that political breakdown was avoided -- from the balancing and compromise of particularistic competing interests, underwritten by a constitutional system which regulated the competition, limited power and protected participation.
It is held that this democratic political culture, and the economic and social structures and the historic ethic from which it derives, are different in kind from the political traditions of non-Western regions -- whether the Oriental despotism of China and the Islamic Middle East, the tribal rule of Africa, or the corporatism of Latin America. (1)

Moreover, it is contended that outside attempts to transfer or support the development of democracy within third world climes are too often laced with insensitive ethnocentrism and primarily mirror domestic political pressures within the outside power. (2) Given the faulty fit between political cultures, the intervention likely will be maladroit and cosmetic, or, if genuinely leavened, conducive to social anomie.

Foreign policy practitioners also share this discomfort of promoting democracy abroad. The U.S. Foreign Service establishment, for example, reflects a visceral conservatism on becoming involved in internal political reforms and social change initiatives in other sovereign nations, preferring rather to limit itself largely to the business of government-to-government relations, and to focus on issues and problems over which it feels it has some control. In this regard, the recent U.S. government interventions in Haiti and the Philippines do not reflect divergence from conservative predilections as much as very short-term calculations that the character of the particular crises allowed to other alternative.


The U.S. foreign service officer is indeed all too aware of the mischief that undue foreign involvement can cause within the volatile politics of social change characteristic of third world countries. He knows that the divide between supporting positive change and becoming enmeshed in unpredictable intervention is a narrow one for the foreign actor -- easily and in many cases unknowingly violated given differences in political culture and social structure. If he has a choice, he prefers to stand aside, or to limit himself to short-term, equivocal scenarios with the leading actors in the drama, usually host government officials. This explains at least in part why the U.S. Government stood by in a posture conspicuous for its inaction and ineptitude while Marcos and his minions in the 1970s largely dismantled Philippine democracy, a product of almost a half century of U.S. tutelage.

II.

If these arguments of the critics are credible, they would appear particularly so with respect to third world countries in which the demographic and socio-economic characteristics are predominantly rural, or at least to the peasant sector within such countries. This sector with few exceptions has been the least amenable to structural alteration. The tempo of change in agricultural societies is traditionally slow and the massive quality of life problems they share, the most intractable to solution.

Village inhabitants are largely preoccupied with the daily problems of sustenance and survival. The political culture tends to be passive and introverted. Traditional leadership is hierarchical and paternalistic. On issues beyond the village border, the collective reflex action essentially is one of non-participation. This conservatism in part relates to the unsparing and exacting conditions of life, and also explains a strategy of risk minimization. The peasant -- given his lack of education and political experience, and his marginal economic position -- is not prone to risk much, or expend his energies on national or regional questions. Though such
questions may impinge on his life, he does not feel he can in any significant way control or affect their outcome, and that the economic and political dangers of his involvement, of taking sides, generally will outweigh the potential benefits of his participation. 3

Further, the peasant sector, particularly if it is predominantly subsistence and non-modern in character, tends to be structurally amorphous or undifferentiated. It has not as yet broken down into the interest groups, unions, associations, etc. that are the spin-offs of modernization — agricultural diversification, specialization, new services and markets, etc. The disaggregation of the mass into economically differentiated groupings, which facilitates political organization and representation in wider jurisdictions so as to protect the new interests being generated, generally lags in insular agricultural societies. In addition, in such societies, assets have only been partially monetized, and there is little of the growth in commerce and the play of broader market forces which disperse economic power and trigger political organization of intermediate non-State entities. (4)


III.

It would thus seem that the rural political cultures of third world countries do not offer particularly good prospects for the development of popular peasant organizations. However, those who take this view are prone to overstate the case, or to reflect but a partial view. Cultures are not static. They change as they are exposed to different life concepts and goals, to different values and practices; and as they adjust traditions to new realities that impinge on daily living and impel change.

In much of the Third World today, peasant societies -- and their village cultures -- are in process of basic change. Driven by the penetration of modern technology, principally the methods of scientific farming and fertility control, traditional peasant attitudes of changeless fatalism, of an ordained future and the sense of powerlessness, as well as the rejection of mediated experience, are gradually changing. They are giving way to a more modern mind-set which accepts, the human possibilities of change -- of change being generated by technological revolution in the villages themselves. The possibilities for a better quality of life based on increased production and wealth, for the education of fewer sons and daughters, and fundamentally for a life style based on choices and expectations removed from the cruel ambit of survival, are real for millions of rural small producers today, principally in Asia, and loom on the horizon tomorrow as aspirations for millions more\(^{(5)}\).

Rural economic modernization and varying rates of growth triggered by decreasing population growth rates and increasing agricultural productivity, has taken hold across a wide swathe of Third World countries, admittedly first largely in Asia but this is where the great majority of the world's peasants live. Further, economic, social and psychological changes cannot somehow be

walled off from political change or consequences, given the indivisibility of the development process itself. Political, economic and social traditions and structures are intertwined; changes in one will affect the others. Thus, alterations in the distribution of wealth and economic opportunity will impact on the distribution of political power and on social mobility. The agricultural revolution galvanizing Third World villages today narrowly conceived is characterized by higher yielding, faster growing grains and the use of high productivity technologies, such as more intensive fertilizer application, multiple cropping and more efficient irrigation systems. Broadly conceived, the revolution includes the new economic interests and demands being created and the new political forms which will evolve to represent and protect these interests. Samuel Huntington's recent words addressed to the prospects of democracy and inter alia the role of economic development, seem particularly appropriate to countries with developing peasant societies:

As countries develop economically, they can be conceived of moving into a zone of transition or choice, in which traditional forms of rule become increasingly difficult to maintain and new types of political institutions are required to aggregate the demands of an increasingly complex society and to implement public policies in such a society.

No doubt, some countries are more likely than others to find ways of shaping such political change into democratic molds depending on variables such as the extent of diffusion and penetration of democratic ideas from without and their blend with the especial context or "preconditions", favorable or unfavorable to democracy, existing within. However, the

---

(7) Op cit. p. 201.
point here is to put into perspective the central role of peasant societies, especially, the role of the new popular organizations that will inevitably emerge from these societies as they change and modernize, in the evolution of more open democratic structures and governments in the Third World.

The majority of the world's population, roughly 61 percent, live in rural areas, or in villages. In Asia, 73 percent of the population is rural; in Africa, 75 percent; and in Latin America, 39 percent. These figures also reflect understatement in that they do not include people who now reside and are more or less employed in urban areas, but maintain their village links. Moreover, the great historic migration to the cities shows signs of having played out, or indeed to be now in reverse. (9)

Looking at these numbers alone, if one cannot foresee, or reasonably postulate, the effective penetration of democratic values and practices into the warp of these peasant societies, then the long-term outlook for the spread of democratic institutions in the third world is indeed substantially diminished.

IV.

Technological, socio-economic and attitudinal changes in peasant societies -- the modernization process itself -- intrinsically does not engender the development of democratic political forms, as has been posited, or too facilely assumed, by many Western commentators on the third world, particularly in the post World War II period. What this process does is to vent the weltenschauung of the society, leaven it with new attitudes and opportunities -- and substantial instability -- and compel new choices as to the organization of power and authority. The character of the choices made will depend in some part on the interplay between the forces of change and indigenous customs and institutions in the given country. In this regard, it should not be assumed that in non-Western nations the cultural bases for the existence or development of democratic forms will generally be unfavorable or unresponsive. Raul Manglapus, Filipino politician and writer in a critique of

(9) Critchfield, op cit, p. 322,
George Kennan's view of democracy as a distinctive Western creation, points out that the indigenous institutions in a number of Third World cultures, whose existence pre-date Western colonialism, were strongly laced with democratic values. For example, he points to the customary law, the adat, among the Malays which sanctioned consensus-building through free discussion at the village level; the genuinely democratic means used to select the leaders of local villages (barangays) in the Philippines; and traditional popular governance, through the egalitarian village assembly in Malagasy. (10)

One does not have to go back to pre-colonial history to find similar examples. In the post-independence period in India, "Caste Associations", derivatives of however rigid a traditional hierarchical social order, nevertheless played a modern role of intermediate communal groups, educating and organizing their mass memberships in the principles and practices of political democracy. (11)

In Taiwan, the authoritarian character of the mainlander Kuomintang government surely was moderated by the growth of the mass-based network of Farmer Associations — village, township, county and province — in the post World War II period. These Taiwanese-dominated popular organizations, particularly influential and vigorous agents at the village and township levels, were democratic in structure and practice, and provided a major training ground for Taiwanese politicians and public officials. Large numbers of provincial assemblymen, magistrates, majors, and township heads are former elected officers of the Farmers' Associations. The associations, and the leaders they have produced, have played a major role, perhaps the dominant role, on local issues in the rural politics of Taiwan. The Kuomintang as the party of the national government has been largely content to be more of a broker between local factions, rather than a participant arrogating direct power to itself.

(10) "Human Rights Not a Western Discovery", Worldview, Oct. 1978.
(11) See Lloyd and Susanne H. Rudolph, the Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
There are two other examples, national peasant organizations in Central America, the National Association of Honduran Peasants (ANACH) and the Salvadoran Communal Union (UCS), that have played significant roles in the democratic political development of their countries; however, inconstant and fragile that development has been in Central America and notwithstanding a cultural legacy and structure of authority customarily viewed as resistant to democratic institutions.

ANACH has been a major force in the development of "grassroots" democracy in rural Honduras almost from its inception in 1962. Claiming a membership of 85,000 campesinos, ANACH is organized along democratic lines into local and sectional groups, regional cooperatives, a national staff and an annual Congress. Its leadership has characteristically come from inside the movement, from competition within the campesino ranks. In the first two decades of its existence, ANACH was principally a pressure group dedicated to obtaining land for the landless; a mission which it has carried out with notable success. Its political influence within the national body-politic has been, and continues to be, impressive. ANACH's leadership has been able through various formal and informal arrangements with government agencies, the political parties, and the legislature to ply its influence as a centrist democratic force and make its voice heard with considerable effectiveness over the years, particularly on issues that concern its constituency.

The UCS in El Salvador has had a roughly similar experience. Established in 1968 while one of the more moderate military juntas was in power, UCS has grown into a mass campesino organization of some 100,000 members. (As is the case of ANACH, if the regular payment of dues is used as the basis for defining membership, the number of affiliates would come down considerably. If on the other hand, the definition is more liberal, and includes those who are active, though intermittent, participants, occasional contributors and other working family members, the number of members would go up quite substantially.) UCS service programs are national in scope. It has an organizational presence in all of the Departments, the capability to operate at the local level, and is active on a wide range of campesino
issues. A substantial number of its members are organized in cooperatives and its internal practices are markedly democratic in character. UCS has been relatively more effective than ANACH in providing various kinds of services to its local groups, which has contributed to its ability to mobilize its mass following on political issues with greater facility and impact.

UCS profited greatly from its identification with the Salvadorean land reform programs in the early years of this decade. Its vigorous support brought in new members and much enhanced its political visibility, both domestically and internationally. The price exacted was the shedding of more than a little of its blood.

UCS is now a component element of a clustering of democratic forces that stand between the extremes in El Salvador, the modern absolutists of the totalitarian left and the traditional elitists of the authoritarian right. As part of this fragile center, UCS was instrumental in the election of President Duarte in 1984.

Neither UCS nor ANACH are without their problems. They have not as yet been able to institutionalize their existence in such a way that their future as mass peasant movements devoted to democratic principles is assured. UCS continues to be threatened by the pressures of both the non-democratic left and right in a civil war situation; ANACH by the slower working poison of loss of mission and militancy. Both suffer intermittently from divisive factional struggles that leave them vulnerable to co-optation and/or splintering. Yet, however real these dangers, they are not the point here. UCS and ANACH are cited because they have both survived and grown over a considerable period. They are authentic expressions of democratic will and values in peasant societies which have endured in supposedly alien cultures.
The numerous examples suggest that a non-deterministic interpretation of the role of peasant organizations in democratic development is called for. An approach grounded in cultural determinism does not square with a protean reality, and carries with it unwarranted implications with respect to the future of democracy in the non-Western world. (12)

The next section then will seek to lay out a framework for the development of democratic institutions in peasant societies which does not follow any preconceived notions of change, but rather highlights elements that appear to have wide application or reflect broadly similar experiences among countries.

V.

The Centrality of Economic Factors. The initial motive power for the development of a popular peasant organization must contain a substantial economic component: i.e. a set of activities, services or reforms designed to improve the quality of life of its peasant constituency. It is likely that these activities will address the central problem of improving living conditions primarily through agriculture, the livelihood for the overwhelming number of rural families. The range of agricultural activities and issues that a peasant organization may embrace to provide it its raison d'etre and to attract members can vary greatly -- from issues such as the rural/urban terms of trade, or agrarian reform, to access to services such as credit and production technologies.

The point is, however, that given the paramount aim of organizing rural producers into a mass-based peasant movement, the particular organization must provide -- on a sustained credible basis -- real incentives to participate; and the incentives which will be most valued relate principally to practical services designed to increase production and income, or more broadly to attack the miserable economic conditions that mark the poverty of the potential membership.

(12) See also Beitz, op. cit., pp. 150-155.
This importance of economic factors in developing peasant organizations was not sufficiently appreciated in roughly the first two decades of developmental experience after World War II in the Third World. Rather, much program emphasis, albeit mainly by governments and foreign donors, was placed on sophisticated concepts of community development that stressed political and social goals, largely imposed from above, and that in practice almost inevitably denied the promise of economic growth as the animating force for popular participation and responsiveness. The core idea was to mount through local community organizations a set of related activities, say, adult education, rural health, public administration and economic efforts such as extension and credit, to be implemented more or less simultaneously. The rationale, or rather the mystique, of this approach was that through a synergistic interplay of these activities, modern organizations or communities would somehow emerge, committed to democratic practices and able to resist the attractions and/or subversion of communist-led movements based on more revolutionary models of change.

This community development doctrine, of which many of its precepts were later incorporated into counter-insurgency programs in Third World countries, had largely spent its force by the early years of the 1970s. It failed in most countries simply because the peasant communities themselves rejected it as not being responsive to their needs as they saw them, or as not providing credible incentives for participation.

12) See also Beitz, op. cit., pp. 150-155.
In retrospect, the premises of these community development programs which swept Asia, and parts of the Middle East and Latin America a generation ago seem terribly naive; particularly, the faith in the emergence of democracy, or the efficacy of what were essentially short-term political impact programs to produce it. In any case, given the survival-level conditions of economic existence in most of the peasant societies of the Third World, the denial of the primacy of economic growth, or allowing practical means of improving material well-being to become secondary, fatally flawed these programs from the beginning. Interestingly enough, the father of the community development movement was a Third Worlder, Dr. Y. C. James Yen, who pioneered its programs in China and other Asian countries.

The basic point is that economic needs and interests are integral to the development of democratic peasant organizations. When these needs are serviced, the organization is likely to grow and the possibilities of genuine democratic evolution are enhanced; when the needs are poorly serviced or neglected, the opposite is the case, the organization's constituency tends to atrophy.

The Complementarity of Economic Interests and Democratic Political Development. There is pattern in the economic and political dimensions of developing popular rural bodies. However untidy the pattern may be in particular instances, it appears central to the democratic evolution of such groups. Put differently, the challenge to the groups' leaders is to create and foster a complementary, reinforcing relationship between economic and political development, between material improvements and democratic practices. Of course, this relationship can be viewed in conflicitive terms as well, as reflected in the customary admonitions of developmental experts that politics and economic development do not mix, as if they were somehow in different worlds.

In any case, it is the positive, constructive relationship which we seek here in what is at best a long term, indeterminate process. To illustrate, let us look more closely at the more recent experience of ANACH in Honduras.
During its early years, ANACH was mainly a movement of the rural landless; it functioned primarily as a political pressure group with short-term goals. However, as ANACH became increasingly successful in achieving its goals, new constituency demands were generated. In order to satisfy these demands and retain its members, it got into the business of providing them a range of economic and technical services, principally through the development of a cooperative movement within the organization. However, these services have not been efficiently delivered. They have been considered secondary to immediate political concerns and in fact have deteriorated in the face of the demands upon them which have grown more numerous and technically complex. Indeed, what is at stake is the still impressive popular political base of ANACH. For ANACH is now only marginally tendering the economic development support and assistance which provide opportunity to the campesino to improve his economic station, give him a stake in the economy and encourage his membership and the payment of dues. The consequence is that the fundamental political mission of ANACH of representing the economic interests of the campesino sector -- thereby contributing to the evolution of democratic competitive politics in Honduras -- is being blunted by waning support and/or creeping non-participation of its constituent groups. ANACH can reverse this situation but clearly greater complementarity has to be developed at the
program level between political purpose and economic service, or more broadly between longer term political and economic development.

To state the argument positively, the development and representation of economic and related interests provide a considerable part of the popular support which ultimately is the basis of political power and influence of an agrarian union, or a national peasant movement. By effectively performing these functions, or by exploiting the complementary trade-offs and possibilities that exist, the movement clearly enhances the importance of its own role within the body-politic. More significantly, the movement also contributes to the broader democratization process by incorporating new constituencies into the political system; adding to the competitiveness and pluralism of the system; and by generating new economic assets among its membership, which facilitate expanded opportunities for education, literacy, upward mobility and exposure to the mass media, all of which on balance are conducive to democracy.

The Role of Great Issues. One of the more striking aspects of peasant organizations is that the impetus for their growth has come in numerous instances from their identification with and exploitation of great issues. Land reform is the prime example of this.

As noted, ANACH in Honduras was little more than a national pressure group for land reform in its early years. It gained its political prominence largely through one transcendant issue. In El Salvador, UCS, and also a second smaller but politically vigorous campesino organization, Asociacion de Cooperativas para La Produccion Agropecuaria Integral (ACOPAI) emerged as powerful forces on the national scene as advocates of democratic politico-economic change almost wholly through their identification with the Salvadorean land reform programs of the early 1980s. In both the Honduran and Salvadorean cases, land reform became a means for the mobilization of mass popular support and the development of an organized constituency among the peasantry which was not there before. The land issue generated a militancy within the peasant organizations themselves that sustained momentum and resolve in the face of adversity.
In Venezuela, a similar pattern unfolded after World War II concurrent in time with the struggle to establish and maintain a democratic constitutional government. Today, a national peasant movement is integrated into the Venezuelan body-politic, and is one of the major pillars of support for what has become a stable democratic system. The Federacion Campesino de Venezuela (FECAVE) is a genuine mass-based popular body of members, organized at the local level into ligas and sindicatos campesinas, and linked into the national political scene principally through its affiliation with the powerful Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (CTV).

However, the origins of FECAVE in the 1940s, as well as the wellsprings of its growth and later troubles and divisions, are embedded almost solely in one continuing issue, the structural redistribution of land assets in Venezuela. It was indeed the severe maldistribution of land ownership -- the system of latifundia -- that provided the focal point for the initial political organizing efforts of the peasant leagues and the first national Congress of FECAVE in 1947. Further, it was principally the leaders of the national political party, Acción Democratica (AD), who vigorously exploited, directly and through FECAVE and CTV, the great potential of the land issue in galvanizing peasant participation in and support of their party and the new democracy. And last, it was the promulgation of a new agrarian reform law in 1960 by the Betancourt government that precipitated a major split in the peasant movement and the ensuing struggle over the next few years between the government-supported AD/CTV faction and the faction led by the Venezuelan populist Ramón Quijada for control of FECAVE and its state and local organizations. This struggle mirrored well the growth in the political role of the Venezuelan peasantry over the previous two decades, and the centrality of land reform in generating this growth. 13

One does not have to limit examples on the role of major issues in providing the dynamic for the development of peasant organizations either to one region, Latin America, or to one issue, land reform. Japan provides an excellent example of the impact of long overdue reforms in the rural-urban terms of trade, particularly on rice, as well as land reform, on the burgeoning of a new, more democratic and non-paternalistic structure of farmer organizations in rural Japan in the post World War II period. Long struggles to raise real wages among farm workers in a number of the states of India, such as Kerala and West Bengal, have gone hand-in-glove with the development of vigorous democratic representation and political activism by increasingly strong rural unions. 14

In turn, there is manifest future potential in all the regions of the third world for popular peasant organizations to emerge and spread as spin-offs of the momentous issues being generated today by the large and growing mass of un-and under-employed, landless and impoverished farm laborers in rural societies who have been marginal to, or untouched by, the programs of agricultural development and modernization in their countries. 15

Issues of this kind also become particularly potent, capable of effective exploitation, if they contain a confluence of interests which facilitates a national focus that transcends local interests and jurisdictions; for example, those issues which can bind together in common cause the rural and urban elements of organized labor in an individual country. When industrial workers, or employees in public sector unions, embrace the cause of the peasants to obtain land or more social services because achieving these goals also benefit them, for example, by helping to stem the flow of unemployed farm workers into the cities, then the political staying power of the peasant organization itself is substantially enhanced. In Venezuela, the long-standing, close ties that FECAVE developed with the CTU reflected for the most part common social and economic interests and positions on issues, and concomitantly gave the former national visibility as representative of a large-scale, peasant movement.

Building Political Competence and Cohesion. A fundamental challenge for peasant organizations, particularly in largely subsistence and traditionally passive rural societies, is that of developing effective political participation, that is, the progressive building of competence and cohesion among the leadership and members. Instituting the practical means of political participation, or more broadly of democratic institution-building, is not only imperative in instilling the foundational democratic values and practices themselves -- to give them viability and vitality within the organization -- but also because of the outreach role or mission of the organization. For without effective institutional development strategies, broadly wrought to include political education in ideals and doctrine, organization and promotion programs, and training in the multi-faceted aspects of political activism, the peasant organization will not be able to defend and extend the interests that are the very reason for its being.

Charles Beitz has noted that "owing to lack of education, literacy, and political competence, some groups are systematically unable to defend their interests through democratic processes... (and) that electoral mechanisms among peasants are especially prone to manipulation by traditional elites, who mobilize uninformed and frequently illiterate peasant constituencies by offering selective incentives in return for electoral support." 16

If the peasant organization is to strengthen the fabric of democratic politics, be able to compete effectively and protect its interests -- be something more than an easy source of support and votes in return for material favors -- then the organization has to develop its own internal political cohesion and competence, as well as a sense of mission and confidence, in dealing with the outside forces that impinge on its vital interests.

In Ecuador recently, an able official of a democratic campesino federation, candidly noted to the writer his care and hesitance in involving his organization too soon and too much in provincial and national politics. His fear was that at this point in the early development of the federation and its component agrarian unions, involvement could "prostitute" or "cheapeo" his groups, given their vulnerability to the politicians who inevitably solicit support and votes from campesinos with "cigarettes, tee shirts and other regalos pequeños" which make a mockery out of democratic participation. His meaning was clear. He elaborated the things that had to be done, or begun, on the political and economic sides, such as vigorous programs of political education and the development of agricultural services to provide more economic strength, so that his campesino groups could compete and bargain as democratic equals, not as supplicants.

The key to practical and effective programs of internal education and training in peasant organizations is not only their quality but also their sequence and inter-relation. The programs should mirror the complementary relations that exist between economic interests and services on the one hand and democratic political development on the other. This complementarity at the training level should reflect the real-life situation, or broader reality and goals that the organization is specifically seeking to achieve with its various outreach and service programs.

Thus, an ideal training program, tailored to the needs of the different cadre, whether leaders, para-technicians, promoters, and the rank and file, would include technical subjects such as financial management and the design and implementation of development projects, for example, in credit, marketing or production inputs, inter-related systematically with non-technical, essentially political subjects such as democratic trade unionism, political ideologies, trade union organization and promotion, and the methods of political activism.
The Agrarian Union Services program of the National Confederation of Workers (CNT) in Costa Rica to its constituent farm unions illustrates a conscious effort to blend together these technical and political elements in a mutually re-inforcing pattern of training. 17

Although it is too early to evaluate in depth the project experience with this thoroughly integrative training approach, it seems clear from informal field observations that at least the officials of the sindicatos agrarios being supported by the efforts have a greater appreciation than is usual in campesino projects of this kind of the central requirement of laying the building blocks of genuine democratic political participation, and how the different parts of the project should converge and feed this requirement. No doubt, this has been facilitated however in Costa Rica the democratic traditions, indeed the thriving open society, that exists there but which cannot be found elsewhere in Central America.

In a similar earlier American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) supported experiment in Peru in Trade Union Education, urban as well as rural, by the Centro de Estudios Laborales del Peru, "workers (were) taught that economic, social and political democracy must form an integral system... that only social reform and economic development can provide long-term prospects of improvement in the life of the organized workers, and that the labor movement must therefore spearhead reform." 18 Here again the emphasis was on the fusing of subjects within a more holistic conception of the role of labor in a democratic society.

17 This program is supported by the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) through a technical and financial assistance project with the CNT. The U.S. Aid Mission in Costa Rica provides financial support to the joint effort.

Building genuine political competence and cohesion in peasant organizations is a long-term essentially bottom-up process; a process which is learned collectively and is cumulative. Well-conceived training programs certainly help, as do the charisma and commitment of outstanding peasant leaders, and the opportunities of political visibility and drama offered by great national issues which the organization is able to exploit. However, there are no political quick fixes, no short term magic that creates a peasant organization whole cloth, particularly in the broader society that resists heightened political consciousness and more assertive expression by a traditional under-class.

To make the same point from a somewhat different vantage point — there has to be a set of reasonably distinct economic and social interests that provide the bedrock justification, or the reason for being, for the peasant movement. These interests do not emerge overnight, and without them all the political activity, all the organization and promotion, will progressively lose their credibility for lack of sustained response from the organization's local constituency.

Pluralistic politics in significant measure is the representation of economic interests, almost starkly so, in many of the underdeveloped nations of the third world. If these interests remain amorphous, or if they are neglected by the leaders of peasant groups in favor of the more attractive games of short-term, manipulative politics; or if they are treated narrowly as technical issues bereft of their longer-term political content as technical advisors and developmental experts are so apt to do; then the building of political cohesion and competence within the peasant organization itself will inevitably lag, or become a rather futile exercise honored in rhetoric but without enduring substance.

Similarly, the leaders of the peasant movement should hold to as simple, relatively uncomplicated a model of internal development as possible, one which integrates the principal functions of its agrarian unions under one roof. For example, the movement should likely avoid the establishment of cooperatives to meet the demands for economic and technical services by its local memberships. It is feasible in most instances to mount and implement such services under the management of the agrarian unions themselves without setting up another layer of special purpose organs such as cooperatives.
There is a real question as to whether the cooperative is an appropriate model in any case for farm unions to use in dispensing their constituent services because rather than linking the services to the especial political mission of the union, the cooperative tends to separate them out. At the very least, one can argue that in the early years of a peasant organization the cooperative route should be avoided. The reasons for this seem clear. First, there is the usual lack of trained manpower at the local level. What there is ends-up spread too thin between the union and the cooperative. Second, in many cases there is not sufficient wealth in the rural communities to support cooperatives. Operations become highly subsidized, generally by resource transfers from an outside source. An unhealthy top-down financial dependency soon sets in which likely could have been avoided in the first place with a more modest structure of operations within the union itself.

Last, there is an inherent tendency toward separatism built into the cooperative approach. Cooperatives develop their own style, their own leaders, their own institutional contacts and relations, and in some cases their own sources of support outside the agrarian movement that created them. The divisive tendencies built into cooperativism for farm union organizations is readily apparent for example in Honduras today where the ANACH regional cooperatives are only more or less under ANACH's control, and conflicts and the possibility of breakaways are never far removed from the surface.

The External Environment. The character of the external environment most conducive to the development of democratic peasant organization, is a far-ranging subject that can only be addressed here on a limited basis. Our interest in this regard is not only the impact of the external environment on peasant movements -- the extent to which the former constrains or facilitates the growth of the latter -- but also the reverse; the impact that these movements may have on the democratization of the broader body-politic itself.

The prospects for the development of democratic peasant organizations would appear to be best within a political system, or culture, which is itself democratic. This would appear self-evidently true. Peasant groups, like other interest groups, need political space to operate and grow. Certainly the experience, for example, of the national campesino movement in Venezuela suggests this.
However, some qualification is in order. A cardinal ingredient of effective peasant groupings is their militancy. It has been this writer's observation over the years in many third world countries that the cutting edge of effectiveness and strength of organized labor, both urban and rural, has been militance of spirit and commitment to a set of goals, engendered at least in part by strong outside forces of resistance or opposition. How else to explain the fact that the most politically influential and relatively advanced campesino movement in Central America is the one in El Salvador which essentially developed over the past decade within the interstices of a culture of repression and violence, while one of the least advanced is in democratic Costa Rica -- a divided movement still struggling for identity and the trust of its constituency, and where democracy was bestowed, not fought for. Indeed in El Salvador, the democratic campesino organizations have made a major contribution in securing for the people as a whole a still fragile democracy.

Second, peasant organizations must have the resourcefulness and vigor to exploit an external environment which almost inevitably will provide through the public and private sectors, and through foreign assistance donors, the resources transfer programs, most importantly of technology and modern expertise, crucial to opening up the vistas of education, social mobility and economic advance for their heretofore deprived constituencies.

The challenge for the peasant organizations is strategically to tap into these institutional channels of resources and services as the vital intermediate link between the grantors and their recipient members, and to do this without sacrificing their autonomy and self reliance. The trap of course is that the flow of largesse will create dependent groups who progressively lose their collective will and sense of mission. This hazard is an ubiquitous one for farm unions in resource scarce, poverty-ridden rural communities in third world countries.

However, this is not an argument for non-participation. It is best viewed as a caveat, not a reason for opting out. Emergent peasant organizations simply cannot afford to remain marginal to the historic modernization and development problems that impinge on their constituencies.
For only by confronting these problems, or engaging them by exploiting the external resources available, will the organizations establish their political legitimacy as representatives of the interests of their people. Idealistically, peasant movements will take the long view of participation in the economic and social development process with the purpose assiduously pursued of transforming that participation, and the cumulative successes achieved, into democratic outreach activities or the aggressive uses of their power in the broader body-politic; and not fall prey, consciously or otherwise, to the shorter term games of spoils distribution and the exploitation of dependency relations with client agencies. Realistically however, the world is much grayer with the choices available to farm union leaders inevitably limited by the politics of the moment, but still capable, one should insist of being illumined by visions of longer term change -- by the unfolding of the democratic revolution itself, if you will.

Third, it is often noted that peasant movements have fared better when they have been able to establish ties with, or have had support bestowed upon them by, national power-holders of various kinds, e.g. Heads of State, government agencies, political parties. The basis for this view appears to rest largely on the point that the authoritative political commands and actions necessary to facilitate the reforms, or the programs, sought by the peasant groups in a pragmatic sense can only be engineered or mandated by these power-holders from above. In effect, modern peasant mobilization is less a grass roots affair, but rather relies ultimately more on national politics and the dispensations of those who wield decisive power.

The prime example of this view of the indispensable role of top down power in enhancing the impetus of peasant movements is post World War II Japan. The countryside was indeed democratized in the decade after Japan's surrender. A sweeping land reform program was carried out, the urban-rural terms of trade were adjusted to become more favorable to the small producers on the land and new farmer organizations emerged representing the interests of the new property owners. These organizations were largely stripped of the old
paternalistic influence of the traditional landlord class. Much of this was
accomplished of course under the aegis of a foreign occupation force, General
MacArthur's SCAP command in Tokyo. In effect, the small farmer associations
that progressively evolved on the land appear to have been creatures of
"top-down" intervention by a dominant outside authority.

However, it has been too easily forgotten that the animus of these
sweeping changes came from the militancy of the Japanese small tenant farmers
themselves who were demanding reforms, particularly with regard to the
existing land tenure system, and the fear of serious social disturbances if
changes were not forthcoming. (19) The beneficiaries of the changes were far
from passive role players. Indeed, for a good part of the first half of
this century, the Japanese countryside, and its peasant farmers, were a major
source of political radicalism in Japan.

If the time frame is extended abit in looking at the Japanese agrarian
experience, it becomes clear that the structural changes of the post World War
II period involved considerably more than "top down" fiat. In fact, one might
argue that the reforms were essentially a culmination of a long process of
activism, organization and tenacious advocacy by the peasant themselves.

In the opposite vein, one of the reasons for the failure of the land
reform efforts in the Philippines over roughly the last three decades, has
been a continuing pattern of central government attempts to impose laws and
programs without recognition of the indispensability of an organized peasantry
to participate and tailor the programs to local acceptance and needs. 20

---

19 Takekazu Agura "Economic Impact of Post-War Land Reform", in James R.
Brown, Sein Lin (Editors), Land Reform in Developing Countries (Hartford.
Conn: University of Hartford, 1968), 223-277.
20 See Jeremias U. Montemajor, "Progress and Problems of Land Reform in the
Philippines" in Land Reform in Developing Countries, pp. 199-223.
President Marcos further distorted this top down predisposition by using land reform and numerous other rural development programs, and supposed peasant groups to extend the authority of his government and buttress the political position of the local rural leaders who found it prudent to support him. The commitment to common cause, and the drives to organize, among the Filipino peasantry have manifested themselves twice since World War II, but in the form of radical, communist-dominated peasant movements, the Hukbalahaps and the New Peoples' Army.

The important point to make is that however significant factors in the external environment may prove to be in furthering the growth and effectiveness of peasant movements, there is no substitute for the mix of internal militance, political will, and competence in competitive politics that underlie the ability to exploit the external factors, to turn them to one's advantage. If the focus is also on the contribution that peasant organizations can make to the development of the democratic system as a whole, then it would seem that a key antecedent is the strength and vitality of democracy within the organizations themselves.

VI.

It remains to address the development of democratic peasant organizations from the perspective of the role of outside agents, specifically the role of U.S. policies and programs and the attendant problems involved.

The discussion will be at the micro-level, that is, largely confined to U.S. support through public and private means of peasant organizations per se. Broader questions of U.S. foreign policy concerning support of democratic institution-building, or of democratic regimes generally, and opposition to regimes which are not democratic, are left for other contributors to this volume.
My cut of the subject is thus a more limited one, but a few points, the thrust of which go to this broader realm of U.S. policy, in order to give a measure of deductive coherence to the discussion. First, the promotion and extension of democracy abroad is a key component of U.S. national security. As Michael Ledeen points out: "... the spread of democracy is the most basic of our geo-strategic interests. If the democratic revolution should succeed, our security will be greatly enhanced; if the democratic revolution is defeated and rolled back, our security will be diminished".  

However, support of democracy abroad is self evidently but one component of our national security. There are an array of other national interests that impinge on our security, e.g., the maintenance of alliances, access to strategic materials and self-defense, as well as a multitude of tactical concerns that vary with the different realities that U.S. foreign policy must confront. It would indeed be folly to pursue, or promote, democracy in a vacuum in third world countries, as the independent variable, so to speak. However well the democratic revolution turned out in the Philippines, or however consistent our intervention on behalf of the opposition democratic forces proved to be with our security interests in East Asia, does this mean that we pursue an interventionist policy of similar character with friendly but authoritarian Thailand, South Korea and Indonesia, allies also strategically located on the Asian rim?.

There are no vade mecums to guide U.S. diplomacy in the effort to protect and extend democratic systems. The challenge in each country ends-up being sui generis, with the requirement anew to develop strategies that meld as best as possible different and often conflictive security interests and values, concomitant with tactics that are flexible, maximise options, and recognize the limits of the outsider's role.

Second, absolutely essential to constructive U.S. policies that further democracy abroad is the recognition of the importance of the temporal factor. It has been often pointed out that the U.S. should have been more far-sighted and resolute much earlier-on in our years of deep involvement in Vietnam and Iran in nudging their rulers toward democratic reforms, carried out with due speed; in effect, toward opening-up the regimes to genuine political participation, and in taking advantage of the many opportunities offered by our extensive presence to support quietly, perhaps indirectly, longer-term democratic institution-building programs. Perhaps disaster would have then been avoided; however the opportunities missed, the challenges unmet are immensely easier to appreciate in retrospect.

The relevant lesson is that crises of instability marked by turmoil and uncertainty, and the polarization of forces, generally limit the options of the outside actor. For the United States to be effective in helping to install democratic values in third world nations, understanding the great value of time is indeed crucial. For not only is the democratization process itself a long one, but the closer events approach crisis proportion, the outsider's already limited means of control and influence progressively become more marginal, whatever actions are taken more unpredictable, and the options for bringing about a democratic result more narrow.

An appreciation of these factors—the many-faceted character of national security, the need for time for the foreign actor to make a contribution, and the diversity of the objective reality which requires careful individualization of strategies—is close to condition precedent to an elaboration of more micro-strategies, such as U.S. support for the development of democratic peasant organizations.

There is a fine line between constructive engagement by external actors in democratic change and counter-productive intervention, or "social engineering". Specifically, direct visible involvement by U.S. government agencies in the promotion of various kinds of peasant groups is apt to cross
that line and surely is to be avoided. Proconsul proclivities inevitably are deeply resented in third world nations no matter where one is on the political spectrum. Indeed, American private groups have a comparative advantage in this regard over public sector agencies in areas such as supporting the programs of agrarian unions and similar types of farm worker associations.

An organization such as AIFLD, for example, can reach and involve union beneficiary groups through different programs, such as courses in democratic ideology and techniques of political activism, that are ordinarily beyond the pale of U.S. government agencies overseas for all sorts of reasons, primarily because of the latter's official relations with the host government. AIFLD has greater operational freedom in the host country than, say, the Agency for International Development (AID) given the latter's prominence as an international donor. The former's field of action is farther removed from host government authority and oversight. AIFLD has to cope to a considerably lesser extent with the constraints and uncertainties of working directly with foreign government officials and agencies, and it has the strategic advantage of greater latitude and flexibility in cooperating with its brother unions in the implementation of economic and politico-social change (reform) projects.

The potential for constructive U.S. engagement in democratic change in the agrarian field is thus greater through American private organizations and less likely to leave us open to charges of undue intervention.

Further, reliance on organizations like AIFLD, U.S. cooperative groups and a host of other private American agencies dedicated to working in the rural sector has the added advantage of bringing to bear the full vitality and diversity of our pluralistic society on the complex problems of long-term democratic institution-building in the developing world.²²

This is not to minimize the role of the U.S. foreign service establishment in helping to strengthen democratic trade unionism, urban as well as rural, in third world countries. Through its instruments of diplomacy, economic assistance, information and trade, the overseas U.S. Mission has a significant role to play, especially in impacting on the broader political and economic environment within which democratic peasant movements survive and grow. For example, if the U.S. Mission is able to negotiate with the host government a package of reform measures, including price changes in the urban-rural terms of trade on major crops, as a quid pro quo for greater U.S. financial and technical assistance to the rural agricultural sector, the positive impact on the life of the agrarian unions in the sector would likely be of major consequence, particularly if the unions had been strong advocates of the reforms in the first place.

Indeed, the USAID with its programs of economic assistance in agriculture and rural development, its support of delivery systems of economic and social services, and its traditional emphasis on the technical requirements of economic development, always influence the viability and prospects of peasant organizations, in light of the indivisibility of the economic and political dimensions of development.

The area that this observer feels that U.S. private organizations have been most effective in, and where there is still great potential for inculcating the precepts and practices of democratic trade unionism is that of support for political and technical education programs of campesino union leaders. Here I speak largely of the AIFLD experience in Latin America, which I have been directly exposed to.

The fact is that few campesino leaders who are upward mobile within their organizations have had the opportunity for much formal education through the public education systems of their countries, much less for more advanced professional training relative to their office and responsibilities. What AIFLD does, as well as a number of other international labor organizations, is help to fill this vacuum, to satisfy a great unmet need, and desire within fledgling peasant groups.
The surface has indeed just been scratched with regard to the training of campesino union officials by outside organizations. AIFLD for the past twenty years has tended to concentrate on education programs of various kinds for urban trade union officials. It has only been in the past four or five years that it has turned more systematically to the training challenges in the diverse campesino sector with its mass of non-wage earning small producers, tenants and share croppers, as well as seasonally employed farm laborers, and the landless.

The political consciousness of this sector is manifestly increasing in most of the countries of the Hemisphere, and the massive political potential for organizing its major popular components is all to apparent to the different parties, democratic and otherwise, which compete for power and favor. The stakes are indeed high over the balance of this century with regard to how Latin countries solve their "campesino problem"; how an awakening, traditionally deprived rural mass is disaggregated and absorbed within the economy and body-politic, and under the aegis of what political persuasion.

This process can be significantly influenced in cumulative ways by outside actors. Organizations like AIFLD can have considerable impact on the course of change -- moving it in democratic directions -- through the access provided by its education and training programs. However, so much depends on the type and quality of the education offered to the leaders and members of the array of farmer unions and associations that are now surfacing in large number in the Latin American countryside. The ideal training approach which thoroughly integrates the technical and political elements of the union's mission has been discussed above. The central point worth
repeating is the challenge of conceiving a practical curriculum that links in overlapping ways requisite economic and technical skills and services to the achievement of goals through institutional political competence and dedication to democratic values and practices.  

Also, an education program of this kind to be effective should have considerable scope involving agrarian union officials and potential leaders at the local, regional and national levels in a progression of courses, seminars, and field training. In addition, international training of rural union leaders, as is the case with AIFLD's campesino education programs given yearly in United States and Latin American countries, can be instrumental in exposing the participants to a broader professional and democratic environment that if perceptively drawn upon and adapted by the course organizers and teachers, will indeed be relevant to the local conditions and problems facing the union officials in their own countries.

Last, the involvement of outside agents in democratic development institution building within peasant movements through the education route has one major advantage as against other alternatives. It allows the outsider to get in and out quickly, financially and technically — to limit his presence to short periods however many times — in contrast with the encumbrances that crop up with longer-range commitments of external support. Given the importance of avoiding as best one can seemingly endless subsidies and dependency by the recipient unions on these subsidies, this advantage has much to recommend.

This leads to another key subject, that of mounting other programs of external support which however necessary run the risk of drawing both parties, donors and recipients, into a subsidy/dependency relation. The core of the problem is economic. Peasant organizations typically are root and branch reflections of rural agricultural sectors that are poor and deprived, though perhaps beginning to emerge from the backwash of under-development. Poverty militates against even marginal investments by the small peasant farmers beyond the farm which are in their own self-interest. Or at least, such investments, or contributions, are resisted initially.

Peasant organizations characteristically must build from a very shallow economic base; resources are scarce, new income to tap very limited and dues collections difficult at best even among active members. External financial assistance in one form or another is likely imperative to the organization -- to get it off the ground and to sustain it for some period of time. If the foreign agent provides budget support, picks-up the salaries of the agrarian union officials and other recurrent costs of operation, it will likely be meeting genuine requirements, perhaps of survival, but at what costs? There is no one answer to what is indeed an ubiquitous problem to peasant organizations and their external supporters. So much depends upon mutual cooperation and understanding at the point of implementation. Relevant questions such as how much budget support, over what period of time and exchange for what self-help measures are best worked out in the individual situation.

Generally, this observer has found that the problem of dependency is best dealt with in the context of specific project rather than through general budget support. The project approach is more amenable to the setting of finite time limits and goals and the design of a mutually agreed upon plan of disengagement by the external donor. I would also subscribe in large part to the imaginative proposals addressed to this same set of issues by William Douglas in Chapter Five of this volume, Issues of Dependency and Interference.
However, the ideal or the normative only provides guides for the practitioner who must deal with an ever-changing reality marked by exigencies and crises, large and small, where the relationship of strategy to tactics, or the ideal to the practical, is easily lost in the blur of events.

In dealing effectively with the challenges of democratic institution-building of peasant movements in third world countries from the vantage point of the American organizations involved, there is no substitute for the tested skills and judgment that come with the "hands on" experience of day-to-day implementation and decisions in the local situation. This point is perhaps a truism, a stating of the obvious. However, many sound and hopeful policies and programs of both private and public U.S. agencies have failed precisely because of the absence of this experience.