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Peasant and Revolution in Bolivia, April 9, 1952–August 2, 1953

JAMES V. KOHL*

SOCIAL revolution is a phenomenon uncommon in history and certainly rare in individual experience. In Bolivia, as earlier in Mexico, and later in Cuba, revolutionary upheaval produced an intensity of emotion and experience unique to its participants.¹ The events which began with the assault on traditional power on April 9, 1952, would have a profound and enduring effect on all members of Bolivian society.

Perhaps no social group in Latin America has been as misunderstood as the peasantry of Bolivia; while students of rural Bolivia have noted the diversity of its population, generalizations based on impression, projection of foreign theoretical constructs and naive assertions abound in the popular literature. Che Guevara staked a revolution and his life on notions gathered during a brief visit to the country in 1953, only to return fourteen years later, as luckless redeemer ignored by an unappreciative peasantry. And Régis Debray has included Bolivian peasants, in one way or another, in his grand theoretical schemes.²

This paper will focus on the history of the peasantry during a particular historical experience: the period between the national revolution of April 9, 1952 and the Agrarian Reform Decree of August 2, 1953. This brief period is a crucial one; indeed, one could argue that it is the most important period in Bolivian post-independence history. During these few months a revolutionary movement seized

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1. Revolutions cannot be ignored by those occupying their stage, although there are inevitably those who try. The former has been noted by Oscar Lewis (“. . . most Tepoztecas tried to remain neutral and joined the conflict only when it became a matter of life or death”) in *Tepoztlán: Village in Mexico* (New York, 1960), p. 21, and the latter is portrayed by the bourgeois anti-hero of Edmundo Desnoes’ *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (Buenos Aires, 1968).

2. Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution?*, trans. by Bobbye Ortiz (New York, 1967), pp. 33–36, 110, 123 and, *Che’s Guerrilla War*, trans. by Rosemary Sheed (Harmondsworth, Eng., 1975), pp. 57–59, 93.

power and began the dismantling of a regime entrenched for centuries. The "Tin Barons" were unseated and their mines nationalized; the military was purged; suffrage was extended from some 200,000 adult and propertied males to women, Indians and illiterates; and the fundamental socioeconomic basis of the old order was undermined through agrarian reform.

One can assume that the relationship of the peasantry to the revolutionary process was of particular importance in Bolivia, a country of Indian majority and predominately peasant in 1952. But what specific role did the peasantry play in the insurrectionary scenario of the revolutionary leaders? What was the actual role of the peasantry in the insurrection of April 11, 1952, when the revolutionary forces seized power? A related series of questions regarding the nature of rural politics in the wake of the political collapse of the old order will also be addressed: the position of the revolutionary government vis à vis landlord and peasant; the response of both to new political realities (for example, legal appeals, strikes, sitdowns and land seizures); the impact of social revolution within the peasantry itself (intra-peasant conflict over leadership, patronage, boundaries, and religion); and finally rural-urban political relationships (such as peasant attacks on towns and urban propaganda against the peasantry).

Insurrection: April 9-11, 1952

The role of the peasantry in the revolution of 1952 may be divided into the primary, insurrectionary phase when the old regime was assaulted and overthrown; and the later period, a matter of years, not days, when the revolution spread throughout the nation's social classes and geographical regions. As often is the case in strongly centralized nations, the Bolivian insurrection of April 1952 began in an urban context. The period of revolutionary expansion and consolidation subsequently enveloped the rural sector.

In three days of intensive fighting, April 9-11, 1952, revolutionary forces captured the urban strongholds of power—La Paz, Potosí, Santa Cruz, Cochabamba, Oruro, and Tarija. Miners, factory and railroad workers, MNR (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario) cadre, townspeople and carabineros, together with disaffected members of the military, defeated the government forces. Peasant participation was negligible here, as most scholars have noted.³ Important particulars,

3. The absence of peasant participation in the insurrection has been noted by Richard Patch, "Bolivia: The Restrained Revolution," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 334 (Mar. 1961), 128, and Dwight Heath, "The Aymara Indians and Bolivia's Revolutions," *Inter-American Economic Affairs*, 18 (Spring 1966), 32. For an assertion to the contrary, unqualified and undocu-

however, have been overlooked; the MNR insurrection of April 1952 was elaborately planned and the final act culminated years of experience in the planning and implementation of revolutionary strategy, from electoral participation to urban revolt. The most dramatic and well-known precedent was the 1949 insurrection known as the "civil war," when MNR rebels managed to seize control of the country's provincial capitals, but lost the struggle for La Paz, and thus, ultimately, victory.

The plan for the 1952 insurrection consisted, theoretically, of two stages: an initial urban insurrection in the departmental capitals; and, a contingent stage in which the struggle would be thrown open to workers and peasants. The success of the first stage precluded implementation of the second. It is, nevertheless, worthy of note. The strategy of the 1952 insurrection has been ignored by scholars and, consequently, the role of the peasantry as a revolutionary force in the prerevolutionary years has yet to be fully appreciated in revolutionary historiography.

The resistance of the Bolivian peasantry to white rule during the decade of the 1940s also remains unexamined in the literature. Perhaps equal in consequence to the Chaco War in creating a militant peasant consciousness was the 1945 Indian Congress. The result of concerted planning, the congress was a testimony to the dedication of peasant organizers. Amid the rising revolutionary spirit in the campo (protests, strikes, rebellions), the Indian Congress stands as the apogee of Indian reformism and a monument to the indefatigable effort of such peasant leaders as Francisco Chipana Ramos, Luis Ramos Quevado, Santos Marca Tola, Dionisio Miranda, and Antonio Mamani Alvarez.

On the last day of the congress, May 15, 1945, President Gualberto Villarroel issued a number of decrees ameliorating landlord-peasant relationships and abolishing personal service. The decrees were ignored by the landlords and unenforced by local authorities. This clearly exposed the limits of legislative reform (as the 1951 election would reveal the farce of electoral solutions) and, together with the brutal coup against Villarroel, gave vent to rage against the contradictions and illegitimacy of the social order. The *sexenio*, that crucial six years from Villarroel's death to the 1952 revolution, was an age of heightened repression and rebellion. The 1949 civil war and the later MNR revo-

mented, placing "key cause" for the revolution in "the seething resentment of the feudal landlord by the Indian serf," see David Greene, "Revolution and the Rationalization of Reform in Bolivia," *Inter-American Economic Affairs*, 19 (Winter 1965), 7. For evidence of the participation of some peasants in the insurrection in La Paz, see *El Diario*, Apr. 12, 1952, p. 2, and also, Dec. 31, 1952, p. 7.

lution, although primarily urban centered, should not be viewed outside of this sociopolitical context.⁴

The civil war is often cited as a forerunner of the 1952 revolution, another example of the MNR's focus on urban insurrection as a revolutionary strategy and proof of the MNR's decision to exclude the peasantry in its insurrectionary schemes. Thus, for example, a recent history finds: "Their failure to seek peasant support in 1949 indicates . . . their attempts were vitiated by resistance on the part of MNR urban commando units and by leaders in the MNR primary party organizations."⁵ Evidence for this conclusion, here and elsewhere, rests on a sentence in a biography of one of the MNR leaders.⁶ However, examination of the sentence in its context leads to an interpretation more suggestive of the interplay between urban and rural revolutionaries. Consider the preceding passage in the original work:

At any rate, the perspective of time shows how necessary it might have been, in those moments when the weights of the scale were still seesawing, to throw all the weight of a peasant insurrection on the side of the rebellion. The peasants continued to be faithful to the MNR, and they had already successfully shown their strength in a similar contingency: the federal revolution.⁷

The contingency did not arise. Three days after the onset of the civil war the peasant revolutionary, Antonio Mamani Alvarez, managed

4. In the bloody wake of Villarroel's eclipse the peasantry faced the fury of a resurgent oligarchy. Villarroel is remembered as "el presidente colgado," but we should note the fate of his peasant supporters; Agustín Barcelli S. states that 280 Indian "caciques" were executed after the 1946 coup, in *Medio siglo de luchas sindicales revolucionarias en Bolivia* (La Paz, 1957), p. 196; penitentiaries and prison camps on Coati Island in Lake Titicaca and the infamous Ichilo in the Santa Cruz jungle were crowded with hundreds of Indian political prisoners including veterans of the 1945 Indian Congress. See J. Blanco, *Antonio Alvarez Mamani: Historia de un dirigente campesino* (n.p., 1969), p. 10.

Of the many peasant revolts during the *sexenio*, little is presently known; Barcelli S. discusses uprisings at Culpina (Chuquisaca department), Pucarani (La Paz department), and Incalhuasi (Cochabamba department), in *Medio siglo*, pp. 194-197, 206-207. Jorge Dandler-Hanhart has recorded a fascinating glimpse of the frustration and rage attendant to Villarroel's fall and the rebellion it engendered, in "Politics of Leadership, Brokerage and Patronage in the Campesino Movement of Cochabamba, Bolivia, 1935-1954," (Ph.D. Diss., University of Wisconsin, 1971), pp. 116-120. He has also noted, interestingly, that: "During the 1949 MNR revolt most of the peasant leaders were freed from the penitentiary by MNR forces." *Ibid.*, p. 120.

5. James Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution* (Pittsburgh, 1971), p. 200, n. 30.

6. See also Charles Weston, Jr., "An Ideology of Modernization: The Case of the Bolivian MNR," *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, 10 (Jan. 1968), 97-98.

7. José Fellman Velarde, Víctor Paz Estenssoro: *El hombre y la revolución*, 2d ed. (La Paz, 1955), p. 228.

to leaflet the altiplano with a "general call to all aware national youth workers in the mines, factories and railroads of cities and provinces . . . men of the valley and the altiplano."⁸ Mamani Alvarez' call to revolution went unheeded in the highlands, although it appears there was some peasant participation in the uprising in Cochabamba.⁹

In sum, a more accurate appraisal of the issue would note the "hesitation" on the part of many MNR leaders about "unleashing a campesino movement whose consequences were unpredictable," but it would also stress the movement's strategic consideration of peasant utilization in the highland departments and the tactical participation of select peasant militants in the 1949 and 1952 insurrections.¹⁰

The lessons of the civil war were not lost on the MNR. The 1952 insurrection included greater popular support and enlisted military personnel, a disastrous omission in 1949. There is evidence that in the event of difficulty during the primary, urban stage of the insurrection, the MNR planned to include peasant support in the departments of La Paz, Oruro, Potosí, Cochabamba, Chuquisaca, and Tarija.¹¹ That this potential stage of what would become the national revolution was to have utilized peasants from the highland departments indicates an awareness of the rural masses, including their demographic concentration and social conditions. This would be the center of rural violence during the revolution.

Peasant and Agrarian Reform, April 11, 1952–August 2, 1953

Academic attention has long been drawn to the process by which the peasantry, disenfranchised for centuries, began to recapture their lands. Richard Patch, perhaps the most influential student of Bolivian rural politics during the national revolution, argues that the revolutionary impetus sprang from the Cochabamba Valley where campesinos around Ucureña, already organized in syndicates under the dynamic

8. Antonio Mamani Alvarez, "Llamado a los indios bolivianos," Aug. 30, 1949, Villa Gonzales, La Paz.

9. "Tantos mestizos como algunos pequeños propietarios y varios campesinos eran activistas del MNR, muchos de los cuales incluso tomaron parte activa en la revolución—conocido como la guerra civil—de 1949, que fué aplastada por el gobierno de Mamerto Urriolagoitia. Cuando llegó la revolución de abril de 1952, estos mismos fueron los promotores de la movilización en el campo." Katherine Barnes de von Marshall and Juan Torrico, *Cambios socio-económicos en el valle alto de Cochabamba desde 1952* (La Paz, 1971), pp. 38–39.

10. Fellman Velarde, *Victor Paz Estenssoro*, p. 228, is the source of this quotation subsequently cited by Charles Weston, Jr., "An Ideology of Modernization," p. 98, and Malloy, *Bolivia*, p. 370, n. 30.

11. Interview with Víctor Paz Estenssoro, Lima, Peru, June 27, 1973; interview with Antonio Mamani Alvarez, La Paz, Bolivia, Nov. 4, 1971. See also *El Diario*, Apr. 21, 1952, p. 5, *El País*, Apr. 22, 1952, p. 5, Apr. 30, 1952, p. 2.

leadership of José Rojas, turned out the patrones, seized their lands and sent out a cadre of peasant agitators who ". . . often were the first to bring news of the revolution to Indian villages of remote valleys and lofty plateaus."¹² Thus, Patch continues, "as the wild fire of revolt and hope raced through the villages, the entire campesino movement was completely outside the control of the national government or the MNR party leaders. The only center it recognized was Ucareña."¹³ Patch's was one of the earlier interpretations of the topic, and his thesis, presented in various publications, has consistently attracted adherents.¹⁴

Patch's imprint is also evident in much of the literature treating a related question, the Agrarian Reform Decree of August 2, 1953. The conventional argument portrays the MNR leadership as pragmatic with respect to the question of agrarian reform, and the decree, it is generally argued, sought to enhance the revolutionary movement's position as reformist after the peasants had, in fact, already seized the land. To cite Patch: "the Indian population organized syndicates independent of the government and forced enactment of an agrarian reform," and, "the MNR had plans for an eventual agrarian reform, but no planned reform could have been as sweeping as the one initiated by the Indians themselves and only formalized by the government decree-law of August 2, 1953."¹⁵ The decree, then, only rendered de jure a condition existing de facto in the countryside.

Another interpretation, advanced by Dwight Heath, downplays the dramatic role of the Ucareña syndicate and stresses the efforts of MNR agitators and syndicate organizers.¹⁶ These varying observations

12. Richard Patch, "Bolivia: U.S. Assistance in a Revolutionary Setting," in Richard Adams, et al., *Social Change in Latin America Today* (New York, 1961), p. 122.

13. Patch, "Bolivia: U.S. Assistance," p. 122.

14. See, for example, Greene, "Revolution and the Rationalization of Reform in Bolivia," p. 7; Cornelius Zondag, *The Bolivian Economy, 1952-1965: The Revolution and its Aftermath* (New York, 1966), p. 145; Aníbal Quijano Obregón, "Contemporary Peasant Movements," in Seymour Martin Lipset and Aldo Solari, eds., *Elites in Latin America* (London, 1967), p. 318; Charles Weston, Jr., "An Ideology of Modernization," pp. 98, 100; Eldon Lanning, "Governmental Capabilities in a Revolutionary Setting: The MNR in Bolivia," *Inter-American Economic Affairs*, 23 (Autumn 1969), 11; James Malloy, "Revolutionary Politics," in James Malloy and Richard Thorn, eds., *Beyond the Revolution: Bolivia Since 1952* (Pittsburgh, 1971), pp. 124-125.

15. Patch, "Bolivia: The Restrained Revolution," p. 128, and "Bolivia: U.S. Assistance," p. 125. For discussion to the contrary, on the activities of the Ministry of Peasant Affairs, see Barcelli S., *Medio siglo*, p. 319.

16. Heath's position was first presented in "A View from the Grass Roots: Peasant Syndicates Among the Aymara of the Bolivian Yungas," Conference on Peasant Movements, Ithaca, New York, Dec. 1966, mimeo., pp. 7-9, and subsequently as "Bolivia: Peasant Syndicates Among the Aymara of the Yungas—A

have undoubtedly devolved from differing field experience (Patch in Cochabamba and Heath in Santa Cruz, Yungas).¹⁷ The problem here lies in the use of inductive reasoning based on local experience, in the formulation of national generalizations based on data obtained from regional investigation. Bolivia with its great diversity, geographic and social, does not readily lend itself to generalizations of this nature. Data valid for the Ucureña area of the Cochabamba Valley, or the Yungas, may very well not be applicable to the altiplano, or elsewhere. Peasant responses to the national revolution ran the gamut from outright ignorance of the national situation to revolutionary militance.

The MNR and Agrarian Reform

The revolutionary leadership lacked a specific program for agrarian reform on April 9, 1952, but this should not be interpreted as ignorance, or avoidance, of the rural question. The movement's consuming emphasis had involved the specifics of power—planning the strategy and tactics of the April insurrection, formation of a conspiratorial cell structure, and acquisition of arms and munitions—subordinate factors involved future particulars of programs and administration.

Once in power, the revolutionary government set about the task of restructuring the backward country. Agrarian reform, a question at the heart of traditional society, has always occasioned bitterness in Latin America. Accordingly, the movement treated the reordering of the agrarian system with utmost concern. The MNR itself, never a unified party, was divided on the issue: "By all accounts the question of land reform was the most divisive issue to be raised in the loosely knit revolutionary family."¹⁸

Examination of agrarian reform data, eventually compiled by the MNR, suggests the complexity of the issue in its most abstract form.¹⁹

View from the Grass Roots," in Henry Landsberger, ed., *Latin American Peasant Movements* (Ithaca, 1969), pp. 175–177. See also, Heath, "Aymara," p. 34.

17. Patch, "Social Implications of the Bolivian Agrarian Reform," (Ph.D. Diss., Cornell University, 1956); Dwight Heath, "Camba: A Study of Land and Society in Eastern Bolivia," (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 1959). Yet another response is reported by Madeline Barbara Leons: "In the Yungas, on the other hand, actual occupation of haciendas prior to the law did not occur and land distribution came about as a result of national legislation." Madeline Barbara Leons, "Land Reform in the Bolivian Yungas," *América Indígena*, 27 (Oct. 1967), 693.

18. Malloy, "Revolutionary Politics," p. 124. The specific positions of the various tendencies at work on the decree are marshaled together in "La reforma agraria en Bolivia," *Revista Jurídica*, 17 (Mar.–Dec. 1953), 1–586.

19. A prerevolutionary analysis of the social structure (the classic Keenleyside Report) recommended intrusion of foreign administrators to remedy the institutionalized incompetence of the old regime. Carter Goodrich, who worked with

Worse, the new government was sadly lacking in trained personnel to administer the reform. The revolutionary climate of the time only intensified the critical problem of restructuring rural society. The actual decree came sixteen months after the revolutionary victory of April 1952.

The MNR position on the agrarian question was evident as early as 1942, when in its "Program and Principles of Action," the party recognized the need for a study of the land tenure problem and the necessity of incorporating the peasantry into the national life and restructuring the agricultural economy.²⁰ And, more concretely, during the brief MNR-Villarroel government (1943-1946), legislation was enacted ameliorating some of the more inequitable rural practices (personal service and forced relocation of Indians was declared illegal, arrest was required for violence committed against Indians, and payment for Indian labor was prescribed).²¹ That these reforms were ignored was a function of the political reality of the period; the oligarchy still wielded power and Villarroel's last moments were spent dangling from a lamppost in front of the Palacio Quemado.

Popular pressures for agrarian reform surfaced as early as April 16, 1952, when President Víctor Paz Estenssoro, returning to El Alto Airport from exile in Argentina, was greeted by a crowd of 60,000 supporters, many of whom carried signs asking for agrarian reform.²² Hernán Siles, addressing the crowd, traced MNR history from its be-

both governments, noted the continuity in bureaucratic style by the MNR: "Though the leaders of the MNR remarked again and again that they, unlike the army officers of the junta, 'knew how to govern,' their administration exhibited the same defects described in the Keenleyside Report." Carter Goodrich, "Bolivia in Time of Revolution," in Malloy and Thorn, eds., *Beyond the Revolution*, p. 14. For the specific problem of agrarian reform personnel, see James Wilkie, *Measuring Land Reform* (Los Angeles, 1974), p. 35.

20. Cited in Robert Alexander, *The Bolivian National Revolution* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1958), p. 59. See also the "Principles and Action of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario," in Alberto Cornejo S., *Programas políticos de Bolivia* (Cochabamba, 1949), pp. 149, 169-170. Further evidence of early interest in agrarian reform is found in the 1944 speech by Víctor Paz Estenssoro to the Bolivian senate, in Víctor Paz Estenssoro, *Discursos parlamentarios* (La Paz, 1955), pp. 304-311. See also the message from Hernán Siles (as MNR provisional chief) to the 1945 Indian Congress, in Barcelli S., *Medio siglo*, p. 167. The question of the MNR's historic interest in agrarian reform and the political realities surrounding the issue, eventuating in the Agrarian Reform Decree, are explored in an interview with Paz Estenssoro by James Wilkie in *Measuring Land Reform*, pp. 27-29.

21. José Flores Moncayo, *Legislación boliviana del indio* (La Paz, 1953), pp. 419-425, 427-429; Miguel Bonifaz, *Legislación agrario-indigenal* (Cochabamba, 1953), pp. 520-525, 526-528.

22. *El Diario*, Apr. 16, 1952, p. 1.

ginning in 1941, noting a projected program of vast scope which would incorporate the peasant into the political and economic life of the country.²³ Within the revolutionary movement, the Vanguardia wing quickly pushed for action on the rural question and, in a letter to the president, asked for immediate liquidation of latifundio as well as improvement of rural living conditions.²⁴

One of the first acts of the new MNR regime was the creation of a Ministry of Indian and Peasant Affairs. (Later political considerations would deem the word Indian pejorative, and the generic "peasant" was substituted; the ministry thereby became that of Peasant Affairs.) Ñuflo Chávez, mercurial scion of the Santa Cruz oligarchy, was appointed head of the new ministry. The cabinet post incorporated a wide range of responsibilities. In addition to the broad tasks of incorporating the Indian masses into the national culture, studying the needs of agricultural workers, improving rural health and hygiene, promoting colonization, and developing credit in agricultural cooperatives, the ministry was to deal with peasant education, law and justice, as well as sponsor anthropological and archaeological studies.²⁵

The Ministry of Peasant and Indian Affairs clearly antedated any mass clamor for agrarian reform. It was formed before the onset of popular peasant agitation and, further, its agents were often the catalysts of revolt. According to one observer, "it was agents from this ministry who organized the peasant revolt on the northern altiplano."²⁶ In an early interview, Ñuflo Chávez discussed the objectives of the ministry which envisioned a new agrarian order based on Indian communities working the land cooperatively. He cautioned against developments similar to those of the late nineteenth century when Indian community lands, redistributed by government decree among individual members of the communities, were grabbed up in an orgy of speculation by men of wealth and influence.²⁷ The minister stated his opposition to the minifundio system of agrarian reform on the

23. *El Diario*, Apr. 16, 1952, p. 1.

24. *El Diario*, Apr. 18, 1952, p. 4.

25. The ministry is discussed in, *El Diario*, Apr. 15, 1952, p. 4, Apr. 18, 1952, p. 4, July 16, 1952, p. 15, July 28, 1952, p. 8. *Los Tiempos*, Apr. 20, 1952, p. 4, Apr. 26, 1952, p. 3, June 8, 1952, p. 3, July 16, 1952, p. 3, Aug. 19, 1952, p. 5. *El País*, Apr. 19, 1952, p. 4. Víctor Paz Estenssoro discusses the origins and objectives of the Ministry of Peasant Affairs in Wilkie, *Measuring Land Reform*, pp. 28-29.

26. Personal correspondence with William Carter, Apr. 19, 1971.

27. *El Diario*, Aug. 2, 1952, p. 6. It should also be noted that the MNR leadership was conscious of the similar experience attendant to the Mexican Revolution.

grounds that such division would be detrimental to production.²⁸ Unproductive fincas and haciendas would, however, be expropriated and placed under the technical direction of the state.

Ultimately, the ministry sought development of human resources. This necessitated abolition of the traditional rural social system based on "master-slave" relationships and the substitution of a wage-labor system.²⁹ The ministry advocated formation of collective work contracts with those patrones amenable to a change in labor relations and disposed toward utilization of modern agricultural practices. This position was consistent with an earlier statement in which Chávez declared: "We are going to orient the agrarian reform around the base of strengthening collective communal property, implementing the capitalist stage in private property, and liquidating feudalism."³⁰ Chávez also spoke of technical and educational assistance "toward the end of effectively incorporating the two million Indians into civilization."³¹

The ministry considered the agrarian problem as primarily a political one, with economic and technical considerations secondary. The political problem was to be solved through the integration of the rural masses into national life. The remaining technical and economic considerations would be attacked by a revolutionary change in agricultural practices. Latifundios and Church landholdings were to be expropriated and given to peasant organizations. This would at once enhance the status of the peasantry and destroy the old rural social system. The new capitalist cycle would be contingent upon the restructuring of agrarian society; the nationalization of the land deserved all the nation's energies; and the process of agrarian reform, reasoned the minister, while a bourgeois method, would nonetheless "acquire profoundly revolutionary characteristics, serving to unite the peasant class."³²

MNR propaganda stressed the "order of agrarian reform" over the "anarchy of agrarian revolution."³³ Radical distribution of the land was opposed because of the decreased production created by minifundismo. Only unproductive haciendas were to be expropriated and land-

28. *El Diario*, Aug. 2, 1952, p. 6. Also, *Ultima Hora*, Apr. 30, 1952, p. 4. Chávez' position here vis à vis agrarian reform is at odds with that presented by Patch: "Ñuflo Chávez became an early and insistent advocate of an extreme type of agrarian reform. His concept, if carried out, would have divided all the land areas of predominantly Indian population into minifundios. . . ." in "Bolivia: U.S. Assistance," p. 123.

29. *El Diario*, Aug. 2, 1952, p. 6.

30. *El Diario*, June 6, 1952, p. 6.

31. *El Diario*, May 16, 1952, p. 7.

32. *El Diario*, July 10, 1953, p. 6.

33. *El Diario*, July 10, 1953, p. 6.

lords who agreed with the reform program would be given work contracts for rural labor as the government sought to create a new system of wage labor. Examples of the regime's moderation may be seen in the creation of a mobile rural police force to restrain agitation,³⁴ and the denunciation and imprisonment of rural agitators encouraging revolutionary change. The return of property seized by peasants to some landlords demonstrates the regime's defense of the rural order pending agrarian reform legislation.

In sum, the MNR's position toward the rural question during this period of the revolution reflected the national leadership's middle-class attitudes and values—fear of violence, emphasis on stability and moderation, respect for private property (except, of course, large estates).³⁵ The policy of the revolutionary elites, as characterized in an early essay on the topic, was certainly that of “restrained revolution.”³⁶

During the early days of the revolution the MNR concerned itself with formation of committees to discuss the agrarian question, meetings with peasant delegations, and reiteration of the government's official position regarding previously enacted reform legislation. Ten days after the revolution began, the Minister of Peasant and Indian Affairs met with a group of peasants and intellectuals to discuss the organization of the new ministry.³⁷

Beginning in the first month of the revolution, campesino delegations from various departments arrived in La Paz seeking audiences with the president or with Minister of Peasant and Indian Affairs, Ñuflo Chávez. This indicates not only the formal obeisance accorded the new patrón, Víctor Paz Estenssoro, but also that some peasants possessed a clear sense of their needs as well as their legal position under the constitution. The delegations pledged fealty to the revolutionary government and to the heritage of Gualberto Villarroel. They also presented petitions requesting land redistribution, improvement

34. Personal correspondence with William Carter, Apr. 19, 1971. See also *Ultima Hora*, Apr. 17, 1952, p. 5.

35. For a brief discussion of the middle-class origins of the *movimiento* leadership, see Weston, Jr., “An Ideology,” pp. 97–98.

36. The term is the title of an early work by Patch, “Bolivia: The Restrained Revolution.”

37. *El País*, Apr. 19, 1952, p. 4. The Organizational Commission for the ministry included the following: Max Mendoza López, Herberto [sic] Añez, Julio Ponce de León, Félix Eugino Zaballa, Luis Sandóval Morón, Vicente Alvarez Plata, Carlos Ponce Sanjinés, Alfredo Guachalla, Chipana Ramos, Antonio Mamani Alvarez, and Gabino Apaza. See also *Ultima Hora*, Apr. 17, 1952, p. 5 and *Los Tiempos*, Apr. 22, 1952, p. 3.

of rural hygiene, tax reductions on coca and fruits, agrarian technicians, a rural work code, schools, drugs, and veterinarians.³⁸

Throughout this early period, the MNR government emphasized its support and concern for the peasantry and affirmed adherence to previous agrarian reform legislation, particularly those measures enacted during the MNR-Villaruel years.³⁹ The two decrees abolishing personal service (*pongueaje* and *mitanaje*) during the Villaruel government were reaffirmed and, most importantly, peasant leaders imprisoned by the oligarchy for political agitation were freed by governmental decree.⁴⁰

Peasants who suddenly defied the norms of traditional society threatened those few landlords resident in the countryside. The shock of the revolution, fears of an avalanche of repressed hostility fed by rumors of peasant uprisings, atrocities and massacres, contributed to a climate of dread in those whites left amid the Indian masses. Responses to the situation varied: most patrones joined the absentee landlords in the cities, historic centers of white and mestizo culture; others stayed on and tried to maintain authority through coercion and violence; still others resorted to legal appeals for protection and reassurance from the government.⁴¹

In December 1952, peasants of a newly formed syndicate on the Hacienda Seguenca in La Paz department's Los Andes province clashed with government carabineros. The incident indicates the vol-

38. For specifics see: *El Diario*, Apr. 20, 1952, pp. 5, 11, Apr. 25, 1952, p. 5, Apr. 26, 1952, p. 4, May 1, 1952, p. 5, May 9, 1952, p. 5, June 18, 1952, p. 7, June 21, 1952, p. 6, July 2, 1952, p. 6, Aug. 2, 1952, p. 6, Aug. 5, 1952, p. 4, Aug. 11, 1952, p. 4, Aug. 13, 1952, p. 4, Sept. 14, 1952, p. 7, Oct. 28, 1952, p. 3, Mar. 21, 1953, p. 6. *El País*, Dec. 30, 1952, p. 4. *Los Tiempos*, Apr. 23, 1952, p. 4, May 7, 1952, p. 5, June 19, 1952, p. 3, June 22, 1952, p. 3, July 5, 1952, p. 5, Aug. 15, 1952, p. 3, Sept. 4, 1952, p. 3. *Ultima Hora*, Apr. 28, 1952, p. 4, May 9, 1952, p. 4.

39. Bonifaz, *Legislación*, pp. 520-534; Flores Moncayo, *Legislación*, pp. 420-423.

40. Supreme Decree No. 03129, July 22, 1952, in Flores Moncayo, *Legislación*, pp. 467-469. See also *Ultima Hora*, Apr. 16, 1952, p. 5. *El País*, Apr. 17, 1952, p. 4, Apr. 23, 1952, p. 5, May 13, 1952, p. 5. *El Diario*, Apr. 21, 1952, p. 5, July 23, 1952, p. 6. *Los Tiempos*, May 23, 1952, p. 3, July 4, 1952, p. 4, July 6, 1952, p. 3, Nov. 13, 1952, p. 3.

41. For brief, impressionistic discussions of the hacendado response, see: Dwight Heath, "Land Reform in Bolivia," *Inter-American Economic Affairs*, 8 (Spring 1959), 4-5; Heath, "New Patrons for Old: Changing Patron-Client Relationships in the Bolivian Yungas," *Ethnology*, 12 (Jan. 1973), 81-82; and Patch, "Bolivia: The Restrained Revolution," p. 129, and "Bolivia: U.S. Assistance in a Revolutionary Setting," p. 124; Richard Thorn, "The Economic Transformation," in Malloy and Thorn, eds., *Beyond the Revolution*, p. 161. The response of townpeople to events on the altiplano is noted in William Carter, "Revolution and the Agrarian Sector," in Malloy and Thorn, eds., *Beyond the Revolution*, pp. 235-237.

atility of the rural situation and the status of the revolution during the first months of MNR rule. The carabineros, led by the hacendado, attacked the peasants as they were "taking possession" of the hacienda. But they were rebuffed by peasants carrying "the arms with which we contributed to the triumph of the revolution."⁴² The peasants captured a carabinero in the fracas, and when they tried to bring him to La Paz to explain their version of the incident, they were surrounded by a carabinero force at the city's outskirts. Thirty-one peasants were taken prisoner and brought to the barracks of the Calama Regiment where they were first beaten and later subjected to forced labor. Obviously the landlord still exercised power; behind the thin green line of carabineros loomed the military barracks. The tide of peasant awakening nevertheless had arrived. Not only had a syndicate been formed to represent peasant interests, but the campesinos showed themselves capable of concerted action, military and legal. Peasant *dirigentes* from Los Andes province addressed a letter to the president requesting the intervention of the Minister of Peasant and Indian Affairs in the matter. Further, they asked for release of the jailed peasants, the jailing of the carabineros involved, and the arrest and fine of the landlord for damages to those peasants involved.⁴³

Violence between lord and peasant, while a relatively common occurrence, should not distract from other less dramatic confrontations. As the reality of an impending agrarian reform made itself manifest, many landlords hastened to divide and sell their estates, or subdivide them among family and relatives.⁴⁴ It was hoped that the resulting smaller estates would escape government expropriation. "The land for those who work it" was the cry of the peasantry, not the bourgeoisie, in Bolivia as elsewhere.

The Peasant Awakening

Peasant reactions to the revolution varied considerably throughout the country. Urged by the government to continue working until codification of the proposed agrarian reform decree was completed, some peasants complied, faithfully fulfilling time-honored labor practices; others refused to work for landlords, citing as legal precedent the May 15, 1945 decree which stated that *colonos* could not be forced

42. *El Diario*, Dec. 31, 1952, p. 7.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *El País*, Dec. 24, 1952, p. 5, *Los Tiempos*, Dec. 24, 1952, p. 3, *El Diario*, Feb. 22, 1953, p. 5. See also Heath, "Land Reform," pp. 12-13.

to work without previous consent and just reward;⁴⁵ others presented legal claims for expropriation of fincas; and yet others, less patient, and often organized in syndicates, forcibly seized the lands.

Peasant strikes (*huelgas de brazos caídos*) based on the Villarroel decree of May 15, 1945, were primarily confined to the first few months of the revolution.⁴⁶ Later, as the prospect of an agrarian reform decree grew closer, many peasants refused to work, preferring to wait for the decree which would grant them their lands. Legal appeals for redistribution of land began shortly after the onset of revolution with some peasants advancing claims dating back centuries. Peasants of the Chrungalla community presented a petition which they had pressed for seventy-two years. The Ayllu Hilata, with documents dating from the Spanish conquest, pushed for restitution of usurped lands.⁴⁷ In Chuquisaca department, peasants quickly petitioned for the expropriation of a finca owned by ex-president Mamerto Urriola-goitia, and for the Florida estate; in Potosí department peasants asked for the Buena Vista finca, citing the Villarroel legislation as legal precedent.⁴⁸

Violence was also a common occurrence in the countryside during this period. In the wake of the MNR victory, peasants began exercising their newly found power, and while the process of rural violence is not easily summarized, a few generalizations are in order. The sixteen months between the MNR insurrection and the Agrarian Reform Decree of August 2, 1953, were marked by increased inter-class violence between peasants and either landlords, or more likely, their representatives. Militant land seizures became a common practice, accompanied by attacks on landlords, mayordomos, or estate property. Official reaction to these events reflected the factionalism of the new government, a political movement not a party, and often ill-equipped to deal coherently with complex issues. At times rural violence was ignored, rarely was it sanctioned, and only occasionally was it dealt with effectively through mediation. There are numerous instances of landlords, as in the example cited earlier, continuing to maintain power.

During the early months of the revolution, violence was generally inter-class, as peasant and landlord reacted to evolving realities. Later, after the majority of landlords had been driven off the land,

45. Flores Moncayo, *Legislación*, p. 420; Bonifaz, *Legislación*, p. 521.

46. *Ultima Hora*, Nov. 12, 1952, p. 4. *El Diario*, Jan. 27, 1953, p. 11, Feb. 24, 1953, p. 4. *El País*, May 29, 1952, p. 4, July 4, 1952, p. 4, July 20, 1952, p. 5.

47. *El Diario*, May 13, 1952, p. 4, Dec. 10, 1952, p. 7.

48. *Ultima Hora*, Aug. 9, 1952, p. 5. *El País*, Aug. 10, 1952, p. 5.

power struggles developed between peasant caciques competing for hegemony over key rural areas. Before agrarian reform had arrived, its prospect had exacerbated social tensions, particularly in the densely populated Cochabamba Valley with its complex land-tenure patterns. Intra-peasant violence would involve a host of permutations based on land-tenure relationships: disputes between hacienda and free community Indians, quarrels over boundaries, or religion (Catholic vs. Protestant), and disputes over syndicate leadership at both the local and regional levels.⁴⁹ The wholesale violence in Cochabamba and La Paz departments during 1959–1960 was prompted by the disputed national election of 1960. Civil war over chronic boundary disputes now aggravated by the agrarian reform swept the Laime and Jucumani communities of northern Potosí in 1960–1961.⁵⁰

Violence was particularly marked in the Cochabamba Valley and in the Lake Titicaca region. Demographically, these were the two areas of greatest population density, primarily because of climate in the case of the Cochabamba Valley and irrigable land in the case of the Titicaca region. The two regions constituted the commercial agricultural centers of the country, and under the traditional labor-intensive hacienda system, pressures for production were greatest. As one observer noted in 1950: “The static, unhealthy life imposed by the deadhand manorial system has given rise to a huge urban proletariat which has remained largely unproductive, thereby increasing the pressure of population on the Altiplano’s meagre food supply. . . .”⁵¹ The same observer cited the advent of roads, and the railroad, links with the modern world, and stressed their impact upon the hitherto isolated altiplano peasantry. The prospect of an awakened peasantry and an intransigent rural elite prompted the following prophetic judgment, written in 1947: “A third alternative . . . is a revolution that would dispossess the patrones and place the lands in the hands of those that work them. Such a ca-

49. An early occurrence of intra-peasant conflict on the altiplano was reported in Omasuyos province of La Paz department, where peasants from Yanacachi and Taipi Peroni clashed over a disputed boundary. Two were killed and five wounded. *El País*, May 8, 1952, p. 5. Days later a shootout erupted between two peasant groups on the finca, Nuestra Señora de La Paz. See *El Diario*, May 13, 1952, p. 4, *Los Tiempos*, May 13, 1952, p. 3, *El País*, May 13, 1952, p. 5. *Ultima Hora*, May 12, 1952, p. 5. In Cochabamba, the Minister of Peasant Affairs personally intervened in a dispute between *colonos* of the Vacas finca and *colonos* of the Rancho Santa Clara over a boundary problem stemming from a land purchase. See *El Diario*, Aug. 17, 1952, p. 7.

50. Oscar A. Bustillos Hernanz, “Los Laines y Jucumanis,” *América Indígena*, 32 (jul.–set. 1972), 827–828.

51. Frank Keller, “Finca Ingavi: A Medieval Survival on the Bolivian Altiplano,” *Economic Geography*, 17 (Jan. 1950), 42.

tastrophe is certain to follow if the patrón cannot demonstrate his usefulness to society."⁵²

In the Cochabamba Valley, the agricultural equation appears to have been the following: climate, plus rich soil and water, equaled two to three harvests per year; this in turn allowed for a marketable surplus which, in many cases, provided the necessary capital accumulation to buy land.⁵³ There were thus greater numbers of independent peasants; agriculture (hacienda and non-hacienda) was more likely to be commercial rather than subsistence-oriented, and the land-tenure pattern was more diversified than in other highland regions.⁵⁴ It has also been noted that the peasant population in the Cochabamba region is less atomized than elsewhere in the Andes, generally concentrated into small pueblos. This has been traced to the *reducciones* policy initiated by the Viceroy Francisco de Toledo in the sixteenth century, whereby Indians were forcibly relocated in communities dominated by Spanish towns.⁵⁵ Contact was therefore more intensive between Indian and Spaniard, and social relations would grow increasingly more complex in the region.

Richard Patch first recognized the unique acculturation process of the valley's peasant population where "the group itself is the agency regulating the adoption of mestizo traits."⁵⁶ There was less inclination to desert the traditional community physically, through migration to the city, or culturally through wholesale aping of urban-mestizo traits. The peasantry of the Cochabamba Valley was the basis of a complex and tightly knit social web marked by close contact of Indian and white, of pueblo, town and city. The tendency would be for group, not individual, responses to matters of status. Syndicates would be more likely to germinate spontaneously here than in other more isolated areas. Indeed, they had been organized and were functioning in the

52. David Weeks, "Land Tenure in Bolivia," *Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics*, 23 (Aug. 1947), 336.

53. Specific instances of *colono* purchases of land are noted in Mario Carranza Fernández, *Estudio de caso en el Valle Bajo de Cochabamba: Camarca, Parotani e Itapaya* (La Paz, 1972), pp. 11-13. Others became *piquerías* (small independent landholders) variously, including government grants for national service as cited by Carranza Fernández, *Estudio*, pp. 22-23.

54. The standard Bolivian analysis of the prerevolutionary land-tenure situation in Cochabamba is Rafael A. Reyes, *Historia social del indio boliviano*, 2d ed. (La Paz, 1963), pp. 166-176. For an excellent recent study, see Christine Whitehead, "Cochabamba Landowners and the Agrarian Reform," (Thesis, Oxford University, 1970).

55. Patch, "Bolivia: The Restrained Revolution," p. 128.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

valley a decade before the MNR revolution.⁵⁷ The valley, as the lake, was ripe for revolution; after centuries of white control a power vacuum existed for those campesinos daring enough to seize the time.

The revolutionary violence which began in the wake of the urban seizure of power in April 1952, reached a crescendo in the few months before the Agrarian Reform Decree of August 2, 1953. Conflict between peasants and traditional authorities took the form of confrontation, often violent, between peasants and landlords, mayordomos, police, tax collectors and other local and regional authorities.

For those landlords who elected to remain on their estates, this was a time of trial. Certainly white Bolivians were aware of previous peasant uprisings, but never in the history of the republic had power relationships been so nebulous. Resistance to the peasant awakening was dangerous—threats and verbal intimidation, beatings, kidnappings and murder were common occurrences. Thus, for example, in November 1952, the owner of the Quimsa Maya finca, at Sacaba (Cochabamba department), was kidnapped by a group of peasants and only rescued by the timely arrival of neighboring landlords.⁵⁸ In December 1952, the landlady and mayordomo of the Novillero finca were threatened with a peasant invasion of the property. And at nearby Anzaldo, the owner of the Hacienda Chujchuhafusca reportedly feared an imminent peasant invasion.⁵⁹ By March and April 1953, wholesale attacks by hundreds of insurgent peasants were commonplace in Cochabamba department. In April 1953, the fincas Yerba Buena and La Alcoholería were attacked; the landlord of La Alcoholería was robbed and murdered.⁶⁰ In Tarata, a landlord was beaten and marched captive to the peasant syndicate of Sacabamba.⁶¹ Attacks on landlords were widespread in the areas of Totora, Pojo, and Tiraque, and assaults were reported at Cliza, Sacaba, and Ayopampa.⁶² In Potosí department, a pitched battle ended in the death of the patrón and ten *colonos*.⁶³

57. The origins of the Cochabamba peasant movement centered about the Ucuireña sindicato and the personage of José Rojas, have been traced by Dandler-Hanhart, *El sindicalismo campesino en Bolivia: Los cambios estructurales en Ucuireña* (México, 1969), and "Politics of Leadership."

58. *El País*, Nov. 21, 1952, p. 5.

59. *El País*, Dec. 6, 1952, p. 5. *Los Tiempos*, Nov. 16, 1952, p. 5, Dec. 9, 1952, p. 6. For the origins of the conflict, see *Ultima Hora*, Nov. 6, 1952, p. 4.

60. *El Diario*, Apr. 19, 1953, p. 5. *Los Tiempos*, Apr. 16, 1953, p. 5.

61. *El Diario*, Apr. 19, 1953, p. 5.

62. *Los Tiempos*, Apr. 19, 1953, p. 4, Apr. 21, 1953, pp. 4–5, Apr. 25, 1953, p. 4, May 3, 1953, p. 4.

63. *Los Tiempos*, May 12, 1953, p. 5.

Numerous assaults on fincas in Ingavi and Los Andes provinces of La Paz department were reported.⁶⁴

Land seizures were widespread in the Cochabamba Valley by March and April 1953. At Villa Viscara, Sacabamba, Matarani, Machacamarca, Chilicchi, Ayampu and Skimara, for example, peasants had ceased working for landlords and had begun cultivating the land themselves.⁶⁵ Rural instability had reached such proportions that the revolutionary government issued a decree on April 30, 1953, regulating relationships between peasant and patrón, proscribing agitation, and requiring wages to be paid for peasant labor in excess of the obligations as fixed by the 1945 legislation. The decree explicitly defined the government's view toward the rural sector: "obstruction of some patrones" and the "irresponsible work of provocateurs" led to neglect of the fields. This, combined with "difficulties in the position of tin in the international market and the fall of the price of that product has reduced the availability of foreign money for the importation of food-stuffs."⁶⁶ As rural instability snowballed, the government feared a decline in the available supply of food.⁶⁷

As the burgeoning peasant movement swept the old hacendado class from its rural fiefs and into the towns and cities, the basic antagonism, now openly manifest between lord and peasant, would take a new form. An urban-rural polarization emerged, with the towns and cities in the hands of the white population and the campo increasingly under the control of the peasantry. Meanwhile, the landlords, organized in rural societies and federations, mounted a propaganda offensive in the urban newspapers, denouncing the rural situation in a barrage of polemics.⁶⁸ In April 1953, the Cochabamba Rural Federation

64. *Los Tiempos*, Apr. 19, 1953, p. 3.

65. *El Diario*, Mar. 14, 1953, p. 5.

66. The decree is printed in *Los Tiempos*, May 3, 1953, p. 4.

67. The question of the decline in agricultural production, or at least of food-stuffs in the urban markets, is addressed in Charles Erasmus, "Upper Limits of Peasantry and Agrarian Reform: Bolivia, Venezuela, and Mexico Compared," *Ethnology*, 6 (Oct. 1967), 361, and Ronald Clark, "Land Reform and Market Participation on the North Highlands of Bolivia," Land Tenure Center Paper, No. 40 (Madison, Dec. 1967), pp. 15-24. James Wilkie concludes that "Given the inconclusive nature of present data, we may never know the effect of land reform on past production. . . ." Wilkie, *Measuring Land Reform*, p. 58.

68. The Cochabamba Rural Federation published a series of articles presenting its position; see *Los Tiempos*, Mar. 3, 1953, p. 2, Mar. 10, 1953, p. 2, Mar. 18, 1953, p. 2, Mar. 25, 1953, p. 2, Apr. 1, 1953, p. 2, Apr. 14, 1953, p. 2, Apr. 23, 1953, p. 2. These articles reveal the reactionary and racist bias of *Los Tiempos* and its use as a propaganda vehicle for the Rural Federation by its owner, Demetrio Canelas, a Cochabamba landlord. The upshot of this situation, which would lead to the paper's closing—after an alleged sacking by peasants during the abortive Falangist

officially protested an alleged threat by Víctor Zannier, the MNR Coordinator of Peasant Affairs, with a march of 100,000 peasants to the city of Cochabamba.⁶⁹ Altiplano landlords formed a Rural Bolivian Society soon after the April insurrection to combat peasant agitation, and the Chuquisaca Rural Society asked for concerted action “in defense of private property.”⁷⁰

Another interest group, the Pro-Cochabamba Committee, also appeared during this period. Ostensibly it sought to work toward an end to rural violence, but its primary concern was the decline in agricultural production caused by the continual instability in the valley. The committee proposed a meeting of peasant and landlord representatives to discuss settlement of the escalating violence in the department. The committee’s sympathies are clearly evident in the prefatory remarks of the proposal: “In view of the alarming events occurring of late in the Cochabamba countryside, especially in the regions of Totora, Mizque and Independencia, where the campesinos assaulted hacienda houses and whipped the landlords. . . .”⁷¹

The small towns which infrequently dot the Bolivian countryside provide a link between campesino and government. In the chain of authority beyond hacienda and village, the town represents domination at its most basic level. As a mestizo world based on control and exchange with the rural valleys and plateaus, the town with its corregidores, policemen, tax collectors, and other permanent and itinerant authorities, maintains an alien and exploitative relationship with the countryside.⁷² The anthropological folk-urban continuum is a classic model of an unequal exchange. As any peasant knows, from the urban end comes national authority—civil and religious—judges, police and prisons, armies and officers, Catholic clerics, tax collectors, a host of

coup of Nov. 9, 1953—is discussed by Jerry Knudson in “The Press and the Bolivian National Revolution,” *Journalism Monographs*, 31 (Nov. 1973), 31–33. The rural interest group, while of importance during this period, nevertheless historically antedated the revolution. Eduardo Romecin noted the commercial activities of such a group in the Yungas region during the 1920s in “Agricultural Adaptation in Bolivia,” *Geographical Review*, 19 (Apr. 1929), 253. Rafael A. Reyeros refers to the Oruro Rural Society, an hacendado interest group founded in 1942 to combat a *colono* strike, in *Historia*, p. 187.

69. *El Diario*, Apr. 28, 1953, p. 7.

70. For the altiplano Rural Society see, *El Diario*, June 14, 1952, p. 6; for the Chuquisaca Rural Society see, *Los Tiempos*, June 7, 1953, p. 3.

71. *El Diario*, Apr. 28, 1953, p. 7.

72. This relationship, intuitively obvious to those who have spent time in the campo, is graphically presented in the film *Yawar Mallku*, by the Bolivian director Jorge Sanjines.

Spanish-speaking officials of one kind or another.⁷³ From the peasantry comes food, labor, and especially in Bolivia, cannon fodder. The most basic of communications—a rudimentary road system and Spanish, the language of the bureaucracy—translate government needs from city to town and country.

After the outbreak of rural violence, many landlords fled their fincas for the security of the city. Here they joined the absentee landlords in defense of position and property. MNR leaders made a point of reinforcing peasant distrust of city folk by referring to counter-revolutionaries in the cities.⁷⁴ And that the cities were indeed fonts of reaction was underscored by the numerous coup attempts of the Falange Socialista Boliviana during the course of the national revolution.⁷⁵

Peasants in the Cochabamba area had begun attacking towns by November 1952. Machete-wielding campesinos blocked a road on the Hacienda Emusa, abused the landlord and wrecked his truck; then a force swollen to 3,000 peasants attacked the nearby town of Colomi, burning numerous houses.⁷⁶ The peasants cut the town's telegraph lines and seized control of the roads. An hour after the attack, some 4,000 campesinos, armed with guns and dynamite, overran the area and sacked three fincas. A presidential commission found that the owner of Emusa had precipitated the incidents by his abusive treatment of the peasants.⁷⁷ Two investigators were dispatched to Arque and Villa Rivero by the Ministry of Peasant Affairs, and meetings by the peasantry were forbidden.⁷⁸ The prefect of Cochabamba personally visited the neighboring town of Cliza in an attempt to forestall peasant violence against the populace.⁷⁹

73. Olen Leonard perceptively noted the various techniques utilized by peasants in dealing with white and mestizo authorities in *Bolivia: Land, People, Institutions* (Washington, 1952). The peasant leader Miguel Veizaga, in a personal interview (Aug. 23, 1970, Cochabamba), discussed the hatred of the peasantry for the onerous tax on *chicha*, the fermented maize so appreciated in the region. As early as Nov. 1952, a *chicha* tax collector was beaten and killed on the finca "Apilapampa" by peasants. See *El Diario*, Nov. 6, 1952, p. 5.

74. See the speech of Carlos Serrate Reich, "A los campesinos de Papelpampa," in Serrate Reich, *¿Qué es profundizar la revolución?* (La Paz, 1964), p. 54.

75. The Falange, with its constituency almost exclusively limited to the nation's towns and cities, mounted numerous revolts against the MNR regime. For a brief discussion of the Falange, see Patch, "The Bolivian Falange," *American Universities Field Staff* (May 14, 1959); for the reported arrest of three landlords accused by the Ucureña syndicate of being Falangists, see *El Diario*, July 1, 1953, p. 7.

76. *El País*, Nov. 7, 1952, p. 5.

77. *Ultima Hora*, Nov. 8, 1952, p. 5, Nov. 12, 1952, p. 4. *El Diario*, Nov. 10, 1952, p. 4.

78. *El País*, Nov. 20, 1952, p. 5.

79. *El Diario*, Nov. 22, 1952, p. 5.

The year 1953 would see an increase in urban-rural tensions. In early January hundreds of peasants arrived in Cochabamba in search of weapons.⁸⁰ The small town of Pojo, just off the Cochabamba–Santa Cruz highway, was attacked in January 1953. The attackers assembled on the heights above the town under cover of darkness and then, amid the wailing of *pututus* (bull's horns) and cries of "Death to the patrones," attacked an hacienda house, seizing the belongings.⁸¹

Peasant attacks upon towns in the Cochabamba Valley peaked in July 1953. The towns of Tarata, Cliza, Punata, Arani and Vila Vila were attacked, roads were blocked, and the Cochabamba train was stopped, searched and then forced back to the city.⁸² The attack on Vila Vila resulted in six dead and eleven injured. The town of Tarata was stormed and sacked after a shootout between townspeople and peasants. Two days after the Tarata clash, in which four persons were killed, peasants searching for wounded comrades forcibly entered the Viedma Hospital in Cochabamba and threatened patients from Tarata.⁸³ In July 1953, an attack on the town of Chayanta, in northwest Potosí department, was only averted through the timely intercession of MNR officials and leaders of the peasant syndicate of Llallagua who sought out and arrested the conspirators. The plot revealed coordination among peasants in the region; campesinos from Charcas, Sacaca, and surrounding areas were allegedly involved in the conspiracy.⁸⁴

Conclusions

The role of the peasantry as a revolutionary force in Bolivia remains problematic. The history of peasant opposition to the old regime, particularly during the *sexenio* 1946–1952, has yet to be fully realized. Peasant resistance to the traditional society of prerevolutionary Bolivia included legal strategies for reform (for example, the 1945 Indian Congress), as well as strikes, protests, rebellions and cooperation with elite revolutionary organizations (such as Antonio Mamani Alvarez's "Call to Bolivian Indians").

Peasant participation was negligible in the MNR insurrection of April 1952, although the movement had made plans to enlist the highland peasantry in a contingent phase. Conventional wisdom has inter-

80. *El Diario*, Jan. 12, 1953, p. 5.

81. *El Diario*, Jan. 12, 1953, p. 5.

82. *El Diario*, July 2, 1953, p. 7, July 5, 1953, p. 7. *Los Tiempos*, July 3, 1953, p. 4, July 4, 1953, p. 3, July 5, 1953, p. 4.

83. *El Diario*, July 5, 1952, p. 7. *Los Tiempos*, July 5, 1953, p. 3.

84. *El Diario*, July 11, 1953, p. 5.

preted indigenous revolutionary activity—land seizures, syndicate formation, and violence—as either the handiwork of the much publicized Ucuereña syndicate directed by José Rojas, or the result of official MNR organizers. The peasant awakening was multicausal and dependent upon both national and local variables; in some areas syndicates were organized by the local peasantry, in others, the initiative was provided by government agents. Peasant responses to the MNR revolution varied by time and place, running the gamut from work as usual to violent attacks on persons and property.

Landlord responses to the revolutionary situation were varied and included legal subdivision of latifundios among heirs to avoid expropriation of properties, attempts to maintain control over property through force, and flight to the cities. The situation was further complicated during these sixteen months by the amorphous status of the rural order pending proclamation of revolutionary measures which would significantly change traditional roles. It is noteworthy that both landlord and peasant resorted to utilization of pressure groups—landlord federations and peasant syndicates—to further their respective class interests.

As peasant responses to the political defeat of the traditional order became more militant, particularly in the departments of Cochabamba and La Paz, the new government feared chaos. The “order of agrarian reform,” as opposed to the “anarchy of agrarian revolution,” came to be the governmental formulation of the rural question. While peasant organizers formed syndicates in some areas of the countryside, in others, more militant agitators were arrested and government authority used to maintain order.

The MNR concern with decreased agricultural production resulting from rural instability led to the regulations embodied in the Supreme Decree of April 1953. Likewise, the Agrarian Reform Decree of August 2, 1953, sought to legislate order into the expropriative process. And while it has taken years to deliver the land to those who work it, the decree constituted the legal basis for the final blow against the old order.