The landless rural workers movement (MST) in Brazil

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Peasants Speak

The Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil

WILDER ROBLES

A central feature of contemporary Latin America is the widespread upsurge of new peasant rebellions. In Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile and Brazil, among others, peasants are collectively contesting power structures that buttress social, political, and economic exclusion. Although their ideologies and strategies differ from country to country, these peasants are committed to the common objectives of 'land, democracy, and social justice'. As such, they are building national organizations, forging political coalitions, and expanding internal and external social networks. More importantly, these peasants are practising grassroots democracy as the means of opening alternative political spaces to contest restricted forms of political participation.

Ironically, these new peasant movements have emerged in established democratic regimes. The post-authoritarian civilian governments of Latin America embraced the Washington Consensus (that is, free-markets and representative democracy) as the panacea to the social, political, and economic problems of the region. However, after almost two decades the Washington Consensus has not reduced the gap between the haves and have-nots. In fact, poverty in Latin America has increased, not decreased. This, in turn, has brought profound disenchantment with the status quo, particularly among the most vulnerable sectors of the population: the rural and urban poor.

Democratic governments in Latin America (with few exceptions) are operating within the context of strong executive but weak judiciary. This severely limits the action of the legislative branches and, consequently, restricts actors who, whatever reason, are located outside the formal democratic system from active participation in the political process. The

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authoritarian and restrictive nature of this nominally democratic system encourages political cynicism, systemic corruption, and social inequities.

Thus, in a very real sense, democratic transition has not led to democratic transformation; that is, it has not led to the emergence of substantive forms (and hence the real exercise) of democratic citizenship. Specifically, it has not changed the basic structures of power that benefit the affluent and powerful. Indeed, democratic transition has strengthened, not weakened, the control exercised by the political elites, as they have maintained their hold on power through their ownership and command over the mass media and finance.\(^3\) As a result, the successive neoliberal civilian governments have been eager to pursue narrow economic agendas, with the support of transnational organizations, but have been reluctant to resolve old and new social demands.

Of the many peasant movements calling for ‘land, democracy, and social justice’, the Brazilian Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST), or Landless Rural Workers Movement, constitutes the most vocal, best organized, and most effective. This nationwide landless peasant movement was created in 1984, both to advocate and to pursue agrarian reform via the direct occupation of unused public and private lands.\(^4\) Its current membership is more than 500,000 peasant families, all of which are now attempting to implement from ‘below’ the progressive (but stagnant) National Program for Land Reform (PNRA).

However, it is important to note that the MST is not just a rural political group struggling to gain its share of political power in the New Brazilian Republic via the jogo electoral, or electoral game. Rather, the MST is a rural political movement advocating the fundamental transformation of the structures of power via grassroots collective mobilization. The genuine democratization of Brazilian society is, in short, the MST’s raison d’être, and the democratization of land ownership is the starting point in this process.

The MST’s political praxis has been influenced, to a large extent, by the ideas of Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez and Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. The combination of socially conscious theological and educational theories and practices has shaped the MST’s political praxis since its inception. Specifically, it has contributed to the conceptual articulation of community as an autonomous space where the poor and destitute learn how to transform relations of exploitation and oppression into relations of solidarity and liberation. This conceptualization of community is relevant today because, with the decline of labor movements, community-based politics provides alternative spaces to articulate effective political mobilization.

The MST’s conceptualization of community has both descriptive and prescriptive implications. It provides a theoretical framework which
explains the structural causes of political, economic, and environmental exploitation in the Brazilian countryside. It also provides a practical, concrete strategy to channel peasant discontent into concerted collective action. The MST has embraced political and economic activism effectively, to advance the democratization of land, wealth, power, technology, and knowledge. It is fair to say that in contemporary Brazil, the MST has practically eclipsed organized political parties and labor unions as the main agents of social transformation. More importantly, the MST has managed to resituate the question of land reform at the center of the political debate concerning development, democracy, and social justice.

Since it inception, the MST has built a strong political base, effective organization, and extensive social networks. From 1984 onwards, therefore, the MST has used this strategic approach to ‘expropriate’ more than 7.3 million hectares of fallow landholdings, and to settle more than 400,000 landless workers onto productive small-scale collective or semi-collective agricultural co-operatives. In an age of tremendous economic insecurity, the MST is – and is seen to be – providing meaningful employment to the poor and destitute. This is probably the main reason behind the rapid expansion of the movement.

In sum, the MST has three fundamental goals: political, economic and informational democratization. These objectives are as follows:

(1) The genuine democratization of the polity: The MST is not concerned with advancing democratic transition or consolidation, but with democratic transformation; that is, fundamental changes in Brazil’s power structures that have traditionally excluded the poor. The fulfillment of people’s aspirations to a decent livelihood is virtually impossible in the present ‘democratic’ regime, considering that the politics of patronage, favoritism, corruption, and exclusion are not conducive to social justice.

(2) The democratization of the economy via grassroots co-operativism: The MST has envisioned the establishment of co-operatives not only as profitable economic units, but also as bridgeheads to advance the ‘democratization of the means of production’; that is, the transformation of existing socioeconomic relations. Democratic co-operativism is perceived as being a tool for laying the foundations of a social economy to meet people’s needs rather than wants. The main objective, in the view of the movement, is to construct a socially-oriented conceptualization of the processes of material production, distribution, exchange, and consumption, so as to provide new standards for policies capable of achieving the desired objectives of social and economic justice.
(3) The democratization of technology and knowledge: The MST advocates the democratization both of technology itself and also knowledge about this. The MST’s view is that national governments must promote technological and scientific innovations that contribute to the solution of the most diverse pressing problems confronting humanity. To this end, the MST advocates the participation of the poor in the realization and sharing of technological and scientific research. The poor cannot be merely receivers of already existing information (which may not reflect their interests and pursue their ends), but must also be creators of knowledge.

These three main objectives are clearly elaborated in the following document, written by the landless peasants themselves. Although it lacks consistency, the document enshrines the fundamental political and economic principles guiding the MST. Specifically, the document explains in simple language why the dominant development ideology (that is, neoliberalism) is not – and cannot be – a viable strategy to promote the common good. It also proposes an alternative socio-economic programme based on co-operation, not competition, to better the material welfare of individuals, families, and communities. Ultimately, this programme is based on a simple postulate: the transformation of the politics of exclusion into the politics of inclusion as a fundamental prerequisite to changing the socio-economic conditions of the rural poor.

To conclude, a brief note about the origins and current status of the following document is in order. It was formulated for and widely discussed at the recent national conference that the MST held in Brasilia in July 2000. The final draft of the document has not yet been published, as it is undergoing minor changes. However, the basic arguments contained in the first draft are likely to remain unchanged.

NOTES

1. On these points, see the data presented below, in Tables 1, 2 and 3.
3. For evidence of this kind of power, see Table 4.
4. For the amount of cultivated and uncultivated land in Brazil, see Table 3. The extent of land occupations undertaken by the MST is presented in Table 5.
### Table 1

Comparative Social Indicators for Brazil, Colombia, Chile, and Mexico

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Brazil</th>
<th>Colombia</th>
<th>Chile</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GNP per capita US$ 1996</td>
<td>4440</td>
<td>2140</td>
<td>4860</td>
<td>3670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNP per capita average annual growth 1965–80/90–96</td>
<td>6.3/2.0</td>
<td>3.7/3.0</td>
<td>4.1/11</td>
<td>3.6/–0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U5MR 1960/90/97</td>
<td>177/60/44</td>
<td>130/40/30</td>
<td>138/20/13</td>
<td>134/46/35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy male/female 1995 (%)</td>
<td>83/83</td>
<td>91/91</td>
<td>95/95</td>
<td>92/87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children successfully completing grade five 1990–95 (%)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to adequate sanitation (% total/urban/rural) 1990–97</td>
<td>70/80/30</td>
<td>85/97/56</td>
<td>na/90/na</td>
<td>72/na/na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of household income 1990–96</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>top 20%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lowest 40%</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gini index, or inequality index 1995</td>
<td>12/38</td>
<td>12/33</td>
<td>19/30</td>
<td>24/31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External debt service as percentage of GNP 1970/1996</td>
<td>71/179</td>
<td>6.9/28</td>
<td>12/27</td>
<td>57/157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total external debt in US$ (billions) 1980/97</td>
<td>71/179</td>
<td>6.9/28</td>
<td>12/27</td>
<td>57/157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The Gini index (i.e. Lorenz curve) is a hypothetical line of absolute equality. Recently, the World Bank has adopted a scale between 0–100 instead of the traditional 0–1 to measure the distribution of income in all societies.

TABLE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND IN BRAZIL IN 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Agricultural Properties in Hectares</th>
<th>Agricultural Properties Total Number</th>
<th>As % of Total</th>
<th>Agricultural Area Total</th>
<th>As % of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1</td>
<td>99,074</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>25,827.3</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to less than 10</td>
<td>896,842</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>4,590,083.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to less than 100</td>
<td>1,681,411</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>54,667,741.1</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 to less than 1000</td>
<td>393,615</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>106,323,698.4</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 1000 (Latifúndio area)</td>
<td>43,956</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>165,756,662.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,114,898</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>331,364,012.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA): Census 1992. INCRA is the official government agency in charge of implementing agrarian reform in accordance with the 1988 Brazilian constitution. INCRA was established by the military regime in 1970 to coordinate colonization programmes in the Amazon.

TABLE 3

DISTRIBUTION OF CULTIVATED AND UNCULTIVATED AGRICULTURAL LAND IN BRAZIL IN 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agricultural Area %</th>
<th>Cultivated Land %</th>
<th>Uncultivated Land %</th>
<th>Minifúndio* Area %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center-West</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* According to INCRA's census methodology, the minifúndio is an extremely small plot of land that cannot be considered an agriculturally sustainable productive unit.
Table 4
The Forty-Six Largest Brazilian Latifúndios Grouped By Economic Sectors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Agriculture Area</th>
<th>Cultivated Land</th>
<th>Number of Rural Workers Employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hectares</td>
<td>Hectares</td>
<td>As % of Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>22,133,342</td>
<td>3,799,248</td>
<td>17.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>10,991,211</td>
<td>1,991,396</td>
<td>18.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural</td>
<td>6,277,169</td>
<td>905,297</td>
<td>14.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39,401,7226,695,941</td>
<td>16,99</td>
<td>112,514</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 5
Land Occupations by the MST 1986–96*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>No. of Occupations</th>
<th>No. of Families Settled</th>
<th>Area in Hectares</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>23,250</td>
<td>872,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>76,304</td>
<td>2,317,153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>13,748</td>
<td>281,517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>16,420</td>
<td>314,553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center-West</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>15,990</td>
<td>1,084,862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,564</td>
<td>145,712</td>
<td>4,870,172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The data cover the period from January 1986 to March 1996.

Note: In 1997, land occupations dramatically increased. There were 518 invasions nationwide, which settled more than 151,427 families. The MST has not yet published the 1997–98 data by regions.

Source: MST, ‘História do MST’.
Fundamental Principles for the Social and Economic Transformation of Rural Brazil

THE LANDLESS RURAL WORKERS MOVEMENT (MST)

Introductory Note
This paper emerged out of an initial contribution by our friend Horácio Martins and other Brazilian intellectuals who are involved in our movement, and out of the discussion that took place within the MST’s National Commission for Mobilization.

The paper is a first draft, and is open to further expansion and criticism. However, it provides the framework for the broadest possible collective discussion of socio-economic issues among our different grassroots organizations. The final version of this paper will be ready by July 2000, and will certainly incorporate new insights and responses from our organizations.

Introduction
The new neoliberal economic policies implemented in the country have laid the foundations for the subordination of the Brazilian economy to international financial capitalism. The implementation of these policies started in the 1980s, with the crisis of the model of industrialization pursued during the previous decades. The political unity of the Brazilian dominant classes under Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s administration (1994–2002) has consolidated the implementation of neoliberalism.

However, neoliberalism has not rescued the country from economic crisis. In fact, there is consensus among economists of different theoretical persuasions that the 1980s and 1990s were lost decades for Brazil; that is, economic output neither increased nor kept pace with population growth. As a result, there was an impoverishment of the whole of Brazilian society. Even worse, neoliberal economic policies led to an increased concentration of land and wealth in the hands of a few. It also led to the denationalization of the Brazilian economy, as public and private economic enterprises (more

Translated by Wilder Robles.
than 650 of the largest) were privatized and sold to foreign groups. Thus, neoliberalism led to the subordination of the national economy to international monopolistic groups, and to the dismantling of the state. The outcome has been increased poverty, a process accompanied by an increase in social problems such as unemployment, the lack of housing and schools, and violence in the largest cities.

Popular movements must challenge this neoliberal conceptualization of our economy and society. Clearly, the strategy of these movements requires, at the very least, the definition of basic objectives, so as to guide collective mobilization aimed at meaningful social transformation, particularly in the rural context.

I. Land Reform: The Democratization of Land Ownership

Our definition of land reform presupposes the comprehensive distribution of land, the regularization of rural property, and the legalization of ownership titles of peasants already occupying land. Land reform constitutes an urgent matter that can be postponed no longer. It is fundamental for the establishment of social justice and citizenship in rural Brazil.

There are 4.5 million landless peasants who are potential beneficiaries of the land reform process. There are also millions of posseiros, or peasant squatters, demanding that the state take immediate action to legalize their situation. Land reform is advocated by all popular movements. It is also supported by broad sectors of Brazilian society, particularly in the urban areas.

Land reform also entails providing subsistence farmers with more land, so as to enhance their economic potential. In some cases, this might involve the relocation of subsistence farmers away from agriculturally non-viable areas.

Land reform is fundamental to the process of promoting viable forms of sustainable livelihoods for millions of peasant families. It is also fundamental to the process of establishing a more democratic agrarian structure made up mostly of small and medium-scale producers. Moreover, these agricultural producers can play an important role in protecting our national resource, land, and its biodiversity, from avaricious multinational corporations.

It is necessary, therefore, to establish a limit to the maximum size of rural property, so as to prevent the increasing concentration of land and wealth. This is a prerequisite for fulfilling the social function of the land; that is, making the land productive. The agricultural land left over should constitute a land trust fund, administered by the State for the purpose of advancing the common good, and in particular for further land reform.
II. The Reorganization of Production: Democratizing the Use of Land for the Benefit of the Whole Society

The present economic model being implemented by the dominant classes is oriented towards obtaining foreign currency to service the nation's external debt. This model reflects hegemonic economic interests. It promotes the use of land for monocultural purposes; that is, it favors the cultivation of crops for export to foreign markets. Monoculture leads to a loss of biodiversity; it contributes to the deterioration of land and the environment. The cultivation of cereal, for instance, has contributed to the acceleration of the destruction of the biosphere in many regions of the country, particularly in the Brazilian Amazon.

The agroexport model is highly dependent on foreign capital and technology. It also severely curtails the use of manual labor. Furthermore, agroexport is dominated by powerful monopolistic agricultural enterprises.

There must therefore be a limit on the proportion of each farm that is dedicated to monoculture. Farmers should be encouraged to use the rest of their lands for food crops destined for local domestic markets.

Moreover, it is fundamental that the State forbids the expansion of agricultural frontiers in areas of the country threatened by environmental destruction, particularly in the Brazilian Amazon.

III. The State Should be the Promoter of Policies that Reorganize Agriculture and Rural Communities in Relation to Population

The policies being implemented by the present government are oriented toward the dismantling of the role of the State, particularly the Ministry of Agriculture. The government has drastically reduced funding for agricultural research, technical assistance, rural transportation, financial credit, and price subsidies.

The present agricultural policies are predominantly oriented toward the consolidation and expansion of agribusiness enterprises that promote monoculture. Small and medium-scale farmers are considered insignificant agents in the productive process and, thus, are not properly supported by public policies and programmes. Moreover, the government and the dominant classes believe that these farmers will inevitably disappear.

The achievement of agricultural diversity requires the implementation of public policies and programmes that take into consideration the scale of the units of economic production in the countryside. Small and medium-scale rural producers, present and future beneficiaries of the agrarian reform process, are the ones that are employing manual labour intensively and effectively. These farmers constitute the economic sector that will generate,
in the short and medium-term, employment and income. Small and medium-scale farming are more productive than large-scale farming, due to the intense use of manual labor per hectare. Even so, these farmers receive no support from the government, which favors large-scale farming.

Accordingly, the State must protect small and medium-scale farmers through different public policies and programmes. The use of agricultural subsidies is fundamental to promoting the development and permanence of these kinds of farmer in the countryside. As is the case of developed countries, agricultural subsidies must be considered public investment that will in the short and long-run generate social and economic returns in the form of employment opportunities and income generation.

In addition to the aforementioned aspects related to the productive process, it is indispensable that the State provides additional resources, so that small-scale farmers and rural workers can have free access to legal aid, to defend their interests.

IV. Agricultural Co-operation as a Strategy for Developing the Social Forces of Production

Because of the monopolistic, capital-intensive nature of modern Brazilian agriculture, co-operation between small and medium-scale farmers is fundamental to increasing productivity and income in the countryside. Access to modern agriculture inputs (that is, seeds, fertilizers, machinery, etc.) is beyond their means, and consequently these farmers are unable to participate effectively in the highly competitive agricultural market. To counteract this situation, small and medium-scale producers must co-operate to gain collective access to technological, financial, and marketing mechanisms, so as to enhance their economic efficiency.

The neoliberal worldview stresses individualism, and advocates indiscriminate market competition. This worldview is in direct opposition to the values of co-operation and solidarity, which are the basic values of small and medium-scale agricultural producers. These values are fundamental to community life.

Agricultural co-operatives must play an important role in promoting social solidarity and the common good. Therefore, the establishment of these co-operatives, in their most diverse forms and practices, must have both economic and social functions. They must be oriented toward the reinvigoration of economic and social relationships that transcend the bourgeois values of individualism and competition.

The promotion of co-operation requires political and ideological efforts on behalf of the most diverse social and popular organizations. These organizations must demand public policies that encourage the establishment
and consolidation of small and medium-scale agricultural co-operatives in the context of land reform programmes.

Agricultural co-operatives must be diversified economically, so as to generate alternative forms of employment and income. These co-operatives must also be linked to other sectors of the economy, so as to benefit subsistence peasants, rural workers, and those who earn a living from fishing on a seasonal basis. The vertical and horizontal integration of the economy at the local level is thus also a fundamental part of the social and economic reinvigoration of rural communities. It also creates alternative employment for the young in rural areas.

V. A New Model of Technology: The Substitution of Agricultural Inputs

The agricultural policies currently being implemented in the country facilitate the control of agricultural inputs by multinational corporations. In the neoliberal logic, this is a ‘natural’ process of expanding modern agriculture. The unrestricted opening up of the domestic agricultural market to multinational corporations has meant that the prices of basic agricultural inputs for local production, which could be supplied by national industries, are now dependent on the monopolistic practices of foreign industries. This situation has contributed to the dismantling of the nation’s scientific and technological infrastructure.

It is also noteworthy that, in order to maximize their profits, multinational scientific corporations are reorienting their research and marketing strategies to meet the growing needs of agribusiness enterprises. In technological terms, these multinational scientific corporations are producing and marketing genetically modified agricultural seeds that enhance the cultivation of crops for export. This practice essentially reinforces monoculture.

The use of domestic rather than foreign agricultural inputs, particularly at the level of small and medium-scale production, is fundamental to the stimulation, the development and the expansion of the nation’s scientific and technological infrastructure. This is essential to the pursuit of scientific and technological autonomy, so as to be able to develop appropriate technologies that are socially and economically beneficial to small and medium-scale farmers. Clearly, this is an ideological-political task that involves challenging the vested economic interests of multinational corporations, in order then to be able to advance and consolidate the democratization of wealth and power in the countryside.

Accordingly, we need to construct a new technological model that moves away from the Green Revolution and the monopoly of
biotechnology, each of which is controlled by multinational corporations. We need to search for an autonomous technological model that helps small and medium-scale agricultural producers to develop their own agricultural inputs. We need to encourage technologies that not only promote organic farming but are also ecologically and economically sustainable.

VI. Agricultural Co-operatives

The object of establishing agricultural co-operatives in all rural regions of the country should be to diversify and maximize value-added agricultural production. The creation of small agroindustry enterprises is part of the development of a society’s productive forces, and essential for generating alternative rural employment and income. It is also a viable strategy for the provision of affordable food supplies to those consumers living in overpopulated urban cities. However, small and medium-scale agricultural producers must control the process of agricultural diversification, so as to avoid exploitation and improve their own income. This model of agricultural co-operativism should contribute to the democratization of the means of production in the countryside.

Over the past few years, different experiences of the aforementioned model of agricultural co-operativization in the country at large have demonstrated that an value added agriculture, based on the vertical integration of production, is to the benefit of small and medium-scale producers.

The vertical integration of agricultural production also encourages cooperation in the social, political, and economic spheres of human life, which, in turn, benefits community living.

Similarly, the vertical integration of agricultural production additionally stimulates the development of appropriate technologies, new forms of the division of labor, alternative forms of market relationships, and new social relations.

Moreover, the establishment of small-scale agroindustries in the countryside provides rural employment for young people, thus encouraging them to remain in the countryside. These agroindustries will also require the creation of technical colleges to train young skilled workers, so as to meet the labour needs of the different sectors of the rural economy.

VII. Integrated Rural Development

The above model of integrated rural development must embrace the different spheres of social existence: political, economic, and environmental. It should seek to improve the quality of life for individuals,
families, and communities, through the creation of non-private schools, health centres, decent housing, and basic transportation. Integrated rural development should also seek to create the necessary infrastructure by which rural communities can learn to manage efficiently their natural and human resources.

Integrated rural development also involves the appreciation and valuing of rural culture and traditions. It is accordingly important to support programmes aimed at reinforcing the values and practices of social solidarity among the local population, in order to construct a more just, egalitarian, and fraternal society.

Brazil possesses the basic infrastructure to close the gap between living conditions in rural areas and those in urban environments. In fact, the national electrical, telephone, transportation, and water services are sufficiently well developed to be used to create living conditions in the rural areas that match (if not far surpass) those existing in the largest urban centres of the country.

VIII. Food Security and the Domestic Market

The present North American agricultural model being implemented by the administration of Fernando Henrique Cardoso presupposes that cost-effective agricultural enterprises are capable of meeting the country’s domestic food consumption needs. Because of their financial and marketing muscle, large agribusiness conglomerates, most of them foreign-based, have basically established oligopolies in the domestic food market at the expense of consumers. Not surprisingly, Brazil’s domestic food market today is under the control of a few multinational corporations. At the same time, large-scale agricultural producers are still committed to cultivating monocultural crops for export to international markets. As a result, the Brazilian population is essentially at the mercy of these two powerful agribusiness interests. This situation exacerbates the social and economic exclusion of small and medium-scale agricultural producers, committed as they are to producing for the local markets. In most cases, these producers have been forced to abandon agriculture altogether.

The present agricultural policy has serious consequences for our national food security. It is also destroying the country’s social, economic and agricultural infrastructure. In this context, it is necessary to reverse the present situation by strengthening the productive capacity of domestic agricultural producers committed to producing food for the internal market.

The political objective of an alternative agricultural policy, therefore, should be to be able to provide affordable and good quality food supplies to all Brazilians throughout the year. The achievement of self-sufficiency in
the food sector is a fundamental prerequisite to breaking the monopolistic control currently enjoyed by multinational agribusiness conglomerates.

IX. The Distribution of Income and Agricultural Development

The rural development model outlined above will not be viable without simultaneous and fundamental changes in economic policies applied at the national level, aimed at securing the redistribution of wealth and income. The process of increasing production and income in rural areas depends fundamentally on a corresponding growth in consumer demand for food staples at the level of the domestic market. However, the tremendous concentration of wealth and income in the country hampers the expansion of the internal agricultural market. Because of this, vast segments of the urban population have insufficient income with which to purchase additional food staples. For this reason, therefore, they cannot generate a growing demand for agricultural products in the domestic market. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Brazil has 32 million people who go hungry every day, and another 33 million people whose diet is inadequate for their subsistence needs. To ameliorate this situation, a new agricultural policy must be accompanied by better income distribution, higher salaries, adequate pensions, and more just taxation system, the latter aimed particularly at the wealthy. These policies will create conditions that will in turn stimulate a growing consumer demand in the countryside.

X. Rural Development as a Strategy to Confront Unemployment

As in developed or developing countries, the present capitalist economic model implemented in Brazil has contributed to the emergence of what is now a major global problem confronting humanity: unemployment. Vast sectors of the Brazilian population do not have the right to work. This is an affront to human dignity. If a person does not have the right to work, then he/she is condemned thereby to social exclusion.

It is therefore necessary for us to search for alternative economic policies that will create meaningful employment for vast segments of the Brazilian population. The integrated rural development model discussed above is a socially, economically, and environmentally viable strategy, designed to guarantee the right to work to all Brazilians. It also can contribute to the solution of the urban crisis, by decentralizing economic activity, away from the largest cities and towards small and medium-sized urban settlements. Moreover, the integrated rural development model proposed above has the potential to generate an expansion in productive
capacity throughout all sectors of the national economy, and thus to contribute to employment opportunities and income resources both in rural and in urban areas.

XI. Popular Democracy

Finally, it is imperative that the integrated rural development model set out above be accompanied by a process of genuine democratic change. This is a crucial part of securing a transformation in the currently exploitative social, political, and economic relationships so prevalent in the countryside. Rural citizens must embrace grassroots democracy, so as to learn how fully to exercise their political rights in the wider democratic process.

It goes without saying that citizens who have the right to work, whether members of agricultural co-operatives or not, are in a better condition to confront the power structures which buttress political domination and economic exploitation in the countryside. Given the present domination exercised by the mass media, it is therefore necessary to promote a counter process: namely, the democratization of the mass media in rural areas, so as to provide a more balanced coverage and source of information on radio and television, and in newspapers.

A genuine process of democratization must also involve the transformation of existing discriminatory practices based on race, gender, or economic status.