



# Peasants in Revolt: A Chilean Case Study, 1965-1971 (Edinburgh Bilingual Library,)

*James Petras, Hugo Zemelman Merino*

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Based on extended interviews at the Culiprán *fundo* in Chile with peasants who recount in their own terms their political evolution, this is an in-depth study of peasants in social and political action. It deals with two basic themes: first, the authoritarian structure within a traditional *latifundio* and its eventual replacement by a peasant-based elected committee, and second, the events shaping the emergence of political consciousness among the peasantry. Petras and Zemelman Merino trace the careers of local peasant leaders, followers, and opponents of the violent illegal land seizure in 1965 and the events that triggered the particular action.

The findings of this study challenge the oft-accepted assumption that peasants represent a passive, traditional, downtrodden group capable only of following urban-based elites. The peasant militants, while differing considerably in their ability to grasp complex political and social problems, show a great deal of political skill, calculate rationally on the possibility of success, and select and manipulate political allies on the basis of their own primary needs. The politicized peasantry lend their allegiance to those forces with whom they anticipate they have the most to gain—and under circumstances that minimize social costs. The authors identify the highly repressive political culture within the *latifundio*—reinforced by the national political system—as the key factor inhibiting overt expressions of political demands.

The emergence of revolutionary political consciousness is found to be the result of cumulative experiences and the breakdown of traditional institutions of control. The violent illegal seizure of the farm is perceived by the peasantry as a legitimate act based on self-interest as well as general principles of justice—in other words, the seizure is perceived as a “natural act,” suggesting that perhaps two sets of moralities functioned within the traditional system.

The book is divided into two parts: the first part contains a detailed analysis of peasant behavior; the second contains transcriptions of peasant interviews. Combined, they give the texture and flavor of insurgent peasant politics.

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