



**PEASANT RESPONSE TO STATE GRAIN POLICY
IN REVOLUTIONARY NICARAGUA**

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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates the peasant response to grain policy in Nicaragua during the revolutionary period. The author presents an overview of the stages and effects of the 1979-1986 agrarian reform. He argues that a treatment of the peasantry as homogeneous is inadequate, and proceeds to differentiate the peasantry into categories based on participation of agricultural producers in one or more class processes. This framework and empirical evidence show that these categories were characterized at times by markedly different grain production and marketing strategies, which were affected in distinct ways by the policies of the revolutionary state. The class-based analysis allows for policy implications that other frameworks might not capture; in particular, a view of the sectors within the peasantry in which grain self-sufficiency might be reached.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo evalúa la respuesta campesina a la política estatal de granos básicos en Nicaragua. Se presenta un resumen de las etapas y los resultados de la reforma agraria en el período 1979-1986, pero una visión tan general no es suficiente para abarcar la problemática de los granos. Para diferenciar al campesinado, se crean categorías que se basan en la participación de los productores agrícolas en uno o más de los procesos de clase. Este marco y los resultados de una investigación empírica muestran que las categorías fueron caracterizadas por estrategias de producción y comercialización de granos a veces muy distintas, y que fueron afectadas de manera diferente por las políticas del estado revolucionario. El análisis, basado en el concepto de clase, permite que se llegue a conclusiones para las políticas públicas, conclusiones a que otros marcos teóricos no llegarían. En particular, se desarrolla unas ideas acerca de cuáles serían los sectores dentro del campesinado que más podrían contribuir a la autosuficiencia en los granos.

I. Introduction

The Nicaraguan agrarian reform has been the subject of much discussion. Many observers are familiar with its broad features, affecting land, credit, technical assistance, inputs, prices, marketing, and peasant and productive organization. Writing has obviously tended to focus on the "peasantry." Peasants were historically one of the most exploited groups in Nicaragua. They form an important part of the revolutionary alliance, and they produce two of the main staples in the Nicaraguan diet: corn and beans.¹

The purpose of this paper is to locate the peasantry within the framework of the Nicaraguan revolutionary process. It is argued that the Nicaraguan peasantry (and by association, other peasantries) cannot be reduced to a single homogeneous mass. There are many competing theories of the peasantry. The most useful theory, it is contended here, is one that stratifies the peasantry into "peasant" categories based on their participation in one or more class processes.

Such an argument may appear abstract, but it becomes less so once it is extended. It is theoretical, but has tremendous implications for the success of both short-run grain policy and the long-run socialist class transformation of a revolutionary society. A perfect setting for "testing" such an argument is the experience of the Nicaraguan revolution.

This paper will begin by briefly reviewing some of the principal components of state grain strategy and its general results, and will add a few analytical points concerning this review. Although the general features of the agrarian reform are not familiar to everyone outside Nicaragua, the remarks will necessarily be brief since the purpose is to go beyond a general approach with respect to analysis and policy-making. Thus, the paper will briefly comment on the background in the literature to the author's work on the peasantry, and then develop peasant categories theoretically. Next, the paper will show the heterogeneity of the peasantry within the process of implementing Nicaraguan grain

policy and class transformation. The conclusions maintain that in order to meet the goal of food security,² the Nicaraguan state cannot afford to ignore the facts that peasants are class-differentiated, and that class transformation has an impact on peasant grain production and marketing. Likewise the Nicaraguan state cannot ignore the impact of peasant grain policy on its plans for peasant transformation.

II. State Grain Policy Toward Peasant Producers, 1979-1986

Nicaraguan state intervention in peasant grain production and marketing has passed through several stages in the revolutionary period.³ The generally accepted division of these stages (with slight variations among authors) is as follows:

Stage 1. In the first six months of the revolutionary period (the last half of 1979), the state had its hands full dealing with the farms confiscated from Somoza and his allies (representing approximately twenty percent of all land under cultivation). The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) favored state farms as more efficient than other forms of production, such as "peasant" production.⁴ The surplus from the farms could more easily be mobilized for social goals. The farms were seen as more "progressive" organizationally, that is, as a more advanced form of production in the context of a revolutionary and (some day) socialist society. In the process, peasant production of corn and beans received little attention though some peasants were permitted to produce corn and beans for a season on the confiscated farms.

Stage 2. From the beginning of 1980 to mid-1981, the FSLN paid increasing attention to peasant grain activity. This was primarily due to the pressure that the peasantry itself put on the FSLN, first through the Association of Rural Workers (ATC), and next through the National Union of Farmers and Cattle Ranchers (UNAG). A secondary reason was the FSLN's realization that peasants produced basic foods, and

that Nicaragua was incurring grain deficits and facing a foreign exchange constraint. The country was not in a position to import grains. While the FSLN considered peasant grain production to be inefficient, such production could alleviate one economic problem, at least until state farms came into their own. The state directed huge amounts of credit, chemical inputs, technical and marketing services, price guarantees, and organizational efforts toward peasant grain producers. The results were positive in peasant bean production and imports of beans were all but eliminated, although corn production remained stagnant.

Stage 3. Mid-1981 represented the culmination of a number of victories that significantly favored peasant producers of grains and other crops. The FSLN made a lasting commitment to "peasant" production by enacting into law and beginning to carry out land redistribution. The Law of Cooperatives recognized production cooperatives as legitimate forms of organization, broadening the FSLN's vision of rural transformation.⁵ The creation of the Nicaraguan Food Program (PAN) appeared to imply acceptance of peasant grain production and marketing as a key to both increased rural well-being and increased supply of foodstuffs to the urban population. The growing momentum of a peasant-based solution to part of Nicaragua's food needs was cut short by the floods of May 1982 and the droughts that affected the 1982-83 and 1983-84 growing seasons. The impact was more severe on corn than on beans--they are usually planted at different times in the agricultural season, and corn is more sensitive to inadequate rainfall.

Stage 4. Early 1983 saw an "emergency" response to the nature-provoked crisis in corn production and supply, but by 1984 this had evolved into a "strategic" response. Comandante Jaime Wheelock envisioned and began a massive program of irrigated corn production on state lands in the fertile Pacific regions. Peasant production of corn and beans was not seen as viable in the medium run, and was to be eliminated in favor of the transformation of grain-producing peasants in the interior to producers of crops more

suited to those areas. After initial problems state production yields rose, although foreign exchange cost of imported inputs and equipment was also high and increased Nicaraguan dependency on international aid and trade. A significant level of resources continued to move toward peasant producers, but in a stop-gap sense. The resources never solved key problems that had plagued the state's integrated approach to peasant grain production since the beginning: prices in real terms had been allowed to fall, and consumer goods were in shortest supply in rural areas. A popular mobilization to guarantee timely grain marketing was never attempted, nor was a systematic program of improvements in grain production and storage methods instituted.

Stage 5. In 1984, there were considerable tensions among certain sectors of the peasantry. For at least three years the state had given ideological support to the peasantry as a group distinct from the rural proletariat, and had begun land distribution. However, that distribution went slowly, reflecting the care of the state in respecting capitalist farming but also its hesitancy to endorse peasant production. Only during 1984 did the FSLN start to recognize that the peasants were losing patience. In certain areas, some peasants began to collaborate with counter-revolutionary forces. As a new measure, the FSLN instituted massive "legalizations" of already existing peasant landholdings. However, this did not help poor and landless peasants waiting for land. The measures were positive, but represented no new resources or solutions to the economic crisis which had been building in the countryside. Low turnouts at important political events, such as agrarian reform ceremonies, hinted at peasant displeasure (and also at fear of the counter-revolutionaries in isolated areas). The state continued its irrigated production project, but did not eliminate the problems of grain supply to urban consumers.

Stage 6. In 1985, peasant demonstrations in Masaya (and relatively low rural support for the FSLN in Masaya in the 1984 elections) convinced the FSLN to take a new

step forward, redistributing significant quantities of land to individual peasant farmers for the first time. The FSLN was responding not only to the peasantry, but also to the U.S.-sponsored contra war, the U.S. trade embargo, and U.S. efforts to interrupt international and bilateral aid to the Nicaraguan government. The extension of the war throughout the mountainous, grain-producing interior interrupted rural grain production and grain marketing to urban areas. Military and political pressure helped to produce new and promising FSLN initiatives in the countryside. Land redistribution to both cooperatives and individuals continued. For the first time, the state made a real effort to turn the terms of trade toward the countryside, as part of an overall effort to reward productive activity. A key component was the prioritization of rural residents in the distribution of basic consumer goods. The Law of Agrarian Reform was reformulated in January 1986 to allow the state to confiscate small and medium-size farms that were not being cultivated (producing farms, small or large, were still respected under the law), in order to provide new lands to both individual and cooperative farmers.

Nonetheless, these measures could not immediately overcome the impact of contra pressure on peasant grain production and marketing. As of 1986 key components of an integral grain policy were not yet in place. International prices and the economic blockade reduced in many subtle and not so subtle ways the ability of the economy to respond, even if the correct internal policies were applied.

The description of these stages, while sketchy, points out some key elements. One is that, for whatever reason, peasant grain production has never been fully supported by all elements in the FSLN and in the state. This does not mean that the FSLN is anti-peasant. On the contrary, the FSLN has always appeared to want to help the peasantry as citizens and as members of the revolutionary alliance. What it has not been able to do, perhaps, is to view the peasantry with sufficient clarity to recognize the dual role that the peasantry has to play in both the provision of grains and the socialist

transformation of Nicaraguan society. In not providing adequate economic resources to peasant grain producers in the short run, it limited economic and political enthusiasm on the part of the peasantry. For example, one result of low grain prices and poor supply of goods to rural areas was a lack of overall peasant support for the FSLN's preferred program of agrarian transformation (post-1981), i.e. production cooperatives. There were not enough incentives for producing peasants to cooperativize, nor for landless peasants to join to solicit land in cooperative form. Grain policy has affected the success of rural class transformation. Below, it is shown how rural class structure and transformation has affected the response to rural grain policy.

The unity of peasant transformation and grain policy has theoretical and, more importantly, policy implications. In order to examine these implications, the class differentiation of the peasantry must first be specified.

III. Understanding Peasants as Participants in Class Processes

There has been much theoretical debate over the nature of the peasantry during the past century. Lenin (1964: 175-190) used three principal categories for rural direct producers: rural bourgeoisie (well-to-do peasants), middle peasants, and rural proletariat (allotment-holding wage-workers). He sometimes refers to these as "types" of peasants, while at other times refers to them as classes. His writings can be interpreted in both directions in the debate over whether peasants do or do not represent a class (or classes). In this paper, to describe how the rural population contributes its labor to agricultural cultivation, the categories used are those of rich peasant, medium peasant, poor peasant and communal peasant. In the following analysis, Lenin's categories are reconceptualized and extended in terms of "class processes."

It is argued here that peasants do not represent a class in the sense of one homogeneous mass of rural direct producers. This argument is based on important theoretical contributions by several authors. Ennew, Hirst, and Tribe (1977) provide a succinct argument for rejecting the notion of a "peasant mode of production." They suggest that a Marxian analysis of agricultural household activity must first begin by analyzing the "social relations of production." For them, "peasant" is a category that can only be used outside of Marxism.

Deere and de Janvry (1979) do not create a break between but rather link "peasant" and "class." Like the previous authors, they state that "the analysis of peasantries must be based on the specification of the relations of production in which peasants participate." The strength of their work is an explicit focus on mechanisms of surplus extraction, which they define in general, and ground empirically in a study of the Peruvian countryside. However, their argument loses some of its strength in their lumping of different forms of surplus extraction together with different forms of transfer of surplus already extracted. That is, they do not differentiate between these two qualitatively different sets of social relations. This confusion over the forms of surplus extends itself to the notion they have of peasantry and class. After showing that distinct peasants are characterized by distinct relationships to processes of production, extraction, and distribution of surplus labor, they remark that peasants are, under capitalism, a "transitory and differentiating class" (1979: 610).

Resnick and Wolff (1979, 1982a, 1982b) do not analyze the peasantry, but they do provide clarity in understanding the concept of class. In particular, they define class as a process involving the production, extraction, and/or distribution of surplus labor time. A fundamental class process is one in which the production and appropriation of surplus labor time takes place. For example, the capitalist class process is one in which this surplus production and appropriation is realized in value form. A subsumed class process

is one in which a distribution of surplus labor time takes place, such as that in which a merchant receives a share of the surplus in return for providing the non-class process of marketing, necessary for the reproduction of a capitalist (or other) fundamental class process. Both fundamental and subsumed class processes presume classes of extractors of surplus labor, performers of surplus labor, and receivers of distributed labor.

Resnick and Wolff regard class processes as only one kind of process that characterizes society, existing alongside many non-class processes. They give class or surplus extraction no a priori status as primary determinant of all other goings-on in society, and are strongly anti-essentialist in their writing. Class is the focus of analysis because it is important and also of interest to the analyst, and not because of some eternal characteristics that elevate class above other mortal concepts. They view class not as solely economic, but as a process overdetermined by numerous economic, political, ideological, and cultural processes. One criticism of their framework is that it may generate many subsumed classes. A positive aspect, however, is that these classes are accurately specified and differentiated from fundamental classes, by a distinction between distributions of surplus labor and the production and appropriation of surplus labor. Their framework is general, and must be extended to be used in the theoretical and historical analysis of other social processes or relationships. That is, the class process may explain a great deal about other social processes, but the latter cannot be reduced to the former. Instead, the theoretical and historical links between both must be stated explicitly. Only Bluestein (1982) has applied this notion of class to the peasantry.

This notion of class can be applied to rural direct producers in order to form a series of class-based peasant categories. "Peasants" are all categorized as members of peasant categories--poor, medium, rich and communal--according to their participation in one or more class processes. Poor peasants participate in the capitalist class process as workers or performers of surplus labor. They also take part in the petty class process as

combined producers/extractors of their own surplus labor time. They receive (at least) three types of income: their wages as workers, "necessary" and "surplus" labor time in the petty class process. Medium peasants participate only in the petty class process. Rich peasants partake in the petty class process and the capitalist class process, in the latter as extractors of surplus labor time. Communal peasants participate in the communal class process as members of production cooperatives that jointly perform and appropriate communal necessary and surplus labor.

The peasant categories have now been theoretically defined. In practice, however, there can be a number of variations in the categories. In Nicaragua, and elsewhere, peasants can occupy numerous class positions. Rich peasants, at least historically, participated in the two fundamental class positions stated above as well as subsumed class positions such as moneylender, merchant, and landlord. The relative importance of each class process in each peasant's overall activity can vary. Peasants who spend ninety percent of their time in petty production and ten percent as workers are similar qualitatively to but quite different quantitatively from peasants who spend the reverse proportions in these two activities. If a large group of peasants participates in the same fundamental class process(es), the complex set of class and non-class, economic, political and other processes that define each peasant's reproduction can still be quite different. For example, even if participation in petty and capitalist fundamental class processes are qualitatively and quantitatively the same for two groups of peasants, differences in geography, crop mix, access to means of production and state services, cultural forms and ideology may all occur, making the two groups more dissimilar than similar. These are important caveats to keep in mind even as the Nicaraguan peasantry is characterized as belonging to four distinct groups.

The development of the concept of the peasantry on class-theoretical lines can have very practical applications. For those who participate in a revolutionary process of

rural transformation, it provides a framework (albeit so far general) for analyzing the way in which a short-run agricultural policy is joined with the long-run class transformation of the countryside. This is not to say that such an analysis will eliminate the joint and separate tensions of rural grain policy and the class transformation of the peasantry. On the other hand, it does form a basis for understanding the class differentiation of a) the peasantry and b) peasant grain production and marketing activity. Such analysis would form a starting point from which more successful policy interventions could be made, by constructing policy so as to take into account these differentiations.

IV. A Class Analysis of Peasant Grain Production and Marketing—Response by Peasant Category to Nicaraguan State Grain Policy

Class-based peasant categories allow insights into rural analysis and policy that other frameworks do not.⁶ One way of ascertaining the validity of the present approach is to judge its results in concrete analysis. This section is an analysis of changes in each category's production and marketing strategy based on a) its historical conditions of production and marketing, b) its participation in one or more class processes, and c) its receipt of new resources on the basis of revolutionary state policies.⁷ The presentation will directly illustrate the use of class-based categories in explaining how diverse groups of peasants respond to state grain initiatives. The conclusion will comment on the role of state grain initiatives in class transformation and, conversely, the role of class transformation in state grain initiatives.

A. Poor Peasants

Revolutionary state policy did not occur in a vacuum, but rather within a given historical context. In pre-revolutionary Nicaragua, full-time petty production (medium peasants) of corn and beans was a limit to and a condition of pre-revolutionary capitalist agricultural

development. Petty production was problematic for capitalist agriculture when it occupied lands which capitalist producers decided to integrate into their farms. On the other hand petty production was also a condition of capitalist agriculture through its provision of cheap foods to workers and labor power to capitalist farms. Resolving these simultaneous tensions helped to develop a stratum of poor peasantry, who were simultaneously petty grain producers and agricultural workers.

Limited resources for petty production by poor peasants were one determinant of petty producers' need to participate in wage labor. At the same time, seasonal wage laborers were not supported by capitalist employers year round. In the marginal areas of the Pacific, and in areas of the interior, some harvest workers found access to a small amount of resources (including land) with which to plant foodgrains. In the pre-revolutionary period, poor peasants typically produced corn, beans, and sometimes a native sorghum⁸ as a necessary complement to their harvest wages. Corn was used primarily for consumption, while beans were used both for direct consumption and to generate money income. This type of activity was based upon an extremely low level of resources--small parcels of land, and no access to bank credit, chemical inputs, technical assistance, nor to the pre-revolutionary state grain agency (INCEI).

The intervention of the revolutionary state notably transformed poor peasants' access to resources in a manner that was supportive of their efforts to produce and market corn and beans. Case studies of poor peasant farmers revealed a marked increase in access to production and marketing resources. In the revolutionary period, poor peasants were receiving bank credit, inputs, technical assistance, and state marketing services for the first time, and were making small technological changes in the production process.

State grain policy made only a slight impact on poor peasant grain activity, and not always in the anticipated direction. State policy encouraged poor peasants to attempt to

increase grain production. Between 1978-79 and 1982-83, poor peasants attempted small increases in grain area, greater use of chemical inputs (applied to bean production in particular), and different areas and combinations of grain planted. They also tended to decrease their marketing of corn. Bean sales were generally maintained at their prior levels.

Limited increases in grain production by poor peasants were closely related to limitation of resources for petty production, which helped deny poor peasants the ability to survive through petty production alone, provoking part-time sale of labor power. In spite of increased access to resources, poor peasants still lacked sufficient levels for full-time petty production. The same lack of resources that contributed to their remaining poor peasants also limited their attempts to increase grain production.⁹

Poor peasants lacked, among other resources, sufficient land and/or labor power. More land was often a necessary condition if poor peasants were to produce sufficient grains to support the peasant family on a year-round basis, without the necessity of selling labor power. On the agrarian frontier, poor peasants may have had sufficient land to guarantee family reproduction, but lacked access to family or hired labor power. Insufficient labor power placed a limit on the division of labor within the peasant household (as a unit of production and reproduction), and prevented necessary tasks of cultivation from occurring at the proper moment. In some areas labor-sharing by poor peasants did not function. Even with labor-sharing in other moments of cultivation, harvest labor requirements were so large that each peasant family was left to its own devices. Given the technological level of production and existing socio-economic relationships for poor peasants, family labor time could not provide enough grain and other farm output to ensure family reproduction. On the agrarian frontier, there was little labor power available to be purchased.

In non-frontier areas, it was still difficult for petty producers to hire labor power. Though many poor peasants did receive credit in the revolutionary period, and this credit could have conceivably financed hired laborers, poor peasants may have been hesitant to increase their financial obligations to this level. State and capitalist farms all competed with petty producers for the existing supply of wage labor. Rural-urban migration, the defense effort, and transformation of poor and landless peasants into medium and communal peasants reduced the supply of wage laborers.

Just as limited resources prevented increases in poor peasant grain production, other resources provided by the revolutionary state permitted poor peasants to reduce their level of corn marketing. Corn sales by poor peasants tended to fall in the revolutionary period. State merchants and banks replaced private, offering guaranteed prices and "easy" credit. For poor peasants, this represented an historic opportunity to alter their grain strategy and prioritize grain consumption over marketing. The state reduced the subsumed class rent, interest, and marketing payments by poor peasants, thereby reducing the necessity to market grain. Increases in bean prices relative to corn, and increases in rural transportation costs both had a great impact on poor peasant marketing of corn.¹⁰

Their close proximity to the minimum physical level of subsistence influenced poor peasants to focus their production on corn and beans in order to guarantee their food supply. This is a key to evaluating poor peasant grain potential. With greater access to resources, poor peasants tended to attempt to increase production of grains. It is not surprising that, in a time comparison, those who remained as poor peasants showed little improvement in grain production and marketing. Significant improvement and increases in grain production depended on the very transformation of poor peasants into a different peasant category, particularly into that of medium or communal peasant.

B. Medium Peasants

Pre-revolutionary medium peasant strategy was similar to poor peasant strategy. Medium peasants were successful in maintaining full-time petty production and avoiding wage labor, but there were still important limits to medium peasant activity. Medium peasants, too, possessed only limited quantities of production and marketing resources. Lack of land, financial resources, and work and transportation animals affected poor and medium peasant decisions on production, marketing, inputs, and use of family labor power.

Pre-revolutionary medium peasant strategy, like that of poor peasants, consisted primarily of production and sale of corn and beans, although in slightly greater quantities. One difference was that medium peasants often cultivated a small quantity of other crops such as vegetables, sesame, feedgrain sorghum, and coffee, and raised a few cattle.

Greater levels of grain and non-grain production was one of the factors that permitted medium peasants to avoid wage labor. However, greater production did not automatically provide greater income, and neither was it the only manner in which greater income could result. Some medium peasants owned land and avoided payments to a subsumed class of landlords. Others owned work animals and avoided animal rental payments, and possibly earned such payments from other petty producers.

Smaller subsumed class payments meant a smaller distribution of surplus labor time from medium peasants to subsumed classes, which in some cases may have meant the difference between being a medium peasant or a poor peasant. When petty subsumed payments were low, then petty producers had a greater chance of retaining enough necessary labor to guarantee year-round survival. Higher production of grains and non-grains (cash crops) by medium peasants was often made possible by slightly greater access to resources, compared to that of poor peasants. Medium peasants had access to more and better land and more labor power,¹¹ allowing greater flexibility in crop

selection. Case studies suggest that medium peasants had slightly better access to credit and chemical inputs than did poor peasants in the pre-revolutionary period. Full access to credit, inputs, etc. occurred only in the revolutionary period as a result of revolutionary policy.

Changes in medium peasant strategy from the pre-revolutionary to revolutionary period were not very different from those of poor peasants. Where they occurred, increases in production were small. Medium peasants were distinguished in that when they expanded production, they tended to emphasize increases in both corn and beans and other grains and non-grain crops. Medium peasants also decreased corn marketing. As with poor peasants, state reduction of subsumed class payments for moneylending, land rental and merchant services, as well as price and supply problems, reduced medium peasant marketing of corn. Greater medium peasant production of crops other than corn and beans was an additional factor. Cattle or coffee production, for example, gave medium peasants greater economic security, and made it easier for them to retain corn and beans for home consumption.

In spite of their differences from poor peasants, without more land, financial resources, and labor power, among other factors, medium peasants could not consider a significant expansion of petty production or move into capitalist production of grains or other products. Medium peasants were more secure economically than poor peasants, yet medium peasants were still petty producers of food, with a limited capacity and willingness to invest in technical improvements. Even where more profitable crops were being introduced, medium peasants did not eliminate corn and bean production as the mainstay of their cultivation.

C. Rich Peasants

Pre-revolutionary rich peasants were somewhat sheltered from the tensions that affected poor and medium peasants. Capitalist surplus value appropriation plus petty

necessary and surplus labor increased rich peasant income and permitted a different corn and bean strategy. Case studies of rich peasants show that corn and bean production was an important component. However, as capitalist production brought greater income, so too did it permit rich peasants to diversify production into more lucrative crops, and not concentrate on corn and beans as their primary activity. Paradoxically, for rich peasants corn and bean production had more uses: family consumption, sale, work animal and livestock consumption, and permanent and/or harvest laborer consumption. Foodgrain production provided rich peasants with important conditions of petty and capitalist production.

Rich peasants distributed less surplus labor to others. Prior to 1979, rich peasants held an advantageous position with respect to grain marketing. They did not face the same local "buyers' market" that adversely affected poor and medium peasants. Rich peasants had access to good quality and relatively abundant quantity of land. Rich peasants did not depend on sharecropping for access to land, with its large subsumed class payments to landowners. With access to bank credit or internally generated funds, they did not have to depend on pre-harvest crop sales. With better conditions of transportation and storage, rich peasants had greater control over both the location and timing of sales. Rich peasants could avoid payments to rural merchants by transporting grain directly to urban areas. With better storage facilities than poor and medium peasants,¹² they could also avoid peak moments of grain sale, when prices were lowest.

These conditions resulted in part from the ongoing capitalist class process and permitted that process, and the production of crops other than corn and beans, to continue and to expand. Other crops accounted for increases in overall rich peasant production.¹³ Corn and bean consumption needs were met, and some beans produced for sale, since their profitability was much higher than that of corn. Beyond this, rich peasants were likely to turn to other crops.¹⁴

Given rich peasant strategy and conditions, revolutionary state grain policy had little positive impact on rich peasant production of basic grains. In fact it tended to decrease grain production and marketing by rich peasants. They purchased subsidized grain instead from the state's grain agency, the Empresa Nacional de Alimentos Básicos (ENABAS). The fall in production differentiated rich peasants from poor and medium peasants. Unlike poor and medium peasants, rich peasants did not perceive grain sales to ENABAS, state marketing services, and guaranteed producer grain prices as beneficial. For rich peasants, guaranteed prices and ENABAS' initial near monopoly on grain purchases represented more of a restriction than a benefit. State prices and regulation eliminated many rural grain merchants, competition among grain buyers, and cyclical variation in grain prices. These prior conditions had been advantageous to rich peasants who had better storage facilities, market information, and transportation, and thereby sold their grain when and where the price was highest. In pre-revolutionary times, such resources enabled rich peasants to increase payments received from merchants. Additionally, the decline in real producer prices for grains was felt more sharply by rich peasants who evaluated prices with respect to a higher paid labor cost.¹⁵ The result was a tendency for the cultivation of corn and beans for sale, particularly corn, to decline.

If storage, transportation, and price were the only factors, state grain policy would have reduced rich peasant sales, but not production, of corn and beans. Corn and beans were too important with respect to on-farm consumption. The tendency to reduce production was aided by the complementary effects of changed conditions in rich peasant grain purchase. As producer prices for corn were falling below production costs paid by rich peasants (and capitalist farmers), the state was making corn and beans available for rich peasant purchase. Rich peasants, as "productive consumers," were uniquely able to buy grain at subsidized prices. They purchased subsidized corn at prices below their cash cost of production, and below the price at which corn was purchased

from themselves or other producers by the state. By and large, the state was able to guarantee grain supply to rich peasants.

Rich peasants who reduced corn and bean production may have sacrificed some bean income. However, they also eliminated the risk of crop losses in their least profitable crops. The strength of rich peasant production in other crops was sufficient to overcome any negative consequences of the termination of direct grain production.¹⁶

D. Communal Peasants

In the pre-revolutionary period, production cooperatives did not exist. Sandinista Agricultural Cooperatives (CAS) were created beginning in 1979. Even though they were post-revolutionary creations, they still shared with petty producers of corn and beans conditions and problems that had been inherited from the pre-revolutionary period (for example, level of available technology, motivation and strategy of the producers, and marketing infrastructure). In spite of many limitations, initial grain results from production cooperatives were positive. The creation of CAS transformed landless and poor peasants into communal producers. Poor (and sometimes medium peasants) joined CAS with corn and bean production as their prior experience. CAS members, having lived a precarious rural existence, perceived their best interests as being served by engaging in direct production of corn and beans because their first concern was to ensure an adequate supply of basic foodstuffs for their own consumption. Their initial production of corn and beans was expanded over the first few agricultural cycles.

The emphasis on corn and beans was also due to the high degree of involvement of CAS members in the revolutionary process, the prioritization of CAS by the state, and the strong presence of UNAG, which generated a political commitment by CAS members to the revolutionary process. All of this made them receptive to FSLN requests for production priorities. Revolutionary tasks for communal peasants included defense and corn and bean production and sale.¹⁷ From 1979-80 to 1982-83, increases in grain

production occurred or were attempted even where the cooperatives were well aware of the economic disadvantages involved (relative to the income to be gained by producing other crops).

Greater success in increasing corn and bean production and marketing was linked to state provision of greater resources for communal than for poor or medium peasants. CAS received titled land, prioritized state access to credit, inputs, technical assistance, and training. All CAS sold grain to ENABAS, and were prioritized for ENABAS' services.¹⁸

By 1982-83, however, CAS developed two distinct strategies of production and marketing. One set of CAS had begun by expanding corn and bean production, but then increasingly turned to alternative crops for subsequent expansions (referred to below as CAS strategy 1). Some of these CAS maintained a combined emphasis in both areas of production, and corn and bean production was held at its prior level. In others, corn and bean production was reduced. Even in the latter case, the strategy 1 CAS produced and sold a greater proportion of their corn and beans than either poor or medium peasants. The amount of grain produced was more than the CAS required, and regular sales were made in both grains. A second group of CAS (strategy 2) stuck to limited increases in corn and bean production and sales. These CAS resembled medium peasants in their access to resources and economic strategy. While alternative crops might be produced, production was concentrated on corn and beans.

Among peasant categories, the impact of state policy was greatest on the communal peasants. The creation of CAS combined producers with sufficient resources to guarantee their production of food crops. Their first step was to plant enough corn and beans for their own consumption, followed by increased corn and bean sales. The initial and subsequent increases in corn and bean production and sales were greater than those carried out by peasants in other categories.

In the case of the strategy 1 CAS, however, the prioritization of consumption crops and the political commitment of the CAS members were at odds with the potential of the resources at the peasants' disposal. Access to sufficient land, good soil, and adequate climate, combined with the other resources, provided the material base for experimentation with cash crops.¹⁹ The ongoing experience with the communal class process provided strategy 1 communal peasants with a greater sense of economic security. This allowed the peasants to overcome the economic and psychological risks of cash crop production. Collectivization also facilitated productive benefits through a more complex division of labor and the ability to utilize more advanced means of production. The success of the cash crops led to increases in their planting, CAS members being aware of the opportunity for communal (and even capitalist) accumulation.²⁰

The strategy 2 CAS were characterized by the same class processes as the strategy 1. However, the first years of the agrarian reform resulted in an uneven land distribution to the CAS. While both types had access to many of the same resources, the strategy 2 CAS often had insufficient access to land, poor soil, and/or poor climate. In these CAS, there was less choice of crops which could be planted. Either alternative crops could not be produced at all or, if they were produced, they required an unacceptable replacement of corn and bean production. Like medium peasants, strategy 2 CAS members were limited by their access to resources and continued to emphasize grain production.

V. A Class-Based Focus for State Grain Policy

This paper has produced a partial explanation of state grain policy and peasant response. Each peasant category contributed in a distinct manner to the overall response to state grain policy--increased bean production and sale (at least initially), and

stagnation in corn production and sale. Far from making a homogeneous response, each peasant category altered production and sale of the various agricultural products in a different manner. Between 1978-79 and 1982-83, poor peasants showed little movement toward increased production yet decreased the sale of corn. Medium peasants were able to attempt modest increases in production and sale of beans and cash crops, and to decrease corn sales. Rich peasants decreased corn and bean production and sale while following their prior pattern of gradual increase in cash crops and livestock (for example, cattle). Communal peasants significantly increased production and sale of both corn and beans and cash crops.

Analysis using class-based peasant categories can also orient policy itself. The impact of minor adjustments on petty grain production by poor and medium peasant producers should not be underestimated. In Nicaragua (at a rough approximation), there existed about 70,000 poor peasant families and 40,000 medium peasant families at the outset of the revolution. It is a reasonable supposition that, over the first several years, 10,000 poor peasants were converted to communal grain producers, leaving approximately 100,000 petty producers of grain (excluding rich peasants). Each poor and medium peasant family was estimated in 1980 to produce 2.2 and 3.1 manzanas of corn, respectively. Assume corn yields equal to the national average of 16.6 quintales (hundred-weights) per manzana (0.7 hectares). In that case, poor and medium peasants produced over four million quintales of corn. Even with all the potential errors in this calculation, the result is that petty producers accounted for the overwhelming share of Nicaragua's corn.

Assuming that the underlying data and assumptions are correct,²¹ poor and medium peasants are estimated to market 14.7 and 19.6 percent, respectively, of their corn output. The total amount of corn marketed by these petty producers would have been slightly over 300,000 quintales for poor peasants and 400,000 for medium

peasants. Going back to the original number of families, this would mean that each poor peasant family sold an average of five quintales of corn while each medium peasant family would have sold ten quintales. Without going through all of the assumptions again, the equivalent results for beans are that poor and medium peasants together marketed approximately 450,000 quintales of beans. The average poor peasant family would have sold approximately 3.5 quintales, while the average medium peasant family sold six.

This simple calculation, while only a rough estimate, shows the tremendous potential of the state for either choking off marketed corn supply, or satisfying a good part or all of the revolution's grain needs on the basis of petty production. The estimate of corn and bean marketing by petty producers is almost equal to the total corn and beans purchased by ENABAS in each of the 1981-1983 calendar years (ENABAS, 1981-1983). Thus, given that real prices of corn fell and the real price of beans rose with respect to that of corn, just a small shift of consumption within each peasant family would explain the drastic fall in corn supply and the increase in bean sales, in the first years of the revolution.

Other factors could have provoked the same results. Nicaraguan petty producers are known to consume a large quantity of corn relative to beans. One of the tensions of the pre-revolutionary period was the impossibility of year-round survival of poor peasants based on their petty production alone. It is likely that poor peasants did not retain enough corn in the pre-revolutionary harvests to meet their yearly consumption needs. If the state reduced the subsumed class payments that made grain sale necessary, then one destination of the corn that previously supported these payments would be home consumption. An increase in home consumption by five quintales per family would have eliminated the totality of poor peasant marketing.

Looking at the situation in reverse, real possibilities may exist for a successful peasant-based corn and bean strategy on the part of the revolutionary government. The strategy would have to be based on improved schemes to affect the broad mass of

peasant producers, but remain sensitive to the class differentiated peasant grain strategies. Given the calculation above, simple techniques to improve yields, store grain, and facilitate marketing, if generalized across medium and communal peasant producers, could result in a large increase in grain supply (as well as increased support by petty and communal producers for revolutionary policy).

Limited poor peasant access to land and/or labor power reduced potential increases in grain production and marketing. Increased access to credit and state marketing services perversely allowed poor peasant corn sales to decline. Poor peasants would not make the best focus of the state's grain efforts, unless they were transformed by the agrarian reform into medium or communal producers. State incentives and resources might have only a small impact on poor peasant production and marketing of corn and beans (although continued economic support for grain production by poor peasants might be necessary for political reasons).

Medium peasants, however, could be a major source of increased grain production and sale. Their on-going focus on corn and bean production, combined with limited options for non-grain production, implies that state grain policy can be particularly effective. Improvements in the areas of technology, price policy and marketing might be received more readily by medium peasants than by rich or poor peasants. For example, the importance of unpaid family labor power in medium peasant production signifies greater earnings for the medium peasant per quintal. A small increase in price, when combined with the other policies suggested, might therefore elicit a greater marketing response from medium peasants than, for example, rich peasants, who face paid labor costs.

Rich peasants' greater economic base and expanded economic reproduction allowed them to ignore policies promoting corn and beans in favor of the more profitable production and marketing of cash crops, and to reduce corn and bean production and

sale by taking advantage of grain subsidies designed to benefit urban consumers and rural workers. If there were a large increase in corn price relative to other crops, rich peasants would be likely to increase their marketed production. This would include those rich peasants who were continuing to produce, as well as those who had eliminated, corn and bean production. Tighter access imposed by the state to subsidized grain and to state grain supply in general (apparently the policy since 1985) may be convincing rich peasants to produce more corn and beans out of necessity.

Production cooperatives are also a potential area for grain response. The type 2 CAS may respond to the policies mentioned for medium peasants. Type 1 CAS, with greater resources, would probably need a greater incentive, similar to the case of rich peasants. Both types of CAS would presumably be more receptive to state grain policy, given their political commitment to the revolutionary process and their prior "political" grain sales. Modest improvements in economic conditions for production of corn and beans, if combined with the political ties between the CAS and the revolution, might allow important increases in grain production.

VI. Conclusion

A more successful state grain policy aimed at the peasantry would be dependent on numerous factors. State grain policy could potentially strengthen grain results among all peasant categories. On the other hand, it could be used to try to strengthen the expansion only of communal production cooperatives. Support for each peasant category carries economic and political costs. Support for petty production could move increased quantities of corn and bean toward the cities. Greater political integration of the peasantry into the revolutionary project could be another result. However, this would solidify petty production and restrict the political and economic benefits of communal

production. "Getting prices right" might meet the need for increased grain marketing through increased rich peasant and capitalist production and sales as well as promote increases by the better equipped communal producers. Yet this might result in substitution for other crops and strengthen capitalist production, which is probably not a long run goal of the revolution. Poor and medium peasants would certainly benefit from the increase in prices. However, without extra resources, poor and medium peasants would be limited to a small share of increased grain production and sales. While communal peasants would be responsible for some increases, the largest grain increases would be provided by (and the largest share of income received by) rich peasants and capitalist producers.

An approach that focused narrowly on the transformation of class processes might speed up the voluntary collectivization of agriculture but would not, by itself, provide sufficient results. Prioritizing production cooperatives would affect only a small proportion of all peasant producers. Small increases in grain would come as the CAS met their consumption needs and gave some support to the revolution politically. However, CAS with more resources would continue to turn toward cash crop production. Additionally, collectivization may be a condition of increased grain production and sale only if other conditions of grain policy are changed at the same time.

State corn and bean production, even if based on the "peasantry," can take many roads. The calculations above suggest that petty production can supply most of Nicaragua's grain needs. State policy can alternately or additionally focus on rich peasants and/or communal peasants. Each focus will have particular implications for grain production, for the class composition of grain producers, and for the alliances and tensions that underlie the revolutionary process.

Notes

1. In Nicaragua, beans are referred to as one of the four basic grains (the others being corn, rice and sorghum) even though technically they are a legume.
2. Food security can be defined briefly as 1) the satisfaction of national food needs on the basis of national production, 2) an adequate supply of food to each member of the population, and 3) the protection of food production and distribution from external shocks. This analysis assumes that these are goals of the Nicaraguan government. For discussion of the Nicaraguan state's food security goals, see Zalkin (1986a, 1986c) and Collins (1986).
3. This section will be brief, as these policies are treated elsewhere. I have dealt with these policies in Zalkin (1986a and 1986b). They are also treated in Austin, Fox, and Kruger (1985), Collins (1986), Deere and Marchetti (1981), Deere, Marchetti and Reinhardt (1985), and Central America Historical Institute (1985). For an analysis of the state and planning in Nicaragua, see Ruccio (1985).
4. For the moment, peasant production is taken to be that of rural families who directly participate in the cultivation of crops.
5. For an excellent discussion of the theoretical debate and empirical evidence on organization of rural production in socialist transition, see Deere (1986).
6. It has not been the paper's purpose to review other frameworks, such as the neo-classical view of rural direct producers as income-maximizers or utility-maximizing risk minimizers (Ghatak and Ingersent, 1984).
7. The analysis represents part of the results of primary research carried out by the author as a member of the CIERA research team responsible for the Nicaraguan Food System Project. A systematic series of case studies and interviews was carried out between August, 1982 and July, 1983. The case studies involved peasant producers, while the interviews took place at top, middle and lower levels of state institutions, mass organizations, and private organizations. The work was structured so as to take into account national, regional, and municipal variations in grain production and marketing. For more information on the methodology, see appendix in Zalkin (1986c).
8. While corn is preferred by the peasantry, this type of sorghum achieved better results in dryer areas where corn yields were low. Since its role is similar to corn both in peasant diet and strategy, native sorghum is not separately treated in the present analysis.
9. This would exclude the cases in which poor peasants were transformed into medium or communal peasants, i.e. where the conditions of existence of poor peasants changed sufficiently to significantly increase total grain or non-grain production and marketing.
10. Transportation costs were measured by weight, and the absolute price of corn was one-third that of an equal weight of beans. Easy credit made possible declines in corn and bean marketing after below-average harvests.
11. Poor, medium and rich peasant families averaged, respectively, smallest, second, and largest in size. See CIERA (1980), p. 17.
12. Often this would only mean a house with a wooden floor instead of one with a dirt floor, but it would protect the grain for a longer period of time.
13. This is supported by the data of the 1982 Rural Credit study, which showed crops other than corn and beans to be more profitable. See CIERA (1982b).

14. It is also true that where non-grain production included livestock, then there might be an increase in corn production for animal consumption.
15. Poor and medium peasants faced a much lower paid labor cost, and a higher implicit labor cost, since the peasant family provided much of the labor time.
16. Poor and medium peasants did not respond to consumer grain price subsidies with reduced production, for two reasons. First, most poor and medium peasants depended on corn and beans for their income and food. They perceived the risk of replacing direct corn and bean production with alternative crops as too great. Secondly, poor and medium peasants had less access to the subsidized grain. ENABAS had more success supplying rich peasants.
17. Without a political commitment, communal peasants still would have produced grain for home consumption and sale, as did medium peasants. However, they would never have sold the same quantities. For example, in years of below-normal harvests, it was observed that communal peasants kept less grain for home consumption than was necessary. They sold because of their political understanding that it was needed in the urban areas. The sales were an explicit show of support for revolutionary policy.
18. For example, production cooperatives often received free or inexpensive grain transportation services from ENABAS. Peasants in other categories had to find their own grain transportation to ENABAS' intermediate and central collection centers.
19. In the Pacific region, cash crops included cotton, feedgrain sorghum and sesame; in the interior, coffee; and in various regions, vegetables and cattle.
20. Where the members of production cooperatives collectively expended labor power, and the commune was the first appropriator of the surplus labor produced, a communal class process was taking place. Where the CAS, in addition to using member-family labor power, contracted wage labor, the cooperative combined the communal class process with the capitalist class process.
21. See CIERA (1982a and 1984a) and PAN (1983).

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