PEASANT POVERTY IN HAITI

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AIDING MIGRATION: THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE ON HAITI. By JOSH DEWIND and DAVID H. KINLEY III. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1988. Pp. 196. $22.00 paper.)

LE COMMERCE DU CAFE EN HAITI: HABITANTS, SPECULATEURS ET EXPORTATEURS. By CHRISTIAN A. GIRAULT. (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1981. Pp. 292.)

DEFI A LA PAUVRETE. By FRANK LARAQUE. (Montreal: Les Editions du CIDICHA, 1987. Pp. 165.)

THE HAITIAN ECONOMY: MAN, LAND, AND MARKETS. By MATS LUNDAHL. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983. Pp. 290. $27.50.)

Contemporary analysts of Haiti concur that it is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and one of the poorest in the world. They disagree, however, on the causes of Haiti's persistent poverty. Haiti is not only poor but predominantly agricultural. Between 75 and 80 percent of the population live in rural areas and derive their living from agriculture. This review essay will examine two recent perspectives that attempt to explain the causes of peasant poverty in Haiti and the solutions each one offers for eradicating poverty. The first perspective is that of Mats Lundahl, who locates the causes of peasant poverty primarily in overpopulation, inadequate technology, soil erosion, and government extortion of peasant incomes through taxation, compounded by denial of technical assistance for changing production methods and improving the soil and productivity. A second, antithetical perspective is expressed by Christian Girault, Josh DeWind and David Kinley, and Frank Laraque in their works under review here. These authors argue similarly that the class system of exploitation and Haiti's subordination to foreign capital are the primary causes of peasant poverty in Haiti.

In *The Haitian Economy: Man, Land, and Markets*, Lundahl rejects the view that peasant poverty is rooted in the exploitation of Haitian peasants by a dominant class or in Haiti's peripheral position in the capitalist world economy as a result of Haiti's agricultural sector having been penetrated by foreign capital (pp. 41–61). He argues that the prices Haitians receive for coffee, the main export crop, are fixed not by developed capitalist countries but by the free play of supply and demand in a competitive world market. Lundahl argues further that Haitian peasants are not forced by anyone to produce export crops but instead behave as rational actors who respond to market opportunities (relative prices) to decide what to produce. Because the peasants "participate in the circuits of international trade of their own free will . . . , they can withdraw from this trade if they wish, i.e., should the conditions on which they participate become too unfavorable." Thus "it is not possible to explain the poverty of the Haitian peasant in terms of any international conspiracy, where he participates in an international trading system where others reap the profits and systematically deprive the peasant of the fruits of his labor" (p. 46).

In an earlier work, Lundahl argued that if Haitian peasants are not exploited by the foreign capitalist penetration of Haitian agriculture or by price-fixing in the world market, neither are they exploited within Haiti by a landlord class or by commercial intermediaries called speculators who exercise monopolistic practices (that is, they distort the functioning of the market to the disadvantage of the peasants) (see Lundahl 1979, 173–75). More recently, however, he seems to have modified his earlier views on the existence of groups in Haiti who exercise monopolistic practices over the prices paid to peasant producers of coffee. Lundahl now recognizes that the largest coffee exporters who make up a small number of the export firms in Haiti and dominate the Association des Exportateurs de Café (ASDEC) represent a "collusive oligopsony" that fixes prices paid to the intermediary speculators, who in turn buy their coffee from the peasants. These practices introduce some "imperfections" into the market by permitting "fixing the price paid to the producers at a level which is lower than the one which would have been established in a competitive market" (Lundahl 1984, 191; see also pp. 171–89 in *The Haitian Economy*). Lundahl's conclusion does not imply, however, that peasants are exploited by the coffee exporters or that their options are limited. Because the peasants are not monocultivators, they can choose to withdraw from the production of coffee if "ASDEC attempts to exert excessive pressure on the peasants" (p. 180).

If Haitian peasants are not exploited by coffee exporters, Lundahl reasons, they are less likely to be exploited by speculators acting as intermediaries between peasant producers and coffee exporters. Unlike coffee exporters, speculators do not constitute a monopoly force capable of imposing disadvantageous prices on the peasants. There are too many speculators, and their profit margins are too low to prevent competition among them and the peasants over sale prices. Moreover, Lundahl continues, contrary to conventional wisdom, speculators do not exploit peasants by cheating them or charging excessive interest rates on short-term loans. High interest rates in themselves do not demonstrate that exploitation is taking place, given that borrowers may choose these rates over other options that may be more disadvantageous. In addition, many of the speculators are potential lenders, and they do not represent the only category of lenders, a situation that thereby limits the extent to which the speculators can create a monopoly on the rural credit system (pp. 180–85; also Lundahl 1984, 192–93).

Nor are Haitian peasants exploited by a class of large landowners, in Lundahl's view. He observed that in contrast with most other Latin American countries, land is relatively equally distributed in Haiti among a large number of small farms (averaging 1 to 1.5 hectares). This situation resulted from the breakup of the large estates inherited from the colonial period and the inability of Haitian rulers to reimpose plantation production after independence (pp. 30–31). Thus the transformation of the Haitian agrarian structure into a system of small farms "precludes the exploitation of the peasants via a monopolistic land market, reductions in rural wages and usurious rates of interest." Moreover, although tenant farming is widespread in Haiti, it takes place among peasants within the same class rather than between landless peasants and large landowners, as happens elsewhere in Latin America (p. 24).

If Haitian peasants are not exploited by dominant social classes or by market imperfections, then how does Lundahl explain their chronic poverty? He finds the answer in a series of cumulative causes that begin with population growth. Even though Haiti's population growth rate of 2 percent per year is not high by international standards, it is consequential in light of Haiti's rugged terrain, which sets off a chain reaction of deforestation, soil erosion, reduction in crop yield, and declining incomes.

Population growth forces the peasants to fell more trees in order to increase the area of cultivation and also to provide fuel for cooking, given the lack of alternative sources of energy. Population growth also extends cultivation into the hillsides, but then deforestation increases soil erosion, which worsens due to the lack of modern technology for preventing erosion.

Soil erosion in turn decreases crop yield, especially for coffee, a land-intensive crop. As the relative price for coffee decreases, the peasants "rationally" turn to planting labor-intensive food crops. But these subsistence crops have an even more damaging effect on soil erosion because unlike coffee trees, which protect the soil against tropical rains, food crops do not prevent rain from washing away the vital top layers of humus. Also, food crops have to be planted twice a year, unlike coffee's perennial yield.

As land erosion proceeds and more labor-intensive crops are produced, the relative price of these crops would be expected to fall in relation to the land-intensive crop (coffee), leading peasants to turn to coffee production. But because the price of coffee is determined by factors outside Haiti, its relatively low price on the world market from the early 1950s to the early 1970s compelled Haitian peasants to continue to produce subsistence crops, which further aggravated the processes of soil erosion, destruction of cultivable land, and reduction of peasant incomes (pp. 28–29). The only way out of this vicious cycle, according to Lundahl, would be for peasants to protect the soil and improve crop yield through technological innovation. Such innovation would require the reinvestment of surpluses from agricultural production back into agriculture. For a variety of reasons, however, the peasants themselves are unable to garner the surplus to introduce the needed technological innovations. The only agent in Haiti capable of initiating such changes is the central government, which could provide technical assistance, education, and training and facilitate peasants' access to the appropriate technology.

But here is the catch, according to Lundahl: the Haitian government has historically been the largest obstacle to technological change in agriculture. The reasons are to be found in the evolution of Haiti's social and political structures. The failure to prevent former slave masses from gaining access to land and transforming themselves into small farmers forced the elite to seek alternative sources of income. Consequently, the state became an important avenue of wealth accumulation for the elite through taxation, an outcome that led to constant in-fighting among elite factions for control of the state and to the elites' furthering their own interests by excluding peasants from political participation. By taxing crops that peasants produce, especially coffee, and basic consumer goods imported and consumed by peasants (but not luxury goods consumed by the elite or elite incomes), the Haitian state appropriates approximately 40 percent of peasant income. Because this surplus represents a major source of wealth accumulation for those in power, very little of it finds its way back into agriculture. Moreover, the authoritarian practices of the government and its rural agents intimidate peasants, which makes them distrust government-sponsored programs. Thus the government, the only external force capable of intervening to implement the needed changes in agriculture, has become the largest obstacle to such changes (pp. 251–80).

Despite its elaborateness, Lundahl's argument in *The Haitian Economy* is weak on several counts. Largely because his paradigm precludes his understanding the market as anything other than the free exchange of goods and services among actors making rational choices, his analysis fails to take into account factors that could more fully explain the causes of peasant poverty in Haiti. For Lundahl, the state is exogenous to the market, and its actions can only impede the market's "perfect" operation. Likewise, groups that attempt to exercise monopoly control over the market are perceived only in terms of introducing "imperfections" into the market rather than being considered as integral to the nature of market exchanges.

Lundahl is correct in viewing the Haitian state as an important agent in peasant exploitation and poverty and in stressing the extraction of taxes as a major means for appropriating peasant incomes. But his understanding of the state is inadequate because he fails to place the state in the wider context of Haiti's class structure and relations of exploitation and domination. In short, the Haitian state is not the only factor in peasant exploitation but is linked to a wider network of relations of domination and subordination that combine to impoverish peasants. Lundahl denies that peasants are exploited by coffee exporters as members of a dominant class despite his acknowledgment that they in fact have a monopoly on buying and pricing coffee within Haiti. Moreover, Lundahl makes no connection between the wealthy commercial bourgeoisie and the state that protects the right of the bourgeoisie to exercise its monopoly power over buying and reselling peasants' cash crops.

Consequently, a convincing argument can be made countering Lundahl that the state is not separate from the wider market system in which peasants participate but is an essential component of that system, and also that the market itself is the site of relations of power and exploitation among social classes that do not hold state power. It is through the very process of market exchanges, at the national and international levels, that exploitation and impoverishment of the peasantry occur. Class exploitation—that is, the appropriation of surplus wealth or profits by more powerful and privileged social groups—takes place in a market system not only between owners of means of production and owners of labor power, as in the Marxist scheme, but also between "employers and employees on the labor market; lenders and creditors on the financial market; and consumers and producers on the commodity market," as in the Weberian perspective (see Collins 1986, 126).

Moreover, classes playing different roles in the market seek to monopolize their positions to become closed economic groups by excluding other groups, which in turn attempt to break down these exclusive practices. The relations of exploitation and conflict, or of exclusion and usurpation, among differently situated classes in capitalism are dynamic processes that are ultimately rooted in complex relations of power among classes (Collins 1986, 127–28; Parkin 1979, 44–86). Monopoly power, therefore, is not an "imperfection" or an "aberration" of the market system but one of its inherent characteristics.

Also untenable is Lundahl's argument that population growth is the primary factor in the cumulative chain of causation leading to peasant impoverishment. A more convincing explanation may be found by examining the market relations involving peasants. As most studies of Haitian agriculture show, Haitian peasants are not self-sufficient but produce primarily for the market in order to obtain income needed to buy what they do not produce, pay government taxes, repay debts, pay rents on land if they are sharecroppers or tenant farmers, and meet other living expenses. Thus Haitian peasants face a constant need for a steady cash flow (see Murray 1984, 145).

This ongoing need for cash has major implications for the relationship of peasants to the land. First, it means that the land will be worked as much as possible to produce food or cash crops for the market, without allowing enough fallow time for the land to recuperate. Second, peasants in Haiti use livestock as a cash reserve. Under the current practice of allowing livestock to graze recently cropped fields, the animals eat the growing shrubs, trees, and grass and thus prevent any rejuvenation. As the topsoil disappears, the land becomes uncultivable, leading to thousands of hectares becoming unsuitable for agriculture. Thus "in addition to population growth per se, cash-oriented livestock raising can provide a partially autonomous impediment to the reappearance of the soil restoring tree" (Murray 1984, 146).

A third factor in soil erosion results from the commercialization of wood. During the nineteenth century, trees served not only as a source of energy but primarily as an export crop. This process is still going on today in some regions. But with the growth of the urban population and the demand for more charcoal (the primary source of energy for cooking), tree cutting for charcoal production has increased in significance (Murray 1984, 146; Anglade 1982, 20). As Georges Anglade emphasizes, however, the primary cause of deforestation is tree cutting not for charcoal but for wood export. The problem, therefore, is not the use of trees by peasants as a source of fuel but the export of wood by the wealthy combined with the agrarian structure that prevents replanting of fast-growing trees that could be used for charcoal (Anglade 1982, 20). Murray has shown that such trees exist and could be planted to achieve the simultaneous goals of rejuvenating the soil and providing a source of cash flow for peasants (Murray 1984, 147–59).

In sum, the density of the population per cultivable area is not the primary factor in the Haitian causal chain of peasant poverty, contrary to Lundahl's analysis. If population density were the cause, then France would be a poor country because its ratio of inhabitants to cultivated acre is roughly similar to that of India. Yet China, with twice the number of persons per cultivated acre as India, eradicated starvation in twenty-five years. Meanwhile, the areas of Africa south of the Sahara that experienced the worst famine now have about 2.5 cultivated acres per person, "more than in the United States or the Soviet Union and six to eight times more than in China" (Lappé and Collins 1978, 18). Lappé and Collins's conclusions make it clear that peasant poverty in underdeveloped societies is not caused by the number of inhabitants per cultivated area but by the production of food for sale in societies with large income inequalities (Lappé and Collins 1978, 19). Lundahl has simply got his causal variables backwards.

For a more comprehensive understanding of peasant poverty in Haiti, one must consider other arguments. Let us now examine those advanced by Girault, DeWind and Kinley, and Laraque, which analyze the impoverishment of Haitian peasants from the standpoint of Haiti's position in the world economy and its class relations of exploitation and domination.

Haiti is only one of forty-two or more Third World countries that produce coffee for the world market, all of whose economies depend to some degree on revenues from their coffee exports. Haiti's share of global production of coffee is actually negligible: 1.2 percent of the total production from Latin America and 0.6 percent of the world total. In contrast, Brazil and Colombia produced between 65 and 70 percent of the Latin American total in 1977, according to Girault in *Le commerce du café en Haiti* (p. 42). Consequently, a country like Haiti suffers a considerable loss in revenue when the price of coffee falls on the world market. And even when coffee prices have increased on the world market, Haiti has been unable to increase its production, according to DeWind and Kinley's *Aiding Migration: The Impact of International Development Assistance on Haiti* (p. 76).

Another important characteristic of coffee production for the world market is that the core countries are the major consumers of coffee. Because the world market is made up of many sellers of coffee but few big buyers, the demand for coffee tends to be inflexible in the core countries, thereby allowing them to control the market and fix the price of coffee on the world market. Moreover, the coffee industry in the core countries is dominated by a few giant firms like General Foods and Nestlé. The result is that the few giant firms dominating the coffee industry in terms of importation, roasting, conditioning, and distribution constitute a monopoly power over Third World coffee producers (Girault, pp. 37–41). Thus one can speak of the Third World countries as being dependent on and exploited by the core capitalist countries. The core countries' control over the demand, buying, processing, distribution, and pricing of coffee on the world market affects Third World producers directly but differentially.

By locating Haiti in the context of the world production, sale, and consumption of coffee, Girault can explain why the country has derived very little benefit from its coffee exports. In addition to the mechanisms of unequal exchange that govern Haiti's relation to the world market, foreign capital exercises a more direct form of domination over the economy. This domination has been accomplished through the direct involvement of the World Bank and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in designing and implementing Haiti's development strategy under the Duvalier regime through successive five-year plans.

As Laraque and DeWind and Kinley show, the World Bank and USAID aimed to transform Haiti's agriculture to produce primarily for export rather than to increase its self-sufficiency in food production. Haitians were to rely on increasing food imports to supplement the loss in local production. The goal was to be fulfilled by developing agro-export industries and by diverting about 30 percent of all cultivated land producing food for local consumption to the production of export crops, notably coffee, fruits, and vegetables. This approach was undertaken despite knowledge that it would reinforce the process of land concentration, worsen the income and nutritional status of small farmers and peasants, and force their emigration to urban centers (DeWind and Kinley, pp. 57–58). According to Laraque's *Défi a la pauvreté*, the strategy of USAID and the World Bank, along with the Reagan administration's Caribbean Basin Initiative, was to make the Haitiian economy more open to foreign trade and investment and to increase Haiti's integration into and dependence on the U.S. market. One of the initiative's main objectives was to increase Caribbean exports to the United States in the form of agricultural products and manufactured assembly products, which would make U.S. industries more competitive by barring imports from East Asia and elsewhere, thus benefiting U.S. industries while reinforcing the Caribbean's dependence (Laraque, pp. 40–41).

These authors are aware, however, that this global perspective alone cannot account for peasant impoverishment. Other sources must be sought in the nature of the relations of domination and exploitation within Haiti, reinforced as they are by foreign governments and investors. In addition to the state's appropriating peasant income through taxation without returning anything to them, two other dominant classes exploit Haitian peasants through the market—the coffee exporters and the speculators.

Speculators in Haiti are no longer independent agents who use their own capital. They now operate with money advanced by exporters and may have become mere purchasing agents for exporters (DeWind and Kinley, p. 89). This development is also recognized by Lundahl. The speculators are therefore subordinated to the coffee exporters, who appropriate the largest margins of profits through their monopoly power. For example, in 1974–75 the average profit margin for exporters was 16 percent. It was up to the speculators to pass on the costs to

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peasants and extract from them what they could; in the same year, speculators obtained an average profit rate of 5.2 percent (Girault, p. 195). But the fact that the profit margin of the speculators was much lower than that of the coffee exporters does not negate the point that both groups exploited peasants, who received even less from the sale of their coffee.

Speculators exploited peasants by engaging in collusive and exclusionary practices and thereby limiting peasant options. Although the number of speculators was large (between 750 and 860 in 1975 in about 100 speculating centers throughout Haiti), speculators were unequal in wealth and influence, being divided into large and small speculators. Most *bourgs* (market towns) contained less than ten speculators. Several speculating houses in the same center or in several centers belonged to the same speculator. Even with many speculators in the same speculating center, only a few of them bought most of the coffee. These individuals represented large speculators who constituted a quasi-monopoly force that was not as powerful as the ASDEC but allowed large speculators to agree among themselves and impose a relatively fixed price on peasants (Girault, p. 216).

Speculators figured prominently among the rural bourgeoisie. They were often large landowners who rented small plots to peasants and invested their wealth in commercial businesses and financial transactions. They also loaned money to peasants in return for future coffee harvests. Speculators became powerful notables in their bourgs by combining their economic functions with political functions such as government agricultural agents, deputies, and rural section chiefs. As members of a rural bourgeoisie, speculators were among the strongest supporters of the Duvalier regime, and many joined the powerful Tontons Macoutes—the dreaded *force de frappe* of the regime—and used their power to coerce or threaten peasants into selling them coffee. Speculators also reinforced their domination over peasants through paternalistic social bonds (Girault, pp. 150, 233–34; DeWind and Kinley, p. 89; see also Nicolls 1984, 255–59).

Haitian peasants are also exploited by other landed classes, which consist of landholders defined as large (more than thirteen hectares), medium (between five and thirteen hectares), and small (less than three hectares). Only medium and small landholders and the landless should be included in the definition of *peasant* because they are subordinated to and exploited by social classes and groups more powerful and privileged than they. The years since 1950 have witnessed a process of proletarianization of the most vulnerable peasants, primarily small landowners, that has resulted in the concentration of their land in the hands of large landowners. Between 1950 and 1971, the proportion of properties of 1.23 hectares rose from 39 percent to 71 percent, and 45 percent of the farms had less than 0.3 hectares. In 1971, 11,000 farms with 8.5 hectares and 1,000 farms with 100 to 300 hectares together represented 20 percent of the cultivated area. By that time, some 30 percent of Haitian landowners owned more than two-thirds of all cultivable land. The state owned more than one million hectares and rented its lands to officials at less than the market rate. These officials then subleased these "state lands" at the full market price and thereby appropriated the difference as profit. In 1971 there were 656,000 landless peasants (Laraque, p. 52; DeWind and Kinley, p. 76; see also Anglade 1982, 107). Thus Lundahl's argument that Haiti has no land problem because land is relatively equally distributed is erroneous (p. 24).

The small landholders and the landless are among the most destitute of the rural population. Although coffee is not the only crop grown by the minifundist peasantry and coffee production has fallen steadily since the 1960s, coffee still provides the primary source of income for nearly half the rural population. Smallholders continue to engage in multicrop production and to enter into tenant farming and sharecropping agreements among themselves (DeWind and Kinley, pp. 75–76), which is to say that small landowners also exploit each other. To supplement their meager incomes, smallholders (who may or may not have titles to their land) also compete with the landless to sell their labor to the medium and large landowners at very low wages or enter into sharecropping or tenant farming agreements with larger landowners to whom they pay rent. The small peasants are also very dependent on large landowners and speculators for short-term loans at steep rates of interest. As Girault concludes, the "independence" of this "social layer, which represents the majority of coffee producers" is "a fiction" because this layer is actually characterized by profound dependence. Moreover, smallholders have been the most affected by increasing demographic pressure in rural areas. Their small farms cannot sustain all their family members, and many are forced to emigrate (Girault, p. 96).

Medium landowners are also heavily involved in coffee production. This class of peasants is not privileged or well-off, being vulnerable to economic crises and the burden of debt, but enjoys relatively more independence than small landowners.

By contrast, the large landowners constitute a rural bourgeoisie. Although some manage their own properties, many subdivide their land and rent it out to sharecroppers or tenant farmers. They also exploit the labor of landless peasants as day or seasonal laborers. This class also reinvests its wealth derived from agriculture to pursue commercial, financial, or political activities. As a whole, the rural bourgeoisie opposes technological change and agricultural development, which would undermine its "power by allowing a certain emancipation of the peasant world, which [it has] traditionally dominated and exploited"

(Girault, p. 97). Thus, contrary to Lundahl, the state is neither the only nor necessarily the major obstacle to agricultural development through better technology. The largest obstacle is the very structure of the class relations of domination and exploitation that requires an exploitable and dependent labor force (see Maguire 1984, 166).

Many factors combined explain why peasants have cut back coffee production in favor of producing food crops for the domestic market: high state taxes, monopolistic prices imposed on peasants by exporters and speculators, various other mechanisms of wealth appropriation by the dominant classes, and the peasants' inability to sell their coffee beans on the domestic market because of its relatively small size (DeWind and Kinley, p. 90). As Anglade has shown, however, the dramatic increase in domestic food prices since 1970 has led to certain food crops (sugar, flour, and beans) becoming the object of speculation controlled by a powerful new group of wealthy merchants and state officials. The result is that land values have increased, and small landholders are being increasingly squeezed out as land becomes concentrated in the hands of wealthy urban groups (Anglade 1982, 21).

The conclusion of the class perspective is that Haitian peasants are subject to a chain of domination and exploitation beginning with the international economy and filtered through the Haitian state, the merchant bourgeoisie, the speculators *qua* direct coffee buyers, creditors, landlords, government officials, and medium and large landowners. These exploitative social relations offer a much fuller explanation of peasant poverty, especially when combined with related factors such as the constant migration out of the countryside, lack of investment in human resources by the dominant classes, a dearth of investments in rural areas (in contrast to the capital city), and unequal distribution of income and access to resources leading to high levels of material inequality (Laraque, pp. 46–55; see also Maguire 1984, 161–62).

A perspective emphasizing class exploitation can also suggest better alternatives than those proposed by Lundahl, which frame the solution to peasant poverty as a technical problem rather than one requiring structural change. Here Laraque's argument is most persuasive. Locating the solution of Haiti's agricultural backwardness in restructuring its entire economic and class structures, Laraque proposes a two-stage process of reconstruction based on the belief that development is nothing if not the development of the human individual at all levels—educational, technical, spiritual, and cultural (Laraque, pp. 46–52).

Toward this ultimate objective, Laraque suggests short- and long-term strategies. The short-term solutions immediately relevant to agriculture include several proposals: increasing employment by extending public works projects in rural and urban areas; building temporary shelters for the homeless and combining them with literacy and health care centers; launching an immediate reforestation program; and ending the nefarious contraband trade that undermines the local production of foodstuff.

During a longer second stage (twenty to twenty-five years), structures of domination and exploitation would be transformed to benefit the peasant producers and the rural population in general by bridging the widespread inequalities between rural and urban areas and between rich and poor. This goal demands elimination of the mechanisms of surplus extraction, starting with the monopoly rent extracted by the state and coffee exporters, the system of sharecropping, and the usurious practices of moneylenders. These measures will have to be accompanied by a major agrarian reform that would establish the small farmers' right to property and redistribute small farms to the landless by fixing the minimum and maximum number of hectares that individuals can own. In short, a new agrarian system must be created that maximizes the control of the smallholders over the means of production and marketing of their food and cash crops, thus allowing them to be the primary beneficiaries of their labors. New units of production such as state and private cooperatives will also have to be created to increase Haiti's self-sufficiency in food production. These transformations, however, must not be implemented from above for peasants but must take as a point of departure the priorities and practices established by peasants themselves (Laraque, pp. 56–75).

Such reforms cannot be implemented without profound changes in the type of government and the class system now dominating Haiti. Lundahl thinks that it is utopian to believe that such changes are possible. But it is no less utopian to believe that things will always remain the same. If any lesson is to be drawn from the social and political turmoil that contributed to the overthrow of the Duvalier dictatorship and shook all of Haiti during the last two years, it is that the subordinated classes and progressive members of the middle class are not only thinking through better alternatives but are willing to struggle for them despite incredible odds.

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