KENNETH DUNCAN / IAN RUTLEDGE (EDS.)
Land and labour in Latin America
Essays on the development of agrarian capitalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

The scope of this study on land reform in the Philippines by R. Hanisch goes well beyond what might be expected from its title. Hanisch does not only deal with the important administrative issue of ‘decisionmaking processes’ and the connected ‘problems of implementation’ in relation with the recent land reform campaigns in the Philippines though he has devoted the larger part of his study to this topic, but he puts the whole land reform policy into its proper historical and political context of a changing class structures. Moreover he examines the role of state and its political goals and limitations which characterize the Martial Law-Society of the era Marcos. Hence, he enlarges not only the scope of his analysis but also the amount of problems arising from such an ambitious approach.

The fundamental problem of Filipino society is rural poverty. The fundamental problem of the Marcos administration, however, is the legitimation and extension of centralized power and control over the people which links up closely with governmental efforts to eradicate rural poverty thereby broadening its “rural base” again. According to R. Hanisch, the land reform issue became therefore an instrument of quite disparate objectives:

Rolf Hanisch

ROLF HANISCH
Land Reform in the Philippines
Decision-Making Processes and Problems of Implementation
"The ML (Martial Law) regime had need of the land reform for the substantive justification and legitimation of the centralisation of power. Moreover, it had come to realise that the solution of the food crisis must be given a high rating in overall economic (and industrial) development. It looked on the land and agrarian reform as an important means for such a solution" (p. 44).

But, as Hanisch explains further, the Marcos administration “discovered much to its surprise that a very large part of the tenanted land was controlled by small landowners, most of them members of the urban middle class. To liberate their tenants would alienate a class scarcely inferior in numbers but politically and socially much more important” (p. 45). Thus, the attempt to coopt another supporting class (poor peasants and landless rural cultivators) would “automatically” endanger the support of the relatively prosperous urban middle class which is considered to be the mainstay of the Marcos-regime.

Having explained the functions of the agrarian and land reform policy under Martial Law, Hanisch analyses in detail the process of agrarian policy decisions, the land reform programme and its administration, the complicated process of implementation and finally the counter-techniques of the landowners.

If the agrarian reform policy in the Philippines will be the panacea for rural poverty and malnutrition as the Marcos government claims in its propaganda oriented mass-media, remains to be seen. It is not only limited in its scope (rice and maize cultivation only) but also in as much as productivity is concerned: Larger agrarian units which share machinery and technological know how and distribute the returns from sales evenly among their members could provide a feasible alternative to the prevailing “dualism” of small-holders on one hand and large-scale capitalist enterprises on the other. In other words: a crucial problem is whether the tenancy reform can help to increase productivity and hence provide more food for the people or if it is merely a “counter-reform” designed to contain rural unrest but not able to satisfy basic needs? And if this “popular programme” fails, will there be alternative sources for the legitimization of the present Martial Law regime and its policy of survival?

Hans A. Luther