"The Peasant Betrayed – Agriculture And Land Reform In The Third World", by John Powelson and Richard Stock et al. Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, (1987), Oelgeschlager, Gunn and Hain.

AFTER studying 26 societies, the authors of The Peasant Betrayed come to the somber conclusion that land reform programs whether sponsored by regimes of the Left or the Right have "harmed the peasant more than helped him." More importantly the authors discovered that only when the peasants drew on their own strength were their gains likely to be permanent. Land reform in the main, they say, has been granted by a benevolent government or been achieved through the power of the peasants. Only land reforms negotiated from peasant strength have survived.

Powelson says he had not expected this finding, which is contrary to much of the literature. He favours land reform as a "prerequisite for equitable economic growth - without it a whole generation of landless poor will live short and nasty lives with little dignity and less security.

But land reform is not implemented to give the peasant a place in society, he contends. The pattern in most Third World countries is to centralize power and then transfer the agricultural surplus to the State through its monopoly power and price controls.

Powelson states that the result "almost without exception is that output decreases and the peasants are impoverished. The most harm is caused by interfering with the peasant. The most is to be gained by granting them freedom to do what they have done so well for so many years.

WHERE farming is left to farmers, output increases and the welfare of peasants greatly improves. This laissez faire approach is rarely used, Powelson says. He details the ways governments pressure the peasants to give up the surplus and to reshape their lives along the lines of new government edicts.

In most cases, the record shows, the land is taken from oligarchs and transferred to the State. Incentives are reduced. The State in Lesser Developed Countries is not a defender of the national interest, nor of the poor, he says, "except when the poor have the leverage to demand it." The governments in LDCs tend to be less accountable to the poor and often have little respect for the key role they play.

Land is worth the capitalized value of its revenues (e.g. crops). If bureaucrats skim these revenues away, leaving the farmer with no more than he could earn as a landless laborer, his newly acquired land is worth zero. If the same happens in a government cooperative, his membership is worth zero.

A 20 year review of 26 nations demonstrates that except in two, the peasants are worse off than before. Only in Taiwan and South Korea, where the peasants had more political leverage, were conditions different. Even here though, the authors believe that the benefits would have been greater if the government had not interfered in the market.

"All peasant societies have their own systems of credit, supply, markets, savings and investments and communications of technol-Yet the State often supplants rather than supports these indigenous institutions and thereby disrupts village life.

The governing elite also favour the urban residents over the rural

Land reform schemes fail



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This is a very readable book w commend to students of develop for t and land reform. Its widespread coverage and succinct presentat evaluating new proposals for aidig the landless poor who make up so much of the Third World. summarized below

IN THE 1960s many people local to the Tanzanian experiment under Julius Nyerere. Despite his one for his people and his hopes for creating a new society, the results were disastrous. The African traditions were destroyed. Cooperation gave way to orders and interference from government "strangers." Little or no respect was paid to differing tribal traditions and many people were forcibly moved by government edict. Farms were chen burned to prevent peasant farmers from returning home. The predictable result of substituting Nyerere's vision for that of the pasant was a ruined economy.

SOUTH KOREA is different because:

- (1) the reform did not lead to new government institutions in the countryside;
- (2) the rural elite which hid collaborated with the Japanese during its occupation and annexation of Korea was destroyed without creating new class; and
- (3) the value in agriculture increased 4% per year for eight years without government interference, enhancing the peasant political power.

After WWII the large landholders (as in Taiwan) were discredited and thus were politically impoter. The government also did not contance to the Ja emerged even st American spon They diversified increased vege chickens.

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(3) cooper not ma blems in Egypt, Tanzania, the Philippines, Mexico and other countries we have studied," and respond to *Food First* authors' Joseph Collins and Frances Moore Lappe who wrote *What Difference would a Revolution Make?* after an extended visit to Nicaragua.

Collins and Lappe contend that the Sandinista government did not promote "Land to Tiller" programs on purpose in order to sustain the production level (which often falls after such programs) and to prevent possible inequities in parceling out land. Powelson says that the experience was the opposite of what was intended. "Production and output dropped substantially on state farms" – unlike the private farms in Bolivia and Paraguay after land reform.

Most peasants want individual ownership despite what Collins and the Sandinista say. Powelson says the Food First authors could

HENRY GEORGE SESQUICENTENNIAL CONFERENCE

A CELEBRAI ORY conference to mark the 150th birthday of American reformer Henry George will be held in Philadelphia, the city of his birth, from Saturday July 29 to Sunday August 6, 1989.

This will be the 18th conference staged by the International Union for Land-Value Taxation and Free Trade, and will be held jointly with the Council of Georgist Organisations.

Plenary papers are invited from scholars, which will then be published by the newly formed Centre for Incentive Taxation in England in conjunction with Shepheard Walwyn Ltd.

Editor of the book will be Richard Noyes, the IU President, whose co-authors will examine the contemporary relevance of Henry George's philosophy.

Their analyses will be presented in a problem-solving context, addressing major global issues such as ecology, social and economic justice, and the reform of socialist economies.

The conference will be held at the University of Pennsylvania. Charges:

- Conference fee: \$40 (£22.50)
- Accommodation: \$395 (£220)

Bookings should be through the IU at 177 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EU, England.

Peasant farmers betrayed

"provide a great service" by "confin(ing) themselves to promoting the priority of food first for less developed countries."

This book, *Peasant Betrayed*, in fact demonstrates, as Collins and Lappe contend, that governments in LDCs and international agencies discriminate against agriculture – even in land reform programs. "Many LDCs could feed their poor if they devoted greater resources to agriculture," Powelson says.

But he also argues that Lappe's bias – that food should be produced for local consumption first rather than planting plantation crops – may be in Nicaragua "a formula for poverty." He responds, "In a classic case of comparative advantage, countries adept at plantation agriculture – exporters of sugar, coffee, tea cotton etc. – can feed their poor better if they export these crops and buy basic food stuffs with the proceeds. The key is not which crops to grow – exports or food consumption – but one of increasing the income of the poor." (emphasis added)

HE CONCLUDES by asking the question: "So then, who advocates for the peasants?"

Neither Marxists nor capitalists; neither the USA nor the USSR; not even most non-govermental agencies such as Oxfam. Only the American Friends Service Committee is cited for enhancing the power of the peasants without getting into politics. Marxists have the better rhetoric but neither Left nor Right are concerned about peasant empowerment.

"Power to the masses" to the authors means "freedom for the masses to structure their own societies, to select private, state or cooperative farming" as they like. Despite the Marxist rhetoric, "peasants have never selected a state farm except under coercion."

The authors conclude "that no foreign government or international agency qualifies as an advocate for the peasant - i.e. promotes the peasant's control over his own structures and freedom in his decision making."

There is ample opportunity to test these theories again in an era where we see formidable changes in two Marxist nations – China (where the government is giving incentives to the peasants) and the USSR (where "perestroika" may allow more private farms) and even in the USA where thoughtful concern about the inequitable distribution of wealth and access to land may lead to change.

This book is a wonderful addition to the library of those who want to first identify and then slay the dragons of land reform.

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