

Document Profile: "La Unión Comunal Salvadoreña y la reforma agraria"

Title: La Unión Comunal Salvadoreña y la reforma agraria

Contributor: Unión Comunal Salvadoreña (UCS)

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Description and Contents Summary:

The pamphlet, constructed as a comic strip, delineates the history of the Salvadoran Communal Union (Unión Comunal Salvadoreña) (UCS) and uses selected parts of its history to paint a clear portrait of the union, which ostensibly represents the interests of Salvadoran farm workers. It is written in a comprehensible way to cater to Salvadoran farm workers not yet involved in the union, who probably are not highly educated. The UCS is portrayed as successful, having achieved many of its goals, and as having the potential to continue its work with the Sandinistas, the socialist Nicaraguan government from 1979-1990, to pass their progressive legislation. The comic strip starts out with an overview of the union; a member explains that it was founded in 1968 with the goal of organizing farm workers who wanted agrarian reform. According to him, this reform would eliminate the supposedly discriminatory *latifundio* system, and would instead redistribute these lands to those who actually worked them. The pamphlet—a glowing overview of the UCS and its successes in organizing, educating farm workers, and passing progressive legislation—attempts to persuade potential members to join. This is evident in its main character's successful persuasion of other characters who are not yet members but who are "convinced" of the UCS's achievements and worker-centered mission.

The comic argues its case, firstly, by making clear that the UCS has nothing to hide and that its members want to disseminate their information without fear of questions. Secondly, it appeals to family values in the way that it emphasizes the importance of the wellbeing of the "whole" Salvadoran family. Lastly, the pamphlet portrays a sense of comradery and equality in the union to audience as it describes the worker-centered education system for UCS members and the ways members have organized and protested to achieve their goals.

The illustrations, layout, and type are intentional, making the pamphlet much easier and more appealing to read. This caters to farmers with little education, helping them to understand the goals and achievements of the UCS (and why they should join) without elitist condescension.

Significance:

The pamphlet is clearly left oriented with strong pro-union overtones throughout the comic. Viewpoints that are missing include Salvadoran female farmers or farmers' wives, previous landowners, economic elites, government officials, and non-farm workers.

This pamphlet, published in 1980, was born out of the tumult in El Salvador. After having been suppressed for a decade over the topic of land reform, groups pushing agrarian reform acted with a new vigor. One of these groups was the UCS, founded by rural campesinos who had a shared history of poverty and oppression, and who used Marxist and Leninist ideology to shape their dissent and proposed communal policies, culminating in the Agrarian Reform (Paige 133). Leading up to this was the mid-nineteenth-century federal conversion of communal land to private property, creating an economic elite reinforced by the army. The campesinos worked for slave wages on plantations owned by these wealthy elites, sowing the seeds for dissent (Bonner 4-6).

In 1970, the First Congress of Agrarian Reform convened in an attempt to institute land reform, and intensified and specified the wishes of those seeking change. This culminated in the unification of separate communist guerrilla groups into the United Front, which backed Napoleón Duarte for president in the 1972 presidential race. The government refused to acknowledge Duarte's victory, which led to a coup allowing Duarte to seize power, although he was soon overthrown by the other conservative faction within the army. The next administration was led by Colonel Molina who was committed to agrarian

reform. Following his election, the Institute of Agrarian Transformation (ISTA) was founded in 1975. The following year, legislation founded the First Project of Agrarian Transformation, but terrorist groups murdered or intimidated those in support of agrarian reform. In the next election in 1977, the right-wing candidate, General Romero, won through electoral fraud and by 1979, El Salvador was on the precipice of civil war, thanks to his unwillingness to work with reformists. One military group overthrew Romero, sacrificing their “traditional role as ‘guardian of the oligarchy’” (Browning 411). The result of this was the sudden explosion of reform policies.

This pamphlet can help researchers answer the following questions: What was the communal alternative to the *latifundio* system? How did the UCS help pass Agrarian Reform laws and how did they implement them? What was the relationship between the UCS and the campesinos? How was the UCS constructed (and by whom), and how did they work with the government to pass legislation?

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Works Cited

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