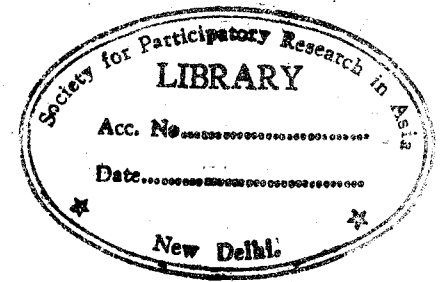


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KNOWLEDGE AND PEOPLE'S POWER

Lessons with peasants in Nicaragua, Mexico and Colombia

(book)

A study prepared for base groups and the International Labour Office
within the framework of the World Employment Programme

by Orlando Fals-Borda

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* O. Fals Borda, Conocimiento y poder popular. Bogota-Mexico-Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores, 1985.



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PREFACE

The present study of "Knowledge and People's Power" was conceived within the framework of the Participatory Organisations of the Rural Poor (PORP) programme of the International Labour Office, the purpose of which is to contribute to a better understanding of peasant classes and the furthering of their participation in the development processes through self-reliant forms of organisation. Two of the main components of this programme concern the need for participatory research and technical co-operation with national agencies to stimulate and promote this type of initiatives.

The subject of the present study is pertinent in relation to two ILO instruments: Convention No. 141, and Recommendation No. 149, both of 1975, on Rural Workers' Organisations. Both emphasise the need for access to first-hand information on the obstacles confronting the establishment of people's organisations and the opportunities for their development. This time, the processes are examined in the light of the knowledge-making efforts and methodology known as participatory-action research (PAR), which is opening up encouraging perspectives. The World Employment Programme has already sponsored work in this field, especially in Asia and various books and papers have appeared on the subject. Now we have this monograph on Latin America in which the PAR methodology has acquired greater maturity through the development of systematic procedures for working with peasant communities whilst respecting their autonomy and creative capacities.

The resulting study -- a synthesis of participatory experiences in Colombia, Nicaragua and Mexico -- makes a major contribution not only to our knowledge and understanding of grass-roots processes but also to the ways in which participatory investigations can be pursued in different socio-political contexts. It offers an alternative to the formal practices of academic research and participation imposed from above, which have not always resulted in substantial social change.

The authors have put to the test for the first time a comparative PAR methodological instrument and a wide variety of techniques for the dissemination of knowledge in the field of social action and political practice in such a way that a need has been met at both the scientific and social development levels.

In stressing the need for stable and strong grass-roots organisations, the study provides the rural working classes with the basic intellectual equipment required to defend their interests. It is not, therefore, simply another institutional report, but a valuable theoretical and practical treatise for applying the participatory principles at different levels.

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INTRODUCTION

The five years following the Cartagena World Symposium of 1977, which launched the methodology now known as Participatory Action Research (PAR), were an intense period of trial and error for both revolutionary and developmentalist policies. The results of these years have been submitted to international criticism and the practical consideration of grass-roots organisations. From Asia and Africa to Latin America and here and there in Europe, Northern America and Canada PAR has made its presence felt both scientifically and politically and is recognised dialectically in both spheres. In the process of determining its specific components, it has tested in practice the techniques and guidelines which distinguish it from those other activities which seek to combine knowledge with efficacy in the task of social transformation.

Numerous field reports were made by those of us who carried out these experiments and national, international, and regional meetings were organised for this purpose. Several theoretical works were published, and an initial attempt was made at systematisation with the compilation of one or two manuals of procedure (see the bibliography at the end of section 9).

Although our cultures and political systems as well as the Premises of our research and ideologies were very different we managed to achieve a conceptual and technical consensus in a way which we never expected. Perhaps the common problems of the poverty, exploitation and oppression of our nations brought us together as dependent peoples of the peripheral Third World where the PAR idea was originally conceived. Such preoccupations served to unite us. For all these reasons it can now be said that PAR has acquired a certain consistency and that it seeks to achieve even greater acceptance as an open and creative alternative in the political and scientific goals which we saw as the challenge facing us in Cartagena.

PAR has shown itself to be an endogenous intellectual and practical creation of the peoples of the Third World. Neither its appearance nor its significance in Latin America can be understood outside the specific context of the economic, social and scientific development of the region during the 1960s. Its main components derive from the regional appearance and diffusion of theories of dependence (Cardoso, Furtado) and exploitation (González Casanova), the counter theory of subversion (Camilo Torres) and the theology of liberation (Gutiérrez), dialogical techniques (Freire) and the

reinterpretation of the theses on scientists' commitment and neutrality taken from Marx and Gramsci, among others.

Indeed, we view PAR as a methodology within a total experiential process (ensuring a satisfactory productive cycle of life and labour in human communities). Its aim is to achieve "power" and not merely "growth" for the grass-roots population. This total process simultaneously encompasses adult education, scientific research and political action in which critical theory, situation analyses and practice are seen as sources of knowledge. PAR implies the acquisition of experience and valid data for the construction of a special kind of power -- people's power -- which belongs to the oppressed and exploited classes and groups and their organisations and the defence of their just interests to enable them to advance towards shared goals of social change within a participatory political system. People's power is expressed through external and internal mechanisms that monitor and supervise these processes of change and the leaders who bring them about, in the forms which we have called "countervailing power", the most complex expressions of which are the regional socio-political movements. These concepts and ideas are dealt with in section 8.

The PAR studies carried out up to now have been based almost exclusively on small local cases and individual regions. This approach has been necessary in order to identify and understand clearly the mechanisms of this complicated research process. The attempts at systematisation have reflected simply the overall results of the cases examined and led to the paradox (counterproductive in my view) of giving the impression that PAR is an already finished product. This, of course, is not so and was not the goal sought by those of us who put forward the idea. On the contrary, we wish to preserve the original freshness and spontaneity of PAR as we advance towards the necessary methodological clarity.

However, among the tasks which were not completed during these difficult and decisive years of struggle was one which concerns the direct comparative utilisation of the same conceptual and technical guide for working with PAR in different contexts, countries and cultures. Such a step -- which at first sight seems to contradict the autonomous parameters of the method -- could not be taken without the support of local participatory bodies. Nor could it be done without national teams of researchers who were able to carry out the work responsibly and carefully in the allotted time without losing sight of the

philosophy of action or the quest for knowledge which had stimulated all of us from the beginning.

National conditions began to mature in such a way that it at last became feasible to undertake such a comparative project in Latin America. This was made possible thanks to the support of the International Labour Office (Rural Employment Policies Branch, Employment and Development Department), with the collaboration of Md. Anisur Rahman, Dharam Ghai and J.P. Martin, and the contributions of public and private institutions in Colombia, Nicaragua, and Mexico which came to the task with enthusiasm and dedication.

In Colombia, four private institutions which have been working with peasants for a number of years offered their collaboration. In addition to the Punta de Lanza Foundation in Bogotá, the Development Co-operation Enterprise (EMCODES) and the People's Communication Foundation, both in Cali, provided staff and resources for work in the south of the country. Local co-ordination was the responsibility of Alvaro Velasco, a lawyer, and John Jairo Cárdenas, an educator. They chose Puerto Tejada as the site for the participatory experience in view of the interesting history of research and action which their organisations had been pursuing there since 1978.

In northern Colombia, the Sinú Foundation at Montería organised corresponding activities with its directors, Victor Negrete and José Galeano, both educators. It was decided to provide participatory support for the fieldwork which they had been carrying out in El Cerrito, a hamlet on the shores of a lagoon where peasants had been waging a struggle to defend their land rights.

In Mexico, co-operation was provided on behalf of the Centre for Studies and Assistance to People's Science and Education by Félix Cadena, Bertha Barragán, Carlos Cadena, and Roberto Cubas who are educators and social scientists with links to the Mixteco community of San Agustín Atenango (Oaxaca) which had been chosen for the participatory experience. Moreover, in Mexico, Salvador García Angulo, a social worker with considerable experience with the Otomi peasants in the valley of Mezquital, also provided valuable assistance.

In Nicaragua, we first made contacts with the National Planning Department, where Malena de Montis, a sociologist, was entrusted with the fieldwork in El Regadío which had been selected because it was a "vanguard

community" in Region No. 1, Estelf, close to Honduras. Subsequently, support came from the Vice-Ministry of Adult Education and the Nicaraguan Union of Farmers and Cattlemen (UNAG).

The present report is a synthesis or global, methodological and conceptual vision of this collective enterprise. In order for our work to be a truly comparative endeavour towards this common goal, we based our tasks on a previously prepared technical guide or conceptual frame of reference which reflected the regional problems which went beyond the local context with which in principle we identified ourselves, as well as the basic concerns which are shared by participatory researchers in general. This preliminary guide was first studied by everyone involved and then modified to take account of local realities: it was discussed again at several subsequent meetings during the course of our research, and in particular with the co-ordinator. The guide allowed for flexibility in the field as was to be expected. The test of its effectiveness came with practice, a challenge which the guide met successfully. The fieldwork was done between 1982 and 1984 in the five peasant communities (Mestizo, Black and Indian), selected according to the conditions and contexts explained below.

One question which united us all was the problem of people's power and countervailing political mechanisms and their relation to the search for and accumulation of knowledge to bring about necessary social changes. We all agreed that this question was extremely important and that it faithfully reflected some of the real concerns and situations which we had encountered among the peasants and Indians whom we had met during the course of our previous work or with whom we had lived in the three countries.

This problem led us to collective reflection as a way of putting to the test both the PAR methodology at the comparative level as well as our own convictions and commitments in the field of social and political action at the local and regional levels. Indeed, such a collective study on the problem of people's power and knowledge could be carried out in many ways: for example, we could have chosen a sociological approach, with all its working hypotheses, variables and matrices, or formal anthropology. This would undoubtedly have led to long and interesting studies, full of statistical tables, excellent photographs and drawings, and presented in a heavy and ponderous style. But this learned knowledge would have been limited to a small group of readers, to an intellectual and disciplined elite. It would not have reached the communities themselves, and probably none of the local people would have been

aware of the existence of such monographs or if they had, they would not have been able to understand them.

Our objective was quite different: to examine and test, in a comparative and critical manner, the idea that it was possible to produce a serious analytical work based on practical knowledge of the reality of both the ordinary population and of the activists which would enrich not only the general fund of science but also the people's own knowledge and wisdom. Our idea was to take grass roots knowledge as a starting point and then to systematise and amplify it through action in collaboration with external agents of change - such as ourselves - in order to build and strengthen the power of formal and informal rural workers' organisations.

Our aim was not to carry out purely scientific or "integrated rural development" work, objectives which no longer really satisfied us, but to fashion intellectual tools for the ordinary working classes - those who have unjustly borne on their shoulders the weight of the development and social and economic enrichment of other classes - and to establish or promote grass-roots organisations such as co-operatives, trade unions, handicraft and cultural centres, education and health brigades, which would allow the people to cope with real life situations through recourse to justified popular mobilisation, create new employment opportunities, increase incomes and improve the standard of living in the communities studied. Indeed, these processes and changes were witnessed in the field during these years, as described and explained in the following sections. There was a real process of transformation and material and intellectual progress congruent with our personal and institutional aims. This process is still alive, and it has sometimes gone beyond our expectations.

If such were our intellectual, social and economic objectives, they were nevertheless subordinated to another general goal of a more practical kind. Our referents were and still are the representatives of the interests of the people with their capacity for becoming (if they are not so already) efficient and enlightened leaders, members of a new type of service vanguards who would be non-sectarian and non-messianic, and who would not impose their views vertically from above. Together with them, we wanted to contribute in our own way and within the limits of our abilities to changing the unjust and violent society which we have inherited, so that together we could initiate the necessary transformations.

Thus the intellectual and practical aspirations of all of us were rooted in a single and shared experience, in which distinctions between leaders and subordinates had no part. With this philosophy as our spiritual anchor, we tested the different techniques for creating and communicating knowledge, with the appropriate adjustments being made in attitudes and values. These techniques are described in the following sections. Nor did we forget the problems of organisation and interaction implied in the popular struggles or the need to support and reinforce the workers' own organisations.

As participatory researchers sharing the land and life of the people, we met several times in the three countries to compare experiences and information, discuss ideas and techniques and to clarify our positions. Of course these meetings, which sometimes included colleagues from other parts of the world, strengthened the comparative approach of our work and, as noted above, led us to a fruitful consensus at the theoretical, practical and ideological levels. We saw that these problems could indeed be tackled by PAR in a co-ordinated manner in different cultural and political contexts. The principal categories with which we started (chosen on the basis of former participatory experiences) were gradually confirmed; others passed to a secondary rank or were rejected. The resulting consensus is expressed in the present summary report.

It was important to understand the different stages of economic, social, cultural and political development of the three countries at the time of the studies. In Colombia some PAR experiences had been carried out during the 70s with peasants and labourers. They were part of a powerful wave of political activism by the major peasant organisations and trade unions of the time. The ups and downs of this process affected the development of PAR in the Caribbean coastal regions of the country. However, following the partial destruction of the initiatives launched in the 1970s, the participatory methodology was gradually resurrected later in the same communities and locations, until the appearance of the present El Cerrito project. El Cerrito is thus a serious and careful continuation of those pioneer ventures. It is therefore not surprising that this experience not only served to strengthen the aspirations and civic and cultural struggles of the people of the coast but led to the publication of a series of interesting regional studies of scientific calibre.

Something similar had been happening, in an independent way, in the same years in southern Colombia, where an active group of intellectuals and political cadres made use of the existing organisations to work with the

peasants. The result was a research-oriented popular movement which influenced the struggles of the local Black communities, especially in the towns of Puerto Tejada and Caloto. The PAR approach was formalised precisely during one of these active periods of the movement, and for this reason it was included in the present project.

In Mexico, in the valley of Mezquital to the north of the capital, there had been a similar development of PAR-related methods during the 1970s and which were the subject of a number of theses, analyses and studies. The local Otomi Indians and Mestizo peasants of this valley were - and still are - searching for economic and cultural avenues of development independent of the dominant classes which have exploited them. Like the Oaxaca Mixtecas in San Agustín Atenango (where the process of methodical action was initiated by us), the Otomis have attempted valuable participatory experiences with external cadres. These are also included in the present report.

As for Nicaragua, PAR was introduced as an experimental idea following the overthrow of the dictatorial regime of Anastasio Somoza and the establishment of the National Reconstruction Junta in 1979. Some of the Junta's advisers (including a noted action-research epistemologist) began to talk about PAR in official documents and government seminars.

Thanks to the interest shown by officials of the Department of National Planning and the Vice-Ministry of Adult Education, these authorities agreed to take part in the comparative studies on people's power which we had proposed and El Regadío was chosen for this purpose.

Thus the PAR approach was taken to Nicaragua and actively used for the first time in a revolutionary context, in a "vanguard community" involved in national defense and food production. Following the confirmation of its suitability and congruence with the national revolutionary process, the experience is now reaching a crucial stage involving its generalised application to other parts of the country. The extension of the El Regadío experiment to 17 other rural communities in the same and other regions was decided by the Nicaraguan Government in 1984 in association with the FAO and the National Union of Farmers and Cattlemen.

In Mexico and Colombia the continuity of our projects was assured by various non-governmental organisations as well as through local support.

As was anticipated in the conceptual and technical guide, fieldwork was flexible in each country and subject to the criteria of the national teams as regards programming, procedures, tactics, and aims. Each community defined its own tasks and techniques with the collaboration and encouragement of the outside researchers. Other related activities were carried out which cannot be described in the present report such as meetings, marches, festivals, workshops, and other complementary tasks designed to foster employment and raise the standard of living and culture of the people. Moreover, we tried to encourage and maintain self-reliance and people's power in existing workers' organisations or in the new ones being formed, because this seemed indispensable to create permanent and stable structures to implement action.

The partial reports were drafted in Spanish and in the native languages once the results began accumulating. The co-ordinator, in consultation with the rest of the team, prepared the present abridged report. The resulting text was taken to the grass-roots organisations for revision and approval.

Since the five communities chosen in the three countries were and are our reference groups, the present report was conceived and written for them in a simple and direct manner, in line with the techniques governing the diffusion of knowledge adopted by PAR researchers. It will be recalled that four levels of communication have been established: "0", when the information is without printed words and is based only on symbols and pictures; "1" when the same information is given by combining both visual and written signs, as in an illustrated booklet; "2" when the information is prepared with a view to training community leaders or cadres who have already received some conceptual initiation; and "3", when the same material is carried to a more complex analytical, conceptual and theoretical stage, for advanced cadres and intellectuals.

In the present case, the "Introit" and the first seven sections which comprise the two main lessons were conceived and written for a level 2 audience; Section 8 and further reading for level 3. We did not write our reports necessarily with the ILO or its Geneva officials in mind, although this Organisation sponsored our studies and fieldwork. On the contrary, since the base groups constituted our principal reference, we are pleased to report that the Spanish version of the present text is already being used as educational material for cadres in our countries. This fact alone would undoubtedly justify the effort which we who are not peasants have made from the outside to accomplish something useful for the struggles of our peoples.

The reader will note that the report is divided into two parts, each of which has been called a "lesson". We have done this to emphasise the nature of our common quest for knowledge which we undertook in the field. The first lesson deals with "learning to interact and organise" in order to attain our aims, with account being taken not only of participatory experiences but also of the urgent need to bring about significant changes in the structure of our societies. In this connection we believe it is essential to break the relationship of submission (and the related modes of production of knowledge) found in most types of work and life in our societies and elsewhere, and to induce stable forms of organisation for action.

The second lesson -- "learning to recognise oneself" -- emphasises the actual components of the PAR approach and the means for producing and diffusing the acquired knowledge. Here emphasis is placed on the centrality of the collective work undertaken, the recovery of our awareness of regional history and the use of and respect for popular cultural elements. Both lessons are preceded by a description, in the form of a dialogue, of the five communities which we studied and which set the tone of the text which follows. Finally, after a theoretical and conceptual section (level 3) and suggested further reading we have included summaries of each participatory experience.

Some positive consequences of the studies were observed in the life and culture of the rural populations and in the creation of new work and income opportunities in the organised communities, as stated above. This can be seen in the field as well as in the detailed partial reports. There were also other immediate practical results, especially in Colombia: the reinforcement of local networks of independent political, civic and cultural movements. An association was established between dispersed participatory initiatives within a new context of study and action focused on the establishment of people's power or countervailing power. This context has now acquired a national dimension. The regions are represented in this national network from the base upwards and from the periphery to the centre, a situation which may allow the communities to regain the power which is their original and constitutional right, so that more participatory forms of democracy can be developed.

The reticular national system of people's power, with its countervailing political mechanisms (action groups and committies, trade unions, co-operatives, community boards, etc.) is now also spreading throughout the

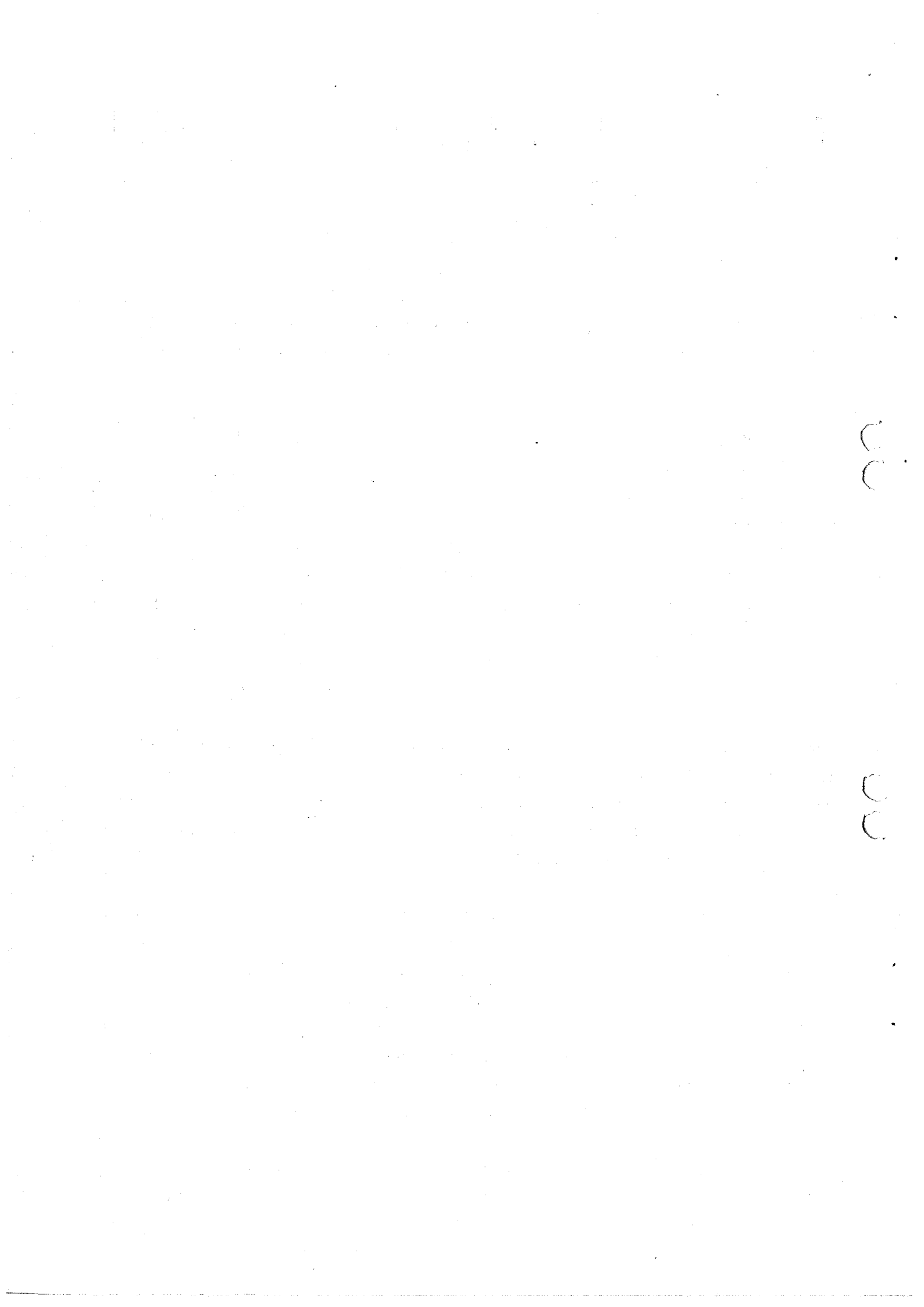
world. It has been discovered that PAR works well even in countries governed by dictatorships if prudent and imaginative procedure are applied. Moreover, many interesting participatory experiences have been carried out not only in countries of the Third World but also in Austria, Belgium, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United States. Several co-ordination and exchange bodies have been established in cities such as Santiago de Chile, Toronto, Rome, Helsinki, Colombo, New Delhi, Geneva, Mexico City and Bogotá. The general PAR process is now culminating in the establishment of convergent networks of international institutions which lend their support to the struggle for people's power. This is necessary because the problems of the groups and classes concerned often go beyond national frontiers.

The time has thus come in which the mechanisms of countervailing power provided by PAR in any given place (such as those studied in the present report) are being given multiple forms of support at the regional, national and international levels. Much has been achieved, therefore, since the first World Symposium in Cartagena.

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INTROIT
(Level 2)



THE POOR PEASANTS MOBILISE

"Grandpa, what is power?"

"Power is to be able to act well in life with what one knows and has in hand". The words rise and fall like an avalanche down the hill of the Acostado, across the cactus fruit of the Mezquital Valley and the tomato plants of San Agustín Atenango, the ripe maize of El Regadío and the withered cocoa trees of Puerto Tejada, and finally come to rest in the lagoon of El Cerrito.

They are words which might have been used by Quezalcoatl, Bochica or some Chorotega deity. But now they come from an old man with arched eyebrows sitting on a stool in the kitchen of a thatched hut in a village which was celebrating the big event of the day: the legal takeover of 30 "plazas" (over 40 acres) from the La Cabaña sugar plantation near Puerto Tejada (Cauca, Colombia) which up until then, together with other sugar plantations, had been suffocating thousands of black and mulatto families of the town with its insidious "green enclosure".

Ño Didacio explains how in the weeks before the take-over he had spoken at the meeting which the leaders of the community and the young people had organised to discuss the local housing crisis. He spoke of the kind of life they used to live before the sugar plantation, "that perverse and heartless evil" had invaded the region, when people earned a living from growing cocoa, owned their own plots, were healthier, ate properly and organised communal dances and fiestas in the village.

His grandson was a member of a group of "observers" elected at the communal meeting and had been one of the canvassers who went around visiting houses and families, although he could hardly read or write. During his "inspection" visits he helped broaden the community's information on the housing situation and knowledge of the village history so that finally it was able, both ethically and legally, to undertake collective action against the sugar plantations. "Strength and reason are already on our side. All we need now is to act", was Ño Didacio's conclusion. And everybody present (especially the women, though they had remained quiet during the meeting) agreed with him that the right moment had come for the invasion to take place because now enough information, facts, laws, figures and recordings had been gathered to carry it out efficiently. They had obtained a power which no one

would be able to take away from them although its defence would cost some lives: the power of valid knowledge supported by reason, justice and moral principles. This power gradually developed into a regional civic and political movement aimed against the large sugar plantations which had appropriated the land and which were exploiting its people. Everybody in the town had arrived at this conclusion in his own way and with his individual human resources, without the help of sophisticated research techniques.

"Hey, Ño Didacio" replied Don Silvestre in his house of El Cerrito (Córdoba, Colombia), "What we need here in El Cerrito is not so much houses as land to grow food, because we have many mouths to feed. Take the case of the Muñoz woman, who has thirty children. We grow yucca, yams, water melons and other crops in the dry lands left around the lagoon when the seasonal water level falls. The law confirms our communal rights over those lands, but the rich owners of the neighbouring estates, supported as they are by the corrupt authorities, have been putting up more and more barbed wire fences to take them away from us".

"Have you not been able to make them respect those ancient rights?"

"I suppose we have not been consistent in our action although this year we have organised ourselves better. We compiled a history of the village which gave us plenty of reasons to defend ourselves and to act. I myself told about the origin of El Cerrito and how we used to use the lagoon, how we founded a prosperous and happy hamlet with healthy and co-operative people. That is until the greedy capitalists arrived. Others explained what they had learned in the local peasants' organisations, such as techniques for defending the land. Our young people put on plays and sang songs about our plight. And so, on the night of March 4th 1982 we got together and decided to go into the dry lands with our machetes and to plant seeds. The police arrived, opened fire on us and took prisoners. But as you can see, we are still here and we shall stand firm because, as in Puerto Tejada, reason and justice are on our side too".

From beneath the shade of his broad-brimmed hat, Don Vicente, the old Tata Yiva or "lord of the powers" of the Mixtecos in San Agustín Atenango (Oaxaca, Mexico), said thoughtfully: "I notice that you Colombian countrymen lost the power of the old traditions of your people and have had to rebuild them the hard way in order to defend your interests. Here in San Agustín the women drove out the mayor because he would not allow the steward to organise a

fireworks display for the village fiesta as we always had done. Now our chief concern is to defend ourselves from abuse by the tomato buyers. So we have set up a production co-operative and are studying simple ways of book-keeping. In fact we are writing an accountancy manual in Mixteco, which is based on our own experiences and realities".

"Is that all?", asked Ño Didacio and Don Silvestre, raising their heads in half disbelief.

"Well, no. We are also discovering, poor and illiterate as we are, that we can defend ourselves from many dangers if we use the traditions which have been handed down by word of mouth from family to family. We were not aware of this force of ours until we remembered, not long ago, the time when the people did not have to depend on anyone from outside. Now with this knowledge, which was not forgotten and which we have learned to revive, we are rediscovering the arts of pottery, sewing, and cooking of our ancestors, all of which is very useful in the present poor economic situation. We are also setting up a cultural training centre for our young people, because history never ends and can always teach us something. So we are regaining the control over our lives which we had partly lost. Even the half-breeds of Oaxapan respect us now, because they see that we are progressing with our heads held high, and that is something!"

At the foot of a beautiful walnut tree, Doña Jovita, a peasant woman from Cuesta Blanca (one of the 54 communities in the valley of Mezquital, in Hidalgo, Mexico) said the same as she described in Otomi the meetings of the herbal doctors and local sages which take place every two months in the study groups of the community centre. They too are seeking independence by means of traditional knowledge which they put to the service of social change and people's progress. Their efforts complement those of teachers, land squatters, the united tillers of the common land and the students who provide information which will foster greater transformations in Mexican society. "All of us come together to produce and share our knowledge in the same way that the bees make honey. We could even start a popular political movement of the masses". Doña Jovita finished her talk by shooing away some goats which were coming too near the delicious chilacayote dish which she was cooking.

The smell of food and open cactus fruit wafted to the south towards the rocky hamlet of El Regadío near Estelí (Nicaragua) and the border with Honduras. "Their food is delicious, but the way things are going in Mexico

and Colombia, they will never have a revolution" said Teresa as she lit an oil lamp in the corridor of her house where the peasants of one of the 17 literacy collectives of the neighbourhood will come and sit on long benches at the end of the day as usual for their class.

"Our Sandinist Revolution, on the other hand, is trying to create and consolidate people's power right now, which is the force and the knowledge of all of us who are working and learning together to build a better country."

"And what about the vanguards? What are those?", the Colombians and Mexicans asked in worried voices.

"Things are not the same here as in other places", Teresa answered. "Experience is showing us that it is the organised people who recognise their own capacities who are the real vanguard because they are shaping the new reality and will persist in their action until the final victory is won. For this reason here in El Regadío we are studying our history and have learned to make a census, tasks in which we got ahead of the experts from Estelí and Managua. We are learning how to deal with Government officials because we are looking for ways, with our experience, to co-ordinate the efforts of all of us to build a just society. We fought against the large estate owners, and after our victory we founded two Sandinist agricultural co-operatives in lands that we took from the old estate-owners. And we are still continuing our fight against the Somozists. Look! Some of our young militiamen are returning victorious from the frontier! All this is people's power."

"Power for what?"

It is said that this was a question asked by a Colombian politician and philosopher when he held in his hands the destiny of the country on April 9th 1948, as violence broke out and partially destroyed the city of Bogotá following the assassination of the political leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. Now nearly forty years after that bedlam, the answer seems clearer, if not for him at least for the masses who suffered in the flesh the consequences of the revolt.

A choir of voices rises in unison up along the highways and byways of the three countries, because their peasants have lived a common destiny which they now understand better: the exploitation to which they have been subjected for centuries long. "Power is for fighting poverty and establishing

justice. We have all asked the same questions: Why is there poverty in such a rich land as ours? Why are we so poor? In our answer forged with the instruments of our revived knowledge and that of our friends and collaborators outside, and with our weapons in our hands, we have come to understand the harsh realities in which we live. We have also discovered what we are capable of achieving".

"It has been said that knowledge is power. By understanding poverty and its causes in this way, we have begun to lift up our heads. We are again becoming proud of being people. For this reason we want to eliminate poverty and exploitation in all its forms. This is the purpose of our power, people's power. We are no longer the passive ignorant serfs scorned by the rich white lords and aristocrats who used to be our bosses. We are not so stupid or apathetic as many learned 'doctors' thought we were. To them and to everybody we have given what was ours, and we have received almost nothing in return. Now it is time for us to assume the power which comes from our will and which is ours by right so that we too can become prosperous and happy like them. We no longer want to be second class citizens; we want, at last, to become full human beings."

Someone else asks: "And what did you do to reach this kind of awareness and action?"

"All this was the result of the work which we did together to understand our own reality and be able to transform it. We have been pursuing this work for some time now. In two long lessons we should like to explain how we achieved our present spiritual alertness and level of economic and political activity. We do this because we want to share these experiences with all our brothers in Latin America and the world. We want them to hear our voices and opinions which before never went beyond the silence of our hamlets or were swallowed up in technical reports written by visitors who never got to know us well.

This, then is the purpose of the following pages. Obviously they cannot include the other forms of knowledge which we produced and used such as pamphlets, films, photographs, tape-recordings, protest songs, plays, festivals, radio programmes and stories, all of which were developed in our co-operatives and trade unions amongst friends and companions, in workshops, handicraft and cultural centres, health and education brigades, assemblies, and in collective action and study groups. They are elements of knowledge of

which we are the rightful owners and this knowledge will remain in the communities themselves where we supplied the information and where we used the participatory approach, a work and study method which has led us to agree to the publication of this book."

LESSON ONE

(Level 2)

LEARNING TO INTERACT AND ORGANISE

1. The tension between bases and activists
2. Breaking the relationship of submission
3. The need to persist: linkage without deadlines

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1. THE TENSION BETWEEN BASES AND ACTIVISTS

When the "Carlos Alberto Guzmán" neighbourhood of Puerto Tejada was once again flooded by rain, 1500 families were affected. A committee was elected to represent those concerned. But the families were powerless to defend their interests, which were manipulated as always by local political bosses, whose only objective was to gain access to the relief money from outside and obtain votes in the forthcoming elections. The families in the neighbourhood continued to live in poor conditions. They did not get the draining systems nor the bridge which they needed to help solve their difficulties. Only a few families received the rations sent by the Government. To make matters worse, Andrés, the principal leader of the district, was threatened by the police with reprisals if he continued working with the committee.

Why all these failures? Because the families of the district did not know how to organise themselves so that they could, with their own power, counteract the abuses and lack of respect of the local bosses and their hirelings. They could not exercise countervailing power. But the Puerto community learned the lesson and discovered how to mobilise themselves better if they were to make progress and ensure just treatment from others, especially from State officials, and how to interact with the latter.

Part of this discovery was to enter into contact with persons from other regions and social classes who could really understand the situation of the countryside and the subject of study proposed by the base communities. In fact it happened that Andrés and his fellows had met a group of experts from the EMCODES Foundation (almost all of whom belonged to the middle class) in the nearby city of Cali, who were studying rural problems and lending their support to grass-roots communities. Andrés explained to them the problem confronting his community: "One day we wondered what the so-called political leaders of the region had done to prevent more atrocities being committed against the poor people of Northern Cauca, and we saw that they had trampled over our needs. They told us there would be agrarian reform and yet the sugar plantations have invaded us. They told us they would improve our standard of living, and here we are with very low wages, without jobs, without education, sick, badly nourished, in debt, and every day we are getting poorer".

The experts from Cali, although technically qualified for the job, had not been fully prepared for co-operation with people like Andrés and his community. But although they belonged to other classes, they gradually became

aware of the need to find more efficient ways of "working with the grass-roots". The techniques with which they were already familiar were designed to promote "social development" from the centres of power which were ruled by technicians, academics, specialists or to engage a "process of change" from the top, under the guidance of a radical vanguard which issued the theoretical concepts and revolutionary ideas which should govern collective action. Neither of these theses had been able to satisfy the honest aspirations which motivated those serious, enthusiastic and idealistic young men, some of whom had had the practical experience of "bare-footing" in the countryside.

On the initiative of the inhabitants of Puerto Tejada there came an invitation to act together, thus creating the necessary mutual confidence with the technical workers and which led them to investigate the real situation of the community. In order to achieve the efficacy which everybody - both the inhabitants and experts - wanted, the knowledge acquired in the process would have to reach the very soul of the people, because a better understanding of their experiences would serve to articulate their struggle. This meant developing a special praxis which could combine theory with practice, and establishing a fruitful dialectic in which practice would be the decisive factor.

The analytical tools acquired in the universities were too expensive, pretentious, petulant and unnecessarily complicated for the type of work needed in the local context. Such techniques did not lead to a deeper knowledge of the experiential dimension of this special praxis. On the contrary, they tended to distort reality or to see it through a kind of mist, shaded with the colours of cultures of other parts of the world. For example, what the activists identified as "agro-industrial capitalism" in the sugar plantations of the area was not understood in this way in the immediate vicinity. Such a concept was anchored in the historical process of European capitalism. In Puerto Tejada, on the other hand, there were extreme and direct forms of exploitation of the work force which were summed up in the people's image of the "green enclosure" that they felt was creeping in upon their houses. Neither was the classic proletariat so often sought by revolutionaries clearly present in the region; instead, several types of formal and informal labour existed for which there was no counterpart in the textbooks.

Despite these discrepancies in the ways of looking at things by the town people and the intellectuals, it was obvious to everyone from the start that

knowledge by itself would not transform reality, and that action without study and reflection could lead only to blind or futile spontaneity. It was necessary to go further and to combine theory not only with practice but also with the wisdom of several sources. The desired objectives could not be fully achieved without an ideological alliance of mutual commitment between the local inhabitants and outside intellectuals to reach the shared goals of social change.

The co-existence in praxis of these two poles of different techniques, knowledge and social origins in these cases of real ideological commitment to change, created a dialectical tension which made it necessary to modify the respective social attitudes of both sides. On the one hand, the outside actors tried to overcome class attitudes, the old vanguardism and spirit of the academy, the Cartesian rationality of expensive and complicated modern science, and thereby convert themselves into organic co-operators with the working classes; on the other, the community actors endeavoured to overcome the local people's inferiority complex, so that their traditional knowledge and experience, coupled with their own practical rationality, could be fed into the process, thus developing a new social conception of the world which would prove less alienating.

In this way the foundations were laid for a potentially fruitful exchange which would achieve two important objectives: first, a critical and reflective attitude on the part of the local people which would lead them to a better understanding of their lives, by overcoming their earlier alienation or conscience conditioned by traditional exploitation; and second, a common pattern of thought which would be shared by the base groups and professional cadres, that is, a pattern combining popular leaders and outside activists converted into organic intellectuals, so as to create a type of service vanguard which would organise action in a more efficient way against external and internal common enemies. Such foundations were designed to establish and fully implement the people's countervailing power in the town and in the countryside.

The colleagues of El Cerrito, El Mezquital, San Agustín Atenango and El Regadío in Norther Colombia, Mexico and Nicaragua were already moving towards this same point of dialectical tension, mutual confidence and critical conscience in praxis. Each came with his own culture, language and view of the world, but each too had specific problems which also required an alliance

between different social classes and forces committed to the same goals of change, as had occurred in Puerto Tejada.

Since 1969, the 120 families of El Cerrito had not been able to defend their rights to use one thousand hectares which the Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform (INCORA) had drained from the lagoon and declared common land three years before. These fertile lands were gradually being taken over at irregular intervals by large neighbouring land owners, despite the constant individual protests successively lodged with the authorities. Clovis, a worker from Montería (the capital of the department of Córdoba 15 kilometers away), who had been a leader of the regional peasant movement ANUC (Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos) tried unsuccessfully to go into the recovered marshland and plant food crops for his family.

What Clovis had said about his experiences in ANUC encouraged the inhabitants of El Cerrito to organise themselves. As in Puerto Tejada, they made their own enquiries about the situation (which at the beginning necessitated secrecy and the observation of nearby haciendas by fellow workers) and established a defence committee headed by Don Medardo, a respected leader in the village, a worshipper of Saint Lucy, 50 years of age, and illiterate. The local committee decided to invite the same Montería intellectuals who had previously helped ANUC in its struggle against the large estates. Together they now studied the economic, social and legal situation of the region more decisively and with greater confidence, some contributing their initiative and information, others their previous training. In this way they prepared themselves for action in the defence of the threatened rights of the local peasants.

In El Mezquital, the educational initiatives did not originate among the peasants themselves but were introduced by members of the official Mexican institutions who, however, made the mistake of inundating the entire valley with surveys and interviewers. This led to a negative reaction on the part of the people. However, since 1975, as a result of contacts with the region, officials began to modify their elitist procedures as well as their original developmental strategies. The Centre for Adult Education (CEDA) discovered that the peasants were not so much interested in gaining a primary school certificate as knowledge to improve their standard of living and the marketing of their products. The exchange of information in a spirit of mutual respect not only allowed the peasants after a while to participate more enthusiastically in the educational activities, but led the promoters

themselves to share in activities directed by the peasants. A new tool for mass educational and political action had thus been forged in El Mezquital as a result of dialectical tension. It was what the experts subsequently called "solidary self-teaching" or mutual education, and which they continued to use in various fields.

Although the people from San Agustín Atenango, for their part, had managed to survive through their oral tradition, the vigour of their ancient institutions and the Mixteca language, they were constantly abused by the mestizos and whites of other villages to whom they appeared as "irrational". The water for irrigating their crops did not arrive on time, the bats' droppings which they collected from nearby caves were stolen from them, but the authorities paid no attention to their verbal complaints. However, some of the peasants were relatives of graduates in social and economic sciences who worked in the capital and who knew about PAR. Thus there was scope for contact which allowed the participatory research approach to be applied effectively in the local community.

The numerous journeys of these graduates to San Agustín Atenango and their frequent stays in the town gradually established an atmosphere of confidence. In the same way a change occurred in the relationship of the villagers with their neighbours and in the way in which they saw themselves. Atenango was no longer the same as it used to be. But in the same way the graduates ceased to belong to the classic academic world -- they had become an organic part of the people with whom they now worked.

El Regadío was known in the governmental circles of Managua as a "vanguard community". Battles had taken place closeby during the Sandinist Revolution under Miguel Angel Cortés, a local guerrilla leader and since 1979, mass organisations were represented locally. Although the process of change was making progress, it lacked the expected speed and necessary conviction.

The opportunity for furthering the process of building the new Nicaraguan society with militant communities like El Regadío occurred when PAR was considered in governmental circles as an adequate tool for research and action in the revolutionary context. The questions which were asked included: how does one develop a revolutionary peasant and a co-operative movement which would at the same time support and generate social transformation? How does one prepare a blueprint for change which would mobilise the masses, unite the past, present and future, and show the way

ahead? And who will prepare this blueprint? The answer which was given was as follows: the preparation of such a blueprint requires above all a knowledge and analysis of the cultural and educational situation of the people so that their power can be maximised through self knowledge and other new, convergent and necessary forms of knowledge, thereby establishing a critical conscience in the rural base groups.

In El Regadío, good ingredients were available for such an experiment. Furthermore, the village was near the threatened frontier with Honduras, and that was one reason why it was chosen. The confidence of the people of the neighbourhood was established through repeated exploratory and explanatory visits, which led to mutual enrichment between the officials appointed for this task and the peasants (especially the local Co-ordination Commission which was elected democratically). The knowledge and experience of all concerned were used to discover how the People's Educational Collectives (CEP) ("Colectivos de Educación Popular") could improve the vital agricultural production of the region. From this sum of knowledge there emerged the idea of "incorporating the practical aspects of life into a process of continuous learning", as well as applying the participatory approach among teachers and students in the CEP. These concepts would eventually be extended to other parts of the country and return as feedback to the higher levels of the central Government.

The liaison between State institutions and the organised community of El Regadío had some expected moments of tension when the people exercised their countervailing power outside the community, especially when the contact between the municipal and departmental Government delegates and members of the Co-ordination Commission created a natural wave of expectations. As the peasants gradually gained systematic knowledge of their own reality and a greater critical conscience, they responded more efficiently to the external delegates' requests than the latter did to their own petitions. This led to apprehension concerning the expectations encouraged by this process of external countervailing power. But the peasants replied: "We know that the country is poor and that we cannot solve everything at the same time. What we want is to talk about what we can do together and with our support". With this the community arrived on the threshold of a fruitful co-ordination between the village and the State through a mutual process of effort and learning.

There emerged from this exchange an interesting network of co-ordination and inter-action at the two levels (community and State), which is illustrated as follows:

Internal relations of the community

External relations of the community

CDS			Mass Organisations
UNAG	Co-ordination	Commission of	MICOIN
AMNLAE	Commission	external	MIDINRA
VIMEDA	of El Regadio	delegates	HEALTH
ETC.			CULTURE, etc.

CDS	- Sandinist Defence Committees
UNAG	- National Union of Farmers and Cattlemen
AMNLAE	- "Luisa A. Espinoza" Association of Nicaraguan Women
VIMEDA	- Vice-Ministry of Adult Education
MICOIN	- Ministry of National Commerce
MIDINRA	- Ministry of Agricultural Development and Institute of Agrarian Reform.

These two commissions succeeded in correcting in practice the widely held view that everything must come from the State; they demonstrated that centrally organised vertical decisions prevent proper consideration being given to community realities, which is essential to promote local progress. This dialogue between levels and interaction of powers in Nicaragua may make it possible to combine the thousands of creative ideas and proposals which come from the base groups, with the ideas and proposals of the State. Such an interchange may permit a better harmonisation of micro- and macroplanning, in which the people's own knowledge of their specific realities would be complemented by the wider knowledge of national and international realities through a process of feedback and the permanent elucidation of the unknown and confusing elements which may emerge from both sides.

Co-operation and interaction are expressed in these multiple and varied ways between external activists and the grass root population in the praxis of people's power. Such a process creates an inevitable dialectical tension

within PAR. How creative is this tension will depend, of course, on other factors, some of which are studied in the following sections.

2. BREAKING THE RELATIONSHIP OF SUBMISSION

It is not easy to unify the thought patterns of base groups and experts so as to foster mutual confidence and achieve in praxis the shared goals of social transformation and people's power. The weight of this responsibility falls less on the members of base communities than on promoters, animators, activists and "outside agents", whose general ideological and technical qualifications have already been mentioned. Moreover, both the communities concerned and independent observers expect activists to make a special effort to achieve modesty, understanding, empathy and a capacity for self-criticism which will serve to correct the inevitable lapses in their field-work. As they say in Mexico: they must be brave and know how to do their job well, because "not all those who whistle are muleteers".

This seems to show that well-trained outside agents or animators with an understanding of praxis and with the above-mentioned critical skills and qualities are necessary to PAR, especially at the beginning of the cycle when they share responsibility with the base groups for the initial decisions concerning the investigations to be undertaken and their subsequent development. With the organic intellectuals of the base groups, similar tasks and problems are involved although they occur at a different, but equally comprehensive and dynamic level. The qualities, attitudes and abilities of external animators in managing and understanding human relations as well as their political vision are vital for success. But this success itself depends to a large extent on breaking the relationship of submission or dependence which may exist between cadres and base group members.

The moments of crisis or the actual disintegration of the tasks undertaken could often be traced to personal failures by outside and/or inside agents of change to observe these rules of conduct. They could become pivotal men controlled by outside considerations, required to act under the pressure of interested outside institutions and organisations. Consequently, they could easily fall into the nets of co-option, swayed away from their work by the real or fictitious advantages offered by others; they could become corrupted by money, overgenerous salaries, and by doubtful distinctions of a different kind; they could let themselves become caught up in the web of weariness at the lack of rapid progress in their work, their inability to be

readily understood by the base groups, or as a result of the constant bombardment of negative criticism. They could also be hypnotised by radicalism and turn into obstinate or dogmatic fanatics unable to see the truths of others, intent on pursuing internal holy wars with often false accusations, purges, unreasonable and counterproductive punishments caused by disagreements; or they could develop confusing procedures like mixing trade-unionism with politics in the same organisation (anarcho-syndicalism).

As a rule, these dogmatic and overbearing attitudes of pivotal men were nearly always related to a special view of vanguardism inspired by historical experiences which had been successful in other revolutionary contexts elsewhere. According to these earlier views, social change should be based on vertical decisions monopolised by ideological minorities or elites in radical political parties. In our own clashes between different vanguards and the sub-division of movements resulting from such controversies, something very strange occurred: this ideological discussion became reduced to the so-called "informed leaders" of the political minorities and did not extend to the base groups. The grass-roots remained quiet during these confrontations and observed from the fence, sometimes with amusement, how the "doctors" cut each others' throats. The people's common sense made them stand aside from such fireworks; it made them more practical than their leaders, and allowed them to exercise skilfully their countervailing vigilance. The people thought that the vanguard should be conceived differently as an element of social catalysis to advance and support their causes. The true vanguard would be governed by the people's own dynamics rather than being imposed as an authoritarian and infallible guide.

No other recourse was left to the unsuccessful cadres - if they wanted to be efficient and recapture their audience - than to return to "charge their batteries" through renewed and more respectful contacts with the base. As Mario Giraldo, one of the leaders of the Workers and Students Movement of Colombia (MOEC) stated in 1972: "We believe that people's power is related to what the common folk can do and not to what the Marxist groups (believing ourselves to be the party) claim they can do".

It seems then that such vanguard and anarcho-syndicalist techniques of the recent past have been criticised in our context and that their practical failures have led the people to look for adequate alternative forms of leadership, without necessarily falling into the opposite error of inefficient spontaneity. The PAR experience has made it possible to identify three of

these internal countervailing alternatives based on the elimination of the relationship of subordination implied in classic vanguard techniques. These alternatives are: (1) collective leadership; (2) the principle of "first amongst equals" in leadership (primus inter pares) (although this principle has not worked in places like El Cerrito where there is a marked tradition of machismo or male dominance which requires further study, or in San Agustin Atenango, where the traditional charisma of the Tata Yiva has survived); and (3) the parallel nature of political structures as regards trade-unions, civic and cultural organisms so as to ensure the respect of their autonomy. These points will be dealt with in the remainder of this section and the following one.

The new type of catalytic, enlightened, diligent and comprehensive leadership associated with PAR - the group responsible for guiding, systematising and undertaking the tasks together with the grass-roots - is a response to the rise of new social values which question the existing society and seek to resolve its contradictions and inconsistencies. It is inspired by the organic interests of the working classes. If done well, the breakdown of traditional dependence would make redundant the roles of "leaders for life", pivotal men and vanguards who have monopolised knowledge, power as well as resources, and exploited the masses to the hilt. Catalytic team leadership is founded on ample political participation (not only technical or operative participation), as has been tried in Nicaragua, by allowing some degree of autonomy to the base organisations and by truly delegating power to regional institutions. This form of leadership based on catalytic inputs is emerging as a new kind of a superior philosophy of life and action in the face of the revolutionary development of the country.

It was difficult in our experiences to resist the old temptations of anarcho-syndicalism and vanguardism. The dead weight of bad habits and even the accumulated prestige, whether false or well-earned, of previous political tasks could be disconcerting. When such habits and temptations were not controlled, serious problems emerged. But we found that our awareness of these temptations and dangers and the need to restrain or equilibrate them was an important internal corrective factor which enabled animators to respect the creative processes initiated with the base groups.

The old vanguardism was not the only temptation which the animators had to face. They were also tempted to remain with the experiments in order to "protect" them, becoming their watchdogs or stepfathers. These paternalistic

attitudes also prevented autonomy from flourishing in the communities, and impaired the ability of the communities to take control of their own development. Of course, we recognised the importance of carefully supervising and promoting our work from the very beginning. Specific situations and dangers had to be faced and dealt with immediately. But our cadres were careful not to form strong ties of dependence which would increase the traditional relationship of submission and they worked so that their own presence would be progressively redundant. This rule of potential redundancy - the contrary of paternalism - stipulates that the organised communities should become able to carry on alone the tasks which had been initiated, without having to appeal to outside experts or intellectuals except in special and extreme cases.

The emphasis placed on the potential redundancy of the external animators is one of the main differences between PAR and the applied research methodologies of the academic and developmentalist schools. It requires the break up, in the field as well as in life in general, of the relationship of submission or dependence which exists between the interviewee and the interviewer and, by extension, between the peasant or worker and his boss or supervisor; between the masses and the chiefs, the people and the intellectuals, pupils and teachers, clients and bureaucrats, direct producers and experts, indeed between manual and mental labour. In theoretical terms, this process can be defined as the break-up of the subject(I)-object (you) dichotomy and its replacement by one between co-operators, that is, a subject to subject relationship. Once this symmetry of work and life is attained, there is true participation and a corresponding improvement in the quality of social and political action.

This change towards symmetry in the relationship of dependence and submission (implicit in the break-up of the subject/object dichotomy described above) results in the development of a deeper and richer relationship with people without, however, weakening or destroying individuality. This would be theoretically and practically impossible and if it did occur, it would create an unmanageable void. The differences between persons continue even in conditions of redundancy, so that the new relationship is rather one of complementarity, healthy emulation, convergence in outlook. It is a dialectical liaison in which the popular bases, as a collective subject, determine the tone and form of the relationship in order to produce knowledge, improve material production and overcome political problems. With which criteria? Our experience in these countries shows that there are at least

three criteria, which will be studied more thoroughly in Section 3: permanent ratification in practice, pluralist ideology and participative democracy.

Let us now examine some of the ups and downs of these important processes as we experienced them. The Co-ordination Commission of El Regadío (Nicaragua), which was set up at the beginning of our experience, had to become fully acquainted with the research, ensure that the census of the community was properly carried out and help in the analysis and correction of its results. The researchers noted, however, that the members of the Commission began to complain of headaches, backaches, stiff necks, etc. precisely when greater intellectual reflection was required. The latent intention was that the external animators should give the "correct answers". As they did not lend themselves to such purposes, tense moments of silence arose as the members of the Commission waited for the answers, or indulged in trivial conversation and jokes.

If they had adopted other guidelines on research and action, our researchers could easily have assumed the role of those indispensable leaders "normally" expected by the peasants of El Regadío. However the animators insisted that the peasants should analyse their own patterns of dependency, authoritarianism and paternalism inherited from the traditional exploitation systems of the past which continued to flourish there despite the Revolution of 19 July 1979. Together with the results of the census, this historical and social self-analysis offered the community another excellent opportunity to take a look at itself. It was the first time that the inhabitants had done this, and so their history "acquired a face of its own" in a process similar to that which had occurred among the Otomis of El Mezquital. In this way the process of change in El Regadío became more dynamic and the people could undertake new tasks for their own development with more effectiveness and confidence.

If the old habits of submission and dependency had not been broken in El Regadío, the community census would have failed because the interviewees would have given false answers. Resistance and suspicion disappeared when it was seen that the interviewers themselves were from the community and were trained in situ by the animators (using "sociodramas" among other techniques), thus establishing a direct subject to subject relationship. "If people from other places had come to do it, the investigation would have failed because there are persons here who believe that most outsiders come just to steal", the Commission rightly concluded.

In the case of Nicaragua there was no difficulty in training community cadres and interviewers in simple methods of registering, counting, systematisation and data analysis. Thus the concept of "research" was demystified. It was no longer seen as something magical or difficult, as if it were an exclusive monopoly of "experts" and "academic". The demystification of research and its replacement by subject-to-subject analysis also occurred in Puerto Tejada (Colombia) when the housing conditions of the poor were examined. This process strengthened the confidence of the communities to get on with the task of asserting their claims. Nevertheless, care had to be taken that the newly trained cadres did not adopt the superior attitudes of exploitation and allow themselves to become pivotal men, just because of the training which, they had received and which in one way or another, made them different from the rest. When this selective training was not done carefully, its results were counter-productive, as in El Mezquital.

As part of the breaking up of the rites of submission and dependency, the practical procedure of working in circles was adopted in the three countries. The idea was that those present could see and talk to one another without having to refer to a "leader" sitting in front, like the teacher in a traditional school. So when chairs and benches were placed in circles everyone felt more comfortable and able to take part in the discussions. They were more ready to give information and were more aware of the democratic nature of their relationship. This was especially true when outside visitors were present. The sociodrama technique was also successfully used, as already noted.

This process of mutual discovery on a one-to-one basis would have been even more difficult if another step, which at first seems obvious, had not been taken by our animators: using the same communication code which the base groups themselves used. We shall return to this subject later in greater detail in the section on the production and diffusion of new knowledge (Section 7).

For the time being, let us emphasise that a practical way of learning the popular code is, of course, to speak, act, and live together with the people, that is, through the application of horizontal communication patterns between cadres and bases. This was done in so-called "friendship groups" in El Cerrito, in "discussion workshops" and in "study circles" at San Agustin

Atenango and Ixmiquilpan (Mexico), in "collective sessions" held to "socialise the data" in El Regadío, and in "analytic workshops" in Puerto Tejada.

This need for horizontal communication had a special impact on the superiority/subordination patterns of external animators and among visitors. On such occasions of conviviality and collective discussion at the sites, it became more convenient for the cadres to listen rather than to talk. This went against the expectations created by old habits in theory-making and the control of the ideological jargon which the cadres had previously employed in those types of meetings and which had, of course, led to confusion and humiliation amongst audiences subjected to such long-winded speeches.

One of the first consequences of this horizontal communication was to highlight the difference between the intellectual nature of the models which were as a rule presented by the outside cadres and the pragmatism of those who listened to them. The Mexican animators, for example, were not initially aware of their own abstract intellectualism until the peasants complained that "no more time should be wasted in these discussions", because "problems are not solved by just discussing them". The method employed established too great a gap between analysis and reality, theoretical study and the immediate context. In other words, it confirmed the classic distance between subject and object, theory and practice.

Another reaction came from the cadres' insistence on holding too many meetings. They did not usually take sufficient account of the life and work cycles of the peasants. In these cases the "objects" of the Mezquital valley managed to impose their practical point of view on the "doctors" by simply not going to the meetings.

Even so, in our attempt to solve these initial problems of the two worlds, we often came up against a tendency by narcissistic cadres to maintain the old asymmetry of the subject-object dichotomy, when they tried to monopolise the right to speak at meetings. The persistence of these negative attitudes damaged the reputation of some of the cadres to the point that there was some degree of rejection and resistance to their presence by the base groups, as occurred in Northern Cauca.

The destruction of the relationship of submission was formally achieved when the peasants started to argue with conviction that "now we have lost our fear of speaking our minds". This newly acquired ability (and the adoption of

more power) can be reinforced with modern technology, as occurred in El Mezquital when businessmen from Mexico City offered to install a community swimming pool if the inhabitants would cede part of their common land. The peasants recorded the entire conversation, and when the businessmen did not keep their promise, the peasants transcribed the tapes and distributed critical leaflets. The horizontal control of communication was thus maintained and the peasants were able to exercise the power of proposing initiatives, that is, their external countervailing power.

A natural consequence of practising the dialectical tension between bases and activists - and the destruction of the relation of submission which these efforts involve - is the strengthening of well-known community organisations through which externally-oriented countervailing power can be exercised when necessary: The neighbourhood committees, community action groups, co-operatives, trade-unions, civic brigades, assemblies, forums, sports clubs, cultural groups, theatre ensembles, etc. Just as "knowledge is power", in the same way knowing how to organise and interact in the name of justice is another way of recognising the truth of the old saying that "union makes for strength". In these cases, the exercise of externally-oriented peoples countervailing power is an expression of the class struggle and may become a genuine counter force.

However, one also has to learn to unite and remain united not only against outside forces but also against inside threats, so that vigilance and control can be maintained over the development of activities inside the organisations and over the behaviour of formal and informal leaders. Internal countervailing power is thus exercised to prevent those mistakes, defeats and losses of interest that stand in the way of the objectives of social change. At this level people's countervailing power serves to nourish a basic collective consciousness which keeps everyone alert against the abuses of formal power and the carelessness of leaders.

3. THE NEED TO PERSIST: LINKAGE WITHOUT DEADLINES

How long does it take to break up the relationship of submission and to apply the rule of redundancy in practice? The present experiences do not offer any definite formula, except that one has to persist in the search for the autonomy of the people and the support of stable organisations. Sometimes dependence and paternalism continue for long periods, depending on the circumstances, as in the cases studied. All the same it is a sign of success

that those who manage to break the subject-object binomial persist in doing so by their own means, with their own strength, and without further need for guidance. This is a litmus test for PAR.

Indeed, our fieldwork was not always successful. There were ups and downs which were sometimes quite serious, resulting from various crises and difficulties with people and situations which could not be controlled or sufficiently anticipated.

How can one explain these periods of fatigue when interest was lost in the interaction and organisation processes? Fortunately these negative aspects did not last very long and there was a general tendency to go forward in the process of change. The difficulties were understood rather as special problems related both to personal expectations and the time factor. They were connected with work rhythms, social processes, and personal attitudes. We asked ourselves whether in the praxis of participatory-action research there could be fixed deadlines, planning, formal evaluation and absolute laws, or whether such research was necessarily a less rigorous and more conjunctural process.

One of the main differences observed between participatory-action techniques employed locally and regionally in Mexico, Nicaragua and Colombia and the classical methods of social research was the indefinite, plastic, and open nature of PAR. The latter was seen to have no fixed cross-sections, such as surveys; there is no racing against the clock to meet established requirements or to write a thesis with the aim of graduating on time. Successive work cycles are determined in PAR only by the sense of commitment of the researchers (organic intellectuals) with the people's organisations, movements and actions, and depend upon the goals achieved. PAR engagements are generally of a long-term nature lasting as long as those taking part in them desire, continue, or give their authorisation. They may last as long as the people persist in their legitimate struggle.

Within such a context, as was seen in the cases we studied, tactical constancy and flexibility are more important than central, disciplined regimentation. The social movements generated by PAR are subject to independent forces which go beyond official planning and evaluation. Fortunately, such forces manage to preserve the spiritual autonomy of the thinking and acting man who continues to create and respond to circumstances as he moves towards the proposed social goals. There do not appear to be any

"laws" in this field nor is it possible to make any absolute scientific predictions, since the force of chance remains supreme within the general framework. For these reasons PAR social movements and organisations are marked by the ebb and flow of the involvement, efficiency and interaction of the cadres and base groups and are not subject to precise theoretical, ideological or scientific laws. Their golden rule is to persist as far as possible in order to achieve the objectives of radical transformation, without losing the sense of urgency to solve the serious structural problems which affect the working masses. This is PAR's own system of evaluation.

To persist, in this sense, does not mean to be on one's feet fighting day and night in public places - blocking the traffic, or shooting in the jungle or on the streets - because this would of course be impossible. Human communities need to stop and take a deep breath from time to time before starting off again. To persist here means to retain the initiative constantly by promoting actions which cover different fields (from the cultural to the ecological and in different social milieux). Such action, which may be simultaneous or consecutive, depending on the available opportunities, should be aimed at the establishment of permanent organisations. One's vigilance must never be lowered, because the struggle is long, multifaceted and of an urgent nature. It should not be difficult to persist if there is the will to do so.

Sometimes this will to act is lost, as much in the communities as among the animators, and this explains in part the rhythms to which we have referred. Base organisations and movements experience death and resurrection by turns, alternately between bursting like a bubble and rooting themselves successfully in the ground like seeds. Such rhythms appear when the communities give in to the routine of exploitation and submission, when they return to the passivity of old, or forget their countervailing mechanisms of protest and vigilance. Setbacks also occur when the animators allow themselves to be co-opted, or when they become tired or fanatic and mix politics with trade-union matters, often through impatient vanguardism and the contradictions of pivotal men.

Diversity in their respective conception of time may be one cause of tension between bases and animators. This problem arises when pressing needs claimed by often petit-bourgeois activists lead them to act compulsively as if suddenly they want the whole world right now! However, the common people, albeit heroic at times, are not in such a hurry to "make history". They know

how to wait, and have faith in the future, especially when they discover themselves and the potentialities of their action.

An example of this dialectic of ebb and flow, bubble and seed, impatience and hope can be seen in Puerto Tejada and the People's Civic Movement of Northern Cauca which grew into a political front as a result of local PAR experiences in 1978. Once the initial academic stage with the sponsoring authority was completed, the movement then undertook the search for a participative model of social and economic action in the region. There was a reaction against the dogmas of the vanguard left from which most of the cadres were drawn, although something of their elitist messianism still lingered on. This defect was tempered only by the obvious need to find an effective response to the serious problems of the region.

The work advanced so well that soon it was possible to discover latent organic intellectuals among the peasant classes with whom the creative tension derived from the destruction of the subject-object binomial could be practiced. Andrés was one of those intellectuals of the working classes, a teacher of peasant origin. The great forum of 1981 on regional problems which climaxed the movement was organised by external animators and local intellectuals such as he. The success of the forum gave encouragement to the subsequent tactical step: to participate in the forthcoming municipal elections to win seats on the town councils of the region. Two seats were won. But then, perhaps because of the elections, a process of disintegration began.

Until then the movement had been a "popular" one, that is, it was a social movement based on the struggle for specific cultural, political and economic demands. The people liked this, especially those who were tired of politicking and the concomitant deceit and demagoguery. They saw in the movement a new, more intelligent and more useful way of "making politics". However, the subsequent addition of the word "civic" to the name of the movement gave rise to heated discussion. Many became suspicious and stopped taking part in the activities, because they found them reminiscent of the old corrupt anarcho-syndicalist practices.

To a certain extent they were right to be suspicious. The movement was suffering from two kinds of impact: the first was from organised regional groups whose working methods and procedures were not participatory but messianic and authoritarian. The other came from the unexpected

self-sufficiency of some of the founding cadres who, perhaps overreacting, began to create difficulties and impose their views at all costs on the meetings. The movement no longer belonged to the people and became an arena for byzantine conflicts at the individual and group levels. The movement became a vested interest created from above and from outside of the people's base organisations. The setback was quick to appear and had several adverse consequences. On the one hand, it split the movement into at least two groups in different localities (Puerto Tejada and Santander de Quilichao); on the other, some cadres deserted and others failed, weakened in their attitudes, convictions and conduct.

Nevertheless, these failures had the effect of accelerating in other ways the pace of earlier work. The basic orientations of the movement and the initial praxis were, in spite of everything, seen to be valid. It was felt that the participatory methodology proposed was useful, and that it was still tactically valuable. To start with, the local leadership, once left to its own resources, could now at last move to the forefront. Suddenly there were several other people like Andrés, natives of the region, taking over control. The aims of the movement, a little more modest now than at the beginning, ripened politically and greater skill was acquired in managing the rhythms of practical work.

In the same way it was soon discovered that the old friends of the movement had not disappeared. They were there still, ready to rekindle their ardour. With the new winds of action and study, the flame of involvement once again burst forth in Puerto Tejada. Will it spread once more throughout the depressed regions of Northern Cauca and perhaps further? Perhaps. For how long? We do not know, because this struggle is open-ended, it is an unending praxis. We know that PAR commitments have no deadlines, and they will not cease until justice and communal progress have been achieved in every place and region where research and action are undertaken. This is PAR's true and final evaluation.

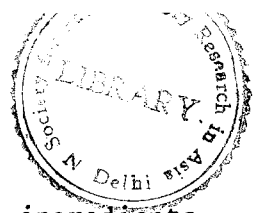
A similar process, though over a more prolonged period, was observed in El Cerrito and in the region of Córdoba as a whole. The first local PAR experiences had taken place in this zone as early as 1972 when they helped organise and promote the peasant movement as authentic people's power. Today, twelve years later, we cannot say that these experiences have ended. Many of the persons involved (some from the first day, others joining at later stages of the process) go on persistently working. Their historic responsibility has

not ceased because the social movements to which they have committed themselves still exist.

The first setbacks to this work among the Córdoba peasantry were almost deadly. The Colombian Government in power at that time and other agencies intensified the repression and sabotaged the main umbrella institution (ANUC) during the remaining years of the 1970s. At the same time, self-appointed revolutionary groups proclaiming themselves as "vanguards" endeavoured, through anarchical procedures and without the necessary internal vigilance, to destroy the very institutions which had sponsored the PAR experiences in Córdoba. Only the members remained in some "peasant bastions" in the form of memories of earlier struggles, persons or leaders who remained loyal to their past participation and who continued to be concerned by the fate of the common people. They were ready to assume again their responsibility in later processes.

Indeed, during the third year of setback, some comrades who had participated in the initial PAR experiences took over and endeavoured to revitalise them by giving new life to the moribund institutions. They solved the problem of anarcho-syndicalism by creating parallel organisations, some of a popular civic nature, others with congruent political characteristics with the same persons or with significant sectors of base groups so as not to mix both aspects of the work in the organisations or formal social groups. For example, they set up committees for the protection of the environment, research foundations, co-operatives, trade unions, and discussion groups. And they went ahead also to organise protest movements, strikes, marches, party cells and promotional committees for political action. They opened up different work fronts in the same place as before and in new ones, and were able to give tactical support to the struggle for land in El Cerrito as well as in other marshy areas of the department (Ciénaga Grande, Martinica, Betancí, the San Jorge river), and to lay the foundations for the eventual regional and national reconstruction of the peasant movement.

In El Mezquital the most serious crises since the initiation of the "self-teaching" experiences in 1975 were caused by manipulation from above by some external agents who forgot to put into practice the democratic rules which they preached for others. Here co-option processes similar to those stemming from political party structures lacking adequate internal community vigilance, transformed local leaders into pivotal men. They prevented the self-teaching process of the first project from developing into the



all-powerful socio-political movement for which it had all the ingredients. As in Colombia, it was necessary to establish parallel organisations, to go back and forth several times to maintain the original work rhythm and apply the guidelines of the participatory approach.

In San Agustín Atenango, after two years, new tactical fronts for popular action are emerging which promise a constant effort, provided that the external and internal animators do not abandon the struggle.

The tragedy of the war against the "contras" who have repeatedly invaded Nicaragua through the Honduras frontier has partially slowed down the development of the participatory research experience which was started in 1982 in El Regadío. A pause has resulted because of the war. Eight of the twelve members of the local Co-ordination Commission went into the militias to defend the community and are fighting today in the forests near Estelí. We shall wait and see what happens. The fact is that the seeds of participation have also been planted in Estelí, and await the moment to sprout again, at any time, without any deadline, bringing a new surge of significant change to the region.

Finally, it should be noted that the dimension of space is just as important in PAR as that of time. In fact, in Colombia, Mexico and Nicaragua during the initial development of the PAR experiences for people's power, the external animators became fascinated with the work of the smallest communities. We wanted to reach the roots, to understand the folk culture better and directly identify ourselves with the limited demands of peasants and workers. It is for this reason that we can talk with so much detail of specific places where we were able to develop important affective links, where the local people made us feel that we were a part of their life and small world.

However, such a localised and limited praxis was not sufficient to allow us either to know the social problems in their true dimension or to organise really effective countervailing action which would exert a more lasting and effective impact on unjust structures. We felt that we had to turn our attention to macro structures, that is, a much larger dimension. This is an effort in space and time which requires clarity, patience, and persistence. We saw that if it is well done, the work of PAR demands constant expansion, and that it sets up ripples like those which are produced when we throw a stone into a pool. Increasingly greater spaces are necessary to support the

struggle. This leads to the emergence of two other tensions in the PAR process - the micro versus macro tension and the civic versus the political tension - which result from the discovery of the importance of the regional level. In this respect outside animators of the people's participation process can make an important contribution.

Our experience in the three countries shows that this regional process develops in two ways: (1) vertically, in the community where one works, through the presence of persons or groups who are active on different fronts and who are just as worried and motivated by the social and economic situation, and who want to work more efficiently; and (2) horizontally, in other communities, through the existence of various groups in the same fields of activity as the cadres, who are struggling for the same ideals although their members rarely meet one another. We suddenly became aware of the fact that for some time now efforts have been underway in our countries at the regional level to achieve change and progress by numerous sponsors and promoters, although they do not come into contact with one another.

But something even more complex also happened. Learning about one another as we did in this fashion, we started to establish a network of relationships which added another dimension to the work which we were doing, without prejudice to the clarity or autonomy of the latter. However, this new dimension was not only of a civic, trade union, economic, cultural, religious, ecological or sports nature - but had a more formal and organised political dimension. We were witnessing already the birth of grass-roots social movements.

This being so, PAR emerges as a scientific methodology for productive work (and not only research) which includes the organisation and promotion of grass-roots social movements functioning as wide-based fronts made up of the working classes and various groups in the struggle to achieve structural change. Researchers and animators become increasingly committed to such movements so that it becomes difficult to distinguish between study and militancy in such struggles.

Grass-roots social movements are thus a basic experimental component of PAR at the communal, regional and national levels. It is here that the theoretical-practical presuppositions ("working hypotheses") are confirmed or rejected, where the objectives are adjusted in accordance with the dialectical relationship between what is expected, seen, and done; and finally, it is here

that the personal commitment of the animators finds its greatest fulfilment and where the experiential principles of PAR are most fully incorporated into praxis. A clear difference emerges between the episodic or superficial phases of the process ("the bubbles") and the more serious or permanent ones ("the seeds").

The social movements brought into being by PAR, whether episodic or permanent, are part of the constant, open-ended and indefinite search for knowledge which this method implies and which will reinforce the commitment to and effectiveness of social transformations. From our experiences in the three countries, we realised that it was possible to create theory simultaneously with and through practice. Thus although recourse may be made to conscious reflection (as in yoga), in which action is reduced in relative terms, there is no reason to suppose that in PAR the work of theoretical construction should be done without reference to action; on the contrary, it is based on and simultaneous with the dictates of praxis.

Now let us see how these incipient processes of theorisation and militancy in our cases have developed and opened up new opportunities for working with the resulting countervailing power.

During the housing crisis commissions set out from Puerto Tejada to seek the solidarity of neighbouring municipalities. However, the breaking of local boundaries was never so dramatic as on that day when, from the mountains of Cauca and Nariño in the south of the country, an "Indian march" (of Paeces, Guambianos and Gran Cumbal) arrived with their traditional costumes and flutes on their way to Bogotá to denounce the constant persecutions of which they were the victims, and to have the rights of the Indian people respected. The Indians and blacks, in an unusual way, made a sacred pact to fight their common oppression. Everybody in the town came out to receive the visitors with floats, music and dancing, cheering, posters and fireworks. Thus the bases were laid for future investigations and co-ordinated actions by their respective organisations.

The holding of the Regional Assembly was another important step towards further strengthening this encouraging process of internal and external relations. Delegates from six different parts of Northern Cauca were present, with their respective studies and papers on local problems. From this Assembly there emerged the first sure indications that it would be possible to

establish a regional political movement which would be set within an autochthonous cultural reality.

Fulfilling its obligation to persist, the new People's Movement of Northern Cauca spread its network towards the south of the neighbouring department of Valle del Cauca (Jamundí, Villapaz) and then up towards the Andes. Local study and action groups patiently co-ordinated their efforts both horizontally and vertically.

Meanwhile the people of Cauca and Valle del Cauca discovered that there were similar independent and critical groups and movements in other Colombian departments (Tolima, Cundinamarca, Cordoba, Sucre, Antioquia and Caqueta). Their first contacts were nervous and unsure. However, little by little relations became warmer among these local groups and movements until they saw that it was both possible and necessary to reach a supra-regional level of activity by establishing the formal bases for a national "popular movement". The first convention of this movement took place in Bogotá on 24-25 September 1983, two years after the first local contacts had been established. This "popular movement" was not born as a political monolith: it has neither hierarchies nor chiefs, but is a pluralist and manysided body. It has already managed to co-ordinate civic and regional movements, at the national level and has continued to reinforce the same process in cultural, scientific, social, economic, religious and other spheres. It is hoped that by maintaining their own autonomy and leadership these movements will coalesce towards the common political goal of achieving substantial changes in the fabric of Colombian society.

It is significant that in Colombia this process has led to the organisation of a movement rather than a political party as such, and that the procedure adopted has been from the bases upwards and from the periphery towards the centre, rather than the contrary, as has usually been the case with traditional parties and sects, including those of the left. There was resistance on the part of local groups to "funding a party", something which they had seen fail so many times before in regional capitals through decisions taken by intellectuals cut off from the bases. Any eventual party was seen more as the result of the process and work with the bases rather than an instrument to be used to carry out the tasks in hand.

Something similar was observed in Mexico, where after a while local co-ordinating agencies and other popular fronts working in specific activities

(some of them inspired by PAR) started producing results which may undermine party monolithic structures. Leagues of peasants living on common lands, squatters' organisations, people's health associations, solidarity leagues between settlers and persecuted Indians (groups involved in participative methods) are producing new constellations that may lead to independent movements, as in Colombia. Some of the symptoms of this political realignment are already being felt in San Agustín Atenango and in the valley of Mezquital, as well as in many other regions of Mexico.

The validity and evaluation of these new movements come firstly from the praxis as it emerges in the work of the base groups involved, from the collective opinion of authentic cadres, and from the degree to which the set goals were met. We are dealing here with a process of permanent validation inherent at every stage to practice, which replaces the usual post facto evaluations. Secondly, the validity of the accomplishments is judged from the standpoint of a specific ideology which in the present cases proves to be pluralist, independent and critical, the result of a more fluid and flexible organisational structure, more informal and collective than is usual in traditional parties.

In the three countries where we worked the central referent for this process of practical and permanent validation was that of a participative democracy rooted in regional history, people's culture and wisdom converging towards the goals of change. Because of these cultural factors, participative democracy differs from the representative or parliamentary forms of democracy which were imported into our countries during the 19th century, together with their national constitutions translated from English and French. Participative democracy is more authentic and indigenous. Neither is it the same as the democratic centralism subsequently applied in other countries and which is also an imported model. Participative democracy derives from PAR methodology as it seeks to break up the relationship of subordination implied in the representative/represented dichotomy; it comes closer to the concepts of "direct" or "self-managed" democracy.

For these reasons, since PAR takes greater account of the common people's history, the national cultural ethos and the genuine aspirations of the grass-roots communities, No Didacio, Don Silvestre, Don Vicente, Doña Jovita and Teresa are now enjoying the freedom which they had glimpsed and show delight in the ensuing creativity as they challenge the discovered

injustices. Perhaps now they can better answer by themselves those eternal questions which we posed at the beginning: "What is power?", "Power for what?"

The persistent extension of a network of participatory grass-roots organisations (action committees, trade unions, co-operatives, leagues etc.) in neighbourhoods, districts, villages and regions, as in the three countries studied, and often with account taken of autochthonous and indigenous associations, contributes to this struggle. The present challenge of Nicaragua in this respect, on the basis of El Regadfo experience stands out in all its importance since it is ahead of what is being done in other Latin American countries. El Regadfo showed how to generalise experiences with the base groups through mass organisations and demonstrated that it is possible to reinforce material production schemes with participatory educational schemes (converting the CEP into an agricultural co-operative). This is important and vital to the ideal of participative democracy proclaimed by the Sandinist National Liberation Front when it launched its national literacy campaign on the 23rd of August 1980: "Democracy means participation of the people in political, economic, social and cultural affairs". This means a policy of the "gradual decentralisation" of the State as the mass organisations become active subjects in the process of reconstruction and social change.

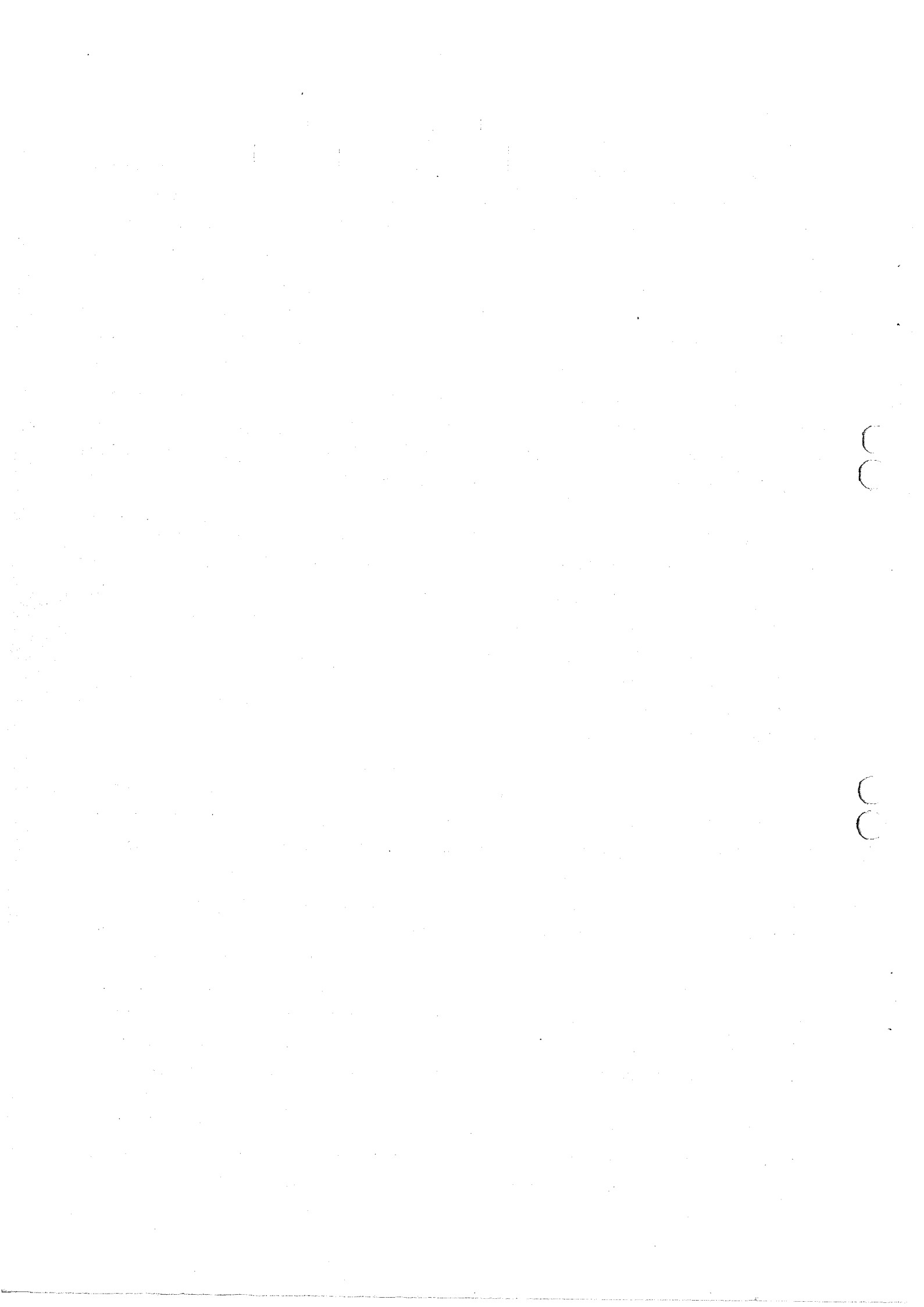
The collective form of political control in Nicaragua in consultation with base groups and mass organisations (as with the National Education Consultation of 1981), the search for comprehensive solutions to old structural problems, the CEPs, the Christian base communities, the health brigades, the autonomous production units, all these and many more are making the present Nicaraguan experience an interesting alternative of a participatory nature, an invention peculiar to Latin America, which nevertheless respects and learns from the experiences of other countries.

The patient and persevering construction of the Nicaraguan participatory network for building the democratic alternative established by the Sandinist Front in 1980 - and which may become a hemispheric phenomenon - thus becomes indispensable for its own survival.

LESSON TWO

LEARNING TO RECOGNISE ONESELF

4. Collective research
5. Critical recovery of history
6. Valuation and use of popular culture
7. Production and diffusion of new knowledge



4. COLLECTIVE RESEARCH

The problems in our communities continued, sometimes getting worse, despite the intervention of lucid internal as well as external cadres. In Puerto Tejada meetings were held between the most resolute members of the community to see what could be done about the housing situation. Some went to the nearby city of Cali to learn first hand how land invasions had been organised in workers' districts. With these examples they could discern more clearly the way to seize the land of the sugar plantations which were suffocating the village and thus build the new houses which were needed. Knowing also means organising oneself for action. In this way they began to value their own experience and to trust in direct observation with their own eyes, rather than in the words or leadership of the experts. This kind of countervailing power was needed in those moments of crisis.

From such tasks -- group travels and meetings -- useful information was collected for the mobilisation of the people in the region which could not have been gathered in any other way except verbally and in groups. This group-and-oral content of the research work, directly related to immediate community usefulness, gives PAR two of its special characteristics which are not found in other methods: collectivity and informality. In this manner PAR social research incorporates valuable knowledge acquired from the collective experiences of the people and with the people.

If we look carefully for the roots of this method of practical valuation we find that they are the same as those which have produced authentic popular knowledge since the time of the Indian civilisations and which continue to flourish, even today. They include the same social mechanisms which serve to transmit verbally and to reproduce the culture and basic values of the community, such as story-telling at the end of the day, vigils for the dead, the daily work routine, even dances and games. With PAR these mechanisms achieve another dimension: they reappear in meetings, assemblies and open councils where the same informality and spontaneity of the other events are maintained. It is the school of real life and experience which is affirmed in the search for systematisation and new practical applications of knowledge.

This is what happened in the forum held on the housing problem in Puerto Tejada. Not only were there first hand reports of observation visits in Cali but also "living memory" accounts of personal experiences like those of No Didacio'. They were reports full of collective experiences and observations

from the old days which charged the ideological batteries of the people for further activity.

This important information could not have been obtained from any formal enquiry nor perhaps from private interviews because of its collective and dialogical nature: it was based on dialogue and the direct exchange of information collected from everyone and systematised through the stimulus of the forum. Its purpose was to mobilise the people and develop their self-esteem. It gave additional ammunition to their search for justice. It combined research and action, that is, it was praxis.

The people's assemblies in Puerto Tejada were held at least twenty times. They became a sort of social arena in which the people discovered themselves and their history. There were several levels of such collective recognition: 1) that of individuals as acting and thinking people; 2) the past in relation to the present; 3) the legitimacy of the struggle to destroy the bourgeois values of crime and sin; 4) the causes of injustice and exploitation and the identification of those responsible; 5) the people's capacity to decide, act and transform themselves collectively.

The assemblies became a sort of "public trial" in which the people acted as judge and where the proceedings concerned the reason for injustice. Evidence was presented to the assemblies in the form of witness accounts, documents, technical opinion from friendly experts, etc. on the basis of which the sugar planters were indicted and ordered to return the land they had abusively taken. In this dynamic way the people of Puerto Tejada took over for themselves a well-known bourgeois ritual and gave it a different meaning and content.

The combination of study and practice, when done in this collective and dialogical way, implies the idea of a service to the community. It is altruistic knowledge. Thus in El Mezquital the inhabitants hoped that the outside investigators "would show the people how their training could be applied to the problems of real life". This expectation was closely connected with the Indian communal tradition. In this way the periodicity of meetings increased; communal first-aid kits, maize mills, and family kitchen gardens were established; defective wells were repaired; buildings were roofed, and pine trees planted in school yards.

The same effects, at another level, were seen in the "census data socialisation" meetings which took place in El Regadfo. Through comments and analysis at these meetings the people not only corrected the data and filled in the gaps (they knew each other quite well) but also gave a meaning to the collected information, so that the successive steps of the economic and political development of this region of the country could then be established.

For example, many women of the neighbourhood were classified in the census as "unemployed"; Teresa commented during one of these analytical meetings: "It does not seem right to me that they should call us unemployed, because we are always doing something productive even though no one pays us". This led to a more realistic consideration of this census category.

Another neighbour, with the support of those present, declared; "I am counted here with my cow, but this is unfair because I am not in the same category as cattlemen". "I have not paid for the cow which I have, it is not mine yet", explained another. "Why are there so few households counted as growing fruit and vegetables, when everybody here has orange trees and coffee bushes in their back gardens?" a third asked.

From these meetings in El Regadfo there emerged the idea of establishing a collective vegetable garden for women, since it was a clear and well-documented fact that in the existing co-operatives there were only men. When the Co-ordination Commission decided to try audiovisual aids, this was the result of collective discussions and training which took the peasant groups on many occasions to film studios in Managua.

In El Cerrito, meetings held between friends made it possible to reconstruct the history of the hamlet and to clarify issues related to the problem of the local lagoon. They were communal acts of systematisation, clarification, and cultural valuation through dialogue. Little was left aside and even the personal conduct of animators came under scrutiny. By the use of dialogue at these meetings it was possible to overcome the crisis which developed when cadres from a political movement which did not share the participatory methodology of PAR arrived in the hamlet. The discussion the meetings contradicted so much the vertical imposition of the newcomers that the contrast with the participatory methods shocked the community. Little by little the newcomers had to withdraw, thus preserving the gains which had been made so far through participatory work. This same dialogue within the community, based on profound, frank human relations, revealed the social

values of the people of El Cerrito and the existence of other important aspects which could not have been identified otherwise for the purposes of our research.

The final work on the local history of El Cerrito was another collective experience which was indispensable for the proper completion of the task. All the inhabitants were summoned to listen to the first draft of the text. It was there - with some persons answering, others correcting - that the final orderly and polished text emerged and which was then sent to the printers as part of the local PAR experience.

In El Mezquital, the same conclusion was also reached on the importance of dialogue and group investigation as means of increasing self-esteem, learning, systematisation and self-teaching. As Doña Jovita said "We can learn together from one another, by pooling our ideas". Hence the analogy, already mentioned, of knowledge being seen as a honeycomb.

The advantages of this type of collective reflection go beyond research as such and concern other fields such as that of informal adult education. When carried out in a participatory manner, adult education becomes instant political pedagogy. Thus it was found in Mexico that "words and messages which are not understood in books are easily learned in groups"; that doubts are resolved better within a group than through individual give-and-take; that "students give their opinions more freely in the absence of a teacher", and that they correct their own mistakes more readily in this manner, without feeling ashamed or being laughed at. The same happened in analytical workshops, "exchange meetings", and open councils whenever they were set up collectively to resolve social problems such as the lack of land titles, the use of irrigation water, abuses by Government officials etc. Responses to these problems depended on "being united" and on exchanging appropriate information and data.

Through this group pattern, definitions of doubtful terms emerged which, although not so precise as those of the dictionary, did offer a great deal of insight. They are therefore more useful and have immediate political consequences for action resulting from the exchange of information and critical, collective analysis. This was the case when the community launched artisan co-operatives for the distribution and consumption of sugar in the valley of El Mezquital.

Indeed, the organisation of rural co-operatives as units of social and economic action in El Mezquital was also understood from the standpoint of these participatory guidelines and political pedagogy as a form of collective training in various fields including market research, sales, management, and accounting. All these tasks were performed in turn by all the members of the co-operatives. In this way they were able to discover by themselves the shortcomings of the Rochdalian co-operatives of European origin which turned into discriminatory ghettos or instruments for the penetration of mercantile capitalism.

Is there a limit to the number of people who can take part in collective research to make it successful? In El Cerrito, the best "meetings of friends" never had more than 15 participants. Moreover, it was necessary to hold such meetings on some regular basis, for example, once a week.

In any case man's naturally gregarious impulses and his yearning to share experiences and knowledge acquired or produced are thus confirmed as another important aspect of social studies of the various places and regions in which PAR is being applied. This collective, dialogical and systematic dimension of fieldwork endows PAR not only with its special texture and meaning (as distinct from purely academic research), but also with its experiential quality in response to the circumstances encountered. Without these elements, uncommon as they are, our research would not have been useful, accurate or interesting either for the people themselves or for the outside researchers.

The most important thing is for the peasants to be able in the same way to rediscover their own culture and regain respect for those autochthonous values which contact with other social classes had debased. Now they can say with more complete understanding: "The person who does not know is like the one who cannot see". Now they can exercise their rights with greater effectiveness and power.

5. CRITICAL RECOVERY OF HISTORY

While the research tasks and the housing struggle proceeded in Puerto Tejada, external animators witnessed the unfolding of other interesting and unexpected popular participation processes for the acquisition and implementation of knowledge. (The same occurred in El Cerrito, San Agustín Atenango, El Mezquital and El Regadío.) One of the most important of these was the critical recovery of the history of the town: the rendering of

selected events concerning class conflicts of the past, which the people of the villages and regions were able to produce through their own collective memory, individual recollections, oral tradition, as well as documents and objects found in family trunks and coffers.

This popular version of history proved to be critical because it brought out crucial aspects of the real class struggle which had been blatantly omitted in official versions of the same events or had been silenced by previous historians. The critical history of the town - so different in its emphasis and meaning from the academic or university version - carefully sought to avoid reviving the reactionary elements of the past and was an essential factor in the search for, and construction of, people's power and its use as a countervailing mechanism in situations of conflict and crisis.

In the case of Puerto Tejada, results became quickly evident. The first attempts at critical recollection during the communal forum saw the re-emergence of an ideal of freedom dating back to the time of the courageous runaway black slaves who had colonised the neighbouring region of La Perezosa on the Palo river. It was a recollection which had been repressed by subsequent exploitation, when the whites established their cattle ranches and extended them by violence, destroying the free black villages which had thrived in that fine region.

But the feeling of being free which had characterised the old Palo villages re-emerged in unexpected ways during the forum. It was as if a sleeping volcano had suddenly become active. Some elders recalled the life of authentic heroes of the region like Crucito (a local Robin Hood), Fidel and José Ignacio Mina (Sinecio), Sixto and Ciro Biáfara, and Natanael Díaz. They had been exceptional crusaders who had fought since the beginning of the present century with their black groups for the possession of lands which the estate owners still wanted to wrestle from the people. They were indeed "black bucks" who knew how to value their freedom! By comparison, the present situation of town life was hateful and incomprehensible. Critical collective memory called for something more concrete to be done to correct such injustices, because if their grandparents had been able to fight the "whites" before with relative success, why couldn't they also? History thus gained a new meaning from these new glimpses of truth and power, namely that not only could the facts be remembered, but that they could also be converted into a catapult for a better communal life.

The free settlement of the former slaves thus emerged from the past and became an ideal of freedom for the entire Northern Cauca thus avoiding the earlier pitfall of reactionism. This was not all. As cocoa had been the principal product for trade and economic survival during that heroic period, the plant became the local symbol of freedom. At the same time, its historical counter-symbol clearly emerged in dialectical opposition: the sugarcane as a sign of evil, represented by the plantation owners who were destroying the traditional ways of life by taking over the land of the peasants.

By recourse to these familiar elements, it was easier to carry on the political and civic struggles in Northern Cauca: they could be better understood by the peasants and workers of the region. Now they had less difficulty in identifying themselves with these struggles: they all had the same historical and cultural roots and had no problems in understanding the symbols.

In the same fashion, Don Silvestre in El Cerrito, together with other elders, became one of the few sources in Córdoba of trustworthy historical facts about the region. His inimitable stories explained how the village was founded on the shores of the lagoon, with recognised legal rights to the use of the fertile plains in which staple crops were grown. The law protected the peasants although it was constantly ignored by the powerful landowners of Córdoba whose aim was to increase their herds selfishly. They wanted the same territory as the peasants.

The struggle had begun decades ago, towards the end of the last century and the beginning of the present century and had inevitably extended to El Cerrito. It was history which had been forgotten and buried until 1972 when a piece of participatory research was carried out with the then powerful peasant movement of ANUC. Some of the heroes and heroines who had defended the interests of the working classes during the 1920s were fortunately still alive: Juana Julia Guzmán among others, now old, poor and sick. She had worked shoulder to shoulder with Vicente Adamo, an immigrant Italian labourer who in 1918 organised the first workers' struggles in Montería and its surrounding districts.

Juana Julia held the key to the critical, untapped historical knowledge of those years. She had not wanted to share it with local conservative or liberal politicians who constantly urged her to tell her story. She only

relented when she saw that her own class had re-emerged in the peasant movement which had inspired her in the best years of her life. She not only began to recount the real story of that brilliant decade but herself took part in the new struggle, attending meetings and assemblies along with the others. Juana Julia's presence in the peasant meetings was like seeing history in the flesh. In these special circumstances her word carried the additional magic of real experience and the weight of the exciting experiment which had defeated the landowners of the coast for the first time. In the same way, it can be said that the discovery of Juana Julia (and other contemporary figures) was one of the ideological factors which most stimulated the struggle for land between 1970 and 1976 in Córdoba. The legal possession of the marshes and lagoons by the people was at last established in El Cerrito through pressure from the peasants on the Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform (INCORA).

Another advantage gained from the "recovery" of Juana Julia Guzmán was that she also opened up the coffers where she kept the material souvenirs of her past struggles. In spite of the ravages of time and damp, they contained the first treasures of a genuine people's museum, like the silk armbands with the "three eights" (a socialist aspiration of the period), pictures of Adamo the Montería Workers' House, the first hospital, members of the first organised trade-unions. They were indispensable elements (we call them "data columns") to understand past events, the antecedents of the present struggle carried on by the grandchildren of those who figured in the old yellow documents or in the faded photographs of an epoch resurrected from the past in these family coffers.

Juana Julia mentioned it and Don Silvestre confirmed what had happened in Córdoba: the first land invasions organised by Adamo in Córdoba had been called "bastions". Since the new invasions of 1972 were inspired by the earlier ones the term "bastion" was now used to replace the official wording used by ANUC for the takeovers, "self-managing co-operatives". The term "bastion" reminded the peasants of their former struggles and aligned them with their recovered systematised history. As a result the peasant assemblies decided to call one of the invaded holdings the "Bastion of Juana Julia".

All this fervent and systematic research activity carried out in collaboration with the local people - with data columns, the recovery of popular figures and heroes, ideological projections, imputations, and personifications - took place outside academic institutions. Official and academic historians had completely ignored the existence of Vicente Adamo and

the socialist workers' organisations of the 1920's. But this grass-roots corrector of official history completed and illustrated the past in a critical manner, putting it to the service of poor people so that they too could acquire respectable identity and a collective ego through the recognition of their traditions and history. The PAR ideal of opening new ideological and scientific perspectives of popular origin in the Atlantic coast was thus fulfilled. The same happened in Mexico and Nicaragua.

In Mexico, the objective was for the communities to rediscover their roots so that "they could find their face", to quote an Aztec image, so that the young could learn the true history of their towns "and so many things which they themselves did not experience. Everything requires work, pain, even enmity, and the young must know this if they are to speak with truth and confidence".

The effect of this search for true historical identity varied according to specific necessities: from understanding the peasants' struggle against cattlemen in El Desengaño (Oaxaca) to the Trique guerrilla struggle among the Mixtecas. The local peasants still believe that Emiliano Zapata (the great peasant fighter of the Mexican Revolution) did not die because he had not completed his mission of justice for the poor. Thus, Zapata appears from time to time on his white horse to continue the war against the landowners. So it is whispered in San Agustín Atenango with respect and awe, thus helping to strengthen the peasants' resistance to the exploitation which continues to occur in spite of the revolutionary triumphs of the past.

In San Agustín Atenango, the recovery of local history has also cast light on another special aspect of collective life: it showed the people that they could still invent and create, that their own intelligence could measure up to those mocking whites and mestizos of Tonalá who did not believe in the talents of the Indians, which the newly discovered past now fully confirmed.

To begin with, the Mixtecas remembered that it was the late Ranulfo Fuentes, a man of humble origin, who first raked the ground and deepened the furrows with his yoke rather than leaving it fallow. He thus increased fourfold the amount of land prepared, and the technique which he used was adapted all over the valley. By observation and direct experimentation another Indian discovered that by placing green leaves of groundnuts in strategic parts of his field he could combat the plague of the carrier ants which were destroying his maize crops: he noticed that the leaves attracted

smaller ants which apparently were more pleasant food for the carriers than the maize stalks. Also through contact with other regions, including journeys to look for work in the United States, Sinaloa and Sonora, other peasants discovered that they could grow watermelons even in bad soil, and that intensive techniques could be used for growing tomatoes. When they returned to San Agustín with this newly acquired knowledge, the migrants brought about major changes in crop cultivation which increased the incomes eked from their ancestral plots.

The opportune rediscovery of these innovative possibilities of the people through their collective memory - the evidence of the creative ability of common people - prepared the Indian peasants of San Agustín Atenango a little better to face the difficult changes imposed by capitalism which had come creeping along the new road and irrigation canals since 1972. The pressure of the money economy on the local peasantry took them into an unknown territory in which everything cost money. Many responded to this threat by emigrating, but others (those which really interest us) stayed and sought local alternatives by adapting and creating. Don Vicente (the present Tata Yiva) discovered practical and cheap ways to improve the tomato crop yield, new practices which were afterwards copied by his neighbours. Moreover, the worsening of the Mexican economic situation in the autumn and winter of 1982-1983 led the people of San Agustín to assume new functions, for which the rediscovery of all their own history became essential.

They started by re-valuing the traditional maize and bean crops which had declined in the wake of capitalist tomato competition. They also discovered that there used to be a prosperous ceramics and pottery tradition; the good lodes were now hidden by disuse and only the old people remembered where they were. The most recent Mexican crisis compelled them to return to them. As a way of defending their traditional autonomy and the ancient ways of self-subsistence and barter. And so one of the unexpected results of local participatory research was that one day, in the local training centre, Don Pilar asked what would happen in Mexico if the peasants decided not to sow cash. It was this question which spurred the local revival of maize and beans and also the radical idea of re-establishing a pottery workshop, like those of earlier days where household articles could be produced without having to spend the little hard cash available.

This critical trend toward autonomy extended to other forgotten arts - those of the tailor, blacksmith and tilemaker - which were now revived through

the traditional experience recovered by the people's history and collective memory. The technique of mixing the clay for pottery was easy for the women because it was like a simple transfer of the methods they used in making flat maize pancakes. The economic benefits of this self-examination of reality and the analysis of recent history were obvious to every member of the community; they were thus able to reconstruct the economy and above all to defend their affronted dignity and recover some of the local power which they had lost in the wake of capitalism and the trend towards national integration in recent decades.

In Nicaragua, the memories of the wars against imperialism during the 1930s had not been lost, although in some people in El Regadío had given way to the false belief that Augusto César Sandino had been just a simple bandit. Then Miguel Angel Cortés, a peasant cadre, arrived and proved the contrary by organising the first local Sandinist guerrilla group with young idealists and enthusiasts like Luis Octavio Ortegón (a delegate of the Church of the Word and present manager of one of the local co-operatives), who considers that he "accomplished himself as a Christian during the Revolution". The 1979 insurrection was the crucible in which the personalities of the present active generation were formed. It was a revolution in everything, but above all in educational matters. The critical recovery of history played a predominant role in this process: it managed to restore to the national consciousness not only the true image of the rebel Sandino as a symbol of the Nicaraguan moral and political reconstruction, but also that of Rubén Darío, the poet of "Abrojos" and "El canto errante", whose anti-imperialist career had been hidden by the intellectuals of the former period of defeatism.

The literacy campaigns which culminated in the organisation of People's Education Collectives (CEPs) were designed "to give to our popular classes the right to develop their critical conscience, discover their historical roots, know and combat the causes of misery, to acquire technical training to improve the quality of their work, cultivate their talents and abilities by higher levels of training and preparation and to participate effectively in the political, social, economic and ideological processes of our Sandinist People's Revolution". Such was the official programme of the Ministry of Adult Education (1982).

Indeed, in El Regadío the local CEP made it possible to rationalise and understand better the division (apparently a natural one) between its two hamlets: Valle Arriba and Valle Abajo. The inhabitants of Valle Arriba had

been put there by José María (Chema) Briones - the original owner of the land - so as to enlarge his pasture lands at the expense of the staple crops. Briones wanted to introduce cattle which would supply the nearby meat-processing plant in Condesa. He employed the inhabitants of Valle Abajo as servants and part-time workers at the farm, and was always niggardly to them in regard to firewood. And so those from Valle Arriba became more radical Sandinists than those from Valle Abajo. Although the triumph of the revolution resolved the problem, the people of both hamlets had been unable to put those internal tensions of the immediate past to rest. Now, with the critical recovery of their history, they began to understand those tensions better and to place them in their proper and more limited perspective within the revolutionary framework.

The story of Chema Briones himself - when it was at last incorporated into the history of the region through oral testimony - gave additional data for the revolutionary reconstruction of the community. Don Chema had been a shoemaker who travelled by mule along the path from Estelí selling his produce. Little by little he started to buy plots of land in El Regadío, until he opened the first store in the region. The store was convenient for the peasants because they no longer had to travel all the way to the town to buy what they needed; but now they had to pay the heavy extra cost of the middleman's share. Having grown rich through such businesses, Briones improved the path with the aid of the reigning Somoza family, which subsequently made him a senator. Finally he built his farmhouse at the entrance of Valle Abajo, where he stationed his foremen.

The routine of poverty and exploitation by the Briones family had blunted the understanding of the people of El Regadío: they became the victims of negative alienation. But now after freely analysing the history of the landowner in the local CEP and in their own terms, they were able to understand better the origins and causes of their stubborn poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth to which everyone contributed with his work. In this way they justified the invasion of 31 "plazas" (42 acres) of the Briones estate which took place shortly after the insurrection and which led to the establishment of the first co-operatives as an action unit. They could now understand the feelings of José Norberto Briones, one of Don Chema's sons, when he joined the Sandinist National Liberation Front (FSLN) and turned over the cows from his father's estate to the two hamlets. "Go on, milk them and make cheese", Jose Norberto told the peasants before he was killed by the Somaza guards in Estelí.

Of course, all this was recent history still fresh in the memory of the people of the two hamlets. But it had not been systemised or properly assimilated. The thorough and critical study of this history helped mobilise the local peasantry, strengthened the revolutionary convictions of the people, and reinforced the patriotic idealism of the young generation.

With some additional research on the earlier history of local exploitation, the picture was complete. It did not matter so much to repeat what was written (with different intentions) in the known textbooks, for example, that the Chorotega Indians had been annihilated by the Spaniards in the 17th century, when the conquerors founded the Royal Audiencia of León and established the local seigneurial dynasties of Castellón, Ondino and Obregón. On the contrary, it was better to remember and restore the forgotten tradition: that the Chorotegas and their cultured Maya-Quiché ancestors had arrived in this region thinking that they had found an ideal country, the paradise which, according to these beliefs, would be dominated by twin volcanos and an immense lake. There they were in fact: Otom and Pepetl in the centre of the largest lake of the region. This beautiful, ideal country had to be theirs - Nicarauac!

The legendary dream of the Mayas and Chorotegas became frustrated by the Spanish conquest. The wars of independence in the 19th century did not resolve the problem either and subsequently took the country to the abyss of the Walkers and foreign interventions, to the dictatorships of the lackeys of the present century. Today, now that Somoza is gone and a new social order has been established the Mayan-Chorotegan dream has been recovered and has acquired a new meaning. There is once again the possibility of it becoming true at last, in the struggle for a second independence.

The peasants of El Regadío can now lift up their heads with pride, recognise the potential advantages of the new order, and bear the obvious and expected difficulties of the revolutionary birth. "But we are no longer dumb", cried Teresa opening her arms; "now we do not have around us any of those damned bosses, thanks be to God and to the FSLN".

6. VALUATION AND APPLICATION OF FOLK CULTURE

Two social groups have distinguished themselves in Nicaragua by their enthusiastic and loyal dedication to the onerous revolutionary tasks: women

and young teachers, that is, those young people with a minimum level of education and who have only recently become literate. This is understandable. They are among the most haunted victims of the economic and social systems which predominate in a large part of the world and who have found, in the revolutionary adventure, a genuine outlet for their creativity hitherto frustrated by injustice, exploitation and prejudice.

In El Regadío (as in El Realejo, another Nicaraguan community studied in 1981) women were considered dolls, good for making tortillas and cooking beans. Hardly anyone recognised their important role as "anchors" in society although they were the centre and often the main support for their families. But with the revolution, women found in the CEPs a way of leaving home and the kitchen. They discovered how to break their routine and organise themselves to defend their interests. They began to speak about less trivial matters and to seek ways of overcoming existing poverty. Their task was how to transform the CEPs into something more productive, such as a useful sewing class, for example and from there to proceed to the acquisition of a sewing machine which the community would share. Debates of this kind could finish in subversive talk, as happened with the subject of machismo and public dances. How was it that married men, but not married women, could go alone to these dances? Armed with this dynamic and critical approach to such double moral standards, Nicaraguan peasant women became a motor for social and revolutionary change, and displayed an almost monopolistic activism in the new processes.

For their part, recently literate young Nicaraguans have experienced a spiritual elation which has made them more altruistic than before. They dedicate themselves to the educational campaigns with "body and soul and guts". For them, there are no fixed timetables nor family duties. Their spirit of sacrifice is absolute and they are the driving force of the revolutionary wheel. A temptation to which they are sometimes exposed is to make pupils feel the weight of their newly-found knowledge - their newly acquired authority as teachers of the people - and to become somewhat domineering. However, in this they are simply imitating the oppressive educational models which they had seen applied before in the local school or nearest village. In such cases they fail to break the subject/object binominal and prefer to bully adult pupils who cannot understand, let us say, what the dactylic stress is. But imagination can come quickly to their aid, by recourse to shared experiences. Then they can explain that the dactylic stress in any given word is like a "triple play" in baseball. Everyone can understand this and go on to the next lesson.

Something similar has occurred in different contexts in the other places included in our study. The awakening of women and illiterate youth in the three countries is a phenomenon related to core cultural values - those essential beliefs inspired in original praxis, contact with nature, and the regional milieu, without which true people's power and to an even less extent their countervailing leverage against existing abuses cannot be constructed. These core values nurture processes whose source lies in oral traditions, and which not only justify the rejection of existing inequalities but provide guidelines for new activities to challenge old customs and to speed up the revolutionary torrent.

Things may go step by step, as occurred in San Agustín Atenango on 30 July 1979 when the people of the village sacked the municipal mayor for not respecting customs concerning traditional holidays the duties of the organisers of fiestas and the use of fireworks to summon the congregation to vespers. These were all traditions greatly valued by the Mixtecas. The local mayor had proposed "modernising" the village by force. But he did not take into account the weight of custom and even less the resolute belligerence of the women from San Agustín Atenango. When the fraternity deputies began to give in to the authorities, the women demanded "that the mayor must be dismissed" and argued that "if the men wet their pants we certainly will not; we will sweep the mayor out with our shawls". The will of the common people prevailed in this case because of the force of the women. Although it was an incident which seemed to halt the course of history, in fact, in the actual context, it served to lubricate the mechanisms of countervailing power through popular organisation to defend community values and limit the abuses of governmental officials many of whom were inadequate to fulfil their functions. In this sense, the 1979 incident had and continues to have a mobilising effect on the people of San Agustín Atenango. Moreover, it shows that not all traditions are positive, that one has to select those practices which are free from the alienating interference of systems which exploit the people.

The women of Northern Cauca in Colombia have acted in a similar way. In the face of police and military action, they refused to withdraw, dancing, gesticulating, shouting, and laughing at the troops, while their men ran away and hid themselves. At the meetings they seemed timid, downcast and silent while the men would talk incessantly. But the women were burning inside with

a fire of action which exploded in a myriad of ways during street demonstrations on the following days.

This force of the women in Cauca (like that of the young volunteers of Nicaragua) was not a spontaneous phenomenon. As we have already said, its cultural supports were the ancestral core values. There are at least three processes worthy of attention in this behaviour which converge in the establishment of people's power: feelings, imagination and ludic tendencies. These processes and their symbolic structure are not noticeable at first, especially to those scholars who remain within the rational confines of academia. But they can be easily discovered by those who approach the people through their hearts rather than their heads, by intuition rather than by rational criteria. At the precise moment when the observer and the observed vibrate in harmony - that is, when the relation of submission is broken - the repressed voice of the common people can be clearly heard, with all its rich structure of popular wisdom hitherto muted or hidden by contempt and distrust. It is then that we truly appreciate the value of the culture of the common people, and understand better the manly courage of these women and the idealism of the young. This does not mean, however, that we should unquestionably accept popular wisdom as such, or be misled into believing that "the people are always right" because this is not the case either historically or socially.

Through feelings it is possible to understand the primal forces of people's culture and symbols. They are like an affective logic. In Puerto Tejada, when he spoke of the historical origins of the enclosures of the runaway slaves of the Palo river, No Didacio expressed the same idea: "Negro culture is not just a culture of evocation; it is not a question of memory but of feelings". His sentiments led him to revive the old "dance of the knives", a half-forgotten form of folk music the meaning of which could only be recaptured in the mobilising context of the People's Civic Movement of Northern Cauca, with its challenge to the municipal patriarchs. Through the importance which it attached to local culture in this way, the movement experienced the greatest political gains of its short history. It had managed to give voice to the soul of the people.

Sentiment as affective logic sharpens the people's imagination in a chain of successive effects which are expressed creatively in a thousand and one ways. One of the most frequent expressions is in oral couplets which sum up the peasants' talent and sense of humour, their capacity for critical

observation and protest. Thus the struggle against the sugarcane exploiters was expressed in Cauca in the following verses:

"The Cauca sugar plantations
Press the pulp from the men
As well as from the cane."
Cane cropping for the people
Is a burden on their shoulders:
They produce the sweet sugar
But their lives turn bitter."

In San Pablo in the valley of El Mezquital, the same feeling stimulated by popular imagination produced several protest songs:

"I am an artisan born in San Pablo,
Of humble origin and Otomí blood.
Though people look at me in strange ways
I don't give a damn what they say about me.
May the voice of the poor be heard in the land.
May the password be heard: Liberty and Unity!
They should pay a fair wage for the work that we do
And stop their exploitation once and for all!
Life is not worth living if there is no justice.
Death is not dying if there is a good reason.
United and fearless let us take the risk
And search together for our common freedom".

Who could remain unmoved in San Pablo by such a song? Not even the landowners. It was the same telluric cultural force which in Córdoba inspired the irreverent vallenatos and accordion music of Máximo Jiménez, his early paseos and merengues ("The Sinú Indian", "The air is free", "The Colombian State", "The wood-carrying donkey"). They were rhythms to which hundreds of ANUC peasants gathered and danced. There was also the reed flutist of El Cerrito who kept alive the local musical tradition and put his talents at the service of local peasant mobilisations. These artists of the people were the first to demonstrate in practice to the disoriented Colombian leftists that the theory of revolution would not prevail if it remained so verbose and ethereal, and that art could also be a means for mobilising and educating the masses. But this required knowing how to study and understand folk culture, knowing how to interpret it through well conducted research.

Imagination could be extended to other fields such as painting, designing posters and banners, sculpture, theatre, puppetry, pantomime, masquerades, dancing, the cinema, audiovisual aids and other cultural expressions as methods for producing and retrieving knowledge (we will return to this later), all of which require a knowledge and assimilation of the values of the people. In all these fields there was an extraordinary show of creativity on the part of artists who combined sentiment with imagination, knowledge with commitment. The force of their comparisons, the simplicity of their expression, the efficiency in communicating their message were all important elements contributing to the establishment of people's power. This includes even those examples based on playful humour as in the following verse, with its pun on the word "ingenco", which in Spanish means both "wit" and sugarmill":

Of all sugarmills (wit) in the Cauca

Only one is the best: that which belongs to the people who carried out the invasion."

This pun leads us on to that other undercurrent of popular culture, the ludic factor, the games and entertainment which Cartesian students tend to forget or underrate because they cannot grasp their significance.

Has the ordinary public a sense of humour? Do the people know how to have a good time and enjoy life? Or are they always complaining, passive, fatalist, and suspicious? In general there is a tendency to describe the masses (and especially peasants and Indians) in the worst terms: sleeping under a big hat at the foot of a cactus shrub, sitting on a chair propped up against a crumbling wall, dirty, hungry, tired and wearing worn-out clothes.

Although we do not deny the existence of these controversial cultural traits, there are also popular artists of good temper and with a talent for entertainment who can help in the mobilisation and educational campaigns. The secret is to involve them in the superior interests of the people, where they can show great skill and overcome what has sometimes been called the "tomorrow complex" that is, the tendency to postpone action until the last possible moment. Or what has been called in other cultures the "Indian melancholy".

It should therefore come as no surprise to learn that in Cauca the young people have great analytical ability for football which would be the envy of political scientists in their respective field. They not only know about the

combinations, tricks and tactics of the game, but also where the players' come from, their defects and virtues. A discussion on football in the bars of Villarrica, near Puerto Tejada, can turn into a really learned debate. But it is in those very same places and discussions that initiatives have sprouted for the formation of youth clubs and campaigns to obtain the sporting and other facilities which afterwards became the starting point for the People's Movement. Analogously, it was the small children with their ability for games and other atavistic activities who proved to be the best messengers, look-outs and spies during such dangerous events as the land invasions in Córdoba.

Another important popular recreative expression which is recoverable for action - at least among the coastal people of Colombia - is that of story-telling: tales, legends, parables, fables, anecdotes, riddles and puns. Even refined gossip, viewed as information, may be useful as a means of positive mobilisation. All these elements of oral culture may be exploited as a new and dynamic political language which belongs to the people, as we saw in El Cerrito and Puerto Tejada, especially those forms which already contain an implicit protest intention. This is the case for example with the well-known tales of "Uncle Tiger and Uncle Rabbit" which narrate the impudence and skills of a defenceless little animal (the peasant) confronted with a dangerous beast (the boss) and which display a powerful sense of latent resistance against the injustices which characterise the production relationship. In the Colombian coast (as in other regions), story-telling and other expressions of oral tradition are among the most effective ways for keeping alive the people's culture and their core values. Story-telling refuses to die because if it did, the peasant people would die with it.

These cultural processes operating within the heart of the community are an active force which allows the knowledge of the people to ferment in a vast cauldron or melting pot, and acquire the incredible resources of resistance which characterise the popular struggles in the three countries. Moreover, feelings, imagination and the sense of play are apparently inexhaustible sources of strength and resistance among the people. However, these three elements have a common basis which cannot be ignored in the struggle to promote mobilisation and people's power in our countries: religious beliefs.

In El Regadío, religion and the theology of liberation were important for the revolution. Luis Octavio Obregón, leader of the local CEP, did not hesitate to declare: "Through the Bible, the Catholic Church started to show us the injustices under which we were living and which the people were

suffering. For this reason it supported the Sandinist guerrilla movement of Miguel Angel Cortés and the Committees for Civil Defence of the F/S/L/N. The people responded with food and money. They organised themselves into clandestine committees to combat the threat of Somoza's National Guard. It was easy for us to join the revolution, because we felt that it would be easier to fulfil our Christian role as revolutionaries".

The Nicaraguan socialist ideals, he claimed, could indeed be assimilated to those of Christianity because of their common emphasis on love and peace. These are values highly appreciated by peasants. Why could not those ideals be unified? Thus it was perfectly feasible that revolutionary priests should be part of the Junta, and the peasants readily agreed to sing in the masses revolutionary songs by Father Ernesto Cardenal. For this reason it was difficult for some people to understand the order for "Silence!" when an appeal was made in Managua for sympathy for the victims of the war with the "contras" during the most important act of authentic religious experience of the visit to Central America by the Holy Father in March 1983.

The death of a child during the invasion of Puerto Tejada and the bravery of its mother, together with the practices and beliefs implicit during the funeral wake, were events which stopped the army in its tracks when soldiers attempted to occupy and burn the huts of the new district. The spectre of the "little angel" lying dead and the hypnotic rhythm of the alabao (ritual music), more than the presence of the national flag which had been hoisted there, made the troops respect the invasion.

A sorcerer added his secret powers to the fight against a landowner from Anticquia who did not want to give up his excess land to the peasants in Córdoba. The sorcerer's services must have been effective judging by the eventual success, and his support had an important moral and psychological effect among the popular masses. Another sorcerer is still being consulted in Villapaz, not far from Puerto Tejada, to see if he can change the course of a river so that public land can be recuperated and floods avoided, and thus help achieve the objectives of a new local civic movement.

Something similar can be said with regard to health protection practices based on the knowledge of medicine-men and herbologists in the peasant communities of the three countries. These are serious and systematic classificatory practices requiring no further elaboration, as can be seen in Ixmiquilpan and other Otomi settlements in the valley of El Mezquital. These

reevaluation endeavours have had an extraordinary effect on Otomí peasant behaviour and on their campaigns to defend their economic and cultural heritage. The same can be said for San Agustín Atenango where Don Vicente is the community "doctor", the dispenser of the empirical scientific knowledge which he holds as Tata Yiva or "lord of the powers", the permanent guardian of the core values of his ancient and respectful community.

All this and much more can and should be examined and better understood with a view to establishing countervailing action. If the basic culture and values of the peasants are selectively harnessed to the popular struggle, and if negative alienation is properly contained, an unconquerable force is thus created which will lead to the establishment of an authentic and deep-rooted people's power based on imagination and feelings, which will be capable of transforming the unjust structures of the dominant society.

7. PRODUCTION AND DIFFUSION OF NEW KNOWLEDGE

External animators, Government officials and ordinary experts, such as academic intellectuals, are faced with no major problems concerning the production and diffusion of the knowledge and techniques which they acquire. They simply write a report or a book under their own responsibility, see that it reaches their colleagues or higher authorities, publish it themselves or through a third party and then wait until the critics take note of their "contribution to knowledge", with their subsequent inclusion in the respective technical bibliographies. Politicians likewise have no difficulties in this respect. They simply decide what to offer to the masses according to their own superficial impressions and proceed accordingly to dispense the crumbs of power through offers, gifts, and miscellaneous promises which encourage traditional subservience.

Our experience in the three countries confirms that in participatory action research these academic and political rituals are incongruent with the search for people's power. PAR activists claim that all the knowledge obtained in the communities and subsequently sifted, systematised and fully elucidated does not belong to the researchers or to the activists themselves, but continues to be the property of the investigated community, which has the first right to know the results, discuss and direct them for its own purposes, and authorise their publication.

There is an obligation to "return" the processed information to its rightful owners, that is, to disseminate in the communities concerned through a respectful, responsible popularisation of good quality, the acquired knowledge and resulting techniques. This "devolution" is an intrinsic part of participatory research praxis because it is another aspect of the emphasis on collective experience which leads to the goal of social change. The classic separation between survey activities and the publication of results has thus no part to play here. In PAR all elements converge, and publication is also evaluated within the context of action and its continuation.

In the same way, the process by which obtained knowledge is systematised, that is, made formally scientific, is not the monopoly of the external agents because the grass-roots can and must in one way or another play a critical role in this process. They too are capable of systematising, as can be seen every day in the practical wisdom of the breadwinners and in the work of the herbologists at Ixmiquilpan in the valley of El Mezquital and the botanists in El Cerrito. Of course, they do not follow the principles of "universal scientific" rationality (whether Cartesian or Kantian) but rather with their own empirical methods. But these procedures may be more effective and exact than the former in the context of grass-roots action. However, it is clear that the patient and imaginative counselling by external animators is more significant during this process than at other stages of the fieldwork provided that they do not saturate and overwhelm the analytical processes with their own techniques and specialised concepts and bear in mind the objectives of increased conscientisation, integration and politisation which are being sought by people's power. In other words, both rationalities - the academic and the empirical - appear indispensable if we are to proceed from common sense to the "good sense" and informed action postulated by Gramsci for transforming societies.

This delicate ideological and technical equilibrium was plainly in evidence in El Regadío. The communal census was not a simple task of the planning animators (who introduced the idea) but was assumed by the peasants' local Co-ordination Commission, corrected and tabulated by the inhabitants themselves, and subsequently discussed in a general meeting before the preparation of the final report.

In this manner the resulting product was not something created outside and brought in as a gift to the community. It was not the result of an exercise by armchair ideologists or urban experts with computers on hand, but

an ingredient in the formation of the thought processes of the people which had practical and political consequences within the community. It was therefore, an integral part of the entire research-and-action effort.

The often frightening jargon of traditional sciences and technologies, which appears magical and unattainable to the masses and sets apart the "doctors" and "experts" as a superior class, was thus avoided without however closing access to new ideas and concepts and to techniques which are accessible to and can be mastered by the masses. Of course one has to be skillful in this task and avoid dogmatic and impositional methods, which may result from an erroneous application of revolutionary rules, such as Mao Tse-tung's well-known principle of "from the masses to the masses". In this case it is important to recognise the capacity for systematic thought of the masses as a whole and not limit it to selected cadres. We know that this danger can be overcome with PAR if the necessary simplicity, intelligence and clarity are applied.

As in the case of El Regadío, it is useful to remember that the basic objective of participatory action research is not "to do science" as such or "to make the prairies burn" although this may happen as a result of other factors. Its purpose is to promote a coherent network of significant changes through praxis and enlightenment at the grass-roots level so that the base groups can wield the power which belongs to them in the defense of their class interests. In this context, the devolution and popularisation of knowledge and techniques are a practical, communal and collective exercise resulting from the combined and convergent knowledge of different groups and classes. These groups and classes produce, apply, and diffuse the systematic knowledge thus obtained in various ways at the grass-roots level.

For this reason, the devolution of knowledge and techniques should not be limited to books or pamphlets. It takes many other different forms, from graphic maps ("talking maps") to films produced by the communities themselves and various other projects and activities for economic advancement. They are informal adult education techniques in which the work of participatory investigators complements the efforts of the teachers and the promoters of popular commitment and liberation.

The reasons for participating in such informal research-and-education activities varied from community to community. In San Agustín Atenango, as we have already noted, cultural recovery involved producing a pamphlet for young

people as a sort of legacy so that they could know their true history, defend local traditions, and combat age-old forms of exploitation. Through discussion workshops, the people themselves took part in examining the data and in preparing this booklet which had to be written in both Mixteco and Spanish. It was essentially simple teaching and conceived for preliterate peoples, with many illustrations and little written text. The same has been done in El Cerrito and on the Colombian Atlantic coast since 1972 with booklets such as "Lomagrande", "El Boche", and "Tinajones". For the illiterate Cauca Indians, "talking maps" have been drawn with the barest significant features, which the animators and other activists discuss verbally with the people. Likewise in the valley of El Mezquital, "social trees" have been used to represent the natural socio-political and economic systems, an inductive technique based on group discussion. When the materials thus returned are totally without written words, they are designated as "level 0" for communication purposes. Images and short written sentences combined with illustrations which accurately depict reality, like comics, produce "level one" leaflets or pamphlets.

When the same materials are more elaborated and designed to develop the ideological and conceptual thinking of animators, "level two" monographs result. This has been done in Cauca, on the Colombian Atlantic Coast and in El Mezquital. "Level three" material comprises essays and books of a more sophisticated and theoretical nature, although the material is the same, for advanced cadres and intellectuals. Ideally, according to this scheme, materials should be produced in a synchronic or co-ordinated way for all four levels, with only their respective styles and expressions changing; an attempt has already been made to combine levels two and three in the same production in the series of studies entitled "The double history of the Coast" (published in Colombia by Orlando Fals-Borda) and which includes the case of El Cerrito. The present report has two such levels (two and three). Moreover, such levels of written devolution, as we have said, do not exclude other expressions; they constitute only a part of the possibilities offered by this method. When the communication work of PAR is thus reduced it falls into the trap of the printed word, which is foreign to the cultural patterns of the ordinary people. Being used as they are to oral traditions, the people often "do not recognise on the written page their intellectual offspring". They see such works as artificial or adulterated renditions of their knowledge by disrespectful cadres. Hence other forms of devolution and technical popularisation appear which involve the material development and which local application of the ideas thus systematised for the immediate benefit of the

base groups. In San Agustín Atenango, for example, a training centre for local cadres was set up; the old municipal archives were organised in volumes on a year-by-year bases; a community research fund was established for consultation visits to the city archives; a simple accounting manual in Mixteco was written to facilitate the auditing of the tomato co-operative; workshops of revived handicrafts (pottery and tailoring) were organised; tape recordings of interviews with authorities and other sources of information were made with the idea of checking facts and reprimanding negligent officials when necessary; photography was taught as well as its use for the purposes of organisation and mobilisation.

These material or technical forms of devolution and informal popular education not only helped to systematise the people's political thinking but also socialise the knowledge acquired by returning it to the community from which it had sprung, thus enriching common sense and providing a wealth of research-and-action tools which some universities might well envy. In this way, the peasants were better equipped to exercise and defend their countervailing power if need should arise.

In El Cerrito, systematic devolution techniques and popular adult education included pamphlets like those already described; a tape recording of the history of the village, in dramatic form, was produced for home audiences; there were exhibitions of local photographs on cardboard organised by themes and without captions; filmstrips on specific community problems (health, housing) were shown; local newspaper articles on the same and other problems were written by one of the animators; a weekly radio programme presenting interviews with members of the community was launched, which was a useful means of broadcasting information and obtaining outside support; political and protest vallenatos (songs from the Colombian coast) were composed and sung by peasant musicians, so easy were they that even children could learn them. In the same way, local popular newspapers of Northern Cauca ("The People's Courier", "The Loose Wheel", "Villarrica Opinion") have played an important role in the regional movement.

As officially proclaimed in 1981, the educational programme of Nicaragua are conceived within the framework of "promoting the revolutionary process, eliminating egoism, individualism and opportunism, and contributing to the formation of a new man and of a new society" (Ministry of Education). Such worthy aims converge with the work and philosophy of PAR, as was seen in the already mentioned experiment with the community census in El Regadío. Once it

was designed in Managua, the census received the benefit of devolution and critical reception in the community, through graphs and summaries presented on big pieces of cardboard, thus increasing its effectiveness as an instrument of study and self-analysis. A local newsleaf was launched ("Planting the future") edited and printed in the community itself with a wooden mimeograph; a writing and drawing contest was held among local peasants for this purpose. A sociodrama and a moving audiovisual film were prepared which included a direct exchange of views between State film-makers and the inhabitants of El Regadío concerning the subject, script, presentation and acting. This production is now being shown around the world under the auspices of the Vice-Ministry of Adult Education. The local CEPs were converted into motors of activity for agricultural and livestock production in the neighbourhood co-operatives as a result of the newly acquired knowledge. A flexible co-ordination commission was set up which was able both to study and take decisions, to use the pen but also the gun, especially when it was a question of confronting in a spirit of righteous conviction the rebel "contras" which were infiltrating the country through the frontier with Honduras.

It is easy to see that the secret of the mobilising efficacy of systematic devolution comprise two stages: (1) to "break" the linguistic code and master the communication symbols of popular groups so that external animators or activists can thoroughly assimilate them; and (2) to "freeze" the specialised and sophisticated code of the activists themselves and which generally results from their academic or political training such training unnecessarily widens the gap between them and the base groups and erects barriers to mutual communication.

The problem is not difficult to resolve. Philosophers such as Hobbes and Kant long ago recognised the real communicating function of what is called intentional language. Such language differs from "scientific" or "technical" parlance in that it incorporates the direct vocabulary of the wants and aspirations, the thoughts and the beliefs of ordinary people with which everyday behaviour is understood or explained. (Since Durkheim an attempt has been made in sociology to develop an alternative technical vocabulary which, far from clarifying the social reality studied, has only obscured and unnecessarily complicated the observations.) Since the objective is clarity and facility of communication it would be unwise for animators not to master the intentional language of the groups with which they come into contact.

The ideal is to foster forms of horizontal communication like those already mentioned, such as that established, for example, between a politicised peasant and another who has not been initiated. Hence the conviction that there is no better catalyst than a member of the same social class who learns how to translate new political or technical messages into ordinary terms because he carries within himself the complete set of local communication codes and intentional language. This has been observed and practised, especially in El Mezquital. Such identification also functions even with audiovisual aids, since their success depends to a great extent on the talents and skills of the persons who use them, just as the issuing debate depends on the personal relationship established between the communicator and his audience.

The political effects of communication are not obtained by separating discourse from the people's concrete necessities or from their own forms and symbols of expression. Shouting slogans and hurling accusations, let us say, against imperialism in the way that activists of the left often do, may in such circumstances become incongruous. The desired effect is better obtained through a well-composed song, for instance, or an inspired poem denouncing exploitation by multinational industries which pollute or destroy the environment of a region.

The attitude of the speaker often conveys more than vociferous slogans. This is another form of recognising the role of symbols in folk culture and in horizontal communication. Thus gestures count as much or more than words. There is even a tactile code, ways of embracing and shaking hands (learned instinctively by clever politicians), expressing physical affection or rejection are patterns of regional behaviour which every animator, educator, and participatory researcher should know, because they are part of the communication code with base groups which they seek to activate.

In general, however, one should also know how to use properly the words of the people and be familiar with their archaeology, because the same syllabic sounds may have different meanings and produce contradictory Macondian or Orwellian effects.

For example, in El Mezquital the idea of "credit" had an enslaving connotation for the peasants, while for the experts it evoked the idea of good banking service. The concept of "illness" was understood by the people as "loss of freedom"; it did not evoke the idea of some malfunctioning of a

mechanism (the body) in which "loose nuts" could be tightened by some institutional process. In Puerto Tejada it was clearer and more convincing to talk of "impoverishment" than of "proletarianisation" or "class decomposition". Categories such as "remunerated" and "unremunerated" were not understood in El Regadío. For many people, "subversion" was the same as terror and delinquency. And the idea of the "green enclosure" to refer to the invasion by sugarcane plantation owners was more effective in Cauca than the "green revolution" or "agro-industry" concepts proposed by outside intellectuals. There are peasants in Nicaragua who heard the word "democracy" for the first time only during the year of anti-Somoza rebellion, and they did not understand its meaning.

Moreover, folk language is not vulgar but highly literary and harmonious. It is rich in analogies and metaphors; as in the "blue snake" of Cauca, the extraordinary adventures of Crucito Mina, numerous fairy tales and stories of mocking imagination. Peasants experiment with diction and invent phrases which, although grammatically incorrect, are absolutely fresh and exactly describe situations in such a way that they are more easily understood.

Folk tales and stories are an inevitable and infinite part of all men. Thus at the popular level there are never two identical versions of the same story; they never become fossilized or acquire a final shape but remain ever alive and changing.

All these techniques of intentional oral communication, through appropriate gestures and symbols are handed down in folk culture from one generation to the next. Since they run in the blood, it is difficult but not impossible for outsiders to assimilate them. It is therefore advantageous to join forces with local narrators for the purposes of increasing political concientisation and commitment, if one wishes to communicate new ideas at the base level.

The failure by the left in our countries to 'break' this popular code or to "freeze" the cadre's own jargon has been one of the main causes of the frustration of their attempts to further their political objectives.

CONCEPTUAL SUMMARY

FOR ANIMATORS

(Level 3)

8. People's power and PAR

9. Further reading



8. PEOPLE'S POWER AND PAR

Let us now make a broad theoretical and conceptual interpretation of our endeavours. Our experiences in the peasant communities of the valley of El Mezquital, San Agustín Atenango, El Regadío, El Cerrito and Puerto Tejada have given us a better understanding of a process which combines scientific research and political action to bring about a radical change in social and economic structures and foster people's power for the benefit of those who have been exploited. This complex process, which also includes adult education, situation diagnosis, critical analysis and practice as the sources of knowledge for understanding the new problems, necessities and dimensions of reality, has been given the name of Participatory Action Research (PAR). We have chosen this name to distinguish it from other types of action research whose objective is not social change but the maintenance and defence of the status quo (such as that proposed by Kurt Lewin).

From our definition it may be deduced, once again, that PAR is not exclusively research oriented, it is not only adult education or only socio-political action. It encompasses all these aspects together as three stages or emphases which are not necessarily consecutive. They may be combined into an experiential methodology, that is a process of personal and collective behaviour occurring within a satisfying and productive cycle of life and labour. This experiential methodology for productive life and labour implies the acquisition of serious and reliable knowledge upon which to construct power or countervailing power for the poor, oppressed, and exploited groups and social classes, and for their authentic organisations.

The final aims of this special combination of knowledge and power within a continuous process of life and work are:

- 1) to enable the oppressed groups and classes to acquire sufficient creative and transforming leverage as expressed in specific projects, acts and struggles; and 2) to produce and develop socio-political thought processes with which popular bases can identify. The evaluation of these aims is done in practice by examining the results obtained in PAR projects. Or as peasants say: "Seeing is believing".

This creative power-knowledge is expressed in pluralist experiences which lead to a much more participatory, direct, and self-managed form of democracy than that which has been observed in the representative systems. On

the contrary there is no place in participatory democracy for dogmatic vanguards nor mechanisms or institutions designed to manipulate the people from above, because the masses are respected in their own terms and for what they are. Therefore, people's power may be defined as the capacity of the grass-roots groups which are exploited socially and economically to articulate and systematise knowledge (both their own and that which comes from outside) in such a way that they can become protagonists in the advancement of their society and in defense of their own class and group interests.

The application of this methodology for productive life and labour in Mexican, Nicaraguan and Colombian rural communities between 1972 and 1983 allowed progress to be made in the additional examination of two important theoretical problems: (1) the implications that the perception of reality and the contemporary world have on personal and collective everyday behaviour; and (2) the effects which the people's conscientious struggle may have on improving existing standards of life and labour and in order to accomplish, defend and promote significant or revolutionary changes in society through internal and external mechanisms of countervailing power exercised against dominant systems.

Two broad lessons have been proposed from our experiences in these countries concerning the establishment and exercise of people's power:

1) learning to interact and organise for such purposes; and 2) recognise ourselves and learning within such contexts.

At first sight it may appear that there is nothing new in these two lessons. Many observers would claim that such theses are implicit in the literature on social and economic development. However, there are significant differences in the way the proposed elements of organisation and cognition are conceived in the two approaches of developmentalism and the participatory approach.

The main difference lies in their ontological conceptions. The developmentalist discourse, as is well-known (Foucault's thesis on the archaeology of knowledge can help us in their respect), involves dealing with the concepts of poverty, technology, capital, growth, values, and so forth as defined from the standpoint of rich, developed societies (where in fact the concept was first proposed), a discourse organised into a coherent intellectual whole for the purposes of rationalising and defending the global dominance of these rich and powerful societies.

The participatory discourse or counterdiscourse, on the other hand, initiated in the Third World - perhaps as an endogenous response to the developed world - postulates an organisation and structure of knowledge in such a way that the dominated, underdeveloped societies can articulate their own socio-political position on the basis of their own values and capacities and act accordingly to achieve their liberation from the oppressive and exploiting forms of power imposed by dominant foreign powers and local defeatist elites and thus create more satisfactory life for everyone. In this way a more human Weltanschauung can be fashioned from this world of exploitation.

This creative balance or positive confrontation between both forms of courses may be necessary today in order to halt the destructive forces being unleashed - though not of course through the wishes of the poor and the destitute - in the world: the arrogant arms race, flagrant injustices, squandering and egotistical oligarchies, abusive undertakings, the rampant abuse of nature and man. PAR can make an important contribution in this field in which knowledge and action are combined for social progress.

* * *

Our first lesson - learning to interact and organise - is based on the existential concept of experience (Erlebnis) proposed by the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset. Through actual experience of something we intuitively apprehend its essence, we feel, enjoy, and understand it as reality, and we thereby place our own being in a wider, more fulfilling context. In PAR such an experience, called vivencia, is complemented by another idea: that of authentic commitment resulting from historical materialism and classical Marxism (Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach: "Philosophers should not be content with just explaining the world, but should try to transform it").

This combination of experience and commitment allows us to see for whom such knowledge is intended: the base groups themselves. Moreover, such a concept of experience recognises that there are two types of animators or agents of change: those which are external and internal to the exploited classes and units which are unified in one sole purpose (telos), that of achieving the shared goals of social transformation.

Both types of animators (internal and external) contribute their own knowledge, techniques and experiences to the transformation process. Since these elements of knowledge result from different class conformations and rationalities (one Cartesian and academic, the other experiential and practical) a dialectical tension is created between them which can be resolved only through practical commitment, that is, through praxis. But the sum of knowledge from both types of agents allows us to acquire a much more accurate and correct picture of the reality which we want to transform. Therefore academic knowledge combined with popular knowledge and wisdom may give as a result a total scientific knowledge of a revolutionary nature (and perhaps a new paradigm) which destroys the previous unjust class monopoly.

This dialectical tension in praxis leads us to reject the asymmetry implied in the subject/object relationship which characterises traditional academic research and most tasks of daily life. According to participatory theory, such a relationship must be transformed into a subject/subject one. Indeed, the destruction of the asymmetric binomial is the kernel of the concept of participation as understood in the present context and in other aspects of the daily routine (family, health, education, politics, etc).

Thus, to participate means to break up voluntarily and through experience, the asymmetrical relationship of submission and dependence implicit in the subject/object binomial. Such is its authentic essence.

The general concept of authentic participation as defined here is rooted in cultural traditions of the common people and in their real history (not the elitist version), which are resplendent with feelings and attitudes of an altruistic, co-operative, communal nature and which are genuinely democratic. They are core values which have survived from original praxis in spite of the destructive impact of conquests, violence and all kinds of foreign invasions: such resistant values are based on mutual aid, the helping hand, the care of the sick, the communal use of lands, forests and waters, the extended family, matrifocalism, and many other ancient social practices which vary from region to region but which constitute the roots of "our participation". We do not need therefore to appeal to other profound or distant philosophical or rational referents derived from different intellectual or academic traditions, or from other continents.

Recognition of our authentic constructive and altruistic mode of participation, as a real and endogenous experience of and for our people,

should reduce the differences between bourgeois intellectuals and grass-roots communities, between elite vanguards and base groups, between experts (technocrats) and direct producers, between bureaucracies and their clients, between mental and manual labour.

Hence the immense and dynamic potential for creativity which such a break-up of the subject/object binomial implies, through the rejection of dogmatisms and vertical authoritarian structures whether planned or centralised and traditional patterns of exploitation and domination at various levels. One consequence of this interpretation is to view the "vanguard" concept under a different light, as a counter-élitist team rooted in the people from whom it derives its legitimacy and life. These enlightened masses which have risen up are the real vanguard. Thus such a team would have a different philosophy of life and work; it would have to be endowed with a capacity for self-criticism be helpful, technically trained and feel empathy with the people. It would not be impositive but only seek consensus, its members would not be authoritarian but act like catalysts in the process over specific periods of time.

In other words, the collective pursuit of these goals in social, educational, and political practice turns all those involved into organic intellectuals of the working classes, without creating permanent hierarchies. The proof of the success of these people's intellectuals can be seen in the fact that eventually they become redundant in their places of work, that is, the transformation processes continue even without the physical presence of external agents, animators or cadres.

In the same way, these remarks imply that not everything which goes by the name of participation today is in fact of a participatory nature. There are voluntary and vertically imposed aspects of this process which should be taken into account in present-day processes of political and social action. In particular, national and international politicians have been prone to base their philosophy of popular participation on Samuel Huntington's limited definition of it as "acts affecting governmental decision-making". Of course this is not participation at all according to PAR standards (since it is not the government which is the final referent, but the peoples themselves), a fact which is now recognised by critical political scientists such as Seligson, Booth and Gran who admit the real-life complexities of the participatory process.

Neither is Jaroslav Vanek's "participatory economy" entirely satisfactory for Third World peoples (in spite of Vanek's well-intentioned remarks that the powerful may learn "something fundamentally good" from the poor and weak to achieve "a better balance of respect among nations"), because his analysis is limited to equilibrium and convergence theories deeply rooted in developmentalist discourse; the latter is failing precisely because it has achieved only a selective assimilation of what is "fundamentally good" in the dependent countries.

PAR principles on interaction and organisation in praxis lead on to other important consequences, namely, that PAR induces the creation of its own field in order to extend itself in time and space, both horizontally and vertically in communities and regions. It moves from the micro to the macro level and thus acquires a political dimension. The final evaluation or applied criteria of the methodology revolve on this political dimension and the opportunity which it offers for making theory concomitant with action.

In addition to the central ideas of culture and ethnicity, special importance is accorded as we have seen, to the concept of region (within the context of social formation), as a key element in the PAR interpretation of reality for the creation of inward and outward mechanisms of countervailing power. Exploitative traditional structures are thus better understood, as are the alliances of forces toward revolutionary conjunctures which may be forged under new leadership or by enlightened vanguards. Catalytic external agents play a crucial role in linking up the local dimension to regional and, at a later stage, to the national and the international levels. The particular and the general, social formation and mode of production may thus be synthesised in this manner.

In the same way, the creative socio-political force thus set in motion by PAR may also lead to the conformation of a new type of State which is less demanding, controlling and powerful, inspired by the positive core values of the people and nurtured by autochthonous cultural values based on a truly democratic and human ideal. Such a State would be neither an imitation of existing historical models whose errors are easy to recognise or a copy of earlier representative democracies. It would strive for a more even distribution of power-knowledge among its constituents, a healthier balance between State and society with less Leviathanic central control and more grass-roots creativity and initiative, less Locke and more Kropotkin, that is,

it would seek a return to the human scale which has been lost in the recent past.

In general, PAR is able to resolve the main contradictions of a given region through recourse to endogenous elements and even alleviate the conflicts resulting from a chauvinistic view of nationalism. By promoting these activities - which directly combine knowledge with power and local political action - PAR acquires another dimension and helps clarify what "militancy" is or should be. For this reason people can be mobilised with PAR techniques from the grass-roots up and from the periphery to the centre so as to form social movements which struggle for participation, justice and equity, without necessarily seeking to establish hierarchial political parties in the traditional mould.

These socio-political tasks cannot be strictly planned or generalised or copied uncritically, since they imply open social systems and conjunctural processes. There are no fixed deadlines in this work, each project persists in time and proceeds according to its own cultural vision and political expectations until the proposed goals are reached. These tasks may be as arduous as those of Sisyphus. But we should remember many of the goals being sought today were pursued by the Chartists in England a century and a half ago, with only partial success.

Nevertheless, the open-ended nature of these struggles, as seen in the three countries studied, undoubtedly shows that ebbs and flows are unavoidable because of personal failures by animators and cadres, official repression, internal and external conflicts, ecological rhythms, and lack of material resources. These factors cause the communities to fall victim to the structural violence of the old order (seignersuial or capitalist) of poverty, exploitation, oppression and dependence. To persist at every level and over the long term is therefore an integral ingredient of PAR and of the endogenous lesson of the organisation and interaction of the popular bases.

This means that upholding the organisational and interactive efforts of PAR - the mechanisms of people's countervailing power - can also reach the international level. Indeed, as we have already noted, there already exist in several world capitals important support institutions for this type of work and which are responding to this special (and perhaps unexpected) challenge from the Third World. They are non-governmental organisations, private foundations, sympathetic ministries, ecclesiastical bodies (such as the World

Council of Churches), alert United Nations agencies (such as the ILO), etc whose positive support calls for an awareness on the part of participatory researchers to preserve the freshness of the PAR approach as an original input from the world periphery.

On the other hand, many writers and thinkers from the dominant countries are also responding to the need to understand these new intellectual and political trends which are coming from the periphery and harmonise them with their own schemes of explanation and action. Hence the contributions of work on historical economic theory (Feder, FRANK, BARRACLOUGH); the countercurrents in the sciences (Capra, Berman, Nowotny); the new emphasis on political processes from the grass roots up (Gran, Wolfe, Pitt, Galtung, Castells); critical epistemology (Oquist, Moser); applied hermeneutics (Himmelstrand); radical adult education (Hall, de Schutter, Swantz); problem-oriented social science (Pearse, Comstock, Goulet); and the convergent work on social intervention and action (Touraine) as well as on world systems versus dependence theories (Wallerstein, Seers). (see bibliography)

Perhaps we have all been drawing closer, each in his own way in the face of the scientific, political and moral crisis facing the world today, towards the expression of a new kind of socio-political discourse based on revalued concepts such as participation, endogenesis, regionality, and power as we have defined them in this study and which will replace and supercede the current concepts of development, underdevelopment, integrated rural development, nationality, and growth, i.e., the concepts which have dominated international debate since at least 1949, in support of the rich countries which are now in crisis.

The second lesson which proposes the experiences of learning to know and recognise ourselves as a means of creating people's power and the internal and external mechanisms of countervailing power, may have certain phenomenological bases.

It starts with the thesis that science is not a fetish with a life of its own or something which has an absolute, pure value but is simply a valid and useful form of knowledge for specific purposes and based on relative truths. Any science as a cultural product, has a specific human purpose and therefore implicitly carries those class biases and values which scientists hold as a group. It therefore favours those who produce and control it, although its unbridled growth is currently more of threat than a benefit to

humanity. For this reason it is theoretically possible that people's science may exist as an endogenous process - or which may be formally constructed in its own terms - which perhaps could serve as a corrective to certain destructive tendencies of the predominant forms of science - in which the knowledge acquired and properly systematised would serve the interests of the exploited classes. This 'people's science' would converge with the so-called "universal science" to the point where a totalising paradigm would be created which would incorporate the newly acquired systematised knowledge as mentioned before.

Under these conditions, it is obvious that forms and relationships of knowledge production should have as much, or even more, value than forms and relationships of material production. As Md. Anisur Rahman has pointed out, the elimination of exploitation patterns at the material or infrastructural level of a society does not ensure, by itself, that the general system of exploitation has been destroyed or that poverty, ignorance, and injustice have been overcome. It becomes necessary to eliminate also the relationship governing the production of knowledge which tend to give ideological support to injustice, oppression and the destructive forces which characterise the modern world. It is only in this manner that the classic axiom that "knowledge is power" can be fully understood. When the exploited classes acquire such an understanding they take a decisive step not only towards their own liberation, but towards that of the other social classes threatened with global destruction.

This creative process of responsible all-embracing and useful knowledge-making does not take as its point of insertion the pedagogical method implied in the earlier Freire treatises but dialogical research oriented to the social situation in which people live. For this reason, it begins with the question: "Why is there poverty?", the answer to which may lead simultaneously to conscientisation, social research and political praxis.

Ideally in such cases the grass-roots and their cadres should be able to participate in the research process from the very beginning, that is from the moment it is decided what the subject of research will be, and they should remain involved at every step of the process until the publication of results and the various forms of returning the knowledge to the people are completed. This is a task which gives preference to qualitative rather than quantitative analysis as can be seen from the present report. It believes that it is more to be gained by using the affective logic of the heart and the sentiments

than the cold-headed analysis that comes from offices and laboratories. Even so it does make use of explanatory scientific schemas of cause-and-effect not only in association with formal and affective logic but also dialectical logic. In peasant terms: we learn about ourselves by living, remembering, comparing, and working.

With these objectives in mind, we found that our Mexico, Nicaragua and Colombia experiences indicated that the following techniques resulting from the practice of PAR are useful in the establishment of people's countervailing power.

1. Collective research. This is the systematic use of information collected and systematised on a group basis, as a source of data and objective knowledge of facts resulting from meetings, sociodramas, public assemblies, committees, fact-finding trips, etc. This collective and dialogical method not only produces data which may be immediately corrected or verified but also provides a social validation of objective knowledge which cannot be achieved through other individual methods based on surveys or field work. In this way confirmation is obtained of the positive values of dialogue, discussion, argumentation and consensus in the objective investigation of social realities.

2. Critical recovery of history. This is an effort to discover selectively, through collective memory, those elements of the past which have proved useful in the defence of the interests of exploited classes, and which may be applied to the present struggles to increase conscientisation. Use is thus made of oral tradition, in the form of interviews and witness accounts by older members of the community possessing good analytical memories; the search for concrete information on given periods of the past hidden in family coffers; data columns and popular stories; by ideological projections, imputation, personification and other techniques designed to stimulate the collective memory. In this way folk heroes, data and facts were discovered which corrected, complemented or clarified official or academic accounts written with other class interests or biases in mind. Or completely new and fresh information was discovered which was of major importance to regional and national history, all with the purpose of upholding people's power.

3. Valuing and applying folk culture. In order to mobilise the masses this technique is based upon the recognition of essential or core values among the peoples in each region. This allows account to be taken of cultural and ethnic elements frequently ignored in regular political practice, such as art,

music, drama, sports, beliefs, myths, story-telling, and other expressions related to human sentiment, imagination, and ludic or recreational tendencies.

4. Production and diffusion of new knowledge. This technique is an integral part of the research process because it is a central part of the feedback and evaluative objective of PAR. It recognises a division of labour among and within base groups. Although PAR strives to end the monopoly of the written word (which as a rule is an élitist phenomenon), it incorporates various styles and procedures for systematising new data and knowledge according to the level of political conscience and ability for understanding written, aural or visual messages by the base groups and public in general.

Four levels of communication are thus established depending on whether the message and systematised knowledge are addressed to preliterate peoples, cadres or intellectuals. They require that a good PAR researcher should learn to address all four levels with the same message in the different styles required, if he is to be really effective in the written, auditory or visual communication of the thought or message.

One efficient method of systematic devolution is the use, at a professional level, of the mass media in the interests of popular causes and organisations, as we have seen in Colombia. In addition, organisations and groups which work with the communities should have "news agencies" available to provide information to the local, regional and national news services.

Other efficient forms of communication based on a "total" or intentional language include the use of image, sound, painting, gestures, mime, photographs, radio programmes, popular theatre, videotapes, audiovisual material, poetry, music, puppets and exhibitions. Finally there are material forms of organisation and economic and social action developed by base groups, (co-operatives, trade-unions, leagues, cultural centres, action units, workshops, training centres, etc.) as a result of the studies carried out.

There is an obligation to return this knowledge systematically to the communities and workers organisations because they continue to be its owners. They may determine the priorities concerning its use and authorise and establish the conditions for its publication, dissemination or use, as was the case with the present study.

This systematic devolution of knowledge complies with the objective set by Gramsci of transforming "common" sense into "good" sense or critical knowledge ("revolutionary science" as a new paradigm) which would be the sum of experiential and theoretical knowledge. It thus transcends Mao Tse-tung's principle of "from the masses to the masses" in that it recognises the capacity of the bases to systematise the data discovered, that is, to participate fully in the entire process, with their own organic intellectuals from the beginning to the end. This serves to neutralise the negative alienation which has prevented the effective development of people's power and its internal and external mechanisms of political countervailing power. Sectorian and impogitional ranguardism is thus rejected.

To succeed in these endeavours requires a shared code of communication between internal elements and external agents of change which leads to a common and mutually understandable conceptualisation and categorisation. The resulting plain and understandable language should be based on daily intentional expressions and be accessible to all, avoiding the airs of arrogance and the technical jargon that spring from usual academic and political practices, including ideological elements from the current developmentalist discourse.

These PAR techniques do not exclude a flexible use of other practices deriving from sociological and anthropological tradition such as the open interview (avoiding any excessively rigid structure), census or simple survey (on rare occasions the mailing of questionnaires) direct systematic observation, (with personal participation and selective experimentation), field diaries, data, filing, photography, cartography, statistics, sound recording, primary and secondary source materials, notarial, regional, and national archives. Cadres ("resource persons") should not only be equipped to handle these orthodox techniques responsibly but also know how to popularise them by teaching the activists simpler, more economic and controllable methods of research, so that they can carry on their work without being dependment on intellectuals or external agents of change and their costly equipment and procedures. Thus, with all these ways and techniques, we can collaborate in the transformation and advancement of exploited and oppressed peoples, especially in the Third World where the PAR methodology originated as a dialectical response to the contemporary crisis. This is a methodology for productive life and work which differs from other more academic forms in that it can be assumed and practised autonomously by oppressed peoples who need knowledge to defend their interests and ways of life. In this way, perhaps, it will help build a better world for everybody, with justice and peace.

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SUMMARIES OF THE FIELD EXPERIENCES*

*These summaries were prepared by the co-ordinator on the basis of partial detailed reports from the national teams. For the institutional affiliation of the authors, see the Introduction.

A. Potential for people's education in the social transformation of rural areas: the case of El Regadío (Nicaragua)

by Malena de Montis

El Regadío is a village of small farmers, agricultural tenants and sharecroppers dedicated to the growing of basic staplefoods (maize, beans, coffee, sugarcane, sorghum). It is situated to the north-east of Managua, near the frontier with Honduras, 23 kilometres from Estelí, the departmental capital, with which it is connected by an unpaved road.

It has a population of 759 (363 men and 396 women, according to the local census of 1982), the majority of whom are natives of the village. There are a total of 110 houses, with an average of seven people to a house. The village is divided into two hamlets: Valle Arriba and Valle Abajo, separated by a steep rocky path. Out of the 110 houses of the community, 71 have direct access to the land, of which 260 manzanas were sown in the agricultural year 1981-1982 (each manzana equals 4/5 of an hectare). The rest of the people cultivate small plots and also work for a wage especially in the agricultural co-operatives and in the reserve infantry battalion which operates locally for territorial defense.

Of the homes at El Regadío, 44 possess a total of 790 heads of cattle and 115 transport animals. Almost everyone has pigs and poultry. There were only 87 illiterate people in 1982 (47 men and 40 women) equal to 10 per cent of the population, following the intense educational campaigns of the previous years; 263 persons had already completed their primary education and another 53 their secondary education. In addition, 83 persons were attending the collective education centres (CEPs) in that year.

Besides the local primary school, the community also boasts of a Catholic chapel, a public telephone and a telegraph service. A health centre was also being built with German aid. There is no electricity. The houses are of sun-dried brick, some with latrines.

At the time of the study there was a Sandinist agricultural co-operative (CAS), as well as a credit and service co-operative. Another CAS was recently formed on lands recovered from local estates, now considered areas of public property. The two CAS co-operatives decided to unite, once their respective

debts contracted with banks during the past production years were settled. The National Agrarian reform programme was giving them the ownership titles of approximately 1,000 manzanas (800 hectares) to form a mixed co-operative for grain and cattle comprising 28 members, all from the region.

There is a high level of organisation in the community, as witnessed by the existence of the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women (AMNLAE), the Committees for Sandinist Defense (CDS), the National Union of Farmers and Cattlemen (UNAG), the Sandinist Popular Militias (MPS), the Reserve Infantry Battalion (BIR), and Christian Youth. Membership in these organisations varies between 27 to 67 per cent of the local population. There is a large female participation in all these fronts, especially in the CEPs, where the women act as co-ordinators and constitute the absolute majority. This acceptable level of activity in the processes of popular participation in a community situated in a region of strategic importance to the national defense was the reason why it was chosen as the first place to try out the PAR methodology in Nicaragua, as proposed recently by the central Government.

The first efforts to organise the community started in 1977 when a Catholic priest encouraged the people as a whole to reflect on the injustices of the Somoza regime. He contacted young people to whom he gave sporadic courses on how to assume their responsibilities as "delegates of the word". Some of these young people are still active in the field of adult education.

Once induced into the United Peoples' Movement in 1978, the community formed its first civil defense committees, in which the hero and martyr Pedro Barrientos played an important part. During the war of liberation, El Regadío helped the fighting vanguards by providing them with food, clothing and medicine. Some peasants joined the nearby war camps at Los Encinos and other places. Twenty-one fell in battle.

The first inhabitants of the region were Chorotega Indians, descendants of the Nahuatl Indians of Mexico. During the period of Spanish colonisation beginning in the sixteenth century, these Indians were forced into a servile relationship or exterminated, while encomiendas* and estates were established for the whites. Between 1680 and 1690 Estelí was founded as a stopping-place on the way towards the gold mines in the north.

*encomienda: systems of Indian labour held on trust for the Spanish Crown.

Approximately six generations ago, El Regadío started as a large estate. Its first owner, Juana Evangelista Castellón, was from Matagalpa. The original estate was successively divided between its heirs until it was reduced to medium-sized plots.

Towards 1930 a shoemaker called José María Briones came to the region selling miscellaneous goods on his way to Limay. Little by little he bought up plots of land until he was able to consolidate them into another estate, part of which had been the property of Juana Evangelista Castellón. He eventually set up a shop in Valle Abajo, where he gave credit on usurious terms to the peasants. He established sugar plantation and cattle farm and became very rich.

The prosperity of the Briones family led José María to become a senator of the Republic and to support the Somoza regime then in power. Somoza reciprocated by improving the road from El Regadío to Estelí to make it accessible to vehicles.

During the revolution, the Briones separated and José Maria died. The triumphant revolutionaries confiscated the lands of the estate and founded the first co-operative. Some local institutions such as the school, the chapel, the estate house and the principal shop still remain from the Briones period. The shop today belongs to the peasant who used to be Briones' overseer; he now shares his house with the local command.

Recognising that the poor peasantry of the country constitute the principal force of the Sandinist revolution, the present study has focussed on the problem of how to develop a peasant and co-operative movement which would be congruent with and encourage the social changes necessary to the construction of a new society. The objective was to stimulate the conscious and organised participation of the working classes in political, economic, social and cultural affairs, and in the management of businesses, farms, co-operatives, and cultural centres. In other words, to form and consolidate people's power. To this end it was necessary to know, to investigate, to systematise, and to reflect in order to make appropriate decisions.

The adult education programme, which had already been initiated in the form of basic popular units was a driving force in this process. It was important to understand how the people could teach themselves without the negative intervention of teachers trained under the earlier system. This

Zapatista forces (followers of Emiliano Zapata) which made the most radical demands concerning land tenure, the reclamation of common lands and the struggle against the large estates.

In all these processes, San Agustín Atenango, like many other Indian villages, managed to preserve a good part of its cultural heritage as reflected in animist beliefs in the Mixteca deities, costumes, agricultural practices, music, language, and collective labour practices such as tequio (voluntary community assistance) and topil (civic service).

This cultural heritage is represented by one of the elders of the village: the Tata Yiva or "Lord of the powers" whose authority is widely accepted and recognised. The force of tradition in community vigilance and control was demonstrated a few years ago when a young man who became the mayor tried to end the annual festivities and the ancient celebrations. He was sacked by the people (the women played a major role) and expelled from the village, and subsequently the authorities were more cautious and respectful. "Custom must prevail", as the leaders said.

With the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution, some local wealthy families managed to keep part of their land and went into other activities such as the production and marketing of eggs and poultry, while peasants continued to depend on traditional farming. As a result, they developed other forms of dependency on the dominant families, especially in relation to credit. One of these families has taken this role recently, by giving loans "without interest" (in fact really to defend what is left of their land, according to the opinion of local peasants) to peasants who want to grow tomatoes, although such a venture requires much greater investment and modern technical know-how.

The idea of growing tomatoes had come from the migrants (the "swallows" or "netbacks") who returned to the village after having seen it done on a commercial scale in the north. The idea was also related to the pressure of the new monetary economy reaching the village. Some of the people decided to form a co-operative and started to organise and sell their products with relative success, once the water for irrigation started to flow in 1972. The contradictions of the economic system, the dangers of the co-opting and corruption of leaders, and the failures in communication with the outside world took this co-operative into successive crises, from which it was barely rescued with the "help" of dominant families. In this way, the tomato business could not prosper.

The arrival of participatory researchers from Mexico City brought some solution to these difficulties. The community had been chosen precisely because it offered typical regional conditions. There were personal links with local families which made it easier to introduce the participatory methodology.

One initial possibility was to rationalise the management of the tomato co-operative with a simple, practical accountancy manual prepared by the Indian peasants themselves and written in their own language. Collective analytical sessions were also held as a way of understanding the co-operative experience and planning what subsequent steps should be taken.

These tasks were considered valid since they could be integrated into specific local processes and interests which were of vital importance to the people and their organisations, especially as regards production cycles. A need was felt in San Agustín Atenango to "do the accounts properly" both as concerns the administering of loans and in order to defend themselves against middlemen. Other tasks were subsequently pursued: the struggle for access to irrigation facilities, and the local recovery of history so that the young people could reinforce their ethnic and cultural identity in such a critical period.

The worsening of these local, regional and national problems during this participatory experience led to the autonomous development of interesting initiatives in which the people were able to combine the needs which they felt with the recovery of their history in the local training councils. Thus it was decided to revive forgotten crafts like pottery, for which the old people rediscovered ancient suitable clay deposits. They wanted to manufacture the local products as before, without having to pay hard cash for mass-produced versions manufactured elsewhere. Barter once again began to flourish in these examples of the search for communal autonomy.

At the same time, the researchers worked at several levels of communication in order to inform the community of the results of the investigation. There were collective discussions and workshops on various topics and several audiovisual productions proved effective. A pamphlet prepared jointly with base groups on the history of the village was completed "so that the young people would be able to know how it was", to quote the words of the Tata Yiva.

In this manner, the embryonic forms of contemporary people's power appeared enmeshed within the ancient Indian traditions. Several institutions - religious, educational, political, and economic - were involved in the process. Traditional control and vigilance mechanisms can, if the appropriate adjustments are made, help produce better things for the progress of all.

Other promotional activities were undertaken: practical errands for the functioning of the co-operative van; organised support to obtain financial aid from various authorities or for the holding of some festivity or meeting.

All these initiatives went through several discussions and were submitted to a new training centre which was set up when one of the leaders asked what would happen in Mexico if the peasants should decide not to sow cash crops but only for their own use. This introspective trend, observable also in other parts of Mexico, is slowing the commercial production of tomatoes and intensifying once again the traditional production of maize and beans.

Self-subsistence, independence and communal autonomy are thus stimulated in the face of external modernising influences. They are trends which show not only the vitality of the Mexican Indian peasant culture but also the contradictions of the system and the alternative ideas and actions which could benefit this immense and rich nation in the short or long term.

C. People's countervailing power in the valley of El Mezquital (Mexico)

by Salvador García Angulo

El Mezquital is a series of valleys and low hills with a temperate climate located on the central Mexican plateau (Hidalgo state) in the Tula river basin, some five hours to the north of Mexico City by paved highway. There are 29 villages and 54 communities of Otomí origin with 416,000 inhabitants who have a rich cultural tradition which has managed to resist the successive Nahuatl and Spanish invasions. Their culture includes precious codices and stable communal forms of social and economic organisation.

The 1910 Revolution succeeded in redistributing the land of the local estates but preserved a mixed system of private and community-held property. For this reason conflicts, land invasions and endless litigations are still persistent features in El Mezquital. Capitalism has spread and is now

dominant thanks to the extensive irrigation system of the valley, despite the fact that the canals are contaminated by detergents and other waste products from the great metropolis.

El Mezquital has been the subject of almost constant study over the last fifteen years. This research has not, however, been sufficiently respectful of the Otomí nor has it allowed them any participation. In 1975 another type of research was initiated to help the people of the valley rediscover their cultural roots and acquire the wisdom and the spirit necessary to improve their conditions of life.

This research effort began by proposing the need for a collective learning model in the form of meetings for the exchange of views and information which have proved fruitful in several fields of knowledge: agriculture, health, recreation, and applied sciences. Questions were answered and doubtful concepts and meanings of words were made clear in such groups. This method, known as "collective self-teaching" is still being used in the valley and includes self-training and self-evaluation.

In such a method it is the group which analyses the problems of the community and which is trained to take action to resolve them; this leads to the organised participation of the group. Discussion of matters such as the village shop or the village mill are a concrete expression of this kind of work.

These mobilised groups have acquired the capacity to involve the community through the use of different means of social communication to inform the various neighbourhoods. This often causes jealousy and anger on the part of the authorities. The groups have also sought to finance themselves with their own funds and standard of living have tended to improve.

Such research experiences have also been conducted with and on behalf of the local communities of San Pablo Oxototipan, Maguey Blanco, and Puerto del Dexthí: collective mills have been established, literacy campaigns launched and primary schools opened. In these efforts, study and action were never very far from one another, on the insistence of the Indian peasants themselves. Near Ixmiquilpan, the main mestizo town of the region, similar experiences were carried out.

In general, apprenticeship in the collective self-teaching model is a collective creative act. Acceptable levels are reached in the systematisation of knowledge, as occurred in San Pablo Oxtotipan on an experimental cactus plantation where an attempt was made to control erosion. The same is true in the field of health, the use of medicinal plants and experiments with homeopathic kits, the sowing and use of soybeans, in maize mills and forage ovens, and in the joint purchase of household articles and construction materials.

A useful technique has been the use of "social trees", which are drawings showing society in the form of a tree with three branches: the economic, the political and the ideological. They are used as a means of increasing community awareness and enabling the Indians of the valley to overcome their fragmentary and naive vision of reality.

In the past there have been exchanges of experiences among the communities, with mutual visits and direct observation, although there has been very little systematic return of the information acquired. Even so note has been taken of various cultural expressions of the people's struggle such as the songs of the Revolution which continue to be used as elements for popular mobilisation. Pamphlets and leaflets have been printed in several communities and radio programmes devised. However, it has been seen that the best way to make a peasant sensitive to political issues is to acquaint him with another peasant who has been politicised. Hence the importance of horizontal communication.

Especially during the early years, external activists tended to slow down this process at inappropriate times or to accelerate it beyond what the objective or subjective conditions of the struggle could support. The fact that the external agents did not share the experiential problems of the people since they belonged to other social classes and lived in different environments made them incapable of devising appropriate strategies to promote or sustain the people's struggle.

The present stage of the work in El Mezquital leads one to believe that there are now adequate bases for popular mobilisation in which due account will be taken of the decisive role of the working classes together with the catalytic role of the people's organic intellectuals. There is a greater awareness of the potential contribution of these cadres ("resource persons") as regards tools and techniques which the people do not have at their

disposal, such as the knowledge of history and other means for systematising their struggles.

D. A new experience in participatory research and action:
the case of El Cerrito (Colombia)

by Víctor Negrete B. and José Galeano S.

El Cerrito is a hamlet situated 15 kilometres to the south-east of Montería (the capital city of the department of Córdoba) in the torrid Caribbean coastal region of Colombia. The hamlet has 120 families (720 persons) living in three clusters of 90 houses. Eighty-five per cent of the people are illiterate, although there is a radio in each house and some have television sets.

The hamlet was founded in 1800 on what used to be an island of a big marshy lagoon. The lagoon was a source of food for the peasants who lived on its banks from their small plots of semi-seasonal crops (rice, bananas, coconuts, yucca, yams, maize). The people are in general of a tri-racial ethnic origin (Indian, black and white).

The peaceful peasant occupation of this marshy region was first threatened at the beginning of the present century, when the owners of the large estates started to expand their properties, put up barbed wire around dried banks of the lagoon and introduce cattle. Such conflicts worsened in 1966 when the Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform (INCORA) drained the lagoon and declared the 1,590 resulting hectares as common land.

Although the agrarian law (as well as the national Constitution) stipulates that such lands are for the exclusive use of poor peasant communities, today after fifteen years, 1,000 hectares of El Cerrito continue to be in the hands of the rich cattlemen and politicians of the region. There is a possibility that INCORA might legalise the cattlemen's tenure. Thus the social and economic situation of the people has deteriorated and today the local peasants have almost no land or marshy plain. This leads them to ask themselves what action they can take to defend their rights over their lands.

When INCORA started to give the marshy plains to the rich, the inhabitants of El Cerrito appealed to experienced cadres who had been involved in previous peasant struggles (with the National Peasant Association(ANUC),

since 1971). They decided to take defensive action in three stages: the compilation of information with the people of the hamlet, the seizure or partial recuperation of the land in question, and the consolidation and widening of their experience. These steps were taken with positive and lasting results.

In the first stage agreement was reached with the leaders of the community to work in two closely co-ordinated ways: research and organisation. Contact was made with elder persons and key informants who were well versed in the history of the community: they told their story. Private and official archives and some secondary sources were examined. A promotional campaign for the defense of the hamlet was launched through a radio programme and a newspaper in Montería. An attempt was made to use a common language for this purpose, without theoretical or technical jargon and using the local form of narrative or story-telling in which the coastal peasants excel.

There was some initial apathy in the organisation of action. This was caused by the former failures of ANUC, the negative influence of certain religious beliefs, the feeling of helplessness in the face of the power of landowners and Government repression, the migration resulting from the lack of work, as well as machismo and paternalism among local political bosses.

Nevertheless, people's assemblies were held and proved to be useful. The old and recent history of the hamlet was related, pertinent experiences by similar peasant groups involved elsewhere in the struggle for land were evaluated, photographs of the region were shown and tales and legends based on the marshy culture were related. The consensus in the assemblies fully and morally justified the effort to recuperate the people's ancient rights over the area.

Action was finally taken in February 1982. It was the first time that this had occurred in El Cerrito, but the peasants with their practical wisdom and sharp sense of observation and experimentation gradually solved all the problems so as to stay on the land, in spite of the successive police raids sent by the landowners.

This effort to regain the land was affected by the arrival of a group of activists who did not share the participative method, but who wanted to impose themselves as a typical vanguard. The inevitable discussions which ensued distracted the attention of the base groups and thwarted the self-expression

of the community. But the free debate which followed in what was called "meetings of friends" clearly showed who was right in this ideological and practical confrontation. The newly arrived cadres lost their influence and withdrew from the area.

During June and July the peasants dedicated themselves to consolidating their organisation and ensuring the greatest possible participation in the land takeover. Additional more advanced training was given to leaders in local skill programmes.

Meanwhile, the drafting of the history of the hamlet was finished, based on testimonies and documents of the local people ("trunk archives"). The resulting text was read and discussed at assemblies. On these occasions activities were enlarged to include artistic and cultural expressions, such as folk music. Shortly afterwards, a complete booklet on this history was published for the use of the community and general distribution.

The techniques employed covered aspects of communication, organisation, research and education, simultaneously or by stages.

The mass media (radio and newspapers) were used from the beginning to create a wide feeling of solidarity and collective pride. As the number of tape-recorders had increased, a programme of cassettes was devised on the history of the village, based on the published pamphlet. There were slides and photographic exhibitions and ample use of popular songs adapted to the circumstances of the struggle for the land, as had occurred before during the emergence of ANUC.

The investigation on the community profile was carried out by sifting data in different archives, through discussions in the meetings of friends', the recovery of oral tradition, with the elders of the hamlet and in meetings on the exchange of experiences. Communal work was fundamental. A friendly dialogue with the community was essential to the discovery of hidden aspects of the people's culture.

The main organisational aspects have been mentioned. External animators acted as advisers more than anything else and tried to support and promote the natural leadership of the community, but without stimulating the traditional charisma which leads to the manipulation of grass-roots groups (and which involves some degree of machismo). This was difficult but highly

instructive. The resulting organisation allowed the peasants to keep up the pressure on the recuperated land through a group of about 40 peasants who have so far remained there.

It is evident that this methodology requires persons who are completely identified with PAR ideals, and who have a clear and critical political position. It was also evident that academic learning combined with the people's own understanding make for a type of knowledge which is more complete and closer to reality, all of which is more appropriate to investigators and popular sectors alike. The people of El Cerrito have the ability to create knowledge and possess sufficient historical, social and cultural values to allow them to propose alternatives for change and people's power.

E. People's power: genesis of a social and political
movement in Puerto Tejada (Colombia)

by Alvaro Velasco A., in collaboration with
John Jairo Cárdenas

Puerto Tejada is a town of 50,000 inhabitants located in the northern part of the department of Cauca, near the city of Cali. The vast majority of these inhabitants are black, descendents of the slaves and runaway slaves who occupied the region from the seventeenth century on in farms and in small free settlements.

The local people traditionally lived from the cultivation of cocoa, bananas, coffee and other staples of the Colombian countryside, until it was discovered that the lands of the valley of the Cauca river (to which Puerto Tejada belongs) were ideal for the commercial cultivation of sugarcane. From 1940 there was a great expansion of sugarcane cultivation in twenty plantations which eventually occupied all of the land up to the town limits of Puerto Tejada. They took over small peasant farms by coercion and added them to the new plantations. Sugarcane, which covers 60,000 hectares in this part of the valley, has induced radical changes in the economy as well as in the ecology of the area. Puerto Tejada was transformed into what is today an over-structured camp of black wage-earners.

A characteristic of this sugarcane expansion was that it left the boundary of the town completely fixed, imprisoning it a "green enclosure" which reached as far as the last houses. Meanwhile the local population was

growing. There were cases of 50 people or more living in one house, with all the problems that such a situation involved, without any action or interest being taken by the departmental or municipal authorities.

Inevitably, the people finally exploded. On 22 March 1981 more than a thousand families forcibly took possession of some of the lots of a neighbouring sugar plantation, cut down the cane, and built huts. This process of direct action was supported by another process, namely, the collective investigation and reflection which eventually culminated in a social and political movement: the People's Civic Movement of Northern Cauca, which is still active in the region.

The fact that the families are matrifocal in this area gave the local women an important role in the entire process. Without them, there would not have been investigation or action. The research was directed towards discovering from the past those elements of popular mobilisation which would serve the cause of the present struggles. Indeed, the community elders and key informants who were interviewed made an important contribution to the community profile because their memory was good: thus events were reconstructed and the black heroes of the people hitherto forgotten or despised through ignorance were once again brought to life in the popular imagination. There were also studies made of the present housing situation, the public services, and other aspects which were presented in a communal form covering the entire region. There it was decided to recover the past and to affirm the identity of the blacks, so as to show what their real positive role was in the creation of Colombia as a nation.

The local political and social action had dramatic ups and downs, from the moment when the soldiers and police tried to expel the people and destroy the huts. The authorities relented and discussed alternatives with the people to solve the problem because it was clear to everybody that the people were right. A massacre was avoided when the military yielded to common sense. And so a new neighbourhood for the common people was born.

The historical recovery of the profile of Puerto Tejada and its people led to an understanding of the role of two cultural symbols: the sugarcane as a symbol of evil; and cocoa as a personification of freedom, a traditional value held by the escaped slaves but which had been lost after the capitalist offensive. These symbols allowed the work to be undertaken on the basis of popular feelings, shared not only by those who took over the land but also by

the rest of the people. This created widespread solidarity which in part allowed the slow and counter-productive work of some leaders of the political left and right who had remained in the area to be neutralised.

There were assemblies every Friday and which took as a starting point the community action boards. There the moral aspects of action and concepts like "sin" and "crime" were discussed. The fear of action was conquered, once the conviction of justice had been acquired.

The struggle against such fears led to the emergence of a new consciousness and the acquisition of a new knowledge. The search for reasons to act confirmed that the people were right. The process of investigation also had a specific objective: to prove the justice of the demands. Hence the commissions of people's researchers that were formed. This created interest in knowing other local realities, for example, in the districts of Cali taken over-by the people and in the Indian communities in the southern regions of Cauca and Nariño.

With the idea of invasion ripening, the leadership passed from the community action board to other more directly concerned bodies, principally the "Association of the Homeless" which organised the takeover and negotiated with the Government. The success of the Association went beyond all expectations and convinced thousands of people. Unfortunately, it also attracted the repressive forces so that it had to apply the old tactics of survival. However, in the end the departmental Government had to yield before the clear decision of the people, and those lands remain occupied even today.

The success in Puerto Tejada opened up possibilities for action in other neighbouring areas. In Caloto a foreign company wanted to build a sulphuric acid plant which would pollute the environment. The people of Caloto organised themselves into a special committee for study and analysis similar to that of Puerto Tejada, and acted decisively with the help of advisers from the Civic Movement.

The dynamics of social and educational movements of this kind made people look for ways to support one another. Thus the Regional Forum, already mentioned, discussed such topics as the following: "Our region is rich but our people are poor" (an analysis of the causes of poverty), "The public services" (judgement on the State), "The black people of Northern Cauca" (a search for historical, ethnic and cultural identity) and "Environmental problems"

(ecology and society). They were useful for developing people's thought and action in northern Cauca. As a result, the regional movement became stronger.

Action continued in another neighbourhood of Puerto Tejada where a flood had occurred and which the traditional politicians tried to exploit. Reflection and action workshops were organised on infant population problems and plays, songs, etc. were presented.

Something similar as regards people's organisation, study and action occurred in the nearby town of Santander de Quilichao as a result of a savage act of police repression. The initial local protest was organised by the young people who were acquainted with the experience of Puerto Tejada. They published a small newspaper and participated in the local elections in unusual ways: the objective was to "give people back their voice". They organised songs, plays, masquerades, carnivals. The people and their culture were the protagonists of this campaign. Two town councilmen were elected.

The regional movement of northern Cauca has kept its course. Its leaders and animators continue to work in spite of difficulties. They believe that it is necessary to go on designing an alternative model for the exercise of politics, that is for "genuine, good politics". They want a movement which values people's knowledge, which knows how to orientate the mobilisation of the masses, and which can build alternative ways of producing useful knowledge that will eventually lead to true people's power.

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