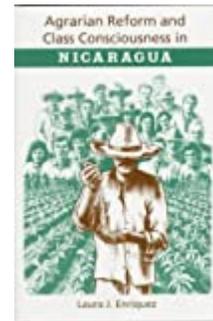


**Laura J. Enríquez.** *Agrarian Reform and Class Consciousness in Nicaragua.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997. x + 206 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-1489-0.



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*Agrarian Reform and Class Consciousness in Nicaragua* is a comparative analysis of two specific Sandinista agrarian reform projects, Los Patios and Plan Masaya (prime agricultural areas in the region south of Managua), and the impact of these reforms on the political positions within the beneficiary population. Agrarian reform was a central component of the revolutionary government's development model, which sought to minimize Nicaragua's agro-export dependence and redistribute the country's agricultural resources among the rural poor. The Sandinistas implemented their agrarian reforms in three stages. During the first stage (1979-1981), the revolutionary government encouraged the formation of state farms and provided financial credit to farmers. During the second stage (1981-1984), land was redistributed to peasants who had formed production cooperatives. In the third stage (mid-1980s), agrarian reform projects were designed mainly to respond to the problem of landlessness that characterized the regions where they were implemented. The target population was that of the *minifundistas*, the poorest of the peasantry, who had not benefited thus far by the Agrarian Reform Law. The Los Patios and Plan Masaya agrarian reform projects were products of this third stage of agrarian reform.

Sandinista agrarian reforms had both economic and

political goals. In the economic sphere, Sandinista policy makers targeted the *minifundistas* in order to improve their standard of living as well as achieve a better balance between production for export and domestic consumption. In the political sphere, the Sandinistas tried to consolidate political support for their government among the rural population. Laura Enriquez argues that Sandinista agrarian reform in Los Patios and Plan Masaya succeeded in bringing social and economic benefits to its participants. It introduced new levels of technology to food crop production and the peasants. However, the 1990 electoral defeat of the Sandinistas indicates that agrarian reform in Los Patios and Plan Masaya did not produce the expected political results given its economic achievements. Laura Enriquez also points out that there were significant differences between specific subgroups of peasants with regard to their support, or lack thereof, for the revolutionary government. Thus, her study addresses two crucial questions: (1) why the agrarian reform in Los Patios and Plan Masaya did not produce the expected political results given its economic achievements; and (2) which sector of the peasantry is most likely to engage in revolutionary organizing activities?

*Agrarian Reform and Peasant Consciousness in Nicaragua* departs significantly from much of the lit-

erature of the 1980s on the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. Enriquez's work offers a number of insights for theorizing about development, agrarian reform, and peasant politics. At the core of these discussions lies the major question of what role the peasantry is capable of playing in agricultural transformation and development. She sees the poorest of the peasants as the most revolutionary subjects. Her main argument is that the Sandinista government was not only confronted by many structural impediments to economic development, but it had the additional responsibility of trying to meet the needs of poor peasants in whose name the revolution was carried out. Consequently, the challenge for the Sandinistas was to maintain the loyalty of these poor peasants even as economic conditions deteriorated. In this context, elections contained within it the potential of producing an overthrow of the socialist project.

Based on data collected from surveys and interviews with representatives from the institutions and organizations that were involved in planning and implementing the Los Patios and Plan Masaya agrarian reform projects, Enriquez points out two fundamental flaws in the Sandinista model that failed to incorporate peasants. First, the Sandinistas did not always assure peasants of becoming the beneficiary of their agrarian reform. This could have helped the Sandinistas to clarify to the peasants that the revolutionary government was indeed interested in promoting their interests. Second, the Sandinistas failed to organize the production of peasants as a result of the resources they received through the agrarian reform. For

example, in Los Patios, the beneficiaries were not the poorest peasants in the area, and they were unwilling to move beyond participation in credit and service cooperatives to work together in fully collectivized production. As long as they were able to sustain themselves on their own, they were not inclined to join a cooperative. Thus they effectively remained individual farmers with the consciousness of small-scale capitalist producers. However, if the Sandinistas had organized production, they could have prevented the emergence of an individual capitalist farmer outlook. In sum, the most important lesson that Los Patios and Plan Masaya offers is that for agrarian reform to succeed in Latin America, state officials must first make sure that peasants are fully incorporated into its development model by taking into account peasants' perspectives and demands.

It is hard to envision discussing the historiography of the Sandinista Revolution without highlighting the work of Laura Enriquez, who is Associate Professor of Sociology at University of California, Berkeley. *Agrarian Reform and Peasant Consciousness in Nicaragua* is a provocative and insightful text that is well worth reading. It poses new questions and clears the way for the elaboration of a range of new research inquiries about revolutionary governments and agrarian reform in Latin America.

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