

Thank You of the Legendary Members of the SOBER, 2004¹

G. Edward Schuh²

It is a great honor for me to be here this evening, in this city on the frontier of Brazil. Let me begin by congratulating the SOBER on the location of the meeting. I understand that this is the first meeting of the SOBER in the Central West, except for a couple of earlier meetings held in Brasilia, the nation's capitol. My commendations on an excellent choice. The Central West is one of the dynamic regions of Brazil, and characterized by a dynamic agriculture that is helping to drive Brazil's economic growth and expansion.

I was asked to deliver an expression of appreciation on behalf of all three of us on this auspicious occasion. In the beginning, this request puzzled me quite a bit. I kept wondering why I, a foreigner, was the one asked to respond for everybody. Then it suddenly occurred to me! Had they asked Eliseu to speak, he is a Mineiro, and he would have been saying "Uai," "Uai," "Uai" all the time. Paulo, for his part, is a Carioca. He would have been "Chiando" all the time. They asked me as the only one who had a pure Portuguese and who could speak on behalf of all three without distortion!

It just could be that from time to time a grammatical error in Portuguese will creep into my remarks, especially in terms of changing the sex of some words – that hobgoblin of all native English-speakers in speaking Portuguese. You should understand, however, that those are not my errors! Someone typed up my handwritten remarks on a computer. You all know how computers introduce errors into what we do!

¹ Presented at the 42nd Meeting of the Brazilian Society of Rural Economy and Sociology (SOBER), Cuiabá, Mato Grosso, Brazil, July 25th through 28th, 2004. The occasion was the induction of G. Edward Schuh, Eliseu Roberto de Andrade Alves, and Paulo Fernando Cidade do Araújo as Legendary Members of the SOBER. The author of this paper was asked to speak on behalf of all three in responding to the recognition. The remarks were delivered in Portuguese.

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Despite these caveats, I ask your forbearance with my Portuguese. The truth of the matter is that your President probably reasoned that with me speaking in Portuguese you would all have to pay attention more closely!

In a more serious vein, I am very grateful for the honor of being asked to speak on behalf of all three of us. I have known Eliseu and Paulo almost from my first arrival here in Brazil, some 41 years ago, and have been collaborating almost continuously with them during this period. Even so, they were very gracious in allowing me to speak on their behalf.

My association with SOBER goes back almost to the origins of that organization. However, I should emphasize the word “almost.” The origins of SOBER date to a period prior to my arrival in Brazil.

My first thought in accepting the invitation to speak for the three of us was that I would talk about the history of the SOBER and how it has evolved over time. But then your President imposed severe time limits on me – ten minutes! I proceeded to negotiate an additional five minutes, but that still didn’t give me much time. In the end we agreed that I would do a separate paper on the history of the organization that would be published separately in the Journal.

While this discussion between your President and I was taking place, Eliseu sent me a copy of the minutes of one of the early meetings at which the creation of SOBER was discussed. I think it appropriate on this occasion that we recognize some of the people who contributed so much to creating the organization in the beginning. In doing so, we would surely be remiss if we didn’t recognize the names of Ruy Miller Paiva, Edson Potsch de Magalhães, Victor José Pellegrini, and Rubens Dias Araújo. There were many others, but a great deal of the energy and inspiration for the creation of the SOBER came from these four men.

It also seems appropriate, given that this is a bi-national event this evening, to recognize that the creation of the SOBER was truly a bi-national initiative. It was a combination of North Americans and Brazilians who took the initial steps – largely because both the Ford Foundation and the US aid program focused on developing the profession of agricultural economics as one of their important missions. Eventually, four contracts for collaboration between Brazilian universities and US were signed by the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Mainly because the first contract was with Purdue University and the (then) State University of Viçosa (now the Federal University of Viçosa) two of the key people involved with SOBER were D. Woods Thomas (an agricultural

economist) and Kenneth McDermott (a rural sociologist). Another agricultural economist, Richard Newberg (formerly of The Ohio State University) played an important role in his position as Mission Director for the USAID.

Another unique feature of the SOBER from its beginning has been the extent to which it has tried to include the sociologists in its program and membership. (Note that Sociology is in the name of the organization.) During the time the military were in power that inclusion provided good cover for our sometimes-controversial colleagues. We may laugh at that now, but at the time it was a serious issue. More generally, all three of us hope the SOBER will continue to reach out to the rural sociologists and involve them in the work of the Society. They have the potential to greatly enrich what we do.

Some of you know that our President, Antônio Salazar Brandão, collaborated with me in doing a survey of the literature on the development of agriculture in Latin America. This was done at the request of the American Agricultural Economics Association (AAEA). One of the things that impressed us in that survey was the richness and diversity in the perspectives taken in that literature.

The post-World War II period has witnessed the introduction of neoclassical economics into the study of agricultural development. The neoclassical perspective, although very powerful in its analytical potential, can also be rather narrow. The Latin American literature, and especially the Brazilian literature, has avoided that narrowness. Importantly, some of the best economic insights have come from historians, from sociologists, from political scientists, and so on. Consequently, we have gained the analytical power of neoclassical economics, together with the much richer perspectives the other disciplines bring. I speak for all three of us being honored tonight in making a plea that we continue to involve sociology and the other social science disciplines in what we do.

To speak more directly to my assignment for the evening, my task is to express, on behalf of the three of us, our thanks and appreciation for the recognition that is being bestowed on us this evening. It is truly a remarkable honor to be named a Legendary Member of the Society. We are each grateful for both the honor and for this magnificent event this evening.

However, an occasion such as this is a good time to think about what it is that brought us each to this point in our careers. As I thought about that issue, it seemed to me that each of us had a common set of factors that has enabled

us to do what we have done. Let me elaborate a bit on the factors that seemed to me to be important.

First, we each had a good set of genes, which we inherited from our parents. The truth of the matter is that we had little to do in selecting those genes. They were given to us! But they have had a great influence in making us who we are.

Second, we have been able to work in an environment of social, economic, and political institutions that have enabled us to work productively. Indeed, they have even given us the incentives to be more productive.

Unfortunately, it is all too easy to neglect the importance of these institutional arrangements that govern how we interact with each other. The three of us have been fortunate to live in countries in which the prevailing institutional arrangements served us well, even though at times they have been far from perfect in both countries.

The process of global economic integration is putting great stress on our institutions, and will likely put even greater stress on them in the future. However, we can each be thankful for what we have had, and continue to have.

Third, we have had professional colleagues who have critiqued our work and thus helped us to make it better. None of us work alone in this world. The great strength of an organization such as the SOBER is that it provides the mechanisms by which we can interact with each other, challenge each other, and help us to be better analysts.

Finally, each of us has had spouses who at important points in our careers have contributed importantly to them. Unfortunately, these spouses seldom receive the recognition they deserve. On behalf of each of us, I want to thank our respective spouses for the contributions they have made to our respective careers.

(I ask that the audience also recognize their contributions by giving them a big round of applause.)

As my comments should help make clear, none of us do what we do alone. And that is what is humbling about looking back on our careers. We are each the products of a set of powers and principalities that is far larger than us, and that has had a very powerful influence on us.

I like the concept of powers and principalities to help explain who we are and what we do. I first encountered the use of this concept when I was a student at the University of Chicago. The faculty from the various schools of

religion at the University gave the Sunday lecture in the Rockefeller Chapel. I attended regularly. One of the most remarkable and insightful lectures I heard bore the title “Principalities and Powers.”

That lecture was about George Wallace, the then Governor of Alabama, and a significant racist of the time. The speaker pointed out that Wallace was for the most part not acting volitionally. Instead, he was a product of having been born and raised in a racist society, and of still being under the influence of powerful economic and social structures. The point, of course, was to take these considerations into account in judging the actions of the man and his actions.

I found that to be a very powerful lesson. My point this evening, however, is that the same principle applies in a positive sense. There are powers and principalities that influence our daily lives. They include living at the right time for the instruments with which we were born and which we have acquired over time, being invited to play important roles at critical times, having colleagues who complement our own talents and skills, and so on. Recognizing the importance of these powers and principalities is a truly humbling experience. That is why we are so grateful for the recognition we are receiving this evening.

To conclude, I want to make one final point on our behalf. We live in a critical time in our history. Technology has created conditions in which a small number of people can destroy the world, as we know it. At the same time, economic integration – facilitated by another set of technologies – is so great and so pervasive that we have essentially become each other’s neighbors. Yet we live in a world of isolation – each of us – so vast that we hardly understand the values and motivations of the people and countries with which we interact with each day.

The technology with which we live makes it very dangerous for us to continue to live in this way. In concluding these remarks I want to challenge each of us to do our most to cooperate across cultural and national boundaries, and to make a greater effort to understand each other. We need to make much greater efforts to understand other peoples, and to understand other countries. The differences among countries are rooted for the most part in ethnic differences, and understanding those is not easy. Yet doing so is fundamental to building a peaceful world.

In writing these remarks it occurred to me that perhaps the only common

characteristic the three of us shared is that we have had strong international experiences. These international experiences tend to make us more effective professionals because they widen our vision and give us a broader perspective on what we do. That makes us more productive, while at the same time giving us a more ample vision of the world in which we live.

An important part of this challenge I am making goes to the SOBER itself. This important professional organization has contributed significantly to international cooperation and collaboration. The three of us has each benefited tremendously over the years from that cooperation and collaboration, culminating in the events of this evening. All of us have benefited from the aulas magnas that were started some years ago, and which we will benefit from again later this evening.

There is much more that SOBER could do as an organization, however. In closing these remarks I challenge each of us to do more to help make this One World. That will require that we make greater efforts to understand other cultures, and to reduce and eliminate the pervasive set of fragmented and narrow political and economic interests that create so much political and social conflict. Let's each of us make that effort to make this a more peaceful world!