

## Andean Report by Javier Almario

### Ibero-America's 'agricultural vocation'

*With the failure of the consumer-goods model, the IMF is promoting a labor-intensive 'return to the land'.*

Among certain political and economic sectors of Colombia—and throughout Ibero-America as well—the idea is being promoted that the solution to the debt crisis lies in these countries returning to their original “agricultural vocations.” After all, certain leaders argue, Colombia’s main export products are coffee, bananas, and flowers.

The oligarchical Colombian Growers Society (SAC) has just written a study on the future of the agricultural sector which notes that “with an increased devaluation rate, we will see slight increases in agricultural exports this year, especially coffee, banana, cotton, cocoa, and meat.” The SAC report asserts implicitly that it is in a return to agriculture coupled with accelerated devaluation of the peso that the problem of flagging foreign exchange reserves can be dealt with—not accidentally, the thinking of the International Monetary Fund.

Even some honest leaders on the continent are beginning to think that a return to agriculture is the only option in the face of the failure of the consumer-goods industrialization model of the U.N. Economic Commission on Latin America (ECLA). However, a return to the “agricultural vocation” defined by the IMF and World Bank can only guarantee more hunger.

The SAC document admits that this year Colombia will continue to import substantial quantities of wheat, sorghum, groats, and other agricultural requirements the country could surely produce. Why doesn't it? The explanation lies with the decades'-long ap-

plication of colonial policies: high technology for export and archaic technology for internal consumption.

Why doesn't national industry produce agricultural technology and other capital-goods requirements for mechanization of the countryside? Because the very forms of land ownership that exist preclude the use of modern technology: either the *minifundio* where mechanization is simply uneconomical, or the massive, inefficient *latifundio* used for extensive cattle raising.

According to the Association of Agricultural Machine Importers (Adimagro), Colombia has some 28,000 tractors. The life of each tractor is 10 years, which means that to replace the tractors which with time become obsolete, it is necessary to annually import 2,800 new tractors.

This practice was in fact maintained until the 1974-78 presidency of López Michelsen, under whose administration tractor imports fell to an average of 1,000 per year. This year imports have virtually come to a standstill, thanks to the import reduction policy imposed by former Finance Minister Gutierrez Castro's secret agreement with the IMF.

According to Adimagro, Colombia has at least four million hectares which should be utilizing 20,000-25,000 new tractors a year in order to match the mechanization levels of France or Spain which, to be sure, are themselves not optimal.

On the other hand, the “agrarian reform” applied by former President Carlos Lleras Restrepo (1966-70)

never had the perspective of “producing more and better” but rather of “giving land to those who work it”—the Maoist slogan under which Lleras created the national peasants association, ANUC. Lleras' reform simply created unmechanizable mini-plots often incapable even of sustaining the family working it.

In the aftermath of President Betancur's recent peace accord with the FARC (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces) guerrillas, which included a commitment to a new agrarian reform, Lleras has begun to pontificate anew, demanding that the reform be carried out along the policy guidelines of the Malthusian Club of Rome. These guidelines insist that since resources are limited but the population is still growing, the criterion for agrarian reform must not be to produce more, but “to generate more jobs,” the more labor intensive the better.

It is no coincidence that the planning office of the Agricultural Ministry, OPASA, is reformulating its production goals on the Club of Rome supposition that population growth can be made to fall to zero. The reality is that by shrinking food production, OPASA will in fact foster the outright starvation required to realize the Club of Rome's genocidal “predictions.”

Recent Central Bank statistics indicating that the population of Bogotá ate 30% less meat in the first three months of 1984 suggest that the recommendations of the IMF and the Club of Rome are indeed working.

Betancur's pledge of a new agrarian reform nonetheless opens the way for establishing new criteria consistent with the continent's economic integration efforts. The state-owned mechanized collective farms in Mexico's northwest and the huge private capital-intensive ranches of California's Imperial Valley point the way.