

## The Agrarian Political Economy of Left-wing Governments in Latin America: Agribusiness, Peasants and the Limits of Neo-Developmentalism

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*This article concludes this special issue. It draws on the findings of the individual contributions and provides a comparison of the agrarian policies of left-wing governments in Latin America. The authors identify common trends and offer an explanation of why these governments did not change the agricultural model towards food sovereignty but continued to heavily support agribusiness while redirecting some resources to peasant producers. They improved living conditions of the rural poor, mostly through populist anti-poverty and social protection programmes financed by the commodity boom. They expanded programmes to integrate small farmers into commodity chains and improved working conditions of rural wage labourers, but did not carry out a redistributive agrarian reform. They instead continued to support agribusiness with numerous policies and measures. The authors argue that these governments did not curb the power of the dominant rural classes because these are highly intertwined with capital, making them part of a coalesced bourgeoisie that occupies key positions in the state. Leftist governments did not have a real agenda of social transformation or a strategy to tackle the rentier nature of the state. Contradictorily, their policies furthered peasant differentiation thereby weakening the previous alliance of rural subaltern classes.*

*Keywords:* agrarian policies, agribusiness, coalesced bourgeoisie, neo-developmentalism, 'rentierism'

### INTRODUCTION

On June 22 2012, one day after an impeachment process had been initiated against him by the Chamber of Deputies, Fernando Lugo, the elected President of Paraguay, was removed from power by the Senate. Lugo, elected just four years earlier, had been the last candidate of the recent wave of leftist politicians to be elected to the highest office of their country in Latin America. No one could imagine it in 2012 but Lugo's fall was an omen of what was coming to Dilma Rousseff in 2016 in Brazil, the largest country of region.

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As will become evident in this concluding article of this JAC special issue, the agro-export boom and the expansion of agribusiness have been at the root of the success of most of the left-wing governments in Latin America. But all of these left-wing parties and politicians managed to get into government in the first place by promising to carry out land re-distribution and improve the living conditions of the rural poor, a promise they only partially fulfilled. Exploring the contradictions between the reality of the agrarian policies of these governments and their early promises has been a central focus of all the contributions to this special issue. Explaining the reasons behind this common trajectory, beyond the diversity of national agrarian structures, through an agrarian political economy analysis is the purpose of this conclusion.

For many, the experiences of left-wing governments in Latin America seemed to represent a new round in the debate on alternatives to neoliberal market-driven agrarian policies. These governments, supported or allied with rural movements, were going to be the first policy test for food sovereignty, which could be assessed by examining government policies on agrarian reform, support to small-scale peasant producers and family farming, restrictions on corporate agribusiness, environmental sustainability and other progressive aims. Our objective is to contribute to the discussion around food sovereignty and the literature on rural social movements and alternatives to neoliberalism. More than through a political and theoretical discussion on the nature, prospects and promises of peasant farming today, our aim in this article is to participate in these debates through an analysis of the concrete policies implemented by governments that have, at least rhetorically, taken up the idea of food sovereignty (Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela) or claimed to support peasant and family farming (Argentina and Brazil).

There is a great diversity in the ways agribusiness has developed and the type of insertion into the global food regime among the countries covered by this special issue (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela). There is also a great diversity in the size of their economy, their process of state and class formation, as well the state capacity of each of these countries. However, our main argument is that left-wing governments in Latin America have not significantly transformed the industrial agribusiness-controlled model of agriculture that they inherited from earlier governments. In fact, their policies have been instrumental for its most recent and dramatic expansion across the region. Although a substantial amount of land was distributed by the governments of Brazil and Bolivia, and to a lesser extent Venezuela, none of the Latin American left-wing governments has implemented a redistributive

agrarian reform that has significantly transformed the unequal distribution of land which historically characterises the region. However, these governments have deployed an array of policies to support small-scale producers that partly distinguish them from right-wing governments. Four types of policies have been implemented: 1) credit schemes for agricultural production; 2) policies linking family producers to a commodity chain; 3) the regulation or creation of privileged or protected markets; and 4) the institutionalisation of family farming within the state. Nowhere, even in countries where rural movements appeared to be stronger at the beginning of these governments (Brazil, Bolivia and Ecuador), were rural movements able to influence or radicalise these policies, even where movement leaders were placed in positions within the state apparatus. There was in fact a significant loss of mobilization capacity on the part of peasant and indigenous movements that contrasts sharply with how compact, coalesced and organized the dominant agrarian classes have become. This situation calls for a renewed critical analysis of the balance of class forces in the countryside and in Latin America in general. But it also calls for critical assessment of the peasantry itself as the analysis of all the contributors to this special issue point to an increasing class differentiation within the peasantry. It appears that it was the middle peasantry, those with sufficient land and savings, instead of the poorest fractions, that benefited the most from left-wing policies; see Edelman and Borras (2016) for an analysis of how this plays itself out in transnational rural movements like La Via Campesina.

This article is organised in three sections. The first describes the main trends in the agrarian and agricultural policies of these governments. The second analyses these results in relation to the economic conjuncture of the 2000s and the balance of class forces existing at the time of the rise of the left to power. In this section, we argue that neoliberalism was in crisis in the early 2000s, but it was not an 'organic crisis of hegemony' but rather in a 'conjunctural crisis'. Rural social movements had a strong capacity of mobilization, but urban labouring classes were disorganised and left-wing political parties in a well-advanced process of moving to the centre. The third section attempts to explain the limited achievements of the pink tide by taking a longer term perspective. By borrowing Zeitlin and Radcliff's (1985) Marxist concept of the 'coalesced bourgeoisie', we argued that the rise of agribusiness has accentuated the fusion of the landed classes and the industrial bourgeoisie that was already evident in the 1960s. This has made them into a single class that has been able to temporarily bring the richer strata of the peasantry under its wing.

## COMMON TRENDS AND DIFFERENTIATED PATHS

The evidence and analysis provided by the contributors to this JAC special issue allow us to identify the following eight general trends around the agrarian political economy of the pink tide governments in Latin America. First, there was nowhere an agrarian reform of the magnitude required to have a significant impact on the unequal distribution of land inherited from the past. Second, where land has been distributed, the relative progress in women's access to ownership was due to the existence of autonomous rural women's movements. Third, the power of agribusiness was not challenged anywhere, but some policies to support family-farmers were created or expanded. Fourth, the state did take on a 'new' role, but this role was guided clearly more by neo-developmentalism and agro-extractivism than by food sovereignty. Fifth, peasant and indigenous movements were paradoxically weaker or less able to mobilise support during these governments than in the past. Sixth, the landed classes proved to be resilient and were able to effectively influence policies and keep government attempts at reforms contained. Seventh, left-wing Presidents adopted very effective populist<sup>2</sup> rhetoric, strategy and policies of class representation toward labouring classes. Eighth, though some efforts were made to address the problems and challenges faced by rural labour, no structural reform of the rural labour market was attempted anywhere.

These general trends play themselves out differently in the countries of the region because of their distinctive histories, size, class and state formations, ethnic composition of their rural population, as well as the type of agribusiness formation and the strength or weakness of rural social movements. In this section, we will explore these general trends and differentiated paths through a description and analysis of the main agrarian policies of left-wing governments.

### *Agrarian Reforms: Failed Opportunity*

Agrarian reforms have been put back on the policy agenda by rural movement since the 1990s. Latin American left-wing politicians having promised agrarian reforms during their electoral campaigns, their governments were expected to carry them out. But if none of these

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<sup>2</sup> Populism here is used not as "agrarian populism" or simply a "way of doing politics" or "political style". It refers to a political formation, often supported by a form of state, that allows for the representation of the interests of labouring classes through an unmediated relationship with the political leader. Populism is thus a politics of class conciliation, instead of class struggle, which impedes the independent and autonomous class formation of labouring classes.

governments can be said to have carried out a radical land re-distribution that modified the highly unequal land distribution, there was nonetheless some quantitatively significant land distribution in Bolivia, Brazil and Venezuela (for detailed analysis see Webber; Sauer and Mészáros; and Purcell, respectively, in this issue). In Brazil, the four presidential administrations of the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* or PT) are said to have 'distributed' over 51.2 million of hectares to 721,442 families (Sauer and Mészáros, this issue), an area more than twice the size of Great Britain or equivalent to Spain, making this probably in absolute term the largest amount of land to be distributed on the planet in recent years. The PT governments (2003-2016) were responsible for 58 per cent of the total area distributed in Brazilian history and 40 per cent of benefited households (Silveira et al. 2016: 11-12). Some important caveats are required though. Firstly, in relative terms this is not as important as it appears, due to the sheer quasi-continental size of Brazil and a renewed process of land concentration that has been taking place simultaneously. Indeed the area controlled by large properties (including by the state) passed from 214 million hectares in 2003 to 318 million in 2010 (four times the size of Britain, twice that of Spain), of which 244 million were in private hands (Farah 2015). Secondly, critical rural scholars have highlighted that land was really distributed only to between 120,000 to 250,000 families, as most of the land was not distributed but regularized or legalized. This means that a huge number of families already had effective control of the land and their holding simply became legal. In addition most of the land was distributed in the Amazon and from public land rather than from the expropriation of private landowners (see Sauer and Mészáros, this issue). As a result, the agrarian reform in Brazil has had little impact on the extremely unequal land distribution.

A similar outcome through a different route emerges in Bolivia. Until 2014, the government of Morales had distributed 28.2 million hectares to 369,507 beneficiaries, a bit more than half the area distributed by the PT but in a country eight times smaller. However just like its Brazilian counterpart, the Morales government distributed mainly public land and practiced similar favourable ways of presenting the data. In fact, it went further as this programme cannot really be called an agrarian reform because it is an enormous land legalisation and titling programme (Deere, this issue; Kay and Urioste 2007; Colque et al. 2016). The Morales government did innovate though by titling land through a new institution called '*Territorio Indígena Originario Campesino*' (Indigenous Aboriginal Peasant Territory, TIOC) that replaced the '*Tierra Comunitaria de Origen*' (Communitarian Land of Origin, TCO). Both formalized land of indigenous communities under a collective form but TIOCs are given more 'autonomous

power', which the government has not always respected<sup>3</sup>. Of the 28.2 million hectares of land officially 'distributed' until 2014, close to 15 million hectares (53 per cent) were titled as TIOCs. The Bolivian case may even be worse in some respect than the Brazilian one, as an important quantity of land (almost 14 per cent) has been distributed to medium and large property owners, including 56 titles to properties over 5,000 hectares (Webber, this issue). On a more positive note, however, both Bolivia and Brazil were the countries where more land was titled to women, either individually or as co-owner, to a great extent because of pressure from autonomous rural women's organisations (see Deere, this issue).

It is important to highlight here that in both Brazil and Bolivia agrarian reforms were already being carried out under neoliberal governments before left-wing parties won the Presidency. The agrarian reform of the PT government under Lula's administration is in clear continuation with that of the Cardoso government, who also settled families mostly on public land and in less agriculturally productive regions. In contrast, the MAS government under Morales first broke temporarily with his predecessors, but then backtracked in 2009 to more conciliatory positions. In the first phase, the Morales government introduced several procedural and institutional modifications to the law of agrarian reform to make land distribution easier and transformed the TOC into the more autonomous TIOCs. Morales also facilitated land titling to women (Deere, this issue). But in 2009, after striking an alliance with the landed bourgeoisie of the Eastern Lowlands, Morales effectively protected large properties by establishing a ceiling of 5,000 hectares of land that can be owned by an individual, while allowing that limit to be multiplied by the number of associates participating in an agribusiness. Moreover, the law exempts large land properties existing before the enactment of the law (Webber, this issue).

Venezuela is probably the most surprising, but also the most tragic, case of failed agrarian reform under a left-wing government. Indeed, by 2013 the government had redistributed 6.3 million hectares, regularised 10.2 million hectares and distributed 117,224 'cartas agrarias' ('agrarian letters') which gave provisional usufruct rights to recipients, benefitting over a million people (Purcell, this issue; Enríquez and Newman 2016). Comparatively, land distribution also came with the creation of new state institutions and an investment of approximately \$US 2 billion in rural development. However, because of the economic crisis after the sharp fall in the oil price, the lack of adequate planning and monitoring within the state, the overvaluation of the

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<sup>3</sup> In a typically pink tide neo-extractivism manner, Supreme Decree 2366 of 2015 contradicts the autonomy granted to TIOC, as it authorizes hydrocarbon exploration and extraction within TIOCs and other protected areas (personal communication from Ben McKay).



national currency and the generalised practices of *Bachaqueo*, the reform fell flat (Purcell, this issue). This transfer of land to small-scale family producers, their organisation in collectives to generate economies of scale and the deployment of an arrays of supporting policies did not translate into a significant increase in land area under cultivation or increased production. It translated, as in other moments of Venezuelan history, in an extreme distortion of the productive sectors, namely agriculture, by the overwhelming dominance of the circulation and appropriation of the oil rent by all groups in society, though some obviously benefited more than others.

### *Signs of Another Wave of Land Concentration?*

In Brazil and Bolivia, the expropriation of private properties was not the main policy tool of the agrarian reform. It was the registration or legalisation of land already occupied by peasants or the distribution of public land, either through land that is marginal for agribusiness or the colonisation of frontier areas. The latter has generally been the favoured way of distributing land to the rural poor in Latin America because it avoids having to challenge the interests of the landed class. Effectively, this means that everywhere in Latin America, including in Bolivia and Brazil, the existing high concentration of land in the hands of a minority has not been challenged in any way. Apart from the Brazilian case mentioned above, there were even signs toward renewed land concentration in Argentina, Ecuador, Uruguay and Paraguay (Gómez 2014, Berry et al. 2014).

The outlier in terms of unequal distribution of land in the region is Nicaragua, but not because of the actions of the current government of Daniel Ortega. Land distribution in Nicaragua is relatively more equal than in other countries of Latin America because of the radical agrarian reform of the Sandinista regime (1979-1989); and this even after a process of privatisation of land implemented by subsequent neoliberal governments. Though it has seen some process of concentration at the top, Nicaragua is the only country of the pink tide where small and medium-size producers control more than 50 per cent of the land. The case of Nicaragua under the Ortega government shows, however, that it is not the poor peasantry that is improving its situation, but rather those capitalist farmers holding between 35 and 141 hectares, who are able to link up with agribusiness (Martí i Puig and Baumeister, this issue).

If land was not distributed, could it be that land already in the hands of peasants was at least better protected by these governments, through a reform of the tenure system or of the property rights regime? In all cases, with the exception of Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, left-wing governments did not create a new institutional figure that could serve as an alternative to private property rights. In both Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, left-wing governments re-introduced the requirement that property needs to fulfil its 'social function', but it was the constitutional amendments and political settlement around indigenous autonomy in Bolivia and Ecuador that presents itself, potentially, as a brake on the privatisation and commodification of the right to land. The TIOCs in Bolivia and communal land in Ecuador could eventually represent some kind of refuge from market forces, but their importance is very limited and they have not impeded left-wing governments from encroach on those territories when the extractive imperative requires it (Bebbington and Bebbington 2011). Hence, the process of the privatisation of the right to land and the commodification of nature was generally not substantially mitigated by these governments.

### *The Undisputed Advance of Agribusiness*

None of the left-wing governments of this last wave modified the agribusiness-dominated agricultural model. All governments continued to support agribusiness especially that oriented at export. In several countries, agribusiness actually continued to expand geographically, sometimes dramatically as in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Uruguay and Paraguay, to such an extent that the term 'Soy Republics' has been coined to refer to the dominance of this crop. Soybean production, although also produced by medium-size producers, is a sector that is dominated by large-scale industrial farming and agribusiness at almost all the stages. It provides a relative good reference point to measure the expansion of agribusiness. In Argentina in 1997 nearly 6.7 million hectares were planted with soybeans. It jumped in 2002 to 11 million hectares, close to a fourth of the country's arable land, and again to more than 20 million hectare in 2013, close to half of the arable land (Lapegna, this issue). In Paraguay, in 2000 soybean was planted on 1.2 million hectares of land. This jumped to 2.9 million hectares in 2012 and again to 3.2 million hectares in 2015 (Ezquerro-Cañete 2016: 704). In Uruguay, the area planted with soybean was only 30,000 hectares in 2001. It jumped to 1.3 million hectares in 2014 or 72 per cent of the cultivated area. In Bolivia in 2013, soybean was planted on 1,176,268 hectares, representing 35.5 per cent of the cultivated area compared to only 178,306 hectares at the close of the 1980s. It is today by far the



most planted commercial legal crop in the country. In Brazil soybean has also expanded under the left-wing government of the PT. In 2003, the year that Lula da Silva took power, close to 18.4 million hectares were planted with soybean. In 2016, the year Rousseff was brought down, the area covered by soybean was 33.3 million hectares (CONAB, 2016).

Trends towards geographic expansion similar to that of soybean can also be observed across Latin America in a selected number of agricultural activities and crops, such as cattle ranching, forestry, sugarcane and palm oil. Flex-crops<sup>4</sup>, like sugarcane and palm oil (Borras et al 2016), have been expanding but under a different logic than soybean. They have been benefitting from the creation of effectively protected markets established through blending mandates of agrofuels with gasoline adopted by several countries to mitigate climate change. In Brazil alone, the agricultural area planted with sugarcane has almost doubled between 2005 and 2013, when it reached close to 10 million hectares.

The expansion of agribusiness over the countryside, particularly because of its enormous use of agro-chemicals, is having significant negative environmental impacts across the region, such as increased deforestation, loss of biodiversity, decrease soil fertility, surface and underground water contamination, as well as negative health impacts on the population. If another commonality stands out among the pink tide governments is that they did not elaborate more strict environmental regulation or increased the monitoring of the environmental impact of agribusiness. The decision taken by Brazilian President Dilma of pardoning the \$US 4.3 billion in fines issued by Brazil's environmental protection agency (IBAMA) to large landowners when she ratified a new forestry code is a testament to this (Carter 2015: 417). The unwillingness to act against agrochemical aerial spraying in many South American countries, regardless of the growing scientific evidence of its damaging health effects and the mobilization of affected communities, is another one. Discourses of environmental sustainability or 'buen vivir' have not had any traction what so ever on their policies. If we take into consideration that an important proportion of the production is exported, it makes sense to argue that the pink tide governments have increased the global metabolic rift and the unequal ecological exchange between the periphery and the core as well as endangering food security (McMichael 2008; Veltmeyer and Petras 2014; Gudynas 2015).

This expansion has triggered a very significant increase in the price of land across Latin America. In Brazil, the average price of land increased by 430 per cent in 16 years between 1994 and 2010 (Sauer and Leite 2012: 890-91). In Uruguay, it went from an average of \$US 500 per

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<sup>4</sup> Flex crops are those crops that have multiple uses such as for food, animal feed and fuel.

hectare at the end of the 1990s to an average of \$US 3,519 per hectare in 2013 (Piñeiro and Cardeillac, this issue). An important trend within the land market is that a substantial amount of land is being bought by foreigners. In Brazil in the 2000s, 18.7 per cent of the properties registered and 20.1 per cent of the total agricultural area was in the hands of foreigners (Sauer and Leite 2012: 887). These properties tend to be very large and in states with high agricultural potential in sectors like cattle ranching, soybean and sugarcane. In Uruguay in 2000, 90 per cent of the land was in the hands of Uruguayans while in 2011 this proportion had dropped to 54 per cent (Piñeiro and Cardeillac, this issue). Translatino capital<sup>5</sup> has poured into Paraguay as land was significantly cheaper as compared to the various neighbouring countries.

### *Agribusiness and Market Concentration*

Agrobusiness has not only extended its grasp territorially, but also across the different commodity chains in agriculture. Market concentration has continued to be particularly acute in downstream activities, such as processing, commercialization and export. In Argentina in the mid-2000s, seven companies (Cargill, Bunge, Nidera, Vicentin, Louis Dreyfus, Pecom-Agra, and AGD) controlled 60 per cent of the agro-export market, Cargill alone exported almost 20 per cent of soybeans, more than 27 per cent of soybean oil and almost 22 per cent of soybean feed (Lapegna, this issue). In Paraguay in 2015, 6 companies control 70 per cent of the soybean export and almost the same five companies control 95 of the export of soybean derivatives (Vázquez 2016: 36). In Uruguay 10 companies controlled 86 per cent of the value of soybean export (Piñeira and Cardeillac, this issue). In Bolivia, 6 companies control 90 percent of soybean export (Webber, this issue). In Brazil, the situation is somewhat different as the capitalist modernization of agriculture came earlier in the late 1960s (Graziano da Silva 1981). Thanks to generous public credits, Brazilian agribusiness rapidly took a seat among the most powerful in the world and has been expanding across the globe, but primarily in South America. Brazilian agrarian capital is behind the soybean expansion in Bolivia and Paraguay, as is to a lesser extent Argentine capital in Uruguay's expansion. However, the same large TNCs (ADM, Cargill, Louis Dreyfus, Bunge and Syngenta) participate in the Brazilian market alongside Brazilian capital and concentrate the lion share of the profits.

This general trend toward concentration is a bit more complex in upstream activities and varies according to commodity chains and countries. In soybean and cereals, agribusinesses of different sizes are involved in all the stages of the commodity chain, some rent land from

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<sup>5</sup> This term is used to refer to capital from a Latin American country invested in another Latin American country.

medium or large landowners, and even from peasants, and engage in production, some companies simply provide producers with the technological package and others specialize in the processing, commercialization and export stages. As far as the labour market is concerned, this whole sector hires fewer and fewer rural wage-workers. In cattle ranching and meat production, agribusiness again adapts to local social and natural conditions. In South America, especially Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, it is transforming the traditionally extensive way of raising and fattening cattle by replacing it with more intensive methods such as feedlots. This is especially so in Argentina where between 2007 and 2010, thanks to government subsidies, the number of feedlots quadrupled, from 550 to 2770 (Lapegna, this issue). As a result, in Argentina the space that family producers occupied in the commodity chain has shrunk, as they are unable to access the capital required to invest in these innovations. In contrast, in Uruguay 61 percent of the family farmer continue to raise bovine cattle but their dependency to agribusiness, especially in respect to animal feed, has increased. Agribusiness in the cattle and meat sector has become more transnational, with translatino capital playing an important role in the Southern Cone but also internationally. Two of the largest meat processing companies of the world, Marfrig and JBS, are indeed Brazilian, with JBS accounting for 10 per cent of world meat production. As a result, in Uruguay of the 10 companies that control 77 per cent of the industry, only three were national, six were Brazilian and one was Argentine (Piñeiro and Cardeillac, this issue). In contrast, a country like Nicaragua can for the moment escape this trend toward the expansion of capital intensive forms of production and foreign control of processing and commercialisation. Although in Nicaragua the cattle ranching has doubled in terms of hectares dedicated to the activity as well as the heads of cattle between 2001 and 2015, most of the cattle ranching is still carried out by small and medium ranchers, with very low ratio of animal per hectare (Martí i Puig and Baumeister, this issue).

In fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as cut flowers, agribusiness also has a commanding position. These crops are very capital intensive, require at substantial amount of energy and water, and are oriented at both the domestic and the global market, depending on the quality of the produce. In comparison to soy and cereals, however, they still require a substantial amount of seasonal wage-labour, very often women and sometimes child labour. Though they have been squeezed out of the export market and by some supermarket chains, peasant and family farmers still produce a substantial amount of the fruits and vegetables for the domestic market. Finally, in typically peasant crops, such as coffee and cacao, although there are some large plantations, production is still in the hands of peasant and family producers and agribusiness, both domestic

and foreign, focuses on controlling processing, commercialization and export. However, agribusiness has made important inroads upstream also in these crops with the intention of improving quality and traceability for niche markets.

Scholars have been referring to this natural resource export trend as the re-primarization of Latin American economies or the return to a neo-extractivism (Cypher 2010; Acosta 2013; Burchardt and Dietz 2014). In this recent commodity boom, agro-export have hence accounted for a very important portion in the overall exports of most of the Latin American countries, while manufacturing has continued its decline initiated in the 1980s with neoliberal globalization. In Brazil, from 1999 to 2010 agricultural exports accounted for around 42 per cent of total exports – and only around 7 per cent of imports. The gross agricultural exports of US\$ 96.75 billion (and a corresponding net surplus of US\$ 80.13 billion) in 2014 broke all records (Sauer and Mészáros, this issue). In Uruguay in 2014, total exports were just over 10 billion dollars and 76 per cent of those were agricultural and agro-industrial exports (Piñeiro and Cardeillac, this issue). In Paraguay in 2016, more than 83 per cent of the total exports were agricultural, with soybean and its derivatives representing 53 per cent and meat representing 18 percent (Vázquez 2016: 34). In oil exporting countries, such as Venezuela and Ecuador, agro-export have not accounted for these high proportions of total exports, as an enormous portion comes from oil. They have, on the contrary, had difficulty stimulating their agricultural exports due in part to their overvalued currency and the circulation of oil rent throughout their economy (see Purcell, this issue).

The policies deployed to support agribusiness have thus been different and have depended to a large extent on the size of the economy, the financial capacity of the state and the nature of agribusiness. In countries with larger economies and states with broader financial capacities like Brazil and Argentina, the state mobilised its full range of policy instruments: institutional reforms to protect land and intellectual property rights or facilitate purchase of land, investment in infrastructure, fiscal incentives, soft credits, direct subsidies, labour conflict mediation, favourable environmental regulations, etc. Because of its sheer size and capacity, once again Brazil stands out in the region. In 2015, the Brazilian government is said to have distributed 187.7 billion reais (US\$ 46.6 billion) to agribusiness in a single year, mainly through credit to finance production, but also subsidies, debt equalization, purchase and price guarantee, stock exchange shares, etc. (Sauer and Mészáros, this issue; and see Carter 2015 for some of the most pro-agribusiness policies). In Argentina, the state also supported agribusiness, though in contrast to Brazil it significantly levied it with an export tax on soybean that reached 35 per cent

under the government of Kirchner and was maintained at this level by the subsequent government of his wife Fernández de Kirchner after an attempt to increase it failed in 2007 due to a vigorous campaign against it. But in typically Argentine populist tradition, the state took money from agrarian capital with its left hand and gave it back with its right one. Indeed, in 2007 the Kirchner government allocated 1,400 million pesos (444 million dollars) in subsidies to agribusiness, 55 per cent of which were assigned to the ten largest companies. The confrontation with agribusiness over the increase of the export tax in 2007 did not change anything since between 2007 and 2010 the subsidies were 7,359 million pesos and again 80 per cent went to agribusiness (Lapegna, this issue).

States with less financial capacities or with less political capacity or willingness to tax agribusiness, like Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Uruguay, not to mention Paraguay which does not impose any tax whatsoever, tended to adopt measures that support agribusiness institutionally such as protection of property rights, allocation of land titles and fiscal incentives (see the respective articles in this issue). Bolivia is probably one of the most surprising cases because the large capitalist producers of the Eastern Lowlands were historically the strongest allies of the Right and hence a target of the Left. Evo Morales' first three years were indeed very tense years of open confrontation with the landed oligarchy of that region. But after this initial conflict, which Morales managed to defuse, the state decided to support agribusiness in that region through institutional protection of large properties and the registration of more land to them (McKay forthcoming). As a consequence, the area planted with soybean soared multiplying by eight between the end of the 1990 and 2013 (Webber, this issue).

#### *Improvising support policies for peasants and family-farmers*

While all left-wing governments continued to support large-scale capitalist agriculture, it cannot be said that they did nothing for peasants and family producers. However, what is clear is that their policies, contrary to what could have been expected, were not inspired in the ideas of the food sovereignty movement. In a few countries, such as Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, the discourse of food sovereignty was used, and even enshrined in the constitution, but nowhere was it the ideological foundation of the agricultural policies supporting small-scale producers. Most governments seemed to have improvised the policies oriented at small-scale producers instead of having followed a clear agenda or programme. Most of them established policies that were in reality more poverty alleviating programmes. Some governments, for instance in Ecuador and Brazil and later in Venezuela — after its failed attempt to create a family-farming sector

(Enríquez and Newman 2016) — established policies to try to link-up small-scale farmers to the different agribusiness-dominated commodity chains. The furthest that a left-wing government went in terms of active policy to support family-farming was in Brazil with significant amount of funding and the creation of a protected markets for family-farmers through the local procurement of food by public institutions (see below).

Anti-poverty programmes, especially cash transfer programmes, were the main policy instrument of left-wing governments, who multiplied them to reach different constituencies, increased their coverage and raised the monetary allowance for them. These kinds of policies, though not supporting the productive capacity of peasants and family farmers, made a difference in the daily lives of the most marginalised agrarian sectors by reducing extreme poverty. Some of these policies were also implemented by many 'non-pink tide' governments, though they were normally more targeted in their constituencies, less generous and their coverage was not as extensive. Hence, these policies cannot be said to be policies that tackle the root causes of poverty and allow the most marginalised sectors of the peasantry to build a capacity to reach some level of autonomy vis-à-vis the market or secure a space within the market.

Some more clearly agricultural policies to support small-scale producers were nevertheless expanded or created by several left-wing governments, but they did not constitute a long-term strategic plan to transform the agricultural model. These policies tended to be of four types: credit schemes for agricultural production, linking family producer to a commodity chain, the creation of privileged or protected markets, and the institutionalisation of family farming within the state.

(1) The first type of policies distributed small credits to family farmers to help them improve their infrastructure, raise productivity, improve the quality of their crops, or generate new sources of income. Brazil has had these types of policies through its *Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar* (National Programme for the Strengthening of Family Farming, PRONAF) since the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002). Traditionally through this programme the state provided credits to agrarian reform settlers and family-farmers for planting, the purchase of equipment, animals and infrastructure, at low interest rates and with a reasonable repayment period. Some funds were also assigned to the creation or the development of groups, association, or cooperatives. During its time in power, PT governments substantially increased the budget and the type of agricultural activities that could be funded through this programme. It reached its highest point with 28.9 billion reais (US\$



7.2 billion) in 2015. Though important this may be, it still represents only 15.5 per cent of what was distributed to agribusiness that same year (Sauer and Mézsáros, this issue). Moreover, critics of PRONAF highlight that the credits are geared at the richer family farmers with the ability to repay (they capture 80 percent of the loans) and promote particularly their insertion in agribusiness-dominated crops, like soybean or sugarcane (Silveira et al. 2016). In Bolivia, the activities of EMAPA, the state-owned enterprise in charge of supporting food production, seem to follow the same logic as PRONAF in Brazil, as it concentrated the bulk of its 2011 budget of US\$ 148 million in providing credit and support for family farmers to produce soybean in the region of Santa Cruz (Webber, this issue). Nevertheless no other country, not even Argentina comes close to Brazil in the disbursement of funding to family farmers.

Argentina also had rolled out these types of policies long before Kirchner won the Presidency. They came under the umbrella of a programme called *Programa Social Agropecuario* (Social Agricultural and Livestock Programme, PSA). Kirchner did not significantly change the programme, but he transferred the control of the state institution that implemented this programme to a peasant movement in 2007. However, Kirchner's need to reinforce the government's alliance with local governors led him to subordinate the programme to local governors, several of whom have historically been in conflict with peasant movements (Lapegna, this issue). In Uruguay the Frente Amplio government implemented policies that are similar to those taken in Brazil though much more modest in the budget (Peñeiro and Cardeillac, this issue). The Correa government in Ecuador took certain measures to support peasant and family farming, like the creation and promotion of alternative small-scale income-generating activities. An institutions to oversee these projects was created, the *Instituto de Economía Popular y Solidaria* (The Institute of Popular and Solidarity Economy, IEPS), and given a budget of US\$ 9.5 million, though just like in Brazil it pales in comparison to the more than one billion and a half US dollars allocated to various projects to transform the economy. However, through one specific targeted measure the government allocated US\$ 60 million for loans to small and medium scale farmers to improve the quality of their cocoa trees (Clark, this issue).

(2) The second type of support policies attempted to link small-scale producers to agribusiness-controlled commodity chains. It would be difficult to argue, however, that these types of policies fall anywhere near a food sovereignty agenda, as the World Bank has been calling for this type of state intervention since its World Development Report 2008 entitled

*Agriculture for Development*, if not earlier.<sup>6</sup> It is revealing also that no left-wing government attempted to elaborate policies that could lead to the growth or improvement of what could be considered markets that are in principle favourable to peasants or small-scale farmers (fair trade, farmers' markets or niche speciality markets). When they did take these types of measures, as in Ecuador with the creation and promotion of farmers' markets, they tended to be marginal to the general agricultural policy or the dominance of agribusiness in the commodity chain (Clark, this issue). The PT government in Brazil attempted this type of policy with the biodiesel sector through its *Programa Nacional de Produção e Uso de Biodiesel* (the National Programme of Production and Use of Biodiesel, PNPB). Critics who have studied the application of the PNPB argue that the programme does not effectively give the means to peasant producers to collectively set up their own production infrastructure, but rather subordinates them to large agribusiness corporations operating in the sector (Fernandes et al. 2010: 808).

(3) The third type of support policy for small-scale producers involved market regulation, but also the creation of protected, nested or structured markets for family producers by the state, which was a feature in only three left-wing government: Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela. As far as we know, Ecuador and Venezuela, the largest oil producers of the region, were the only countries to establish guaranteed floor prices for commercial crops. These applied to a crop irrespective of the size of the farm though they were justified as a way to help the poorest producers. The case of Venezuela is an extreme case of capitalist rentierism distorting all the sectors, including the efforts to transform agriculture, making it difficult to use as a test case. (Purcell, this issue). But Ecuador did establish guaranteed floor prices for eight crops. However, it is not clear which types of producers benefited the most from this floor price policy. It is likely that medium and large-scale agricultural producers gain the most from this type of policies, as they tend to benefit from economies of scale and generally supply most of the protected crops.

Brazil, under the PT governments, stands out with its public procurement programmes through which the federal government requires municipalities to buy food from family producers (Nehring and McKay 2013). The biggest of these programmes is the *Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar* (National School Feeding Program (PNAE), with a budget of 3.8 billion reais (US\$ 1.15 billion) in 2014, of which 1.14 billion reais (US\$ 340 million) was reserved for the direct purchase of family farming products. Since 2009, the federal government requires municipalities to buy 30 per cent of the food for school meals from family farmers. The vast

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<sup>6</sup> For critical reviews of the World Development Report 2008, see the various symposium articles published in the *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 9 (2), 2009.

majority of the municipalities (60 percent) have not yet reached the 30 percent mark (Schneider et al 2016). Another of these programmes is the *Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos* (Food Procurement Programme, PAA) that also promotes the purchase of food from small-family farmers by state institutions, such as local public school, feeding programmes, food banks, community kitchens, charitable associations and community centres. The food is bought by these institutions at fair prices based on the regional market average and donated to the population facing food insecurity.

(4) The fourth type of support policies toward small-scale producers came by way of the institutionalization of the category of family-farmer and the formalization, creation or increase funding for state institutions responsible for this sector. Indeed, with the exception of Brazil where such an entity already existed, almost all the left-wing governments created a state institution to attend to the interests of small-scale producers. In Bolivia Morales created the Ministry of Rural Development and Land and the *Empresa de Apoyo a la Produccion de Alimentos* (EMAPA); in Ecuador Correa created the Ministry of Social and Solidarity Economy; in Argentina, Kirchner created the Secretary of Rural Development and Family Farming; in Venezuela a whole set of institutions were created to replace private companies, see Purcell in this issue; and in Uruguay the FA created the General Directorate for Rural Development within the Ministry of Agriculture, Cattle Ranching and Fishery. This is one of the common measures of these left-wing governments and it is significant that such institutions did not exist before their arrival to power. It is certainly one of the ways in which left-wing governments sought to officially recognise the importance of family-farming and allocate funds and administrative resources directly to small-scale farming. These institutions were also the space within the state apparatus where peasant organizations and allied intellectuals had more influence, though some of these were barely more than empty shells. Whatever the case may be, it is noticeable that one of the first measures as interim President taken by Michel Temer, who replaced Dilma Rousseff after her impeachment, was to abolish the ministry of agrarian development (MDA) which is responsible for agrarian reform and family-farming.

### *Tackling Rural Labour Markets*

Because peasant movements, and not rural unions, have been at the forefront of resistance to neoliberalism for the past two decades scholars and activists have given less attention to rural labour issues than to land conflicts. The transformations of the world of rural work are

nonetheless extraordinary. There has been a major shift from relatively permanent rural employment to temporary employment as well as an increasing participation of women in the rural wage labour market, albeit under precarious conditions (Deere 2005). Peasant households have increasingly been forced to find off-farm employment largely as wage labourers in agricultural activities but increasingly also in non-agricultural jobs. Ongoing processes of pluriactivity, de-agrarianization, proletarianization, flexibilization and feminization have been intensified with the shift to non-traditional agricultural exports such as soy, palm oils, fruits, horticulture and flowers, stimulated by neoliberal globalization. The use of labour contractors by employers has become more common. These contractors take advantage of the vulnerability of wage labourers who are competing for jobs, as these have become scarcer, by often not complying with the labour legislation and demanding long working hours or intensifying work through payment by result. Most of the contributors to this special issue have highlighted the loss of jobs that has accompanied the expansion of agribusiness and mechanization of agriculture. Thus increasingly rural labourers have to migrate within the country and beyond its frontier so as to find a job and through their remittances help to sustain the peasant household (Kay 2017a).

As working conditions and wages are generally not regulated in Latin America and trade unions tend to be very weak or non-existent, it is important for rural workers that the state intervenes to limit the many abuses suffered by wage workers in the countryside. This is an area in which left-wing governments distinguish themselves from their right-wing counterparts. Many pink tide governments took measures to increase the minimum wage, to regulate the rural labour market, and provide wider access to pensions. In Ecuador under the Correa government the minimum wage doubled and subcontracting of labour, which allowed employers to avoid their legal obligations to workers, was made illegal. However, the problem in Ecuador as well as other pink tide governments has been in applying the law and sanctioning the offenders. The FA in Uruguay was very active in extending most of the social and labour rights such as collective bargaining, eight hour working day and regulated breaks that urban workers had had for many years to rural workers. It doubled the minimum wage and created a special unit for rural labour within the ministry of labour. In Brazil between 2003 and 2010, the minimum wage increased 81 percent even after inflation was taken into account (Sauer and Mészáros, this issue) and the levels of labour formalization in agriculture have improved from 33 percent in 2004 to 50 percent in 2013 (Silveira et al. 2016: 4). Although important, these measures have not established any solid foundation for rural labour to recover some of its mobilization and representation capacity.

Nowhere, with the exception of Uruguay, were labour unions empowered with legal reforms that could have made unionization and collective bargaining easier and more effective.

### *NEO-DEVELOPMENTALISM: INTERPRETING CONTRADICTIONS, EXPLORING LIMITATIONS*

In order to explain the types of agrarian and agricultural policies we have to distinguish between factors that are the result of the conjuncture of the 2000s from those that stem from the historical changes that have happened in the Latin American countryside, which are linked to the *longue durée* and the nature of class and state formation in Latin America. This section deals with the former and the following section will address the latter.

#### *The Long Commodity Boom, Progressive Policies and Social Mobilization*

While the period of intense rural mass mobilisation of the 1990s—in particular in Brazil, Bolivia and Ecuador—coincides with an economic crisis experienced by labouring classes through rising unemployment and inequalities, the relative economic and social success and sustained popularity of pink tide governments stood on the shoulders of the recent 'long commodity boom', which to a large extent was fuelled by the Chinese demand (Jenkins 2011). This favourable conjuncture led leftist governments to fall in the easy temptation of 'progressive neo-extractivism' or what could be called 'social rentism', i.e. allowing extractivist production to continue to thrive while using the government income it generates to fund social programmes. With the commodities boom in many Latin America countries levels of employment rose, poverty significantly decreased and income inequality declined, albeit marginally (CEPAL 2016:50). Rural poverty tended to decline fastest in those countries which rolled out different types of cash transfer programmes for the poor which were principally significant in countries with left-wing governments but not necessarily confined to them. Brazil's *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger, later *Brasil Sem Miséria*) programme was particularly innovative and was emulated by various countries. The incidence of rural poverty between 2000 and 2012 declined most in Ecuador, i.e. by 49 per cent, followed by Brasil (44 per cent), Bolivia (34 per cent), Paraguay (31

per cent) and Nicaragua (15 per cent)<sup>7</sup>. While rural poverty in 2012 varies from 65 per cent in Nicaragua to 31 per cent in Brazil, it is only 2 per cent in Uruguay (CEPAL, FAO, IICA 2015: 2008).

Although it is difficult to establish an unequivocal correlation, social mobilisation attracted less people during this long commodity boom, even though there were numerous conflicts between peasant and indigenous communities and extractive industries and agro-export. The hegemonic character of the national celebration of the export boom, be it based on oil, gas, mining or agriculture, certainly made it more difficult for groups resisting extractivism to make their voice heard. The consolidation of agribusiness because of this favourable conjuncture and its way of interlocking with the interests of different sectors, including some capitalised small-scale family farmers, placed a wedge between the richer peasantry and the poorer peasantry and landless rural workers. If the crisis of the 1990s created fertile ground for class unity among them, the economic boom of the mid-2000s blurred things and suddenly several sectors of the peasantry, especially peasants with sufficient land and some saving, as well as unionised rural workers, saw the importance of a thriving agribusiness sector. For these sectors land struggle or agrarian reform, not to mention a radical transformation of the agricultural model, was no longer a priority in countries where it had been during the 1990s, such as Brazil, Bolivia and Ecuador. As we have seen in the section describing the policies of left-wing governments, several policies that supported peasants and family-farmers were policies that actually supported the middle and richer peasantry. The pink tide policies that supported small-scale farming in a sense came to reinforce the ongoing internal class differentiation, while the anti-poverty policies supported the income of the poorest sectors of the peasantry.

The case of Brazil is a perfect example of this situation. From the 1990s until the first years of the Lula government, the internal strength and vitality of the MST relied on maintaining an alliance between the 'land-poor' peasants, the landless rural workers and the threatened small-scale capitalist family producers. Similarly, its external political projection relied on reproducing this intra-class alliance with organisations like the *Movimento de Pequenos Agricultores* (Movement of Small Farmers, MPA) and the rural unions within the *Confederação Nacional de Trabalhadores na Agricultura*, (National Confederation of Agricultural Workers, CONTAG). However, the MST was never able to become hegemonic within rural social movements as rural unions were already

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<sup>7</sup> There are no reliable data available for Argentina and Venezuela. Furthermore, not all documents provide the same data for poverty as adjustments are sometimes made to the official data.



adopting more conciliatory stands and avoiding strikes by the beginning of the 2000s. But through these not always tensionless alliances, land reform, policies to support family farming and improvements of working conditions became shared demands of all rural movements vis-à-vis the state and against agribusiness (Vergara-Camus 2014: 232-41). The commodity boom, especially the expansion of soybean (and sugarcane until 2013), provided the context for a contradictory convergence of interests between small landed producers, unionised rural workers and agribusiness(see Lapegna 2015).

The case of Ecuador and Bolivia also show the importance of the new conjuncture that made confronting agribusiness less attractive to certain sectors of the peasantry. The Bolivia case resembles that of Brazil the most, as a sector of the poor indigenous peasantry seems to have transformed itself through internal social differentiation into a petty-capitalist fraction linked to the soybean complex. Important sectors of the indigenous middle peasantry, traditionally strong supporters of the MAS, are probably less vocal for a radical agrarian reform than they were in the past (Webber, this issue). In Ecuador the situation seems less clear, as agribusiness is neither of the size that it is in Brazil or even in Bolivia, nor soybean the crop of choice of agribusiness expansion. However, the mass mobilisation of indigenous peasants for agrarian reforms has been extremely difficult and modest considering the high degree of land concentration and Correa's failure to implement any significant land redistribution. Henderson (2016) explains the lack of real capacity of peasant organisations like the FENOCIN and CONAIE to mobilise their militant base in favour of agrarian reform with the fact that grassroots members of the biggest movements tend to already be landed and are more interested in government support for agricultural production, or because the land question is more an issue for the Andean peasants than a real national question. In addition, rural unions in Ecuador represent proletarianized rural workers, which have historically been fragmented and focused on struggle for better working conditions, and their links to peasant movements were not very strong. This make the development of a common agenda among rural movements very difficult.

The other factor related to the conjuncture of the early twenty-first century in Latin America that can explain the form that pink tide government policies took combines the 'legitimacy' or 'organic' crisis of neoliberalism and the relative weakness of the radical left. Four contributors to this special issue (Ezquerro-Cañete and Fogel, Lapegna, Webber) use Antonio Gramsci's idea on social change and moments of economic crisis. Lapegna and Webber use Gramsci's concept of the passive revolution, which the Italian communist developed to describe

the way in which several European countries adopted bourgeois institutions facilitating capitalist development without having to go through a revolution, as the French did in 1789 (Gramsci, 1971:114-120). In general terms, the concept refers to the contradictory situation in which a regime incorporates some ideological elements (and organic intellectuals) of the revolutionary forces in order to respond to the challenges and new requirements of the capitalist system, without radically transforming the class relations that sustain the system of domination. Indeed several authors explain the contradictory nature of the pink tide in Bolivia, Argentina, Ecuador and Brazil by arguing that these governments produced passive revolution because they have exhibited an ability to incorporate ideas like 'buen vivir', 'food sovereignty' into a nationalist or anti-imperialist discourse as well as some social movement leaders into the state administration, while maintaining the core of the neoliberal model unchanged. There is a great deal of truth in this description, but using the concept of passive revolution is a bit like identifying a diagnostic. The concept is better at describing the symptoms than at explaining the causes of how and why a social process takes this form. The balance of class forces, the nature of the political leadership, and the social form taken by class organisation are important causes of the generation of a passive revolution. Marx (1963) in the 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire speaks of the emergence of a *Bonaparte*, a political saviour and opportunist that can take power, when a society faces a situation in which no class is able to impose its domination. Similarly Gramsci speaks of a situation of 'organic crisis' when no class is capable of becoming hegemonic and of the emergence of a *Cesar* that plays the same role of the *Bonaparte* for Marx (Ezquerro-Cañete and Fogel, this issue). These concepts can provide a key to understanding the why these left-wing governments did not produce more radical changes with respect to agrarian and agricultural policies.

Latin America is the region that pioneered neoliberal policies, these policies being implemented in varying degrees already by the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is also among the first regions in which the economic crisis that neoliberal restructuring triggered, regardless of the recovering rates of economic growth in certain countries in the early 1990s, turned into a legitimacy crisis. This was the case in most of the region, but the more acute cases were Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Brazil. Two paths can be identified here: a Right-wing (Neoliberal Populists) one and a Left-wing (Neodevelopmentalist Populist) one. In some countries, a right-wing neoliberal populist leader, often with a business background, presented himself as the saviour of the poor: Carlos Menem (1989) in Argentina, Alberto Fujimori (1990) in Peru, Fernando Collor de Mello (1990) in Brazil, and Vicente Fox (2000) in Mexico. This first

path proposed to solve the economic crisis by radicalising the neoliberal reforms and failed for the most part, as it simply exacerbated the contradictions of neoliberalism.

The second path of resolution of the crisis of legitimacy of neoliberalism came in general chronologically later in the 2000s, often after a serious debacle or a financial shock like in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela. In class term, at the top neoliberalism was facing an re-accommodation of the power bloc, in which the ruling class alliance fractured and the role of the finance bourgeoisie in particular as the leading class within the dominant bloc was *temporarily* questioned. This seems to be more clearly the case in Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela. The case of Brazil is more a case where financial capital is not discredited but accepts to give room to other sectors of the bourgeoisie (Morais and Saad-Filho 2005, 2011) and these sectors take a chair at the high table of the state. Simultaneously, at the bottom, some sectors of the subaltern classes (indigenous, peasants and unemployed) managed to mobilise and organise mass protests, but they were often not matched in this by urban labouring classes. In Bolivia, Ecuador and Brazil, where peasant movements were the strongest, movements managed to extract significant concessions from neoliberal governments in the 1990s. But they were already on the decline before the access of leftist forces to government in Ecuador (Clark, this issue), Bolivia (Webber 2011) and Brazil (Vergara-Camus 2014: 232-256). In the cases where they created or participated in a political party, like Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador and Nicaragua, and gained some political momentum, they tended not have a clearly defined political programme of reforms and policies. Compared to the 1990s, the position of the peasant movement in the 2000s, even in the strongest cases, is one where they only have some mobilization capacity, but are weak in their political organisation. In Nicaragua peasant movements had already been displaced and in Venezuela they were practically inexistent as a political force. In the cases where the political party that they supported had been running for elections for some years, as with the PT in Brazil, the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement toward Socialism, MAS) in Bolivia, the *Frente Amplio* (Broad Front, FA) in Uruguay and the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*, (Sandinista Front of National Liberation, FSLN) in Nicaragua, the ideology of the party moved closer and closer to the centre as the year passed. Hence, the class conjuncture in which many pink tide governments emerge is one where class forces balance each other out and no class emerges as a clear 'leading class'.

However, these were more cases of 'conjunctural (or occasional) crisis' that Gramsci distinguishes from 'organic crisis' in his notes on the Modern Prince. The former is a crisis where

the political leaders are the target of attacks, while the latter is where the whole model of domination is put into question (Gramsci 1971: 177-78). These were not cases of hegemonic crisis of neoliberalism, even in countries like Argentina, Bolivia and Ecuador where the discredit of neoliberalism was probably the deepest. However, following Marx's analysis in the 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire, the political conjuncture was perfect for the appearance of a *Bonaparte*. In the context of the 2000s, Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Néstor Kirchner in Argentina in particular represent perfect cases of *Bonapartism*. These leaders took power in a situation of crisis and first establish opportunistic alliances with social movements, before fatally weakening them through a subtle combination of repression, co-optation and *transformismo*<sup>8</sup>. Kirchner's case is a peculiar one because he managed to enlist on his side contradictory and even antagonistic groups such as the *Piqueteros*, poor urban popular sectors, local peasant and indigenous movements, as well as pro-agribusiness authoritarian provincial governors, which only Argentine populism can assemble. Where the popular movements had kept a certain control over the political party, like in Bolivia and Brazil, the President still had a significant amount of power vis-à-vis the movements.

The situation in which no class force emerges as the leading class without being an 'organic' but a 'conjunctural crisis' explains why several left-wing leaders had to strike an alliance with quite conservative sectors of the Right to reach power. Analysts tend to forget that the running mate (and later Vice-President) of Lula Da Silva was José Alencar, from the Liberal Party of Brazil. This alliance had to be reworked with another force of the Right, the *Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party, PMDB) that had supported the previous military dictatorship, when Dilma chose Michel Temer for Vice-President. He would later lead the impeachment process against her and become President himself. It is also often forgotten that Néstor Kirchner also had a right-wing running mate, Julio Cobos, who was a politician from the *Unión Cívica Radical* (Radical Civic Union, UCR). Julio Cobos also played a critical role against Kirchner when he casted the decisive vote in Senate to bring down the motion to increase the export tax on soybean in 2007. In Paraguay Fernando Lugo was the left-wing politician that arrived to power in probably the weakest position. He had to strike an alliance with the centre-right *Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico* (Authentic Radical Liberal Party, PLRA), the right-wing opposition had a majority in both houses of Parliament, and he was even in a minority in his own governing coalition.

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<sup>8</sup> *Transformismo* is a term that Gramsci uses to refer to the incorporation of left opposition leaders and parties into right-wing governments or forces or when leaders switch from one party to the other without any ideological coherence (Gramsci, 1971: 58-59).

Hence the policy choices of left-wing government were very often restrained from within their own political coalition. Nowhere was this more evident than in Brazil, where the PT accepted to relinquish the control of the ministry of agriculture to agribusiness (Mészáros and Sauer, this issue), while populating the smaller ministry of agrarian development with peasant movement activists or intellectuals close to them. Thus, the Right did not lose its access to the state although it lost the Presidency. In many countries, it remained powerful in the Parliament, the bureaucracy and the judiciary, as well as in several regions of these countries. Moreover, the extractive imperative of the left-wing governments ensured that the doors of the presidential palace were never closed for them.

Right-wing forces were however not only present inside these governments, but rapidly reorganised themselves to confront it from the outside if needed. In the early years of left-wing governments in Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay, the landed classes reacted vehemently to the threat or mere possibility of a redistributive agrarian reform. In Venezuela in the early 2000s, the opposition carried out its failed coup and economic boycott, and presented the agrarian reform as an attack on private property at large. In Brazil the year 2003 was marked by the reappearance of public demonstrations of the *União Democrática Ruralista* (Democratic Association of Ruralists or Democratic Rural Union, UDR), the organization defending large landowners, to oppose the increase in land occupation by landless peasants and rural workers. Throughout the PT governments, large landowners and agribusiness also continued to work in Parliament through their 'bancada ruralista', a pressure group of around 200 elected officials, and created enquiries and commissions to scrutinise and criminalize the activities of peasant movements (Sauer and Mészáros, this issue; Carter 2015). In Bolivia, almost right from the beginning the government of Evo Morales had to confront a quasi-secessionist movement in the Lowlands provinces of the Media Luna, which saw the landed elite use violence against indigenous and peasant movements allied to Morales (Webber, this issue). However, only in Paraguay did landlords, almost on their own, deem it necessary to bring down the elected President Fernando Lugo, who they saw as a threat to their interests because he had not decisively acted against land occupation and had previously tabled a motion to introduce an export tax on cereals of a mere six percent (Ezquerro-Cañete and Fogel, this issue).

*From Autonomy to Clientelism, from Anti-neoliberalism to Neo-Developmentalism*

As was shown above, many of the measures and policies implemented during by these governments produced significant positive though not path-breaking effects for peasants and family producers. However, not in a single country were peasant movements able to successfully pressure the government into taking more assertive measures. The weakness of the movements was increased either by the corporatist origin or the clientelist tendencies dominating within Latin America social movements. In Brazil, these characteristics were already well established when Lula became President, the large unions, including the rural CONTAG, preferring to participate in the different type of neo-corporatist consultative councils that exist instead of mobilizing their membership to pressure the state. Correa, Lula, Chávez, Evo can all in different degrees be said to have fostered clientelist linkages with the grassroots membership of the great majority of the social organisations, while attempting to co-opt their leaders. On their part, social and peasant movements, beyond their demand for autonomy have remained state-centric in their strategies. Once these governments offered positions within the state many of these movements lost their ability to mobilise their basis in exchange for very little influence on the political or policy process. They ended up at the mercy of state programmes over which they had very little input. Moreover, they did not have their own self-sustained autonomous model of development. It was as if movements thought that the state would deliver the goods and if it did not, they would have the strength to pressure it. They did not. On the contrary, the movements that decided to confront the state's extractivist agenda were criminalised and marginalised in Bolivia, Ecuador (Bebbington and Bebbington 2011), as well as in Brazil.

To be fair though, the parties that came to power with this pink tide, if they were still anti-neoliberal in their propaganda, did not have a real alternative to offer. This is another reason why we cannot speak of a real crisis of hegemony of neoliberalism. Across the pink tide, with the partial exception of Venezuela —where some kind of socialist agenda of nationalization, workers control and participatory working class democracy has been attempted (although fuelled by oil rents and populism)—, food sovereignty, buen vivir, agro-ecology and so on did not challenged the core of the neoliberal hegemony. The market and the private sector remained the privileged actors and most of the agricultural policies were oriented at accelerating capital accumulation and deepening market integration. The notable difference was that the state took on a more active role in stimulating and orienting economic growth and deepening the export-orientation of the economy. It also played a role in the redistribution of part of this growth toward labouring classes. If these governments were not hard core neoliberal governments, they firmly remained within its compounds by mutating into neo-developmentalism.



In contrast to what some authors like Grugel and Riggirozzi (2012) argue, these left-wing governments were not post-neoliberal, if we understand it to be beyond neoliberalism (see Petras and Veltmeyer 2017). In our view these regimes are best characterized as neo-developmentalists. They all pursued a development strategy in which they sought to strengthen the state, which had been significantly trimmed down during the neoliberal period, so as to intervene more on the market and steer the development process in a desired direction, i.e. towards a more diversified and technologically advanced economic structure as well as to a more socially inclusive and egalitarian society. While some governments (re)created new state enterprises, reversing some privatizations, or re-nationalised (Venezuela) or increased their royalties and participation in the extractive industries (Bolivia, Ecuador), these initiatives were few and certainly did not recreate the pre-neoliberal developmentalist state of the import-substituting and protectionist industrialization era, with the exception of Venezuela. One of the important objectives of neo-developmentalism is to choose the right sector and champions and establish the conditions for their market success, with the idea that it is necessary to grow before redistributing. In agriculture, we have seen that this view has translated in supporting agribusiness and exports while diverting some of the state funds to support the small-scale producers that have the ability to integrate successfully into the market.

While these governments made significant advances in social policy, social inclusion and poverty reduction as already discussed, they were unable or unwilling to transform the country's productive matrix as some of the left-wing governments had proposed in their development programmes such as 'buen vivir' (Ecuador), 'vivir bien' (Bolivia) or 'socialism of the 21st century' (Venezuela). Such a transformation of the country's productive structure requires developing new activities, largely linked to the industrial and service sectors, which generate higher value added, promise greater possibilities for productivity growth and can find an expanding world market for its products and services. The aim is to diversify the economy and reduce the dependence on primary commodities. These were not novel ideas, however, as they had already been proposed by staff of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in a series of publications during the late 1980s and early 1990s. With these writings ECLAC attempted to find a space alongside neoliberalism without completely abandoning its structuralism – hence their development proposal was labelled neo-structuralist.<sup>9</sup> It is surprising that the left-wing government generally did not acknowledge that their development ideas were significantly influenced by neo-structuralism. In a way neo-

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<sup>9</sup> For an analysis of structuralism and neo-structuralism, see Leiva (2008) and Kay (2017b).

developmentalism is the child of neo-structuralism though missing in practice its core proposal of the productive transformation which drew on the successful development experience of South Korea and Taiwan. These governments were largely seduced by the more easily achievable neo-extractivist policy, to which they attached some neo-structuralist elements of market steering.<sup>10</sup>

### *COALESCED BOURGEOISIE, NEOLIBERALISM, RENTIER STATE*

The neoliberal reforms since the 1980s, in which the privatization of land and tax incentives and credits to the agribusiness stands out, gave a new impetus to large agricultural properties. In many cases, these reforms contributed to transforming the remaining 'traditional landowners' into large modern capitalist farmers who are tightly inserted into the global circuit of capital. In most cases, the social sector that was created during the agrarian reform is stagnating and large sectors of the peasantry cannot reproduce themselves without the income from temporary employment or migration. In agriculture, the state has been replaced by national and transnational agribusiness, as capital has extended its control over agriculture from inputs (seeds) to consumer markets (supermarket chains). Technological innovation and production certification have a clear preference for the large capitalist production because they require significant capital investment and a flexible labour market, often only providing temporary and precarious work. Levels of exploitation and labour productivity demands have dramatically increased. Financialization has also made significant advances through mechanisms such as crop insurance, hedge funds or 'futures' that speculate on price changes of crops (the case of soybeans is emblematic).

In this context it is helpful to refer to Marx's concept of the 'coalesced bourgeoisie' (Marx 1963), a situation that arises when the ties that bind the different fractions of the bourgeoisie and landed property reached a level at which the distinction between capitalists and landowners is abolished. In a pioneering and fascinating study Maurice Zeitlin and Richard Ratcliff (1988) apply and enrich Marx's concept of the coalesced bourgeoisie to analyse the composition of Chile's dominant class up to the 1960s and their capital accumulation strategies. They concluded that the Chilean ruling class was composed of great landowning families whose members are simultaneously principal owners of capital, top executives of larger corporations,

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<sup>10</sup> These comments apply to a lesser extent to Brazil as the country was already more industrially advanced and the State had retained many of its developmentalist features during the neoliberal phase as compared to the other pink tide countries.

and key political figures within the state (Parliament, state bureaucracy, and government). They also showed that the Chilean landed capitalists had chosen for many years to actively imbricate their economic interests with foreign capital through the ownership of stocks in foreign corporations and through their direct participation, or that of a relative, in the executive boards of foreign companies operating in Chile. Zeitlin and Radcliff (1988: 238-9) called these mechanisms 'the ties that bind'.

In the corporate food regimes of the globalisation era the links between the different fractions of the Latin American ruling classes have coalesced even further. As can be seen in several contribution of this special issue, the fusion between agriculture and industry within farming through the rise of agribusiness and processing plants, as well as outside farming proper with merchant capital (supermarkets) and financial capital (insurance companies, investment funds, banks) has aligned the most powerful rural classes with capitalist sectors. Although it is a general trend and takes on very different form in different countries, this fusion is probably much more acute and complex in the largest and most capitalist agricultures of the region, like Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, and less so in the smaller ones like Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Paraguay. In Argentina, finance seems to have created a new model with its '*pool de siembra*' ('sowing pools') that goes well beyond conventional linkages between capitalist farmers and agribusiness companies (Lapegna, this issue). Agriculture is once again a good business opportunity for capital and this has led to a new wave of land grabbing in many Latin American countries, internationalisation of Latin American (particularly Brazilian and Argentinean) agrarian capital, the increase presence of transnational agribusiness (independent or through merger and cooperation with national agribusiness) and the multiplication of technical agricultural service providers (Borras et al. 2012). This means that profitable agriculture is no longer simply about the control of land but is a lot about the highly advanced technology, biotechnology, advanced management systems for increasingly complex value chains and a highly flexible labour regime. Different capitals come together but large agribusiness capital extends its reach through the value chain. As we have seen, agribusiness produces 'interlocking chains', weaving more firmly together various forms of capital beyond landed capital: finance, logistics of the value chain from the farmer to the supermarket, infrastructure such as silos, processing and packing plants, services for technology, biotechnology seeds and new irrigation and farming techniques. Hence, the 'ties that bind' have been extended further to include not only bourgeois sectors, but also petty-bourgeois ones such as specialized service providers (professionals, labour contractors, technicians, marketing experts and others) and even sectors of the peasantry.

### *Neoliberalism, Rentierism, and the State*

If we understand rentierism as made of a series of wealth accumulation strategies that relies broadly speaking on a monopoly or monopoly-making position, be it private land property, state office, officially-granted quasi-monopoly over a sector (energy, telecommunication, transport, agrofuels), rentierism is a practice that is prevalent within contemporary capitalism. Though contradictory if understood from classical Marxist theoretical definition of capitalism, where capitalism is defined as being characterised by the separation from the economic and the political and capitalist accumulation is driven by the imperative of market competition, rentier strategies can be fully consistent with *really existing capitalisms*. Indeed, rentier strategies of wealth accumulation can be understood as ways of bypassing, or restricting, market competition by securing politically-protected market control. The private sector thus can be heavily reliant of rentier strategies of wealth accumulation, but so can a sector of the 'political class'.

We argue that combining Marx's and Zeitlin and Radcliff's idea of the coalesced bourgeoisie with the idea of rentier capitalism inspired in Marx's concept of ground-rent helps us make sense of the essential form that capitalist farming is taking in Latin America in the early twenty first century. We are not only witnessing the era of the financialisation of the economy, including the agricultural sector, but we are also witnessing the *rentierisation of the economy*. Under neoliberalism, political power and access to the state has become determinant for the strategy of several capitalist actors. In Latin American agriculture, this 'rentierisation' of agriculture is translating itself in the following three strategies:

First, agribusiness firms are able to expand their reach and increase revenues as much through their political leverage than through their 'market power'. They do so by gaining monopoly control of a sector, as in soybean export, or being given monopoly power by the state in a certain sector such as intellectual property rights over seeds or agrofuels at pre-established prices for blending mandates.

Second, some formerly dominant classes and fractions of classes at the top, especially large landlords, which were unable or unwilling to transform themselves into large capitalist producers, have allied themselves to dominant capitalist groups. They extract ground rent by renting out land to (or investing their surplus in) agribusiness companies.

Third, some sectors of the subordinated classes or fractions of classes at the bottom that managed to maintain their access to land, i.e. middle and rich peasants, have also aligned themselves with agribusiness. The expansion of soybean production in South America is actually being accompanied by the emergence of a 'petty rentierism'. Small and medium size producers, who do not have sufficient funds or prefer not to risk losing their land if they engage in farming, rent out their land to large capitalist producers and sometimes sell their labour power to them. We are seeing a new phenomenon of 'too poor to farm, but rich enough to rent out'.

In sum, the power of the dominant classes in the countryside, even the top strata of the peasantry, has never been as intricately linked to those of leading capitalist sectors of the whole economy. This stands in sharp contrast to the process of precarization, fragmentation, demobilisation or even repression that peasant and rural workers have faced and are enduring under neoliberalism.

## CONCLUSION: THE END OF A CYCLE

With the defeat of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in December 2015 in Argentina, the removal from power of President Dilma Rousseff in May 2016 in Brazil, and the debacle since the death of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, the latest cycle of left-wing politics has come to an end in Latin America. The corruption scandals, implicating the Workers' Party (PT) among many others parties and the above mentioned removal of Dilma Rousseff is an historic moment not only for Brazil but for the Latin American Left in general. Not simply because of the size and importance of Brazil in the region, but because Brazilian social movements and parties played a key role in the renewal of the Latin American Left under neoliberalism, through fora and coalitions, such as La Vía Campesina and the World Social Forum. The fall of the PT, especially the way in which it has fallen, dramatically closes the latest cycle of popular mobilisation that began in the early 1980s with the rise of new unionism and saw the emergence of a democratic, radical and pluralistic Left, preoccupied at first as much with reaching political power than with changing society and the way of doing politics within social and political organisations. The PT was already no longer the PT of its origins when 'Lula' won the Presidency in 2003, but that past remained in the background and the PT still had important connections to social movements, which yielded some progressive changes in terms of affirmative action policies. Leftists will look back at this

experience with a sense of disappointment and despair, as they will at the other experiences in Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Venezuela.

The contributions to this JAC special issue have highlighted the specific characteristics of each country, the peculiar confluence of interest between the state and agribusiness, and the particular policies oriented at large-scale farming and peasant and family farming. This concluding article summed up the findings and identified similarity and difference. However, the general finding is that there was not a substantial change in the agricultural model. In policy terms, the two most important missing elements were the lack of redistributive agrarian reform and the lack of a programme of reforms to place peasant and family farming firmly at the centre of sustainable and egalitarian model of agricultural development. In absence of a redistributive agrarian reform that would have distributed land to landless peasants and rural workers, the concentration of land and the marginalisation of small-scale producers were not properly tackled. The policies that supported small-scale producers ended up being policies for the middle and richer peasantry. No plan was drawn up to begin to reorganise the peasant sector so that it could acquire some kind of collective dynamism, through the creation of cooperatives, networks, agro-industries, instead of isolated policy oriented the individual producer. Similarly, most anti-poverty measures simply temporarily alleviated the levels of poverty through a variety of subsidies and income support measures which are dependent on the ability and willingness of governments to provide.

What will happen now that the commodity boom has vanished, the state will not have the financial resources to fund the cash transfer programmes and the millions of rural poor do not have land upon which to fall back on, albeit for self-consumption? The end of the commodity boom exposes the shaky foundations of all this and the lack of solid base from where to rebuild. Banking on agribusiness and extractivism was probably the worst mistake of left-wing governments because if its boom allowed them to remain in power and redistribute some of the national income to popular classes, its recent bust has displaced them from power and they will not have much to show their political constituency other than a temporary increase in disposable income. The coming crisis will surely rearticulate the different class interests within the peasantry, including that of the middle peasantry who stands to lose in the economic restructuring that will come.



*Lessons for the Left: Confronting the Spectre of Rentierism and Neo-Populism*

These left-wing governments had the good fortune of arriving to power and governing during a long commodity boom, which made them easily fall into what we called a 'state social rentierism'. It was much less dangerous and challenging, not to say more electorally rewarding, for them to surf the wave of the commodity boom than to begin to build a new sustainable agricultural model on the promised ideas of 'buen vivir' and food sovereignty. The main agrarian challenge of the Latin American Left, including parties and social movements, in this last decade has not necessarily been the issue of choosing between doing this 'within' or 'outside the state'. Although this is an important question, the main challenge was rather how to deal with a rentier capitalist state, entangled within an agribusiness-led agricultural market. The ways the different governments and political parties have tackled this issue and the class alliances that they have struck have been fundamental in determining the path that each country has taken. These have varied from almost classically populist path (Argentina) to reconstituted landlordism (Paraguay), with all kind of shades of neo-populism in between: neo-developmental populist (Ecuador), sub-imperialist developmentalist populism (Brazil), political patrimonial rentierism (Nicaragua) and neo-nationalist modernising populism (Bolivia). The term neo-populism is probably the most appropriate because left-wing governments remained firmly within the realm of the Latin American style 'national-populist' politics, which have always signalled a tension within working classes between corporatism and self-organisation or autonomy.

The political lesson in all this is that in some sense the Latin American Left, even in the cases where social movements had played a key role in challenging neoliberalism as in Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina and Brazil, was much weaker than most analysts argued, and that labouring class forces did not have the autonomy and the level of class consciousness that many thought. Right-wing forces were much stronger than most thought on the left and neoliberal hegemony was weakened but not in crisis. The scholars that see autonomy as a viable strategy (Zibechi 2010; Escobar 2010; Vergara-Camus 2014) probably failed in properly analysing the conjuncture. However, the more conventional Marxist analysts did not fare much better at forecasting the outcome either. Gaining access to the state did not end up yielding more concrete results than building autonomy from below and outside the state, as some authors like Atilio Borón (2012) proposed.

Some authors (including Webber and Lapegna in this issue) have resorted to Gramsci's concept of the 'passive revolution' to describe this outcome characterised by a complex

combination of reform and restoration. Following Gramsci, we could also add that this lack of long-term strategy was the result of the Left's own strategic decisions. The Latin American Left simply traded the 'war of position' (hegemony within civil society) for a 'war of manoeuvre' (access and control of state institutions), without having properly won the 'war of position' or without thinking that it was important to continue to carry the struggle on both fronts.

This strategic focus on gaining access to state power by most of the parties of the Latin American left revealed their inability to deal with the rentier character of the state, still to a great extent in the hands of conservative forces, the control of markets by agribusiness and a lack of long-term strategy of most of the Left. It did not have for instance a plan on how to slowly rebuild a peasant economy in the shadows of an agribusiness-dominated agriculture. It did not either have a clear idea of the types of reforms or policies that were required to empower and promote peasant producers and family farmers, nor the sequence of these reforms. Finally, any class hegemony or agenda of social transformation needs to also build new social relations of production, such as new ways of organising production, new ways of exchanging and new forms of property relations. This is probably where the pink tide of the 2000s produced its most resounding defeat. Absolutely nothing of this kind was attempted.

In reality what these cases show is that contemporary leftist movements and parties have not reflected on the possibility or necessity of establishing new societal forms within civil society as an important element of any long term strategy. The belief that in one way or another power is concentrated in the state still dominates the thinking of the most important sectors of the Latin American left. The most tragic example of this is to be found in the long march of the Brazilian PT toward electoral respectability. In the 30 years from its creation to its electoral victory at the Presidential election of 2003, the PT abandoned all its original thinking with respect to internal party democracy, participatory processes and workers control in the workplace. It moved electoral campaign after another closer to an almost typical clientelist populist party. When the time came to call in 'the masses' to support it from the coup, they were no longer there (or not in the numbers required). Instead of using its partial access to the state to build an active, politicised and supportive citizenry, the PT itself contributed to turn it into a clientelist network. To be fair though, the PT included more participatory processes than any previous government. However these were basically consultative bodies and backroom deals came to dominate policy-making.

What may be the way forward? No one really knows. But an essential ingredient for a recovery of peasant movements has to be the strengthening of the organization of peasants and rural workers and the building of broad-based class alliances within rural and urban sectors. Another ingredient will be the re-invention of class-based left-wing parties that will include mechanisms, such as limitation and revocation of mandates, rotating leadership and collective leaderships, which will avoid the appropriation of the party by professional politicians and the development of clientelist practices. This is not an easy task for sure, especially for rural movements in a context where the rural population is diminishing, agriculture is more and more controlled by agribusiness, and the ruling class is now a new coalesced bourgeoisie.

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