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## **The Landless Rural Movement and the Settlements in the West of Paraná: Agreements and Disagreements over the Struggle for Land**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines three case studies of rural settlements in the west of Paraná, which were settled in different periods, and are representative of the changes in the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST) over the years, particularly as regards the organizational forms assumed by the rural settlements. These were based on the collective organization of production, which, when implemented, provoked conflicts revealing the inadequacies of such model. This paper also highlights the tensions between the leadership of the MST and its base, directly related to the existence of two projects in clear opposition: the ideological political project of the MST leadership and the project for organizing daily life and production by the social base of the movement.

**Key words:** rural settlements, MST, agrarian reform

The formation of the MST or Landless Rural Movement occurred in 1984, in the city of Cascavel, in the west of Paraná State, when regional movements fighting for land joined together under a single acronym, thus completing 20 years of formal existence in the month of January 2004. During this time, the MST has concentrated on two basic goals: the conquest of land and the maintenance of this conquest in land-reformed areas. Regarding this latter task, the direction of the MST has looked to develop models of social and productive organization within the agrarian reform settlements under MST orientation, which also concerns their political goals.

Based on case studies, this article aims at analyzing the organizational processes implemented in three settlements established at different times in western Paraná between 1991 and 2001. We aim at showing that such processes reflect the changes undergone by

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the MST movement and the organizational models (ideologically based on the collective organization of production), which the MST tried to implement in the region with the following variants: communitarian (in the Sávio-Dois Vizinhos settlement), cooperative (in the Verdum settlement) and the so called semi-collective (in the Sepé-Tiaraju settlement).<sup>1</sup>

With a view to putting the argument of the present text into context, we initially present a brief summary of the three case studies. Later, we will characterize what could be called two conflicting projects: the first one as conceived by the MST, and the second one reflecting the expectations of its grassroots. In this article, we will attempt to highlight the way in which peasants experienced the organizational processes proposed or developed by the MST leadership, particularly in the settlements studied.

### **Collective organization experiments**

#### *Sávio-Dois Vizinhos Settlement: a communitarian organization case*

In October 1985, the MST was already a nationwide movement. Then, forty-one families, which remained from a regional movement named *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra do Oeste do Paraná (Mastro)*- Western Paraná Landless Workers Movement, founded in 1981, settled in a part of the Mineira farm, an area later dispossessed for agrarian reform.<sup>2</sup> The settlement was named Sávio-Dois Vizinhos.

This settlement, gave great hope to the MST leadership, for being the only settlement located in the western region with peasants from Mastro. According to statements from leaders, during the period prior to the settlement, when the peasants were encamping, they did not have a consistent project for communitarian organization, but only a proposal which was not fully elaborated and concerned an alternative way of organizing production based on solidarity and communitarian ideas. To this respect, one of the regional leaderships interviewed comments:<sup>3</sup> "the first initiative was to fight for the land. A son of the landless wanted the land, a small piece of property. But they did not yet have a greater vision on how it was going to be (...) In terms of production, there were some people who spoke about collective work and association, but they did not have any clear ideas or experience. They spoke a lot, but didn't have any basic proposal to put forward." Another leader, who was a member of the movement's State coordination, talks about the initial concern about attempts at organizational alternatives to make production possible in the early settlements: "We realized that just the land wasn't enough. We lacked credit, fair prices and a fair agricultural policy. We needed to keep on fighting, because capitalism was still there. While it still exists you have to live with it and for us to keep on surviving we needed to organize ourselves within it. In the settlements, we realized that the land only was not enough."

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The still fledgling proposal of communitarian work contained in this leader's speech did not limit itself to economics, but also had a political dimension. Another statement clearly expressing the leaders' expectations includes the role of the rural labor union in the fight for land: "The union was important in putting forward proposals for the settlements. We wanted to create associations, touch on the question of production, and even political education. "

As many subjects for discussion were in the air, some proposals were taken to the settlers, such as the establishment of a communitarian project based on collective ownership of the land and even the formation of an *agri-village*, both of which were rejected. Meanwhile, the situation became more complicated, when an attempt to implement a model based on community links was proposed by the State, which implied the compulsory formation of associations for the collective purchase of machinery, tractors, ploughs, tools, etc.<sup>4</sup> This proposal was put forward before the settlers were sufficiently organized, or they had defined and accepted any organizational project.

The approval of this proposal, by mediators, MST leaders and the settlers themselves, was conditional on the partial release of funds from the *Programa Especial de Crédito para a Reforma Agrária (Procera)* - Special Credit Program for Agrarian Reform. If, on the one hand the State's initiative via the Secretary of Agriculture, was reasonable from the economic point of view and regarding the rational use of resources, on the other hand, the fact that it occurred so quickly overlooked other important issues especially cultural ones. According to some mediators, the imposing vertical role of the State, together with the rapid acceptance of the proposals by some leaders, would undoubtedly bring negative consequences, if not upon introduction, then later during the project's development. The secretary of the CPT during that time, reverend Werner Fuchs, declares: "At the time there were government specialists, linked to the left-wing, who, sitting at their desks, imagined that the MST wanted a collective project; then came the proposal. We did not accept the proposal immediately, so at the time the CPT seemed quite reactionary to these people (...). The leaders and unions accepted the idea very quickly, foreseeing the release of funds, advice and technical assistance."

In the Sávio-Dois Vizinhos settlement, after the acceptance of the Secretary of Agriculture's proposals, the Procera funds were released for the purchase of communal tractors. According to mediators, a *modus operandi* was started which would set a pattern for the other settlements. The settlers also received the support of a technician from the *Empresa de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural (Emater)* - Company for Technical Assistance and Rural Extension - who aimed at developing an educational project associating technical guidance to the political organization of the settlers. Even so, the project was short lived.

Regarding the association for purchasing machinery, the motives for undoing the project were the misuse of the tractor, the need for repairs and lack of funds for it, plus misunderstandings between settlers regarding procedures to be adopted.

Besides the experience of that association, some settlers, nine in all, who at first favored the proposed collectivist project, agreed on the attempt to implement it, so that it would

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become a successful example. Little by little, this would attract other settlers to join. However, this experiment was also short lived mainly because of the distance among the lots involved, according to farmers.

In 1987, similar circumstances took place in another settlement called Vitória, located in the west of the state. Some farmers aiming to put into practice what had been discussed at the encampment began to organize an association. They intended to gradually consolidate a larger organization beginning with a partially collective model. The association included nine peasant families, however, lack of economic resources, together with such factors as the different amount of agricultural work allocated to the settlers, made the continuation of the project difficult. Gradually the farmers abandoned the association, causing its closure after two years in operation.<sup>5</sup>

Frustrated attempts occurred not only here, but in other settlements in the State, led leaders to conclude that having partitioned the land, this would make the implementation of these forms of communitarian organization practically impossible. During the following years, they concluded that a specific organization for rural settlements on a nationwide scale would be needed. To allow for this, a national MST plan for the period 1989-1993 was drawn up, which outlined the future direction of the movement and developed the parameters for cooperativism within the movement, with an emphasis on the creation of *Cooperativas de Produção Agropecuária* (CPAs) - Farming Production Cooperatives.<sup>6</sup> The CPA model prioritized by the MST in those years included the collective organization of the settlers in the widest of terms. The land, machinery and facilities were all for collective use and belonged to the cooperative. Work was also organized collectively, and was evenly divided among settlers, based on number of hours worked. Similar experiences developed in the south of the country as pilot projects to be extended to other settlements. Among such cases we find the Verdum settlement in the State of Paraná, founded at the beginning of the 90s, which was the second cooperative to follow this model, as we will see.

### **Cooperativism in the MST: emphasis on collective productive formats**

The current Verdum settlement originated from the occupation in 1989 of an unproductive farm in the municipality of Lindoeste. State Justice then issued a repossession order, which was carried out in the month of January the following year. The MST leaders in Paraná, aware that the farm was unproductive, insisted on its dispossession. In June 1990, they decided to transfer a group of 20 families from the occupied Papagaios farm in the municipality of Inácio Martins, in south-central Paraná to reoccupy the Verdum farm with the intention of installing a CPA there.<sup>7</sup> After inspection procedures carried out by Incra, the farm was considered unproductive. However, the proprietor, once more claimed for repossession. Only after the case was judged, could Incra continue with the process of settling families there. The twenty farmers who originally headed for the Verdum farm left behind their previous settlement, conscious that they were committed to organizing a CPA, even before the definitive dispossession of the area. Later, another family joined the group, making a total of twenty-one families. After

entering the area, they put up provisory tents around the main farmhouse to shelter the families and dedicated themselves to the initial tasks of organizing the cooperative, formed on August 16th, 1990, under the name *Cooperativa de Produção Agropecuária Camponesa Ltda.* (Coprac) - Farm Production Cooperative Ltd. Internal rules and

regulations were elaborated - and the first directorship was chosen, with one of the settlers as its president. An *agri-village* was founded and each family was given a small lot for housing construction. Gradually, wooden houses substituted the canvas tents.

During the first years, there was still no clear definition regarding distribution of tasks among farmers, who were happy with their new form of social organization and work, and lived in relative harmony. However, during the first years of the CPA, leaders of the cooperative and the MST considered that there were still many obstacles to overcome, making it necessary to form an “organizational field workshop” (“*laboratório organizacional de campo*”).<sup>8</sup> With the organization of the workshop, it was intended to teach the farmers business and to unite all the members of the cooperative under a *common purpose*. In short, it was hoped to modify the group’s peasant culture eliminating “traditional peasant ways”, which made it difficult to organize production on the basis of collective ownership of the land. It was also intended to achieve group *unity and discipline*, factors considered essential for this organizational model.<sup>9</sup>

A “primary structure” formed of six people with considerable knowledge (e.g. of the social composition of the group) was created. They would *control* the workshop, *preventing anomalies, controlling factions and trends*, with a view to guaranteeing the harmony of the group. This group was also responsible for running the settlement and carrying out daily evaluations, by means of reports called “Daily Chronicles”. The group also produced weekly reports, named “Information and Critical Balance”.

The workshop lasted for 33 days and came to an end on June 20th, 1992. After this period, and without anyone in charge of its organization, the group had to continue with the work already started and carry on with their plans. Aimed at getting the cooperative running and distributing the available manpower, a system was drafted, which defined work sectors, where men, women and teenagers over thirteen years of age would take part. Lighter activities and chores, such as taking care of the communal canteen, the day-care center, healthcare and clothes-making, were destined to the women; sectors such as horticulture and cattle farming, to both genders; those that demanded greater energy, such as heavy farm labor were only carried out by the men; finally, the administrative sector became the responsibility of the elected Coprac directorship. It was not the custom to operate a rotation system of settlers in the different work sectors. Each sector had a coordinator who gathered together the group to plan activities and from these meetings they established the monthly ordinary meeting’s agenda.

A communal canteen under the responsibility of three or four women was organized, depending on the number of meals to be served. At fixed times, the families would leave their jobs and head for the canteen where lunch was served. Other meals took place in the families’ houses.

Since the cooperative’s beginning, the division of its produce was calculated on a basis of number of hours worked by men, women and teenagers over thirteen. Hence, after the sale of all produce from the commune, overheads were reduced, and the surplus was then distributed according to the number of hours worked.

After the workshop had set *disciplinary* objectives, the same standards were maintained regarding conduct, the carrying out of planned activities and fulfillment of work schedules. The statement by the former president of the cooperative describes the aforementioned: “the workshop was a start, then it continued. Every day at seven in the morning, come rain

or shine, *we were all ready in the canteen. We got together in the canteen* then later we left for our sectors. We would sing the movement's anthem and everyone would present him/herself to the coordinator of each sector, who announced the work plan and from there we would set off to work. "

In those days all efforts were made for the organization's success, especially as *a model* for other settlements and for the society in general. Difficulties of a diverse nature started to arise, however, portraying inherent contradictions within the organizational form adopted, something that we will look at hereafter.

At that time, the president of the cooperative moved to another settlement in the center of the state, with the commitment to forming a new CPA there, then the vice-president assumed the direction of Coprac. After this change, many problems amounted in the following months. According to the new president, more problems arose, which had to be dealt with during his leadership, such as the low farming income and the lack of State resources, at a time when the case for dispossession of the farm was still going through the law courts.

In 1996, a first group of settlers – most of them farm laborers – split from the cooperative against the will of their leaders, the movement's State leadership, and Incra specialists. Each family drew up a separate area of land for plantation and housing, far from the cooperative's headquarters.

According to statements gathered, both the direction of the MST and specialists from Incra wanted to make the separatist group leave the estate and go to other settlements being set up in the region, however, the farmers refused any type of deal.

In order to maintain the enterprise and according to settlers, the MST's state direction supported by Incra opted to substitute the old CPA leadership, which was already at the end of its mandate, for a group of seven peasant families from other settlements situated in south-western Paraná. The measures taken by this group, such as ending with the various work sectors and forming a single farming sector, led to greater controversy and confrontations, not only restricted to the grassroots of the movement, but which also reached part of the previous leadership, who opposed the ideas of the new group in charge. They disagreed, therefore, on the way this group directed the cooperative and on decisions adopted without prior consultation, such as the sale of two tractors for payment of cooperative debts.

As conflicts built up, another group of farmers abandoned the cooperative (its former-president belonged to this group). This fact made the whole project unfeasible and the CPA was dissolved.

Faced with the facts, both the movement's direction and Incra, were obliged to accept the division of lots after the land was finally dispossessed. However, transferring the seven peasant families so as to direct the cooperative had created a new problem. At that time, the number of people settling the estate exceeded the number of families the land could bear. Furthermore, the previous figure of 21 families was already considered too high. According to Incra's assessment, the area of circa 963 acres was suitable for only 16 families.

Settlers who, supported by specialists from Incra and the MST, were later transferred to the location, deemed themselves with the right to own land; those who had settled since the beginning, even more so. Due to this stalemate, one of the meetings at the settlement was attended by State leaders of the MST and members of the *Central Cooperativa dos*

*Assentados* (CCA) - Central Cooperative of Settlers, whose headquarters is in the State capital.

The leaders had avoided visiting the settlements for some time due to successive confrontations taking place then, as one of the former-leaders of the movement puts it: "They had stopped coming, because when they came here it was just a lot of fighting. Because there's one thing, this movement teaches, it was the best schooling for me, I used to be shy to even speak, nowadays I'll talk to anyone. If I'm right, I'll fight, we developed... we learned that if you are right, you have to battle on...he who owes not, fears not. "

Even with those leaders present (who insisted that the settlers left the area), no agreement was made. Faced with the settlers' resistance, it was decided to carry out a selection of those who should remain in the area; the remainder would be transferred to other settlements being set up in the region. Those who had been transferred later remained and part of the original settlers had to leave their lots, and was sent to other settlements.

### **Sepé Tiaraju settlement: a semi-collective experiment**

The Boi Preto farm (nowadays Sepé Tiaraju settlement) used to belong to the company J. Malucelli Florestal Ltd., owned by Jose Malucelli who, from 1970-80, used the location for reforestation and timber processing. At the end of the 1980s, he abandoned these activities and the farm itself. After an inspection carried out by Incra showing the farm to be unproductive, the MST, aiming to put pressure on the State and to speed up the process of dispossession and settlement of the landless families there, decided to occupy the estate. The occupation of the farm occurred on January 3rd, 1998, and initially included only eight families. Other families joined the settlement during the months to follow, reaching a total of 17, precisely the number of families the area of 1,067.5 acres could support. On May 26th, 1998, Incra emitted a decree dispossessing the area for agrarian reform. Meanwhile, the company put in a claim for repossession, and won the case in the State Court of Justice. The settled families left the area on February 16th, 2000.

If, on the one hand, the eviction of the settlers took place by means of a legal procedure, on the other hand, it was absolutely unnecessary. While State Court ruled for repossession of the farm, another lawsuit moved by Incra was going through federal justice. Only one month after eviction, this case ruled definitive dispossession of the farm, which allowed the peasants to return to the farm.<sup>10</sup> During this period they had camped at the headquarters of the cold store of the *Cooperativa de Comercialização e Reforma Agrária do Oeste do Paraná* (Coara) - Cooperative of Comercialization and Agrarian Reform of Western Paraná,

Unlike what happened at other land occupations, the MST rigidly controlled the number of families settling the Boi Preto farm and demanding land for the agrarian reform. The peasants were screened, and for this reason only a small number of farmers joined the occupation in the beginning. These procedures were not unusual, however, as similar screenings could be observed throughout the 1990s at other occupations. In the case of the previously mentioned Verdum settlement, the settlement project was not laid out *a priori*, nor did it depend on choice, as only those who agreed to the defined model were led to the location. Selective procedures were directly related to the intension of the MST leadership to establish an organizational model founded on collective ownership of the land, with an

emphasis on the formation of CPAs throughout western Paraná, as already seen. However, due to the failure of this type of experience in several other settlements, internal arguments regarding the proposed model arose.<sup>11</sup> When these debates and reevaluations were in progress, and still without any clear outlines, the State and regional leaderships, in an effort to balance the situation, decided to implement semi-collective organizational models at the settlements in western Paraná State. That is, part of the undivided land was destined to the collective organization, while other areas were assigned to the families, as we can see in the following statement by one of the leaders interviewed who favors the choice of a semi-collective model:

‘From 92 up to 95 we made great progress with the CPAs. This was one of the strong points of the movement. From then up to now, we’ve faced problems. We had a socialist experience within the CPAs, but our country was still capitalist! Even so, we believe that cooperation is the best solution, but we learned a lot from our mistakes back then and started to change. The proposal for a part collective / part individual model offers an alternative for both individual and collective production.

The occupation of the Boi Preto farm occurred at a time when arguments and reevaluations were going on. This led to proposals for a *break* in the collectivization process until we could construct the "subjective conditions" needed for developing the organizational model for rural settlements sustained by the direction of the MST.’<sup>12</sup>

After the organizational structure for future settlements had been established, families who were to join the project were screened thoroughly.<sup>13</sup> The person responsible for the selective procedure was a member from the MST’s regional coordination, who also took part in the project. When the inclusion procedures had been concluded, families on arrival began putting up their canvas tents, side by side, near the old farmhouse, where an old wooden house still remained, the only facility left by the proprietor. It was in this house where meetings, assemblies and religious celebrations were held during the time of occupation. At that time, the settlers’ established social rules, through distribution of tasks and the organization of the coordinating commission, which in the beginning was composed of four representatives.

When the peasant families joined the occupation, the existing project, was a semi-collective organization, as we have seen. Although the defined model of the settlement was alien to the lifestyles and cultural history of some families, it would at least allow them to possess part of the land for rebuilding their lives as they wished. This way they could preserve part of the land for themselves, where they could build their homes, raise their children and plant and grow whatever they pleased. However, in those initial months, both regional and State leaders, made new evaluations reconsidering the initial proposal. After that they concluded that the whole area should be used for the organization of a CPA without dividing up the land. All housing would be situated in one area as an *agri-village*. Work would be organized according to the technical division of labor, and remuneration would be based on the number of hours worked. Once the proposal was thus redefined, three local leaders were appointed to “negotiate it” with the settlers. However, a faction of the families opposing the new ideas expressed their dissatisfaction in meetings and assemblies then held. Furthermore, they felt cheated. They believed that the leaders already had this intention from the very beginning and the semi-collective proposal was only used so that

the settlers would eventually adjust to what the leaders wanted. Even faced with this resistance, the leaders continued to insist upon the new collective model.

Believing that their desires were not being met, two families, sons and daughters of settlers, who had occupied the area since the beginning, broke away from the leaders and abandoned the group, outlining a plot of land for themselves and their families, for work and housing, at one of the limits of the settlement. In the impasse, leaders of the MST started to put pressure on the two families to leave the place. The other families (four in total) in opposition to the new proposals also started to suffer pressure. According to statements by settlers, the MST leaders and Incra only allowed families who agreed to their new proposed model to remain settled in the area.

After all the quarrels and confrontations at the settlement, local leaders faced with conflict and no longer able to contain the settlers' spirits, requested the presence of an MST state coordinator, who seeing that it was impossible to implement what they intended, mediated the conflict, re-dividing the settlement. Having done this, 60% of the area would now be divided among all the settlers, allowing each family to have its own individual lot to build housing, and 40% would be allocated to the collective organization, where they could form groups to produce whatever they chose. The two settlers who had broken relationships with the local leaders remained in their individual lots. It is important to remember once more, that after all these difficulties and divisions, eviction from the area still occurred. On returning to the area, after the final dispossession of the farm, the previously outlined definitions of the organizational model were maintained.

### **The MST rural settlement project and the settlers' expectations**

The three case studies presented here represent the never-ending search for models to organize production carried out by the MST since the first settlements. As already mentioned, the changes, which occurred in these settlements, regarding organizational choices, are related to the changes that the movement underwent throughout the years. Hence, the movement itself and the policies defined for the rural settlements are two aspects of the same process.

As to the MST's background, its first phase was completed in 1984, when it consolidated its organization nationwide. During the following years the level of involvement of mediators was outlined (CPT and unions) and the organizational structure was defined. The extent of involvement of mediators,<sup>13</sup> which was defined during the second phase (even though a relationship between them still existed, and developed more intensely in the case of the CPT),<sup>14</sup> relates to the definition of the movement's policies at the time, and the Leninist conceptions of their leadership. Documents published at the time show this, including the previously quoted text by Clodomir Dos Santos Morais. Such documents were regarded during the 90s as references for the structuring of CPAs and organizational field workshops. Due to such developments, the leadership of the MST then gave priority to forming cadres to integrate a leading vanguard.

In this context the strategic creation of an own organizational structure for rural settlements took shape, as Zander Navarro demonstrates (1994) in his pioneer study on the first cooperative implemented following these patterns in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. The cooperativist system with an emphasis on a collective format would therefore play a double

role: making the settlements economically viable and at the same time, meeting political objectives. That is, cooperativism would serve as an economic anchor to continue the struggle, by means of preparing, deploying and maintaining cadres (cf. MST, 1994: 41). Since the first settlements, as in the case of Sávio Dois-Vizinhos, the leaders interviewed tell of their efforts to work in an economic and political fashion, as shown when trying to organize settlements on the basis of the collective ownership of land. The failure of the first experiments led to an own organizational structure of the rural settlements, which would not follow economic logic alone. It concerned above all a political choice, which related to a socialist utopia and theoretical references that oriented the MST,<sup>15</sup> as Ilse Scherer-Warren (1997) points out.

Even with a specific plan and a technical-organizational apparatus, the majority of these experimental models put into practice during the 1990s also produced unsatisfactory results, as in the case of the Verdum settlement. Thus, the MST leadership opted for a break in the collectivization process, at least regarding the formats, which were formerly sustained. In the discussions and reevaluations that took place, they began to favor the creation of less radical models, but once again without clearly outlined formats, as happened in the Sepé Tiaraju settlement.

In texts published for internal discussion by the MST on the CPA crisis and in interviews by leaders of the movement, such as the one given by João Pedro Stédile to the geographer Bernardo Mançano Fernandes,<sup>16</sup> one can see that these leaders blamed the breakdown in the organization of the settlements on the many difficulties regarding the implementation of proposed objectives. According to the leaders the root of the problem did not lie in the type of organizational model chosen, but as Stédile puts it, it lay in the fact that these experiments occurred in places where "subjective conditions were not sufficient", or even, as Ademar Bogo another MST leader said, in the "internal and external difficulties that affected this process". Texts published by the MST show that these ideas had been inspired by the Chinese revolutionary experience, and the need for a *cultural revolution* within the rural settlements was sustained.

Despite the concepts used, which hypothetically emphasize cultural factors, the so-called *cultural revolution* was not a change in acknowledging the cultural particularities of the peasantry and the historical and cultural diversity of the country (Bogo, 1999). Rather, it is a way of utilizing new mechanisms to discipline men, women and children within a cause that would respond to their desires, dreams and expectations.<sup>17</sup>

To understand who the subjects of the developed projects are and what expectations they have – aspects not taken into account by the MST leaders or by other mediators when they opt for the organizational models shown here – it is necessary to consider the enormous historical and cultural diversity of the country to begin with. In southern Brazil, and particularly in western Paraná State, where the aforementioned settlements took place, we need to consider the characteristics of the colonization per se. The migrants who headed for this region in the 1940s and '50s, mainly descendants of Italians and Germans, did so in order to guarantee the production method they were accustomed to in their state of origin: Rio Grande do Sul. The productive organization they aimed to reproduce in western Paraná, as many of them succeeded in doing for a period, has the family as the basic unit of

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economic production. Its main objective, as we know, is family subsistence, with any surplus production being traded. Mutual aid and cooperative relations are only established when necessary, due to certain phases in the productive process. These relations are spontaneous and do not require any formal agreements, and are established because of friendship, kinship and proximity. In other words, such associations are substantially different from those supported by the MST for organizing rural settlements.

Besides the previously mentioned particularity, there is a second aspect to be considered. The grassroots of the MST are a social segment, which over the last years experienced successive losses and migration, particularly due to the so called "agricultural modernization", which in certain locations was caused by dispossessions for the construction of hydroelectric power stations, such as Itaipu. This concerns people who, in general, have not been incorporated to the modernization processes and due to lack of economic opportunity, suffer continuous displacement in search for ways of survival.

A third aspect concerns the fact that, even joined together under the landless banner, these groups are not homogeneous regarding labor categories – they are former-proprietors, wage-earners, lessees and migrant workers - as well as concerning their backgrounds and life-styles and the ways they subjectively experienced the losses suffered and the migrations forced upon them.

If during the time of encampment these differences were not noticeable and there was apparently a degree of homogenization due to the fact that all settlers were marginalized, such differences later became obvious as the settlement developed, where the peasants tried to reconstruct their lives, and establish a permanent situation instead of the previous transitory one, as Martins (2003) observed. Once the settlements took shape, new groups were gradually formed due to relations established during the encampment phase or even before joining the struggle for the land. In the three case studies we can observe the formation of groups because of growing conflicts derived from attempts to implement organizations based on collective models. Two basic distinct groups appeared: on one side, the group linked to the MST and on the other, the group which opposed them and resisted their proposals, most of which had been previously defined, as mentioned.

A fourth troubling aspect to be considered regarding the MST grassroots' expectations concerns the true meaning that the conquest of land held. What really mobilizes the peasants, making them put up with all kinds of difficulties, dwelling in canvas tents in extremely precarious conditions, is the conquest of the land as a means of livelihood. Statements gathered from farmers at the Sávio-Dois Vizinhos settlement illustrate this point: "The land is everything for me. I get my daily bread from it, so do my family and my herds." "The land is wealth, it represents life". "I was brought up on the land, so it represents everything to me". "For me the land is a symbol of life, we have the land to produce, it sustains life".

We can see the existence of two projects in open conflict: the political-economic project of the MST vis-à-vis the grassroots' project of life and work. The expectations of the grassroots diverge from the expectations of the leaders, both in regard to what they expect from the conquest of the land, and in relation to the social and productive organization in the settlements.

The ideal communitarian organization at the Sávio-Dois Vizinhos settlement was initially inspired on the teachings of the church and elaborated by the church cadres <sup>18</sup>. Based on

solidarity ideals, however, it was limited and difficult to apply to the concrete historic and cultural reality. In fact, the leaders of the MST were too strict and insisted that the settlers should adjust to the proposals presented. The main reasons for settlers rejecting the proposals for collective production were the differences existing among themselves and the right of each individual to decide what to plant. In other words, what in fact was at stake for the settlers was the freedom to organize production at their individual lots. Other settlers, besides pointing out the differences between themselves in relation to their way of thinking and their economic backgrounds, also stressed the differences in volume of work that each individual member would carry out in the event of a totally collective organization. As in the first settlements, these experiences were based upon a cohesion that really did not exist. The MST leadership, aiming to equate the difficulties they faced, opted for developing more consistent organizational models as in the case of the Verдум settlement.

It is necessary, however, to highlight that there is a substantial difference between the comunitarianism initially proposed, which was based on a totality founding communitarian practice as Jose de Souza Martins observes (2003: 105), and the collectivism defined later. Moreover, the choice made in order to achieve the social cohesion of the group proved to be the wrong procedure to transform the social relations in the countryside, for it aimed at converting country peasants into proletarians by introducing the division of work and the specialization of functions. In a nutshell, the MST leaders intended to adjust the peasants to the collectivist model by means of disciplinary measures. Foucault's analysis (1979, 1987 and 1988) of the relationship between power and the diverse disciplinary mechanisms (time control, surveillance, standardization of gestures and attitudes) with a view to achieving obedience and subservience, even though we recognize the specific details of his analysis, are fruitful in understanding the relations established between the MST direction and its grassroots, when attempting to put into practice models to organize production at the rural settlements.

At the Verдум settlement, this attempt to establish the collectivist organizational model with its related methods of control also ended in total failure due to the gradual opposition of settlers to such a model and to the organization of daily life, which was alien to their desires and expectations. Rather, they are conditioned by their own cultural backgrounds, traditional family values and organization of work.

The failure of this project was mainly due to disagreements in relation to the division of work and the almost total absence of rotation of tasks. The coordinator of the farming team, which carried out the heaviest work from sunrise to sunset, had constantly worked the land since the beginning of the project, as there was no rotation of tasks. He felt he had been treated unfairly and represented the unsatisfied workers of the farming team in opposition to the decisions of the cooperative leaders. The disagreements in relation to procedures adopted by the Coprac administration and the conflicts between the farming team and the cooperative leaders increased as time passed. The first complaint made by the farming team regarded the volume of work carried out by each member of the settlement, not only concerning the volume of work done on the same task, but also in relation to energy spent on the tasks involved in the different work sectors. It is worth noting, while some members carried out the "lighter" activities, others were occupied with the "heaviest" ones. The farming team believed that all the work in the farming sector generated income, whereas this was not the case with most of the work carried out in other sectors. The feeling of

injustice related to work representation, is shown in the statement by the coordinator of the farming team: "The farming activities ended up paying for everything. The infrastructure, health and service sectors never made a profit and there were a lot of people working there. And some guys there were lagging. They were getting the same pay anyway, so why should they work? Those who worked the land were the people supporting everything and they were also the most discriminated against." The farming team understood that the leaders, responsible for the administration of the cooperative, were not producing any income, as they did not work, at least in accordance with their conception of work, that is, work carried out from sunrise to sunset and using a hoe. For them, the people who worked selling the harvest, or negotiated with INCRA, financial institutions, development agencies (agencias de fomento) and other public bodies, worked less not in terms of working hours, but of physical energy exerted. Therefore, they should not get the same wage as the others, as we can see from the words of one of the members from the farming team: "The people who worked in commerce and took care of accounting earned the same as those who worked the land. So they started rebelling. "

The farming team believed that those working in the administrative sector (cooperative leaders) were not necessarily working for the service of the cooperative when they were not present at the settlement. Often work was carried out far from their eyes, therefore they neither saw nor knew that work was being done (even because they were not informed about these activities).

Besides the aforementioned interrelated aspects, another factor can be added: the fact that the farmers from the farming sector felt inferior compared to the rest. In meetings and discussions held, they considered themselves discriminated against by the settlement leaders and other MST organizers. On these occasions even though they had the right of opinion and could express their dissatisfaction, they were put down and felt discriminated against by the leaders, who were more experienced, as can be seen in this statement from one of the interviewed workers: "The ones who really worked got no value. The farming team did most of the work, earned the income, but was also the most discriminated against. In discussions in the general assembly there are those who get discriminated against. Like it or not, the blacks are the most discriminated, those that suffer are the most discriminated against...". Through time, those farmers gradually learned how to use their voice and to resist what they considered a breach of their civil rights. This resistance was based on the peasants' conception of work, that is, concrete work producing visible and tangible goods, making it possible for the workers to follow all the stages of the work process, plowing the fields, planting, harvesting and selling the produce. Actually, this particular resistance was based on the values of moral economy, as Thompson (1993) says, even considering the specific characteristics of the studied case. Settlers split from the projects in which they took part or were compelled to join because the organizational pattern of those projects opposed their cultural traditions.

Besides the reasons for the confrontations mentioned here, in the case of the Verдум settlement there were two other reasons determining the settlers' opposition. One of them was the attempt by MST leaders and Incra to settle confrontations by means of dismissing the old direction and the transference of another seven families to the settlement, with the objective of managing the cooperative. This provoked new conflicts, no longer between the direction and the farming team, but between the old direction and the farming team on one side against the new direction on the other. The second reason for confrontation was the

almost total lack of financial results (surplus) from productive activities developed by the cooperative. The peasants involved in farming activities judged that the lack of surplus was caused by the fact that only a few settlers worked in income generating activities. They also started mistrusting those responsible for administrating the settlement as to the final destination of the cooperative's revenues. They claimed that in the beginning when almost everyone carried out farming activities, these problems did not happen. Only after the implementation of the "workshop" and the division of work within it, did problems start to arise. In fact, conflicts surfaced more frequently after the reorganization that followed the "workshop", when the project was redesigned.

At the Sepé Tiaraju settlement, resistance to the formation of a CPA was based on the same motives. Several farmers suspected that some settlers were being allowed to do less work than others, and were concerned about being deceived by those in charge of the cooperative's administration. There was even mistrust of losing the autonomy required by an organizational model thus defined. One of those interviewed, mistrustful that things would remain as proposed, said: "One could cheat the other. You could work and work and at the end of the day, have no say! We were afraid that one day things would go wrong and we'd want to leave and have no rights. If each one's got his own, he's got command on his own thing, right?"

Another settler speaking on the subject of organizational and productive redefinition of the settlements, said: "Each was to live on 2.5 acres of land, 2.5 acres of land was for each house, from there on, the collective was a mess. Everything was collective and every person was supposed to have a job of work. Then we started to notice that it was no use, because some worked and others didn't. There were some who wanted to get others to do the work. Then we had a big split. We saw that it wouldn't work." Besides the lack of individual autonomy inherent to this type of organization and mistrust regarding the volume of work being executed, other matters were raised by farmers, such as the subordination of manual work, essential to the division of work under the proposed terms.

At the Sepé Tiaraju settlement there was yet another reason given for opposing the organizational model, relating to values and moral obligations of the peasantry and their inheritance rights. They argued that in a model based on collective ownership of the land there was no guarantee that in future their children would have an assured right of inheritance, as shown the following statement: "You see, as we get old, when we die, it's left to the children. In a collective system, it's complicated. The children will have to do the same as their fathers did."

At the Sávio-Dois Vizinhos settlement, similar reasons led the farmers to fight for the land: the desire to own the land so that in future, their children would have a means of support. The following statements show such concerns: "The land is fruitful, I got the land by fighting for it and I'm gonna leave it for my children, and they're gonna pass it on to my grandsons." "The land is new life for me and I'm gonna leave it for my children to work it." These case studies show that the associative cooperative models proposed by the MST, still aimed at forming *agri-villages*. The leaders' justification for organizing the housing in such a format was due to the fact that this type of spatial organization would facilitate the placement of each family and the dispatching of produce. At the Sávio-Dois Vizinhos settlement, one of the farmers justified his refusal of the proposal as follows: " We would not accept this idea of making rows of houses. The people were even afraid of being made to build the *agri-village*. From my point of view, I think that it's just the same thing as us

living in a new small town. It becomes the same thing. Then you want to breed chickens, but you're not allowed to, eh? " This statement shows that the refusal tended to defend and preserve the families' private lots, where housing, livestock, the vegetable garden and the land are inseparable. Such refusal was also based on the division of work in the countryside, where tasks in the yard are traditionally performed by women. The organization of an *agri-village*, thus represents the impossibility of reproducing the peasants' ideal model of life and production. Another reason for resisting the proposal of an *agri-village*, is the refusal to become urban, the city life for the farmer is an inferior way of life with no natural qualities and restricted individual freedom. In the two other settlements studied, the same reasons are reiterated because of the organization of work and family life in the countryside, where there is practically no separation between productive and reproductive activities, or between work and the home. Such an organization would allow the peasants to perform productive activities and look after their children simultaneously. In the environment of an *agri-village*, besides the lack of privacy and autonomy concerning growing and breeding their own livelihood, the housing model does not allow the education of children as the parents would wish for, accompanying them at all times of the day during all of their lives.

Despite the grassroots of the movement having rejected proposals regarding the proposed collective organization, the formation of *agri-villages* was insisted upon, as occurred very recently at the Sepé Tiaraju settlement.

Acknowledging the fact that the proposed format is an extremely rational organization, however not unique, and that architecture is a basic component of power relations (cf. Foucault, 1987), we suppose that some other veiled reasons explain the obstinate attitude on the part of the MST leadership, for example, greater control over the base of the movement and easier surveillance through the organization of space, so as to meet the movement's political goals.

Another remarkable aspect outlined in the three case studies is the role of the State and its agents in this process. It would not be possible to fully explore such contradictory aspects within the limits of this article, but a brief mention is necessary in an attempt to clarify details of the sort of symbiosis established between the MST and the government and its agencies, which is not always easy to understand. Since the first experiments at creating associations or communitarian organizations, such as the Sávio-Dois Vizinhos settlement, government action was observed in the process. On this occasion there was a case of mistaken intervention by the government. When supposedly settling a claim by the MST, it was decided to create a communitarian organization dedicated to purchasing machinery, linking the release of resources with the acceptance of proposals. In the other two case studies, we observed interference by government agents on behalf of the federal agency responsible for agrarian reform policies, that is, Incra, even though on both occasions this agency should not officially intervene in the settlements, unless for the only reason of inspecting and dispossessing areas for agrarian reform purposes, as at that time they were dealing with land occupations, where dispossession procedures of both estates were still under way. Besides, it is not the business of this agency to define the internal organization of settlements, as was being proposed or developed in these cases. According to statements by the settlers, Incra agents exerted pressure on the Verdum settlers so that they would remain in the CPA. Moreover, they mediated the arrival of peasants coming from other settlements in the south-west region in order to take over the management of Coprac,

substituting the former dismissed directorship. Statements from the Sepé Tiaraju settlement give similar accounts of procedures by Incra agents, as shown here: " Incra came and put pressure on us(...) anybody who didn't want the collective had 24 hours to vacate the area (...) they leaned towards the gang of the movement. Then they came and put us all up against the wall (...)".

These facts leave no doubt regarding Incra agents collaborating with the MST leadership, in favor of the defined organizational models for the settlements. However, it remains unclear what motives led the agents to adopt such a stand. Whether they were moved by ideological conviction or believed in the economic supremacy of collectivism, or due to both these factors, or even because of their inability and impotence, thus compromising interests and preventing direct confrontation with the MST leadership, whatever the reason such collaboration remains unclear.

The selection process for settlements in the west of Paraná State also shows sectors of the agency to be ineffective. In principle, Incra is responsible for the selection of potential members of the agrarian reform procedures based on technical criteria defined by the State<sup>20</sup>. However, this is not what happened in the region. At the Verdum settlement, responsibility for the selection of those who would occupy the area – selection by agreeing to the organizational model previously defined for the area – lay with the MST. Incra only ratified the decisions of the movement when the area was effectively dispossessed for agrarian reform purposes. As we have already seen, at the Sepé Tiaraju settlement, similar procedures had also been adopted. The peasants who had initially occupied that farm and later settled there had been screened by the MST. Five single peasants had been selected for the settlement, three of whom were sons of a peasant settled nearby, who was also the president of Coara in his second consecutive term of office. There is no doubt as to these peasants legitimate claims for land, however, the same cannot be said about the adopted priority criteria regarding their selection for agrarian reform procedures, especially if we consider that at the time there were at least 9,000 families camped in Paraná state, according to MST's own statistics. Besides the selection mechanisms used, another questionable aspect was favoring certain groups of settlers. These procedures are far from being democratic; they rather resemble relationships strongly marked by cronyism, benefiting relatives and protégés.

It is well known that the authoritarianism which permeates Brazilian society until today has its roots in so-called "*mandonismo*" - the power to order - another characteristic of national politics, which, as already demonstrated by Jose Murilo de Carvalho (1997), is distinct from so-called *coronelismo* (derived from northern and northeastern Brazil where in the past the *Coronels* had absolute rule in determined regions) and from *clientelismo* – cronyism, a system which benefits relatives and protégés. However, such *mandonismo* operated alongside *clientelistic* mechanisms. The author shows that both *mandonismo* and *clientelismo* tend to disappear when citizens conquer their civil rights. Although *mandonismo* tends to disappear and in historical terms is agonizing, it is also true that vestiges of an authoritarian and personalized political culture still linger among us, even among those who struggle or are supposed to struggle through their political organizations in order to overcome these anti-democratic mechanisms.

### **The difficult construction of democratic social relationships – conclusion**

Jose de Souza Martins has already pointed out the many interpretative reductionisms (not only as regards rural settlements), which have oriented the MST's actions, and also those who mediate the fight for land. The author has already highlighted what he calls a trend towards anomie - the absence of laws - within social movements and organizations. Referring to disagreements and incompatibilities among the hopes of the agents of the struggle and the expectations of those who need such struggle, Martins sustained:

Social problems in the countryside contradict any reply or solution within a far from well-defined social reform, which is the agrarian reform. Up to now the radical middle class activists have regarded the rural workers' conflicts in the countryside as part of the agrarian issue, proposing the agrarian reform as the solution to those conflicts. However, long winded arguments and discussions have not yet defined what such an agrarian reform actually consists of. Such paradox derives from the fact that this claim is mediated by the interests and conceptions of a social group different from the social strata on behalf of which the claim is made and the pressure exerted. This serious incompatibility is the basis of what I call a trend towards anomie in the case of social movements in the countryside (Martins 2000b: 270-71).

With regard to the discourse of the MST national leadership and of those sectors linked to the middle classes who mediate the struggle for the land, it is possible to discover reevaluations resulting from the opposition of the settlers, as previously detailed. However, they are extremely partial reevaluations, hence, as we have observed in the documents studied, it is not the organizational model that has been put into question. The political-ideological references that inspire the activism of leaders and mediators of the movement have not been put to question either. As Zander Navarro (2002) shows in an analysis of the way the MST is structured, particularly regarding the sectors that resist democratic practices, this is the basic reason behind the mistakes experienced by the settlers.

There is no doubt as to the importance of the MST's emergence in the Brazilian political scenario, above all for placing the issue of agrarian reform on the national political agenda. The movement has also played an important role as mediator, offering a future hope to thousands of marginalized rural workers, who otherwise would lack any future perspectives. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning the significant economic and political changes that took place in the municipalities and regions where the rural settlements took place. However, we need to avoid idealized approaches and point out the many mistakes made, especially when MST leaders and mediators stubbornly force collectivist organizational models upon rural settlements. The case studies presented herein show the failure of many such attempts vis-à-vis the insurgencies that took place in those settlements. The facts related here are not irrelevant. They show, above all, how difficult the task of building democratic social relations can be, even among those who act on behalf of a just and legitimate cause, such as the struggle for land.

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> The collection of data, by means of previously elaborated interviews, occurred in the years 1991-1992, 1998-1999 and 2001 respectively. For a complete detailed presentation of organization development processes at these settlements, see Brenneisen, 1994; 2002; 2003 and 2004.

<sup>2</sup> The dispossessed area was of 1,705 acres. That farm had previously been occupied by Mastro peasants, however, the judiciary ruled a case of repossession to the original proprietor.

<sup>3</sup> We have committed to safeguarding the identity of the MST members who were interviewed, because their statements on the existing controversies could cause complications or even trigger further misunderstandings. So their names are not disclosed in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> An important aspect in understanding the fight for land during these initial years is with regard to the scenario of political opening and redemocratization within Brazilian society. In this context, Jose Richa, member of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB), with support of segments linked to the fight for land and committed to agrarian reform, was elected governor of Paraná State, appointing Claus Germer - former advisor to the CPT and an agronomist linked to the fight for land -, as Secretary for Agriculture.

<sup>5</sup> Similar experiences were in progress at that time in other settlements in Paraná, such as Vitória da União, located in the municipality of Manguairinha, in the south-east of the State. For further information on this experience, see Bonin *et al.*, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> The Cooperative System of Settlers – *Sistema Cooperativista dos Assentados* (SCA) was made up of regional, state and national organizational instances, whose objective was to develop cooperative models within the MST. Nowadays it is known as the Sector for Production, Cooperativism and Environment

<sup>7</sup> The families belonged to a larger group of around 1,200 people who had occupied the Papagaios farm in Inácio Martins, in August 1998.

<sup>8</sup> The “Experimental Workshop-*Laboratório Experimental*” or “Field Organizational Workshop - *Laboratório Organizacional de Campo*” was conceived by Clodomir Santos de Moraes, an old activist and member of the Brazilian Communist Party - *Partido Comunista Brasileiro* (PCB). It consists of developing a group of at least forty people to organize a collective enterprise. According to Moraes own words, the model he created has the main objective of *altering the peasants’ ideological behavior, eliminating crude habits inherited from the craftsman’s work forms.*, making the peasants capable of developing a collective enterprise. For further information on the subject see Moraes, 1986.

<sup>9</sup> The information contained herein were collected from a document elaborated by the leaders during the workshop held.. cf. Coprac, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> **Coara** is a regional service rendering cooperative (CPS), founded in 1993, with the objective of meeting the needs of settlers in western Paraná State, such as transportation, and commercialization of grains and mainly developing own agricultural-industrial

projects. This cooperative is based in the town of Lindoeste and is linked to the *Cooperativa Central dos Assentados* – Settlers’ Central Cooperative (CCA), which is based in the State capital, Curitiba.

<sup>11</sup> In this respect see: Ademar Bogo, *Perspectivas da cooperação agrícola no MST*, 1994 (mimeo); Paulo Cerioli e Pedro Cristofoli, *A crise das cooperativas de produção*, 1994 (mimeo); Ademar Bogo, *Perspectivas da cooperação agrícola no MST*, 1995 (mimeo); Ademar Bogo. *Limites e desafios do SCA*, 1995 (mimeo); MST/Concrab. “Enfrentar os desafios da organização nos assentamentos”, in: *Caderno de Cooperação Agrícola*, São Paulo, n. 7, 1998; Ademar Bogo, *Novo ascenso na organização da cooperação*, Bahia, 1999 (mimeo); MST/Concrab. “A evolução da concepção de cooperação agrícola do MST (1989 a 1999)”, in: *Caderno de Cooperação Agrícola*, São Paulo, n. 8, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> See: Stédile e Fernandes, 1999: 101.

<sup>13</sup> In that group, four peasants were single. Presently, there are five single peasants due to an alteration in the original group, as one of the families (although it was an occupation) was substituted by another farmer, who as the others, was the son of a settler.

<sup>14</sup> Regarding this topic, see Torrens, 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Regarding this symbiotic relationship between CPT and MST, see the clarifying paper by Martins, 2000a.

<sup>16</sup> In her text, the author shows the effects exerted by the predominance of structuralist revolutionary conceptions in the organization of the struggle for land.

<sup>17</sup> Stédile e Fernandes, 1999: 101.

<sup>18</sup> David José Caume, in his study on a settlement situated in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, shows other mechanisms of social inclusion, such as the production and dissemination of a predominant memory (2003). In another study, this author shows how aesthetics serve political goals in rural settlements (2002).

<sup>19</sup> This type of communitarianism was rooted in the activism of the Catholic Church by means of the CPT and groups related to the church called “*pastorais rurais*”, which are active supporters of the landless movement. They educated and formed various MST union and settlement leaders, politically and religiously. Many of those cadres who operated as agents of the church in the beginning, constructed what they called the “*sindicalismo autêntico* - authentic unionism” - Some others got engaged in the construction of the MST at State and National levels.

<sup>20</sup> Officially candidates register in the *Sistema Integrado dos Projetos de Reforma Agrária* (Sipra) - Integrated System of Agrarian Reform Projects. And are screened according to certain criteria. Besides the demand of being over 18 years of age and not having any

criminal records, such criteria included the following: skill for family work, experience in associations (such as having belonged to a union), and time of work in farming.

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