

# An Electronic Seminar to Research Mexican Agrarian Change

by Theodore E. Downing  
Arizona Research Laboratory  
University of Arizona

A fundamental restructuring of agrarian Mexico appears underway. On 7 November 1991, Mexico's President began radical transformation of the legal framework of communal and *ejido* lands, with probable reverberations throughout indigenous and non-indigenous communities of rural Mexico. President Salinas de Gotari argued that a major reason for the change was the low productivity of peasant parcels and the problems of increasing *minifundismo*. Proponents compared the relatively low yields of Mexican *ejido* maize production to that of Iowa.

The law is now a *fait accompli* and the "*leyes reglamentarias*" are now being discussed. Options include (1)

privatization of *ejido* lands, (2) abolishment of constitutional obligations for land distribution and Indian ancestral claims, (3) institutional reforms, (4) promotion of trade unionization of day-laborers in the countryside, and (5) relaxation of the limits to property size.

Transnational corporations would be permitted to freely conduct business with *ejidos*, although PEPSICO and other transnationals already have formed limited operations with *ejidos*. Thus far, reactions among the culture/agricultural specialists have been mixed, some seeing merit in the proposals fostering an influx of capital directly into *ejido* communities. Others feel that it is a land grab which will empty the countryside,

comparable to the U.S. Dawes Act and 18th-19th century English Enclosure Movement.

In mid-December, the author organized an international electronic seminar of scholars to consider and react to this situation. He was assisted by David Barkin, Salomon Nahmad, Scott Whiteford, James Dow, Scott Robinson and many others.

The electronic seminar exchanges information on the daily impact (coming in through press reports, reports from members, news releases), updates legislative and political changes, shares peasant-indigenous reactions based on a variety of sources and exchanges bibliographic material. Eventually, it is hoped that the seminar will enable us to disseminate information on changing events in agrarian Mexico to Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants residing in the United States. As of 21 January, the group included over 40 scholars and is growing, including Latin Americans from Spain, Sweden, England, Canada, the U.S. and Mexico.

Events have moved so quickly that we do not even have a name. Thanks to Jim Dow (Oakland University) a special "discussion channel" has been organized on the BITNET-ANTHAP electronic group (with electronic gateway links to many other places).

ANTHAP is co-sponsored by the Society for Applied Anthropology and the National Association of Practicing Anthropologists (U.S.-AAA). If you wish to participate, request membership by contacting: Theodore E. Downing via BITNET at DOWNING@ARIZRVAX or via FAX at 602-326-3338 or msg at 602-621-2025. Snail mail: 1402 E. Kleindale Rd., Tucson, AZ 85719. Active participation is a requirement for entry.

