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Carmen Soliz, *Fields of Revolution: Agrarian Reform and Rural State Formation in Bolivia, 1935-1964*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021, 280 pp. ISBN: 9780822946656.

The question of agrarian reform in Latin America has recently resurfaced as a topic of historical inquiry. In this context of renewed attention to the political nature of land reform, scholars have begun to ask: which land reform was the most radical? While the success of Mexico's agrarian reform has been hotly contested for decades, gains from Guatemala's reform were reversed after the 1954 coup, and Cuba's 1959 land reform suddenly appears less radical when paired against the 1969 agrarian reform that cooperativized land in Peru. Bolivia's 1953 land reform has seldom been interpreted as more transformational, far-reaching, or long-lasting than these or other Latin American examples. But Carmen Soliz's methodically researched book, *Fields of Revolution: Agrarian Reform and Rural State Formation in Bolivia, 1935-1964*, seems to suggest just that.

Standard depictions of Bolivia's 1952 revolution have regarded its agrarian reform law as either incomplete or a failure. Indeed, when Cuban revolutionaries embarked on their own project of agrarian reform in 1959, they looked to the Mexican and Bolivian cases for inspiration but concluded that neither had been successful enough to elicit emulation. The scholarship on Bolivia's 1952 revolution, moreover, has continued to interpret Bolivia's agrarian reform as limited, top-down, and applied in a clientelist manner. Soliz's book overturns those conceptions and brings to light an entirely different reality, one forged in the highlands of rural Bolivia, where peasants expanded the limits of the agrarian reform law, won a new future for themselves, and changed the outlook of Bolivian politics.

At the heart of *Fields of Revolution* lies the crucial question of whether the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) revolution was a top-down or bottom-up process. Scholarship on Bolivia since the 1950s has almost exclusively argued that the revolution was a top-down, state-led process. But the sources that Soliz examines in this book challenge that interpretation. Measured against the yardstick of whether communities successfully gained control of land, she shows that Bolivia's agrarian reform was successful and, it turns out, quite drastic. Soliz demonstrates that not only were there massive transfers of land following the passage of the Agrarian Reform Law-Decree of 1953, but its enactment was also driven by communities who worked together to petition for land and managed to force the revolutionary government to comply with their demands.

The book begins with an introduction to the systems of rural order in Bolivia leading up to the 1952 revolution. The first chapter describes the landed elite, their haciendas, and the exploitative *colonato* system that they benefitted from. In this system, colonos worked for around five days per week in return for access to a plot of land for subsistence. Working conditions were precarious and evictions were frequent. The second chapter examines the explosion of political debate that surrounded both the question of agrarian reform and the “Indian problem.” Bolivian intellectuals held different conceptions of how far a land reform should reach and whether it was a measure to bring justice, economic modernization, or remove indigenous people from their state of “backwardness.” Patronizing and racist conceptions of development undergirded the impetus for agrarian reform, yet the reality on the ground would yield real results, including the disarticulation of powerful rural societies and the landed class they protected.

The revolution begins to come together in chapter three. Soliz charts how a three-day-long popular insurrection overthrew the military junta in April 1952. Just sixteen months later, under pressure from peasants who demanded an end to abuse by their landlords, MNR leader Víctor Paz Estenssoro signed the Agrarian Reform Decree-Law. Soliz argues that even though land reform got off to a slow start, with some land disputes playing out in the courts for up to a decade, one outcome of the law would be the democratization of the state apparatus.

The momentum for land reform picks up in chapter four. Soliz focuses on three provinces: Germán Jordán, Omasuyos, and Sud Yungas (covering parts of the departments of Cochabamba and La Paz). Peasants in these provinces organized into unions to advocate for the rights that they now saw as theirs and petitioned the government for land expropriation. The book documents the different strategies used by colonos (peasants who worked on haciendas under extremely exploitative labor conditions) and ex-comunitarios (Indian communities who had farmed the land collectively before being dispossessed by hacienda owners decades earlier) to petition, appeal, and argue for the expropriation of land in their favor. With the passage of the law, colonos began to abandon their sharecropping contracts with landlords, denying them the harvests usually reserved for them and sometimes refusing to plant altogether. Soliz’s analysis of labor contracts before and after the agrarian reform shows that peasants managed to improve their working conditions once the law was passed. The number of contracts that were not renewed or where the labor was not complete show that the power of the landlords was already waning.

Chapter five documents remarkable claims for the restitution of Indian lands. If the colonos advocated “land for those who work it,” the ex-comunitarios promoted the idea of “land back to its original owners.” The chapter explains how comunitarios successfully petitioned for the land in the courts. In cases where they could prove that current owners had illegally encroached upon their land, for example, judges often ruled in favor of the comunitarios, expropriating the owners and returning the land to the Indians. In disputes between colonos and ex-comunitarios over the same parcels of land, if the colonos were granted rights, they had to pay an indemnization to the ex-comunitarios.

One strategy for stretching the limits of the land law beyond its design was to prove that a parcel of land constituted a latifundio. Colonos bent the definition of latifundio to reach beyond

the simple size of a landholding: if they could prove that they had labored under harsh conditions for a landlord, judges often ruled that the land constituted a latifundio and ordered its expropriation. Well-documented cases and data compiled by the author show the tangible results of Bolivia's agrarian reform. In the three provinces studied in the book, 70 to 90 percent of the land changed ownership. In subsequent years, no government leader dared to reverse the outcome of the land reform.

The transformation wrought by agrarian reform, Soliz concludes, strengthened the power of the peasant and Indian classes and changed the landscape of Bolivian politics, giving rise to the powerful popular movements that would sweep across Bolivia at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Grounded in clear historiographic contributions and skillful review of archival sources, *Fields of Revolution* overturns long-held conceptions of the MNR and its agrarian reform program. Meticulously researched, its framework and methodology will remain a solid example of how to return to the agrarian question and revisit the theme of peasant politics in Latin American history.

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