Socialist Values and Cooperation in Brazil's Landless Rural Workers' Movement

by
Aldiva Sales Diniz and Bruce Gilbert

When the Movimento de Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra do Brasil (Movement of Landless Rural Workers' of Brazil—MST) occupies land and forms autonomous agricultural communities, it aspires to achieve the supremacy of labor over capital and to embody socialist values. However, a policy of organizing production cooperatives on its settlements in the early 1990s was unsuccessful, principally because of a failure fully to respect traditional forms of work and sociability. However, the MST learned from its early mistakes and has since developed elaborate forms of informal and formal cooperation on land that is essentially the common property of a democratic settlement association. It is therefore living up to its socialist objectives and manifesting a real alternative to capitalist work and property relations.

Cuando el Movimento de Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra do Brasil (MST) ocupa tierra y forma comunidades agrícolas autónomas, aspira a lograr la supremacía del trabajo sobre capital y encarnar valores socialistas. No obstante, una política para organizar cooperativas de producción en sus asentamientos a principios de los 1990 no prosperó, mayormente por la falta de respeto pleno a las formas tradicionales de trabajo y sociabilidad. El MST aprendió de sus errores iniciales y desde entonces ha desarrollado intricadas formas de cooperación informal y formal en tierra que es esencialmente la propiedad común de una asociación de asentamiento democrática. Por lo tanto está haciendo honra a sus objetivos socialistas y demostrando una alternativa concreta a las relaciones capitalistas de trabajo y propiedad.

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The Movimento de Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra do Brasil (Movement of Landless Rural Workers of Brazil—MST) struggles not only for agrarian reform but for the supremacy of labor over capital and for socialist values. Indeed, when MST members carry out an occupation of land they claim to be seizing the means of production and thus undoing centuries of exploitation. Consistent with its values, the MST made a serious attempt through the early 1990s to form production cooperatives on its many settlements spread across Brazil, but this effort was largely unsuccessful, calling into question its capacity to live up to its socialist aspirations. One prominent Marxist intellectual in Brazil has

Aldiva Sales Diniz is a professor of geography at the Universidade Estadual Vale de Acaraú and coordinator of the Institute for the Study of Agrarian Geography in Sobral, Ceará, Brazil. Bruce Gilbert is a professor and chair of philosophy and director of liberal arts at Bishop's University in Sherbrooke, Quebec, Canada.

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suggested that the MST makes no difference whatever to the fate of capitalism. This essay will show, however, that the MST has developed a unique form of socialism that has organically developed cooperative work and property rights on the basis of the *camponês*[1] tradition of land, family, and work.

The MST was a creative response to the desperate need for agrarian reform (see Akram-Lodhi, Borras Jr., and Kay, 2007). Centuries of plantation agriculture, corruption, and land misuse had resulted in an enormous underemployed and often desperate class of landless camponeses, many of whom had filled Brazil's favelas over the last half-century. Even factions of the dominant class in Brazil perceived the need for some kind of agrarian reform; the 1964 Land Statute promulgated by the new military dictatorship, the 1967 Constitution, and the 1988 Constitution of the postdictatorship New Republic all provided for the state expropriation and redistribution of lands that were not fulfilling their "social function." These provisions for expropriation were, of course, widely resisted, watered down, or ignored, with the result that very little serious agrarian reform actually took place. However, with the assistance of the Catholic Church's Comissão Pastoral da Terra (Pastoral Land Commission—CPT) and the Lutheran Church, camponeses began occupying underused private or public property in the late 1970s. The strategy was so successful and spread so quickly that the MST was formally established in 1984 (see Branford and Rocha, 2002; Fernandes, 2000; Morissawa, 2001; Ondetti, 2008; Stédile and Fernandes, 1999; Wright and Wolford, 2003). MST land occupations, at first called encampments (*acampamentos)*, become permanent settlements (*assentamentos*) when (and if) they receive legal title to their land under the provisions of the "social function" clause of the constitution. MST settlements have mixed forms of property, work, and decision making, prioritize production for subsistence, and typically provide educational and health care services for their members. The MST has grown to perhaps 1.5 million members in thousands of encampments and settlements. It challenges Brazilian political elites and capitalism by occupying private property and by engaging in aggressive political struggle. At the same time, it relies upon the state to legalize and protect its occupations and to provide credit and other services, primarily through the state authority for agrarian reform, the Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform—INCRA).

The first section of this paper will show that one of the main reasons the MST failed to form production cooperatives in the early 1990s was that, rather than respecting and cultivating traditional camponês family-based social structures, it tried to impose a rationalized system of cooperation intended to maximize commodity production and accumulate capital. In the second section of the paper we will suggest that, once the MST perceived that its socialist values had to grow organically from the concrete material culture of its membership, an indigenous form of socialism emerged. We will show that the MST has cultivated traditional notions of the family, land, work, and property in a direction that is subtle, creative, and sometimes highly effective with respect to both material well-being and political resistance. A comprehensive study of the MST's socialist values would have to include discussion of features of the movement that are beyond the scope of this paper, among them its *mística*,

education, media and information services, national and international links, and gender issues. However, since the MST's socialism is fundamentally an attempt to create a fully democratic economic order, we will focus on property rights, governance, and work relations within individual MST settlements.

THE EARLY PRODUCTION COOPERATIVES

The MST's attempt to create production cooperatives in the late 1980s and early 1990s never fully overcame the traditional Marxist suspicion of rural workers. The Marxist theory of history (see, e.g., Kautsky, 1980) posits that rural areas are typically backward places, destined either to remain remnants of precapitalist property and social relations or to become sites of capitalist production and property rights. For reasons well articulated by many theorists of peasant studies (see Akram-Lodhi, Borras Jr., and Kay, 2007; Bernstein, 2010; Bryceson, Kay, and Mooij, 2000), these reductive notions of rural work have long since been discredited. The presumption of the backwardness of camponês culture is, however, perceptible in the MST's own documents and cooperative policies.

The movement has always been well positioned to take advantage of an insight articulated by Ricardo Antunes (1998: 127): "Capital has a metabolic system of social control that is essentially extraparliamentary. As a result, attempts to dominate this system in the institutional and parliamentary spheres are doomed." The MST recognized the opportunity to undermine capitalism from within by collectivizing its settlements so that they would be materially self-sufficient and politically subversive. Importantly, it framed these aspirations at precisely the historical moment that neoliberalism and the Washington Consensus were becoming consolidated. When Fernando Collor was elected Brazil's president in 1990, for example, he eliminated most forms of state support for MST settlements, cutting the state credit agency and gutting INCRA. Strong cooperatives on MST settlements, the MST leadership thought, would ensure their independence from state assistance and make the movement more powerful (see Ribeiro, 2007). As Stédile and Fernandes (1999: 100) put it, "Only agricultural cooperation would allow settlements to best develop their production, introduce the division of labor, allow access to credit and new technologies, permit and maintain a high level of coherence in settlements, create or improve conditions for the installation of electric power and full water and sewerage services, and ensure the construction of a school close to the settlement." Indeed, there were and continue to be excellent economic, social, and political reasons for cooperatives. Cooperatives allow for the accumulation of capital, better access to credit, an increase in productivity, better adaptability to local climatic and soil conditions, and the development of agro-industry. They provide members better access to communal facilities and facilitate education, transportation, and health care, and members "perceive themselves as a force that . . . can contribute to the construction of a new society" (Morissawa, 2001: 231–232).

It was not therefore the notion of cooperation itself that was flawed but the means the MST chose to embody it. Many MST militants, inspired by visits to Cuba, envisioned similar forms of cooperatives on MST settlements. The

movement enlisted the support of Clodomir de Morais, the long-exiled but recently repatriated Brazilian sociologist whose 40-day "organizational workshops" had become well-known around the world (see Carmen and Sobrado, 2000; Morais, 1986; Thomaz, 2009). The MST held the first of Morais's *laboratórios de campo* in 1988, under his direction, at Palmeira das Missões in Rio Grande do Sul (Stédile and Fernandes, 1999: 99). Morais also wrote an MST pamphlet used extensively in training courses in which he argued, drawing on Kautsky, that the survival of the settlements depended on the rationalization of production. "In order to be able to produce . . . a quantity of commodities in the shortest amount of time, the producer must not only seek out the best instruments but also seek to rationalize the form of production" (Morais, 1986: 8). Subsistence agriculture was to be replaced by the large-scale production of agricultural commodities for the market (corn, cotton, soya), which required a clear division of labor, rigorous administration, and mechanization. Accumulated capital would be reinvested in the cooperative, making it stronger still. Work would be specialized to maximize efficiency, and workers would submit time sheets and receive a portion of the cooperative's profit proportional to the hours they worked.

Moreover, according to Morais the rationalization of production demanded a direct challenge to the traditional patterns of camponês agriculture: "Their isolationist attitude with respect to union organizing (of unions, cooperatives, etc.) is not only a consequence of levels of education, which among camponeses is nearly always very low, but also proceeds from the structural incompatibility of this attitude with the development of character and social participation" (Morais, 1986: 12–13). Camponeses, according to Morais, did not follow a clear division of labor, preferred subsistence agriculture, and were unfamiliar with the goals of maximizing production and accumulation of capital. Even camponês notions of time were a hindrance: "Among camponeses . . . units of time are indefinite and are, in general, long: an 'instant,' a 'moment,' noon, a week, the next new moon, the harvest, etc. Already among workers in a factory time is measured in seconds, minutes, an hour, etc," (8). Moreover, the creation of the "new person" (*novo sujeito*) required the elimination of a set of vices held to be common in camponês life, including "individualism," "personalism," "anarchism," "adventurism," and "self-sufficiency" (23–39).

A long consultation process followed Morais's workshop (see Ribeiro, 2007: 27), resulting, in June 1990, in the announcement that the MST would attempt to collectivize all its settlements (Branford and Rocha, 2002: 92). Production cooperatives were set up and then linked to state-level coordinating bodies the goal of which was to "stimulate and define the different possibilities for the development of the principles of cooperativism and to organize settlers to produce with access to credit, technological innovations, and the popular market" (Scopinho and Martins, 2003: 126). The cooperatives and coordinating bodies were given much-needed intellectual, technical, and organizational support at the national level, beginning in 1992, by the Confederação das Cooperativas da Reforma Agrária do Brasil (Confederation of Agrarian Reform Cooperatives of Brazil—CONCRAB). In 1993 the MST set up its first cooperative training course in Braga, Rio Grande do Sul, and it became part of the Instituto Técnico de Capacitação e Pesquisa da Reforma Agrária (Technical Institute of Training and

Research on Agrarian Reform—ITERRA). Together these bodies constituted the MST's Sistema Cooperativista dos Assentados (Cooperativist System of Settlements) (Cardoso, 1994: 140). According to the *Jornal Sem Terra (*April/May 1990, cited in Wolford, 2010: 236), settlers were encouraged to identify their membership and interests, to valorize the work of everyone, to create a division of labor that would maximize production, to live close together, to maintain individual plots of land but work them only for a predetermined limited amount of time per week, to establish administrative organization including time sheets, to divide income by work time, to create production plans, to establish links with other cooperatives and CONCRAB, and to create and enforce the internal rules that would govern their cooperatives.

By 1991, according to Carter and Carvalho (2010: 312), "there were two dozen cooperatives, although the majority of them had a short life." Indeed, by 1994 the MST acknowledged a widespread crisis in the cooperative sector, and by 1997 only 6 percent of settlements had agricultural production cooperatives or combined cooperation with familial production (Vergara-Camus, 2009: 189). As a result of this widespread failure the MST resolved to allow individual settlements to make up their own minds about their form of organization.

The reasons for the general failure of production cooperatives in the MST are complex. Most broadly, it was very difficult for MST cooperatives to insert themselves into a highly competitive market already dominated by oligopolies (Scopinho and Martins, 2003: 131). They suffered from a lack of access to the necessary credit and, because they could not produce enough surplus, could not reinvest in their own growth. To make matters worse, they often had difficulty marketing their products, and all of this led to debilitating debt. Interpersonal problems in the cooperatives exacerbated the structural limitations (Scopinho and Martins, 2003: 128). "At the beginning all of us decided to form a collective," explains a settler from Ceará, "but people were constantly absent. . . . The collective didn't produce much because in the way it was organized some people didn't have much interest and when the time came to harvest there were some who didn't show up at all, not even once, and yet they still wanted their share—this created problems" (Diniz, 2009: 200).[2]

Studies of particular cooperatives by Wolford (2010: 109–111) suggest that they typically undermined traditional camponês practices. They often undervalued children's labor and demanded a degree of specialization based on a strong division of labor that was boring, frustrating, and contrary to camponês inclinations and traditions. Since the cooperatives were no longer producing for subsistence, they also undermined the social safety net provided by subsistence agriculture. Camponeses sometimes objected to having to pay for products in the cooperative store that they would normally have produced themselves. In the Northeast, where workers were accustomed to working on plantations, collectivization sometimes "provoked extreme objections" (Wolford, 2010: 188–192). Wolford cites an unfamiliar gender division of labor, difficulty in attending and participating in cooperative meetings, traditional camponês hierarchies, the expectation of regular remuneration, and a lack of intergenerational ties to the land. MST militants and cooperative members sometimes bickered over work-times. An MST leader in the Northeast said, "In the cooperative . . . say you have thirty men, for example, when they go to

work, they arrive all full of the will to work, but after, the conversations start, and the storytelling. There are people who begin to nap. They fall right down on top of their hoes. It's absurd" (Wolford, 2010: 191). According to Cardoso (1994: 142), the division of labor in cooperatives often directly contradicted family and settlement work patterns: "Families that already worked together in collective ways were separated according to the criteria prioritized by INCRA and everything had to start from zero."

Many settlers, pleased to have control over land for the first time in their lives, resented the imposition of cooperatives. Interviews by Calvo-González (2010: 361) revealed that many settlers thought that the cooperatives were a hostile and unwelcome "imposition of the MST." "Despite a rhetoric of autonomy," Borges (2009: 1624) says, "the organizational model of production reproduced the relations that rural workers had sought to overcome." As Ribeiro (2007) interpreted the situation, MST members on settlements felt that with collectivization they could no longer determine their way of living and working by themselves. They began to experience themselves as once again subordinate to external authority—no longer plantation bosses but the administrators of the cooperative and the MST. Camponês families lost much of their sense of control and self-determination, and this undermined the feeling of autonomy and independence that had motivated them to participate in the occupation in the first place. MST members, Ribeiro (2007: 3) reports, were "uncomfortable in a situation in which they could no longer individually or as a family decide what to plant and how to sell their production."

In many cases the relationship between camponeses and the militants sent by the MST became strained (Romano, 1994; Wolford, 2010) The MST rank and file did not relate to the abstract and alien political and economic categories of the consultants, and the consultants frequently failed to sympathize with the religious, ethnic, and moral paradigms that were motivating the camponeses, much less with the unique forms of neighborly sociability and work that characterized their culture. For these reasons and because many of the cooperatives were economic failures, the rank and file of the MST widely rejected collectivization. In the settlements researched in Ceará by Diniz (2009), production cooperatives were uncommon and, when they did exist, quite small. The majority of camponeses wanted to divide the total occupied land into family-sized plots and farm it individually, and this is what they did. The failure of so many production cooperatives and of the collectivization policy in general called into question the MST's socialist values. Indeed, it seems unlikely that a movement that institutionalizes what seems like familial private property, whatever its rhetoric and official objectives, can seriously be considered socialist.

FAMILY, LAND, AND WORK: THE MST'S ORGANIC SOCIALIST VALUES

The camponeses of Brazil have historically organized themselves in ways that are unique, persistent, and creative—and inconsistent with the putative goals of "rationalized" production. Indeed, the MST is but the most recent of many similar movements in Brazil's history, including, for example, the

predictatorship *ligas camponeses* and the Movimento de Agricultores Sem Terra (see Morissawa, 2001: 56–94). In broad terms, then, the failure of the MST policy to impose rationalized, commodity-producing cooperatives must be understood primarily as the self-assertion of the camponeses as a unique class with its own distinctive modes of producing and cooperating (see Bernstein, 2010; Bryceson, Kay, and Mooij, 2000). The MST learned that if there was to be cooperative socialism it would have to be on the terms of camponês social and economic life. "We have learned from our mistakes," says CONCRAB President Milton Fornazieri (Percassi, 2011). In this section we will unfold the ways in which this camponês self-assertion has manifested itself in the MST. We will see how camponeses themselves, building on a foundation of family, land, and work (see, e.g., K. Woortmann, 1993; E. Woortmann, 1995), have led the MST in a different but still socialist direction. The MST now cultivates cooperative work from within the logic of camponês sociability—with far better results.[3] In the following study of MST settlements we will chart a course that explores occupation, family, land, property, self-governance, habitation, shared informal work, cooperative associations, and, finally, the current state of production and service cooperatives, in all of which the notion of socialist values is immanent.

The key to MST resistance to capitalistic exploitation is the occupation of land. An MST land occupation is, whatever else we may say of it, the expropriation of the means of production by members of a subordinated class. "Before, we worked for the boss," an MST member from the 25 de Maio settlement in Ceará says, "but today we work for ourselves. . . . For me everything is better because I am no longer a prisoner. . . . To be a prisoner is to live the way the bosses want" (Diniz, 2009: 214, 216). Bernardo Mançano Fernandes (2000: 280) puts the same issue in the technical vocabulary of Marxist theory: "In the resistance against the process of exclusion embodied in the occupation of land, workers develop a politics of resocialization, struggling for land and against wage labor with the result that the struggle for land is a struggle against capital, against expropriation and exploitation."

It is for this most fundamental of reasons, then, that MST settlements are understood by so many (e.g., Almeida, 2006; Fernandes, 1996; Oliveira, 1986; 2001) as socialist islands resisting capitalism. However, Almeida (2006: 78) is right in saying that the fulfillment of the MST's goals requires not merely the occupation of land but "the whole conjuncture of actions carried out to this end." It is this "conjuncture of actions" that makes all the difference in consolidating an occupation into an embodiment of socialist values.

The fundamental nucleus of camponês life is the family. As Oliveira (2001: 78) says, "In and through the work of the family, settlements are spaces of social organization and of differentiated land use and, as such, units of familial production and consumption and spaces of struggle." The Brazilian camponês family is already itself a kind of collective, with its own distinctive patterns of division of labor and common property. As Santos (1985: 35) puts it, "The internal structure of a family is a technical division of labor articulated according to the process of cooperation, resulting in a work day that combines the various members of the family. In this way the camponês family transforms itself into a collective worker." What may seem like individual work is thus, in truth, really the work of the family, which is, then, the true unit of production (see

Diniz, 2009: 187–194). Of course, cooperative familial work is not necessarily socialist work, but we will see that the MST has come to use familial cooperation as the basis for the formation of other kinds of cooperative work.

The camponês family, moreover, often has a deep connection with the land, generating notions of "property" that do not fit comfortably in standard juridical models predicated on the capitalist commodification of land. "I think of the land as like a mother," says one MST member from the Terra Livre settlement in Ceará (Diniz, 2009: 210), "and she sustains every family and brings life." The camponês frequently relates to the land not in economic but in spiritual terms, experiencing it as a gift of God that requires stewardship for the sake of the common good. This perception, of course, emerges from the tradition of Catholic social teaching, and, given the importance of the CPT in the development of the MST, it is not surprising that these notions often emerge clearly within the movement. Familial property may be private in the sense of belonging to one family rather than another, but it is not a commodity. According to the CPT (1997: 270), the land first and foremost "belongs to itself and to its Creator" and has, as essentially common property, been "given to man as a gift and a responsibility, for the sustenance and the realization of everyone, without distinction, from the present generation to those of the future." The Conference of Catholic Bishops of Brazil, to which the CPT belongs, clearly distinguished, in its formal document of 1980, "The Church and the Problems of Land," between the misuse of God's gift as "capitalist property," used as an instrument for the exploitation of alienated labor, and "private property," used by "the worker himself and his family, . . . having a social function and respecting the fundamental rights of the worker" (CNBB, 2005 [1980]: 299). Given this view of the land, one's responsibility is stewardship of one's part of God's common endowment to all. Familial "private property" is therefore really the care of land that is primordially the common property of all people. It is shared work for the common good that marks good stewardship and, a fortiori, shared work rather than abstract legal title that generates a sense of "ownership." Thus it is not hard to see why the CPT's slogan "The land to those who work it" is understood to extend the familial notion of good stewardship to a cooperative community such as an MST settlement.[4]

The CPT critique of capitalist private property dovetails with more secular articulations of the same theme. Capitalist property in land, J. Martins (1991: 54–55) says, "is one of the varieties of private property, which is in this case distinguished by its capacity to ensure for capital the right to exploit labor; it is fundamentally an instrument of exploitation. For this reason it is imperative not to confuse *capitalist property* and *familial property*, even though both are, strictly speaking, private property" (1991: 54–55). Land that is worked, Oliveira (2001: 61) says, "is thus the property of the worker, for it is not fundamentally an instrument of exploitation" (see also Paulinho, 2006: 30).

There is a way, therefore, in which the new prioritization of agroecology in the MST elaborates this kind of organic connection to the land. Agroecological practices care for the land both sustainably and with a deeper respect for nature. The refusal to commodify land and its products as in capitalist agriculture becomes a form of resistance to capitalist production. To this end the MST, at its Third National Congress in 1995, decided to prioritize agroecology (Borges,

2009: 1617–1618), including the production of organic produce and resistance to genetically modified crops produced by mulitnational corporations like Monsanto (see, e.g., Morissawa, 2001: 237–238). The MST also worked with the Via Campesina in 2005 to set up the Escola Latino-Americana de Agroecologia in Lapa, Paraná, which offers courses on agroecological methods to students from across Latin America and the Caribbean.

While in traditional camponês culture the family makes collective decisions, in the MST it is the settlement association that does so. Everyone is a member of the association, but it is an assembly of families rather than of individuals. "The association is very important because a settlement without one will never move forward," says one Ceará settler. Another says, "An association must exist because everything comes from the association," and "the members must help in the coordination of the life of the settlement for it to work. All the members participate in discussions of the association" (Diniz, 2009: 201–202). The association may have a wide variety of activities, but it generally functions as the democratic decision-making body of the settlement from the moment of occupation. The association determines, democratically, all matters that have to do with the settlement as a whole and, since membership is based on the family, typically does so in way that builds upon rather than undermines the solidarity of family relations (see M. Martins, 1994, on the emergence of associations and other forms of cooperation in four settlements in Ceará). Typically, the settlement association is a legally constituted body with a 12-member directorate made up of a president, vice president, treasurer and assistant, secretary, and subsecretary and three alternates. The association as a whole is responsible for establishing the internal structures, policies, and projects of the settlement, while the directorate carries out its day-to-day administration. Larger settlements are divided into *núcleos*, units of about 10 families each, each of which is coordinated by two people, a man and a woman, and nominates a representative to the directorate.

The association, as the governing body of the settlement, functions as a participatory democracy in overseeing what is essentially common property. Even when families farm their own plots, it is the settlement association that collectively owns legal title to the settlement property as a whole. The association, moreover, can decide to follow one of three forms of property rights or a combination thereof. The settlement may (1) function as a full cooperative, (2) be parceled, with families being permanently assigned their own lots (which they farm but do not own), or (3) be unparceled, with families being assigned to work particular sections of the settlement. The majority of MST settlements are unparceled, and in them the sense of the land's being "common" is stronger. Of the 391 settlements in Ceará studied by Diniz (2009: 145), for example, only 22 were parceled. Parceled or unparceled, most MST settlements also maintain *terra solta* (literally "loose" land), land that is owned and used collectively by the whole settlement for the cultivation of commercial crops, the housing of livestock, or the grazing of animals. Thus, even when MST members individually farm plots, the land belongs to the settlement association as a whole and not to them as individuals; they farm it as mandated by the settlement association, and they participate in the care of settlement's common land. The MST practice of land ownership deftly synthesizes familial property with the

common property of the settlement as a whole. It is unusual for anything directly resembling "private property" in the juridical and, indeed, capitalist sense of the term to exist in an MST settlement.

Most MST settlements, furthermore, are organized according to a loosely communal structure of habitation. Rather than living in individual homes spread far and wide across the settlement, the MST has been successful in promoting the *agrovila*, in which homes are grouped together, greatly increasing the sense of community and collective identity. This spatial logic articulates the notion that the settlement is a cooperative community of families. Of course it then makes perfect sense for the settlement to put its school, healthcare facilities, and other collective buildings or resources in or adjoining the agrovila. In cases where an agrovila is impractical (e.g., in very large settlements), the MST encourages *núcleos de base* (base nuclei), groups of families living relatively close to each other that engage in various kinds of cooperative activities. These can themselves contain *núcleos de moradia* (residence nuclei), in which houses are located close to each other in subcommunities. As Morissawa (2001: 230) says, "Living close together in agrovilas or in residence nuclei that are part of base nuclei, families are stimulated to find solutions to problems in a collective way."

Moreover, in most MST settlements there is much informal collective labor. Some of this collective work is done on the terra solta or other collectively maintained infrastructure. An MST settler says that collective work "is done on the day of service. A fence has to be fixed, something has to be done, and the community gets together. Each person decides what day they are available and they take care of a certain area, a certain number of people form each brigade, while others make up another area—it is all decided in the meeting" (Diniz, 2009: 197). A settler from the Assentamento Maraquetá in Ceará says that work crews in his settlement work collectively "two days per week" and that it is "easier if it is divided into four groups, each with its own coordinator" (Diniz, 2009: 203).

MST settlements will often use what is traditionally called the *mutirão* to meet immediate labor-intensive needs. In the words of a settlement member from the Vida Nova in Ceará, "Things work better in settlements because we already have a wonderful custom: when someone needs a hand everyone gathers together to help" (Diniz, 2009: 206). As Silva (2004: 47) describes it, "the *mutirão* is a form of exchange of service and work that is among the most straightforward of forms of camponês cooperation. It typically takes place quite frequently in settlements, especially among neighbors and family members, usually involving the cutting of grass, planting, harvesting. The shared work of the *mutirão* promotes unity among members" (see also Candido, 1992). These and other forms of informal cooperation allow, as Paulinho (2006) argues, for an equilibrium of the settlement's workforce throughout the agricultural cycle, especially its most intense periods. MST members will also share seed, food for livestock, the use of tools and tractors, and the renting of transportation, and none of these exchanges is governed by the logic of commodities or wage labor. "There are the animals that were bought collectively," a settler from the 25 de Maio settlement in Ceará says, "and the singular ones, the bull, for example, are collective. Everyone takes care of the bull. . . . There is the large

cistern for water . . . that is collective, and several fields of corn and beans are also collective" (Diniz, 2009: 196). MST members, moreover, will cover for each other when someone is sick. "I was so thankful," one MST member recalls, "when I was sick one day and everyone worked my field for me, planting some nine kilos of corn and castor beans. There were so many people that they even finished early" (Diniz, 2009: 206). Of course there is also a great deal of sharing of information and experiences essential to the well-being of crops, livestock, machinery, and buildings.

With respect to more organized or formal forms of cooperative work, the MST has responded to its original failure with creativity and flexibility. Sometimes the settlement association is the only group formation on the settlement, but sometimes there are various other configurations, "collective groups," "assocations," or "nuclei" representing particular parts of the community or carrying out particular functions. In a handbook for cooperative and collective work published by CONCRAB, collective associations are explicitly linked to their roots in the family: "Collective groups represent a development of the familial organization of production, for they require a more developed level of consciousness such as to link together individuals or families that are already well disposed to organize the process of production in a collective way" (MST/CONCRAB, 1998: 14). Since full-scale cooperatives are difficult to administer and require at least 20 members and formal legal registration, the movement has been successful in promoting many smaller and more informal associations that are far more flexible and answer much more intimately to the logic of family-based agriculture. As Wolford (2010: 84) points out, the associations may also target specific aspects of the productive process in which cooperation is particularly helpful. In the Assentamento 25 de Maio there were 19 such associations in 2011, and in 2012 there were some 350 in the 316 MST settlements in Ceará (interview, CONCRAB, Ceará, August 22, 2012).

Moroever, the MST has been very successful in implementing service cooperatives that target a particular aspect of production—credit, seed purchase, tools, sawmills, machines, livestock care, harvesting, storage, silos, mills, processing, marketing, etc. (Morissawa, 2001: 230–231, 233). It is far easier for a group of settlers to apply for a collective loan or to buy seeds in bulk than it is for each individual family to do so. Many of these cooperative ventures fall into the category of "agro-industry," of which there are three types. "Rural agro-industry" creates specialized products from raw materials produced by settlers and processed by families; "mixed agro-industry" draws on outside sources for at least part of the raw materials or the production process, and "traditional agro-industry" draws on outside sources for raw materials but carries out the rest of the processing and marketing cooperatively in the settlement (Morissawa, 2001: 235–236). Such agro-industries now include slaughterhouses, facilities for the processing of milk, fruit, vegetables, cashews, spices, cane, and coffee, and various kinds of mills, some of which produce MST brands such as Terra Viva, Sabor do Campo, and Paladar (see also Stédile and Fernandes, 1999: 101, 107). For example, one such processing-marketing cooperative in Santa Catarina makes jam from fruit supplied by settlement members and sells it as far away as São Paulo (Wolford, 2010: 84).

The key is a kind of flexibility that arises directly from the needs of settlers themselves. As M. Martins (2000: 35–36) makes clear, variation in the forms of property and work is considerable, depending on specific conditions. Sometimes part of the work is done collectively and the rest individually. Martins reports that "a growing proportion of settlers' monetary income is not divided but used collectively to maintain the existing means of production, for new investments, or for educational, health and technological assistance to their families. These different kinds of reserves provide evidence of an experiment in socialized capital accumulation" (2000: 36).

Having learned from its original failure, the MST remains as committed as ever to formal cooperatives. CONCRAB President Milton Fornazieri said in 2011, "We are taking up cooperation anew in such a way that, despite many difficulties, we are seeking to create smaller but more solid cooperatives, with lines of production well defined within the settlements" (quoted in Percassi, 2011: 4). CONCRAB and other agencies continue to promote and develop cooperatives within the framework of camponês culture. To this end the MST reorganized its cooperative administration in 2002, creating the Setor de Produção, Cooperação e Meio Ambiente (Production, Cooperation, and Environment Sector), divided into five "fronts" to take action on specific goals. There were also changes in tactics. For example, Fabrini (2002: 88–89) says, "In the earlier period there was an emphasis placed on struggles for official credit in the formation of cooperatives, while now the concern has turned more toward internal organization, with cooperatives based more on work and land and less on the hope of credit and allocation projects for financial resources." Moreover, new government programs such as the Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos (Food Acquisition Program), which requires that at least 30 percent of the milk served to students in Brazilian public schools be purchased from agrarian reform settlements, has provided a badly needed source of security for some cooperatives and associations (Percassi, 2011).

The new cooperative policy requires great flexibility with respect to both objective conditions (geographical, geological, climatic, etc.) and subjective conditions (the perspectives and inclinations of the membership) in each settlement. As João Pedro Stédile (in Pinassi, Cabral, and Lourenção, 2000: 55) puts it,

> There are . . . different, complementary forms of cooperative farming appropriate to the objective conditions of each settlement: its natural resources, type of farming, how much capital has been saved, the distance to markets, and the degree of technological sophistication among the settlers. There are also such subjective conditions as the settlers' level of political awareness, their cultural tradition, etc.

One can readily see how the MST's elaborate and sophisticated educational efforts dovetail with the goal to expand the cooperative sector gradually and organically (see Caldarte, 1997).

By 2008 the MST had helped establish 161 cooperatives of various kinds, including 140 agro-industries (Carter and Carvalho, 2010). By 2010 the number of agricultural production cooperatives had increased to 86 (with 6 in Ceará), and there are now 10 states that have cooperative coordinating bodies (São Paulo,

Ceará, Paraná, Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, Bahia, Pernambuco, Maranhão, Minas Gerais, and Espírito Santo) and 3 more with coordinating bodies in the process of formation (Paraíba, Mato Grosso, and Mato Grosso do Sul) (interview, Ceará, August 22, 2012).

CONCLUSION

The MST's socialist values are built upon traditional camponês cooperation and attitudes toward the land. The MST has successfully developed this base into sophisticated and often quite impressive cooperative structures. Property is common rather than private, habitation is communal rather than isolated, decision making is collective rather than individual, and work combines many forms of cooperation. While the dangers of incautiously applying traditional Marxist paradigms are obvious, it is plausible that the MST has achieved the supremacy of labor over capital and socialist values by eliminating exploitation, expropriating the means of production, and establishing cooperative work relations on what is essentially common property. In the view of one commentator, moreover, "The MST plays the same role that the political party does in Gramsci's . . . thought. By empowering landless people, it is an educator in class power, citizenship, and self-government for the subaltern classes" (Vergara-Camus, 2009: 183). Of course, one should not be too sanguine about these questions. Many conflicts and difficulties plague MST settlements: Membership in a settlement directorate can lead to a sense of hierarchy. Disagreements over the degree and form of cooperation can still be strong and heated. Unequal degrees of interest in voluntary participation lead to resentment. It is often difficult to generate sufficient income. Young people too often work away from the settlement or leave it altogether, and so on (see Caldeira, 2007; Calvo-Gonzalez, 2010; Wolford, 2010). There is also a disturbing trend in many settlements in which women who were active in the occupation and organization of the settlement drift away from the settlement association and return to their traditional work in the home. Correspondingly, men more often than not are a majority in the settlement association, and the fields, as opposed to the home, begin to seem like a man's world (see Menegat, 2008). Moreover, not only does the MST work in a sea of capitalist relations that are arguably enjoying greater hegemony than at any time in capitalist history but the new challenge of fighting well-organized multinational corporations like Monsanto rather than old-fashioned, semifeudal land barons is daunting. Despite these and other grave challenges, however, there is no rhetorical exaggeration in saying that the MST has succeeded in establishing substantial, creative, and indeed inspiring socialist communities that achieve the supremacy of labor over capital.

NOTES

1. We have chosen not to translate *camponês* and its plural *camponeses.* Literally the term means someone from the countryside (like the Spanish campesino), but terms such as "rural worker," "farm worker," "peasant," and "farmer" fall short of the cultural, political, and historical significance of term. All translations from Portuguese to English are ours.

2. Quotations of individual settlement members are drawn from Diniz (2009). Settlers' names have been omitted for the sake of confidentiality.

3. This point should not be exaggerated. The MST has never been a top-down organization, and camponês forms of cooperation and sociability have been its foundation from the very beginning. It is only the attempt to collectivize in the above-discussed forms that is in question here. The term "sociability" here refers to the general logic and character of mostly unself-conscious or traditional relations that structure communities. Most fundamentally it has its roots in Hegel's theory of mutual recognition, especially as developed by John Russon (2004), Axel Honneth (2012), and others.

4. Wolford (2010) explores the considerable differences in attitude toward the land between itinerant plantation workers in the Northeast and more settled rural workers in the South.

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