


Chapter 10

Land Reform and the Liberal Revolution

Nick Sharman

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7213-5703>

University of Nottingham, UK

ABSTRACT

Spain's adoption of a market-driven land market in the nineteenth century has been the subject of intense academic study. Much of this has painted a picture of a weak bourgeoisie unable to overcome the conservative resistance of the traditional institutions, monarchy, nobility and Church. Building on Karl Polanyi's analysis of Britain's experience of its Industrial Revolution, the chapter suggests a more complex story. Policies inspired by an individualistic free market ideology threatened the integrity of Spanish society, much of it founded on strong communitarian traditions. In response, progressive as well as reactionary groups united to halt or mitigate the impact of liberal reforms. The often-violent reactions slowed the process of reform, allowing change to be absorbed without the intense trauma endured by the English working class. Spain's 'failure' to undergo a rapid agricultural and industrial revolution on the Northern European model can be seen as a form of adaptation to the inexorable forces of international capitalist change.

INTRODUCTION

The free market ideology of British classical economists provided Spain's nineteenth century liberal regimes with a conceptual framework for the radical reforms of property rights. These were designed to create a commercial market in land, guarantee the individual ownership of property and remove the feudal legal framework which, in 1810, still covered over half the country's land area. For the

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-0634-6.ch010

rising urban middle classes, the abolition of entailed property enabled owners to re-invest their capital into safe assets with good prospects of rising rental income. (González de Molina, 1984, p.174).

In the countryside, the property reforms led to fierce resistance which united widely disparate social groups in protest throughout the century. This broad-based opposition contributed to Spain's chronic social and political upheavals and, in turn, to the chequered development of its economy. The property policies themselves emerged in the chaotic circumstances of war and violent political change but their apparent contingency was misleading. A few, actively political, liberal economists gave the reforms conceptual coherence. Álvaro Flórez Estrada, Eudald Jaumeandreu and Canga Argüelles, in particular, 'inspired the reform's principles and gave it a shared language' (Pan-Montojo, 2018, p.31). The problem was that the creation of a free market in property struck at the heart of the social relationships and communitarian traditions that sustained Spain's largely agrarian economy. The impersonal and inexorable working of the unregulated market progressively replaced the informal, personal social contract on which rural communities depended, threatening the stability and very functioning of society as a whole. The result was a long-running series of conflicts that brought together unlikely and seemingly incompatible groups to resist the changes and defend the integrity of Spanish society. This political trajectory closely reflects the analytic framework proposed by Karl Polanyi in his review of the commercialization of Britain's land market. He suggested that attempts to turn a common good, in this case land, into an individually owned commodity require comprehensive state action to embed market-based relationships into society.

This leads to destabilization and a broad-based societal reaction to protect itself, which he termed the "double movement" (Polanyi, 2001, p. 80). These collective responses to changes in the organization of society are designed primarily to redress the cultural devastation created by a market society. He concluded that the promise of free market ideology to reduce the role of politics in civic and social life is in practice therefore impossible, a conclusion amply supported by the experience of both the English and Spanish enclosure movements.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

The acute social conflicts generated by liberal agricultural and land reform have been the centre of intense study by Spanish historiography since the nineteenth century. In the 1950s, Jaume Vicens Vives, the economic historian, led a flowering of empirical and statistical studies of these turbulent transformations. Significant works by authors such as Jordi Nadal, Josep Fontana, Tuñón de Lara and Gabriel Tortella analyzed in detail the critical role of agriculture and land in Spain's eco-

26 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/land-reform-and-the-liberal-revolution/383404

Related Content

Corporate Governance and Value Creation: Indian Experience

Neeta Baporikar (2016). *International Journal of Asian Business and Information Management* (pp. 51-61).

www.irma-international.org/article/corporate-governance-and-value-creation/155173

The Economies of West Asia

Lauren A. Alatiand Harpreet Kaur (2021). *Emerging Business and Trade Opportunities Between Oceania and Asia* (pp. 32-55).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-economies-of-west-asia/260869

Interactive Strategies for Cultural Heritage Tourism and Macau City Development: The Tourists' Perspectives

Aliana M. W. Leongand Jacky X. Li (2010). *International Journal of Asian Business and Information Management* (pp. 1-19).

www.irma-international.org/article/interactive-strategies-cultural-heritage-tourism/49551

E-Business Adoption by Jordanian Banks: An Exploratory Study of the Key Factors and Performance Indicators

Ali Alawneh, Hasan Al-Refaiand Khaldoun Batiha (2011). *Global Business: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools and Applications* (pp. 1055-1070).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/business-adoption-jordanian-banks/54823

Improvement in Medication Adherence Using TV Programmes as Reminders (2021). *International Journal of Asian Business and Information Management* (pp. 0-0).

www.irma-international.org/article//273898