Civil Society and Social Movements

The Dynamics of Intersectoral Alliances and Urban-Rural Linkages in Latin America

Henry Veltmeyer

Contents

Acronyms

ADC	Alianza Democrática Campesina
ASOCODE	Asociación Centroamericana de Organizaciones Campesinas para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo
CEPAL	Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe
CMS	Coordinadora de Movimientos Sociales
COB	Central Obrera Boliviana
CONAIE	Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador
CONFENAIE	Confederación de los pueblos y nacionalidades de la Amazonia
CSO	civil society organization
CTM	Confereracion de Trabajadores de Mexico
CUT	Central Única dos Trabalhadores
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ECUARUNARI	Confederación de los Pueblos de la Nacionalidad Quichua
EZLN	Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarios de Colombia
FUT	Frente Unitario de Trabajadores
GRO	grassroots organization
ICCI	Instituto Científico de Culturas Indígenas
ICIC	Iniciativa Civil para la Integración Centroamericana
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INI	Instituto Nacional Indigenista
MAS	Movimiento de Autonomía Sindical
MST	Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	non-governmental organization
NSM	new social movement
NSP	new social policy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional
PCAR	Cooperativismo e Associativismo Rural
PNRA	Plano Nacional e Reforma Agraria
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática
PT	Partido dos Trabalhadores
SAP	structural adjustment programme
SLA	sustainable livelihoods approach
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Summary/Résumé/Resumen

Summary

The study of development has always been surrounded by debate about its driving forces, its facilitating and inhibiting conditions, obstacles to its achievement, and the appropriate agents for bringing it about. At the centre of this debate have been questions about structure and agency. To what extent and under what conditions are poverty and underdevelopment rooted in the institutionalized practices or structures of the prevailing economic and social system? What are the most effective agents and strategies for generating the structural changes and conditional improvements that constitute development? Over the years, these and other such questions have been raised and addressed with numerous permutations in different and changing contexts, most recently in terms of the role of civil society and social movements.

This paper aims to shed some light on these questions as they relate to developments in Latin America—and similar developments are unfolding elsewhere in the developing world. Part I discusses the alternative meanings associated with the term "civil society". This term is at the centre of current discourse on development theory and practice. Part II reviews the available studies on the macro and meso dynamics of urban social movements in Latin America. Part III takes a closer look at the role of the urban poor in these movements, particularly in the context of conditions that prevailed in the 1980s. In part IV, the role of government and the state in the development process is briefly explored, as is the role of the "middle strata" in the social structure of Latin American societies. Part V turns to the struggles and social movements of organized labour, while part VI considers development theory with a brief discussion on the sustainable livelihoods approach to the problem of rural poverty. Part VII makes reference to, and use of, an alternative approach to development in exploring the dynamics of struggle associated with peasant-based rural sociopolitical movements, which, according to the author, appear in the current context to be the most dynamic forces for social change in the region. Part VIII examines intra- and intersectoral linkages and strategic alliances in the building of a popular movement of resistance against the system in place. In Henry Veltmeyer's view, these linkages are critical for the dynamics of an emergent and vibrant civil society and for the coordination of the diverse struggles for social change and development.

In the conclusion, Veltmeyer identifies two modalities of change and development, both at odds with the recent (and dominant) economic model of neoliberal capitalist development and its associated project of "globalization". One of these modalities relates to the political dynamics of Latin America's social movements, while the other relates to a ubiquitous search in the region for "another development"—development that is initiated from within and below rather than from the outside and above. Despite (or perhaps because of) its reformist orientation (and its commitment to allay the negative effects of neoliberal capitalist development and associated policies), the author argues that the sustainable livelihoods approach has the greatest potential for bringing about an improvement in the quality of life of the rural poor—that is, for providing a theoretical and practical solution to the problems of poverty, social exclusion and underdevelopment.

Résumé

L'étude du développement s'est toujours accompagnée d'un débat sur ses moteurs, les conditions qui le favorisent ou l'inhibent, les obstacles à sa réalisation et les agents les plus propres à le produire. Au centre de ce débat se trouvent des questions de structure et d'"agence". Dans

quelle mesure et dans quelles conditions la pauvreté et le sous-développement sont-ils ancrés dans les pratiques ou structures des institutions ou du système économique et social dominant? Quels sont les agents et stratégies les plus propres à entraîner les changements de structure et les améliorations des conditions qui constituent le développement? Au fil des années, ces questions, entre autres, ont été soulevées et étudiées avec de nombreuses permutations dans des contextes différents et en évolution, tout récemment encore à propos du rôle de la société civile et des mouvements sociaux.

Ce document vise à apporter quelque lumière sur ces questions en se référant à l'évolution de la situation en Amérique latine—évolution que l'on retrouve ailleurs aussi dans le monde en développement. La Ière partie est consacrée aux divers sens donnés à l'expression de "société civile", qui est au centre du discours actuel sur la théorie et la pratique du développement. La IIème partie passe en revue les études disponibles sur la macro- et la méso-dynamique des mouvements sociaux urbains en Amérique latine. Dans sa IIIème partie, l'auteur examine de plus près le rôle des citadins pauvres dans ces mouvements, en particulier dans les conditions qui régnaient dans les années 80. Dans sa IVème partie, il explore brièvement le rôle du gouvernement et de l'Etat dans le processus de développement, de même que celui des classes moyennes de la société latino-américaine. Dans sa Vème partie, il aborde les luttes et mouvements sociaux des travailleurs organisés et, dans la VIème, étudie la théorie du développement en débattant brièvement de la lutte contre la pauvreté rurale, abordée sous l'angle de la création de moyens d'existence durables. Dans la VIIème partie, il se réfère à une autre façon d'aborder le développement et l'applique en étudiant la dynamique des luttes sociopolitiques liées aux mouvements paysans qui, selon l'auteur, apparaissent dans le contexte régional actuel comme les forces les plus dynamiques de changement social. La VIIIème partie s'intéresse aux relations intra- et intersectorielles et aux alliances stratégiques dans la constitution d'un mouvement populaire de résistance au système en place. Henry Veltmeyer juge ces relations essentielles pour le dynamisme de la future société civile et pour la coordination des diverses luttes menées dans un but de changement social et de développement.

Dans sa conclusion, Veltmeyer distingue deux modalités de changement et de développement, toutes deux contraires au modèle économique récent (et dominant) du développement capitaliste néolibéral et à son projet de "mondialisation". L'une d'elles a trait au dynamisme politique des mouvements sociaux en Amérique latine, et l'autre à la recherche, omniprésente dans la région, d'un "autre développement", développement qui part de l'intérieur et de la base plutôt que l'extérieur et du sommet. En dépit (ou peut-être à cause) de son orientation réformiste (et de sa volonté de modérer les effets néfastes du développement capitaliste néolibéral et des politiques qu'il inspire), l'auteur fait valoir que c'est en créant des moyens d'existence durables que l'on a les meilleures chances d'améliorer la qualité de la vie des pauvres des campagnes, c'est-à-dire d'apporter une solution théorique et pratique aux problèmes de la pauvreté, de l'exclusion sociale et du sous-développement.

Henry Veltmeyer est professeur de sociologie et d'études internationales du développement à l'Université St. Mary d'Halifax, Canada. Ce rapport a été préparé dans le cadre du projet de l'Institut sur les Stratégies et mouvements de la société civile pour la redistribution des ressources et pour l'amélioration des conditions de vie rurale. Ce projet, mené entre 2000 et 2003, était dirigé par K.B. Ghimire avec l'aide d'Anita Tombez.

Resumen

El estudio del desarrollo siempre va acompañado de un debate sobre sus motores, sus condiciones facilitadoras e inhibidoras, los obstáculos para su logro, y los agentes apropiados para efectuarlo. En el centro del debate han estado presentes preguntas sobre "agencia" y "estructura". ¿Hasta qué grado y bajo qué condiciones están arraigadas la pobreza y el subdesarrollo en las prácticas o estructuras institucionalizadas del sistema social y económico imperante? ¿Cuáles son los agentes y estrategias más eficaces para generar los cambios estructurales y las mejoras condicionales que constituyen el desarrollo? Con el transcurso de los años, éstas y otras

preguntas se han planteado y abordado con numerosos cambios en contextos diferentes y en continua evolución y, más recientemente, con respecto al papel que desempeñan la sociedad civil y los movimientos sociales.

En este documento se pretende arrojar luz sobre estas cuestionas, en la medida en que están relacionadas con los cambios en Latinoamérica —y otros cambios similares están produciéndose en otros lugares del mundo en desarrollo. En la parte I se examinan los significados alternativos asociados con el término "sociedad civil". Este término es el núcleo del debate actual sobre la teoría y la práctica del desarrollo. En la parte II se analizan los estudios disponibles sobre la macrodinámica y mesodinámica de los movimientos sociales urbanos en Latinoamérica. En la parte III se observa de más cerca el papel que desempeña la población urbana pobre en estos movimientos, particularmente en las condiciones que prevalecieron en el decenio de 1980. En la parte IV se estudia brevemente el papel del Gobierno y del Estado en el proceso de desarrollo, así como el papel que desempeñan las clases medias en la estructura social de las sociedades latinoamericanas. En la parte V se hace referencia a las luchas y movimientos sociales de los trabajadores sindicalizados, mientras que en la parte VI se aborda la teoría del desarrollo con una breve discusión sobre el enfoque del problema de la pobreza rural desde la perspectiva de los medios de vida sostenibles. La parte VII hace referencia y utiliza un enfoque alternativo del desarrollo, al examinar la dinámica de la lucha asociada con los movimientos sociopolíticos de origen campesino, que, a juicio del autor, parecen las fuerzas más dinámicas en el contexto actual que impulsan el cambio social en la región. En la parte VIII se examinan los vínculos intra e intersectoriales, así como las alianzas estratégicas al forjar un movimiento popular de resistencia contra el sistema establecido. Según Henry Veltmeyer, estos vínculos son fundamentales para la dinámica de una sociedad civil emergente y vibrante, y para la coordinación de las diversas luchas a favor del cambio social y del desarrollo.

En la conclusión, el autor identifica dos modalidades de cambio y desarrollo que se oponen al modelo económico reciente (y dominante) del desarrollo capitalista neoliberal y a su proyecto asociado de "mundialización". Una de estas modalidades guarda relación con la dinámica política de los movimientos sociales en Latinoamérica, mientras que la otra se refiere a la consabida búsqueda de "el otro desarrollo" en la región —el desarrollo que comienza desde dentro y desde abajo, y no tanto desde fuera y desde arriba. A pesar de (o tal vez debido a) la orientación reformista (y de su compromiso para disipar los efectos negativos del desarrollo capitalista neoliberal y de las políticas conexas), el autor aduce que el enfoque de los medios de vida sostenibles es el que tiene mayor potencial para mejorar la calidad de vida de la población rural pobre —es decir, para ofrecer una solución teórica y práctica a los problemas de la pobreza, la exclusión social y el subdesarrollo.

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Introduction

At the turn of a new millennium, the quest to lift the burden of poverty from the shoulders and households of a multitude of individuals in developing societies across the world is no less pressing than it was in the late 1940s when the development project came into being or, in the view of Wolfgang Sachs (1992) and other exponents of "grassroots postdevelopment", the concept of development was invented.[1] From the beginning, the study of development has been surrounded by an extended debate as to its driving forces, its facilitating and inhibiting conditions, the obstacles to its achievement, and the appropriate agents for bringing it about. At the centre of this debate have been various questions about structure and agency. To what extent and under what conditions are poverty and underdevelopment rooted in the institutionalized practices or structures of the prevailing economic and social system? What are the most effective agents and strategies for generating the structural changes and conditional improvements that constitute development? Over the years, these and other such questions have been raised and addressed with numerous permutations in different and changing contexts, most recently in terms of the role of civil society and social movements.

To shed some light on these questions as they relate to developments in Latin America—and similar developments are unfolding elsewhere in the developing world—this paper is organized as follows. Part I discusses the alternative meanings associated with the term "civil society". This term is at the very centre of the current discourse on development theory and practice. Part II reviews the available studies on the macro and meso dynamics of urban social movements in Latin America. Part III takes a closer look at the role of the urban poor in these movements, particularly in the context of conditions that prevailed in the 1980s. In part IV, the role of government and the state in the development process is briefly explored, as is the role of the "middle strata" in the social structure of Latin American societies. Part V turns to the struggles and social movements of organized labour, while part VI detours into the terrain of development theory with a brief discussion on the sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) to the problem of rural poverty. Part VII makes reference to, and use of, an alternative approach to development in exploring the dynamics of struggle associated with peasant-based rural sociopolitical movements, which in the current context appear to be the most dynamic forces for social change in the region. Part VIII examines the issue of intra- and intersectoral linkages and strategic alliances in the building of a popular movement of resistance against the system in place. These linkages are a critical but very much underresearched factor in the dynamics of an emergent and vibrant civil society and for the coordination of the diverse struggles for social change and development that have arisen.

The conclusion identifies two modalities of change and development, both at odds with the recent (and dominant) economic model of neoliberal capitalist development and its associated project of "globalization". One of these modalities relates to the political dynamics of Latin America's social movements briefly reviewed below, while the other relates to a ubiquitous search in the region for "another development"—development that is initiated from within and below rather than from the outside and above. Despite (or perhaps because of) its reformist orientation (and its commitment to allay the negative effects of neoliberal capitalist development and associated policies), it is argued that the SLA has the greatest potential for bringing about an improvement in the quality of life of the rural poor—that is, for providing a theoretical and practical solution to the problems of poverty, social exclusion and underdevelopment.

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[1] According to Gustavo Esteva (1992) and Wolfgang Sachs (1992), the idea of development was invented as a political project initiated by United States President Harry S. Truman in his Point Four Program to ensure that the decolonization process would not result in the liberated countries falling into the Communist camp. In this same context, economic development and, soon thereafter, the sociology and politics of development, were initiated as fields for social scientific study. However, the idea of development, as noted below, can be traced all the way back to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and its concept of progress. Although in this context we might better speak of another project, that of imperialism, the development project was also prefigured by a century and more of efforts by colonizers and missionaries to conquer and make over the New World and other areas of the non-European world. As noted in a personal communication by K.B. Ghimire in a review of the first draft of this paper, the French colonialism of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was based, in part, on the logic that overseas areas and people needed scientific knowledge and the fruits of modernization.

The SLA, however, is predicated, at least in part, on social empowerment, a matter not only of building on the poor's social capital (namely, their organizational capacity for networking and collective action), but also on political power—effective participation in decisions regarding the allocation of society's productive resources. Currently, this power is highly concentrated in the hands (and institutions) of the rich and powerful—the economic elite or dominant class. Thus, social empowerment depends on political empowerment, which will undoubtedly entail a direct or indirect confrontation with the existing power structure. In effect, what is needed is a strategy that moves beyond the reform parameters of the SLA. This remains a problem without a solution, a challenge without an effective response.

I. The Concept of Civil Society and the Politics of Language

One of the most striking features of the discourse of development theorists and practitioners in the 1990s was the prevalence and centrality of the notion of "civil society", a term widely used, if not invented, by the *philosophes* of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment in their thinking through the differences between "the social" and "the political".[2] The revival of this notion of civil society and its conceptual reformulation can be traced along two lines of academic studies: a liberal tradition concerned with the dynamics of the political process and that of international development—the "empower[ment of] civil society to be the true guardians of democracy and good governance everywhere" (UNDP 1997);[3] and a poststructuralist/Marxist or Gramscian tradition on the left of the intellectual and political-ideological divide.[4] Today the discourse of all international and governmental development agencies, as well as associated practitioners and intellectuals, is informed by the notion of civil society advanced in the liberal tradition. It is not hard to see why. In this discourse, civil society includes all manner of organizations found between the family and the state—to paraphrase Hegel on this point—including business associations that used to make up the "private sector".

Thus, a civil society discourse allows the global community of international development organizations, governments and practitioners to simultaneously:

1. advance a non-state and market-led or market-friendly approach toward international development, as per ideas advanced in the counter-revolution in development theory and practice during the 1980s;

2. reduce the reliance on third-sector non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for the execution of development programmes and to turn toward a strengthening of civil society—that is, the myriad of informal associations in civil society, including

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[2]   In the 1980s, the term "civil society" was increasingly used with reference to the political dynamics of a democratization process. As for the discourse on development, its use as a descriptive, analytical and policy tool became widespread among both scholars and practitioners in the 1990s in a conceptual shift away from the notion of a "third sector" of voluntary, non-profit and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) toward the emergence and strengthening of all sorts of grassroots organizations and civil associations.

[3]   In this liberal tradition (Blair 1997; Clark 1991; Diamond 1994; Gelner 1994; Mitlin 1998), the main function of civil society is to prevent abuse and misuse of the state and to hold its officials accountable, in effect, to create a bulwark of democracy—to secure the conditions of democracy in both the political and the development sphere. The liberal tradition is focused on both the political and the development process. With regard to the latter, the position taken by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other United Nations (UN) agencies and other organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is most clearly articulated by Diana Mitlin in the following terms: "Civil society is increasingly represented as being critical to the successful realisation of development...[namely,] the importance of local institutions in supporting and undertaking development... such as poverty reduction and good governance" (Mitlin 1998:81).

[4]   Cox 1987; Bobbio 1979; Kumar 1993; Laclau and Mouffe 1985. The Gramscian notion of civil society as the social basis for a counter-hegemonic movement has been applied with numerous permutations in the analysis of a global struggle of resistance to the processes and projects of neoliberal capitalism (Gills 2000; Gunnell and Timms 2000; Mittleman 2000; Rupert 2000). A Gramscian perspective is also the theoretical basis of a number of interpretations of the Zapatista rebellion in southern Mexico as a counter-hegemonic resistance movement that has challenged in a major way not only the hegemony of the Mexican state and its neoliberal project but also the global projection of this hegemony (among others, Morton 2001; Womack 1999). A Gramscian theoretical perspective has also begun to permeate the analysis of the organic intellectuals of diverse class-based or grassroots organizations such as the Instituto Científico de Culturas Indígenas (ICCI) in Ecuador. Unlike the Marxist class analysis adopted by many intellectuals connected to or working with peasant-based or working-class sociopolitical movements, such as the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) and Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), the intellectuals associated with the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE) and other indigenous organizations have in a few cases adopted a post-modernist language of identity politics, but generally have turned toward Gramscian categories of a dominant hegemonic bloc of social forces and a social-popular counter-hegemonic bloc.

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neighbourhood and women's self-help groups (in the context of criticisms from the grassroots sector of civil organizations), so as to broaden the social basis for a more participatory and equitable form of development and good governance (Mitlin 1998; UNDP 1997);

3. pursue the strategy of international donors, government agencies and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to form partnerships with business associations—to incorporate the private sector into the development process (United Nations 1998); and perhaps most importantly, although rarely if ever admitted,

4. provide an alternative to organizations and movements that share an antisystemic and "confrontational" approach toward change; and

5. provide a countervailing force against the recent appearance of rural activism in different rural societies of the world—a bulwark against the persistent search by class-based social movements in these societies for radical or antisystemic solutions to the problems of land reform; the concern here, normally unstated, is to minimize or avoid the conditions of political conflict that characterized earlier phases of land reform (in the discourse on civil society and sustainable livelihoods, now dubbed "asset redistribution").[5]

On the other side of the intellectual and ideological divide can be found a range of studies that have sought to resolve the theoretical and political impasse—and crisis—associated with various structural lines of analysis, and associated ideas and prescriptions, by turning toward a post- or non-structural form of analysis, a postmodernist perspective on society and a Gramscian-type analysis of the need to mobilize forces of opposition and resistance into a counter-hegemonic power and an alternative form of development (Kumar 1993; Morton 2001).[6]

Within the framework of this poststructuralist/Marxist or Gramscian critical approach, the bearers of these counter-hegemonic forces are found among diverse actors in civil society,[7] including what Marshall Wolfe (1996) terms "spontaneous grassroots movements" and most recently, a broad array of indigenous organizations and communities (Stavenhagen 1994, 1997).[8] In the context of this discourse (see Mallon 1995), the relevant civil society organizations (CSOs) and associations are not class-based (peasant or worker) but rather community-based organizations that take the form, for the most part, of spontaneous grassroots movements, particularly those new social movements (NSMs), which like so many economic associations or other CSOs, are formed around a single issue, with a highly particularized, albeit heterogeneous, social base and a concern with the politics of identity.[9] In this context, profit-oriented business associations and organizations of the hegemonic class, including associations of big landlords, chambers of commerce and paramilitary forces, are excluded from any notion of a civil society.

In the theoretical and political space between these two notions of civil society—a liberal one favoured by the community of international and governmental development agencies, and a critical one rooted in a Gramscian notion of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic power—can be found a broad array of views and loose ideas associated with a growing complex, and diverse networks, of NGOs that see themselves as a primary agent for international development, acting in support of grassroots- or community-based development.[10] Many of these development NGOs[11] see and present themselves as intermediaries between, on the one hand, international donors and governments, and on the other, the urban and rural poor, the identified targets and

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[5] On the dynamism and recent rural activism in Latin America, see among others, Petras (1997). On the SLA approach, see Amalric (1998); Helmore and Singh (2001); Liamzon et al. (1996).

[6] On this theoretical impasse, see Booth (1985); Schuurman (1993).

[7] See, for example, Castells (1983); Laclau and Mouffe (1985).

[8] On the various forms and growing relevance of this "ethnodevelopment", see Partridge et al. (1996).

[9] Escobar 1992; Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Melucci 1989.

[10] Biekart 1996; Carroll 1992; Kothari 1996; Macdonald 1997; Swift 1999.

[11] Some observers, such as Charles Reilly (1989), tend to use the term "NGO" broadly as a shorthand for all popular expressions of civil society, including neighbourhood associations, volunteer organizations, unions and grassroots movements. See also Landim (1987).

intended beneficiaries of the development process. In the 1980s, these third-sector NGOs were the favoured partners of governments and international donors in the implementation of their programmes in the form of projects and at the level of the local community. However, these organizations of civil society, ranging from international advocacy networks to community-based organizations and pursuing alternative agendas of environmental protection, human rights and social development, or opposition to the corporate agenda, are generally oriented toward a politics of resistance and committed to what could be termed "another development"—development that is from within and below rather from outside and above, that is people-centred and managed, human in scale, socially inclusive, sustainable in terms of both the environment and livelihoods, and participatory and empowering of the poor (Veltmeyer and O'Malley 2001).[12]

What are the politics of this middle-of-the road conception of civil society associated with an international movement of development NGOs and other expressions of civil society? In a word: reformism. Virtually all scholars and practitioners in the field are committed to the belief in the need for institutional or structural change as a precondition and means of bringing about or promoting development. However, in the context of current or available conditions, very few of them prescribe radical change, that is, a fundamental overhaul of the existing system and the power structure that supports it. Conditions for social transformation—requiring what in the 1970s was termed "social revolution"—are simply no longer on the agenda, a point well taken by organizations such as the Alianza Democrática Campesina (ADC) in El Salvador and other protagonists such as the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in Mexico that waged class or civil war to settle not only the land question but also that of democracy (indigenous rights and so forth). In El Salvador and Guatemala, the peace accords precluded any radical solution to issues that continue to surround questions of land and land reform. Even class-based social movements, such as the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) in Brazil or the EZLN, with an agenda of more far-reaching structural change, have drawn this conclusion. Like the ADC or the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), such class-based or indigenous movements have decided as a matter of strategy to search for opportunities and work within the political spaces created by a programme of political, economic and social reforms implemented by the governments in the region. At the very least, they can push for an extension and deepening of these reforms; at the most, they can seek to mobilize the forces of opposition and resistance into collective action on pressing issues, hoping thereby to foment conditions for more far-reaching change in the direction of land (economic development), democracy (autonomy) and social justice.[13] It is in such situations that the social left and NGOs in Latin America and elsewhere seek to project themselves into the development process.[14] As a result, NGOs tend to be courted by organizations and political parties on both the political left and the right; and by the same token, they tend to get involved in the politics of strategic alliances and concerted actions sought by political and civil organizations on the left (those dedicated, in theory, to radical or antisystemic change); the right (forces ranged in support of the status quo); and the liberal centre (committed to reform of the existing system in the direction of equity or greater freedom for individuals to act decisively in the process of their own development).

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[12] On the search for, and the theory and strategy of, development that is people-led, -centred and -managed, socially inclusive and initiated from below and within rather than from above and outside, see, among others, Chambers (1997); Friedmann (1992); Korten (1987); Korten and Klaus (1984); Veltmeyer and O'Malley (2001).

[13] On this point, see Stedile and Frei (1993) and Robles (2000) with regard to the MST, and Macas (1999) and Lluco Tixe (2000) with regard to CONAIE. The position on these issues by the indigenous organizations is made clear in a series of interviews with Jose Maria Cabascango and Luis Macas, leaders of CONAIE at different times. In their words: "The uninational bourgeois state, hegemonic, its legal-political and economic nature, is exclusive, antidemocratic, repressive and pro-imperialist" (Cabascango); "the indigenous peoples and nationalities and other social sectors...relegated to an inhuman standard of living and submitted to the cruelties of exploitation and oppression, have a single path for solving our multiple national problems...the construction of a participative New Multinational Nation" (Cabascango); "modernization has to be understood in its broad, global meaning. One should not speak only of the modernization of the sectors of a country's economy" (Macas); "we...have to begin [by] revising everything related to the political system, the decrepit structures" (Macas); "autonomy is based on the elements of territory, political administration, social organization, the development of the peoples" (Macas).

[14] On the social left versus the political left, see Petras (1997).

With few exceptions, the alternative models and strategies advanced over the past few decades —including those based on the SLA, the latest advance in the many twists and turns in the long road toward "another" or "alternative" development—are predicated on reforming the existing system. For example, this applies to the alternatives proposed by the World Bank, the UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), key institutions in the formulation of alternative development models and strategies.[15] All these and other such agencies within the United Nations system, including the now somewhat weakened United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), are committed to a programme of political reforms that focus on the decentralization of government decision making and electoral politics—democratization of the political apparatus; economic reforms designed for macroeconomic stability and structural adjustment; and social reforms, in the form of a new social policy (NSP) in the direction of greater equity and protection of the most vulnerable groups among the poor.[16]

Under the direction and advice of these international organizations, many governments in the world have instituted reforms, some of them deeper and more extensive than others. In the process, they have created, or sought to create, favourable conditions for a strategy of popular participation and partnership with municipalities, communities, development NGOs and other elements of civil society. Bolivia is a case in point. It is difficult to find another government that has so whole-heartedly adopted the political dimensions of this reform process (Gleich 1999). As for the NSP, Chile probably provides the best example. And with regard to economic reform, in Latin America it was widely implemented in the 1980s under conditions of a debt and development crisis; and in the 1990s, the reform process was both radicalized and extended to the four hold-out countries in the region—Brazil, Venezuela, Peru and Argentina.[17]

To conclude this brief discussion on the notion of civil society, we restate the central point that there are clear political issues involved, that is to say, the associated discourse has an ideological dimension: the issue is not accurate description and analysis, but prescription and mobilization of actions toward a desired end and in the interests of a specific social group. In this context, the concept of civil society, like that of the equally pervasive concept of globalization (see Petras and Veltmeyer 2001b) provides a poor tool for description. For one thing, it obscures more than it reveals about the dynamics of the development process. The specific combination of strategic and structural factors involved can be better presented and examined through class analysis—an analysis that allows more useful positioning of individuals in the larger structure of economic and social relationships in both rural and urban society, and that leads to a better assessment of the social forces that could be mobilized in support of various political and development projects. But this point is merely asserted here. Full argument would require a much closer look at, and documentation of, the dynamics of struggle in the countryside as well as diverse understandings and discourses on the dynamics involved. It is to this we now turn.

II. The Dynamics of Urban Social Movements in Latin America

The 1980s in Latin America (and elsewhere) provided a crucible of change that would bring about a virtual counter-revolution in the dominant form of social and economic organization and usher in a new era under conditions that would generate in response a new wave of social movements in the countryside and the cities. By the end of the 1990s, the political landscape in the region was radically altered, but not that well understood.

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[15] Since at least 1980, all of these organizations have been convinced about the need for an alternative approach—the need to rethink development from within the framework of a new paradigm. On the World Bank's position on this issue, see Salop (1992).

[16] On the NSP and the underlying models advanced by ECLAC, see, among others, Morales-Gómez (1999) and Veltmeyer and O'Malley (2001). See also the comprehensive bibliography (259 items) compiled by the International Institute for Labour Studies (1994) on the conditions of social exclusion and the NSP.

[17] On the political dynamics of this process, see Veltmeyer and Petras (1997, 2000).

To understand better these changes and associated developments, it is important to grasp the workings of a protracted, decades-long struggle leading to the gradual but increasing incorporation of the working and middle classes into the political process and the process of economic development in Latin America. To some extent, the changes and developments that unfolded in the 1980s and 1990s were the outcomes of political reaction to these processes; that is, they represented the efforts of the propertied interests and the economically dominant class to arrest and reverse long-standing processes of democratization, modernization and development directed toward the goals of progress ("economic growth"), greater individual freedom ("democracy") and improvements in the level and form of social justice ("equity" in the distribution of society's productive resources).[18] It is within the framework of this multidimensional project (and process) and the forces ranged against it that we can locate (and thus explain) the emergence and dynamics of new sociopolitical movements of peasant farmers and small producers, indigenous communities, various categories and classes of workers, the urban poor and women, as well as what has been called the "middle sector" or "middle strata".

As for the historic conjuncture within which these movements were formed, it relates to specific, albeit diverse, combinations of the following conditions.

First, by the mid-1980s, Latin America was in the throes of a debt crisis that would provoke a severe production and fiscal crisis, the conditions of which led to a lack of productive investment, a fall in productive capacity and output, a decline in levels of national income, a fall in the value and purchasing power of wages, a general deterioration in living standards, and a deepening and extension of old and new forms of poverty.

Second, corresponding to or underlying these conditions, which in a number of contexts reached crisis proportions, and in the region as a whole led to an entire decade lost to development, can be found a series of structural changes that created an entirely new context for the emergence and dynamics of sociopolitical movements in the urban centres and the countryside. These changes include the following:

1. a process of productive transformation and technological conversion in the industrial sector, leading to a sloughing off of labour and an overall decline in the importance of this sector in the production process and as a source of employment (Leiva and Agacino 1995);

2. a process of urbanization fuelled by conditions of primitive accumulation and proletarianization—the separation of landless and near-landless producers in the countryside from their means of social production (Bartra 1976; Veltmeyer 1983);

3. the growth of a large informal sector of economic activity characterized by irregularity, lack of government regulation, conditions of economic insecurity, relations of self-employment and family unpaid labour, the formation of micro-enterprises on the margins of a rapidly growing urban economy, and widespread poverty (Portes et al. 1989; PREALC 1991);

4. a radical change in the relationship of capital to labour, reflected in a dramatic fall in the share of the latter in national income and, at the political level, a direct assault on the organizational capacity of labour and its capacity to negotiate collective agreements with capital;[19] and

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[18] This project can be traced back to the concern of eighteenth-century *philosophes* with the creation of a new and improved form of society in which there would be "economic progress", greater individual freedom (democracy) and conditions of social justice for all. In the post-Second World War context, this modernization process would be reformulated in the search for economic development, democracy and social justice or equity. In the 1980s, however, this project and the associated processes foundered on the shoals of a poststructuralist/postmodernist perspective. In this new context of an emerging postmodern era (Mills 1959; Bell 1963), large numbers abandoned the entire modernization and emancipatory project, viewing the ideologies and metatheories used for over a century to mobilize actions and explain development as no longer serviceable under the conditions of a postcapitalist, postindustrial and postmodern society.

[19] On the dynamics of this struggle, see, among others, Davis (1984) and Veltmeyer (1999).

5. the privatization of state enterprises and previously nationalized means of production, a cutback in government spending and the provision of social services, and a relative decline in the public sector of economic activity and employment.

Third, these structural changes and their socioeconomic conditions were facilitated, if not induced, by government programmes of economic, social and political reforms designed by economists at the World Bank, but widely implemented by governments under conditions of a region-wide debt crisis and a right-wing counter-revolution in development thinking and practice.[20] By the end of the 1980s, only four countries in the region (Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Venezuela) had failed to fully embrace these reform measures, but by 1995, these countries had also succumbed to the pressure to adopt the neoliberal reform programme (Smith and Korzeniewicz 1997; Veltmeyer and Petras 1997). Included in these reforms was a programme of policy measures designed to:

1. *privatize* the means of production and enterprises, reversing the process of previous decades which had led to the nationalization of strategic industries and the formation of a state enterprise sector;

2. *deregulate* markets so as to "get prices right"—that is, operate under the market mechanism of free and open competition;

3. *liberalize* movements of capital and goods, reducing or removing restrictions on foreign investment and trade barriers;

4. *open* the national economy to competition on the world market, increasing the propensity toward exports; and

5. *protect* the most vulnerable groups among the rural and urban poor with a new social policy that would give reform a social dimension and the whole process a "human face" (Cornia et al. 1987).[21]

In addition to this structural adjustment programme (SAP) of neoliberal or social-liberal economic reforms, designed to adjust the national economies in the region to the requirements of a new world order, the reform process was given a political dimension with a series of measures intended to modernize and democratize the state apparatus and its relation to civil society.

There are five aspects to these political reforms:

1. *retreat* of the armed forces to their barracks and the reinstitution of civilian constitutional rule and electoral politics, a process that unfolded from 1979 (Ecuador, Bolivia) to 1989 (Chile);

2. *decentralization* of government decision making, namely, the allocation of productive resources, to foster popular participation in these decisions—the missing link between the process of productive transformation (technological

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[20] The dynamics of the debt crisis has spawned a literature too voluminous to cite, but on the dynamics of the conservative (neoliberal) counter-revolution in Latin America, see Toye (1987), Veltmeyer and Petras (1997) and the monthly bulletin of the Ecuador-based ICCI. In this connection, Palacios (1999:1–2) writes: "The political project of the country's economic elite [to structurally transform the state and the society] can be termed 'neoliberal transformation', which has as its objective converting the market and liberal forces into mechanisms for the regulation of social conflict and the allocation of resources in the interest of efficiency and profitability". Palacios adds: "This transformation has a great historic scope in terms of the aim of dismantling the welfare state...the model for a participatory form of democracy [and which] in Latin America has taken the form of a protectionist state oriented towards import substitution and the domestic market". Palacios further adds, in class terms: "When our economic elite seeks the downsizing of the state via a reduction of the labour force and the privatisation of a large part of the social sector...and a deregulation [process] in reality what is sought is the submission of society as a whole to the coordinates of its power and dominance".

[21] On the new understanding reached by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other international organizations within the United Nations system (ECLAC, UNDP, UNICEF) for the need to redesign the SAP, see Salop (1992). ECLAC, in 1990, provided one of the clearest and most elaborate statements of the "new economic model" based on this new understanding. The literature on the NSP, the centrepiece of this model, and a "new social investment fund", the key mechanism of this policy, is voluminous, but see Morales-Gómez (1999).

conversion of industry) and greater equity in the access to, and distribution of, these resources;[22]

3. *downsizing* of the state apparatus vis-à-vis ownership of the major means of social production and employment, intervention in or the regulation of economic activity, development planning, and the provision of social goods and services (which, where and as much as possible, would be privatized);

4. *capacitating* local governments as the loci of a participatory form of development, in partnership with international development associations, governments and third-sector NGOs (Reilly 1989; Smillie and Helmich 1999); and

5. *strengthening* of civil society in both the private sector (of business associations) and third sector of popular organizations, and the institution thereby of a more participatory form of development and governance.[23]

These economic, social and political reforms constitute the framework and context for the emergence and strengthening of civil society in the form of popular organizations and social movements —organizations and movements that have taken diverse forms in both rural and urban society as a political response to the social and economic conditions of neoliberal capitalist development or what has been termed by the Ecuador-based Instituto Científico de Culturas Indígenas (ICCI) as "neoliberal democracy" and "democracy of structural adjustment" (Palacios 1999).[24] These responses can be placed into three categories, each with an identifiable set of conditions and dynamics, but all part of what has been and could be termed "the popular movement":

1. economic and political organizations and collective action of the urban poor, including a myriad of popular economic organizations and movements of (spontaneous or organized) opposition and protest against the lack of democracy and International Monetary Fund (IMF)–sponsored government policy measures;

2. a host of NSMs formed by diverse associations of urban-based neighbourhood groups, groups of women, human and political rights and environmentalist activists, to advocate changes; and

3. sociopolitical movements based on organized or unionized labour.

Each form of organizational and political response has been, and is, mediated by the activity and support of NGOs formed within what once (in the 1980s) was termed the "third sector" but now "civil society" (Mitlin 1998).

III. Social Organization and Political Response of the Urban Poor

In the 1980s, under conditions described above (debt crisis, retreat and withdrawal of the state, political dictatorship, transition toward democracy, neoliberal counter-revolution) and in diverse contexts across the region, a number of popular economic organizations were formed with the purpose of collective cooperative (in solidarity) actions to meet the basic needs of the urban poor, as were political organizations to protest against the lack of democracy and/or government-led neoliberal policies. In a number of contexts (particularly Santiago, Lima, Mexico City, São Paulo, Buenos Aires), these organizations were formed by the urban poor in the absence or cutback of government programmes to provide income-poor households with necessities such as shelter,

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[22] See Boisier et al. (1992); Borja et al. (1989); Conyers (1986). The policy of decentralization was advanced, from a variety of political and theoretical perspectives, as a form of democratization and modernization of the state and, as such, the precondition of a more participatory form of development, even a panacea.

[23] See Carroll (1992); Landim (1987); Macdonald (1997). The literature on the politics of structural adjustment is almost as voluminous as that on its economics, but see Tulchin and Garland (2000).

[24] Democracy in this neoliberal form is a major object of criticism and opposition by many intellectuals associated with indigenous and peasant movements in Latin America (Palacios 1999; Macas 1999, 2000a, 2000b). As opposed to such an "inauthentic" form of democracy, the indigenous and peasant movements all call for democracy but in a very different form, one that is community based and truly participatory.

food and primary health care. In this context was formed what Luis Razeto (1986, 1993) calls an "economy of solidarity" and what others more generally view as the emergence of civil society. In some contexts, the conditions of an economic crisis, especially when exacerbated as in the case of Mexico, and the near-total incapacity of the state to respond to the requirements of the situation, resulted in grassroots or community-based organization of neighbourhood associations, women's groups, cooperatives and a wide array of NGOs, many of them church based, all formed and active within civil society for the purpose of economic defence and security, and the provision of vital goods and services to poor households in the urban centres.[25]

Elsewhere, notably in Chile, popular organizations of the urban poor were formed to protest against conditions of political authoritarianism or dictatorial rule and to push for a democratic opening. In Chile and elsewhere in the 1980s, the urban poor were at the forefront of the struggle against political authoritarianism or dictatorship and for a return to democratic rule. In other contexts (Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela), the popular movement was formed and active in the popular struggle for a deepening and extension of political reform and transition toward democratic rule and forms of good governance.

In this context, class-based forms of organization, and labour unions, continued and extended their struggle against capital, and to some extent the state, for improved wages and working conditions. However, in the popular movement, these organizations and the labour movement as a whole were generally subordinated to other forms of civil society, notably those organized and led by the urban poor. Some of these worked with or through the instrument of political parties that were formed in their struggle to present alternatives to the urban electorate and seek state power through electoral means. This was the case, for example, in Mexico — in a broadly based coalition of popular forces organized under the banner of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD); it was also the case in Brazil where the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) managed to organize not only the labour movement, but also a broad array of forces for change and development. Generally, however, these CSOs were formed around particular issues, with a distinctly heterogeneous social base, rooted not in relations of property but in the need to redress the grievances or situations of particular groups within civil society. Thus the notion of NSMs emerged — or, to be more precise, this notion spread to conditions found in the urban centres of developing societies (Calderón 1995; Escobar and Alvarez 1992).[26]

In the 1990s, most of the NSMs[27] that had materialized in the 1980s in the context of an emergent civil society subsided, with a consequent dissipation of the opposition and resistance that they had mobilized under different conditions. The context for this emergence of a vibrant civil society had radically changed, undermining this form of political response precisely at a point when social and political analysts, who shared an ideological orientation toward reform or more radical change, discovered the emergent power of civil society.[28]

The political context of this demobilization process included a completion of the transition toward political democracy, namely, the institution of civilian constitutional rule and the mechanisms of electoral politics, decentralization of policy- and decision-making structures and so forth (Lijerton 1996). Other elements of a changed political context involved a process of political reform engineered by the political class from within the state apparatus (see below). Only in Mexico were the institutions of a relatively authoritarian state still in place, but even here the system was subjected to pressures that in the 1990s would bring about a democratic opening

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[25]   Cuéllar Vázquez 1992; Paley 2001; Razeto 1993; Schuurman 1989; Stokes 1995; Van Garderen 1989.

[26]   For a critical assessment of the sociology of these NSMs, see Veltmeyer (1997a).

[27]   The notion and theory of NSMs was formed in the context of political developments in Western Europe and North America, but was extended to conditions found in developing societies in the 1980s by political sociologists who, by and large, shared a postmodernist perspective and a poststructuralist mode of discourse analysis (Veltmeyer 1997a). However, the entire theory of NSMs has been put into question. So-called NSMs are neither new nor isolated from the class struggle. Ethnic, indigenous, women's and religious movements have existed for centuries; they have simply assumed new forms and adapted to changed socioeconomic and political contexts.

[28]   See Kothari (1996) for an exposition of this discovery. As noted in the opening section of this paper, there is a large and growing literature about this emergent civil society.

and the emergence of political choice within the institutional context of electoral politics. In Guatemala and El Salvador, this political development necessitated resolution of a 10-year civil or class war waged by the state against the indigenous population of peasant farmers. In most countries, however, the dominant and critical element of a new political context was the result of actions taken, a strategy of accommodation and reform, and partnership in a development enterprise initiated from above and outside.

In this new political context, the nature and dynamics of struggle associated with the popular movement had markedly changed. For one thing, the popular movement became increasingly fragmented. One stream of this movement is based on the class struggle of workers against capital—and against the state where and in as much as the state represented or was dominated or controlled by propertied interests or the capitalist class within the private sector. However, other parts of the popular movement focused on a broad range of issues including the lack of democracy, the violation of human rights and gender-based inequalities, and problems of poverty, irregular employment and social exclusion.

As for the urban poor—who make up, it has been estimated, from one third to one half of the economically (and politically) active population in the large urban centres—the forces of opposition were by and large demobilized, emerging only in the form of sporadic outbursts against specific efforts of the government to implement IMF-mandated austerity measures and the broader programme of neoliberal reforms (Walton and Seddon 1994). In Mexico, up to 350 such outbursts of collective action, occasionally reported on but rarely documented, were identified by this author in the space of less than a year (September 1996 to June 1997); in other contexts, they have tended to come in waves that correspond to the various twists and turns in the implementation of the neoliberal agenda (Walton and Seddon 1994; Petras 1997). The outbursts have been characterized, above all, by a relative lack of organization, that is, a spontaneous rather than organized response to government policy.

Within the middle strata of urban society, an estimated 30 per cent of the economically—and politically—active population, the dominant organizational form is an issue-oriented social movement based on a non-governmental form of organization, primarily an association of collective interest. These organizations were formed on both the left and the right of the political spectrum, but the vast majority had a centrist or liberal orientation, concerned with addressing these issues within a reformist framework.

In a number of countries, especially Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador and Mexico, the most dynamic sector of the popular movement in the 1990s (and into the twenty-first century) can be found in the social movements of landless or near-landless workers, peasants and indigenous communities within the rural sector of society (Petras 1997). One of the interesting features of these old ethnic- or class-based sociopolitical movements is in the shift of the locus of their struggle. The struggle for land and land reform, as regards peasant-based and peasant-led movements, as well as the struggle of indigenous peoples against the incursion of the transnational corporation and capital into their communities and the struggle for dignity, respect for indigenous culture, national or ethnic identity and autonomy used to take place primarily in rural society. However, in the 1990s, this struggle took the form of marches on urban centres of government power and collective action against government policy with other urban-centred groups and organizations. In some contexts, notably Ecuador, the indigenous movement has led, and continues to lead, the broader popular struggle against government policy and its neoliberal agenda. In most cases, this strategy has been centred on strategic and tactical alliances with other CSOs. In the case of Bolivia, however, the response of some elements of the indigenous movement has been to seek alliance with the state—and participation in the urban-centred political system of the nation-state. In some contexts (Mexico, Colombia), the urban struggle for change has included dialogue and negotiations with the interlocutors of government and the establishment, as well as multisector concerted actions. In other cases (El Salvador, Nicaragua), organizations in the popular movement have resorted to participation in the apparatus of electoral politics.

IV. The Role of Government and the Middle Strata

The point has been made that the state-initiated reforms and a strategy of partnership, appease-ment and accommodation were the primary source of the new political context that confronted civil society in the 1990s. However, depending on the context and the available conditions, gov-ernments in the region pursued diverse strategies. These strategies included the following:

1. setting up *parallel organizations* to class-based antisystemic organizations, such as peasant organizations and unions, that have non-confrontational politics;[29]

2. *repressing* class-based organizations with an antisystemic agenda under certain circumstances and where possible or necessary;[30]

3. *dialoguing and negotiating* with representatives of class-based organizations with the capacity to mobilize forces of opposition and resistance (Fuerzas Armadas Revolu-cionarios de Colombia [FARC] in Colombia, MST in Brazil, EZLN in Mexico);

4. *accommodating* the leadership to policies of economic, social and political reform, often with the mediation of NGOs;[31]

5. *pacifying* belligerent organizations on the basis of a reform agenda, a partnership approach and a populist politics of appeasement and clientelism;

6. *strengthening* CSOs with a reformist orientation and a democratic agenda, and weakening organizations with an antisystemic agenda and a confrontationalist direct-action approach in their politics;[32] and

7. *incorporating* groups with an antisystemic agenda into policy-making forums and institutions when all else fails.

The aim and end result of political developments related to this complex of alternative strategies was what could be, and has been, termed "democracy without social movements" (Bultman et al. 1995). It could be added that this political development was predicated on the demobilization of the existing antisystemic social movements and, concomitantly, the strengthening of civil society — the proliferation of groups committed to a politics of accommodation and reform rather than con-frontation oriented toward the goal of social and political democracy, radical change and social transformation.

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[29] The creation of a parallel organization typically involves staged elections for a new board of directors. Government agencies or the courts then award the organization's legal identity (along with offices, bank accounts and other resources) to a favoured faction, whether or not it represents the membership. On this process, see Arita (1994); Lombrana (1989); Menjivar et al. (1985); Posas (1985); Thorpe et al. (1995).

[30] Governments in the region have frequently resorted to repression as a mean of demobilizing organizations with an antisystemic agenda. At times, it has involved the full weight of the state's repressive apparatus as in the dirty war orchestrated by a coalition of armed forces and a series of authoritarian-bureaucratic or military regimes in the Southern Cone of Latin America against the labour movement in the 1970s. In other conjunctures, as in Ecuador in the mid-1980s, the instruments of state terror and repression were wielded against the working class by formally democratic regimes. In this conjuncture—and other such conjunctures in the 1980s in Bolivia, Venezuela and elsewhere involving conditions of brutal repression—radical opposition to the government's neoliberal agenda, led at the time by the labour movement, was disarticulated and demobilized, weakening and nearly destroying working-class political organizations in the process (*Boletín ICCI "RIMAY"* 1999). As it happens, in the case of Ecuador, the repression and destruction of the labour movement's capacity to challenge the government's agenda coincided with the emergence and formation of CONAIE which, in the 1990s, would take over leadership of the popular struggle.

[31] In the context of conditions found throughout the region in the 1990s, a marked development and trend was toward the dis-articulation of class-based organizations and a demobilization of the forces that they had accumulated and mobilized. The dynamics of this political demobilization are not well studied or understood, and there are doubtless many factors involved. However, it is also doubtless the case that a combination of strategies pursued and implemented by governments in the region, and with the support of both outside or international organizations and NGOs within, was a critical factor in the widespread demobilization of many social movements in the 1990s. This factor is clearly evident in the case of the Alianza Democrática Campesina (ADC), which in the post–civil war context of El Salvador emerged as the most representative and dynamic social movement of peasants organized around the issues of land redistribution and indebtedness. As a coalition of diverse peasant organizations, the ADC initially pushed its land reform agenda through a politics of direct action (land invasions, marches and so forth) but was soon constrained to operate within the framework of reforms established through the peace accords. Under these conditions, and with the active support of the Frente Fara-bundo Marti de Liberción Nacional (FMLN), transformed from a belligerent armed force into a left-wing political party, the struggle for cancellation of the land and bank debts was more or less resolved in political-legal terms (through legislation) in the interest of the beneficiaries of the first phase of the government's land reform programme. However, all direct and even indirect action on the land issue was definitively stalled by a politics of economic development projects funded by the World Bank and other donor agencies and executed through NGOs. On some dynamics of this process, see Veltmeyer (1999).

[32] This strategy was pursued and implemented by virtually all multilateral and bilateral development agencies in the 1990s.

The primary social basis of these political developments in the urban centres was what Jorge Dominguez (1994:1–17) and others have termed "middle groups" or "middle strata". In the early decades of the twentieth century, these groups were oriented toward electoral politics and a strategy of incorporation into the bureaucratic apparatus of the state. This was the case, for example, in Uruguay, Argentina and Chile—and then, in the 1940s, in Brazil and Mexico. The middle class (or middle strata) also provided the social basis for the NSMs formed in the late 1970s and 1980s in the urban centres of Argentina, Brazil and Chile (Calderón 1995; Slater 1994). It might be added that they also formed the social basis of developments associated with a politics of social, economic and political reform in the 1990s and a burgeoning of CSOs. While groups in the middle strata had earlier turned to and made use of the mechanism of electoral politics and political parties in their contestation of political power with the elite at the national level, in the 1980s and 1990s, they increasingly turned to local politics and the mechanism of local government and civil organizations. In this new context, under conditions of a political opening toward social and political democracy, groups and organizations in the middle strata of urban society pursued their quest for development that is community based, participatory in form, socially inclusive and sustainable.[33]

V. Organized Labour: Development and Politics

Structural and political changes in the 1980s and the 1990s have had a profound impact on the working class in terms of its internal structure, relation to capital, organizational capacity and capacity to mobilize the forces of opposition and resistance to neoliberal policies. As concerns organization and politics, these changes are associated with a major split within the organized labour movement, namely, the development of a corporatist sector, closely tied to or controlled by government via social pacts and tripartite politics, and diverse efforts to maintain or create an independent union movement.

In the corporate sector of the labour movement, the union leadership and bureaucracy have been generally tied to a politics of accommodation rather than confrontation with capital under conditions of a tripartite social pact. Under these conditions, relations between capital and labour were mediated or controlled by the government, leading to a significant reduction in the level of collective and strike action and in the level and conditions of political conflict. This corporatist structure and its associated politics were given their most definitive or paradigmatic form in Mexico, but this structure and its associated politics were widely instituted, becoming a major factor in the labour movement of most countries in the region.

In the context of a transition toward democracy in the 1980s, however, a push toward independence emerged within the labour movement of many countries. In the typical case of Brazil, this push resulted in the formation of an independent union movement (Nuevo Sindicalismo), as well as the instrumentation of a new political party, the PT, formed in the context of a process of productive transformation and structural adjustment, a region-wide programme of neoliberal policy reforms, and promulgation of a new constitution that provided the institutional framework for a "new republic" (Keck 1989, 1992).

In this context, the labour movement in Brazil made and consolidated significant gains in its relationship with capital, pushing against the tide that was sweeping the labour movement in the rest of the region (Rojas 1995; Keck 1989, 1992). In most of the region, a neoliberal programme of stabilization and structural adjustment measures had created conditions that led to a weakening of the labour movement, a destruction of its organizational capacity and a series of major defeats in the struggle against capital. In Brazil, however, the government resisted and was slow to adopt this neoliberal programme, thereby creating opportunities for labour to strike a better deal with capital and to improve its negotiating position.[34]

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[33] Atal and Yen 1995; Bessis 1995; Reilly 1989.

[34] On these dynamics, see Petras and Veltmeyer (2001a).

The push toward independence within the labour movement took a different form in each country in the region, notwithstanding a shared context of economic and political reforms that generally strengthened the power of capital vis-à-vis labour. In the case of Brazil, strike actions of metal workers in San Bernardo in 1978, 1979 and 1980 spread across the country, creating conditions for a new syndicalism based on the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) and the PT, and precedence of the former over the latter in the event of any conflict of interest. In Chile, discontent among the rank and file (and in some unions within the leadership) with the reformist orientation of the leadership of the labour movement in CUT led, in 1991, to the emergence of the Movimiento de Autonomía Sindical (MAS), an organization concerned with the subordination of labour to both capital and the government, and seeking greater independence as a social movement (Rojas 1995). However, this independence movement did not take hold and MAS eventually succumbed to the superior and growing power of capital vis-à-vis the state. MAS failed to establish itself as the nucleus of a new independent movement, and as with so many other labour organizations in Chile and the rest of the region, it ended up seriously divided over issues of direction and policy. In Mexico, the labour movement, in the form of the government-controlled Confederación de Trabajadores de Mexico (CTM), has been thoroughly accommodated to the tripartite politics of the party-state apparatus, providing few opportunities for the launch and formation of an independent labour movement. A push for independence did emerge in some sectors of the labour movement in the heyday of working-class action, that is, in the early 1980s. However, despite a recent upsurge in a movement for democracy and independence, the labour movement has been maintained in a state of political quiescence even in the face of a direct assault on conditions of work, wages, living standards and its own organizational capacity. Under conditions of a severe economic crisis and a process of productive transformation, the labour movement everywhere has been disarticulated and disarmed, leading to the dissipation of the forces mobilized in the 1980s. To date, despite concerns and signs of militancy among the rank and file in some sectors, in some countries, the continuing push for internal democracy and independence from the state has not resulted in any significant recovery of organizational or mobilizing capacity.[35]

Significantly, the political left, in the form of the PRD, has been and remains disconnected from the ongoing struggle for independence and internal democracy within Mexico's labour movement.[36] And the same is found in other countries; the labour movement, it would appear, increasingly relies for support on a network of social organizations or NGOs that for the most part operate on the centre-left of the political spectrum.

By the mid-1990s, the labour movement everywhere was on the defensive, having lost much of its earlier organizational and mobilizing capacity, as well as its power to negotiate collective agreements with capital. The working-class base of the movement has been decimated by the forces of change that had undermined its strategic position within the organization of production, namely, the productive transformation and technological conversion of industry and the associated disappearance of jobs in the formal sector, and the growth of a large informal sector of workers located in the streets and the home rather than the factory and the office, and thus difficult to organize. In country after country, the organized working class experienced a drastic reduction in numerical terms and capacity for strike and other forms of militant collective action. In Chile, for example, where the process of productive transformation and structural adjustment was most advanced, the union movement in 1992 barely engaged 10 per cent of the working class, down from 389,000 in 1980 and 940,000 in 1973 (Rojas 1995:97–110). Overall, the movement was drastically reduced in terms of its social base and had become highly fragmented and incapable of exercising its former leadership role in the popular struggle. This leadership role, in fact, in many cases was passed onto, or has been assumed by, rural-based organizations and movements of peasant farmers, landless or near-landless workers

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[35] But in the case of Mexico, see Roman and Velasco Arregui (1997).

[36] The incapacity of the PRD to politically represent the organized workers in their struggle for independence from the state and internal democracy is evidenced by its proposal for labour reform, which, from the perspective of the independent workers' unions, is not much different from the reform proposal advanced by the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), which is clearly designed to take the state out of its regulatory and mediating role so as to provide employers greater flexibility and power in their relations with labour.

and indigenous communities. This has been the case, for example, in Ecuador where the indigenous movement in 1994 responded to the call by the Frente Unitario de Trabajadores (FUT) for resistance against the government's IMF-mandated austerity programme. By 1999, it had clearly assumed the lead in the coordination of the popular forces of resistance against one of the most radical SAPs implemented by any government on the continent.

In the political conjuncture found in many urban centres and cities across the region in the 1990s—democracy without social movements or with a seriously weakened and divided popular movement—rural-based sociopolitical movements generally have taken the leadership role in the mobilization of resistance and opposition to government policy and the underlying system. This has been the case, for example, in Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador and Mexico, as well as several countries in Central America, where the rural struggle for land, land reform, access to credit and other productive resources, dignity, social justice and autonomy was taken to the cities and combined with the struggle of diverse groups and organizations against the neoliberal agenda adopted by virtually every government in the region. In the context of this struggle were spawned a complex of shifting strategic and tactical alliances among diverse civil associations and organizations—neighbourhood associations, women's groups, unions and union federations, organizations of small producers, peasant farmers and landless or "roofless" shanty town or informal sector workers, and NGOs of the urban poor and diverse associations of the middle strata.

In the traditional conception of left-wing politics, the working class was assigned a vanguard role in the popular struggle. And in the 1990s, despite a general disillusionment with the working class, there were those leftists who remained in the grip of this conception (for example, Roman and Velasco Arregui 1997). However, the inability, failure or refusal of the working class to assume this role was widely acknowledged, even among the political left. In the 1980s, the urban poor in diverse contexts (Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Peru) had assumed a leadership role in the urban-centred struggle for change and improvement in welfare (housing and so forth), thereby moving beyond the traditional limits of political populism—clientelism and electoral manipulation, without, it might be added, bringing about structural change.

As Manuel Castells (1983:329) observes, with regard to these urban social movements in the squatter settlements and poor barrios of Latin American cities, even when they do have "major effects on cities and societies", they "are not agents of structural change, but symptoms of resistance to the social domination". In the 1990s, in diverse contexts (Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, Brazil and countries of Central America) and under different conditions, the labour organizations in the popular movement were clearly subordinated at the level of leadership to peasant-based/peasant-led sociopolitical organizations and the struggle of indigenous communities against government policy and for improved access to land and other productive resources, improved welfare, social justice and political autonomy. In most contexts, however, the popular movement has been divided and fragmented, coming together only in particular conjunctures, and then only with a very limited reformist agenda with regard to any structural change. None of these movements has been in a position to challenge elite control of the state apparatus and the political process.

VI. The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach to Rural Development

The search for an alternative form of development is predicated on the grassroots organizations (GROs) of civil society, with the support of development-oriented NGOs. In the 1990s, this search took the form of what has become known as the SLA.[37]

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[37]   Amalric 1998; Liamzon et al. 1996; Helmore and Singh 2001.

The SLA is characterized by the following beliefs.

1. The appropriate or most effective agents for change and development—for addressing issues of rural poverty and securing sustainable livelihoods—are CSOs or GROs, capacitated and empowered to undertake collective action in the interest of their members.

2. The problem of poverty is rooted in the lack of power, and thus its solution (reduction and alleviation, if not eradication) requires empowerment that gives the poor the resources and decision-making power needed for them to control their own lives (Helmore and Singh 2001).

3. This empowerment is predicated on better access—including through redistribution—by the poor to society's resources (natural, physical, financial), and the building of other resources (social, political) needed by the poor to take control of their own destinies and to influence governments in this direction.[38]

4. Development-oriented NGOs should act in support of GROs, assisting them in making maximum use of their indigenous knowledge and in understanding and coming to terms with external forces that impinge on their communities (Amalric 1998).

5. This support should take the form of a non-confrontational approach, helping GROs to work within the existing system to make use of the electoral (political) and market (economic) mechanisms of this system.[39]

This institutionality, according to proponents of the SLA, comprises two basic elements: (i) democratization of the state–civil society relation and (ii) market-friendly, socially reformed policies of stabilization and structural adjustment.

As for democratization, it takes the form of (i) decentralization of policy formation and decision making, instituting thereby a participatory form of development and governance on the basis of partnerships formed among municipalities, local communities, governments and CSOs; (ii) the institutional mechanisms of electoral politics; (iii) the strengthening of civil society as the social basis of the development effort and new forms of governance (Reilly 1985);[40] and (iv) the channelling of grievances and demands through forms of peaceful and civil struggle. In the Mexican context, this approach is reflected in the diverse appeals of the EZLN to civil society as well as the declaration from the Lacandon jungle where the Zapatistas had their retreat that "for millions of people elections represent a dignified and respectable space for struggle" and the call to "respect…this form of civil and peaceful struggle" (EZLN communiqué, 19 June 2000).

On the question of the appropriate (or required) framework for a programme of economic policies, proponents of the SLA advocate what in the Latin American context is termed the "new economic model" of neoliberal free market or market-friendly reforms, but this support is con-

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[38] The World Bank has identified five critical resources needed by the poor, consisting of the poor's own bodies, their organizational capacity, information, education and entrepreneurial capacity. Within the SLA framework, five types of resources are identified; three of them (natural, physical, financial) are available but require some redistribution or better means of access by the poor, and two of them (social, political) need to be built by means of expanding the social networks and civil organizations of the poor—institutions in which they have a voice, are effective participants and are well represented. From the point of view of the World Bank, a major institutional supporter of the SLA, the key to development (poverty reduction) is to invest in the resources needed by the poor, to allow them to become active participants in the process of their own development.

[39] A background paper prepared under the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) programme on Civil Society and Social Movements (UNRISD 2000a) outlines these elements of the SLA, using them as principles to guide research into the issues involved. In regard to basic principles, UNRISD differs in one important respect from the position taken and shared by the World Bank, the UNDP and other operational agencies of the UN system. These agencies have generally moved away from or rejected a redistributive approach to a process of building and improving access of the poor to existing assets. Unlike these agencies, UNRISD is much more concerned with the negative social impacts of neoliberal policies and the unsustainability of the dominant model based on these policies (see, for example, UNRISD 1994, 2000b). On this basis, UNRISD, like ECLAC, advocates a redistributive and reformist approach, one that gets behind the human mask presented by the state-led and market-friendly model of social development instituted in the 1990s under the aegis of the World Bank and the IMF. The problem, however, is with the politics needed to institute redistributive policies. Hence the emphasis on building new assets and mobilizing resources at the grassroots level, including the power to influence governments in the direction of redistributive policies.

[40] At the time of writing, Charles Reilly headed a civil society programme and research unit at the Inter-American Development Bank. The central focus of this programme was on linkages and partnerships between diverse civil associations, including business associations, and local governments. This is in line with, if not directive of, the strategy pursued today by all bilateral and multilateral aid agencies in the development process

ditioned by a call for and the design of measures of an NSP, the institution of social reforms that would provide enabling conditions for a process of (social/human) asset building and improved access to and redistribution of existing (natural, physical, financial) assets or productive resources.[41] In the current context, the objective here is to encourage GROs or social movements to make use of the "market mechanism", that is, land banks that provide credit to smallholders, allowing them to purchase land on the market, enlarge and consolidate their landholding and access new productive technologies.

It is revealing that, in the context of a major campaign by the World Bank to institute this market mechanism in Brazil, Colombia and the Philippines, the help of NGOs has been enlisted to have the GROs drop their opposition to this and other market mechanisms and to increase their willingness to utilize these mechanisms (UNRISD 2000a). The stated objective of the empowerment strategy pursued by these NGOs in support of GROs is the building of new (political) assets and a programme of (natural) asset redistribution—what in earlier discourse used to be termed "land to the tiller" or "land reform"—and greater access to physical and financial assets (credit via land banks). The effective and often unstated objectives of this strategy are the sharing and redistribution of power to help grassroots movements and organizations influence governments in the direction of asset redistribution—that is, land reform—and to encourage these organizations to make use of the market mechanism (land banks and so forth) rather than direct action in securing the conditions of this process. In other words, the aim is to transmute the protracted struggle for land and land reform—what in the words of João Pedro Stedile, MST's leader, involves a "broader class struggle"[42] based on direct collective action—into a process of "asset redistribution". At issue in this transmutation is whether to confront the broader power structure involved in the process of asset redistribution or whether, as proposed by the advocates of the SLA, to capacitate grassroots or class-based organizations such as the MST to influence governments in this direction—to empower the former to participate in the process.[43] The issue, although not stated in these terms, is clear enough—the politics of social reform, or transformation?

The end of the struggle for land reform was announced in Brazil as far back as the late 1970s (Lehmann 1978); and in Chile, El Salvador and elsewhere, voices in this regard are legion and have grown louder in recent years (see, for example, De Walt and Ress with Murphy 1994). The problem is that organizations like the MST in Brazil have not heeded these voices; they continue their campaign and struggle for land and land reform on the basis of direct action—a strategy of land occupations, negotiations (with the government) and (putting land into) production ("occupations, negotiation, production"). As the MST sees it,[44] market mechanisms such as giving the direct producers legal title to their land, capacitating them as individuals to buy and sell land as they might choose, and the institution of land banks cannot and do not work in the interest of landless or near-landless peasant farmers or "rural workers" (as the MST defines its social base). For one thing, market mechanisms such as private land titling, commodification of land and land banks are designed to redistribute only the land held collectively or individually in the peasant sector; there is no question here of appropriating or otherwise redistributing the big or corporate landholdings that account for a grossly disproportionate share of total landholdings. The market mechanism as a means of land reform tends to work against the peasantry, leading to its destruction or transformation in the following terms: a small stratum of rich peasants, converted into a rural capitalist class, able to accumulate capital and invest it in various ways; a larger stratum of middle peasants, converted into a class of independent small and

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[41] In this context, even Michel Camdessus, then executive director of the IMF, argued for an approach that could not be termed "neo-liberal", an approach with three pillars: the invisible hand of the market, the visible hand of the state and "solidarity between the rich and the poor", that is, a non-confrontational approach to the political (state) or economic (market) process of asset distribution.

[42] The MST has made it clear in numerous public communiqués that the struggle of the landless rural workers transcends the struggle for land; it necessarily entails a challenge to and democratization of the power structure that has excluded the rural and urban poor for centuries and that resists change even in the wake of the Plano Nacional de Reforma Agrária (PNRA), established by the José Sarney government to ease political tensions in the countryside by expropriating unproductive landholdings so as to settle on them 1.4 million landless peasants. The problem has always been, and remains, political—control of the state apparatus by the big landholders.

[43] On the dynamics of this empowerment, see, among others, Helmore and Singh (2001).

[44] James Petras's interview with João Pedro Stedile, 14 May 2000.

medium producers for the domestic market; and a larger part, over half of the peasantry in all cases, converted into a rural proletariat, forced, for the most part, to migrate to the city in search of wage labour.[45]

This development—the transformation and destruction of the peasantry—is, in effect, the implication of the policy advice given, for example, by Marc Seligson (1995) to USAID with regard to its operations and investment in El Salvador. As he sees it, in the post-peace accords period "there is little land left to distribute" and no place in a modernized restructured economy for the bulk of peasant farmers, who, like peasants everywhere, would have to leave the countryside in search of wage labour or paid employment. Like the operators of so many micro-enterprises in the informal sector of urban economies, their activities are marginal at best, having no productive capacity.

This view about the peasantry as a social group without a future, a prime casualty of an inevitable and irresistible process of agricultural modernization[46] is also held by certain economists at the World Bank and, it would appear, by proponents of the SLA. In any case, despite the World Bank's commitment to the use of various market mechanisms and their broader institutional and policy framework, to date, wherever they have been implemented, they have failed to benefit the landless or near-landless mass of peasant farmers that constitute the social base of rural poverty (UNRISD 2000a).[47] The MST, in this context, has resisted any and all efforts to utilize market mechanisms such as land banks or to buy into the politics of the new language of "asset building and redistribution". Land reform remains on the agenda as does an orientation toward social transformation and direct action.

The SLA raises but does not settle the critical issue of what constitutes the most effective agent for bringing about a genuine land reform, by all accounts the only, if not the best, solution to the problem of rural poverty. In the current context, there are two basic approaches toward land reform, one pursued by government with the active support of the World Bank—for example, Cooperativismo e Associativismo Rural (PCAR) and the Banco da Terra—the other pursued by the MST. The first is predicated on the institutionality of the existing system and use of various market mechanisms such as land banks. The second is based on a strategy of direct collective action taken to occupy land not in productive use, identified as such by the MST, to settle families of landless workers on this land and enter into a process of negotiations with the government to have the land expropriated under the provisions of the Plano Nacional de Reforma Agraria (PNRA); and then to provide support for a process of "asset building", to use the SLA's politically neutered language, in order to help these families bring land into production on the basis of either individual or collective arrangements.

In this context, both the government of Brazil and the MST are engaged in a major campaign for public support, with a number of intermediary NGOs and international advocacy networks brought into the fray on both sides of the struggle. On the government's side, for example, former president Henrique Fernando Cardoso argued that under the PNRA, more than 8.7 million hectares of land were expropriated, settling in the process 372,866 peasants (INCRA 1999). However, the MST and the government's critics responded that these numbers included a large

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[45] On the dynamics of this proletarianization process, see, among others, Bartra (1976); Sullivan (1995); Veltmeyer (1983). In the case of Brazil, this process, viewed from a modernization perspective in terms of the dynamics of urbanization, involved five million rural migrants, and it has been officially estimated that it will bring into Brazil's cities over the next five years another eight million rural migrants (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001b).

[46] On the literature on this point, see, among others, Petras and Veltmeyer (2001a).

[47] Wherever the market mechanism and its institutional framework, provided by various agricultural modernization laws implemented in the 1990s by diverse governments in the region, were instituted (see Dirven 1999), the result has always been the same: the abandonment or sale to large investors or landlords of the holdings distributed to the peasantry under various agrarian reform programmes. In the typical case of Honduras, where by 1990 up to 66,000 landless workers had received 376,000 hectares of land under the government's agrarian reform programme, the 1990s saw a dramatic erosion of these benefits; in 1992 alone, the first year in which the agricultural modernization law took effect, official data show that some 17 per cent of land reform beneficiaries had abandoned or sold their holdings (Thorpe et al. 1995:113). And, as in Mexico and elsewhere (see UNRISD 2000a), many more subsequently sold their land to large investors. Only in Ecuador, it would seem, was the popular movement of resistance against laws designed to modernize the agricultural sector sufficiently strong as to prevent its implementation. On this, see Palacios (1999).

number of peasants who had been occupying land without legal title and that, in any case, the vast majority of these land settlements occurred as a result of direct collective action by landless workers via the MST.

VII. The Dynamics of Rural Struggle: The Agency of Class-Based Organization

The MST in Brazil, EZLN in Mexico, FARC in Colombia and CONAIE in Ecuador are examples of class-based organizations in the form of sociopolitical movements for change. The class character of these and other such movements that dominate the political landscape in Latin America's countryside is reflected in their social base as well as the ideology used to mobilize collective action, that is, the associated discourse, and the form taken by their struggles or practice. As for the social base of these movements, it is generally composed of a large mass of landless or near-landless workers, families and communities of smallholding peasant farmers, and a huge and growing semiproletariat of day labourers, to use language originally designed by Marxists but surprisingly enough retained by more recent analysts of the dynamics of rural struggles such as Marshall Wolfe (1996).[48]

Apart from a relatively small middle-class and an equally small—or, in some contexts, a somewhat larger—rural proletariat of wage-earning workers, in class terms, the rural societies of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are generally composed of an economically dominant but small class of large landlords and capitalists, around 2 per cent of the population,[49] holding the lion's share of the countries' productive land, and constituting the economic base of the oligarchy and political elite; a large mass or class of peasant farmers, small holders and landless (or near-landless) workers; and an enormous (and growing) semiproletariat of day labourers and other part-time/part-year wage workers who account for well over half of the economically active population in rural society and constitute the social base of the most dynamic sociopolitical movements in the countryside (such as the MST in Brazil).[50]

Unlike the organizations and NSMs in the urban centres, those formed and operating in the rural sector of civil society tend to be class based or rooted in the organization of indigenous peoples and communities. Thus, in each country, there can be found various associations of large- and medium-sized producers, including those that take a capitalist or corporate form and those that are organized by rich peasants. In a number of contexts, Mexico, for example, associations and confederations of independent or medium-sized peasant producers, often, as in the case of El Barzón in Mexico, represent farmers who are heavily indebted to the banks. As such, they tend to be well organized, and like El Barzón, with a high degree of participation in reformist sociopolitical movements, supportive of organizations such as the EZLN with an anti-systemic agenda. In this connection, collective action is frequently concerted with the actions of other organizations in protest against government policies.

The great majority of the rural poor, however, are landless or near-landless workers; peasant producers who combine subsistence and petty commodity production with a multitude of other economic activities, waged and unwaged. In practice, so-called and often self-defined peasants tend to rotate between different locations in the social division of rural labour constituted by agricultural and non-agricultural branches of production and associated rural and urban exis-

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[48]   Wolfe (1996) seems to have resisted the growing tide of antistructuralist/postmodernist discourse in his use of class categories "proletariat, semiproletariat and lumpen proletariat" in defining the dominant social relations of rural society.

[49]   In the typical case of Brazil, the author has estimated that the dominant or upper class amounts to fewer than three million, that is, about 2 per cent of the population; the middle class, by the same estimate, around 30 million, while the working classes and population number over 120 million (Veltmeyer 1997a). In terms of the statistical categories used by economists, the wealthiest 20 per cent of the population accounts for 64.2 per cent of national income and a larger share of wealth, including land, other natural resources and financial assets; the poorest 20 per cent, by the same analysis, receives barely 2.5 per cent of national income. These disparities in the distribution of income and wealth are found across the region, although Brazil represents the extreme. On the social dimensions of this problem, see, among others, IDB (1998).

[50]   On the social and political dynamics of these movements, see Petras (1997); Veltmeyer and Petras (2000).

tences (Bernstein 2001:31). The rich peasants frequently pursue diversified accumulation strategies, with investment portfolios in landholding, crop trading, rural transport, tractor renting, village shops and bars. The middle peasantry also typically diversifies its sources of household income, including wage labour. The mass of poor peasants, however, are the most likely to engage in wage labour and to do so under conditions of extreme constraint and bare survival in the more marginal branches of non-agricultural and agricultural production on the large landholdings, as well as in the burgeoning urban informal sector. In this connection, it has been argued (Veltmeyer 1983) that the poor peasantry has long served as an industrial reserve army, a source of cheap surplus labour that capitalist enterprises in both rural and urban sectors can draw on.

VIII. The Dynamics of Cross-Sectoral Political Alliances and Urban-Rural Links

According to the proponents of a Gramscian-type analysis,[51] the EZLN and, to a lesser extent, the MST and CONAIE, have become vital conduits for the development of an effective counter-hegemonic movement vis-à-vis the dominant neoliberal model of capitalist development (Morton 2001). The outcome has been the articulation not so much of the identity politics associated with NSMs as what could be termed the class politics of societal or social transformation—bringing together broad sectors of the popular movement (and civil society) to devise effective forms of collective action to contest the political, economic and cultural hegemony of the dominant class and political elite. The MST leadership, like that of so many other peasant-based (and peasant-led) sociopolitical movements, has had this project and action in mind, virtually from the beginnings of the movement in the community-based and pastoral actions of the Catholic Church.[52] However, the associated politics has undergone a number of shifts over the years. For example, despite the strategic alliances formed over the years with other popular organizations such as the PT, the MST has always insisted on autonomy as a social movement, joining the broader struggle for systemic change and providing or seeking solidarity with other organizations in their struggle in particular conjunctures, but retaining the integrity of their organization and struggle. Since 1995, however, the MST has turned in a somewhat different direction, pursuing, as a matter of fundamental strategy, a politics of broad intersectoral alliances with non-agricultural and other civil and political organizations in the popular struggle, seeking to concert (but not coordinate) the forces of resistance to government policy, while simultaneously seeking to advance the struggle for land and land reform, bringing this struggle to the cities—to the streets, government offices and the media. In the process of this struggle, the MST has concerted its actions with a myriad of CSOs and movements, including the CUT, neighbourhood and civic associations, women's groups, developmental and human rights NGOs, a global advocacy network, and the media—all of the popular organizations that make up civil society broadly defined (but not so broad as to include the business associations and other organizational forms and political expressions of the private sector).

Is the political evolution of the MST in connection with this new politics atypical, or is it shared with that of other organizations in the popular struggle? If typical, what are the social and political dynamics of the struggles and actions involved? Are these dynamics rooted in conditions that are conjunctural and episodic, or are these conditions becoming more widespread and generalized, likely to provoke similar or other forms of organization and further action along the same lines? If so, what manner of forces have been accumulated in the process, and in what

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[51] In the view articulated and espoused by many critical analysts of the dynamics of the popular movement and a growing global civil society, Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos and other organic intellectuals engaged in the global struggle against capitalism in its neoliberal form are much closer to Gramsci than to Marx; that is, this struggle is viewed in terms of the need to build a counter-hegemonic force. Thus Marta Durán de Huerta (1999), in her interviews with Marcos, both quotes Marcos and interprets Zapatista discourse in these terms.

[52] In the well-documented case of Zapatismo in Chiapas, Mexico, the Church, in the person of Bishop Samuel Ruiz, was a critical factor and played a pivotal role in the mobilization and original organization of the popular forces of resistance not only in terms of a critical insurrectionist ideology (liberation theology) but also as the end result of the invitations extended to diverse Marxist and Maoist political organizations to engage in the struggle. On this, see MacEoin (1996); Morton (2001:13–16); Womack (1999).

direction, if any, are the forces of resistance and opposition being mobilized (in the direction of change and development)?

Given the present state of academic study and literature, namely, the relative lack of documentation and comparative analysis of diverse urban and rural social movements,[53] the answers to these questions can be tentative at best. At the moment, the answers have to be given in terms of the specific contexts that have given rise to them. In these contexts, the most dynamic sociopolitical movements, those that have the capacity to address the central concerns of their members and advance the popular struggle, appear to be the peasant-based (and peasant-led) sociopolitical movements, such as the MST, EZLN, FARC and CONAIE. However, the dynamics of these sociopolitical movements pose more problems and raise more questions than solutions or answers.

First, with regard to CONAIE,[54] in the context of conditions found in Ecuador—and similar conditions are found in Bolivia, Peru and Mexico, to name but a few countries—the critical and, at times, dominant issue in the orchestration (and, at times, coordination) of collective action within the popular movement is that of national or ethnic identity and its associated rights.[55] In terms of this issue, which also relates to social movements in Mexico as well as several countries in Central America (Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua) and the Andes (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru), the central struggle revolves around issues not of land or land reform but of ethnic identity, democracy and autonomy, namely, liberation from relations of oppression, respect for indigenous cultures and forms of organization—and, in some contexts, the struggle for a multiethnic or plurinational state, and in others, for social transformation—a fundamental change in the structure of the national economy and the nation-state.[56] In connection to this struggle, leaders of the indigenous organizations and movements frequently register complaints against other organizations on the social or political left—their potential allies in the popular struggle for systemic change—that they persist in viewing indigenous peoples as peasants only, seeking to convert them into the same and then to convert them as peasants into a proletariat. By some accounts,[57] this has been a primary obstacle in the formation or endurance of any strategic alliances among indigenous organizations and the civil and political organizations on the left. It is also a likely critical factor in the recent trend within the indigenous movement to ally with a broad network and coalitions of international advocacy organizations and other CSOs (Keck and Sikkink 1998). These organizations help create conditions of broad public support and thus political pressures on the government relative to campaigns launched in the struggle.

On the other hand, FARC exemplifies conditions of struggle that were widespread in the 1970s, in a very different regional context, but that for one reason or another, primarily as a result of political reaction and repression by the state, have disappeared or radically changed in the other countries in the region. In the 1970s, in Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil and Chile, and other countries in the throes of a counter-revolution and dirty war prosecuted by the armed forces of the state, the popular struggle was largely located in the urban centres. It was in the more rural societies of Central America and the Andes, particularly those with a significant indigenous

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[53] On this point, see Munck (1997).

[54] CONAIE was formed in 1986 as a coordinating network of indigenous organizations such as Confederación de los Pueblos de la Nacionalidad Quichua (ECUARUNARI) and Confederación de los Pueblos y Nacionalidades de la Amazonía (CONFENAIE).

[55] On this point, see the various monthly issues of the *Boletín ICCI "RIMAY"* and *Revista Koeyu Latinoamericano*, a news and analysis outlet for the ICCI.

[56] Each of the major rural sociopolitical movements in Latin America—MST, CONAIE, EZLN and FARC—has systemic transformation rather than structural reforms as a broad political objective.

[57] This question of social identity (how indigenous peoples see or present themselves) also has a political dimension. Before the current neoliberal era, indigenous groups frequently presented themselves as peasants because many government programmes directed toward the rural areas targeted peasants (not "Indians"). For example, Mexico's "Indian" programmes, notably those designed by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) were designed to assimilate indigenous peoples into the peasantry rather than help them as Indians. But with economic restructuring, land became more important to economic planners as marketable commodity and the peasantry as a mobile labour force. The government in Mexico, as elsewhere, eliminated or cut back its programmes that supported peasants. As resources for rural development and support dried up, indigenous peoples found little reason for continuing to represent themselves as peasants rather than as distinct society in their own right. In any case, it is interesting, if not revealing, that the indigenous movement to recover and reappropriate an ethnic or national identity, and to assert the right to autonomous development, coincided with a shift in government policy vis-à-vis the peasantry and a collapse of support for its development.

population, that the popular struggle was centred in the countryside and took the form of a revolutionary armed struggle and a guerrilla organization, much like that which erupted in Chiapas, Mexico, in January 1994. In the 1970s, rural fronts of such organizations and revolutionary movements were formed, but with very few exceptions (Colombia, for one) were either destroyed or did not survive the changing conditions. In the 1980s, however, under these changed conditions and thus in a very different context, peasant-based and indigenous organizations and sociopolitical movements were reconstructed and, in some cases, resurrected. In Central America, they engaged in a class and civil war—a confrontation of belligerent social and political forces that was not settled until well into the 1990s, at an unbelievably enormous human and social cost. However, in Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay and Bolivia, these movements took another direction, generating sporadic outbreaks and another wave of rural activism across the region—a wave that also hit the urban centres in the form of a popular movement directed against the neoliberal agenda of governments in the region. These movements were generally oriented toward action on the critical issues of land and democracy, and were often also constructed to advance the cause of indigenous rights, a cause that led to the growth and proliferation of NGOs with a human rights agenda. In Mexico, for example, by 1990 at least 13 NGOs with a human rights agenda were active in Chiapas alone.

George Collier (1994) argues that market-driven globalization, that is, neoliberal capitalist development, is the primary factor responsible for the activism of social and political movements in the 1980s. The EZLN is an excellent case in point. Its eruption in 1994, on the very day that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) took effect, was strategically timed to coincide with a development that was regarded as the death knell of the economy on which the households in the Zapatista communities depended for their livelihoods.[58] However, as noted above, there were other conditions that gave rise to the latest wave of rural activism, including, paradoxically, a growing democratization process and increased government repression of the forces mobilized in this process. Under these conditions, the peasant and indigenous organizations in the countryside responded by mounting a resistance movement that has cut across the rural-urban divide, forming an extensive, if shifting, complex of strategic and tactical alliances with other civil and political organizations, mostly urban, involved in the popular struggle. The multitude of intra- and intersectoral linkages formed over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, and the organizations' set-up to mobilize the forces of resistance and coordinate and concert collective action within the movement, are clear manifestations of this trend.

These linkages can be put into three categories, each with its own dynamics: (i) horizontal linkages among networks of NGOs and civic associations and grassroots movements in the urban areas; (ii) intra- and intersectoral linkages among class-based organizations and sociopolitical movements, primarily in a national context; and (iii) regional and international networks of national and subnational urban and rural organizations.

As for the networks of NGOs, they are generally located within the middle strata of the urban areas, and they are formed, primarily, for the purpose of providing support to and solidarity with the struggles and social movements of GROs within the broader civil society. In this connection these linkages relate to a broad range of concerns—from the protection and enhancement of political and human rights, diverse environmental issues of concern to neighbourhood groups, women or minority groups of various sorts, to shared concern with the impact of government policies in the context of the processes of globalization and structural adjustment. With regard to this latter concern, and in solidarity with the struggle of class-based organizations and movements as it relates to shared resistance against government policies or concern with organization-specific issues, urban-centred CSOs also participate in the complex of intra- and intersectoral alliances that characterize the organization and politics of class-based organizations. In this connection, all of the major sociopolitical movements (such as the MST), for the purpose of soliciting

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[58]   A similar rebellion against the government's neoliberal programme of structural adjustment measures was launched by Ecuador's indigenous organizations in 1994, contemporaneous with the Zapatista rebellion.

support for their campaigns to influence public opinion and pressure governments, have tended to form linkages with international advocacy groups as well as all manner of CSOs and NGOs.

Notwithstanding the supportive role of NGOs vis-à-vis organizations involved in the popular struggle, most of them have positioned themselves as intermediaries, mediating between grassroots or community-based organizations, on the one hand, and governments and international development or donor organizations, on the other hand.[59] In this connection, development-oriented NGOs generally have entered into partnerships with international organizations, both bilateral and multilateral, and local governments or municipalities that have been assigned, or have assumed, the primary responsibility for advancing the development process under the institutionality of the "new economic model" (neoliberalism). In this process, as executing agents of projects that fall within the development programmes of international donor organizations and central governments, NGOs have tended to play an ambiguous role that has not been exempt from criticisms by both GROs and certain academics. The thrust of these criticisms is that in many cases, the NGOs have wittingly or unwittingly served to advance the interests of external agents —as agents of the forces of global domination or, as some (James Petras, for example) would have it, imperialism—at the expense of communities and GROs.[60]

In effect, it is argued that in conforming to programmatic principles established by the international development agencies and central governments as a funding condition, NGOs have contributed to the disarticulation and disempowerment of many GROs in terms of their capacity to confront the power structure and the conditions of elite control of the decision-making process with regard to the distribution of society's productive resources.[61] In exchange for giving up their confrontationalist/antisystemic approach and their search for radical or extensive change in the structure of decision making vis-à-vis macroeconomic policy and other external conditions that impinge on them, GROs have been empowered to participate in decisions that are strictly local in their scope and effects.[62]

To be more precise, in the context of the partnership strategy pursued by international development agencies and central governments, GROs have been empowered to participate in an identification of their basic needs and decisions as to how, where and on what to spend the poverty alleviation funds provided under the NSP. From the perspective of a number of GROs, particularly those concerned with or oriented toward more fundamental change, this has been a Faustian bargain. Intersectoral alliances and transnational networks are generally formed by federations of peasant producer organizations, producer cooperatives, indigenous organizations and labour unions. In the 1980s, a number of such alliances were formed by organizations that were otherwise concerned with retaining their autonomy vis-à-vis political parties and their distance vis-à-vis the NGOs that were springing up all over the region.[63]

In the 1990s, however, linkages and strategic alliances between and among these organizations, along sectoral lines, were broadly extended across the region in the form of various regional and transnational associations of diverse national organizations (Edelman 1998). In Latin Amer-

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[59]   Carroll 1992; Macdonald 1997; Swift 1999.

[60]   This view is articulated in very clear terms by Ricardo Ulcuango (1999). In the view of this indigenous intellectual, organically linked to the indigenous movement and CONAIE, NGOs wittingly or not have been called to arms and used as an economic-political weapon by the organizations of global capital (World Bank, IMF, Inter-American Development Bank, United States government) for what in this antisystemic discourse appears as a struggle for global domination.

[61]   On this argument, see Marcos (1994, 1996) with regard to Peru, and Veltmeyer (1997c) with regard to Bolivia. The regional and global trend toward decentralization and the agency of local governments in the development process have been viewed in a similar light—as a means of disarticulating traditional forms of social and political organization of the indigenous communities, an opportunity for undermining their traditional authority and consolidating the economic and political power of the elite, namely, its capacity for manipulating the process of local politics with its discourse on "modernity" (see *Boletín ICCI "RIMAY"* 2000a, 2000b). In all of the countries with a substantial indigenous population—Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and Guatemala—one of the more critical concerns with neoliberal policies relates to their negative impact on the relative autonomy of indigenous forms of community-based social, economic and political organization. In the case of Ecuador, see Bautista (1999).

[62]   On this issue, see Veltmeyer (1997c). In the case of Peru, see, for example, Marcos (1994).

[63]   In the polarized political climate of the mid-1980s, Central American revolutionary movements and activists alike tended to view allies in the region and beyond as crucial for political success and even physical survival. On these early contacts see Edelman (1998).

ica, the Asociación Centroamericana de Organizaciones Campesinas para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo (ASOCODE), formed in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in 1991, is an example of this trend. Other examples include the Iniciativa Civil para la Integración Centroamericana (ICIC), a lobbying group formed by a network of cooperatives, NGOs, labour organizations, community groups and diverse organizations of small enterprise operators and agricultural producers; and Via Campesina, formed in 1993 as a transnational network of 55 peasant organizations from 36 countries in the Americas, Asia and Africa.

Although there are not many studies on the workings and outcomes of these regional associations and transnational networks, there is little question about their critical role in raising awareness of common problems, the establishment of shared principles and, in some contexts, the coordination of political action and, in others, the formation of a common front or solidarity actions to improve the capacity to influence government policies. However, the formation of alliances with non-agricultural sector groups, a rejection of political party ties and the building of transnational networks coincided with or has led to a more pluralist and less confrontational approach to politics—a turning away from the strategy of peasant wars and the tactic of armed struggle.[64]

As for intersectoral linkages, they have been formed, primarily, between peasant and indigenous organizations on the one hand, and labour unions, centrals or federations, on the other. In some cases, political parties have mediated these linkages, but for the most part they entail organizational links or strategic alliances around critical issues that affect both types of organization. In some contexts (for example, the Central Obrera Boliviana/COB), the interests and actions are concerted and pursued within a common organization formed for the purpose of broadening the social base for a common struggle against government policies or, more broadly, against the system and process of capitalist development that lie behind these policies. More generally, however, the diverse interests of sectorally driven or class-defined social groups are brought together not organizationally but in the form of a strategic alliance between diverse federations of peasants, indigenous peoples and organized workers.

This has been the case, for example, in the struggles waged by the MST in one context, the Zapatistas in another, CONAIE in yet another,[65] and diverse peasant organizations in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua (Edelman 2000). In this connection, the MST is an organization of landless or near-landless workers while CONAIE and EZLN are organizations of indigenous communities, the economies of which are primarily based on peasant or subsistence forms of agricultural production, as is generally the case in Central America. FARC, in a very different context and under conditions that are to some extent shared but yet unique or specific to Colombia, also has its social basis in the peasantry, broadly defined and located across the country. In each and every case, the noted dynamism of the social movements, in terms of the mobilized forces of popular resistance, can be attributed, to an appreciable extent, to the system of class and intersectoral alliances involved. This is why the political landscape of the Central and South American countryside in the 1990s was littered with so many cross-sectoral organizations.[66] By the same token, the relative failure of these organizations of peasant farmers, indigenous peoples and rural workers to create a sustained popular movement against neoliberalism and to advance an alternative project can be similarly explained (Chalmers et al. 1997:543).

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[64] With regard to these shifting dynamics of organized struggle in the case of ASOCODE in Costa Rica and other countries of Central America, see Edelman (1998, 2000). In the case of rural struggles in Chiapas and elsewhere in Mexico, the diverse studies conducted by Neil Harvey (1994, 1995, 1996, 1998) detail the organizational and political dynamics involved. In the case of CONAIE, *Boletín ICCI "RIMAY"* provides a well-documented strategic analysis of the changing dynamics of struggle waged by the indigenous movement in Ecuador and in the region.

[65] See the series of attempts, in diverse conjunctures, to form a strategic alliance with the Frente Unitario de Trabajadores (FUT) and the Coordinadora de Movimientos Sociales (CMS).

[66] See, for example, the struggles of the indigenous movement in Ecuador against the government's various attempts, from 1994 to date, to implement a neoliberal programme of structural adjustment. On the basis of its organizational and mobilizing capacity, and its capacity to concert an alliance of oppositional forces and popular resistance, this movement has been surprisingly successful in preventing the government from implementing its agenda. As noted by Palacios (1999:1–2), "as of the promulgation in 1994 of the modernization law to the crisis of March 1999 the [project to bring about the] neoliberal transformation of [Ecuadorian] society has failed in all respects". What has been achieved is an extension of a highly speculative structure of economic activity that continues to generate both economic and political crisis.

To summarize, it is possible to identify across Latin America a clear and growing trend toward the formation of linkages among diverse organizations involved in popular struggle. The most important of these linkages have been inter- or intrasectoral, sometimes bringing together both peasant farmers and workers—both urban and rural—within one common organization (for example, COB), but more often bringing them together in strategic or tactical alliances. Although to date there does not exist any systematic study of these alliances country by country or for the region as a whole, the importance of their role in the popular struggle cannot be overemphasized. The meso and macro dynamics of these alliances are absolutely critical to understanding the nature and scope of political responses to the conditions of neoliberal capitalist development in the region, and to gauging accurately the magnitude of the forces unleashed in the process of popular struggle against these conditions. For one thing, cross-sectoral links and alliances among organizations involved in the popular movement provide the necessary conditions for coordinating and directing the accumulated and mobilized forces for change—for moving beyond resistance and opposition to constructive change and development. The agent for this cannot be found in the state and certainly not the market, whether regulated or free, or in business associations, but within a burgeoning civil society.[67] To this extent, the shifting focus of most developmental agencies toward civil society, and a shared concern to strengthen it is not, as suggested earlier, misplaced. It relates to conditions that are real, the identification of potential agency for change, and an assessment of the social forces that can be mobilized in one direction or another—resistance and opposition, or development in some form.

However, short of a systematic region-wide comparative study of both the structural conditions that underlie and generate the forces for change and their political dynamics, it is difficult, if not impossible, to gauge the balance of forces for or against change—change, for example, in the grossly unequal distribution of society's productive resources such as land and the conditions of social exclusion and poverty associated with the structure of this distribution. In fact, without such an analysis, it is not possible to fully understand the issues involved or to prescribe the most appropriate or effective action or policy. This remains a major challenge facing scholars and activists, intellectuals and practitioners, in the field of development.

Conclusion

We have identified two basic modalities of the process of change and development. There are, in effect, two fundamental intellectual and political projects at play—"another development" and "social transformation"—both at odds with the economic model of neoliberal capitalist development and its associated project of globalization. In the mainstream of development thought and practice, there is no question about pursuing the path of social transformation. However, it is possible to identify a number of permutations in the search for an alternative form of development, including efforts to secure sustainable livelihoods of people in the rural sector. Despite (or perhaps because of) its reformist orientation as well as its commitment to allay the negative effects of neoliberal policies and the associated project of globalization and structural adjustment, the SLA arguably has the greatest potential and prospects for bringing about an appreciable improvement in the quality of life of the rural poor.

The reason for this is that the political conditions for a revolutionary path toward development are simply not available and not likely to result from a confrontational political approach. Protest against the system and policies in place is one thing, even where the capacity to mobilize oppositional forces in the popular sector into a united front exists. But to bring about the changes needed to open up a revolutionary path toward development is something altogether different. In Latin

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[67] On this point, note the view expressed by David Rockefeller of the Chase Manhattan Bank, the 174th richest person in the world and one of the architects of the Trilateral Commission, to the effect that "in recent years there's been a trend toward democracy and market economies [which] has lessened the role of government…. But…somebody has to take government's place, and business seems to me the logical entity to do it" (quoted by Herman Daly in his address, in 1999, to the International Society for Ecological Economics, www.feasta.org/article_daly.htm). This view is entirely consistent with what was termed, and what can still be identified as, the Washington consensus.

America's countryside today, the repository of the most dynamic forces of opposition to capitalist development in its neoliberal form and social change are associated with a new wave of peasant-based (and peasant-led) sociopolitical movements that are responsible for a noticeable resurgence of rural activism. But these movements do not have the organizational capacity or access to the resources needed to mobilize other popular forces of resistance and opposition into a counter-hegemonic bloc or, for that matter, to mobilize any productive resources (social capital and so forth) available to the poor at the grassroots level. Depending on one's perspective or politics, this might be desirable or unfortunate. However, it is also inescapable.

On the one hand, it is clear that the sustainability of rural livelihoods requires not only the empowerment of the poor and the agency of civil society, but also a redistributive approach toward the existing structure of productive resources. On the other hand, this approach requires a change in the existing structure of decision making—a sharing of control over, and decision-making power relative to, the allocation of these productive resources.

The problem here, one that has thus far eluded proponents of the SLA, is that such empowerment also requires confrontation of the existing structure of economic and political power.[68] To decentralize decision making and other forms of governance opens up spaces for popular participation in decision making. But it does so only on local matters, and retains a limited scope relative to how (on what projects) to spend the poverty alleviation funds made available from above and outside. However, the lives and livelihoods of the poor are greatly affected by conditions generated by matters of national policy and related decisions made by the class of individuals who own and control the major means of social production, and who, as a result, dominate the national economy. In this political context, the challenge for governments in the region and elsewhere is to recognize and face up to this structural fact. In their failure to do so, they may very well continue to sow the seeds of further protest and direct action, and thus to reap the bitter fruit therefrom.

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[68] A review of policy documents prepared by the operational and policy research agencies of the UN, including ECLAC, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the UNDP, the World Bank and UNRISD, shows that they all accept the institutionality of the existing economic system. The issue is the degree and scope of the social reforms that need to be implemented. In no case, however, is the existing power structure confronted in theory or in practice. This could well be the Achilles heel of social development.

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