



## **GLOBALIZATION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: A BRAZILIAN PERSPECTIVE**

**A public lecture by João Pedro Stedile of the MST (Landless Workers Movement) of Brazil,  
held at O.I.S.E Auditorium, Toronto  
October 20, 2003**

**CERLAC Colloquia Paper**

January, 2004

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**Abstract**

On October 20, 2003, one of the leading spokespersons of the MST (Landless Workers Movement) of Brazil, João Pedro Stedile, presented this public lecture in Toronto. Mr. Stedile provided an overview of the present crisis of neoliberalism, gauging the strategic responses of dominant institutions to this crisis as well as the challenges and opportunities that the moment affords for social movements mobilizing for progressive change. More specific political questions, regarding the situation in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America, received attention in the question period and are discussed in the appendices, which are comprised of press coverage and interviews derived from Mr. Stedile's presence in Toronto.

## Acknowledgments

Mr. Stedile's activities in Toronto were organized by the Centre for Research on Latin America at York University (CERLAC), the Transformative Learning Centre of OISE / U of Toronto, and the Sam Gindin Chair for Social Justice and Democracy at Ryerson University.

Co-sponsors of the Toronto event included: CAW International Department (CAW-Canada), The Centre for Social Justice, The Council of Canadians, Justicia 4 Migrant Workers, The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund, Science for Peace, United Steelworkers (Canada), and the Toronto Social Forum.

Mr. Stedile's tour in Canada was organized by The Canadian Association for the Study of International Development - CASID, and Development and Peace. Prof. Wilder Robles of CASID and the University of Winnipeg played a central role in this effort.

Mr. Stedile's presentation was translated from Spanish into English by interpreter Daina Z. Green. The recording was transcribed into written text by Paula Pelaez. The translation and text were edited and annotated by Ian MacDonald.

The authors and sources of the articles included here as appendices are all identified below; we are grateful for their permission to reproduce these works here.

All photographs were taken by Sharmini Peries and are included here with her kind permission.



Left to right: Marshall Beck (CERLAC), U of Winnipeg student, Wilder Robles (CASID), visitor from Argentina, Carlos Torres, João Pedro Stedile, Daniel Shugarensky (OISE), Sharmini Peries, Leo Panitch (York).

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## INTRODUCTION

BY MARSHALL BECK

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, CERLAC

In one of the most inequitable societies of the world, where land ownership patterns are more skewed than in almost any other country – where 1 % of landowners own nearly 50% of the agricultural land and where some 23 million people in the countryside live in dire poverty; there – in the face of potential assassination and violence meted out with near total impunity by landed elites - the poorest of the poor have organized themselves in order to push forward, by direct action from below, a much-needed agrarian reform that has long been promised but never delivered, and in so doing - with almost 20 years of experience and some million members - they have come to form the largest and most important grassroots organization in Latin America – what Noam Chomsky recently called “the most important and exciting popular movement in the world.”

Far from being merely concerned with helping individual families obtain their own piece of land, this movement has sought to emancipate and empower the dispossessed through organization and education and it has sought, with great success, to rebuild a cooperative culture in communities of families ravaged by poverty. It also promotes an alternative approach to rural development, offering, in the words of Britain’s newspaper *The Guardian*, “a radical solution to the country’s problems – growing food for the rural poor rather than for giant corporations.” The pursuit of such goals, of course, has brought the movement into confrontation with global structures and interests, and it has risen to the challenge by building networks of international solidarity and by engaging in struggles of international importance, such as the anti-globalization movement, those opposing GMOs and the patenting of seeds, and the movement against

the entrenchment of neo-liberal policies through the proposed creation of a Free Trade Area of the Americas.

I am speaking, of course, of the Landless Worker’s Movement, the MST.<sup>1</sup> And although the MST is a broad-based organization that operates by collective action and mass mobilization, one that overtly rejects the need for an individual leader, it is hard not to perceive our speaker tonight – João Pedro Stedile - as a person of singular importance and influence within the movement.

Stedile was born the son of small farmers in the southernmost state of Brazil, Rio Grande do Sul, where – despite his humble origins - he obtained a degree in Economics from the Catholic Pontifical University of Porto Alegre before winning a scholarship that allowed him to complete his graduate studies in the same discipline in UNAM, the National Autonomous University of Mexico. He has long been active in rural struggles in Brazil – first as a member of the regional commission of grape producers, and later through his employment in the agricultural department of the state government of Rio Grande do Sul. Since 1979 he has been especially active in struggles for land reform; he was a prominent organizer among those, from all over Brazil, who gathered in 1984 in a meeting that resulted in the formation of the MST.

One of the founders of the movement, he remains a member of its national directorate. He is also an active player in the international farmworker’s network *Via Campesina*<sup>2</sup>, and has been involved in the organization of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. He is the author of numerous books, has been interviewed widely in print media, and publishes countless articles and essays in Brazil and

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<sup>1</sup> Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Workers’ Movement).

<http://www.mstbrazil.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.virtualsask.com/via/>

abroad on questions of rural development, globalization, and political struggle.

Within the MST, he is certainly the most visible and one of the most articulate and visionary of its spokespersons, and he is consistently identified in the media as one of, if not *the*, most important leader of the movement. In a published interview, however, he explained this away by pointing out that he is a chatterbox, and that it is always the chatterboxes who are most seen and heard, even if they are not the most important players.

Despite his disavowal of personal importance, we are thrilled with his presence here tonight and I ask you to please give a warm welcome to a tireless social militant of a truly inspirational organization, João Pedro Stedile.<sup>3</sup>

## **GLOBALIZATION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: A BRAZILIAN PERSPECTIVE**

I am happy to be here among you, because I know that this is more than an academic space within a University; I realize that I am here among activists - those who are struggling for change in Canada. I'd like to thank all the organizations and movements who have invited our organization to be here with you tonight, not just in Toronto but across Canada where I will be speaking. It is my first time here, but you know that the world is getting smaller every day and, from what I have heard, it seems as though the problems that you are facing are very similar to the ones that we confront in Brazil.

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<sup>3</sup> Most of the biographical information given here is from João Pedro Stedile, "Landless Battalions" *New Left Review*, Vol. 15 (May-June 2002), which also provides a useful overview of the history of the MST. <http://www.newleftreview.net/NLR24904.shtml>

Unfortunately, we still suffer from a language barrier that robs us of time and that also isolates us somewhat. When we speak the same language, it allows us to get closer to one another, and in your own language you are able to speak from the heart – and the heart usually has more valuable things to say than does the brain. I hope you are able to come and visit us one day - in our encampments, our settlements and our schools, hopefully even in an act of land occupation. I am sure that even if the people that you will meet don't speak in English, they will understand you nonetheless.

Tonight I'd like to share with you some ideas about how we, as a social movement in Brazil, perceive the international conjuncture. I'd also like to address the role of social movements more generally, rather than to talk only about our movement.

Brazil is living through a very special moment. To appreciate this, it is important first to understand the underlying global economic and social context. I hope that later on I will have the opportunity to speak in more detail about the MST and what is going on in Brazil, but first I would like to explain to you how we see the world. I'd like to share some of these ideas with you - not to convince you, as I am sure that you have your own visions of the international scene that you have built from your own places of work and struggle. But I want to let you know how we discuss these matters in our educational sessions, how we have come to understand the dilemma of humanity and the dilemmas facing Brazil in the years ahead.

### *The Neoliberal Era*

We see the international conjuncture in kind of a general way, we could say that starting in the 80's up to the year 2000 there have been some major changes in the model of capital accumulation.

These changes influenced struggles in all countries during this period. It was the moment in which capital most clearly internationalized itself. And we began to see the appearance in the South of a new form of economic policy that we called ‘neo-liberalism’, and which for us is synonymous with a new, total freedom for finance capital.



Photo of João Pedro Stedile by Sharmini Peries.

So what changes occurred during this period? Firstly, we had the collapse of the so-called “socialist countries”. Whatever our criticisms of these regimes, in the context of the international correlation of forces, they represented a barrier to the expansion of capital.

There also occurred a technological revolution in the world of work that changed productivity levels within the workplace. Companies were reorganized so that they multiplied their capacity for production. This means that with the same capital you can now produce more goods with less time and less labour. This led to an exclusion of many workers, the relativization of the power of the working class, and the destruction of the power of unions in almost every single country.

The social and ideological consequences for our terrain of struggle were even more tragic.

It discouraged people; it depressed mass movements and produced an ideological rout as people no longer trusted change: they didn’t believe in socialism and they didn’t believe in the possibility of some kind of revolution. It produced an organizational crisis in all the social sectors of the working class, but especially in those of the third world.

This means that we lived through two decades that were very problematic for the development of humanity: on the one hand, capital went on the offensive with massive accumulations of money and profit, and on the other hand, the organized working class was completely crushed. The process of de-organization was accompanied by an ideological crisis, with capitalists prognosticating the end of human history.

#### *A new cyclical crisis of international capitalism*

When many of us fell into this trap some people were co-opted and were turned in the wrong direction. However, just when it looked as if everything was over, old Marx turned out to be right: capital went into another crisis. (applause)

As you know, and I think there is basically a consensus among academics and left wing intellectuals, everybody would say that in the last years of the last century and the first years of this century, we have seen a new cyclical crisis of international capitalism. Now, however, this crisis occurs with one aggravating factor: With the globalization of capitalism under the hegemony of financial capital and the American economy, when the American economy enters a crisis, it takes all of international capitalism with it.

When we look at this crisis of capitalism, we realize that the 500 largest multinational corporations represent the nucleus of power. I would like to remind you that these 500 corporations control 58% of the world’s produc-



tion, but only create jobs for 1.8% of the world's labour force. They control, moreover, the equivalent to the production of almost 133 of the poorest countries. But these companies have attempted to agree on a new strategy to get capitalism out of its crisis.

*The corporate response to the crisis: strategies*

They have many spaces in which to reach agreement, including the Bush administration. The Bush government is itself one expression of the plans of the multinationals and expresses the will of these multinational companies. It is also true that the G7 serves as a space for these companies to control the agenda, and I am very sorry that Canada is part of the G7, because that is the organization that decides the direction for the world's economy and politics.

There is Davos <sup>4</sup> and the remodeled Washington Consensus <sup>5</sup> where people came together to come up with new short-term, medium-term, and long-term strategies, in an attempt to renew capitalism and the model of accumulation. And what they have come up with basically is that the way to increase accumulation is to increase privatization and to invest in war production. Marx tells us that war production is a very special industry, because it's the only industry where everything that is created is meant to be destroyed. And every time that the products are destroyed it creates the opportunity for another round of production. It is the industry of death, and in order for it to

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<sup>4</sup> Davos is the site of an annual meeting of the world's corporate and political elite under the banner of the "World Economic Forum."

<sup>5</sup> The Washington Consensus refers to a policy agenda elaborated by Washington-based International Financial Institutions in the late 1980s. Originally directed at countries in Latin America, the consensus advocates that indebted countries adopt a package of neo-liberal reforms, including deregulation, privatization, trade liberalization, tax reform, and exchange and interest rate flexibilization.

function, politicians have to be willing to declare war.

The second strategy is to control and monopolize the sources of energy, principally oil, that capitalism requires. War and oil go together, and these two elements caused the war in Yugoslavia, the invasion of Afghanistan, the war in Iraq, and the Palestinian war - which is not a religious war so much as an opportunity to use a lot of US-made weapons. And you know it is really an offense that the helicopters that are used in the attacks on Palestine are called "Apache helicopters;" it's a terrible use of the name of one of our aboriginal groups from the Americas- an assault on our culture. The civil war in Colombia is the result of the same tendencies. It is not a war about drugs, it is about the use of resources, and the opportunity to use US-made weapons. The US also attacks the [Hugo] Chávez government in Venezuela because he will not allow the US to control the oil that supplies 30% of the US market. (applause)

The third strategy is to control access to the biodiversity of the planet and to water. Water is a very important topic; we know that lots of work has been done on the water issue here in Canada. But capital has seized on the importance of water because they realize that the way the world is going these days, water is a non-renewable resource. And so they want to transform now, in the twenty-first century, water into a commodity. The population is increasing and since everybody on the earth needs water, you can make a lot of profit if you control access. Nestle in Brazil now controls 60% of the market for bottled water. It is bad enough that they are making profits by watering down the milk but when they start to make profits just on the water itself, this is just too much. (laughter)

Capital seeks to control biodiversity because of its importance to the industries of the future. It is the source of new materials and new live organisms through genetic modifica-

tion. And we have to thank a Canadian compatriot of yours, Pat Mooney,<sup>6</sup> for alerting us to the development of nano-technology, gene mixtures and new live organisms. These, combined with the new rules about private property and patenting -the new patent legislation that was just approved by the WTO [World Trade Organization] are leading to a new monopoly on a whole new market that will flourish over the next 20 to 30 years.

Lastly, the strategy of financial capital is to have complete freedom in the South and around the world to circulate freely and rapidly, especially in the services sector. Capitalists are no longer interested in establishing factories; they aim to increase their profits through the control of services, where the turn-around rate is much higher. This means control of telecommunications, banking, and commercial services. Today, the largest corporation in the world is not General Motors, it's the American corporation Walmart. The only activity it in which it engages is selling goods to you [in the North]. They don't sell to us [in the South] because they know we don't have the money to buy all that stuff.

*The corporate response to the crisis: instruments*

So this is their plan. There are various stages to this plan and methods of imposing the will of capital. Primary among these is the WTO. We all know that the WTO is a hostage to the G7. It was established specifically outside of the UN precisely so that capital would control it completely. It was meant to bypass passing the UN Development Agency (UNCTAD), which has a much more democratic structure, more rules and more protections. Everybody

knows that the WTO is really controlled by 7 or 8 voting countries. That is why a great deal was made of 20 countries saying "no" in Cancún.<sup>7</sup> But the issue was not that 20 countries said "no," but that 140 countries remained silent.

Just to give you an idea of the magnitude of the power of the WTO: on May 5<sup>th</sup> [2003] they decreed that Monsanto now owns every form of genetically modified (GM) soy on the planet. So now, any farmer that dares cultivate GM soy, not just Roundup soy, will have to pay royalties to Monsanto. The Brazilian government felt ambushed by this. It had lifted the ban on genetically modified organisms, effective until December of 2004. Now Monsanto has announced that it will levy a fee of somewhere between 16 and 22 dollars a ton on our soy simply because we have those seeds in our country. What this means is that Monsanto will take out of the Brazilian economy somewhere between 500 or 800 million dollars a year. They have been lurching from crisis to crisis and bad deal to bad deal in the last three years. We wish they would get it over with and go bankrupt already.

There are two other mechanisms that the capital uses, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These work through imposing rules on countries where the people have never voted on these rules. For example, in Brazil they imposed a rule called "fiscal responsibility." This rule stipulates that the Brazilian government cannot spend more than 55% of the budget on the salaries of public employees. However, there is no limit on the interest rates that can be owed to the international banks on our debt. Right now 64% percent of Brazil's annual

<sup>6</sup> Pat Mooney is the executive director of the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI), Winnipeg-based NGO that is dedicated to the conservation and improvement of agricultural diversity and to the socially responsible development of technologies useful to rural societies.

<sup>7</sup> The World Trade Organization (WTO) met in Cancún, Mexico in September 2003. The talks collapsed when Brazil, in concert with 20 other developing countries, walked out in protest at the intransigence of Quad countries (the US, Canada, the EU and Japan).

budget goes to service the debt. You could make Jesus Christ himself president of Brazil, and unless the rules of the IMF are reformed, the situation of Brazil would not change.

The final mechanism capital has for this hemisphere is the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). It is not a trade *agreement*. At least the gringos are honest when they call it an “area.” It is really an attempt on the part of capital to control the production in all sectors of our societies. It is interesting to note that the negotiations are proceeding in nine different areas. Trade is only one of them; there is also agriculture, services, investment, currency, procurement, and tribunals. But the ultimate goal is to create a multilateral legal regime that will impose a certain model of capital accumulation and increase exploitation in our countries.

#### *The popular response to crisis*

Up to now I have been talking about them. Now I am going to talk about us, and I think that is going to be more interesting. Those of us who are Marxist and who profess the Christian faith have a kind of salvation in this conjuncture. (laughter) Because when things get really tough we can call on the Holy Spirit, and when we don’t hear back from the Holy Spirit, we can turn to dialectics (more laughter, applause).

Dialectics show us that even the most perfect plan will eventually end up with a number of contradictions and that no matter how bad things get for people in the social and economic crises, people will begin to respond to those contradictions. And that’s the situation that was germinating in the period 1980 to 2000. But I would say that over the last 4 to 5 years, the people of Latin America have begun to respond to this plan of the domination of capital in earnest.

We have had a number of electoral victories

that were defeats for neoliberalism. For instance, in Venezuela, in Ecuador, Argentina, Bolivia and Peru;<sup>8</sup> and although these victories have not been enough to overturn the plan of capital, they are clear signs of discontent. On the other hand, even in those countries where there hasn’t been the same coming together of mass movements, there have been popular revolts. We saw this in Peru with the struggles over water and electricity. A few years back we saw it in Bolivia with the struggle against the privatization of water and now the overthrow of their Gringo president who couldn’t even speak Spanish (applause). And the revolt in Argentina. Moreover, since the recent elections were unable to solve the economic crisis in Ecuador;<sup>9</sup> take note: we are soon going to see a major popular revolt in that country.

#### *Opportunities for social movements*

It is a pity I can’t stop the clock, so I will have to skip over some issues so that you will have an opportunity to give your opinions. But I would just like to say that the globalization of financial capital does bring with it certain positive aspects for social movements.

The first positive contradiction is that global-

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<sup>8</sup> Hugo Chávez was elected President of Venezuela in a landslide election in 1998. With a large base of support among the poor and working class, Chávez has since moved ahead with progressive political and economic reforms. Ecuador has seen the emergence of mass peasant and indigenous movements, as has Bolivia, where a neo-liberal president was forced from power in 2003. Argentinians ousted 5 presidents in anger over a devastating economic collapse. In 2003, the Peruvian government was rocked by mass protests and general strikes.

<sup>9</sup> Retired colonel Lucio Gutiérrez defeated right-populist billionaire Álvaro Noboa in Ecuador’s November 24 run-off presidential elections. Gutiérrez ran as a center-left populist candidate of the January 21 Patriotic Society Party/Pachakutik alliance. See “Ecuador Elections,” NACLA Report on the Americas [<http://www.nacla.org/bodies/body46.php>]

ization has promoted new forms of organizing. In the classic age of industrial capitalism, society was divided between the bosses and the proletariat and the main political expressions of this divide were the party and the union. New, exciting forms of organization have been engendered by a multiplicity of different forms of exploitation and contradictions. Although we are not used to these new forms, we find them full of promise and energy. They hold out the promise of struggles that can develop outside of the old bureaucratic leadership structures.

A second major gain has been a sense of autonomy; the orthodox left always had the terrible bad habit of trying to control everything and ended up not being able to control anybody. But there are two important reasons why autonomy is important now. Social movements are promoting autonomous activity in contrast to a former emphasis on institutionalization. Institutionalization was too bound up with red tape and the need to use the right kind of seal and the right kind of letterhead, and the meetings were so very boring. You felt like it was a punishment to belong to a political party or a union. It would be a disaster if you were late with your dues and then you wouldn't be able to attend the meetings and you couldn't participate.

So now things are a bit looser and I would say looser in a good sense: people participate in mobilizations and organizations because they want to, not because the rules force them to participate in a certain way. And there are also fewer centralized controls by the political parties, or the church, state, or local governments. And so today there is a new generation of movement. These movements may interact with institutions like church and government and parties, but not in a subordinate way.

But if autonomy has its good side, it also presents a challenge. Before, unity in a movement was insured by a vertical political struc-

ture. Now, the only way you can have that kind of unity is if people share a common identity and seek to promote a common political project. Since we are still in an ideological crisis in terms of which road to follow, it is very difficult to arrive at this common project.

The third point is that social movements have been developing a sense of internationalist consciousness. This results not from our grand ideals, but from the concrete reality of the domination of capitalism. People in the countryside, farmers, used to spend a lot of time navel gazing because all of our issues seemed to us very local. But recently we began to understand that the exploitation that we face in the hands of a company such as Monsanto is similar to the experience of farmers in the US, in Canada, in Mexico, in Korea, in India, in South Africa. If we want to change the agricultural model we are going to have to get the multinational corporations off our backs we have to make common cause. And that is what is leading to this internationalization of our consciousness.

We have a concrete expression of this in the Via Campesina movement. But you also see it in the gender movement, women internationalizing their struggles, other movements such as the struggle against AIDS, the struggle for generic drugs where the transnational companies are holding all the countries' hostage in terms of getting cheap drugs. You also see it in the mobilization against the war. The anti-war movement of today is not just about love and peace, there is a real understanding that war is a strategy for renewing capital, and that the war industries are a key area for capital.

This international consciousness that we as a campesino<sup>10</sup> movement have acquired has led us to really value the world social forum as a space where we can come forward and share our ideas in a non-antagonistic way and, most

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<sup>10</sup> Refers to a small landholding farmer or farmworker.

importantly, link social movements and march against capital. You know right now what our movement is against, what we are all against, but pretty soon we are going to have to propose an alternative. As for us, Brazil's way out of the crisis is linked to joint action on the FTAA and the WTO. I can tell you that Lula himself and his government are not strong enough to make all the changes that he promised.<sup>11</sup> It is going to take the resurgence of mass movements.

I am very sorry to those of you who thought they were going to hear about agrarian reform, but I couldn't pass up an opportunity to reflect on the larger picture of what's happening both within Latin America and also in Canada. Thank you very much. (applause)

## QUESTION PERIOD

**Judith Marshall (USWA Humanity Fund):** *Companero Stedile has spoken of the FTAA as one of the major instruments for capital to gain further domination. I think the labour movement and other social movements here in Canada have felt that we have been in a sort of losing battle against free trade over the last two decades, although we fought. We weren't able to defeat the FTA or NAFTA. So now that the FTAA has come, we are looking to Brazil in hope that they can change the tide. It is interesting to see the goal that the Brazil social forum set itself against the FTAA has now been taken up by the Brazilian government. It has a three-track policy, perhaps keeping some sectors such as investment and services in the WTO and moving towards an FTAA "light" - this is very encouraging for us. So I would like to know what the Brazilian social movements think about this position their government is taking.*

**Stan Raper (National Farmer's Union):** *Welcome to Ontario, where it is illegal for farmworkers to join a union but it is okay to have children*

*working in the fields. Where 10 percent of the farms employ fifty percent of the workers. Where we lost 12,000 family farms last year alone. My question is about anti-corporate farming policy and what your views are on international regulations around corporate farming.*

**John Clarke (OCAP):** *I'd like to take up a question that came up earlier but make my meaning a little clearer. We look to the MST as an example of an autonomous, bold, effective movement challenging the neoliberal agenda of capitalism. And we agree that a movement must be built that moves beyond moral pressure but that builds resistance, that disrupts capital, and we seek to move forward with that. But as we do we are very conscious of the fact that there is the danger of being isolated, of moving forward too fast, of facing the consequences that flow from that. And in your experience with Lula's government you must deal with a movement that is tactically divided, that must have many opinions of whether to move, how far to move, where to move. The question comes up: how do we build movements that really challenge the agenda of capital but at the same time avoid chronic disunity and thus avoid being defeated?*

**Janet Conway (Toronto Social Forum):** *Welcome also to Canada, it is wonderful to hear from you. One of the things that impresses me about the MST is not only your direct action in occupying land, but also your activity in communities in building alternative economies. I'm wondering if you could comment on the relation between these alternative strategies of economy building with other more confrontational approaches with the state. And this debate also occurs in the social forums, a debate between those movements that represent a diversity of attempts on the ground to create alternatives versus those advocating a common project against states or capitalism.*

**Stedile:** Thanks for your very interesting questions. I am really glad to see how much your issues converge with ours, how they reflect the dilemmas that we face. It really shows how much unity there is among our peoples.

<sup>11</sup> Luiz Ignacio Lula Da Silva, leader of the Workers' Party (PT), was elected President of Brazil in late 2002.

On the issue of the FTAA: Don't despair if you haven't overthrown Chretien, but you have gotten rid of many Conservatives. Some of our gains are not just political or electoral but they are ideological and symbolic. One good thing about globalization is that victories multiply very rapidly. So don't get depressed because we in Brazil take quite a lot of heart from what happened at the Quebec Summit<sup>12</sup> and the march against the FTAA at that summit. Since many of the movements were divided before the march, we credit our unity today to your activity. And the struggles of Canadian farmers against GM crops have inspired us greatly. Percy Schmeiser<sup>13</sup> is a hero; you should give him a medal! These are important symbolic victories; do not underestimate them. (applause)

Concerning the FTAA, it is true that there is conflict between the governments over three proposals. There is the Yankee version which is the full out FTAA, then there is the FTAA "light" supported by Argentina and Brazil - don't laugh, that's what they really call it - and then there is the no FTAA position which is taken by the Hemispheric Alliance,<sup>14</sup> and the only government I believe that has spoken out against it is Venezuela. Don't forget, Cuba is not in the negotiations of the FTAA.

<sup>12</sup> The Quebec Summit brought together the leaders of 34 countries in the Americas with the intent of furthering negotiations on a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Their meeting was challenged by 80 000 students and trade unionists who marched through the streets of Quebec, where they were met by riot police and tear gas.

<sup>13</sup> Percy Schmeiser is a farmer from Bruno, Saskatchewan, Canada, whose canola fields were contaminated with Monsanto's Round-Up Ready Canola. He was subsequently taken to court by Monsanto, which alleged that Schmeiser infringed on their private property rights. See [www.percyschmeiser.org](http://www.percyschmeiser.org)

<sup>14</sup> The Hemispheric Social Alliance was formed in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in 1997. A formation of social movements and trade unions that represent 50 million people in the Americas, the alliance aims to strengthen social movements, defeat the FTAA, and develop progressive alternatives.

The FTAA light is an attempt on the part of the Brazilian government to keep the negotiations strictly to matters of trade and to leave all the other areas that the US wants to put on the table until later. We [in the MST] are saying that this is a potentially dangerous tactic. So far, Brazil has not even gone forward with the trade aspect because they say they're waiting for the US to open its market to Brazilian agricultural products. For political reasons, for electoral considerations the US is refusing to do so, but you know if they do open up, that would be the end for small producers in Brazil. That is not how our problems will be solved. That is why the Hemispheric Alliance is saying we are not that interested in what the government's tactics are; we are taking a no FTAA strategy. But we are demanding that the governments maintain full transparency in what they are discussing; we want them to tell the people everything that they are doing and not just put up their discussion papers on the internet. Only 2% of Brazilians have access to the internet.

The debate also has to go forward in the mass media, it has to be on TV for there to be a real national debate. The FTAA will affect every one of us. This is not for the government to do on our behalf. We didn't give them that mandate. We didn't delegate that responsibility. We believe that the people of every country should discuss this and have the right to vote on it in a plebiscite. The government does not have a mandate to decide that for us. (applause)

The issue of agricultural subsidies is a large one, and I am sorry we don't have more time to discuss it. Via Campesina is an organization that brings together campesino organizations from 87 countries; we function completely on the basis of consensus and a basis of unity.

The first issue for us concerns the struggle for food, and argues that food should not be seen

as any other commodity since it is required for the survival of humanity. Multinational companies have no right to transform our food into a commodity for their profit.

The second point is that every government and country should have the right to subsidize its own internal farmers and support family farms, but not to use those subsidies to support exporting items. That is really dumping; that is unfair competition and we are opposed to that.

The third point is that countries have the right to have food sovereignty and that means that people have to organize themselves to make sure that they can feed everyone in their country. If you cannot feed your own people you are slaves. That is what José Martí<sup>15</sup> told us in 1897. (applause)

The issue of diversity of social movements is also a large topic and all I can say about that is that we have not achieved the level of unity that is necessitated by the situation. We believe that we can achieve that unity through the elaboration of a common political strategy. The problem is that the ideological problem that emerged in the 1980s is still with us. There is no common project for the Left in Latin America either; it is not just a problem in Canada. In Brazil, we [i.e., “the Left”] are in the government and we don’t have a policy of social transformation. That’s the truth. So this process will take a while longer, but there is no way around it.

Finally, there is really no contradiction between the different forms of struggle within social movements. Every social movement has its own tactics and this is the richness of our movement. It is true there are problems that arise sometimes in a confrontational type of a protest. We have a joke in Brazil that goes: “If you are in Hell, taking a swipe at the

Devil costs you little.”

The main thing that social movements must understand is that our strength derives from the number of people organized and their level of political consciousness. We need to put our resources into training people with a high degree of political clarity. That’s really the only way that we are going to be able to prevail against the major powers in the medium term. We cannot measure our radicality by how radical our actions are, but by how many people that we can mobilize and how strong our mobilization is. And one characteristic of the left in Latin American - and I will leave Canadians out of it because I know this is true of Latin Americans - is that the smaller your group, the more radical your rhetoric tends to be. And the bourgeoisie knows this. But we really think it should be the opposite. We are organizing a large number of people. If you have only a small group, you have only a small voice. But once you have a big group behind you, you can export the bourgeoisie to Miami and, if you allow it, to Quebec City. (laughter, applause)

I don’t see the dichotomy [in having to choose strategically between *either* developing alternatives *or* challenging the state]. You have to confront capitalism and confront the attacks that we are facing, and *at the same time* build local alternatives and local solidarity economies (that’s what we call them). You really have to do both at the same time as a strategy of accumulating forces.

If you want a concrete example, one of the things we’ve done in our movement was occupy the Parmalat plant because they exploit us: they’ve been raising the price of the milk that they charge to the consumer. But at the same time we are also working with our people to build our own plant so that we can sell our own milk at more affordable prices. Right now Parmalat is paying us 30 US cents (10 *reales*), but then for that same amount of milk, after they process it, they sell it at four times

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<sup>15</sup> José Martí was a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Cuban revolutionary, independence leader, and poet.

that price. We think they should be paying the producers more and we also think they should be supporting our soccer teams. We've been working to organize co-ops that can sell processed milk. Instead of paying 30 cents they are paying 40 or 50. Whereas Parmalat sells it back to consumers at 1.20, we sell it at 70 cents. Everybody wants to buy our milk.

**Audience member 1 (Phil Stuart):** *Why wasn't Cuba put into your analysis? We must defend the Cuban model as an alternative to neoliberalism.*

**Audience member 2:** *Can you make a more exact comparison between the situations of Venezuela and Brazil? It seems that Brazil's problem is not that Lula isn't Jesus Christ or that he doesn't have enough power, but that there is a lack of political will. Chávez came closest to this point when he argued that Lula's government doesn't have a project - and that's a problem. Chávez, on the other hand, does have a project.*

**Stedile:** The compañero is right when he talks about the need to defend the experience of the Cuban people, and even more during this period of ideological crisis Cuba has been a beacon of resistance. It is inspiring how a small country like Cuba can resist a regime with such an adverse balance of power. It shows a tremendous unity among the Cuban people that they have been able to keep Bush's attacks at bay. So I thank the compañero for raising that point.

I'll just give you one example of how grateful we are to the Cuban people, and it's an example I always try to bring out when I have an opportunity to speak. There are 58 sons and daughters of poor landless farmers in Brazil who are studying medicine in Cuba free of charge. (applause) Of this 58, 26 are black. In all the 50 public universities of Brazil and all the medical faculties in all the 50 universities of Brazil, I don't think there are 20 black

students. Just with the 26 black doctors that Brazil will have, we will have a very strong defense for the Cuban revolution.

The issue about comparing Venezuela with Brazil is a good question, and I would say the main difference lies in the fact that Venezuela is experiencing an upsurge in mass mobilization, although they don't have a very high level of organization. Venezuela is different from Brazil though; in many ways, it's a small country and it lives mainly from its oil. To give you a sense of this dependency, it imports 85% of its basic foodstuffs.

I think that the radicalism that we see from Chávez doesn't just come from his will, but from the people behind him. Venezuela is a country where it would be easier to change the economic model because Venezuela has complete control over its oil. Just by democratizing the way that oil industries operate and creating more jobs and redistributing income, they could make a huge change in that country.

The case of Brazil is much more complex. It's been reeling from an economic and social crisis that began with the model of dependent industrialization. In the 80's, that model was replaced by the neo-liberal model that began in the 1990s and that also failed. It has produced the most unequal country in the world - one where 10% of the population has access to an adequate standard of living. There is 25% unemployment; 60% of working people are in the informal economy; there are 44 million Brazilians that go hungry everyday and another 60 million that don't have as much to eat as they should. There are 120 million poor people in Brazil that have nowhere to turn.

In the elections people voted for Lula, but really they were probably voting against neoliberalism; in terms of articulating a positive program it was a very de-politicized campaign, based on gringo political marketing strategies



that prioritized television advertising.

We are in a kind of a crossroads. Actually, the image that I like to evoke is more of a traffic circle. In Brazil we have these traffic circles where you go round and round trying to figure out where to get out. As a nation now we are in one of these circles, and there are three exits: One is to continue with neo-liberalism, join the FTAA, follow the instructions of the IMF and get involved with the WTO. The second exit is a recycled neo-liberalism, which involves reducing the interest rates on the debt, the implementation of social policies to counterbalance negative outcomes, but there is no real change. And the third turn-off is for real change, for building a model that still has no name, but which we could call “the popular project” (*el proyecto popular*).

The problem is that there is division among all the political forces within the government with respect to these three alternatives. There are neo-liberal ministers, recycled ministers, and popular ministers. What is worse is that even within the PT [the Workers’ Party] we have representatives who have sold themselves to Monsanto for a trip to the US. A cheap prostitution!

Right now the problem is that these three options are in a three-way tie. The car continues going round and round in the traffic circle and can’t find the exit. We don’t know how long it will be until it does find the exit but I think it will happen when social movements come together and become such a strong force that they push the car onto the right exit. It is not so much a question of Lula’s will as it is of the balance of power. We in the MST believe that if the people really got involved and got behind the popular project, we could make a real leftist out of Lula.

***Audience member 1:*** *What is a real possibility of an agrarian reform in the Lula government?*

***Audience member 2:*** *What is the representation of the MST in the political sector, which is the one that has all the power?*

**Stedile:** Regarding the second question: I want to tell you that the way we look at balance of forces, it is not simply a matter of how many members of parliament you have, it is not solely a matter of how many mayors or of how many counselors you have. Our groups put 30 people in office directly through MST pressure and that’s our power. But you know, the changes that we want are not going to be made by the people who are holding political office. (applause)

This does not mean that we do not value all spaces where struggle occurs, which includes the legislative sphere, but our priority is organizing people at the grassroots.

As for the real chance that there will be agrarian reform, it has a lot to do with the balance of power. Much has changed with the election of Lula. Before, we had many of the major powers against us - all centers of power except for the Church. Now we have Lula’s government and the church, but the big landowners and the state apparatus - that includes all the institutions or bourgeoisie domination like the judicial branch, the legislative branch and the police - are still against us.

We do think that it is possible to carry out an agrarian reform because the inequities are so deep in the Brazilian countryside. Think of Brazilian society as a pyramid. At the very top we have 26 thousand landowners who own farms of 2 million hectares or more, which comprises about 50% of the agricultural land of the country. And at the bottom we have 4.8 million landless families. So people understand that an agrarian reform would only affect those people at the top and that by distributing those lands we could flatten the pyramid so that it resembles a cube.

The speed of reform will depend on the capacity of social movements to put pressure on the government. Right now we have 200.000 campesino families who are camped in these black tents along the roadside and they are putting a lot of pressure on government. We hope that they will force the government to take action by the end of the year when we expect the government to present an agrarian reform bill that will at least allow a million families to settle on the land. From there, we will continue to make advances and accumulate forces.

Thank you.

## APPENDIX I

### Three Directions in Brazil by João Pedro Stedile

October 22, 2003  
Znet - BRAZIL WATCH

*This is a brief talk João Pedro Stedile of the Movimento Sem Terra gave to a group of activists during a visit to Toronto on October 20, 2003. The address was made in Spanish, and it is reproduced from notes taken by Justin Podur.*

The MST started as a struggle for land. When we began our struggle we believed that land alone would be enough to get people out of poverty. We were wrong. We learned that the enemy was not just the large estates. We learned that there are other fences besides the ones that kept campesinos off of the land. We learned that the lack of capital is a fence. We learned that ignorance, a lack of knowledge, is a fence. We learned that international capitalism and its multinational corporations are fences as well. It is important to understand these fences.

If you'll permit me I'd like to give you a bit of Brazilian history to help understand this. Brazilian society is in a historical crisis. We had 400 years of agro-export 'development', which was no development at all but exploitation. In our case the exploitation was made far more brutal because of slavery. At the end of the 19th century that model reached a crisis point and was replaced by a model that you could call 'dependent industrial development', after one of my teachers and mentors, Ruy Mauro Marini. It took some time, about 40 years, to adjust and change models. The new model produced a tremendous amount of wealth. It brought Brazil into the industrialized world. But it left the people in poverty and misery.

Dependent industrial development itself reached a crisis point by the 1980s. There were many effects of the crisis but one of them was the mass movement to overthrow the military dictatorship that was the instrument of this model. After 20 years of dictatorship we rebuilt our organizations. The unions, the union central was rebuilt. The MST came about as an expression of the will of the campesino to struggle for the land. We had to rebuild all of this because the dictatorship had destroyed all of the social organizations.

In this surge of popular movements, we confronted the ruling class in 1989 with Lula's first presidential campaign. We proposed a popular, democratic alternative to the model we had lived and we found ourselves in a serious confrontation. We were beaten, and the ruling class imposed neoliberalism.

The agenda of neoliberalism was to subordinate the Brazilian economy to international capital. The nature of international capital had changed as well. Today, capital isn't even so interested in exploiting cheap labour and resources. Instead, it is finance capital with purely financial aims: to enter a country, to privatize state enterprises, to earn speculative profits. But the past twelve years of neoliberalism neither solved the problems of the country nor ended the crisis of the 1980s. Instead, the economic and social crisis deepened.

In the case of agriculture, the process of transnationalization of agricultural investment in agro-industry and seeds changed the agricultural economy. That made things difficult

for the MST: under neoliberalism, there is no room for small-scale agriculture, local production for the internal market. What happens to agrarian reform under these circumstances? Under neo-liberalism, 900,000 families lost their land. 2 million lost agricultural jobs. Land concentration reached extraordinary levels. Just for a single example, one highway construction company owns 4 million hectares of land.

In other sectors, the statistics are even worse. We have 22% unemployment. 60% of the employed are in the informal sector. The unions are weak. There is an ideological crisis in all sectors, because part of neoliberalism is an ideological assault. It may have traded the combat boots for the ballot boxes and rifles for TV sets, but the intent is the same - to impose an economic model on people.

There are two reasons why the Worker's Party (PT) won the elections last year. First, because God is Brazilian. Second, because the ruling class divided. According to historian Eric Hobsbawm, the elections of last year were historically unprecedented. Why? This is the first time in history that a party of the left won an electoral victory while the social movement was in decline.

So, here we are in October 2003. The Left won the elections, but without changing the balance of forces in society. It's like driving on a rotary intersection in Mexico. In Mexico they have rotaries instead of intersections, so you can drive around and around in circles. That's what is happening in Brazil today. There are three exits being offered, but we keep going in circles.

The first exit is to just continue on the road of neoliberalism. To accept the FTAA, to follow the IMF and the World Bank, to not stand up.

Some other sectors want a kind of recycled neoliberalism. That's the second exit. Don't confront the United States, adopt a kind of

'FTAA-lite', try to blunt its force somehow.

And the third exit is to rebuild the democratic project. To reorganize on the basis of the internal market, redistribution, agrarian reform, economic reconstruction.

The complexity is that the social forces are divided in 3. In the Worker's Party itself there are all 3 tendencies. Those who continue to defend neoliberalism say they are doing so on a tactical basis, it's temporary. They are actually ashamed to be defending it. But the problem is that it is a 3-way tie. None of the tendencies is strong enough to impose its will on the others.

This is partly because of an ideological crisis on the left itself. We ourselves are unsure of the exit. The MST is trying to create some coordination, to stimulate the struggle and the mass movements. The agrarian reform struggle is more complex now. It's not just about land redistribution any more. The whole agricultural model has to change, and we have to accelerate the struggle.

So there is this dispute of these three different projects. The result is that every small-scale local struggle turns into a metaphor for this 3-way struggle of social projects. Every small issue becomes very politicized, very quickly. I can give you two examples.

In July, the MST had a meeting with Lula. The press came, and Lula put an MST cap on in front of the cameras. This was a typical gesture, but the bourgeoisie went crazy. There was a 2 month-long media assault, and the opposition in government even invoked an emergency national commission! A national commission is something only done in very grave circumstances, so it was very remarkable that they went to these lengths.

Another example is when the movement of the homeless occupied a Volkswagen plant. At first there were 300 families involved, who

occupied the plant at night. But the state of misery and poverty in the country is such that within 24 hours it grew to 4500 families. Again, the bourgeoisie went crazy. It was on the front page of all the newspapers, with headlines like "Stop the Anarchy Now!"

Each moment has become a political battle. There are so many small battles but we have to remember the larger ones too, the FTAA, the battle against genetically modified organisms, the battle against the WTO. If you were to ask me, how can North Americans help, that's what I would say. Stop the FTAA, stop the GMOs, stop the WTO. If you do that, we will have the possibility of moving forward. We can no longer move forward from land alone.

### Question and Answer Session

*Questioner: Can you tell us something about indigenous movements and struggles in Brazil?*

Stedile: Very briefly - the indigenous struggle is similar to our own. We all defend their sacred rights to the land, but indigenous movements, even internally, are facing the same 3-way struggle. Neoliberalism wants their lands. There are at least 16 areas of open conflict between the indigenous and landowners and latifundistas. The government seeks a 'negotiated solution' in these circumstances, which is code for the indigenous getting screwed. One of the most emblematic conflicts is Raposa do Sol, on the border with Venezuela. This state is more than 1/3 indigenous land. The governor is a corrupt, right wing thief - and he has joined the Worker's Party! This is a real danger to the indigenous.

I believe that one does not ask for solidarity, but I do think that international solidarity and pressure to shame Lula into protecting the government's constitutional commitment to indigenous rights is very important and can make a big difference here. The government

has a theoretical commitment to indigenous rights, but we have a saying that you can find the devil in between theory and practice.

*Questioner: What is the relationship between the military and the government in Brazil?*

Stedile: The military has actually been affected by neoliberalism as well. Under neoliberalism, there's no need for sovereign militaries. The US would rather control and coordinate the militaries of the hemisphere itself. So some of the more forward thinking sectors of the military joined us in our struggle against the FTAA. They are thinking about protecting the Amazon, the water resources. It's strange: in the state where I'm from, Rio Grande do Sul, we've been raised to fear an Argentine invasion. The ghost of Argentine invasion was always raised to frighten us as children, and we have many bases on the border with Argentina. Today those bases are picking up and moving inland, into the Amazon, and some in the army are even saying that if there is a war Brazil has to prepare for in the distant future, it is a war with the US.

*Questioner: How do you hope the FTAA negotiations will turn out?*

Stedile: The 3-way struggle I described includes the FTAA. The capitalists want to join, they want a marriage with US capital. Another sector seeks an 'FTAA-lite', claiming that this is 'tactical'. But we fear that it's not a tactic, but a strategy. Then there is us, who are totally against.

Those in favor of FTAA-lite want FTAA to affect only commerce (not investment or services), and this only conditional on the US opening its markets to agricultural products. We believe this is very dangerous. It has gained time, but if the US does decide to open its markets we will gain very little (some small increases in sugar and orange exports) and lose a great deal. It's a trap.

Part of our struggle against the FTAA is to demand transparency. We say, invite the opposition to debate. Have debates on television, not on the internet where only 2% have access. Produce teaching material for the schools and universities, and whatever the deal is - FTAA or FTAA-lite - it must be ratified by a plebiscite. The government has accepted the idea of a referendum, but not a plebiscite. In Brazil these are different things. A plebiscite is before the fact, whereas a referendum would be after the agreement was signed. We are for a plebiscite, not a referendum.

*Questioner: Now that the left is in power, there is a complicated relationship between the movement and the government. What advice would you give for a movement that wants to keep its autonomy?*

We have had autonomy from the beginning, with the Worker's Party. It's part of our tradition. We know that co-optation is a frequent danger, but we are not going to be fools. The PT knows we are not fools. We are not going to be a front for a party.

But since the PT has come to power we have adapted our struggle a bit. We used to occupy the public offices of the agrarian reform agency, in the days when Cardoso was in power. But now we occupy roads, estates - there is a different focus because the government is no longer our enemy. But we must never forget that our force comes from the organized people, not from the government. And that lesson must be extended even in our own organization, where we don't want the grassroots to be led by the leadership. We want people at the local level to be able to act without consulting the national leadership if necessary.

*Questioner: Some have praised Lula for being less 'confrontational' than Chávez, arguing that Chávez's confrontation with Venezuela's elites has brought a great deal of misery down on Venezuela's poor with little benefit. Do you think Lula has had good rea-*

*sons to be more cautious? Or do you think he is going too slowly, compared to Chávez?*

Stedile: First of all, it's important to be clear that these are totally different cases. But I believe that if Chávez has been hit much harder than Lula, it isn't because of his leftism, but because he has more oil. Nor is it easy to say where reforms are occurring faster, Brazil or Venezuela. What we can say is that in Venezuela there is a resurgent mass movement, which is not the case in Brazil. If we had a mass movement on the loose in Brazil, Lula would make Castro look like a right winger. That's not a joke. We saw what a resurgence of the movement could do in Bolivia, a country of 8 million people. Imagine Brazil, with 170 million, 60% in poverty. If 100 million Brazilians went in one direction, the earth would shake.

*Questioner: What do you think of what's just happened in Bolivia? About the many movements against neoliberalism throughout Latin America? Do you think that some of the alternatives being proposed, like Mercosur, are genuine alternatives?*

Stedile: You should come to Latin America. Your eyes will tell you much more than I can. In Bolivia there is a resurgence of the mass movement. There has been a crisis in the economy since the betrayal of the revolution of 1952. In the 50 years since there has only been the emergence of a *lumpenbourgeoisie* that has appropriated the vast resource wealth, leaving the population - well, in shit. So they are right, Morales and Quizque, the two principal leaders, Morales of the Movimiento Al Socialismo (MAS) and Quizque of the indigenous Pachakuti, the problem won't be solved with the new election that the new president Mesa is calling for. It will only be solved with a new development model that will bring the people out of misery. Their good fortune is in having some mineral wealth. Their bad luck is that they are small and have no outlet to the sea.

As for the rest of Latin America, neoliberalism has put all countries in a crisis. People have tried to use voting to get out of it - they did that in Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia. The lesson is that elections are not enough. Look what happened in each of these countries. In Peru, nothing. In Ecuador, the US turned Lucio Gutiérrez around completely. You should watch Ecuador, by the way. Get ready to go there, because there is going to be another Bolivia there. But elections are not enough. There has to be a mass movement that can change the entire model.

Is Mercosur an alternative? It's no alternative to the FTAA. Brazil uses it as a negotiating tool. But it's already undermined: the US has purchased Uruguay for less than the price of a 5-star hotel. Venezuela has proposed a very interesting project for Latin American integration, called ALBA, but it is really too far ahead of Latin America's movements. It is a good idea, but for now it is politically unviable.

## APPENDIX II

### Brazil's Social Movements

Interviewing João Pedro Stedile of the MST  
by Naomi Klein and Justin Podur

October 22, 2003

Znet - BRAZIL WATCH

position.

João Pedro Stedile is one of the leaders of Brazil's Landless Peasant's Movement, the Movimento Sem Terra or MST. Writers Naomi Klein and Justin Podur interviewed him while on a speaking tour in Toronto.

*What do you think will happen in Miami? It seems that the FTAA is an agreement that no one wants except for the United States, especially after what happened in Cancun.*

The US will keep pressuring for governments to accept the FTAA proposal. The strategy will be to try to co-opt governments individually, bilaterally, and in that way create a coalition in its favor. Having done that, it will try to make the claim that the majority of countries are for the FTAA and that it has to be accepted in the name of 'democracy'.

*Can you give a sense of the level of opposition to FTAA in Brazil?*

Until recently, there's been little knowledge as to the nature of the FTAA. But very recently there has been a coordinated effort on the part of the United States and the right-wing press in Brazil. Two papers in particular, *Veija*, and *Estado do Sao Paulo*, have gone berserk with their pro-FTAA stance.

This campaign has actually helped to politicize the issue and involve people. So the Minister of External Relations, *Selso Amori*, has been able to publicly explain the different interests at work and why he opposes FTAA. The government has supported him and made it clear that his position is the government's official

*So the Brazilian government is against the FTAA?*

The government's position is - they want FTAA to affect only commerce, and it is conditional on the US opening its own market to agricultural products. There are sectors of the Brazilian bourgeoisie who want an open US market. From the point of view of the social movements, this 'FTAA-lite' is a trap. In exchange for being able to increase sales of a couple of products - sugar and oranges - in the US market by some 10%, we are going to lose sovereignty over services, investment, biodiversity.

*Has the campaign against FTAA helped revitalize the social movements?*

The movements have mounted a powerful campaign against FTAA. There was a good campaign last year, culminating in the plebiscite against FTAA where 10 million people voted. After the elections, with Lula coming to power, it has moved off centre stage. But it has picked up again. I believe it is a very important campaign for movements, to help steer movements away from parochialism. It is important because it encourages a debate on the entire social project of neoliberalism. Our job is to explain how the FTAA is a tool of neoliberalism, intended to bring our economy completely under the control of North America.

*Would you say that acceptance of FTAA by the government could cause a rupture with the social movements? Is it a make-or-break issue in terms of the*



*relationship between the government and the movements?*

It is very serious. The government says it is against FTAA, and for this 'FTAA-lite'. If it accepts FTAA, it will cause many problems for the government, signalling a clear acceptance of neoliberalism.

*What do you think of Lula's decision on accepting genetically modified organisms (GMOs)? Opposition to GMOs is one of the MST's pillars, and it seems an irreversible decision.*

The decision of the government was to accept genetically modified soya, and it will be revisited in December 2004. The government made that decision under the pressure of the governor of the state of Rio Grande do Sul and his conservative party, the Partido de Movimento Democrático de Brazil (PMDB). The PMDB joined the government's electoral coalition, and one of the conditions was to accept genetically modified soya. In order to win votes for its other legislative projects, the government gave in.

This doesn't mean that we agree with the decision! The debate was an interesting one because even the Vice President of Brazil didn't want to sign. Half of the ministers, the majority of the PT, were against, and the government suffered a great deal in public opinion. We are treating it not as a *fait accompli* but as the beginning of a long struggle. We are fighting on many fronts.

First, we are trying to overturn the law itself. The law hasn't been passed in Congress. Unfortunately we lack the congressional support to stop it despite the fact that the Worker's Party (PT) is divided, because of the PMDB's support for it.

Second, the government has promised to regulate all transgenics in a 'Law on Biosecurity' that is to come before Congress. We hope to use that law to put the brakes on the

diffusion of GMOs, restricting their use to research applications and other very specific purposes.

Third, a technical commission under the Ministry of Health has ruled that glyphosate (an herbicide made by Monsanto, the company that sells the transgenic glyphosate-resistant soy) cannot be sprayed on soy plants after they have grown to a certain height, because after that level of growth the toxins in glyphosate are absorbed into the soybeans making them unfit for consumption. This purely technical decision could help make the transgenic soy economically unviable. Remember that the genetic modification to this soy was to make it resistant to glyphosate spraying. Remember also that the whole point of selling the soy, for Monsanto, is that they can also sell the glyphosate. If the government implements this decision, it could make the marketing of transgenic soy unprofitable for Monsanto.

Fourth, we are looking to have laws passed at the state level to outlaw GMOs. We have had 3 states do so: Santa Catarina, Parana, and Piauí.

Finally, there is the battle on the consumer front. Since there is no unity in the government, the Environment Minister was able to insert an article obliging companies to label, to declare if products contain more than 1% transgenic products. So we go to the supermarkets and demand the labeling. The polls show that the public is against GMOs, so the sales of these products will plummet, causing the companies to suffer and change their tune. Greenpeace has been involved in this campaign. Two businesses have already signed that they will not market transgenics: Carrefour, a grocery chain, and Nestlé. The pressure and example of Europe has been helpful here. Companies don't want to lose markets by using transgenics.

*Recently, the movement weekly newspaper Brazil de*

*Fato reported about a mainstream media campaign against the MST that featured "irate editorials, big headlines, provocative photos, and stories exaggerated to create a climate of war in the countryside." What has happened since, in terms of both the media campaign against the MST and the "climate of war in the countryside"?*

The election of Lula did not change everything, but it did change the balance of forces with respect to agrarian reform. Past Brazilian governments have been against the MST. They criminalized us, they repressed us, they formed alliances with the latifundistas and the World Bank. But the federal government in power now wants reform. It may not want the agrarian reform of our dreams, because that depends on a change in the whole economic model, but it does give us the possibility of advance.

The worst media campaign happened in July. We had a meeting with Lula, and when the press arrived he put on an MST hat. The media took this as a sign of a marriage, and the ruling class got completely scared. They were scared that agrarian reform would speed up, and they acted in such a way as to warn the government. The statement they were making was: we allowed you to take power, now don't you go too far and overstep your bounds. They delivered this statement in a few different ways.

First, they used the mainstream media where they have a monopoly. About 7 conglomerates control the television, radio, and print media in Brazil. Over a month, they had a vicious campaign against the MST and the government. The idea was to try to intimidate the government and criminalize the MST, to put us on the defensive. The worst of that campaign is over now, mostly because people were getting bored of reading about it.

The second reaction was from the latifundistas themselves. As a class, they used the media to intimidate the government and try to

prevent it from moving left. Same as they are doing now with their campaign for the FTAA. As individual landowners, they have moved in various other ways. They have made alliances with conservative governors. It's important to remember that while the left won the federal elections, we lost in 25 out of 27 state elections, and the 2 states we did win are among the smallest and least politically important. So 25 of Brazil's 27 states have right wing governments. The landowners have also got judges in their pockets and are using the judicial system. So since August, we have 19 MST activists in jail and 26 in custody awaiting trial or sentencing. These are all thanks to the local efforts of judges in the pockets of the landowners, who manipulate the law and classify the MST as criminal and its local members as members of a gang. We consider them political prisoners, imprisoned for nothing but their struggle for the land. If taking land is criminal, anyone on any land anywhere is a criminal.

Finally, the landowners have used militias to attack us, organized at the local level, usually in border areas or areas where there is more disorder and chaos. They aren't collaborating with the police or army and here the landowners made a tactical mistake. When they created these militias they tried to use propaganda to intimidate us, which meant they put their militias in the public eye. The public rejected them, and that public rejection helped us pressure the federal government to prosecute them. Some militias have since been disbanded by the federal police.

*What do you think about the role Brazil has played internationally, specifically with the the G22 at the Cancún meeting of the WTO?*

Brazil's leadership in the G22 was important in stopping the WTO. But it's important not to see the G22 as a solution. There were 22 countries in the G22 and 140 left outside. The main point is that the WTO has no right to negotiate any of these things: not subsidies,

not services, not biodiversity, not water, not investment. As a tactical matter, we supported Brazil's moves in the G22.

But outside, we were working through Via Campesina, whose idea is to articulate the peasant movements from all over the world. Peasant movements have tended to be very local. But with the internationalization of capital, agro-industry has been concentrated in 8-9 companies that control the seeds, the inputs. They have forced campesinos to organize on an international basis as well. So Via Campesina coordinates mass actions against the WTO, the World Bank, the IMF, and tries to debate and create another model. We work by consensus and one of our consensus principles is that food is not a commodity that belongs in the market. Food sovereignty means every country has the right to produce its own food for its people, not to serve capital. On subsidies, we have a different position from the G22. We are not against subsidies, because countries might use subsidies to develop internal markets and local production for food security. We are against subsidies when multinational corporations use them for competitive advantage in export, but not in general.

*You have said that agrarian reform is no longer just about land, but that a whole new model of agriculture is necessary. How has the MST changed its methods of struggle to reflect this?*

For many years, Brazil's model of development could be called 'dependent industrialization', which brought the country great wealth and developed industries but did nothing for the people. In such a system, redistribution, getting a campesino a bit of land so that he could join the market, would enable him to get out of poverty. Under neoliberalism, redistribution is insufficient. The campesino can't just have land. A campesino needs materials, markets, inputs, to be economically viable. So you need education. The MST focuses on literacy because no matter how much

land a campesino has, there is no chance of participation in society without literacy. The redistribution of knowledge is just as important as the redistribution of land. You have to think of agro-technology that is appropriate. A campesino cannot imitate the technologies of the big latifundias on a small scale, use massive quantities of fertilizers or pesticides. The whole model has to be different.

*There is a lot of debate about how far to the left Lula can go. Would you say that this depends on the strength of the social movements?*

Yes, and Lula knows it. He's not like Chávez, asking the masses to mobilize on his behalf. In closer circles, he will make this analogy to a soccer stadium: So long as Brazilians stay in the stands and don't come out on to the field, there can be no change.

This has led to a debate in the Brazilian left. Some say that the government has already opted for neoliberalism. We have to return to the opposition, leave the party, and start over. But I think there are two traps here. The first is to analyze the government with a lens of idealism. To hope that the government is going to do everything for you, and when it does not, to point the finger and say: "I told you so!" The second trap is sectarianism, the idea that if the government doesn't do exactly what you want, you have to oppose everything it does.

Instead, we try to understand the complexity of struggle. The government reflects society. When movements pressure, the government goes left. Without pressure, the government does nothing.

Was there a certain complacency after Lula's election, an idea that now Brazil was 'saved' and the people could relax?

I think that existed mostly among the depoliticized. This is the danger with depoliticization. When one is de-politicized and loses

faith with the government, one moves to the right. But among the organized, there was less complacency and a greater sense of the complexities I was talking about.

## APPENDIX III

### Agrarian Reform: Brazil's Landless Reclaim The Soil

By Kevin Spurgaitis  
Reporter/ On-line Editor Catholic New Times

Originally published in the Catholic New Times, October 2003

In the northeastern part of Brazil, at the Encruzilhada Natalino encampment, large families sit in a high-roofed community hall, at long trestle tables, indulging in beef-steaks, chicken legs and spicy sausages.

Those who previously knew only hunger now occupy a spacious sugar plantation, in one in a series of lots equally divided amongst hundreds of families. Despite intensive surveillance by military police at the foot of the plantation and in low-flying helicopters, thousands of Brazilians' hopes for land redistribution are raised here.

These campesinos have taken up "peaceful action" in Rio Grande do Sul, northeast of Porto Alegre - their modest settlements have superseded (white elephant<sup>1</sup> estates. However, although there is plenty of room for small-scale agriculture projects such as these, they are considered unlawful.

Depicted as mere squatters and banditos in Latin America's mainstream press, vilified by right-wing politicians as "enemies of the poor," the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST), or the Landless Rural Workers Movement has become one of the continent's most powerful social movements. For nearly 20 years, the million-member organization has empowered dispossessed farmers through education and the reconstruction of a cooperative, agrarian culture - their grassroots approach to alleviating world poverty.

Acclaimed writer and professor, Noam Chomsky, recently called the MST "the most

important and exciting people's movement in the world." The Guardian Newspaper described their action as a "radical solution" to the problems in Brazil - one of the world's major food producers, where nearly a third of the population goes hungry. In addition to the support of an extensive, international network of human rights groups, religious organizations and labour unions, it has received a number of international honours, including The Right Livelihood Award and UNICEF's education award.

In a Toronto address in October, MST spokesperson João Pedro Stedile, spoke freely about the grassroots mobilization that is entrenched in the South American countryside. The event, organized by the Canadian Association for the Study of International Development (CASID) and the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, was part of Stedile's public speaking tour to build international solidarity against corporate-driven globalization.

"The MST started as a struggle for land. When we began our struggle we believed that land alone would be enough to get people out of poverty. We were wrong. We learned that the enemy was not just the large estates. We learned that there are other fences besides the ones that kept campesinos off of the land. We learned that the lack of capital is a fence. We learned that ignorance, a lack of knowledge, is a fence. We learned that international capitalism and its multinational corporations are fences as well."

Considered to be a principal founder of the

MST, Stedile is a leading international figure in the anti-corporate globalization movement - an activist in the Via Campesina movement and an organizer of the World Social Forum in Sao Paulo, Brazil. His musings on agrarian reform, rural development and globalization have been widely published.

Stedile, born on a small farm in Rio Grande do Sul, obtained a degree in Economics before becoming active in rural struggles, first as part of the regional commission of grape producers. Since 1979, the 50-year-old has been active in land reform. Co-founding the MST in 1984, he quickly became one of its most "articulate and visionary spokespersons." Though Stedile, the grandson of an underprivileged, illiterate farmer, confesses he is a mere "chatter box," and not necessarily the most important figure in the movement.

*The campesino struggle for land*

"The MST came about as an expression of the will of the campesino to struggle for the land. We had to rebuild all of this because a dictatorship had destroyed all of the social organizations," he says. This climate of "violence and desperation" was the catalyst for the Latin American movement.

With more than 400 years of agro-export development, Brazil's economic model produced a "tremendous amount of wealth," Stedile says. Unfortunately, the country's foray into the industrialized world left most Brazilians behind in abject poverty. Historically, war has ravaged Brazil's vast interior, pitting peasant farmers, small holders, and sharecroppers against cattle ranchers and landowners, as well as road and dam builders.

The country's 1970s economic policy led to the displacement of nearly five million people in three southern states. The "sem terra" - or landless, either migrated to urban centres, to overrun shantytowns, or fled to Amazonian

colonies set up by the government, where malaria is rampant and schools and hospitals are conspicuously absent.

The Latin America Press reports that 26,000 landowners now control 178 million hectares of land - an average of 7,000 hectares per estate - leaving more than 20 million rural workers without their own plots. Fewer than 50,000 landowners are entitled to estates measuring 1,000 hectares and control half of the country's arable land. With 400 million hectares of titled land privatized, the remaining 60 million hectares of real estate are often left fallow. More than 4.8 million families are now landless in Brazil, according to MST figures. Millions of peasants subsist day-to-day in transitory, agricultural jobs.

In response to the inequity, the MST has helped 250,000 families appropriate at least 15 million unused acres since 1985. Previously uncultivated plots in southern Brazil are now home to farming cooperatives, which indelibly dot the countryside. However, these have been costly ventures. Campesinos have skirmished with state police, landowners and their para-military forces. Last decade, more than 1000 people have been killed in these rural feuds - only 53 of the suspected murderers were tried before 2000.

Local judicial powers, according to Stedile, have been complicit in the "barbarities" committed by wealthy landowners. The MST maintains it has endured a process of "criminalization," - their political activities defined as illegal by the state. This has resulted in repeated violations of their human rights, it claims. In the second poorest state of São Paulo, for example, police abuse of the landless rural workers is reported.

*Food co-ops, literacy programs and schools*

Despite their dispossession, though, the workers determinedly raised the banner for

agrarian reform. Successfully settling some of Brazil's most fertile pockets, the MST has created 60 food cooperatives as well as small-scale agricultural industries. In addition, they boast a literacy program, involving 600 educators working with adults and adolescents. The movement also monitors 1,000 primary schools in their settlements, where 2,000 teachers work with an estimated 50,000 children.

In the *New Left Review* in May-June 2002, Stedile explained that the greatest success of the Sem Terra farmers, was the reclamation of their dignity.

"... They can walk with their heads held high, with a sense of self-respect. They know what they're fighting for. That's the greatest victory. No one can take that class-consciousness away."

The governments and corporations championing neo-liberalism argue that a free market - the removal of trade barriers and the spread of genetically modified crops - is the *Cure-all*<sup>1</sup> in the developing world. However, Brazil's acceptance of the Free Trade of the Americas Agreement (FTAA) or even the adoption of a kind of *CEFTA-lite*.<sup>1</sup> would be an ill-chosen "exit" from debt and deemed a white flag by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, according to Stedile.

Besides, the door to social reform was swung open by Brazil's leftist party this year. In his inaugural address in January, President Luiz Inácio da Silva or "Lula" of the Workers' Party (PT) pledged to eliminate the country's estimated 54 million poor - 24 million of whom live on less than one dollar a day. Lula, who is billed as Brazil's first working-class president, presented this Zero Hunger project during his election campaign. The National Forum for Agrarian Reform and Justice in the Countryside, which includes the MST and the Brazilian Association of Agrarian Reform,

now awaits the fulfillment of that promise.

Although an old ally of Lula, the MST has still maintained a safe distance from the new government. Since the beginning of the year, members of the organization resumed land redistribution, carrying out 171 land seizures. They say they adapted their struggle a bit, because the government is no longer an enemy. Whereas they used to squat in the offices of the agrarian reform agency, they now occupy roads and estates alone, Stedile illustrates.

"We have had autonomy from the beginning, with the Worker's Party. It's part of our tradition. We know that co-optation is a frequent danger, but we are not going to be fools. The PT knows we are not fools. We are not going to be a front for a party."

In its brief history, the MST's members not only managed to secure land and provide food for their families, but devised an alternative socio-economic development model south of the equator. People have been put before profits.

It is a crime to maintain the plantation system that generates unemployment, marginalization, hunger, misery and crisis, Stedile argues. It is not a crime to struggle for land and for life.

*This piece, based on Stedile's talk, also includes quotes from another Toronto symposium and composite sketches of rural Brazil and statistics provided by independent news sources.*

## APPENDIX IV

### The MST: Reaching For Socialism

#### An interview with João Pedro Stedile, member of the national executive of the Landless Workers' Movement of Brazil (MST), by Carlos Torres.

Translated from the original Spanish by Ian MacDonald.

#### Introduction

*By Carlos Torres*

The role of the party and of social movements in the struggle for political, economic and social transformation is a necessary and timely debate within the Latin American Left. Disagreements over the appropriate space and role for both organizational forms do threaten, however, an unnecessary split within the movement.

With the collapse of the USSR and of so-called “really-existing socialism”, debates over the nature of Soviet socialism and the causes of its collapse have proliferated. The role of political parties, and of Marxist-Leninist parties in particular, however, has been less discussed. It seems as if, in an eager attempt to salvage something from a dismal history of defeats, the Party has emerged as the sacred trust of a confused and ahistorical ideology. It appears as if it has been forgotten that “the Party” is simply an instrument for social struggle and that its function is determined by its effectiveness on this terrain. If the party no longer serves in this regard, its structure and relationship to social movements ought to be re-examined; parties of the Left that resist and raise obstacles to transformative social struggle ought to be recreated or radically reformed.

Political parties of the last century, which were rooted in liberal thought, emerged as vehicles of parliamentary representation

and as a means of mass control. It is clear that they contributed to restrictively delimit the participation of the masses and, at the same time, to legitimize the capitalist system by delegating political authority to “professional politicians” for whom the people could vote from time to time. The political spaces on offer served not only to reinforce the dominant system, but also to promote a political culture of clientilism that survives to the present day. In short, they have bequeathed more than a century of control and manipulation, leading entire societies in some instances to terrible defeats.

The historical facts that gave rise to the old parties have disappeared along with their ahistorical models. It is time, therefore, to break with this dead weight that impedes or cripples people’s struggles for the defense of their interests and rights. Political mediation ought to be redesigned, as should the role of the party and its relationship with people and with power. The challenges which capitalism presents, which determine in many ways the form and character that struggle assumes, can only be overcome by novel forms of political organization which abandons an Olympian view of the party as the wellspring of sacred truth. It is not only a question of building a party for the struggle, but of one which reaches for victory.

The Landless Workers’ Movement has brought to the struggle interesting and



creative reflection on these issues, placing itself in the “vanguard” of a necessary process of practical and theoretical re-evaluation.



João Pedro Stedile and Carlos Torres. Photo: Sharmini Peries.

## The Interview

*The MST is a peasant organization that focuses on agrarian reform in Brazil. Lately, a few intellectuals have affirmed the end of work and, hence, the end of the peasantry as a social class. Consequently, there should no longer be any role for the peasantry in building a non-capitalist or socialist society. But the MST continues to invoke the road to socialism, as it understands this in the Brazilian context.*

Socialism is a broad topic; it can be seen from different perspectives and analyzed in its various aspects. Historically, the fight for agrarian reform was not tied to the fight for socialism. It was inspired by republican, democratic, and popular ideals because, in its essence, it aimed to democratize the ownership of land. It comes from the margins of the democratic republican tradition.

With the accumulation of capital and the development of more modern social relations based on the subordination and exploitation of the peasantry, peasants acquired a highly developed class consciousness and came to understand that they could not become citizens or fully realized human beings on their small par-

cel of land. On the other hand, these contradictions and the development of capitalism determined that a mass agrarian reform in our continent could only be essentially anti-capitalist in character. We are not entirely sure what role to assign it, but we are certainly speaking of a new type of agrarian reform.

In this reform, we will not only have to democratize the ownership and access of land, we must also collectivize the means of production. We maintain that in this phase of capitalism, agricultural production includes agro-industry and not just the peasants who produce the primary products.

In our vision, agrarian reform can only be viable if it combines the democratization of access to land with a new form of organizing agro-industry. In this respect, the democratization of agro-industry in the countryside necessarily implies a superior level of social relations, either of cooperatives or other forms of social enterprise.

This idea necessarily opens a polemic, since not all intellectuals understand that it is possible to develop more advanced forms of social relations while maintaining individual ownership of the land, given that it is becoming increasingly evident that individual ownership of land does not define in absolute terms the capitalist nature of its exploitation. This is the reading we have of the social forces in the countryside.

I should mention now that there exists another important side to the struggle for socialism; namely, the establishment of new social relations in the conquered areas which make possible the full development of the peasants as people and as citizens. This will contribute to eliminate the link of exploitation between peasants and the

families where children are exploited by parents and in the perpetuation of the gendered exploitation between men and women.

In the MST we are trying to set up nurseries in the settlements, although these are modest by the standards of an advanced capitalist country. In this way, however, these new collective spaces in the countryside liberate women from household work and allow them to take up productive work in the field, altering at the same time their relationship with their husbands and with their children, who become more dependent on community education. This breaks the classic repressive relationship that they encounter from birth with the mother in the house. Issues around the exploitation of children and women are slowly being resolved, save for some aspects related to education.

These changes that we are implementing in our settlements are raising the political consciousness of the settlers, both men and women. This accumulation of subjective factors does have a socialist character, one which goes beyond an economic definition and which is required for a transition to a socialist mode of production. In other words, change cannot only originate in the countryside, but requires ever-greater changes beyond this sphere, from which we are still very distant.

There exists a doctrinaire aspect to socialism. We are talking, on the other hand, about the importance of fostering the socialist project, of feeding the soul, of promoting the idea that it is possible to build a different society. We are not seeking to instill a doctrinaire, orthodox ideal of what socialism is, but of nurturing the belief that it is possible to build a better, more just and fraternal world where everyone, men and women, have the same opportunities, are more equal and, of

course, more happy.

*Do you believe that the modification of the relations of production and the social relations in the MST settlements can lead in a direction distinct from that which capitalism imposes?*

Certainly, we want to convert the settlements into spaces where we can accumulate forces, whereby implementing radical changes in social relations promotes social consciousness and a higher ideological level in the peasant classes. From these spaces a variety of transformations could be generated which are so integral that the socialist culture not only survives, but can also lead to the effective construction of a new political culture.

*Given the historical conditions and the place of social classes in the strategic sectors of the Brazilian economy, what role can peasant classes play in the construction of a different society? Taking into account the existence of a strong industrial working class across the country, how can alliances be struck that will contribute towards the development of a national and popular programme?*

One of the most brutal effects of neoliberalism and of the hegemony of financial capital has been the fracturing of social classes into different sectors, and therefore it is very difficult to differentiate between industrial workers and peasants. There is such a fragmentation of the class structure in our society that we prefer to speak of the working class in general.

Also, there are agricultural workers in Brazil who work part of the year in the countryside and the other part they become proletarians or work in the services sector. It is a broad social mix that includes many sectors. We are trying to build a broad movement that includes all workers without establishing a hierarchical schema whereby one social class is

deemed more important than another, while at the same time not forgetting the basic concepts of social classes and that each plays a specific role in production.

What we will always maintain is a proletarian ideology, and the central component of that ideology is that the class that will determine the future is the class that labours. It is a challenge to continue with this ideology without falling into predetermined conceptions as to which class will have the most important role.

If we adopt the standard definition, the peasantry represents approximately 15 to 20 percent of the population, but if we include all rural workers, it represents more than 50 percent. This is the kind of reflection we are undertaking in the theoretical sense.

We are also trying to recuperate the work of Gramsci, who has contributed to an understanding of the complexity of social classes. In this direction, it is a matter of understanding how proletarian ideology and the ideology of our reforms can influence society. We must engage on the terrain of ideas, what Gramsci defined as the promotion of ideological hegemony within society, promoting the idea that socialism is possible, that it is possible to base a society on other forms of social relations.

*Doesn't this oblige us to rethink the role of the party or of parties as political instruments to make change possible?*

Political parties continue to play a very important role in political struggle. Political parties have made many errors and concentrated their energies solely on the institutional level, and mistook the process of the accumulation of forces for the election of councillors, deputies and parliamentarians. The process of the ac-

cumulation of class forces has a much broader meaning - it means having organized force which allows you to act in defense of workers' rights and being able to irradiate the class vision to wide sectors of the population.

We believe that parties have a key role to play in the struggle to propagandize popular projects, in the formation of cadre, in guaranteeing the ideas that are required for the survival of the political aspirations of the people. On the other hand, the social movements have a complimentary role to play in the organization and coordination of wide sectors of the people in the struggle for their claims and through mass struggle to raise their political and social consciousness.

*Is it possible, in this sense and in these times, to speak of socio-political alliances beyond the characteristic vanguardist roles that leftist parties used to play as "transmission belts" to the movements and social organizations under the political control of the party and under the hegemony and leadership of the party?*

In our opinion, the post-war experience and of Eastern Europe in particular revealed the failure of this concept of the party as the brilliant leader of the people. This conception has been superceded by history, unfortunately with terrible consequences. The task now is to combine a constellation of roles, spaces, and ideological positions in a way which allows for the linking role the party should play, linking party organizations and social movements and the diverse ideological tendencies that act within social space.

*So, if ideological tendencies can operate freely within these social spaces, this would also be valid for political parties and the PT would adapt to this role?*

Yes, because the PT distanced itself a

while ago from the traditional vision of the classic party of the Left, but it has also suffered the ebbing of the masses and has tended to opt for the institutional road and has become ensnared in the traditional pitfalls of an electoralist political party. Therefore, the internal tendencies can and should play an important role in the transformation of a party that is no longer playing its role.

Unfortunately, proponents of some of these tendencies have already considered leaving the PT and forming another party. In my opinion, this is not an appropriate strategy. It is very premature since we still have much work ahead of us in accumulating forces in the popular movement, which is not yet at the level where we can demand that it fulfill its political historical project. It is not enough to have a party with a letterhead, and with a significant level of ideological accord, if it cannot extend its ideas to the people.

*We are talking therefore of the democratization of the socialist project, which implies a greater participation of the popular organizations in the drafting of a transformative project and the construction of a new society?*

Yes, but we are also talking about the necessity to rethink what it means to be on the left within a political terrain where we must organize people for a transformative project. If we do not rethink our position, we will end up with a little enlightened group in which everyone within the group understands the group's politics, but nobody outside of it is aware of it.

Neither is it a matter of organizing people for single-issue campaigns: people need a political project and new tools of struggle that will allow them to move forward and consolidate their gains.

This is the challenge for the Left. It must

be able to create new forms of doing politics and of relating to those who are not in the party or even around it - of overcoming its own history. When we achieve this, we will be able to continue on the road towards socialism.