

# History of the MST

We cultivate the land  
and it cultivates us



## OBJECTIVE

Collective creation of the Course of History ITERRA/UFFS Class  
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*“We cultivate the land and it cultivates us” is a verse of the song  
“Caminhos Alternativos” (Alternative Paths) from Zé Pinto*

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Our legacy: free men and women producing healthy food**

The Landless Workers Movement, (MST – Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra – MST), was born, like many other land occupations, at the end of a long dark night. At the dawn of the workers' strikes, of the campaign for general and unrestricted amnesty, the new urban social movements, the Rights Now! campaign, the Ecclesiastical Base Communities which organized the peasants and landless workers in the early 1970s, and the Pastoral Land Commission (Comissão Pastoral da Terra – CPT), founded in 1975, ended the military dictatorship and also allowed for the resumption of the struggle for land and for agrarian reform in Brazil.

The subjects of this process were the occupiers, workers affected by dams, migrants, sharecroppers, peasants,... rural workers without land, without the right to produce food. Expelled to the rural areas by an authoritarian project that proclaimed modernization; but in reality, it encouraged the massive use of pesticides and mechanization which were financed by rural credits exclusively used by the large estates. All the while, large agro-industrial conglomerates increased their control of agriculture. The Green Revolution brought about a huge displacement of populations from the rural areas to the city; this phenomenon is known as rural exodus. From 1950 to 1980, the largest migration from the rural areas to the city on the planet took place, resulting in the

following data according to the IBGE: only 14.57% of the Brazilian population lived in the rural areas in 2014. However, within the international division of labor, one of the principal characteristics of the Brazilian society since the arrival of the Portuguese in 1500 and the subsequent colonization period, are large estates. Based on this contradiction, we founded an autonomous, political and syndicalist social movement which strove to acquire land, agrarian reform and the social transformations necessary for our country.

It is already an important achievement for the movement to have resisted the landowners' economic and political power throughout three decades. But there are other achievements resulting from our fruitful resistance. In 30 years, we acquired land for more than 350 thousand families settled throughout the whole country. Land which was freed from the landowners and encouraged local development. In each large estate, where only a few people lived, now there are 100, 200, 300... This required the construction of hundreds of houses, the purchase of the same hundred tools, home appliances, inputs, etc. Areas which were taken from the hands of large estates for the landless workers are growing and developing themselves to the point of becoming new municipalities. They also demanded new forms of protest and organization, for the more than 400 associations and cooperatives working collectively to produce food without genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and without pesticides. 96 agro-industries improved the income and the working conditions of the rural areas, but also offered food products of high quality and low prices in the city.

However, there are other achievements that cannot

be quantitatively measured. In a country where the rural areas have always been relegated to backwardness, to material, aesthetic and intellectual poverty, we are proud to have formed more than “small landowners”. Our struggle has educated men and women who regained their citizenship as proper subjects of their history and not as subordinates, which is an essential condition to paving a path towards emancipation.

Our commitment towards human development expresses itself in more than two thousand public schools situated in encampments and settlements, which guarantee access to education to more than hundred 60 thousand landless children and adolescents or which have rendered 50 thousand adults and youth literate in recent years. It is also illustrated in more than 100 undergraduate programs established in partnership with universities throughout Brazil.

We are proud to say that no child goes hungry in agrarian reform settlements.

Being 30 years old, the MST is the oldest peasant movement in the history of Brazil. In addition, it is organized in 24 states. This has the following significance. It reaffirms the values of solidarity; it reaffirms the commitment towards a more just and egalitarian society; it maintains the legacy of the thousands of fighters of the people; it daily exercises the capacity to revolt and to act in order to transform; it does not lose the eternal value of learning and studying. And, fundamentally, it reaffirms our commitment to organize the poor of the rural areas.





# CHAPTER 1

AGRARIAN REFORM: WHAT IT IS, CONCEPTS,  
TYPESD OF AGRARIAN REFORM, AND ITS  
DISCUSSION IN BRAZIL

Agrarian Reform is one of the central issues in Brazilian history. As we will see in this document, many of the conflicts that have marked the history of our ancestors, like many of the current problems that we live with, have their origins in the lack of agrarian reform in this country. The concentration of private property in the hands of a few and the consequential exclusion of millions of peasants to access the same is one of the primary reasons for poverty, violence, and the limited and dependent development of our country. The large landowners also concentrate political power, whether it be the large-landowning representatives of the old oligarchies who still remain in some regions of our country or the modern representatives of agribusiness, associated with transnational businesses and international financial capital.

Agrarian Reform is a government program that seeks to democratize the ownership of land in a given society, guaranteeing that all of those who wish to produce and live on the land have the means to do so. Throughout history, one of the most frequently used ways to create agrarian reform was for the state to expropriate large farms and estates and then redistribute the land to landless peasants, peasants with little land, or rural workers in general. The state can do this in a variety of ways. The first is to use a legal instrument called dispossession. This happens when the state pays the large landowner or farm owner a compensation for the land. After this, the state becomes the owner of the land and redistributes it among the landless and the peasants. Another manner of carrying out agrarian reform is expropriation or confiscation. In these cases, the ownership of the land is passed over to the state without any compensation to the large

landowner or farm owner. A third manner exists in which the state does not pay for the land, but compensates the owner with improvements that can be made on the farm, such as homes, sheds, etc. In Brazil, this primarily happens when the farm owners wrongfully appropriate public land without having the legal right to do so. In various countries where there is land available as part of the public domain or property of the state, the land can be distributed by the farmers. The distribution of this land is not part of Agrarian Reform programs because this land was not private property yet, was uninhabited, or native and indigenous peoples used to live there for a long time before the government forced them away. These distributions are projects of colonization and cannot be considered Agrarian Reform programs because they do not represent the democratization of access to land and the elimination of large landowners. In Brazil, this is currently being done on land in the Legal Amazon region.

Throughout modern history, and principally after the emergence of industrial capitalism, various countries in the world have carried out Agrarian Reform with the objective of guaranteeing peasants access to land, in order to construct more democratic societies and a more just distribution of nature's good, the land. We can select some of these processes and establish their principal characteristics; grouping them according to a classification we call Types of Agrarian Reform.

Classic Agrarian Reform was first realized by the bourgeois states. This type of reform began in industrialized countries in Western Europe in the 19th century. The industrial and commercial bourgeois in these countries

formed an alliance with the peasants to bring down the rural oligarchies that concentrated land, political power, and impeded the development of industry. This type of agrarian reform, done by the industrial bourgeois, created a massive distribution of land for the peasants, securing them income and guaranteeing them the republican and democratic access to land, providing the development of an internal market for industry. The United States did this type of agrarian reform in 1862, in the middle of the Civil War. With this, the power of the large landowning slave owners from the South was broken down to the benefit of the industrialized North. Between World War I and World War II, around 20 Western European countries carried out agrarian reform, in fear of the Russian Revolution's influence in the region. After World War II, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea also carried out Classic Agrarian Reforms.

In Latin America, there were Anti colonial Agrarian Reforms that occurred in the context of fights for independence and the birth of a new nationalist political order, dispossessing the land of large landowners subordinated to the cities. The largest of these experiences was in Haiti, realized in 1804, and was very important for the Haitian population because it combined the independence of the country from France and the end of slavery. In Paraguay, between 1811 and 1816, an experience of Agrarian Reform was also carried out, distributing land to peasants of Guarani origin. Under José Artigas' administration in Uruguay, there was an attempt, however limited, at Agrarian Reform. In Latin America, there were also other processes called Radical Agrarian Reforms. They were characterized by the eradication of large tracts of

land and the distribution of land without the interference of the bourgeois state. The first example of this type of reform was the Mexican Revolution, between 1910 and 1920, with peasants, led by Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, taking up arms against the large landowners with the slogan “The land belongs to those that work it.” In 1952, there was another experience of Agrarian Reform with the Popular Bolivian Revolution, when the peasants also took up arms, assumed power, and distributed land. During the 1960s, in the fight for independence and decolonization, some African countries performed National Liberation Agrarian Reforms. The new governments took the colonizers’ land and distributed it. The most important processes of the fight for national liberation and distribution of land were in Tanzania, Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Congo, Libya, and Algeria. Other important experiences were the Socialist Agrarian Reforms. They were carried out in the context of revolutionary processes of overcoming capitalism and in the construction of a socialist society. They based themselves on the principle that land belongs to a nation; it is not private property and cannot be commercialized. Diverse forms of land use and production were organized like the partnerships of the base, small groups of families, self-managed social enterprises, production cooperatives, and state-owned enterprises. This type of Agrarian Reform was experienced in Russia, Yugoslavia, North Korea, East Germany, Ukraine, China in the 1960s, and also attempted in Cuba beginning in 1975, but with the crisis of 1989, the Cubans were forced to change their model. Finally, we have People’s Agrarian Reforms. These are characterized by the process of changing of power throu-

gh alliances between popular governments, nationalists, and the peasants, with the massive distribution of land, resulting in progressive and popular laws applied in a combined manner between the state and peasant movements. The biggest example of this type of Agrarian Reform occurred in China between the years 1930 and 1950. In the advance of Red Army and the Communist Party, territories were being freed and land being distributed, uniting the power of revolutionary, popular government with the peasants who fought in the Red Army. In the 1950s, we also have other experiences of this type in Egypt, under the Nasser government; then North Vietnam, in the areas liberated from the French; in Guatemala under president Jacobo Arbenz, between the years 1951 and 1954; the first years of the Cuban Revolution; and the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua in 1979. In the current phase of financial capitalism, only People's Agrarian Reform, fruit of the fight of Brazilian society as a whole, can overcome the contradictions and injustices that mark our history for centuries. In Chapter 8, we will expand upon the People's Agrarian Reform that we want that will benefit the country and the city.

# CHAPTER 2

THE STRUGGLES THAT WE INHERITED

- XX CENTURY COLONIAL PERIOD-

The struggle for land is not new in this country. It is not just today that workers organize themselves to fight for land. The domination and dispossession of our land is the result of a earlier process, as we are the heirs and heiresses of those people, men and women, who bravely organized resistance in defense of their territory and their freedom.

Since history was written by the rulers, who enslaved, killed entire indigenous peoples, who were whipped and had shoved down their throats the “good manners and civility of the civilized people,” we have few records of this history. It never interested the attacker to tell the history of the indigenous people, even less the story of their struggle and resistance.

### ***The Indigenous Resistance***

Contrary to what we were taught, there is history before the arrival of invaders. This land where we live and what we now call Brazil, has been home to many people. This was Brazil before 1500, inhabited by: Pataxós, Xavante, Cariris, Yanomami, Guaraní, Carajás, Pancararus, Carijós, Tupinajes, Tupinambás and many others.

They lived in small, autonomous communities, and amounted to approximately 5 million people. They had a community organization, producing a self-sustaining livelihood by hunting, fishing, gathering fruits, vegetables, etc. They lived in a mode of production where there was no private ownership of land; what existed was a territory where each tribe exerted dominion.

Each tribe, each community had its own organization, their rites, their experience, their way of producing



a livelihood. With this many communities there developed and created the conditions so that they could have abundant food throughout the year through the agricultural sector, which enabled the development of techniques to perfect it. An example is the Tupi who domesticated cassava and several other plants, such as sweet potatoes, yams, beans, peanuts, pumpkin, pepper, pineapple, papaya, yerba mate, guaraná, etc.

Europe, in this period, lived in a period of the formation of the mercantile capitalist system. Each country sought to expand its territorial and economic domination, transforming countries in Africa and Asia into colonies to exploit raw materials, seeking to accumulate wealth that later would be converted into capital. In this scenario, the Portuguese trade was weakened by competition with other countries in trade with the east and, therefore, needed to exploit commodities in other locations.

The struggle for land in Brazil begins with the arrival of the Portuguese invader and the domination and exploitation of this territory. Everything within it becomes the domain and responsibility of the Portuguese crown. Thus, the territory was divided into large tracts of land, granted to Portuguese nobles, with a concession for land use by paying taxes to the crown for everything produced and exploited within the territory. This division was called captaincies, which altogether were 15 tracks of land between 150-600 km wide, all by the coast. This division did not respect the people who lived there, their beliefs, customs and even the division of the tribes, because some communities were separated and other rival tribes were placed together in the same territory.

In the period during which Brazil was a colony of Portugal, our agriculture was focused on the production of monoculture for export. Products that were of interest to the European market were produced in large estates with slave labor. So were the cycles of pau-brazil [the tree which produces a red dye], sugarcane and later coffee. And the capitalists used the model of the “plantation” as a way to produce agricultural goods for export, exploit labor and accumulate wealth.

The latifundia [large estates] and slavery were essential for this system to work. However, this does not mean that the people who lived here have accepted with resignation the imposed domination, the population extermination, enslavement. There were pockets of resistance and indigenous uprisings. Some are still remembered as, for example, the Guaraní resistance in the Jesuit missions in Rio Grande do Sul in the 18th century. This was a battle that started from the refusal of the Guaraní to leave their land, which they had developed with agriculture and livestock. In a letter to the enemy, the Indian Sepe Tiarajú made clear the decision of his people not to leave the land, with a cry that eternalized, “this land has an owner.” The battle lasted from 1753 to 1756. By its end the Guaraní were massacred by the Spanish and Portuguese armies.

## Know More

Today, of the 5 million Indians who lived here in 1500, according to the census carried out by IBGE in 2010, there are about 896,900 Indians in the country, with 63.8% living in rural areas and 36.2% in urban areas belonging to 305 ethnic groups with 274 languages spoken. Currently there are 462 indigenous lands regularized throughout the country, amounting to only 12.2% of the entire territory of the country.

## The African Slaves Resistance and Struggles

After the failed attempt to use the indigenous as slave labor, the Portuguese began to bring to Brazil slaves from the African coast. Thus slavery became a commercial activity linked to the European market economy. African slave numbers surpassed the 11 million mark.

A key element in this system of colonization was the exploitation of the labor force in the form of slavery. After all, the human being in this case was a commodity, which at that period of bloom of commercial capitalism enabled the accumulation of wealth. Celso Furtado estimated that in Brazil at the end of the sixteenth century, there were around 20 thousand slaves.

Imagine a scenario where thousands of people are uprooted from their homes, their families, and taken to an area where they were enslaved and treated as domesticated animals, objects of wealth and a labor force. They traveled in slave ships, chained to each other in the holds

of ships, fed with only what they needed to stay alive, although many died of malnutrition and other diseases, or, in the case of the weakest, were thrown overboard to ensure food of others.

In Brazil, they were taken to the large farms, where they were responsible for all kinds of work, but mostly manual labor in the fields.

When they could escape they organized themselves in distant farms and developed self-sufficient communities, called quilombos. There they developed a small farming associated with craft activities established in order to meet the community demand. Among the main quilombos we highlight are Palmares, which was developed in [state of] Alagoas, in the Serra da Barriga region. Considered the main focus of black resistance, Palmares was destroyed only in the late 18th century.

During this period, because they were a threat to the interests of slaveholders, quilombos were constantly harassed by gunmen or Capitães do Mato [literally, Captains of the Woods]) hired to capture and / or exterminate the slaves as a way to end the resistance and discourage the flight of others.

Slavery was formally abolished in Brazil in 1888, being the penultimate country to end this form of exploitation of labor, after a powerful movement of runaway slaves, riots, protests in other sectors of society. Even later, this could have been an opportunity to carry out an agrarian reform in the country, distributing the land to freed slaves, as Nabuco (08/19/1849 – 01/17/1910) and many abolitionists advocated. But the Empire did not take this option. The end of slavery did not solve the issue of social inclusion of former slaves: no place to live,

no income, no food security without land to plant. The result was a large mass in the cities of unemployed, the formation of black communities in the hills, on the outskirts of cities, often far from urban centers. Racial prejudice from this marginalization of blacks is still reflected today in Brazilian Society.



## The struggle for land in the XX Century

Until the independence of Brazil in 1822, all land belonged to the King of Portugal. With the separation from Portugal, nothing had changed, because the ownership of the land went to the Brazilian Emperor, which gave ownership to large farmers. From the 1850 Land Law, the land became private property. In other words, those who had money could turn their possession into ownership. Because the values were high, poor free men, former slaves, tenants, farm workers did not have access to land. On the contrary many squatters, who had lived for years on their land, were driven out by large landowners, who falsified the documentation to prove ownership of the land. One of the methods used was *grilagem* when the falsified ownership documents were deposited in drawers with crickets, since this insect produces a type of substance that “ages” documents, which are made to look like old titles.

Thus, the struggle for land gains a new dimension in the history of our country. So far, this fight was also resistance or for the freedom of the Indians and slaves. With private ownership of land and the end of slavery, the struggle for land gained prominence in the social history of Brazil.

Many struggles were regional and isolated. Squatters, renters and poor peasants against local colonels. But other fights won larger and collective dimensions. This is the case for Canudos (1893-97) in Bahia, *Contestado* (1920-27) in Santa Catarina and Paraná, *Caldeirão* (in the 1930's) in Ceará, among many other struggles.

These movements of poor peasants were called “Messianic” because they had religious leaders that guided the struggle for the promised land. They were movements with a strong religious character, where the political and military leader was also the religious leader of the community. Both in Canudos, as in Caldeirão, communities formed by this movement were marked by collective production and distribution, through a division of autonomous work and mutual aid. They were forward looking societies without private property and without exploitation. So, being an example of another way to organize society, they were harshly persecuted and opposed by governments of their time and exterminated.

Local and isolated struggles continue marking the 20th century. After the proclamation of the Republic assured the power of the landlords, in many places called “colonels,” who wielded the political, economic and police power. However, the agrarian issue has attracted the attention of the entire Brazilian population. In addition, the development of industrial capitalism in Brazil also resulted in the emergence of other forms of workers’ organizations to face exploitation, such as trade unions, mutual aid associations and the founding of the Communist Party in 1922. It was this party, led by Luis Carlos Prestes, Carlos Marighella, Caio Prado Junior among others, that for the first time in 1946 presented in Congress a proposal for land reform in Brazil.

Seeking to build a worker-peasant alliance, the Communist Party encouraged the organization of salaried rural workers, small tenants, partners and squatters located in almost all of the Brazilian states. As the peasants were forbidden to have their unions, some of these or-

ganizations were founded as associations, called Peasant Leagues. These initiatives lasted only a little time, because in 1947 the Communist Party was declared illegal.

Even so, between 1948 and 1954, the peasants went looking for other forms of struggle and resistance, including armed uprisings against the landlords, as were the Guerrilla Porecatu in Paraná and the free territory of Trombas and Formoso, which is now known as the State of Goiás.

### *Know More*

Good material to learn a little more about the history of peasant leagues is the film “Cabra marcado para morrer” (“Twenty years later” is the title in English) by Eduardo Coutinho. The film was begun in 1964 and was interrupted by the censorship of the dictatorship, and then returned to be produced almost twenty years later, showing what happened to the members of the Peasant Leagues in this period.

In the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, a new organization of rural workers emerged, who brought back the name of the Peasant Leagues. They were local and resistance struggles that were connecting and forming a great social movement, focusing its political and social strength in the Brazilian northeast. The leagues created a motto: “agrarian reform in the law or by force,” which expresses the radicalism of the Leagues’ proposal at that time. For ten years, the Peasant Leagues mobilized and



organized thousands of peasants in defense of a radical agrarian reform.

In addition to the leagues, other peasant movements were formed in the 1960's, for example, ULTAB (Union of Farmers and Agricultural Workers of Brazil), which again relied on support from the Communist Party, in order to organize and coordinate peasant associations, with the objective of creating conditions for a political alliance with the workers and peasants. In Rio Grande do Sul, the Brazilian Labor Party-PTB, President Joao Goulart and Governor Leonel Brizola spurred the creation of the MASTER — Movement of Landless Farmers, which organized camps and land occupations as a form of pressure for agrarian reform.

In addition to the peasants, urban workers from various sectors — from students to the military - were organized and mobilized to pressure the João Goulart government to make basic reforms: of the various reform proposals, we highlight agrarian, university and labor reforms.

With the socialist revolution in Cuba in 1959, intensified surveillance and the US intervention in our Latin America, there was a preoccupation with combatting the advance of experiences built by the workers. In Brazil, US interests allied with the bourgeoisie, to be careful not to lose their profits with increasing organization and workers' rights.

On April 1, 1964, the military guided by the bourgeoisie, by the middle class, by conservative sectors of the church and financed by the United States ousted President João Goulart and initiated a corporate-military dictatorship that lasted 21 years. The crackdown happened

in several ways: censorship of the official press, torture legitimized by law, banishments, arrests and disappearances of persecuted politicians. The peasants were the first to suffer the violence of the dictatorship: every form of organization was eliminated and prohibited, many rural workers were killed and tortured in the early days of the dictatorship or were forced to live clandestinely. Some peasant leaders, like Francisco Julião, Clodomir de Moraes, Lindoldo Silva were forced into exile. And others were murdered and their bodies are missing until today, as the leader of Trombas and Formosa (GO), and Santa Fé do Sul (SP).

**REFORMA AGRÁRIA JÁ  
SOB CONTROLE DOS TRABALHADORES**

## CAPTER 3

THE RESUMPTION OF THE STRUGGLE FOR LAND  
(1979-1984)



Not only did the corporate-military dictatorship eliminate any and all forms of organization among rural workers, it persevered with its project of “conservative modernization” in the countryside. This modernization was one of machines and the intensive use of poisons – one which would leave intact the power of the large estates (latifundio), exploitation and the concentration of land. In the face of this, conflicts over land multiplied: the Pastoral Land Commission recorded 715 conflicts across the country in 1979, most of which had begun six years earlier.

Large estate owners hired gunmen to drive the peasant out and murder their leaders. All of this with the support of the dictatorship. Over the course of military rule, 1,106 rural workers were murdered.

In 1964 the government approved the Land Statute in an effort to reduce the organisation of farmers. A progressive piece of legislation at a time of military dictatorship, the Statute recognised the need for and reality of land serving a social function: production and the respect of workers’ and environmental rights. It also provided for the expropriation of lands which didn’t serve their social function and for the settlement of landless workers. The Statute followed the orientation of the Alliance for Progress, a United States-initiated program made up of Latin American capitalist countries, in proposing some policies for land distribution whose objective was to reduce tensions in the countryside and avoid a farmer-led socialist revolution, as had taken place in Cuba. Though the Statute contained some progressive aspects, the dictatorship was never actually interested in implementing it. In practice, the government’s response to conflicts was a policy of ‘colonization’ that encouraged poor farmers

to migrate to the 'agricultural frontier' in the Northwest of the country where they were placed in areas that lacked infrastructure and conditions for production.

The debate over the agrarian question eventually became a concern of the Catholic Church, which divided itself into two sides with different positions: the conservatives in the Church sought to organise institutions that would restrain the farmers from struggling for their rights, especially in the Northeast, as was the case with SORPE (Rural Orientation Service of Pernambuco). Among the progressives there was Dom Hélder Câmara who was the target of multiple death threats for denouncing the situation of workers.

It was the most progressive sector of the Church which created the space where workers could organise themselves and discuss their problems. The Ecclesiastical Base Communities (CEBs) established themselves on the national scene from the 1970s onwards as an important space for resistance against the military dictatorship and for organising the rural population. These efforts were boosted after 1975 with the emergence of the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT). The work of both these elements, underpinned by Liberation Theology, represented a key factor in the conscientization of the need to organise and struggle, and it had a decisive influence on the national character of the struggles.

At this time, the project for monoculture and mechanization of the countryside, which was funded by the dictatorship and international capital, only increased conflict in rural areas and hastened the rural exodus. Large projects like the numerous dams which were built also expelled farmers from their lands. These conflicts began to gain strength and become more visible.

One of the key struggles in the early history of the MST were the Macali and Brilhante occupations in September 1979 in the municipality of Ronda Alta, Rio Grande do Sul. The families occupying the Macali estate were landless farmers, squatters and share croppers who had been driven off the land during the mechanisation of agriculture and had occupied some indigenous Kaingang land in the north of Rio Grande do Sul. The indigenous group organised themselves to take back their land and the farmers were evicted.

At first the group was camped on the roadside, as everything was lost and it was the only option available. The government responded by proposing to resolve the conflict by moving the families to the state of Mato Grosso where land was available. Around 50% of the families accepted the proposal while the other 50% stayed behind, being taken in by relatives and some priests. But they continued living in precarious conditions, without land to plant and live from. To avoid drawing the attention of the dictatorship, the farmers were secretly organised by the Pastoral Land Commission and decided to occupy the Macali lands, which had been illegally appropriated by the timber company *Madereira Carazinho Ltda.*

Shortly after the occupation of the Macali estate, another 170 organised families occupied the Brilhante Estate, lands also illegally taken by the then President of the Agriculture Federation, on the 25th of September. Even under threat of police repression, through a state governed by the military, the families had support from society and it passed without violence. The resistance and symbolism generated by the Macali and Brilhante occupations, whereby it had now become possible to

struggle and resist, marked the resumption of the struggle for land in Brazil.

Along with these, the struggles of rural workers grew, expanding and territorialising over the period across a number of states such as Santa Catarina with the occupation of the Burro Branco estate in the Campo Erê municipality in 1980. In Paraná state, this year also saw a conflict surrounding the construction of the Itaipu dam, with the state on one side and more than 10 thousand families on the other. These families had had their lands flooded, receiving merely cash compensation without the right to resettle. São Paulo also saw during this period the struggle on the Primavera estate in the municipalities of Andradina, Castilho and Nova Independência. In Mato Grosso do Sul, tenant farmers waged an intense resistance struggle on the land. Other struggles took place in other states such as in Bahia, Rio de Janeiro and Goiás.



Fazenda Anoni's Occupation

In 1981 another struggle gained national prominence with the setting up of a new encampment on the roadside in Rio Grande do Sul, the encampment of En-

cruzilhada Natalino. Concerned about the growth of rural struggles, the military government responded by sending Colonel Curió to do away with this movement of landless people. This was the same Colonel Curió who had been one of those responsible for the massacre of guerrillas in Araguaia. The encampment became an area of national security with no one allowed to enter without military authorisation. Food supplies were blocked from entering and the occupiers were subject to psychological torture. The families were pressured to leave the encampment and agree to join the colonization projects in the north. However, with the support of society and the strengthening of other movements in the struggle for democracy, such as the workers' strikes, the dictatorship didn't have enough strength to defeat the farmers. Colonel Curió was forced to withdraw and a number of the families were settled in Ronda Alta with the support of the Catholic Church. To spread the word of this struggle and to denounce the actions of the dictatorship, the encamped families created a newsletter, the 'Landless Bulletin', which would later become the Landless Newspaper (Jornal Sem Terra)

Recognizing that previous peasant struggles had been defeated because of their isolation from one another, the landless rural workers came to realise it was necessary to form an organisation that was national and not merely local. From 1981 onwards the first links began to be forged between these struggles and the encampments. With the exchange of experiences, a national coalition of these movements began to emerge, resulting in a social movement that was autonomous, united, that had common objectives and which was national in scope. Out of this process came the founding of the MST in 1984.



# CHAPTER 4

**WE STRUGGLE FOR LAND, FOR AGRARIAN  
REFORM AND FOR THE SOCIAL  
TRANSFORMATION  
(1985-1989)**

The Landless Workers Movement was born with the struggle for democracy. After 21 years of corporate-military dictatorship in Brazil, amid the climate of the campaigns for “Direct Elections Now” and the agitation for the right of people to elect the President, the discussion around agrarian reform is taken up again. In this period we also see the organizing of various fronts of struggle such as the Workers Party (PT) in 1982 and the Central Union of Workers (CUT) in 1983.

As part of this historical context of struggles since the colonization of Brazil and the contradictions created by the modern and conservative large estates, the First National Meeting of the Landless was held in Cascavel, Paraná on January 20–22, 1984. The movement does not have a day of foundation per se, but this meeting marks the starting point of its construction. The activity brought together 80 rural workers who helped to organize land occupations in 11 states: Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná, São Paulo, Mato Grosso do Sul, Espírito Santo, Bahia, Pará, Goiás, Rondônia and Acre, and representatives of ABRA (Brazilian Association of Agrarian Reform), CUT (Central Unica dos Trabalhadores) of the CIMI (Indigenous Missionary Council) and of the Workers’ Pastoral of São Paulo.

The result of the above elements enabled the MST to carry out its 1st National Congress, in Curitiba, Paraná, in 1985, whose motto was: “Without land there is no democracy.” During this period, the country went through a new period, with the exit of the military from power and the arrival of José Sarney, “Colonel” of Maranhão and collaborator of the dictatorship, as President. During the congress it became clear a tactic of struggle that gave



unity to all States. “The occupation is the only solution,” as a form of struggle for agrarian reform to go forward. Since the beginning of our Organization, we declare our three main objectives: to fight for land, for agrarian reform and the transformation of society!

After 21 years of repression and struggle, Brazilian society, animated by strikes and demonstrations, brought up dozens of demands that had been suffocated by the dictatorship: better wages, education, health care, democratic rights ... as well as agrarian reform. To try to restore calm in the country, the Government announced a National Plan of Agrarian Reform (PNRA) in May 1985, with the goal of settling 1.4 million families.

The PNRA tried to promote expropriation for social interests as a priority tool for agrarian reform. It criticized land speculation, rescued the punitive nature of this

type of expropriation and prioritized the participation of organizations of workers and sectors of the church in the agrarian reform process

On the other hand, the owners of the large estates also strengthened their organization and their threats. In 1985 the landowners created the UDR (Rural Democratic Union). This led to a lot of violence in the country: 137 killed, 188 threatened, 30 dead without precise specification of the reason, plus 8 missing, 334 arrested and 190 wounded and tortured. Numbers continued to grow in the following years. The deaths also reached the supporters of agrarian reform, who were threatened for helping workers and were brutally murdered such as Father Josimo in Imperatriz, MA, killed by landowners from Goias.

***Know more:***

Under Article 186 of the Federal Constitution, the social function is met when the rural property complies simultaneously with the following requirements according to standards prescribed by law:

- I - Rational and adequate use;
- II - Adequate use of available natural resources and preservation of the environment;
- III - Compliance with the provisions governing labor relations;
- IV - Use that favors the well-being of the owners and workers

In the process of democratizing the country it was necessary to adopt a new constitution, because the laws of the dictatorship were still in place. The popular mobilizations focused on passing progressive laws, while

the right was also organized through their members of Congress to prevent rights guaranteed to workers. So it was with agrarian reform. With the coalition to the Constituent Assembly, the large farmers organized themselves on three fronts: the armed wing, encouraging violence in the countryside; the caucus in parliament; and the media as an ally.

Starting with the federal constitution of 1988, the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) gained constitutional status thanks to the strength of the struggles of rural workers.

The Constitution also defined the expropriation of properties that do not serve a social function as the main way to carry out agrarian reform, putting the state in charge of this change.

During the Sarney government, the proposal for agrarian reform stayed on paper. Pressed by the interests of the owners of the large estates, at the end of five years, fewer than 90,000 landless families were settled on land. That is to say, only 6% of the targets set in the PNRA were met.

Despite all the violence and the complicity of the state, it was a period of growth for the MST. Hundreds of encampments and occupations were organized during this period, such as the major occupation of the Annoni Farm (RS), the biggest occupation at the time, the Santa Monica Farm in Goiás; the 45 Farm in Alcobaça (BA), the Rio do Peixe, Val Paraiso and Canada farms in Uiraúna (PB) and many others.

## 1987: MST adopts an anthem and a flag

With every occupation, encampment, and mobilization, the movement was gaining strength and growing, but also building the symbols and the *mística*, which encourages us to fight for our organization.

At the Third National Meeting of the Movement, in 1987, two important symbols were approved and they accompany us throughout our history: our anthem and our flag.

The anthem composed by our comrade Ademir Bogo, was set to music by maestro Willy Oliveira, and turned our struggle into song, “Come, let us struggle, with fist raised / Our Strength brings us to build / Our free and strong homeland / Built by people power” and reminding us of our goal, which is the transformation of our society, “Tomorrow belongs to us workers.”

The flag also expresses our Organization through its symbols: the men and women remind us that this is a fight with the participation of all; the machete is our tool for work and struggle; the map of Brazil represents our national organization, throughout the country; Green on the map is our source of work and life, agriculture; The red flag symbolizes the struggle and black colors in the letters represent those who fell in the fight.

# CAPTER 5

OCCUPY, RESIST AND PRODUCE  
(1990-1995)

In 1989 after 25 years, finally Brazilians could elect their president by direct vote. In a close race in the second round, the workers' project, represented by the candidacy of Luis Inacio Lula da Silva (Workers Party, PT) was defeated by Fernando Collor de Mello (PRN). The new president had commitments with international capital and at the same time with the big landowners. His rule was marked by the deregulation of the economy, opening the Brazilian market to international companies and initiating the process of privatization and the dismantling of state, the so-called "neoliberalism". At the same time, it turned a blind eye to the actions of the UDR and violence in the countryside, without advancing anything in the area of agrarian reform.

Given this situation, at the Second National Congress of the MST in Brasilia in 1990, our Movement drew up the slogans that defined what would be our tactics for that period: Occupy, resist and produce!



II National Congress, 1990



Faced with the paralysis of agrarian reform, the Movement reaffirmed that only struggle would pressure the government and at the same time there would be ways to expose for the public the situation in the countryside. And our main tool is the land occupations, showing society where the large estates are and who we are, thousands without land who could be producing in those unproductive areas. Hence the slogan "Occupy".

As the government encouraged repression and criminalization, it was necessary to be well organized and "resist". The repression was not only from the police. During this period it also came from the courts, which appear as a new barrier to prevent occupations, criminalizing the actions and seizing the main leaders of the MST.

With the political repression and violence that we suffered, the analysis performed by the organization as a whole was that the movement should respond by showing society that agrarian reform was indispensable. During the years of the Collor government, it implemented an agricultural policy that aimed to strengthen agricultural production and expel a large mass of rural workers to meet the demands of the industry. Then there was a drastic reduction in prices of agricultural products for the domestic market, which had the effect of non-viability of small farms. So in addition to resisting in the encampments and occupations, it was also necessary to resist in the settlements through organization and production. Therefore, "Produce".

During this period, the Movement had already organized associations, acquiring machinery, developing the marketing of goods, including the creation of small agro-industries. Agricultural production cooperatives

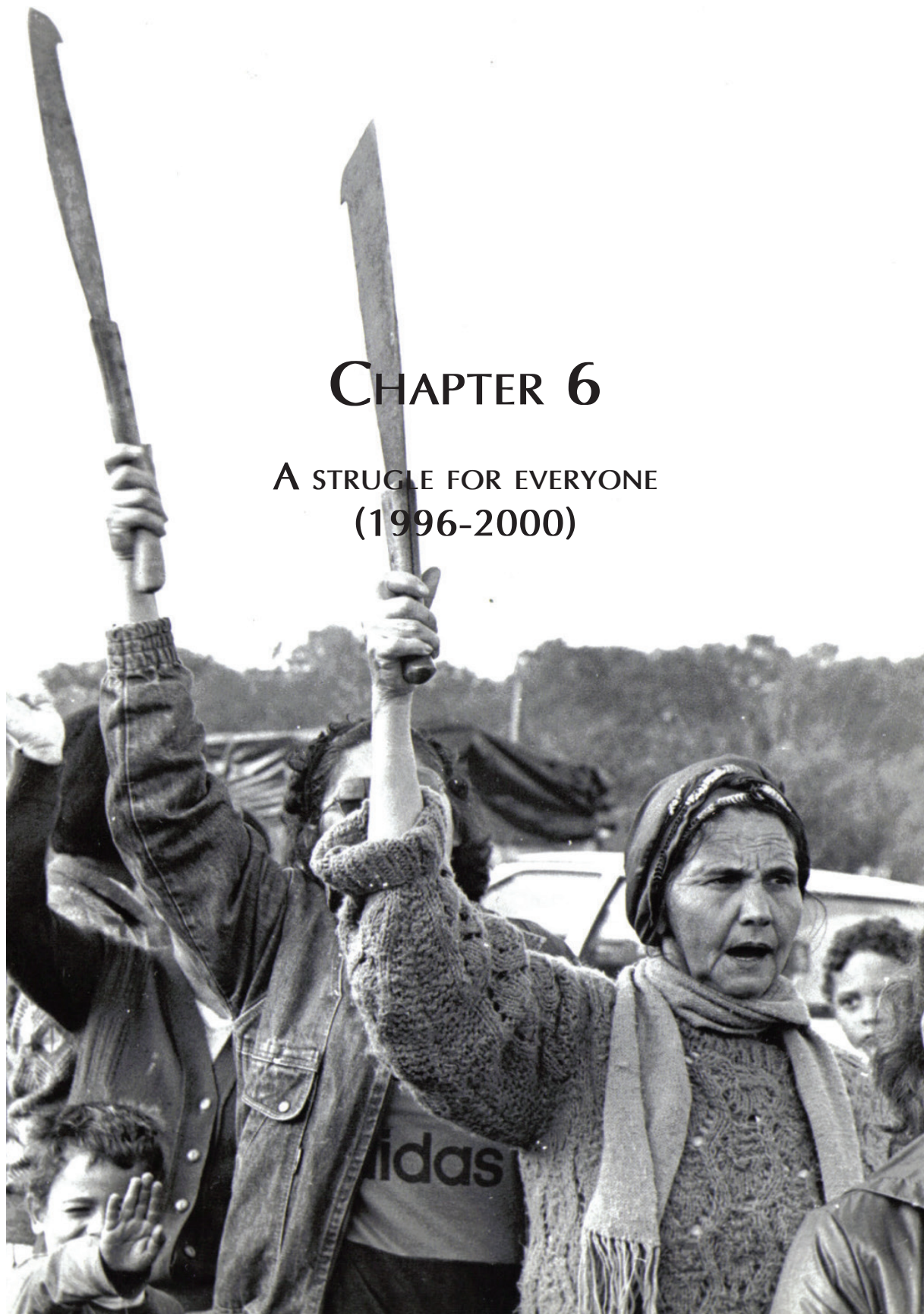
and provision of services were formed. The mobilization of the settlers won the first special credit program for agrarian reform, PROCERA. It is in this period that the Settlers' Cooperative System gave birth to the Confederation of Agrarian Reform Cooperatives of Brazil, CONCRAB, an important national tool to organize production and collective work in our areas.

In the face of all the challenges, the MST leads the struggle for land to the city through the national struggle campaigns denouncing state violence and organizing demonstrations and conducting joint mobilizations with other categories of workers.

In 1992, Fernando Collor suffered impeachment, with his mandate haunted by accusations of corruption. Instead, Itamar Franco assumes the presidency, and starts a dialogue with the Landless Movement. He was the first president to receive our Movement. This was a consolidation period for the MST as a national movement and also a period of strengthening internal organic quality and development of production.

# CHAPTER 6

A STRUGLE FOR EVERYONE  
(1996-2000)





Panel of the III National Congress

In 1995, the Movement reaches its Third Congress having withstood the violence of the years of the Collor administration, which enabled the internal strengthening of our Organization. Land takeovers increased, new encampments were established and new settlements were won. This enabled the MST to expand, getting organized in several states. New tasks demanded more internal organization: education in the settlements and encampments, the discussion of popular communication, the participation of women... these are tasks that require specific dedication and thus several collectives and sectors were organized to respond to these demands.

This period was rich in advancing education sectors such as literacy of approximately 7,000 young people and adults, the creation of the Josué de Castro School in Veranópolis (RS), a partnership for the creation of higher education courses, etc. But the training sector was still committed to the ongoing policy of organizing national and state courses of ideological political education for activists, cadres and leaders to extend our strategy and tactical way of fighting. A communications sector engaged in the creation of community radio stations and worked on the propagation of our newspapers and ma-

gazines as a means of discussion, information, and agitation.

In 1994, Fernando Henrique Cardoso is elected and takes up the neoliberal project that was unfinished in the Collor government. The idea of this project is that the capital and the bourgeoisie cannot have any obstacles in the way of obtaining their profits. Neither workers' rights, or supervision or state control, no law can prevent capital from reproducing widely. For agriculture, the project of the FHC government was to push millions of peasants from the countryside to the city, aiming to establish only 6% of the population in the countryside.

The Third Congress is held in the context of a stronger organization, so this was the first of the great massive congresses of the MST, with 5,226 delegates from 22 states. We faced a project for agriculture that aimed to increase the rural exodus and poverty, focusing more and more land and power in the large estates.

Therefore, the motto of the 3rd Congress was "Agrarian Reform, a struggle for all," because we wanted to demonstrate to the whole of society that agrarian reform benefited not only farmers but also urban workers, increasing food production and decreasing the cost of living in cities.

## The massacre of Eldorado dos Carajás – Pará – April 17, 1996



The Cardoso government's response to the organization of the peasants was the same for all governments committed to the large estates: violence. In 1995, 16 peasants were killed and seven disappeared in a confrontation between the military police and landless workers in Corumbiará, Rondônia.

In April 1996 in the state of Pará, 2,000 families in an encampment who were struggling for the expropriation of Macaxeiras farm, began a march to pressure the state and federal governments to carry out the settlement. On April 17, they were camped along the roadside waiting for a hearing in the capital, at a place known as the S curve in the municipality of Eldorado dos Carajás. The families were surrounded around 4 pm by the Military

Police, which was divided into two groups. The order of Governor Almir Gabriel (PSDB, the same party of then President Fernando Henrique) was to eliminate the encamped families.

The police closed the road with two trucks, preventing the march from continuing. Without any kind of identification on their uniforms and weapons, they attacked the rural workers. Nineteen landless workers were murdered, some executed where they were fallen or surrendered, two died months later from their injuries and more than 70 people — men, women, and children — were injured and suffered serious after-effects.

Today, it is known that the police received money from the owner of the Macaxeira farm and support from hired gunmen to carry out the massacre, which also had the logistical support of Vale do Rio Doce Company and other local businesses. Only 15 years after the massacre, Colonel Mario Colares Pantoja and Major José Maria Pereira de Oliveira were arrested and sentenced, the first to 228 years and the second to 158 years in prison. Neither the Governor, Almir Gabriel, and none of the 155 police officers who participated in the massacre were sentenced. Commanders fulfilled sentence under house arrest. The Massacre moved the people and drew international attention to the serious crisis of the Brazilian agrarian question. In memory of the martyrs of Carajás, April 17 became the International Day of Peasant Struggle, determined by the movements of La Via Campesina International. Later President Fernando Henrique Cardoso signed a decree formalizing this day as the National Day of Struggle for Agrarian Reform, Decree-Law No. 10,469 of June 25, 2002.

## **National March for Agrarian Reform, Jobs and Justice - 1997**

The National March began on February 17, 1997, leaving from three parts of the country. It was planned to reach Brasilia on April 17, exactly one year after the Eldorado de Carajás massacre.

The main goal of the march was to dialogue with society and to face the offensive of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government, and denounce the impunity of the instigators of the Eldorado de Carajás massacre and draw attention to the urgency of agrarian reform. Thus, a long path was traveled in more than two months. Men and women all walking the roads and highways, without going by bus, and in every town that the march went through, there was the conversation explaining to the population the meaning of the struggle, raising political awareness. The arrival in Brasilia was only the result of the whole.

The march consisted of three columns: the first, with the members from states of the South and São Paulo, leaving from São Paulo, with 600 members. Another with the landless from Minas Gerais, Espirito Santo, Rio and Bahia, left Governador Valadares, Minas Gerais, with 400 members. The third column, with activists from Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Rondonia, Goiás and the Federal District, leaving from Rondonópolis, Mato Grosso, with 300 members.

The route of each column was about a thousand kilometers. The three were formed with people from encampments and settlements. The arrival in Brasilia on April 17 was celebrated with a big public event, uniting



various sectors of society with over 100,000 people attending the event.

The National March gained a greater symbolism than the actual Landless Movement. The government of Fernando Henrique had fought the workers and their unions, the strike of oil workers during which army tanks were sent to confront the workers. With the March, the MST represented at that time not only the landless workers but the whole of the Brazilian working class, which was represented at the meeting when the March arrived.

The National March put the landless movement as one of the main social forces of our country, gaining international respect. Under pressure, the government was forced to create the Ministry of Agrarian Development and take policy measures for that benefited families.



# CHAPTER 7

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST AGRIBUSINESS  
(2000-2010)

The policy of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government (1994-1998 and 1998-2002) was marked by the handover of our economy to international financial capital, increasing the power and profits of international banks and multinational companies through privatization and interest rates. In agriculture, this policy gave rise to what we call agribusiness.

Agribusiness is the alliance between the large landowners, multinational companies and banks, which began to buy land, agro-industries and agricultural enterprises. The first goal of agribusiness is to control the entire production chain: from seed to manufactured product. Thus, to control agriculture from production to marketing. The second objective is to produce the so-called commodities, products that are accepted in the markets of the world. So they organized agriculture not to meet the needs of the Brazilian people, but for what can bring more profit abroad. The consequence of this model is the increasing concentration of land and inequalities in the countryside.

From the 2000s, agribusiness had a huge advance over the control of agriculture and peasants, investing highly in production of transgenic seeds, pesticides, monoculture and land accumulation.

In this capital model, one company controls the production of seeds, inputs, storage, processing and sale, thereby taking full control of agricultural production. For agribusiness, settlements and traditional communities, for example, are backwards locations for the production of agriculture since they do not meet the demands of capitalism, which is production of large amounts of monoculture.



IV National Congress

The agribusiness model has two powerful allies. The first is the media. Through their vehicles of mass communication, the media reinforces the idea that agribusiness is synonymous with progress and production, omitting the contradictions of this model. At the same time they criminalize social movements, attacking demonstrations and all forms of resistance to this model, whether by landless workers, indigenous people, or Afro-descendant communities. No wonder that television stations such as Globo and Rede Bandeirantes are part of the Brazilian Association of Agribusiness (ABAG).

Another powerful ally of agribusiness is the judiciary. Historically, this power has always been removed from the interests of the poor and at the service of the dominant classes. So much so that most crimes of violence in the countryside remain unpunished. In recent years, this approach has widened, legitimizing the action of agribusiness and violence through evictions, prosecutions of the entities that defend agrarian reform, lawsuits and judgments against rural workers, while the judiciary

is slow to decide on expropriations or the situation of families in encampments. In this way it acts in partnership with the legislature, where the rural caucus is very strong thanks to the financing of election campaigns it receives from agribusiness companies. In Congress, agribusiness works both to end the laws that protect workers and the environment, and to criminalize social movements through Congressional Inquiries such as the Congressional Inquiry on Land.

Another feature of this period is called “market agrarian reform”, a policy driven by the World Bank and implemented by the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government. The idea was to empty the encampments and mobilizations, suggesting that the landless could win land only with the registration by mail. Another tactic was the Land Bank or Land Title, in which the landless could acquire land by purchase through bank loans without the need to expropriate the large estates. Although the government has invested heavily in advertising, these policies failed because the workers went into debt and were forced to sell the land they had bought. Also, they did not disturb the Brazilian agrarian structure, that is, the large estates remained untouched.

To the extent to which agribusiness imposes itself, it came to be identified by social forces as the new enemy to be fought. In the beginning of 2000, the Movement realized that the large landowner was not their only enemy, but it was now necessary to directly combat international financial capital.

In 2000, the MST held its Fourth Congress, with the theme “Agrarian Reform: For a Brazil without Lati-fúndio”. It was attended by more than 11,000 movement activists coming from the 23 states where the MST was organized at the time, including 107 foreigners from 25 countries representing 45 organizations. In this Congress, the child care center also stood out, so that while their parents were participating in various workshops and discussions, about 90 movement educators took care of 200 landless children in recreational and educational activities in the child-care center.

Despite the strength demonstrated in the Con-

gress, agribusiness continued gaining momentum. Even the election of Luis Inacio Lula da Silva (PT) as President of the Republic was not able to carry out the promised agrarian reform, or stop the advance of agribusiness. His government was made up of both supporters of agrarian reform and by representatives of agribusiness. The new government presented the Second National Plan for Agrarian Reform, with a goal of settling 500,000 new families, half of that required by the social movements. When Lula was elected in 2002, 60,000 families were in encampments. The possibility that agrarian reform could become reality mobilized thousands of people and in a short time the number of families in encampments jumped to 162,000. However, the government foiled the historical expectations of the landless workers and did not reach the goal proposed by the MST to settle all the families in encampments.

It was necessary to get moving again and dialogue with society. And so in 2005 we had one of the largest marches in the history of the movement: the National March for Agrarian Reform. In all, 12,000 participants walked from Goiania to Brasilia covering 200 km. The march began on May 2 arriving in the Federal capital on the 17th of the same month. Again, our child care center was also involved. The 130 children who were accompanying their parents were taken to Children's Childcare or the Traveling School, where they played and studied. Logistics included 415 people in the kitchen. The origin of the food varied: some of it came from our own agrarian reform settlements, some from donation campaigns, churches that were collaborating and the solidarity of society in general. The Health Sector organized 320

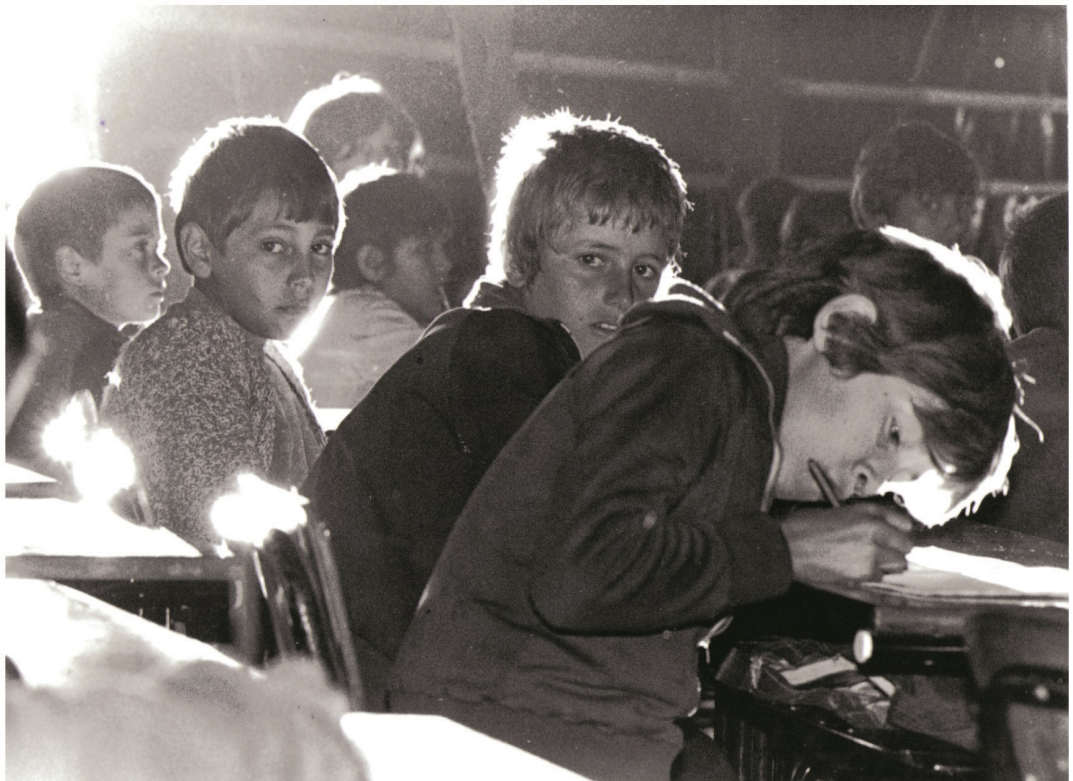


people trained to help. A traveling radio broadcast sound truck encouraged and kept the marchers organized. In the afternoon, discussions were held after the rest time. At night, the Culture Sector ensured the diversity of our artistic expressions. It was a city on the move every day. It was also in 2005 that the movement opened its Florestan Fernandes National School (ENFF), a space for training not only rural landless workers, but at the service of the Brazilian and international working class. In it, the activists of various organizations deepen their studies, exchange ideas and experiences, strengthen the international ties and humanitarian values. The school building itself was built by the hands of landless workers, with the support and solidarity of MST Friends Committees around the world.

In this period the Landless Women's organization also gained strength. In addition to deepening discussions on gender in our movement, women organized big mobilizations against agribusiness, such as the occupation of Aracruz (2006) and sugarcane plantations across the country, making March 8 an important moment of struggle for agrarian reform.

Still in the context of the struggle against agribusiness, the MST held its 5th Congress in 2007. In it were gathered 17,500 workers and landless rural workers from 24 states in Brazil where the MST was already organized. The largest peasant congress in Latin America. One result of this great moment was the letter in which we commit to helping to organize the people to fight for their rights and against inequality and social injustice. For this to happen the letter enumerates joint commitments to the social sectors, the fight against privatization, large estates,

burnings and violence in the countryside; the struggle for agrarian reform, defense of our rights, defense of native seeds, and our water, and combat against transnational companies that exploit and destroy our natural resources only in the name of profit. These commitments were embodied in the motto “Agrarian Reform for social justice and popular sovereignty.”



## INTERNATIONALISM

One of the characteristics of agribusiness is that its design is international, seeking to subject the peasants of the whole world to the same interests of large multinational companies. As a result, the challenges faced by peasants anywhere in the world have become more common, as well as facing a single enemy. With this, the MST's struggle has become increasingly international.

Internationalism is one of the values of the struggle of the working class. Since the first proletarian revolutions of 1848, internationalism became one of the dimensions that would characterize the class struggle throughout history, as the foundation of the First International Workingmen's Association in 1864, or the Hymn of the International, composed after the Paris Commune Paris in 1871. In Latin America, the Cuban Revolution and Che were the greatest symbols of revolutionary internationalism. Cuba has shown its solidarity with the revolutionary processes in all parts of the world

The MST was influenced by this tradition and was born in a context of internationalist struggles against the dictators that marked Latin America in the late 70s. Since our inception, we received solidarity from other countries and movements. In our first meeting, we already had the participation of 15 international delegates.

In 1993, we joined in the founding of Via Campesina, an international movement that coordinates peasant organizations for action at the same time and is at the same time a space for working together. Currently Via Campesina is organized in all continents. In Latin America, Via Campesina is coordinated through the Coordi-

nadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo — CLOCK, in order to establish solidarity and unity in diversity among peasant organizations.



Panel Classics of Socialism

The MST also counted on the important solidarity of Friends Committees that were formed in Europe, the US and Canada. In the early years of the MST existence, these committees, along with the solidarity of the international Church and some solidarity agencies, have made an important contribution to the organization of our encampments. Later the committees expanded their actions, engaging in solidarity campaigns, denouncing impunity, the violence and the criminalization of the struggle. The committees also had a major contribution in building the campaign for the Florestan Fernandes National School with the organization of Sebastião Salgado

photo exhibitions in various countries of the world, which in addition to raising funds for the construction helped to further publicize our struggle internationally.

Another important space with the participation of the MST was the World Social Forum (WSF), the result of a reaffirmation of the struggle against the neoliberal model. The WSF is a worldwide event, where the participants include various social movements, networks, organizations and other civil society opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism. It is a democratic forum for discussion of ideas, formulation of proposals and reflections and exchange of experiences between different countries fighting against the imperialist model that threatens people.

In 2004, encouraged by social struggles and the achievement of progressive governments in Latin America, the proposal of ALBA was born — the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America. And in 2007 the establishment of the Council of Social Movements of ALBA began, a space for the social movements of the members of the ALBA countries to work together. Shortly thereafter, the social movements in other Latin American countries, who came from a long history of fighting together against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, creating spaces such as Jubilee South, the Cry of the Excluded (CLOC) and Via Campesina, saw the ALBA as a model and built the Coalition of movements of ALBA, coordinating social movements with bases and the ability to mobilize the masses of more than twenty countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Since then, the Coalition of Alba Movements has been building an integra-

tion from the people, from below, contributing their brigades in several countries on the continent, defending an anti-imperialist, anti-neoliberal and anti-patriarchal movement.

Thus, following the examples of the history of workers struggles, we also began to create our internationalist brigades to demonstrate concretely our revolutionary solidarity. Our first Internationalist Brigade went to Nicaragua in 1986. Afterward we have expanded our actions. Today we have dozens of landless doctors who have graduated in Cuba and Venezuela. Our brigades worked in several countries from all continents, such as Nicaragua, Cuba, Palestine, Venezuela, Bolivia, Paraguay, Peru, Guatemala, Honduras, Haiti, Mozambique and China, not to mention the thousands of activists who participated in exchanges in dozens of other countries.

# CHAPTER 8

STRUGGLE, BUILD PEOPLE'S  
AGRARIAN REFORM  
(2014- ...)

A decade of domination by agribusiness produced dramatic effects on our agriculture: the mechanisms of the State for agriculture were being dismantled one by one, such as price controls, supply, research, technical assistance. If before they were accessible to only a few, today they barely exist. Some foreign companies, all owned by foreign banks began to control our agriculture from the seeds to the sales. They incorporated land, agro-industries and supermarkets. They defined food prices on the stock exchanges and our country reverted to being a large colony again. In place of food, land would be occupied by sugarcane for fuel in the United States, by soybeans for animal feed in Europe and by cellulose for paper all over the world.

Some traits are common, namely between “past and present”: the state’s role in the financing of these agro-industrial complexes; over-exploitation and job insecurity; the production of commodities aimed at the foreign market; control of agriculture and infrastructure for international capital. If we make a temporary cut of our contemporary history, the financing of Brazilian state (through BNDES – National Bank of Development) for the Capitalist Agriculture (Agribusiness) jumped from 27.1 billion reais in 2003/2004 to 100 billion in the 2010/2011 harvest (source: Ministry of Finance / Secretary of Economic Policy). In 2009, the export of soy, meat, forest products, sugarcane complex totaled 45,963 billion dollars (about 120 billion reais). The agribusiness GDP represented 22.3% of Brazilian GDP, totaling 821 billion reais (Source: CEPEA, MDIC/SECEX, 2011).

The main export destinations of Brazilian agribusiness were: China (\$ 16.5 billion, 17.5% of exports); USA



(6.7 billion dollars, 7.1% of exports); Netherlands (6.4% billion, 6.7% of exports); Russia (4.1 billion dollars, 4.3% of exports); Japan (3.5 billion do- homes, 3.7% of exports). This dependency ratio of the foreign market places Brazil in extreme dependence on the “world market”, when four countries (excluding at that time the Netherlands), buy 32.6% of what is produced in agriculture.

Monocultures take over and divide up our territory, inflate the price of land, reduce food production and generate a great global crisis related to food.

The power of agribusiness is not only economic but also political, financing election campaigns, electing deputies who defend their interests and also influencing the federal government.

This scenario has created a deadlock for agrarian reform. The land cannot be expropriated because even unproductive areas interest agribusiness, either as a “market reserve” to plant in the future, or to protect its ally, the large estates. The land prices became a space for speculation, increasing significantly and preventing governments from paying for expropriation. In addition, many governments are funded by agribusiness and therefore do not take on any commitment to land reform.

In this context, the Landless Movement realized that the nature of the struggle for land and agrarian reform had changed. Now, more than ever, the struggle for agrarian reform involves confrontations with capital, and its model of agriculture, in disputes over land and for territory. And it extends to disputes over the control of seeds, agro-industry, technology, natural resources, biodiversity, water and forests.

Now we need to defend a new project of agrarian reform, land reform that is for all the people.

Classic agrarian reform is not enough. It only divided land ownership and integrates farmers as suppliers of raw materials and food for urban-industrial society.

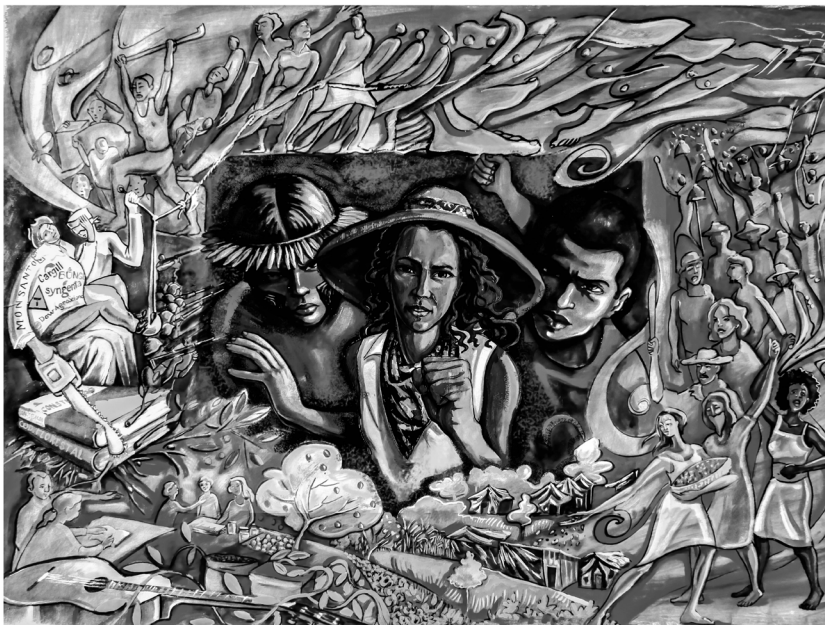
It must be a demand of the people, because it will be the result of the alliance of rural workers and urban workers. It is only with this alliance that we will have power to pressure governments and fight agribusiness

It is based on the people because its interests are the people, not companies. Agribusiness not only reduces food production, using the land to grow sugar cane for fuels, for example, but also threatens our natural resources, depleting natural resources. Moreover, it uses large amounts of poison, which remain on land and food, causing illness in rural and urban workers. This model has made Brazil the largest consumer of the world's pesticides, poison that pollutes the land, the farmer and the food that comes to the cities.

Building People's Agrarian Reform means adopting a new production model based on the rational management of the environment, agroecology, using techniques that ensure productivity, reducing the burden of agricultural work, while respecting the health of the peasant and city worker who consumes our food.

Building this new project means strengthening the organization, production and participation in our settlements. The settlement should be a good place to live, which is both an example for society of the country we want to build, ensuring access to our rights such as healthcare and education where the work and decisions involve everyone, men, women, young and old.

Therefore, the People's Agrarian Reform we advocate is based on the defense of sovereignty, respect and against the commodification of goods of nature and in favor of production of healthy food to feed the population. So it must be the result of an alliance of peasants, but mostly of urban and rural workers and it needs to accumulate forces to produce the necessary changes in the countryside and in the whole of Brazilian society.



Panel of the VI National Congress



# **PROGRAM OF PEOPLE'S AGRARIAN REFORM**

- **BUILT IN A COLLECTIVE PROCESS WHICH STARTED IN 2010,  
AND APPROVED IN THE VI MST NATIONAL CONGRESS,  
BRASILIA, 2014 -**

Our agrarian program seeks structural changes in how we use our natural resources, which belong to everyone, in the organization of production and in social relations in the countryside. We want to contribute in an ongoing way to building a just, equal and fraternal society. To this end, we propose the following objectives:

### **1. Land:**

The earth and all natural wealth in our country should be under social control and should benefit all Brazilians and future generations. For this we must strive to:

- a) Democratize access to land, water, biodiversity (forests, fauna and flora), minerals and energy sources.
- b) Prevent the concentration of private property;
- c) Establish the maximum size for the ownership of land;
- d) Get rid of the latifúndio;
- e) Ensure that the use, possession, and ownership of land fulfills a social function;
- f) Return to the people all lands, territories, minerals, and biodiversity appropriated by foreign companies.
- g) Demarcate and respect all areas belonging to indigenous peoples and communities of afro-descendants (quilombolas), riverbank dwellers, extractivist communities and traditional artisanal fishermen and women.

### **2. Natural resources:**

Water and native forests are assets of the natural world and they should be treated as a right of all workers. They cannot be treated as commodities and must not be subject to private appropriation.

- a) Ensure that the waters and forests are preserved as a public good, accessible to all.
- b) Combat deforestation and illegal logging and illegal trade;
- c) Reforest the degraded areas with ample biodiversity of native and fruit trees, ensuring environmental preservation.

### **3. Seeds**

Seeds are a patrimony of the people in the service of humanity and cannot be considered private property or be under any kind of economic control:

- a) Preserve, multiply and share native seeds, whether traditional or improved, in accord with the biodiversity of our regional ecosystems so that all peasants can use them;
- b) Defend national sovereignty over production and the multiplication of all seeds and seedlings.

### **4. Production**

All production will be developed with the control of workers over the result of their work. The social relations of production must abolish exploitation, oppression, and alienation.

- a) Give top priority to the production of healthy foods in environmentally sustainable conditions for all Brazilians and for the needs of other peoples.
- b) Consider that food is a human right of all citizens and cannot be subjected to the logic of profit.
- c) Utilize organic techniques, abolishing the use of pesticides and genetically modified seeds.

- d) Use farm machinery that is appropriate and adapted to each environmental context in order to increase the productivity of the land, labor, and income in balance with nature.
- e) Promote the various forms of agricultural cooperation to develop the productive forces and social relations.
- f) Establish farm industries in the countryside, controlled by the peasants and other workers, to generate alternative employment and income especially for youth and women.

## **5. Energy**

- a) We must find ways to develop people's sovereignty over energy in every community and in all Brazilian municipalities.
- b) Develop in a cooperative way the production of energy at a local level, with the most varied sources of renewable resources in order to meet the needs of all Brazilians.

## **6. Education and Culture**

Knowledge should be a process of consciousness raising, liberation and ongoing cultural elevation of all people living in the countryside.

- a) Ensure that the population living in the countryside has access to culture and the right to public, free, and quality education at all levels;
- b) Encourage, promote, and disseminate the cultural and social identity of the rural population;
- c) Ensure access, production, and control of the most di-



- verse forms of mass media in the countryside;
- d) Develop ongoing technical, scientific, and political education for all who live in the countryside;
  - e) Continuously combat all forms of social prejudice in order to wipe out discrimination of all types: gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc.

## **7. Social Rights**

- a) The wage workers must have all their social, pension and labor rights guaranteed and equivalent to those of city workers and labor relations must be built on the basis of cooperation, social management and combating alienation.
- b) Ensure that pay is compatible with the revenue and the wealth generated.
- c) Ensure decent and appropriate work hours.
- d) Combat in an ongoing and uncompromising way work that is similar to slavery, expropriating all the farms and businesses that use this practice.
- e) Combat all forms of violence against women and children, punishing in an exemplary way anyone who practices it.

## **8. Decent living conditions for all.**

The countryside should be a good place to live, where people have rights, opportunities, and decent living conditions.





