

CATEGORY: PERU: NOW

CONCEPTS: AGRICULTURE, social class, economics, poverty, government

ACTIVITY: LOOKING AT LAND REFORM IN PERU. The question of land reform is of vital concern throughout Latin America. Very few people deny the need for some type of redistribution of land. The issues involved are, however, very complicated and little real reform has been carried out except in countries that have had successful revolutions i.e., Cuba, Nicaragua. Generally speaking, serious attempts at land reform bring about right-wing coups. It is important for North Americans to consider their position on land reform in Latin America and your students can start with this lesson.

OBJECTIVES: Students will begin dealing with the issues of land reform and will develop their own opinions of the idea of land reform.

MATERIALS: Copies of the Land Reform Work Sheet.

PROCEDURE: This is not an easy exercise. You may have to adapt it to the language and intellectual level of your class. Have your students read through the work sheet. You may have to read along with them and clarify words and ideas. They will also have to explore their own feelings concerning things they take for granted or have negative feelings about i.e., private property, communal ownership, individual rights versus other peoples' welfare. There are no easy answers for your students in this exercise, as there are no easy answers in real life land reform.

VOCABULARY: land reform, peasant, sharecropping, arable, incentive, commune, cooperative

RESOURCES: Peter Dorner, ed., Land Reform in Latin America: Issues and Cases, Madison: Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin, 1971. Ernest Feder, The Rape of the Peasantry: Latin America's Landholding System, Garden City: Doubleday, 1971. Henry Landsberger, ed., Latin American Peasant Movements, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969. Lynn T. Smith, ed., Agrarian Reform in Latin America, New York: Knopf, 1968. James Petras and Maurice Zeitlin, Latin America: Reform or Revolution? A Reader, New York: Fawcett, 1969. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, ed., Agrarian Problems and Peasant Movements in Latin America, Garden City: Doubleday, 1970. Hugo Blanco, Land or Death: The Peasant Struggle in Peru, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972. Thomas R. Ford, Man and Land in Peru, New York: Russell and Russell, 1971.

LEVEL: MIDDLE GRADES

Source: Gibbs, Virginia G. *Latin America: Curriculum Materials for the Middle Grades*. Center for Latin America, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. 1985. | 1989.

LAND REFORM WORK SHEET

In Peru, as in many countries in Latin America, many people earn a living in agriculture. The great majority of these people are the descendants of the Quechua, Aymara and other Indian groups which made up the Inca Empire. Although these people have farmed and raised livestock for generations, they own little or no land.

Before the Spanish Conquest, of course, all the land belonged to them. When the Spaniards came and destroyed the Inca Empire, they divided the land into huge encomiendas (estates) which were given to Spaniards who had displayed loyalty to the Spanish Crown. Many of these estates have remained until today, although some have passed to other wealthy families.

During colonial times, the Indians worked almost as slaves on these estates. Now, there are several systems for employing the Indian peasants. On many old encomiendas, the Indians are allowed and even encouraged to live on part of the land. They are employed seasonally. In other words, during planting, harvest or other busy times they help in the fields and receive money for their work. The rest of the time they are unemployed. Share-cropping is also common. This is a system in which the peasants are allowed to farm small plots of land and in return for this privilege give a part of their crops or profits to the estate owners. They might also repay this privilege with seasonal labor. Sometimes, they simply rent the land they use for farming and grazing. In any case, their income is greatly limited and poverty is the way of life for huge numbers of Peruvian peasants.

Land reform is a way to change this situation. Land reform generally means taking some or all the land in the big estates and distributing it among the peasants, who in this way come to own some land. It is not an easy process since the interests of land owners, peasants, and the government often conflict. Let's create a typical case in Peru and study some of the problems in land reform.

We will call our estate the Cerro Verde Estate (Green Hills Estate). Cerro Verde is a medium-sized estate, covering about 20 square miles. It is owned by the Gostiza family and has been in the family since 1887. When the first Gostiza bought the land, the Indian population living there was also considered part of the estate. The Gostiza family now lives in Lima. They own a factory and an import/export company. Most of their large fortune comes from these businesses. During the summer they vacation on the Cerro Verde Estate.

The day to day running of the estate is left to an "encargado" (overseer) who lives there year round. The people who work on the estate are the descendants of the Indian families who were there before the Spanish Conquest. There are 40 families totaling about 200 people. They own no land of their own but are allowed to work small plots and graze livestock for a rental fee.

Only 50% of the land is arable (can be farmed). Only 10% is used by the owners to produce crops. This is because their businesses in Lima take up

most of their time and energy and give them larger profits than large-scale farming. To develop more of the land would mean large investments in machinery and special technology, so they choose to allow the land to remain idle. This is common not only in Peru but in many parts of Latin America.

The government is considering including Cerro Verde in a land reform program. This would mean taking the land from the Gostiza family and dividing it among the 40 Indian families. The government thinks this is necessary because:

- A. The Gostizas do not make full use of the land. They have no incentive to increase production. This is bad for the economy of Peru and causes some of its poverty.
- B. The peasants who live on the land descended from its original owners: the Indians. It is unjust for them not to be able to own and use the land that was "stolen" from them long ago.
- C. The peasants have been demanding land because they believe it will end their poverty. The government is afraid that if they don't get some land they will become violent.

Now here are some questions for you:

1. Is it fair or moral to take the Gostizas' private property under these conditions?
2. Is it fair or moral for the Gostizas to keep their land under these conditions?
3. Let's suppose the government decides to go ahead with its plan for land reform at Cerro Verde.

What would be a fair price or settlement for the government to give the Gostizas?

- a) Whatever the Gostizas want.
 - b) The money they would earn if they sold the estate to another rich landowner.
 - c) A set price per acre used in all land reform, for example \$10 per acre.
 - d) Nothing at all.
 - e) Other suggestions
4. When this decision is made, the land is given to the peasants. But how would you divide it up? Look at the map. You will see that some land is good for farming, some good for grazing, and some is useless.

Devise a plan to distribute the land fairly. Use the map. Remember, there are 40 families.

5. Once the land is legally given to the peasants they discover several big problems. They have always been poor so they have little or no money saved. When planting season comes they have no money to buy seeds for their new land.

They need new tools and even some machinery for modern farming but can't buy these things. Roads and irrigation need to be improved. Thinking about these problems:

How should the peasants be helped, or how should they help themselves?

- a) The government should give them money.
- b) The government should give them a loan.
- c) The government should give them seeds and tools.
- d) The peasants should form a commune: they should all own the land together and pool their small individual savings, their work and eventually the profit.
- e) The peasants should own and work the land separately but form a cooperative to buy tools, seeds, fertilizer and work together on roads, irrigation systems, etc.
- f) Other ideas you may have

6. Now you have thought of some of the major problems of land reform. Let's consider one more general idea:

Some Latin Americans say "La tierra para los que la trabajan" which means "The land should belong to the people who farm it."
What do you think of this idea?

CERRO VERDE ESTATE

