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SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT  
COMMUNICATION IN LATIN AMERICA:  
THE "RADIOPHONIC SCHOOLS" OF COLOMBIA

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\*\* The opinions expressed in this paper are solely the author's responsibility and not those of the institution for which he works.

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## SUMMARY

This is an overview of rural development communication in Colombia in the general context of communication and development in Latin America. The essay concentrates on a critical analysis of ACPO (Popular Cultural Action), a Catholic inspired autonomous non-profit organization established in 1947, which today constitutes a nation-wide system of multimedia education for rural development, principally known for its "radiophonic" schools. ACPO is the most significant experience in rural development education in the last quarter of a century in Colombia. ACPO defines itself as an action program, a development agency, and a social movement.

It has become a model for the promotion of rural development in all Latin America with 25 radio education projects in 17 countries of the region patterned after its operations.

The activities of ACPO are mounted on the premise that the greatest development problems are derived chiefly from the attitudes and schemes of thought of the people, which render them powerless to better their situation, although it does not deny the role of social structures in determining their conditions. What must change first however, ACPO feels, is the individual and, for this reason, ACPO programs are built around "Fundamental Integral Education".

The paper examines ACPO's principles in the light of the critical conditions of the Colombian peasantry in a society characterized by power concentration in minorities and where land reform has not really taken place. It concludes that, although assertions of some research that ACPO efforts are actually pro status quo are inconclusive, there is no evidence that these may, in fact, be contributing to structural change in the sense of ACPO using its powerful communication system to induce societal re-organization.

The paper accepts the criticism of the ACPO ideology, especially that which locates the source and cause of "backwardness" within the individual himself, and warns against the implications of this orientation for communication researchers and educational programmers in general. However, it concludes with the interrogative -- It is realistic to expect educational communication institutions operating within, and a product of, an elitist society and dependent on public and private dominant interests for their existence, to "swim against the stream"? -- using an example of this, the ill fated end of the MEB (Movimento de Educacao Base) in Brazil.

## CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Summary  | i   |
| GROUP AND MASS COMMUNICATION IN LATIN AMERICA  | 1   |
| Research Neglects Group Communication  | 2   |
| Mass Media do not Communicate with the Rural Mass                                      | 2   |
| Mass Media Questionable Role in Development  | 3   |
| Rural Development Communication in Colombia  | 4   |
| THE ORGANIZATION OF ACPO   | 6   |
| The Nature of "Radiophonic Schools"  | 6   |
| The General Structure of "Popular Cultural Action"                                     | 7   |
| Simplified Headquarters Organigram of Cultural<br>Popular Action (ACPO)                | 7a  |
| Physical Facilities  | 8   |
| Budget   | 8   |
| Staff  | 8   |
| The "School" Audience  | 9   |
| THE OPERATIONS OF ACPO   | 11  |
| The Multi-Media Approach   | 11  |
| The Components of the Mix  | 12  |
| The Courses  | 13  |
| The Group Auxiliaries  | 14  |
| The Standard Broadcasts  | 15  |
| A Newspaper for Peasants   | 15  |
| Supplementary Reading Materials  | 16  |
| The Training of Rural Development Leaders  | 17  |
| Campaigns: The Culmination   | 17  |
| Graphic Representation of the Combined Media<br>Approach of ACPO for Peasant Education | 17a |
| THE IMPACT OF ACPO   | 18  |
| The Influence at Home  | 18  |
| The Repercussions Abroad   | 19  |
| Formal Evaluations of ACPO's Effectiveness   | 19  |
| Feedback Opportunities   | 21  |
| The Lack of a Research Component   | 22  |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>THE PHILOSOPHY, STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF ACPO</b> | <b>23</b> |
| ACPO's "Integral Development" Concept               | 23        |
| The Importance of Structural Change                 | 25        |
| Integrated, Enriched and Protagonist Man            | 25        |
| The Pre-Requisite: Casting a New Personality        | 26        |
| The Specific Objectives of ACPO                     | 26        |
| 1. Motivation                                       | 26        |
| 2. Human Promotion                                  | 26        |
| 3. Integration                                      | 26        |
| 4. Productivity                                     | 27        |
| 5. Organization and Development of the Community    | 27        |
| 6. Spiritual Advancement                            | 27        |
| ACPO's Strategy: "Integral Fundamental Education"   | 27        |
| ACPO's Operational Tactics                          | 29        |
| <br>  |           |
| <b>SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT IN COLOMBIA</b> | <b>30</b> |
| The Broad Social System                             | 30        |
| The Plight of the Peasantry                         | 31        |
| Population  | 31        |
| Land Distribution                                   | 31        |
| Economy   | 32        |
| Education   | 32        |
| Housing   | 33        |
| Health and Nutrition                                | 33        |
| The Monopoly of Decision-Making Power               | 34        |
| The Struggle for Structural Change                  | 35        |
| The Defact of the Land Reform Endeavour             | 35        |
| The Development Models Prevailing in Colombia       | 36        |
| The Failure of Development Efforts                  | 37        |
| The Reason for Failure: A Resilient Elite           | 38        |
| "Modernization" and "Green Revolution"              | 39        |
| <br>  |           |
| <b>ACPO AND STRUCTURAL CHANGE IN COLOMBIA</b>       | <b>41</b> |
| The Structural Perspective of Development           | 41        |
| ACPO as Non-Contributor to Structural Change        | 42        |
| ACPO as Non-Revolutionary Institution               | 45        |
| The Explanations of ACPO                            | 45        |
| Divergence in Sequence, Method and Tempo            | 46        |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| The Influence of Structural Variables             | 47 |
| Politics, Peasant Organization and ACPO           | 49 |
| Is ACPO's Doctrine Obsolete?                      | 50 |
| Is ACPO a Deterrent of Change?                    | 53 |
| Brazil's MEB: Radio Schools for Structural Change | 54 |
| The Dilemmas of Communication in Latin America    | 57 |

#### References cited

## GROUP AND MASS COMMUNICATION IN LATIN AMERICA

The invitation to participate with a paper in a meeting concentrating on "communication and group transformation for development" was warmly welcomed. On the one hand, preparing this paper on Colombia's long outstanding experience with the combination of mass and group communication known as "radiophonic schools", is a valued opportunity for the author to improve his acquaintance with it. On the other hand, the fact that an international meeting of this nature takes place is indicative that, at long last, communication science may be granting due attention to non-mass communication situations within the process of attempting to overcome underdevelopment. And this is directly in line with the author's conviction that it's high time for research in Latin America to concern itself with group communication situations, particularly in the rural areas.

There are at least two reasons behind this conviction. One is the evident and pronounced absence of such research in the region in general. The other are those indications so far provided by research that mass communication may not be aiding development in this part of the world.

### Research Neglects Group Communication

An overview of Latin American communication research done by the present author (Beltrán, /10) failed to find any evidence of interest in group communication situations as such on the part of researchers. Moreover, in writing the present paper, the author struggled through all pertinent literature looking for specific research indications about the "structure, functions and transformation" of the group component of the "radiophonic schools". With few exceptions, the exploration proved frustratingly sterile in this regard. In general, few researchers, if any, seem to care at all for the roles which communication may be playing in the Latin American countries among groups related to development efforts. Almost no one appears interested in assessing how communication influences the composition, orientation, activity and impact of the many community groupings which do in fact exist and operate in those countries, especially in their rural sectors.

### Mass Media Do Not Communicate with the Rural Mass

Most researchers focus their inquiries on the mass media often equating human communication with impersonal communication aided by sophisticated hardware. This dedication seems to be starting to yield, among other findings, some discoveries about the negative roles of these



for the development of society in general in the sense of fostering alienating, conservative and mercantilistic values. \* In what refers to rural society in particular, researchers — after more than a decade of efforts -- have essentially found that: (1) most mass media do not care to reach the rural masses as these are not a part of their market, (2) those few mass media messages which reach a minimal fraction of the rural population provide a content and use a code totally unrelated to the characteristics, needs, aspirations and possibilities of the peasantry, and (3) consequently, mass media have virtually no effects in the service of rural development, even when this is measured only in terms of adoption of agricultural innovations. \*\*

Much of this research is, at the same time, clear in asserting that, on the contrary, interpersonal communication remains fundamental in the rural societies of Latin America. However, its specific anatomy and physiology is grossly neglected by research in this region.

#### Mass Media's Questionable Role in Development

Even if the mass media were eventually to reach a significant proportion of the Latin American peasantry, furthermore carrying contents and

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\* Information on the subject is contained in a recent critical appraisal of the orientation and methodology of communication research in Latin America, by the present author (Beltrán, 12).

\*\* For a short summary of studies pertinent to points (1) and (2), see Beltrán (11). Rogers (56) has summarized research substantiating the conclusion in point (3) for various underdeveloped regions of the world.

codes less inappropriate for this audience, it would still remain to be seen whether in fact they would significantly help peasants attain development. First, responding to powerful minority interests, most of these media are at best indifferent and at worst antagonistic towards social transformation. Second, what media owners and operators seem to understand as development may not necessarily be similar to what government strategists and social critics take development to be or what peasants themselves may expect. Third, media cannot be themselves generate development, particularly in societies as those of Latin America in which structural arrangements and infrastructural derivations make development unattainable for most people almost regardless of whatever access they may gain to mass communication.

It was perhaps precisely these preoccupations what gave birth to private and non-profit efforts to communicate with the rural population, such as the "radiophonic schools" in Colombia. It is within the framework of these concerns that the present essay reviews this nation-wide system of development-oriented local groups.

#### Rural Development Communication in Colombia

Alongside Mexico and Brazil, Colombia is one of the region's most active and outstanding countries in communication for rural development. The Colombian Agricultural Institute (ICA) and the Colombian Institute for

Land Reform (INCORA) have an appreciable number of communication specialists at their headquarters and in regional extension offices. Many of ICA's county agents themselves are considerably involved in educational mass communication operations, particularly through radio. In addition, a number of private radio stations have agricultural programs. \* Moreover, ICA has formed a team of highly trained communication researchers which has contributed a considerable number of studies. \*\*

Many years before ICA and INCORA existed, Father Joaquín Salcedo, a young catholic priest in a remote Andean village, founded "Radio Sutatenza", which was to be the basis for Colombia's largest efforts to communicate with the peasantry for development purposes: the "Radiophonic Schools" of "Popular Cultural Action (ACPO)".

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\* Fierro and Alba (36) have documented these activities, identifying over 70 stable farm radio programs in the nation.

\*\* They have been summarized by Arevalo and Alba (7).

## THE ORGANIZATION OF ACPO \*

ACPO stands for Acción Cultural Popular (Popular Cultural Action), the official name of a Catholic-inspired formal organization which is private, autonomous and non-profit in that it doesn't charge its beneficiaries for its services. This organization, whose origin goes back to 1947, today constitutes a powerful and prestigious nation-wide system of multi-media education for rural development in Colombia. It's composed of a central office, three regional branches, two field institutes, and several thousand local "radiophonic schools" distributed over the country-side. These are the basic cells of the system.

ACPO is understood to be an "action program", a "development agency", and a "social movement".

### The Nature of "Radiophonic Schools"

A radiophonic school is a relatively stable small \*\* group of peasants (of either sex and varying ages) which holds sustained, periodic meetings in a given place (home, church or other) to listen sistematicly -- with the aid of a trained auxiliar -- to radio programs specially made for ruralities.

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\* The information summarized under this and the two subsequent headings on ACPO's operation and impact, was essentially obtained from ACPO (4), Bernal Alarcón (14), Musto (49) and Brumberg (16).

\*\* The average membership is eight persons, usually a family plus some neighbours or close friends.

These programs carry basic educational messages set at three different levels of organized learning, which are measured through final individual written examinations. Broadcasts are supplemented by leaflets, books, newspapers and visual aids, all especially made for the peasant audience, as well as -- occasionally -- by tapes, records or even personal correspondence.

#### The General Structure of "Popular Cultural Action"

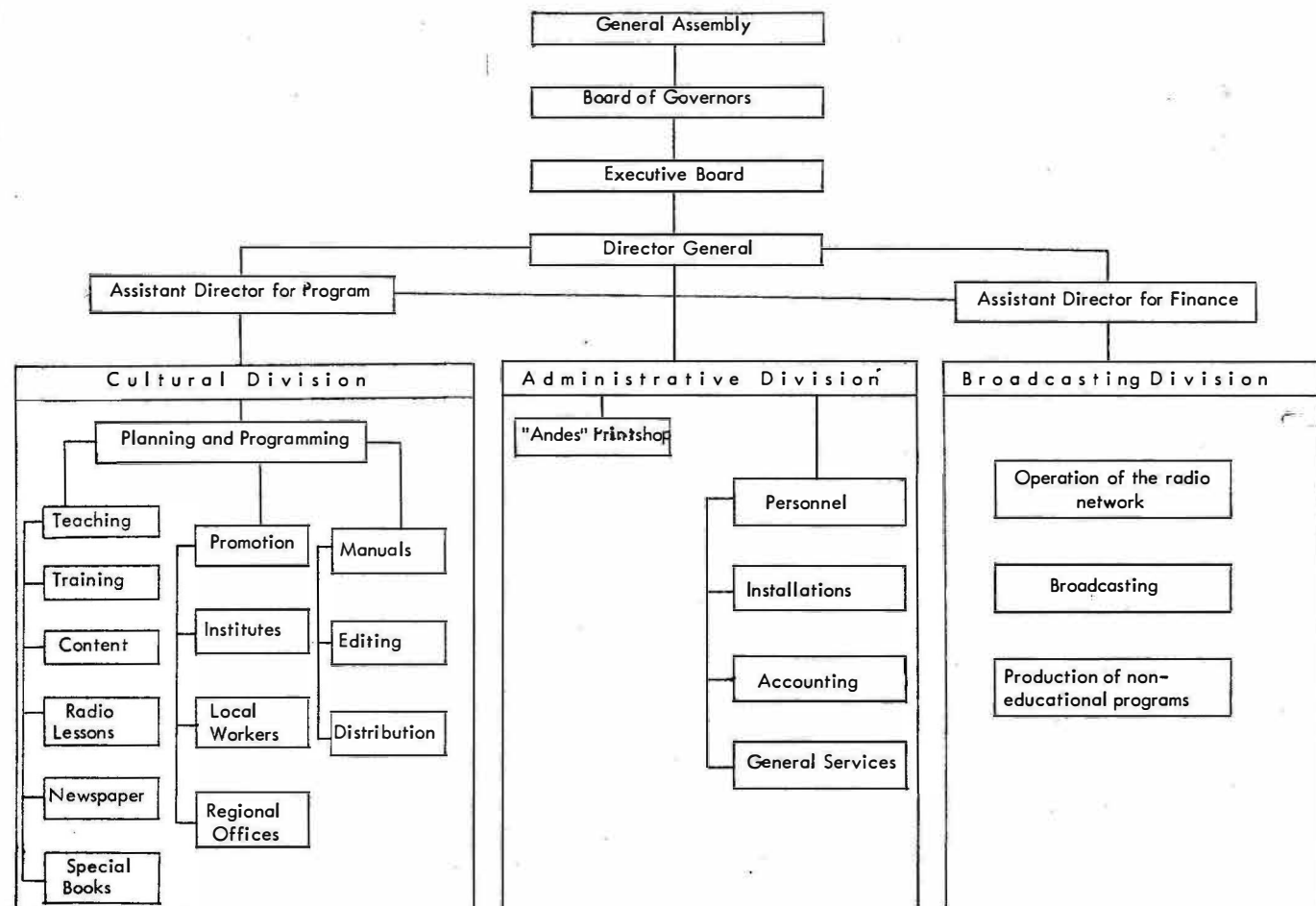
The system is presided by three bodies: the General Assembly, the Board of Governors and the Executive Board. Under these, the Director General, aided by Assistant Directors for Program and Finance, manages the operations of the three main Divisions: Cultural, Broadcasting, and Administrative. The first generates programs and carries out all educational activities. The second runs ACPO's national 11 station network \* and is responsible for non-educational programs. The third provides logistic back-up to the others and handles business, including the operation of a profit-making printshop, a record printer for music and radio advertising accounts. Three regional centers, in the cities of Cali, Medellín and Barranquilla, twenty sub-regional offices and three training institutes for peasant leadership in the provinces of Boyaca and Antioquia, constitute the main field units of the system (See simplified organigram attached).

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\* Named "Radio Sutatenza" after the Andean village in which the institution was born.

SIMPLIFIED HEADQUARTERS ORGANIGRAM OF CULTURAL POPULAR ACTION (ACPO)\*

\* (Adapted from Brumberg /16, p. 12a)



### Physical Facilities

ACPO has a building of its own in Bogota, which hosts all headquarters operations and part of the studio and transmission facilities, as well as other supplementary production activities. The rest of the broadcasting plants are located in the regions, adding up to a total output of about 650 KW. This makes the network the biggest in Colombia \*, covering not only the whole territory but also parts of other countries.

### Budget

The annual operative budget of ACPO in 1972 reached a figure equivalent to US\$ 4.3 million, of which only slightly above a quarter came from public subsidies, contracts and local and foreign donations. The rest, 74%, was self-provided by ACPO through office space rentals, newspaper sales, the printing of music records, radio advertising, printshop business and other income-generating operations, as well as long-term loans.

### Staff

There are 330 executive, professional, technical and clerical employees on the full-time staff of headquarters, the regional centers and offices and the field training institutes. Some 200 field operators receive a small

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\* The country has some 300 radio stations, most of which are affiliated to one of three strong commercial networks. None of the latter, however, can compete today with Sutatenza in transmission power and, thus, in population reached or territorial coverage.

stipend from ACPO and about 20,000 peasants serve as voluntary (unpaid) auxiliaries of the radiophonic schools.

The organization at the village level is characteristically presided by the parish priest, although ACPO has intensified its training efforts to expand lay leadership. A representative of all "schools" in a village assists the ACPO delegate and helps in coordinating the work of the auxiliaries in each of the "schools". Visiting regional supervisors complete the field level scheme.

#### The "School" Audience

By 1971-1972, there were slightly more than 35,000 of these "schools", officially recorded, operative in 1,300 villages throughout the country with a total of 140,000 regular students. \* ACPO addresses its efforts to the family as a whole with emphasis on the adult peasants. However, large numbers of children and adolescents are often present in the school memberships. "The typical student of the radiophonic schools is a small land-owner of the Andean regions, sufficiently poor and conservative so as to expect the overcoming of his marginality from the institutions of the Catholic Church, and yet sufficiently established and dynamic to be inclined towards developing

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\* Both figures have considerably fluctuated over the years. Beginning with one school and a mere handful of students, ACPO once reached a peak of 250,000. The number of schools appears more stable than the number of students, which has gone down appreciably in some years.



his own initiative in the expectation that he will attain concrete improvements in his living conditions through his own efforts" (Musto, 149, pp. 187-88).

## THE OPERATIONS OF ACPO

A key operational feature that needs to be clarified from the start is that ACPO can no longer be equated solely with its radiophonic schools. If it were -- with its present structure and budget, and its "student body" which constitutes a minimal fraction of the rural population -- it would probably be rated as an un-economic enterprise in terms of cost-benefit. ACPO continues to operate its radiophonic schools, the first of which was established over a quarter of a century ago. However, ACPO today is far more than these "schools". It truly is, as has been said already, a complex multi-media non-formal popular education system, each element of which reinforces the others. (See graph at end of section)

### The Multi-Media Approach

In the first place, ACPO consistently supplements its school-like radio programs with a number of written, visual and audio-visual aids for face-to-face communication. Secondly, it provides the students of its schools with additional, not purely didactic, reading materials so they can put their literacy training to practical use and thus consolidate and expand it. Thirdly, through radio itself and the other mass and interpersonal communication devices, it seeks to provide the peasantry with broad and varied informal education. Furthermore, it's increasingly reaching the urban

population in general and even particular audience segments in need of special education, such as long-term prison convicts.

### The Components of the Mix

The mixture of mass and interpersonal communication formats is made-up of the following components:

1. Radio programs (school and non-school)
2. Booklets
3. Books
4. Records
5. Magnetophonic tapes
6. Learning guides, manuals and bulletins
7. Personal correspondence
8. The weekly newspaper "El Campesino" (The Peasant)
9. Peasant leadership courses
10. Extension courses
11. Local community development actions
12. Campaigns.

The first seven elements are eminently addressed to specifically reinforcing the radiophonic school activities and, as such, are intended to reach an audience of modest size within a semi-formal educational approach. The non-school type radio programs and the weekly newspaper are the key

mass media components and, as such, are addressed to a much bigger and varied audience within a non-formal educational and cultural approach. The characteristically interpersonal communication elements are the local community development actions and the leadership and extension courses. The former is an informal educational instance and the latter formal, both being directly addressed, in principle, to the training of field cooperators for the institution. Finally, the campaigns involve a total planned conjugation of all the ACPO's communication resources in order to obtain from the peasantry, in a short time and within defined jurisdictions, concrete development actions.

### The Courses

Three courses are transmitted through the radiophonic schools programming: "basic", "progressive" and "supplementary". The first consists of 90 half and hour lessons transmitted six days a week in a six-month period to teach literacy and arithmetic. The second, of daily one hour programs, lasts two years and is transmitted at different times thrice a day, to provide "integral fundamental education" in five areas: health, reading and writing, mathematics, agriculture, and "espiritualidad" (ethical and religious principles).\* The third course, now being experimented, is a 3-year term designed to enable peasants to validate the fifth grade of the regular elementary

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\* At a lower level of importance, knowledge is imparted through this course on subjects such as history, civics, geography, community education, home economics and human relations.

schooling. The first and second courses lead to written individual tests and require group reception of the radio programs. The other course is usually listened to individually and leads to the option to take formal examinations in regular schools.

### The Group Auxiliaries

It is thus in the first courses particularly that the role of the school auxiliary is vital for the operation of the system. With training and orientation from ACPO, these voluntary assistants perform numerous key roles that help secure the proper operation of the schools. They are more coordinators and helpers than teachers and take care of equipment \*, materials, registration, attendance control, examinations and reports for their schools. But their most important role is expected to be in aiding the group in the proper assimilation of the lessons and in inspiring and guiding discussion in which the students should actively reflect on the radio messages.

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\* In the early days of the institution, receivers were provided free of charge to peasants provided reasonable assurance of their will to have a school. These were foreign-made special units set at a fixed frequency which permitted the exclusive reception of the ACPO stations and thus were sometimes reputed "undemocratic". Later, open frequency receivers were introduced and partially assembled in the country, for which the groups had to pay a small sum (US\$ 7.00). Some fixed frequency units are still used where technical conditions make open-frequency reception too difficult. Rumor has it that these units can be converted to the open type so as to allow reception of non-ACPO broadcasts. For, "who would want to be radio-educated all the time?"

### The Standard Broadcasts

ACPO's non-school radio programming is today so ample and varied that it compares easily with that of top commercial stations. In the daily 19 hours of transmission, almost every known radio format can be found on the ACPO stations which simultaneously transmit different programs for diverse audiences to suit a wide range of interests, tastes and schedules. Instructional radio time constitutes about a third of total time, broad educational programs take another third and the rest is dedicated to casual and entertainment programs that range anywhere from a network newscast to "soap-operas" and sports and music. Through its entire communication operation, ACPO attempts to maintain a high cultural tone and keep most programs at the level of interest and comprehension of peasants. \*

### A Newspaper for Peasants

The other major mass communication tool of ACPO is "El Campesino", a weekly newspaper prepared to reach the rural audience and to familiarize the urban one with the problems and aspirations of these. Now printed in standard size and in color, it sells 70,000 16-20 page copies per issue,

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\* The degree to which the latter intention is being fulfilled may not yet be sufficient according to Primrose (54), Alba (6), Brumberg (16) and Gutiérrez Sánchez (44) among others. A recent analysis of ACPO's "soap-operas" by Ramírez Pardo (55) suggests that they fail to be significantly different from the commercial "radionovelas" seen as fostering conservative, discriminatory, alienating and mercantile values in a "sugared-up" manner. The analyst attributes this deficiency to the influence of the sponsors on ACPO's programming.

constituting the largest circulating rural publication and one of the largest in the country in general for weeklies. A network of 1,200 local representatives secure proper national distribution, overcoming transportation and distance limitations. The paper has peasant-oriented news, education and entertainment sections and performs both rural journalism and house-organ activities. It has an instructional supplement to reinforce the third radio course and takes institutional and commercial advertising. It is understood that each copy of "El Campesino" is actually read by 6 to 8 persons. If this estimate is not faulty, then the readership of this paper expands this aspect of ACPO's reach ten times more than the 140,000 individuals of the radio-phonetic schools. This is a figure that hardly any other media come up with in Colombia.

#### Supplementary Reading Materials

Booklets (cartillas) are distributed free of charge to the radiophonic school families with a yearly average of 200,000 copies of a series supplementing the courses. Books in a 16 title "Peasant Library" sell, on the average, over 90,000 copies per year, with the 1970 figure reaching almost 700,000 units sold at about US\$ 0.10 per copy.

### The Training of Rural Development Leaders

The peasant leadership training courses are the central feature of ACPO's interpersonal communication endeavours. So far in the three provincial institutes more than 3,300 rural development leaders have been trained, with a yearly average approaching 700. The courses -- which involve from 4 to 15 months of theoretical and practical training -- are of two types. One is addressed to forming ACPO's regional supervisors who are to be organizers and main stimulators of the radiophonic schools. The other is for parish delegates who are trained to become local auxiliaries and to act as "opinion leaders" and "innovation promoters" once they return to their villages. Three audio-visual mobile units -- the "Acpomoviles" -- visit the peasant leaders periodically to give on-the-spot back-up, such as helping them to reach some 225,000 fellow peasants per annum with transparency projections posters and other aids. Finally, extension courses are now being held to specifically provide practical agricultural training to selected groups.

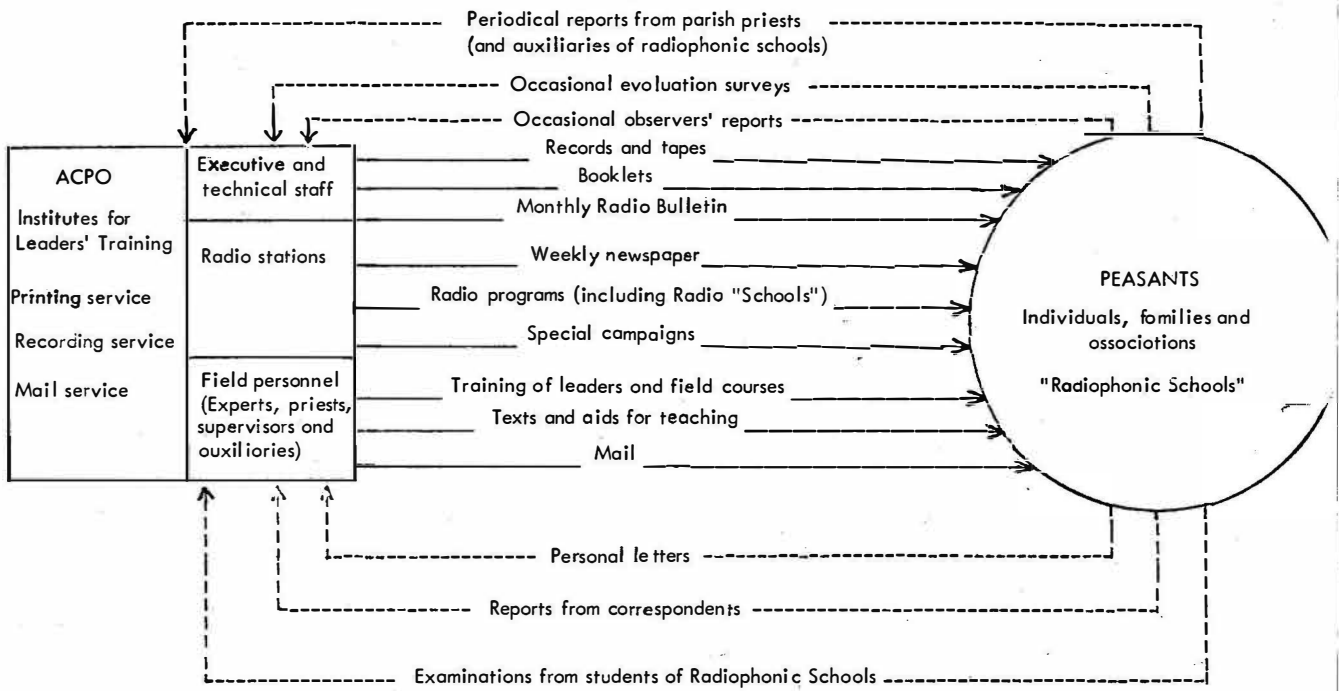
### Campaigns: The Culmination

The totality of ACPO's educational efforts are directed periodically in all-out campaigns designed to promote intensively the adoption of specific cultural innovations in areas such as soil conservation, nutrition, housing, improvement, planned parenthood, recreation and others.

This in summary, is what ACPO does in Colombia.



GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF THE COMBINED MEDIA APPROACH OF ACPO FOR PEASANT EDUCATION\*



\* Taken from Beliron /10a, p. 45

## THE IMPACT OF ACPO

A vast, competent and unusually dynamic organization such as ACPO is certainly not of little consequence in its environment. Both friends and foes acknowledge its success in terms of general impact for, indeed, its influence is strongly felt in Colombia and reaches far beyond its frontiers.

### The Influence at Home

Internally, ACPO is recognized -- even by some of its harshest critics -- as "... the most important institution in the field of popular education in Colombia..." Externally, it is identified as "... a model for the promotion of rural development in all Latin America". (Musto, /50, p. 19). Both statements are demonstrably correct.

It is clear that ACPO has had a direct influence on improving, expanding and up-dating rural education in the country, as well as in generating concrete development advances in the countryside. In addition, it has indirectly influenced the growth of Government rural development communication institutions, which have followed some of ACPO's initiatives and experiences. It may have even exerted some influence on private radio activities in relation to the rural population.

### The Repercussions Abroad

ACPO's influence outside Colombia has been verified in 17 countries of Latin America in which 25 radio education projects, with some adaptations, are directly patterned after the classical "Sutatenza model" (McAnany, /48 and O.S.A.L., /57). In fact, ACPO has had to establish a semi-autonomous branch for services to these countries: O.S.A.L. Moreover, it has inspired the establishment of the Latin American Association of Radiophonic Schools, now headquartered in Argentina.

### Formal Evaluations of ACPO's Effectiveness

Acknowledging impact in general, however, is far easier than gauging specific effectiveness. This has been attempted by several researchers with different foci of interests, diverse methodologies and varying degrees of scope and depth. \* It's beyond the limits of this paper to review these evaluative studies but the results of the principal researches, particularly the coincident ones, will be mentioned. \*\*

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\* The first appraisal was done about a decade after the birth of the radiophonic schools; it was entrusted to Martin Ferrer (47) by Unesco. The first Colombian assessment was that of Camilo Torres and Bertha Corredor (62). Sister Vicent Primrose (54) carried out the first systematic study, closely followed by Hernando Bernal Alarcón (13), who is now ACPO's Director of Planning and top communication staff member. The most critical, comprehensive and penetrant study was performed by a group of German researchers lead by Stefan Musto (49). The latest general inventory of ACPO was contributed by Stephan Brumberg (16).

\*\* Detailed summary reviews of these evaluations are available in Bernal Alarcón (14), ACPO (3), ACPO (4), and Brumberg (16).

In general, all evaluations provide some evidences of ACPO's effectiveness in terms of inducing attitudes and behaviors leading to development in its direct audience, the students of the radiophonic schools. As a rule, the studies found that these students compare favorably with non-students in terms of such variables as inclination towards modernity, innovativeness, social and economic integration and even income. However, according to the evaluation done by Musto (49), these characteristics cannot be attributed exclusively to ACPO's influence. Land ownership patterns and variations in the level of development of the country's regions contribute to the superiority of the ACPO-influenced peasants.

Several other specific findings were produced by the evaluation sponsored by the Development Institute of Germany. Particularly significant was the indication that ACPO's literacy training ability may actually not be very high these days. While acknowledging ACPO's achievements in fostering individual improvement and in the amelioration of rural life, Musto concludes that ACPO has not helped change the structure of Colombian rural society. This contention shall be discussed in detail in the last section of this paper.

The latest evaluative study of ACPO \* was done by the International

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\* Actually, the three most recent studies in regard to ACPO and its radio schools are those of Herzog, Jr. and Braun (45), Braun (15), ACPO (5), and Ramirez Pardo (55). They are not, however, general evaluations of ACPO. They are valuable studies of particular aspects of the system, except for that compiled for ACPO by Eduardo Nieto Moyano (5), its "Data Bank" officer, which is broad and suggestive.

Council for Educational Development. The chief researcher confirmed a number of positive features of the institutions and noted that its activity is addressed more to motivation and attitude-formation than to knowledge-acquisition. He concluded: "ACPO has shown that mass media can be effectively utilized to reach a considerable portion of the rural population". And he added that the institution has also made evident that villagers can be mobilized to devote time and effort to a voluntary program of mass education (Brumberg, 16, pp. 92-96).

#### Feedback Opportunities

As has been suggested in the section describing ACPO's functioning, the system counts on numerous feedback devices. Most noticeable are the 60,000 letters from peasants belonging to the radiophonic schools or not received annually and answered individually. The schools themselves also produce feedback information via the periodical reports of the auxiliaries and the final examinations of the students. Reports by correspondence of the weekly regional supervisors, parish priests, and the sales section of the business office also contribute to an idea of the audience response. However, the information available from these sources is not presently systematized by ACPO so as to permit valid generalizations.

### The Lack of a Research Component

In recent years, ACPO's Planning Department has instigated a few internal studies of some aspects of the system's activity \* and has organized a "Data Bank". This, however, is not the equivalent of having a formal and stable research program addressed to conducting a constant, vigorous and thorough scientific observation. In fact, Brumberg (16) has noted, ACPO does not yet have its own professional research unit. If and when this occurs optimal utilization of the available feedback information should be possible. \*

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\* See, for instance, the ACPO audience studies of Gómez et al (52) and Gómez and Gutiérrez Pinto (53), as well as the evaluation of a regional operation of ACPO by Niño (51).

\*\* Colombian Community Boards (Juntas de Acción Comunal) are the other large and important system of local groups for development. They are supported but not directly financed by the central and provincial governments. Abbott (1) studied some problem solving communication patterns in these groups with an emphasis on feedback conditions. ACPO itself often cooperates in the establishment and activity of the Juntas. Dorner, Thiesenhausen and Brown (26), have discussed the importance of peasant feedback for rural development in Latin America.

## THE PHILOSOPHY, STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF ACPO

ACPO regards itself as a "development agency" but not in terms of doing things for or with people and, even less, in the sense of giving things to people. Its conception of development departs from condemning both marxist and capitalist development models for having lost sight of the fundamental object of development: man himself. Notes ACPO's Bernal Alarcón (14, p. 12) on the subject:

The progress of a country or nation is sought principally in its purely material aspects, and in many cases the humanistic aspect are forgotten. Man, his dignity and values, are sacrificed in order to attain technical advancement. What is simply a means becomes an end... Thus the need emerges to put the accent on man as the object and goal of the development programs and not only as an instrument of these.

### ACPO's "Integral Development" Concept

ACPO believes in what it calls "integral development" understood as an effort to attain material goals of comfort and well being but necessarily on the basis of the development of man himself as a person capable of acting and progressing in all spheres of life. Consequently, the paramount, general and long-term goals of the institution is to help develop "... a new type of Latin American man, capable

of making rational decisions based on a Christian ideology\* of contributing to the establishment of a different social order based on the idea of human dignity". (Musto, /49, p. 15)

Implicit in this goal is the notion that developed individuals and societies are not just those who have more but who also are more in the sense of being better, as has been pointed out by an ACPO officer. (Musto, /49, p. 132)

Evidently, the goal stems from the conviction that "... the biggest problem of underdevelopment consists not in the lack of things but in the inability of persons and of large masses to overcome their backward conditions and to win over the obstacles derived from their very inability" (Musto, /49, p. 15). The concomitant premise of ACPO is that the great problems regarding levels of living are derived chiefly from the attitude and the schemes of thought held by people, which render them unable to achieve development. In turn, behind these premises, is the primary assumption that "... at the base of the problem of underdevelopment of the Latin American campesinos is their ignorance; their traditional attitude of passivity, fatalism and dependency; and a lack of solidarity among themselves to work toward a betterment of the situation". (McAnany, /48, p. 13)

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\* The theological basis of ACPO's development philosophy have been briefly discussed by Houtart and Perez (46).



In summary, ACPO holds the view that "... the problem of under-development lies not in things but in the mind of man himself." (ACPO, /4, p. 66)

#### The Importance of Structural Change

Thus, for ACPO, development begins in people's minds. However, the institution acknowledges the determinant influence of the extant social arrangements on the behavior of individuals. It asserts that its development doctrine is oriented towards "... a change of the social structures which impede the healthy unwinding of human potentiality, due both to the prevalence of an unequal distribution of the material elements conditioning this development and to the lack, in many members of society, of a consciousness and motivation apt to operate as training forces for development". (Bernal Alarcón, /14, p. 12)

#### Integrated, Enriched and Protagonist Man

Under these perspectives, "integral development" exists only where: (a) there is an enrichment of the "ideological values" and the "cultural endowment" of the group, (b) this is linked to an integration of the members of the overall society and expanded by opportunities of self-realization for each and every member of the social groupings, and (c) the development agent is man himself as object, protagonist and target of all social processes (Bernal Alarcón, /14).

### The Pre-Requisite: Casting a New Personality

Achieving this kind of development, ACPO claims, requires that man be enabled through training to secure social integration and cultural enrichment and to be the actor in overcoming underdevelopment. Hence, education to build in man a new personality becomes the pre-requisite for development since, once this newly educated person truly and fully incorporates himself in society, changing the unjust structures of it becomes a viable enterprise (Musto, /49, p. 128).

### The Specific Objectives of ACPO

Derived from its chief aim of "building the new man", ACPO (2, pp.15-20) has set the following specific objectives:

1. Motivation of the peasants for development so that they will have the drive to seek solutions for their problems.
2. Human promotion or education of the whole man in physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual terms for both an individual creative capacity and the performance of social roles.
3. Integration of peasants into the broader society in terms of their active participation in tasks of collective interest, as well as in those of reducing social distances and securing fair access of all persons to the opportunities and services provided by society.

4. Productivity in terms of promoting adoption of modern agricultural technologies to increase production, of encouraging surplus exports, capital formation through savings, investments and proper use of credit, and of fostering re-valoration of labor as a creative endeavour.

5. Organization and development of the community or the promotion of solidarity and formation of associations expressed in voluntary and cooperative public works as well as in the establishment of a cultural, economic and political nature.

6. Spiritual advancement of peasants in the sense of their learning that their ability to dominate nature comes from God, that the Church is not only made up of priests but also of laymen who thus should seek to serve their fellowmen, and that man should be able to critically analyze the possibilities and limitations represented by the social structure in relation to human growth and national development.

ACPO's Strategy: "Integral Fundamental Education"

To implement its development philosophy ACPO designed a general strategy addressed to providing the peasants with a kind of basic education compatible with this vision of the "new man". It defines it, in summary, as follows:

Integral Fundamental Education is to achieve the integration by persons of the fundamentals of the processes in which they are involved so that these make sense to them and so that they incorporate to them their own creativity and develop through their own activity, potentiating their abilities and possibilities (ACPO, /14, p. 67).

This strategy refers to "education" as a participatory process, not as a vertical and static activity. By "fundamental" an education different from the traditional academic and technical formats, in the sense of providing fundamentals for a free and conscious promotion of development, is understood. "Integral" means that it cohesively covers all aspects of human needs (biological, spiritual and socio-economic), concerning itself harmoniously with the whole range of human problems, from nutrition, health preservation and ecological defense, to reproductive behavior, individual dignity and political freedom.

This involves giving people at least minimum training in some notions indispensable for the realization of their individual potentialities. They are the notion of alphabet (reading and writing), number (calculation and prevision), health (in terms of prevention and of care), work and economy (mostly in terms of agriculture), and spiritual advancement as explained in the specific objectives of ACPO. The unifying thread of all these notions according to Bernal Alarcon (14, p. 22) is the concept that "... man has a social function which he must fulfill under each and every circumstance of his existence".

### ACPO's Operational Tactics

In order to put to practice its development model, ACPO has recourse to several operational tactics, according to Musto (49, pp. 129–130). One is scaling its educational action in three stages: (a) inducing the marginal peasants to become aware of the need for modernization, (b) promoting improvement of living conditions among these, and (c) inducing them to strive for integration into the larger society and economy. Another tactic is to concentrate the institution's action precisely on those sectors of the rural population so marginal and isolated that not even a first significant impulse towards development has taken place among them and in which, consequently, impressive, direct and rapid results cannot be expected by ACPO. A third tactic is to give priority to adults over adolescents and children as the latter should actually be trained in regular schools and the former can be more fruitfully and readily involved in the pressing tasks of achieving development (Bernal Alarcon, /14, p. 19).

## SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT IN COLOMBIA

ACPO's organization and operations have been described, underlining their magnitude and quality. ACPO's impact has been shown to be such that made it the country's most important non-formal education agency and Latin America's largest communication institution serving rural development activities. In addition, the ideology behind ACPO was summarily presented. Lastly, then, an appraisal ought to be presented in terms of the critiques which have so far been formulated. Before doing that, however, it is indispensable to refer to the nature of Colombia's social structure with emphasis on the rural sub-system of it. It is equally necessary to refer to the general development models apparently prevailing in the country. Placing ACPO within this overall societal framework should clearly facilitate the comprehension of the institution's position and of the assessments of it.

### The Broad Social System

In many respects, Colombia can be regarded as a country typical to the region. The essential feature of the general social organization is an acute concentration of power in the hands of minorities. Numerous studies have detected rigid patterns of social stratification which keep the majority of the population under conditions incompatible with social justice. The peasant population lies at the very bottom of the social pyramid.

### The Plight of the Peasantry

Recent ACPO documentation itself, based upon official data, \* allows to present here a tight synthesis of the situation of underdevelopment in which the country's rural population has to live:

#### Population

The country's total population is now above 23 million people spread in a territory of about 440.000 square miles. Ten million of this people are ruralities, making 43% of the total, who live in groupings of under 2.000 inhabitants. Of the country's economically active population, slightly above 48% is in agriculture. The population as a whole grows at a rate of 3.2 per cent but the rural population increases at a rate of 3.6 per cent.

#### Land Distribution

The distribution of rural property, as per data published by the Government in 1972 from the agricultural census taken in 1971, gives a clear picture of the acute contrast still prevailing in spite of land reform efforts. There are in Colombia some 700.000 holdings of less than 5 hectares and some 160.000 between 5 and 10 hectares, constituting together a 7% of the total arable lands of the country and 73% approximately of all Colombian agricultural properties. On the other hand, holdings of 500 hectares to 1000 hectares are roughly 4.300 in number (.4%) and those of more than 1.000

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\* ACPO (4), DANE (19) and Musto (49).

hectares represent a bit less than 3.500 exploitations (.3%), with a total area for these two categories of some 12.650.000 hectares or 40% of the agricultural lands. Thus, in summary, "... 70% of land owners have at their disposal only 7% of the arable lands and, consequently, the same percent of access to credit distribution and modern production facilities" (ACPO, /4, p. 58).

#### Economy

Distribution of the GNP as per productive sectors gives to agriculture a participation of approximately 30%. The monthly family income distribution in the rural sector shows the unequal pattern followed, which only allows for saving, investment and production increase in some sectors of the population. According to a National Households Survey the economically active population receives a roughly average of \$ 2.500 (US\$ 100) per month and 98.4 % of the agricultural labourers have no access to that minimum salary. Average monthly wages for the rural sector are around \$ 586.00 (US\$ 23.00) as compared with \$ 1.356 (US\$ 54.00) for the urban sector.

#### Education

The total percentage of illiteracy in the country is 38%, it being 50% in the rural areas. Consequently, rural illiterates represent 5 million of the population of the agricultural sector -- of this figure approximately 4.25 million are adults. The schooling average rate for the whole country



is only 2.39 years. There is an additional factor of inequality between urban and rural population, which is demonstrated by the figures available referring to use of printed material (booklets, periodicals and magazines). We find that city inhabitants expend nearly 0.58% of their salary in these articles, while ruralities expend only 0.10% of their monthly income.

#### Housing

Housing conditions show a similar pattern, in a qualitative as well as in a quantitative sense: 80% of rural dwellings are of a poor and low quality, nearly a hundred percent of them having no sanitary facilities and with an average of 6.7 persons sharing one room. Four thirds of the rural families do not have running water nor electricity. This has been one of the major concerns of the governments during the last decade.

#### Health and Nutrition

Health and nutrition conditions constitute a serious problem in Colombia's rural sector, due to acute deficiencies in medical care and in food consumption. In the countryside the national average is one doctor per each 5.000 inhabitants and 1.5 hospital beds per 1.000 inhabitants. The same figures for the urban population are one doctor per each 2.500 persons and 2.5 hospital beds per 1.000 inhabitants. Rural population suffers from severe malnutrition, with an unbalanced diet, especially lacking in proteins, due both to ignorance and poverty. Consequently, the country's mortality rate continues being one of the highest of the region.

## The Monopoly of Decision-Making Power

The specific nature of Colombia's peasant society and the concrete characteristics of the exploitation it suffers have been documented in detail by many national and foreign researchers. Among the former, the work of sociologist Orlando Fals Borda is outstanding\* and so is among the latter that of U.S. sociologist T. Lynn Smith. Analyzing the sharply differentiated two-class social system of the country, Smith (58, p. 159) concluded:

At the top was a small, wealthy, highly intelligent, landowning, white, aristocratic elite for whom nothing in this world was considered too good; and far below in the social scale was the mass of the population, humble, poverty-stricken, disease-ridden uneducated, colored or mixed-blood campesinos.\*\*

Under such structural circumstances, decision-making on matters of public interest, according to Dix (25), is the privilege of closely inter-related elite groups. Fluharty (3) noted that these groups by themselves set policies in all areas of the nation's life.

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\* See, inter alia, the following studies: Fals Borda (28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34)

\*\* See also Smith (59, 60)

### The Struggle for Structural Change

However, as in most of the Latin American countries, such a situation is far from static. For more than fifty years, the region has witnessed the presence of diverse change-oriented political formations, whose pressure has clearly been felt since about 1940 and became particularly strong in the 50's and 60's. As a rule, these formations have ranged from liberal progressive, nationalist, social-democratic and christian-democrat parties with large popular following to minority radical left wing parties and isolated insurgent urban and rural guerrillas.\*

### The Defeat of the Land Reform Endeavour

A central aim of most of these movements has been land reform to break down the inordinate power of the large landowners and alter the quasi-feudal land distribution patterns in favor of the peasantry. A struggle to establish nation-wide reivindicatory peasant organizations often accompanied this. Yet, after some fifteen years of government-supported efforts in these directions in Colombia, landownership shows

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\* Colombia in those years suffered a particularly violent period of sustained and generalized violence, which has been studied by analysts such as Fals Borda (33) and Torres (63).

very little modification and the peasant organization has not yet gained significant access to political decision-making. Eric Abbot (1, pp. 14-15), a U.S. researcher who studied this process in Colombia, concluded that: "Despite the fact that there are two bitterly opposed political parties, both parties form a part of the elite structure of the country and thus far have effectively prevented formation of peasant power groups ... Such groups exist, but have not yet worked themselves into positions of influence."

#### The Development Models Prevailing in Colombia

Again, as is the case of most Latin American countries, Colombia's development efforts are presided by models originally conceived by, and for, highly industrialized nations, such as the United States of America. In contrast with Colombia, the proportion of people in those countries devoted to agriculture is minimal and structural distances between urban and rural society tend to be insignificant. Yet, in general, their models are transferred virtually without any adaptation to Latin America.

Development is understood by those models as essentially a process of economic growth leading to material advancements which, in turn, generate well being. This, should eventually lead countries to political democracy, cultural freedom and even social justice. Under this

philosophy, the central goals of development efforts are the increased and improved production of goods and services and the expanded distribution and consumption of those. Modern production technologies, entrepreneurship and continuously increasing rates of savings and investments are considered key tools to reach those objectives.

#### The Failure of Development Efforts

These models have been in use in the region for almost a quarter of a century. How well have they fared in inspiring development? Recently gathered in Quito by the United Nations in an evaluative exercise, Latin American development strategists provided the following answer:

Growth recorded in the economic variables often did not result in qualitative changes of equivalent importance in human well being and social justice. This is demonstrated by the persistence of problems as grave as mass poverty; concentrated urban growth; environmental deterioration; inability of the productive system to provide employment to the growing labor forces; and lack of economic and social participation of broad strata of the population (CEPAL, /21)

Actually, rather than growth, what has happened at least in the agricultural sector of Latin America is decline. Comparing the region's productivity in 1938-1939 with that for the period 1963-64, for instance, FAO (1965) found that this had fallen 11 percent per capita in that quarter of a century, while the world average rose 11 percent. Today's rate of food production is so low in comparison with the rate of

population growth that Latin Americans can no longer be sure that famine threatens only the countries of Asia.

The Reason for Failure: A Resilient Elite

One fundamental explanation for this failure -- recorded under the "Alliance for Progress" and during the very "First Decade of Development" -- is that the imported models hardly have a chance to work in the Latin American countries unless substantial structural changes are swiftly effected in their societies. This pre-requisite was publicly acknowledged in the 1961 Punta del Este Meeting of the American States, during which formal commitments were made to, for instance, "transforming the unjust system of tenure", "substituting a just system of property for the rule of the latifundio!" \* Seven years later, with little land if any redistributed (see official figures in Gimenez Landinez,(41), an Inter-American presidential meeting held in Punta del Este, Uruguay, did not mention land reform as a precondition

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\* Official information compiled up to a year before the meeting showed that, out of 140 million rural inhabitants, 100.000 owned 65% of all arable land (Chonchol, /18). According to United Nations (ECLA-FAO) experts, over two thirds of the rural population of Latinoamerica -- 70 million people -- has an annual average income of less than US\$ 100 per inhabitant (Barraclough and Schatan, /9)

to attain development. It referred only to "the modernization of rural life" and to "colonization" (Tarso, /61). Since then, with rare exceptions, things returned to their traditional situation: a slightly challenged status quo.

#### "Modernization" and "Green Revolution"

The ensuing drive for "modernization" appears to be an attempt to "integrate" the "tradition-inclined" segment of the population with the prevalent unjust social order, mostly by adopting sophisticated technologies and acquiring the habits of a "consumer society". But "... in a society like Latin America's with wide sectors of the population cut-off from decision-making and the money economy, a mass-production, mass-consumption advanced economy cannot be developed" (Tarso, /61, p. 125).

This has been particularly evident in the agricultural sector where, at the outset of the present decade, the "Green Revolution" was born in Mexico and applied in countries such as Colombia to squelch further concerns with the need for land reform. It was not that the "miracle" wheat, corn and rice seeds were not good for these lands. It was, simply, that the land, know-how, credit and marketing opportunities required for profiting from prodigious innovations were almost

exclusively in the hands of the minority of the farmers. This has been acknowledged by Wellhausen (64), one of the architects of the "Green Revolution". Thus, as concluded an international expert in rural development, the prospect is that the new technology may only make the rich richer and the poor even poorer, generating perhaps a "highly explosive" situation (Wharton, /65, pp. 467-468).

These realities are now perceived in Colombia. Recent Government planning documents assert: "The aspect which most influences the definition of an agrarian policy is precisely the conception that one has about development and its relationship with social justice. Those who believe that what matters is only economic growth will necessarily oppose all such regulations seeking to change the structure of land tenure given that for them, agrarian policy is confused with agricultural production policy" (OPSA, /20). However, the distance between perception of the problem and remedial action is unlikely to be short.

It is only within the determinant context of total society that the role of communication in social change can be studied realistically. Therefore, it is only in the light of essential information as that presented here about Colombia's social structure and development scheme that experiences such as the one of ACPO's Radiophonic Schools can be properly appraised.



## ACPO AND STRUCTURAL CHANGE IN COLOMBIA

This essay first did a rapid overview of Colombia's rural development communication in the general context of communication and development in Latin America. Then it described in some detail the organization, operations and impact of Colombia's "Popular Cultural Action" (ACPO), the country's most important agency for the promotion of rural development. Subsequently, the ideology behind ACPO's activity in terms of its professed development philosophy, strategy and tactics was presented. Then, in order to view the institution within its broader societal context, the paper delivered summarized data and critical appraisals of Colombia's overall social structure, giving emphasis to the rural subsystem. In the light of this information it is not pertinent and possible to try to find out whether ACPO contributes or not to changing the structure of the society in which it has been so outstandingly operating for more than a quarter of a century.

### The Structural Perspective of Development

For purposes of the discussion, structural change will be understood as the deep and accelerated modification of the prevailing social arrangements. This modification is seen as following a direction from the domination of

the economic, political and cultural systems by privileged minorities to a just and democratic re-distribution of power among the deprived majorities.

This substantial and generalized transformation of the social order -- the breaking-up of the existing oligarchic and hegemonic patterns of social relationships, in search of social justice -- is deemed the fundamental requirement to attain genuine national development.

In the rural domain, structural change means, essentially and specifically, the termination of the undue concentration in land ownership, farm income, technological inputs, and credit and marketing facilities. Likewise, it is understood that true rural development cannot occur unless structural change has occurred.

At least at the level of formal discourse, this structural perspective of development has somehow permeated the Government philosophy of many Latin American countries since 1961. As has been shown in the section of this paper on ACPO's philosophy, they share this perspective but with two apparent reservations: First, is structural change a pre-requisite or a consequence? Second, does its attainment include violence?

#### ACPO as Non-Contributor to Structural Change

Both in and outside Colombia, in different circles and for quite some time, ACPO has been at times perceived as, in general, not contributing

to structural change in this country\*. However, research attempting to substantiate this impression has been available only since 1971. In that year, ACPO was finally able to obtain, translate and publish the report of a study which had been carried on in 1968-69 -- with ACPO's acceptance and cooperation -- by researchers from the German Institute of Development under the direction of Stefan Musto (49).

In its pertinent parts\*\*, this report concludes that ACPO has not achieved change in the prevailing social and economic structures.

In support of this assertion, the researchers provide some empirical evidence that ACPO's radiophonic students are, as a rule, more conservative than peasants not under the influence of ACPO\*\*\*. This was measured in

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\* This, according to Musto (49, p. 50), has been the perception of progressive forces in the country. On the other hand, the same analyst notes, conservative groups fear that ACPO may generate disconformity with the prevailing structure. He adds that commercial mass media see ACPO as a competitor, enjoying State subsidies while the Catholic hierarchy feels that ACPO may be going too far in introducing changes in the economic situation.

\*\* The German research project was not exclusively or even specially designed to tap this question. It was an overall evaluative inquiry which winded-up, in part but quite noticeably, in questioning ACPO's orientation and ability to help generate socio-structural change.

\*\*\* Is this so because parish priests prefer as students those peasants more conservative than the rest? Or is it that the radio school messages strengthen the conformism of traditional persons? These are questions research has yet to document.

terms of the judgements of ACPO students on outstanding national and Latin American personalities identified with land reform or with radical social transformation. Their judgements were found more conservative than those of two control groups. The other measure was obtained by means of a ten-question survey concerning attitudes in relation to changes in the prevailing social and economic structures. The application of this to ACPO students, radio listeners in general, and "the rest", suggested that " ... students of the radiophonic schools are not more radical in their political attitudes, but tend to be more conservative than the other subjects." (Musto, /49, p. 150). The suggestion was not a firm one as the differences among the three groups were minor. However, more recent research by ACPO itself collected sufficient evidence to assert that the number of radiophonic schools and the number of students in them are higher in communities where " ... forms of political and social participation and conception are traditional and non-radicalized..." (ACPO, /5, pp. 205, 207)\*

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\* In contrast with political conservatism, the German study found that correlations among four variables (modernity, innovation, integration, and income) represent a test of ACPO's hypothesis that " ... those, who because of the influence of the radio schools and campaigns acquire basic knowledge, change their traditional attitude towards progress and adopt innovations for the improvement of their living conditions, increase their chance of becoming more integrated into the economic and social life of the country and of attaining a higher income." Yet the study could not find evidence that this had a multiplicative effect in the macro-economic sphere and in the broader rural social context (ACPO, /3, pp. 41, 58).

### ACPO as a Non-Revolutionary Institution

Observations of this kind, apparently induced the German researchers to venture into recording individual testimonies for the most part anonymous and to making judgments such as the following: "ACPO does not produce radical political attitudes but fulfills a rather conciliatory function ... The rural population, on its side, does not see in ACPO any revolutionary force, nor does it expect from it radical changes ... Nobody needs to fear that ACPO may provoke a revolution. On the contrary, it produces frustrations which corroborate the peasant in his passivity." (Musto, /49, pp. 147, 150).

### The Explanations of ACPO

These judgments, for which specific, direct and systematic evidence is not apparent in the report, upset the ACPO executives. They reacted to the accusation in the same publication in which the Musto report was included. They admitted that they were certainly not favoring social revolution in the sense of violent, class-confronting and destructive political upheaval. They regarded as unfair that their institution be condemned for having failed to do something which it had never intended to do given that for them it would be futile to "... try to prove that ACPO is a revolutionary entity or agency, understanding it in the marxist sense of the term." (Musto, /49, p. 20). Responding to questions in an interview with the German researchers themselves, the director general of ACPO, Monseñor Joaquin

Salcedo, summarized the institution's position on the matter as follows:

We create the basis for an explosion. A radical change is not possible without the people raising to work for development. We will reach this radical change by means of the education of the leaders. No doubt ACPO does not foster revolution but it doesn't fear it either. ACPO fears that revolution which is the improvised product of the desk... Authentic revolution has its roots in the people themselves. This authentic revolution, however, requires a period of preparation which consists in building 'man' as a conscious subject of change. (Musto, 49, p. 30).

#### Divergence in Sequence, Method and Tempo

Apparently, then, it is not that ACPO refuses to accept the notion of structural change as a component of development; in fact, it includes it in its goals. But, in addition to rejecting violent struggle as a means for social transformation, ACPO holds fast to its view that individual change comes first and, in due time, should lead to social change. Changing the person is the pre-requisite and changing society will be the long-term consequence of the former. The tool for this is "fundamental integral education", not subversion.

Polemics aside, the German researchers themselves acknowledge ACPO's views in this regard. Musto (49, p. 52) notes: "Above all, ACPO attempts to change the attitudes of the human person ... change of external structures must be the results of the conscious efforts of individuals trained and motivated to achieve this end." He adds: "Undoubtedly more than mere

progress is aspired. ACPO seeks to create a new type of 'Latin American man' ... The ultimate objective is a fundamental reform of the extant social and power structures ..." (Musto, /49, pp. 52-53).

#### The Influence of Structural Variables

If, instead of suspecting the validity and sincerity of institutional statements, the German researchers would have analyzed more closely other data in their own study, they might have found stronger arguments to substantiate their viewpoints. For example, they found clear evidence that the advantages of ACPO-influenced peasants over other (in terms of innovativeness, social integration and income) could not be attributed exclusively to this influence. Being an owner of land counted much\* and the level of development of the region in which the person lived also proved determinant. Could these not be regarded as clear indications of the importance of structural variables? Do they not suggest that communication -- no matter how exceptionally well organized -- may not by itself generate

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\* This finding confirmed previous research, such as that of Bernal Alarcon (13), which had shown that land-owners are more receptive to ACPO's communications than those who own no land. In fact, Musto (49) found that the typical ACPO "client" is the small land-owner of the Colombian Andean region. Given the fact that so very many peasants in this country own no land, the finding has import connotations for ACPO.

development? \* Shouldn't then the research question have been: Which, if any, of ACPO's normal present actions can contribute to generating a fast and wide-spread modification of the structural situation, which communication can then capitalize in favor of many more peasants than those directly connected with the institution's schools?

That, however, would have required from researchers an explicit rather than implicit definition of structural change. If they had chosen one such as that briefly mentioned at the beginning of this section, then they could have more convincingly detected whether or not ACPO was working for rural structural change. That is, they would have been able to find out, concretely and empirically, whether such a powerful communication system was aiding or hindering land reform\*\*. They could have also identified ACPO's role in the democratization of farm credit, the depuration of intermediaries from marketing and the decentralization of inputs and income monopolized by a few large land-owners. Concomitantly, the researchers would have been able to find out whether ACPO was ignoring, supporting or fighting the independent national peasant organization movement which, between 1963 and 1973, attained a militant public influence in favor of restructuring Colombia's rural society.

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\* For a research-backed discussion of this concept, see Felstehausen (35). On the decisive influence of structural variables in development in rural Latin America, see Grunig (42, 43), Esman (27) and Diaz Bordenave (24)

\*\* By 1961, when the government established the National Land Reform Institute (INCORA), ACPO was already 14 years old and quite influential.



### Politics, Peasant Organization and ACPO

ACPO feels it is outside its jurisdiction to promote peasant organizations with reivindicatory purposes. "We leave politics to the parties", says Monseñor Salcedo (Musto, /49, p. 129).<sup>\*</sup> Interestingly some recent ACPO research indicates that this institution's influence decreases as broad peasant organization increases (ACPO, /5, pp. 206-207, 212). This may be seen as supporting the perception of some researchers that:

... the disavowal of many radio schools to engage in mobilization of rural people toward community action because it is political means that radio school students must seek to work for change outside the radio school structure (McAnany, /48, p. 16)

In principle, then, the situation would appear to be one where, while there is evidence that ACPO does not necessarily reject the notion of structural change, there is no evidence that it may actually be contributing to such process in the sense of using its communication power to help induce a major societal reorganization. Musto (49, pp. 51, 132-133) attributes this to the consonance between ACPO and the Government in

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\* Musto (49, pp. 129 and 132) argues that it appears however doubtful that "an organization which aims at mobilizing the masses could remain totally apart from the political struggle". He seems to imply that ACPO may actually share somewhat the politics of the country's traditional power system which believes in modernizing society without having to make major changes in the structure of it.

development objectives couched essentially in terms of raising agricultural productivity, through technological modernization, and fostering the integration of peasants into the overall economy of the country. As has been stressed in a previous section of this paper, such objectives are seen today by many analysts as inadequate to generate a kind of development compatible with social justice and political democratization.

#### Is ACPO's Doctrine Obsolete?\*

Those objectives may not be incompatible, however, with ACPO's ideology which: (a) puts the blame of backwardness on the individual's personality as if it were independent from the culture imposed by society, (b) identifies the locus of underdevelopment in the person's mind, (c) consequently, takes the transformation of individual mentality as the point of departure for development, (d) emphasizes, the growth of individuals and small groups (through motivational, cultural, productivity and socially integrative training) over broader collective advancements, and (e) expects overall social transformation to eventually occur as a product of the long-term aggregation of individual **progress**.

A researcher who studied the radiophonic schools of Honduras, patterned in general after the ACPO model, questions the latter as follows:

The limitation of the radio schools seems to stem in great part from the emphasis on voluntarism, the attitude that if the individual tries to change himself and his environment, he can do so. This activism is directed at the traditional fatalism of the campesino. But there also has to be support from the environment, that is, from many different agencies which provide resources with which the increased motivation can work, and accompanying structural changes. The campesino cannot do it all by himself no matter how hard he tries and to lead him to think he can is too frustrating (White, /66)

ACPO evaluators pointed out that satisfying today's needs of agricultural modernization in Colombia require, in fact, of more than individual wishes and efforts. "Their satisfaction demands in most cases the application of specific measures which only in exceptional situations can be based upon individual initiative." As examples, they mentioned community infrastructure works, cooperatives, rural health units, etc. And they added: "However important education may be -- asserted those concerned -- it will not be possible to obtain the substantive changes required to overcome marginality and to achieve integration in the economic process without applying complementary measures." (Musto, /49, p. 169).

Musto (49) himself had found that peasants appeared no longer very interested in literacy training. He also felt that rural development officers wished ACPO would, in its leader training courses, emphasize agricultural technology subjects over general cultural ones and would foster a more active participation of them in concrete land reform projects. On the other hand, (Musto, /49, p. 147) felt that it was not accidental that ACPO's

ideology fitted characteristically the mentality of the Andean rural population of Colombia. By that he seems to suggest that there may be a coincidence of conventional or traditional viewpoints between the institution and its chief audience.

"Experience has shown" -- pointed out a Brazilian analyst of rural informal education -- "that liberal capitalism, with its individualistic philosophy and related educational concepts, is not a magic formula which gives positive results everywhere" (Bandeira, /18, p. 157). The influence in Latin American of education and communication models permeated by U. S. social psychology -- centered on individual attitudes and values -- and functionalist sociology -- with its emphasis on the adjustment of individuals to social norms for the sake of the equilibrium of the social structure -- has also been made evident.\* Something similar could perhaps be said of modernization theories, including those which attribute to mass communication a central role in that process. (Felstehausen, /35).

Criticizing "functional literacy" and "basic", "fundamental" and "integral" education principles as those professed by ACPO, Marina Bandeira (8, p. 157) argues:

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\* These influences are discussed by the present author in a recent essay (Beltrán, /12). In a previous one (Beltrán, /11), he discusses the basic features of a possible new communication model more akin with genuine development in Latin America.

According to this traditional, conservative, point of view, the 'have nots' have nothing because they do not have the knowledge accumulated by Western civilization. Therefore, this ignorance places these 'ignorant' in a state of marginality with regard to the economic and social benefits that the modern world puts at their disposal. The expression "basic education" and its synonyms, according to this concept, stand exclusively for the basic tools which, once acquired, incorporate the 'ignorant' population into a society which is well organized and perfect, and ready and even eager to receive them.

Stressing the elements in that philosophy which induce people to conformity with the status quo, Bandeira (8, p. 157) adds: "The role of the marginalized, then, is to accept, without argument, without asking questions, the efforts that are carried out for their benefit. They are to adapt themselves to the patterns of behavior, the set of values, the techniques established by the existing society."

#### Is ACPO a Deterrent of Change?

The question then may be whether, in addition to not contributing to structural change, ACPO may rather be helping perpetuate the prevailing unjust social order. As has been already noted here, research studying specifically and directly such a possibility, has not yet been conducted.

However, would it be logical to expect ACPO (or, for that matter, any other similar organization in almost every other Latin American country) to think and act differently than it apparently does? Can they really attempt to bring about radical and accelerated structural change in societies whose leadership, for the most part, is either bent against that

change or has ceased to perceive it as indispensable and viable? Are communication philosophies, strategies and tactics independent from the ideologies presiding societies and from the ensuing development policies? Is it realistic to expect educational communication institutions -- which to some degree are dependent, directly or indirectly, on public and private power nuclei for their own existence -- to "go against the stream"\* And, if they did and somehow survived, could they not indeed in some cases unleash, as ACPO fears, undesirable and perhaps incontrollable social violence, leading only to substituting one undemocratic oligarchy for another revolutionary but totalitarian elite?

#### Brazil's MEB: Radio Schools for Structural Change

Those are the serious questions confronting today educational communication professionals and development strategists. Their most direct confrontation took place in Brazil where, for a while, the main offspring of ACPO in that region attempted to operate in a manner different from the mother institution. This was MEB (Movimento de Educaçao de Base), the "Basic Education Movement" established by the Conference of Bishops of Brazil.\*\*.

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\* Musto (49, p. 73) claims that, in the case of ACPO, "... tactical adaptation to the demands of stability and institutional growth influenced, up to certain point, negatively the strategy of adapting itself to the fundamental changes which took place in Colombian rural areas".

\*\* MEB has been described and discussed by Considine (22), Bandeira (8), and Cortez Romero (23).

MEB developed three main differences from the ACPO model. One was shifting its orientation from standard "fundamental integral education" to the new philosophy proposed by Catholic educator Paulo Freire (39, 40): "education for liberation" through "conscientization".\* Another difference was perceiving mass and interpersonal communication as supplementary accelerators and not autonomous generators of development, which is seen as starting in collective solidary action to re-create society. Emphasis was also placed on the personalized component of the mix: the "monitor" of the radioschools as a "catalyst" of structural change and an "animator" of social "mobilization", as well as a "feedback" stimulator and detector, rather than as an appendix to radio. The third difference was an emphasis on decentralizing the organization so that --in order to secure genuine peasant involvement -- responsibility for the work and its control would be eminently local rather than regional or national.

What were the MEB communication agents to supplement? According to McAnany (48, p. 22), MEB's radio schools "followed the beginnings of the rural leagues and unions of campesinos and in turn became a way of continuing this process by bringing literacy to mobilize rural groups".

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\* ACPO has been criticized for having a highly centralized and vertical hierarchical organization where decision-making is mostly in the hands of a few top executives. Peasants are seen as having minimal access to authority in such a vertical institutional arrangement. See on the topic Musto (49) and Brumberg (16).

During this period the peasant movements were actively struggling to attain rural structural change and MEB's "non-directive" approach fitted with and supported that endeavor. Thus : "Unlike other strategies, the MEB strategy did not see the mass media, etc. as directly causing this change". (McAnany, /48, p. 20).

"Conscientização" is the awakening of historical consciousness in people so that -- acting jointly and autonomously -- they come to be aware of physical and sociocultural reality and of their own potentialities change it and bring about overall human enhancement, political freedom and social justice. This was at the heart of MEB's work. But not for long. Solely for that brief period in Brazil when, in addition to intense activity by peasant organizations, there were circumstantially governments clearly committed to structural change. MEB -- as reported by Herzog and Braun (45, p. 12) -- had " ... embarked on such a course prior to the 1964 revolution. The new military government curtailed their efforts drastically and prohibited 'conscientization' training." Already by 1968, MEB was " ... only a ghost of what it has been and of what it could be ... MEB suffers the fate of so many other organizations that provoke the fear of those in power." (Bandeira, /8, pp. 164-65).



### The Dilemmas of Communication in Latin America

The Brazilian experience shows that communication can be highly instrumental to structural change when the objective political conditions in a country -- the state of the power game -- happen themselves to be favorable to that change. Evidently, that is not normally the case of Colombia or of most of the Latin American countries. What then is the role of educational communication in such a situation? To remain involved in blind activism? To indefinitely serve, willingly or not, the status quo? To insist in learning how to promote substantive and rapid structural change without blowing the world apart, something that -- judging from Peru's present experience -- may not be impossible?

It is a challenging duty for communication strategists, practitioners and scientists to help provide answers to these interrogations. Meanwhile, those whose efforts have met with failure explained by repression, provide an answer as to what they will not be willing to do. Marina Bandeira (8, p. 165), one of the chief promoters of the nullified MEB, affirms:

What we will not do is become another literacy campaign trying to mold the people to the requirements of the powerful. We refuse to act as a buffer between the aspirations of the people and the present unjust social structures ... Many make use of very modern and elaborate methods of transmission of information ... But I should like to ask how many of them, consciously or unconsciously, are aiming at the maintenance of a dual society, with an elite versus the masses?

Indeed, how many?

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## ACPO AND STRUCTURAL CHANGE IN COLOMBIA

This essay first did a rapid overview of Colombia's rural development communication in the general context of communication and development in Latin America. Then it described in some detail the organization, operations and impact of Colombia's "Popular Cultural Action" (ACPO), the country's most important agency for the promotion of rural development. Subsequently, the ideology behind ACPO's activity in terms of its professed development philosophy, strategy and tactics was presented. Then, in order to view the institution within its broader societal context, the paper delivered summarized data and critical appraisals of Colombia's overall social structure, giving emphasis to the rural subsystem. In the light of this information it is not pertinent and possible to try to find out whether ACPO contributes or not to changing the structure of the society in which it has been so outstandingly operating for more than a quarter of a century.

### The Structural Perspective of Development

For purposes of the discussion, structural change will be understood as the deep and accelerated modification of the prevailing social arrangements. This modification is seen as following a direction from the domination of