



# Obliging Need: Rural Petty Industry in Mexican Capitalism

*Scott Cook, Leigh Binford*

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For centuries throughout large portions of the globe, petty agriculturalists and industrialists have set their physical and mental energies to work producing products for direct consumption by their households and for exchange. This twofold household reproduction strategy, according to both Marxist and neoclassical approaches to development, should have disappeared from the global economy as labor was transformed into a producer as well as a consumer of capitalist commodities. But in fact, during the twentieth century, only the United States and Britain seem to have approximated this predicted scenario. Tens of millions of households in contemporary Asia, Africa, and Latin America and millions more in industrialized capitalist economies support themselves through petty commodity production alone or in combination with petty industry wage labor.

*Obliging Need* provides a detailed and comprehensive analysis of small-scale peasant and artisan enterprise in the Oaxaca Valley of Mexico. The authors show how commodity production is organized and operates in different craft industries, as well as the ways in which it combines with other activities such as household chores, agriculture, wage labor, and petty commerce. They demonstrate how—contrary to developmentalist dogma—small-scale capitalism develops from within Mexico's rural economy.

These findings will be important for everyone concerned with improving the lives and economic opportunities of countryfolk in the Third World. As the authors make clear, political mobilization in rural Mexico will succeed only as it addresses the direct producers' multiple needs for land, credit, more jobs, health insurance, and, most importantly, more equitable remuneration for their labor and greater rewards for their enterprise.

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