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THE ROLE OF PATRONAGE IN THE PEASANT POLITICAL STRUGGLE IN LATIN AMERICA

by GERRIT HUIZER

One of the main obstacles to development in many Latin American countries is the existence of the traditional patronage system as reflected in the latifundia-minifundia complex. This implies that a rigid social structure prevails in the rural areas which allows practically no social mobility to the majority of the people employed in agriculture. The ownership of land and the corresponding economic and political power is heavily concentrated in the hands of a small privileged minority. This minority, the rural elite, achieved its position of power and privilege as a result of the conquest in the XVI century and through imposing the legal system of private property in the second half of the XIX century. Resistance of the original indigenous population was overcome by coercive means, which are employed to maintain the latifundia-minifundia system until today ('white guards', *capangas* etc.). In addition to coercion several other means were used to keep the indigenous and mestizo peasant population in submission. Debt-bondage, different types of servitude, and other forms of economic control were part of those means. The whole system was supported by religious sanctions and by monopolizing the social relations of the peasants through the patronage system. Unconditional submission of the peasants was rewarded by the security that a minimum level of survival was guaranteed to them. In a situation where the patron has almost absolute power over the lives of 'his' peasants, the patronage system in which the patron gives certain favors to the peasants in exchange for their allegiance, appears to function as a means of social control in addition to, and as a softener of, the coercive means through which the whole latifundia-minifundia system is maintained.

The complex of attitudes of the peasants which forms part of the traditional patronage system was called the 'culture of repression'.¹ Repression implies that certain 'counterpoints'² to the imposed but on the whole accepted value system have to exist. This is demonstrated to the careful observer in hidden — and at times overt — forms of protest, or in myths or tales.³ Exaggerated servility and feigned 'laziness' are expressions of this protest as well as spontaneous acts of violence and vengeance. The 'image of the limited good', 'amoral familism' and the 'pathological distrust noted by some scholars are partly reactions to the 'culture of repression'. In several cases the hidden counterpoints have developed into overt protest movements. This happened when leaders of a charismatic type were able to use the counterpoint elements to build a clientele which competed with the traditional patronage system and protested against its abusive or repressive aspects. Movements of the messianic type, which led to a new patronage system, as well as movements which come close to modern rational organizations have come up in several countries. For example, the more or less messianic movements occurring from the end of the last century onward in the Northeast of Brazil were followed by more rational and organizationally structured political movements such as the Ligas Camponeses or the peasant unions created by the Church in the late fifties and early sixties.

'New patrons' gain influence and sometimes power in spite of strong opposition of the 'old patrons', the traditional rural elite. Not always are the 'new patrons' more rational and/or democratic than the traditional ones. This depends in part on how they rally their support and following. Some new patronage systems are built up as a protest against the old system and the new patron depends heavily on the active support and participation of his followers for survival and for being effective in establishing a new system. Other new patronage systems depend on a flow of benefits from the government to the followers to tie them to the new system. This last kind has been dealt with by Galjart.⁴

The role such 'dependent' new patronage systems have played in social change away from the traditional patronage system has been considerable

¹ This term has been introduced by Allan Holmberg, *Some Relationships between Psychobiological Deprivation and Culture Change in the Andes*, Cornell Latin American Year Conference, March 21-25, 1966, mimeogr.

² About the role of counterpoints in prevailing value systems see W. F. Wertheim, *East-West Parallels*, Ch. II, 'Society as a Composite of Conflicting Value Systems', W. van Hooft, The Hague, 1964.

³ Some interesting examples of myths and tales can be found in Anibal Quijano, 'El Movimiento Campesino del Perú y sus Líderes', *América Latina*, Vol. 8, Oct.-Dec. 1965; see also note 1.

⁴ Benno Galjart, 'Old Patrons and New', *Sociologia Ruralis*, VII, No. 4 (1967), pp. 335-346.

in only a few cases. More important for social change were the new patronage systems which not only competed with but were frankly opposed to the traditional system and made of formerly hidden counterpoints the main theme, rallying strong participation from below and thus gaining effective power.

On several occasions over the last decades such resistance movements came to the open and found expression in peasant organizations. In some cases they were able to become so strong that they could provoke radical changes in the traditional system. In other cases at least, they formed a considerable threat to it. The most well-known organizations were the peasant guerillas headed by Emiliano Zapata (1910-1919) in the state of Morelos, Mexico, the peasant syndicates in the Cochabamba area, particularly Ucuena, headed by José Rojas (1937-1953) in Bolivia, the peasant federation of the valley of La Convencion, Peru, headed by Hugo Blanco (1958-1963), the peasant leagues in Northeast Brazil headed by Francisco Juliao (1955-1964) and the peasant federation organized by the Accion Democratica party in Venezuela.⁵

It can be seen from comparative study of these and other cases that these peasant organizations emerged as a clientele or following of a strong, often charismatic leader who for a variety of reasons became the centre of adherence of the peasants. In some cases the new clienteles could grow into a sufficiently strong organization so that they could replace the original landlord dominated clientele system. Important was that the clientele around a charismatic leader could achieve a sufficient degree of institutionalization of its group structure, so that it would not collapse at the disappearance of the central leader. Although 'personalistic' tendencies prevailed in all the peasant organizations to some extent, they could survive mainly because of the active participation of the membership. Another important factor of internal strength was the emergence of new and representative leaders as part of a new hierarchical structure within the organizations. The voluntary participation of the rank and file was one of the main elements which made these new clienteles distinct from the traditional system based on forms of bondage and coercion. Obstacles were strong, however.

Already during the first stage of struggle and effort to gain 'political

⁵ For an ample description of these organizations see Gerrit Huizer, *On Peasant Unrest in Latin America*, CIDA-ILO, Washington D.C. 1967, mimeogr.; a summary was presented in Gerrit Huizer, *The Role of Peasant Organizations in Agrarian Reform in Latin America*, paper presented to the II World Congress of Rural Sociology, Enschede, Aug. 1968, mimeogr. See also: Gerrit Huizer, 'Peasant Organization in the Process of Agrarian Reform in Mexico', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. IV, No. 6, 1968-1969, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, p. 115-145.

bargaining power'⁶ it happened that some charismatic leaders, who competed with the traditional elite, were co-opted or corrupted. Many of the revolutionary chieftains in Mexico, which led the peasant armies to overthrow the Government in the early years of the Revolution, and promised a land distribution, later became themselves political bosses and owners of large estates. Zapata was the only peasant leader of high rank who refused several times to become a landowner himself and who effectively distributed to the peasants many estates in the areas controlled by his guerilla groups. He was assassinated in 1919 by the official forces. During the twenties several new peasants clientele were formed in Mexico by political leaders, to achieve agrarian reform. Some of these leaders were co-opted into the overall system after they had shown the power capability of their group, others continued the struggle for land with more or less success. After several such clientele had consistently shown their power capability a government came to power which recognized that the satisfaction of the peasants' demands was a basic condition for the consolidation of the Mexican political system. During the Cardenas regime (1934-1940) a considerable show of political bargaining power, supported by the 60,000 rifles which Cardenas distributed to the peasant groups helped to establish peasant influence at the national political level, and achieved a spectacular agrarian reform. Out of several competing clientele a monolithic peasant organization was created as part of the overall political structure. The several groups were brought together in one organization, the Confederación Nacional Campesina in 1938 and through this structure linked with the political system as a whole.

After 1940 this structure became increasingly controlled by interests not identified with the peasantry, or rather opposed to them, such as the powerful middle class organization. The bargaining power of the peasantry disappeared or was left unused.

Presently many of the CNC's regional or state leaders are politicians, often not of peasant origin, who function as brokers or intermediaries between the government and the peasants and through which individual peasants or groups can obtain favors or facilities in exchange for political support. Roads, schools, water-supply or credits are used by officials to gain a

⁶ The concept of 'political bargaining power' has been introduced by James L. Payne, *Labor and Politics in Peru. The System of Political Bargaining*, Yale University Press, 1965; for the concepts 'power capability' and 'power contenders' used in this paper see Charles W. Anderson, 'Toward a Theory of Latin American Politics', LTC Reprint no. 10, Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin, 1964. For an interesting application of these concepts to some Mexican peasant organizations see Judith Adler, *The Politics of Land Reform in Mexico: The Case of La Comarca Lagunera*, unpublished thesis, London School of Economics, 1969.

political clientele at the local level. This political patronage system could become so overpowering that the peasants were left in a relationship of dependency again. Thus in many areas in Mexico, the new political clientele system of which peasant organization formed part became so monopolistic that for the majority of the peasants the new situation had similarities with the traditional hacienda system. Counterpoints existed, however, and could become new themes.

As a reaction to the tendency of the government to monopolize the political patronage system in ways not beneficial to the peasants, new clienteles were organized. This happened particularly in the areas where peasant expectations for possible improvement and development were high, but were frustrated, such as the Northwestern development area of Mexico. A radical popular socialist peasant organization headed by Jacinto Lopez came up which in 1958 staged massive occupations of estates which were legally claimed by the peasants. The movement gained such an impact that the government's agrarian programme between 1958 and 1964 was accelerated.

Thus a new independent and relatively more participatory clientele could keep the struggle for improvement of the peasants' conditions alive. Strong cohesiveness was the main reason for the strength of this organization and this was based on considerable participation of the membership.

The Mexican case demonstrates to some extent that patronage is a dynamic phenomenon. Traditional patronage is broken up and replaced by forms of patronage which are more rational and participatory and give the peasants more benefits. This can happen repeatedly.

At an earlier occasion⁷ distinction was made between democratic (or participatory) rational clienteles and the traditional, authoritarian ones and a continuum was conceived between the two 'ideal type' clienteles.



⁷ Gerrit Huizer, 'Some Notes on Community Development and Rural Social Research', *America Latina*, Vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 128-144 and Benno Galjart, 'A Further Note on "Followings": Reply to Huizer' *Ibid.*, pp. 145-152.

Although it could be doubted that the extreme 'ideal types' of this scale still fall under the term 'patronage', 'clienteles' or 'following', they have in this study been included in it. This was done as a polemical reaction to an article by Benno Galjart (see note 9), who tried to show that such contrasting 'followings' as the peasant leagues and the traditional estate peasant communities in Brazil were so similar that one could not speak of a 'class struggle' existing in rural Brazil. The scale and its extreme 'ideal types' was then introduced in order to make possible a differentiation between 'class-in-itself' and 'class-for-itself' showing that the Marxian term 'class struggle' was well adapted to describe the reality of much of rural Brazil.

In Mexico a development could be noted towards the left side of the continuum, culminating in the Cardenas period. After that the participatory element diminished again and so did the rationality of the system. Political 'caciquism' increased. The move towards authoritarianism was not complete however, since in some areas independent clientele competed and gained influence. Partly as a reaction to this within the political patronage system which presently prevails in Mexico on which the official peasant organization depend, participatory elements continue to exist, be it limited.

In several other countries counterpoints of the increasingly abusive traditional system were points of departure for new and more participatory 'power contenders', initially independent but later losing some of this independence.

In Bolivia some of the same forces were at work as in Mexico, but had less impact because of the shorter post-revolutionary period, and because the direct peasant participation in the revolutionary change of 1952-53 in the rural areas was considerably more profound and durable than in most of Mexico. The peasants in Bolivia today still have their armed defense structure which they built up in 1952-53 and have maintained the possibility to use political bargaining power to a much larger extent than in Mexico. This came out recently when the president of the country and the top-leaders of the official peasant organization were threatened when they tried to impose measures which were unpopular at meetings with the rank and file in some areas.

Another independent and participatory clientele which could obtain great benefits through the show of 'political bargaining power' (a general refusal to render gratis work on estates and invasion of lands) was the peasant federation headed by Hugo Blanco in the Convencion valley in Peru. The government issued a special agrarian reform decree to distribute the estates of the area among the peasants. This measure, in addition to the imprisonment of most top-leaders of the federation, prevented the movement from spreading over large regions of the Peruvian highlands, where the old patronage system, with few exceptions, could be maintained.

The Peasant Federation of Venezuela was from its initiation dependent on the flow of certain benefits from the Government to the peasants. The benefits consisted initially in cheap rents and agricultural credit. Once a strong organization existed, and particularly after this organization had suffered several years of frustration under a repressive regime, the FCV reacted in ways similar to the initially militant peasant organizations of Mexico and Bolivia. It showed considerable political bargaining power through effective land invasions. Once the most militant groups were contented however through land distribution, the Federación Campesina de Venezuela became a brokerage system through which benefits flow to the

peasant groups in exchange for the electoral support.

Because of the transformation of some peasant organizations from an effective participatory political bargaining organization into a dependent political clientele, some observers tend to over-emphasize the similarities between peasant organizations and the traditional hacienda patronage system. They suggest that leaders of peasant movements who have a 'personal following', such as José Rojas main leader of the peasant organizations in Bolivia, Francisco Juliao and others, use the peasants as 'tools' for their personal purposes, in ways which are not basically different from those employed under the hacienda system.⁸ Such simplified and static interpretations of peasant organizations seem to overlook, however, the dynamics of patronage systems. While the top leaders of most organizations have gained personal prestige, political influence and in some cases even personal wealth through their function as a leader, they compete with the old traditional and rigid structures which did not allow change and mobility at all.

If those peasant leaders would do nothing but to challenge the monopoly of the traditional system and break its rigidity, they would already make a considerable contribution to social change. That the personal motivation of some peasant organizers may be similar to the motivations of landlords is relatively unimportant as long as the effects of the activities of the organizers is an opening up of the traditional system to modernizing influences.

As an example for the similarity of traditional and new, more 'participatory' clienteles the Ligas Camponeses of Northeast Brazil have been mentioned a few times.⁹ The Peasant Leagues, initiated by local peasants but soon headed by the politician and lawyer Francisco Juliao started to form a clientele which opposed the traditional interests. Although initially the joining of the new group gave little benefits and considerable risks to the peasants who participated, later when the Ligas could show, political bargaining power and obtain benefits through organized action, affiliation with this clientele became attractive to an increasing number of peasants. The Ligas could give support to middle class groups against traditional landed elite in gaining political control of the state of Pernambuco in exchange for more benefits.

As a reaction to the growing leagues new clienteles were sponsored, competing with the Ligas clientele. These were the rural unions created in

⁸ Neale J. Pearson, 'Latin American Peasant Pressure Groups and the Modernization Process', *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. XX, no. 2, Columbia University, 1966, pp. 309-317.

⁹ *Ibid.*, and Benno Galjart, 'Class and "Following" in Rural Brazil', *America Latina*, Vol. 7, no. 3, Rio de Janeiro, pp. 1-22.

some areas in the Northeast by the Church.¹⁰ Later the syndicates sponsored by the federal government commission for the organization of the peasantry started under a new legislation to form its own clientele. During the stage that these different clienteles were operating and competing for adherence among the peasantry, considerable benefits were gained by the peasants. At one time the groups united in radical action such as a mass strike in order to achieve an important wage increase. The more radical clienteles could set the tone in such movements while the other had to participate, whole-heartedly or not, in order not to lose their clientele.

Although the Government sponsored structure of syndicates was gaining increasing control over the whole movement, there was considerable room for the articulation of various peasant interests within one overall system. This system was not monolithic, and the competitive aspects gave it considerable dynamism. The whole system, however, was completely destroyed in April 1964.

Again, a crucial distinction should be made between the traditional clientele which monopolized the adherence of the peasants through means which included coercion and new 'participatory' clienteles which competed with the traditional ones, and tried to change the system of which the traditional clientele forms part. The several new clienteles have different places on the above-mentioned continuum.

While some of the new clienteles (the Peasant Leagues) gained adherence by striving for radical change of the whole system, others, such as the syndicates sponsored by priests, were more conformist to the prevailing traditional system. Altogether however the groups stimulated a 'participatory' climate among the peasants, which as such was a first step to end the landlords' monopoly of power and decision-making.

It is clear that the different kinds of patronage briefly mentioned in this paper play an important role in the rural power struggle in some Latin American countries. The traditional system of patronage tries to prevent active participation of the peasants in the political life of the country. Working out from hidden counterpoint elements more participatory forms of patronage have come up. Some of these became new instruments of political control from above while others showed tendencies towards increasing control — or at least active political participation — from below.

It seems that it is not the elements which the different patronage systems have in common which help to understand social life in the rural areas

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that Neale Pearson, *op. cit.*, qualifies the peasant organizations organized by the priests as genuine peasant unions . . . which protect the interest of their members against landowners, middlemen and government agencies, while he describes the Ligas Camponesas as 'tools' of non-peasants.

of Latin America, but rather the aspects in which the patronage systems differ from one another, and the ways in which patronage systems change.

PATRONAGE OP HET MEXICAANSE PLATTELAND

Veranderingen in functies en structuur onder invloed van het moderniseringsproces

door R. BUVE

In navolging van Wertheim wil ik het verschijnsel patronage beschouwen als een waarschijnlijk vrij algemeen voorkomend structureringsprincipe. De vormen die dit principe echter kan aannemen, de functies die het vervult zowel voor de patroon, de cliënt als het systeem waarbinnen patronage opereert en de aard van de onderlinge relaties blijken sterk te kunnen verschillen. Deze verschillen treffen we niet alleen aan tussen onderscheiden samenlevingen, doch ook wanneer we de ontwikkeling van afzonderlijke samenlevingen in historisch perspectief bezien.

De veranderingsprocessen die in de afzonderlijke samenlevingen van invloed zijn geweest op het verschijnsel patronage zouden we kunnen beschouwen als aspecten van het moderniseringsproces, zoals dit door de Amerikaanse historicus Black is gedefinieerd: 'a continuous series of changes accompanying the growth of knowledge and its effects on man's ways of getting things done' (Black, 1966: 55). In het kader van dit proces treden veranderingen op in de functies die traditionele instituties binnen een samenleving vervullen.

Hiermede komen we op onze probleemstelling: Welke is de invloed van het moderniseringsproces in de Mexicaanse samenleving op de functies die patronage binnen die samenleving vervult en welke zijn de samenhangende wijzigingen in institutionele betrekkingen.

Voor de comparatieve bestudering van het moderniseringsproces maakt Black gebruik van een model bestaande uit vier fasen die, wat betreft de tijdsspanne die ze beslaan en de historische periode waarin ze voorkomen van samenleving tot samenleving kunnen verschillen (Black, 1966: 67). De eerste fase, het initiële contact van een traditionele maatschappij met moderne ideeën en instituties, is voor vrijwel de gehele wereld reeds verleden tijd. Deze fase begon in Mexico met de inlijving in het Spaanse koloniale rijk.

De meeste niet-Westerse landen bevinden zich momenteel nog in de tweede fase, de consolidatie van moderniserend leiderschap. In deze fase moeten de samenlevingen een aantal veranderingsprocessen ondergaan