

FROM THE EDITOR

Volume four of the **International Journal** focuses on the issue of the conceptualization of the State in the context of global agriculture and food. The issue of the State has been a central concern of members of the Research Committee on Sociology of Agriculture and Food for years. More recently, coordinated efforts have been carried out to study the empirical dimensions of the transformations undergone by the State as well as the manners in which these transformations are expressed theoretically. The relationship between the State system and the socio-economic sphere has traditionally been studied employing a nation-centered concept of the State. However, changes at the international level, culminating with the emerging globalization of production and consumption processes, have made a nation-centered concept of the State increasingly questionable. Indeed, the emergence of global production and consumption systems has created limits to the traditionally assumed sphere of action of the State and opened up discussion of the inability of the State to carry out its historical role in society. Simultaneously, these changes have prompted scholars to argue the emergence of a new State. This wealth of empirical studies, however, has not been paralleled by a rigorous rethinking of the concept of the State.

The relevance of the identification of a new concept of the State becomes evident in light of the role that the State plays in developing, promoting and implementing agricultural and food policies. Though State policies have often advanced the interests of dominant groups in society, they have also benefited subordinate

groups. For instance, in many countries the State has attempted to stabilize the rural economy as well as stimulate and control production and consumption through various programs, such as supporting agricultural prices, enhancing agricultural and rural infrastructures and assisting producers and consumers to make informed decisions. Additionally, the State has intervened to protect the environment, provide food and agricultural products to needy segments of society worldwide, and advance rural economic development, rural education, health and services. In this respect, the reported limits imposed on the action of the State have significant implications vis-à-vis fundamental issues such as those of democracy, equality and sustainability.

A grant from the Rural Research Initiative Competitive Grant Program of the United States Department of Agriculture allowed the realization of a three day workshop which was held in Wageningen, the Netherlands, in the Summer of 1993. Its primary objectives were to discuss the role of the State in the new global economy and to identify and analyze transformations undergone by the State in regard to components of the agro-food sector such as: labor and production processes, the firm, the organization of superstates, regional development, the environment, and the regulatory process. Its program consisted of the presentation and discussion of papers addressing changes in the State with respect to the above mentioned components of the agro-food system. Revised versions of the original manuscripts are contained in this issue. They

are preceded by an introductory article summarizing the overall discussion carried out during the workshop.

"Global Post-Fordism and Concepts of the State" contains an illustration of the characteristics of the global post-Fordist era and identifies some of the fundamental elements for the reconceptualization of the State. Here, the State is defined in terms of its actions, i.e. the historical manifestations of the relationship between the political and economic spheres in capitalism. State actions are identified in terms of the so-called "imperatives" of the State, i.e., the processes of accumulation of capital, social legitimation, mediation among various conflicting societal groups, and social and physical reproduction. The empirical evidence relating to these imperatives is then analyzed in order to identify ways in which they are carried out in the globalized socio-economic system and the limits of the national State. The article is jointly authored by those who presented papers at the workshop, but was also enriched by comments from other participants. In particular, Reidar Almas, Alberto Arce, Ana Barbic, Maria Fonte, Sergio Gómez, Mary Hendrickson, Joe Molnar, Marie-Christine Renard, and Frank Vanclay provided insightful contributions to the discussion. As the contributors to this issue point out in their articles, this analysis is far from complete. The position of the State in the global system is still rapidly evolving and too many aspects have not been given due consideration. In this respect, the works contained in this issue should be viewed as initial rather than final steps.

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