



Brazil's Landless Workers Movement (MST)

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by

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Brazil's Landless Workers Movement (MST)

This paper deals with Brazil's Landless Workers Movement - in Portuguese, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST). The MST is Brazil's most effective (Wright and Wolford, 2003) and Latin America's largest social movement (MSTbrazil, 2007). In what follows I will try to accomplish two things. I will clarify the connection between the MST and neoliberal globalization and I will illustrate the movement's success. I will put forth the argument that the movement has been successful in the past and that it is successful right now for three broad reasons. Secondary literature on the movement's history, as well as a dataset comprised of nineteen events and gathered over a period of almost seven months (September 2007 – March 2008), show political opportunities, a heavy use of alliances, and tactics that can be categorized as "unruly". I will propose that these are the three reasons that contribute to the movement's success. Even though the MST periodically experiences constraints, they are not severe enough to have a crippling effect on the movement's overall dynamic. From these observations I infer that the movement's future success is foreseeable.

The structure of the paper is as follows: First, I will give a brief account of the nature of the movement, the background in which it developed and the context in which it now works. Secondly, I will try to make a connection between the movement's protest and neoliberal globalization. Subsequently, I will illustrate manifestations of and reasons for the movement's success. This is followed by a

discussion of constraints and, lastly, predictions for the future.

THE MST

At the beginning, the movement was organized within the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), until 400 people decided to split off in order to take a more active approach to the fight for land reform. This group called itself the MST. The movement was founded in 1984 and since then has become "the most dynamic, best organized, and effective social movement" in Brazil's history (Petras, as quoted in Wolford, 2003a: 201). Today, its membership has increased to an estimated 1.5 million people, found in twenty-three out of twenty-seven Brazilian states (MSTbrazil, 2007). The MST has two main goals; namely, to achieve a fair agrarian reform and to establish a just and fraternal society. The struggle for land in Brazil is almost as old as its state formation. The military dictatorship (1964-1984) temporarily put an end to this fight and prohibited even speaking about agrarian reform (Doc.visualab, 2004).

To obtain land, the movement first looks for and identifies unproductive pieces of land and then occupies them. The movement's property claims over unproductive land are backed up by the Brazilian Constitution, which holds that unproductive land should be put to use for a "larger social function" (MSTbrazil, 2007). The first land occupation took place in October 1985, in Rio Grande do Sul (Mark, 2001). In the same year the MST faced its first trial for a settlement occupation. The Supreme Court ruled that it was no crime to occupy unproductive land and that the government had the obligation to expropriate the land

of the landowners who leave it infertile. This ruling gave the MST the status of a legal movement (Doc.visualab, 2004).

The membership of the movement is more diverse now than it was at the beginning or even a decade ago. Members of the movement no longer only come from the countryside or working class. Some of its members stem from urban settings, the middle class, academic backgrounds, liberal professions, etc. (Doc.visualab, 2004). The membership of the MST can be described as active. My dataset, which can be found in the appendix of this paper, shows a number of land occupations, railroad occupations, raids of paper factories, raids of agribusinesses, destruction of genetically modified seeds, etc., involving thousands of members (from the base to leaders alike). The movement's tactic is one of direct action (i.e. mostly land occupations), which contributed to the movement's success. This will become evident later in the paper. Moreover, the MST itself is a member of the larger international peasant organization, La Via Campesina, which has millions of members all across the world (MSTbrazil, 2007).

Why did the movement emerge? The formation of the movement can be seen as a response to agricultural restructuring in the 1970s that resulted in a large landless class (Wolford, 2003a: 201). In 1985, ten percent of landowners in Brazil controlled eighty percent of the land (Wolford, 2003a: 203). Organization therefore became crucial for economic survival for the poor landless population. The second factor contributing to the rise of the movement is the re-establishment of democracy in 1985, after two decades of military rule (Wolford,

2003a: 201). According to Sidney Tarrow, the decline of state repression (among other things) leads to a favourable condition for collective action (1994:82). The demise of the dictatorship provided the MST with the political opportunity to rise up and protest.

Today, the movement is not only recognized for the struggle for agrarian reform. It has also implemented a range of social services for its members, such as health care and schooling. This will be discussed in more detail when dealing with the movement's past successes. Implementing all those services costs a lot of money, so how does the MST fund itself? The general guideline is that every family that has been settled contributes three percent of their produce to the movement (MSTbrazil, 2007). However, these contributions are not mandatory, but optional (MSTbrazil, 2007). The amount of the contribution is discussed in the encampment's assemblies and each family can decide for itself whether or not to contribute (MSTbrazil, 2007). In addition, the movement has established productive mid-size agricultural cooperatives. Its enterprises, selling fruits, vegetables, coffee, dairy products, rums, teas, jams, and meats, generate on the average \$50 million per year. Part of this money goes into the \$20 million budget for social services and infrastructure, and the majority goes directly to the member families. The cooperatives provide jobs for thousands of members and the movement even has its own clothing factory in Rio Grande do Sul (Mark, 2001). Furthermore, the movement receives grants from UNESCO for its educational system and accepts donations over its worldwide network "Friends of the MST" (MSTbrazil, 2007).

Gaining legal ownership of a piece of land can be a long process. Until the ownership of a piece of land is legally recognized, the land is called a “camp”, which implies its temporary situation. Recognition of ownership can take months or even years and on occasion a camp is raided by the military police and the recognition never comes. As soon as ownership is recognized, the camp becomes a “settlement”. How the settlement is organized is decided through a democratic process and may therefore vary depending on different factors, such as the experience of the workers, the kind of crops, the quality of the soil, etc. On the whole, the encampments are either organized in the form of nuclei (family possession) or cooperatives (collective possession) (Martins, 2000). The cooperatives are successfully organized on a local level, state level, and national level (Martins, 2000). Most of the settlers’ income (whether the settlement is organized as a nucleus or as a cooperative) is used collectively and put towards production, health care, schooling, etc. in the settlement (Martins, 2000). Decisions about financial matters and things like production, education, health care, marketing, culture, politics, are made in the settlement assemblies as well. The annual balance is presented in a general meeting and decisions on the use of the budget are decided by majority vote (Martins, 2000).

The movement does not have a single decision-making centre. It is largely decentralized, working through collective leadership (Mark, 2001; Wolford and Wright, 2004). Decisions on local actions are taken democratically in the settlements’ assemblies. Frequently, local MST groups or encampments organize their own protests that are directed at

local problems. However, these protests are usually in accordance with larger national campaigns. For example, occupations of farms run and owned by the agribusiness Syngenta in various parts of the country fall under the national campaign “Syngenta Out of Brazil”. National decisions are made in a different way: Encampments write proposals that go beyond the settlers’ everyday decisions, like the formulation of political, social, economic, and cultural policies concerning the whole of Brazil. The proposals are then sent to the National Board of the MST (the highest level), which discusses them and responds in writing¹ (Martins, 2002). The National Board therefore makes decisions on national campaigns, but often they come out of proposals from the base. The National Board is made up of the national leaders of the MST, including Joao Pedro Stédile, main spokesperson and one of the founding members of the MST. Every two years, elections take place in which the members choose the national leaders. The candidates for the positions are not self-nominated but put forth by regional and state centres, which are in between the base (encampments) and the national leaders (Doc.visualab, 2004).

What the movement ultimately has in mind is a socialist society, in which the means of production are shared. The movement demands aid for five million families with small-holdings and land for four million landless families (MST-brazil, 2007). On a more concrete level, this means the redistribution of land for at least 200,000 families per year. The

¹ The MST does not rely solely on its own expertise. The National Board often decides to seek advice from a network of experts that consults the MST on various issues, like professors, supporting groups, economists, technicians, etc. (Martins, 2000).

government so far has not lived up to this demand and there are several reasons for this (besides not putting enough effort into it). One reason is the discrepancy between the federal and the local governments (Doc.visualab, 2004). It is the local government's responsibility to declare a piece of land "unproductive". However, most of the local governments politically lean to the right, whereas the national government under Lula (President Luiz Inácio da Silva) is largely left-wing. Needless to say, the two spheres do not get along that well. According to the MST and José Luiz del Rojo, a coordinator for the World Social Forum, a lot of unproductive land is declared "productive" by local governments. This means that millions given to the local governments by the federal government simply bounce back (Doc.visualab, 2004). Another reason for the government's shortcoming in terms of land reform is foreign debt. There simply is not enough money available for land reform and/or support for the internal market. In the year 2004, the government spent around \$10 billion on agriculture. Two billion was spent on food crops, whereas eight billion went towards large agricultural businesses (Doc.visualab, 2004). This leads me to the connection between MST protest and neoliberal globalization.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, neoliberal globalization reached Brazil and free-market capitalism was implemented. According to Manfred Steger, globalizations refers to "a set of social processes that are thought to transform our present social condition into one of" interconnected economic, political, cultural, and environmental systems (2003:8). "Neoliberal" globalization refers to the economic aspect of globalization. Na-

tional economies have been linked and economic interrelations now span the entire globe. Goods and services are traded worldwide, precipitated by gigantic cross-border flows of capital and technology (Steger, 2003:37). Neoliberalism brings with it concrete measures, such as the deregulation of economies, privatization of publicly-owned businesses, the reduction of social spending, the liberalization of trade, industry, and financial transactions, promotion of foreign direct investment, labour control, tax cuts, protection of property rights, and a deliberate downsizing of governments (Steger, 2003:41). The neoliberal economic order is largely spearheaded by three international economic institutions: the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). It is endorsed by gigantic transnational corporations that benefit from this, and enabled through various trading systems and agreements (Steger, 2003:37).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, then, the Brazilian market was opened up to foreign capital. The market was deregulated, domestic finances liberalized, the state vanished when it came to fiscal policies and price regulations, state-owned enterprises were privatized or closed down, and state policy agencies were closed as well (Lourdes Rollemberg Mollo and Saad-Filho, 2004). In the transition to neoliberalism, the country's foreign debt and profit and dividend remittances increased drastically (Lourdes Rollemberg Mollo and Saad-Filho, 2004). Brazil found itself in a difficult situation. The country was in need of money and the IMF was able to provide. For supplying the much-needed loans, the WB and the IMF demanded the implementation of so-called "structural ad-

justment programmes”. This meant a reduction of social expenditures and even more liberal trade and regulatory policies (Wolford and Wright, 2004). Undoubtedly this favours large international investors rather than small farmers and indeed, the gap between the rich and the poor in Brazil widened considerably (Mark, 2001). Mechanization of agriculture was introduced and a lot of small-scale farmers and sharecroppers found themselves out of work or unable to compete. Furthermore, the government drastically increased the interest rates in the late 1990s and bankruptcies of small farmers shot up. Within four years (1995 – 1999) four million Brazilians gave up their rural lives and migrated to urban centres to find work (Mark, 2001). Furthermore, the promised economic growth never came². This necessarily led to a higher level of unemployment. The unemployment rate in Sao Paulo increased from 6 percent in the late eighties to 9 percent in the mid-nineties and 20 percent in 2003. Furthermore, the level of income decreased steadily³ (Lourdes Rollemberg Mollo and Saad-Filho, 2004).

Agrarian reform has to be understood in the context of neoliberal globalization. At the beginning of the new millennium three percent of the population owned two-thirds of Brazil’s farmable land with 1.6 percent of all farms occupying 53.2 percent of arable land. Approximately 25 million people have no land at all, while

² Between 1994 and 2003, Brazil’s average economic growth rate was only 2.4 percent per year. This has to be compared to the average growth between 1933-80 of 6.3 percent (Lourdes Rollemberg Mollo and Saad-Filho, 2004).

³ This had detrimental effects, especially on the lower middle class, earning on average between two and five minimum wages (Lourdes Rollemberg Mollo and Saad-Filho, 2004).

1.2 billion acres of the aforementioned land go unused (Mark, 2001). The largest agribusinesses, which produce for export and often hold farms solely for speculative reasons, do not utilize an estimated 88 percent of their land (Mark, 2001). Whereas in the past the MST had to fight large landowners over a redistribution of the land, it now has to deal with even more powerful opponents. At present this means a confrontation first, with agricultural businesses, then with agricultural industry, and finally with financial capital (Doc.visualab, 2004). According to Joao Pedro Stédile, national leader and founding member of the MST, agrarian reform has to take second place for the time being. First, a new model of development, different from capitalism, has to be implemented (Martins, 2000). Only in a just society can a fair land reform take place. The movement’s new orientation is also evident in the dataset. Only 3 out of 19 protests were directly concerned with agrarian reform.

Within the drive to privatization and the accompanying attempts by the WTO and large businesses to dismantle peoples’ rights to unproductive land, it is especially hard for the MST to make claims for a land reform based on communal ownership. Multinational businesses profit from the very conditions the MST tries to put an end to (e.g. rock-bottom wages, a landless and hence dependent workforce, inadequate regulations for environmental and labour standards). To attract investment the government has to remain amiable to large agribusinesses and plantation owners who largely produce goods for export (Mark, 2001). The IMF and the World Bank as well are not very fond of MST’s idea of an agrarian reform. (The World Bank’s own propos-

al for agrarian reform will be discussed in connection with the movement's constraints⁴.)

According to the data I collected on the movement's activities, the movement is engaged in three broad campaigns. As already discussed, the movement fights for agrarian reform, which is exemplified by several activities in the event catalogue: a 62-day march took place during September and October 2007 (MSTbrazil, 2007); the MST raided two tree plantations on October 16, 2007 in which eucalyptus saplings were destroyed (Colitt, 2007); and the movement blocked a motorway on November 29, 2007 to protest the eviction of 250 families from MST's Elizabeth Teixeira encampment (WW4report, 2007; LKAN, 2007).

The second broad campaign concerns itself with environmental issues. Here the focus is mainly on fighting the use of genetically-modified crops by large agricultural businesses. The one multinational corporation most criticized is the Swedish agribusiness Syngenta AG (MSTbrazil, 2007), which specializes in seeds and crop protection (i.e. pesticides) (Syngenta, 2008). The company's other concentration lies in biotechnology and genomic research (Syngenta, 2008). The MST rejects large-scale commercial farming largely based on monoculture with high utilization of chemicals and reliance on biotechnology. Rather, the MST proposes a more *campesino* and family-run agriculture (MSTbrazil,

⁴ There is a strain on the government because, on the one hand, it is left-wing and not wholeheartedly in favour of neoliberalism. On the other hand, it still wants to attract foreign investment and therefore has to be welcoming to large agribusinesses and plantation owners who produce for export (Mark, 2001)

2007). The idea is to have small and medium-sized farms that rely on environmentally friendly techniques such as intercropping⁵ and crop rotations (MSTbrazil, 2007). Numerous activities during September 2007 and the beginning of March 2008 illustrate this campaign. On October 21, 2007 the MST occupied an experimental field of transgenic crops run by Syngenta AG. During this occupation, one MST member was killed (Motley Fool, 2007; Ruiz-Marrero, 2007; WW4, 2007). On December 10, the movement occupied a Syngenta farm, shut down the production and destroyed some of its greenhouses (Colitt and Allen, 2007). On the very same day another Syngenta farm occupation took place in Ceara, in which the MST and another Via Campesina group destroyed genetically modified corn and soy seedlings (Colitt and Allen, 2007). On January 16, the MST started a letter and email campaign directed at the U.S. National Headquarters of Syngenta and the Swiss Embassy in Washington D.C. to demand punishment of the security guards who killed the activist during the October 21 occupation (MSTbrazil, 2007). On March 7, the movement occupied a factory owned by Stora Enso and blocked eight major roads in Rio Grande do Sul to protest the company's plan to plant trees near the border with Uruguay, which would have detrimental effects on the area's ecosystem (MSTbrazil, 2008). More protests took place on the very same day: MST women occupied a Monsanto research site in Sao Paulo to protest the government's decision to legalize Monsanto's GM Guardian® corn. And in various cities across Brazil, demonstrations took place against the ongoing impunity for the murder of the

⁵ I.e. growing a crop among plants of a different kind, usually in the space between rows.

activist on October 21 (MSTbrazil, 2008). Another focus of the environmental campaign is the Sao Paulo river diversion. On December 3, 2007 the MST started a letter and email campaign in alliance with the Movement of Dam-Affected People (MAB), the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), the Pastoral Fishers Commission (CPP), the movement of Small Farmers (MPA), and other local fishing communities, to stop the Sao Francisco River Diversion and to support bishop Luiz Cappio, who went on a hunger strike to halt this project (Bono, 2007). On December 14, the MST (with 230 other groups, including Caritas Brazil) declared a “national vigil and fast in solidarity day” for Luiz Cappio for December 17 (Frayssinet, 2007). On that day, thousands of people came out to protest (Colitt, 2007).

The third campaign is rather new and a response to a wave of privatization encouraged by the World Bank and IMF (Reardon, 2007). As of MST’s fifth National Congress in June 2007, its new mission is to “confront neoliberalism... [and to] struggle for the re-statization of public companies that have been privatized” (as quoted in Reardon, 2007). A number of activities in the event catalogue correspond to this. For one week at the beginning of September 2007, the MST (in alliance with the Unique Worker’s Centre, and 200 smaller movements) organized a plebiscite to demand the re-nationalization of the mining giant Companhia Vale do Rio Doce (CVRD); 3,729,538 million people (94%) voted in favour of its re-nationalization (Reardon, 2007; Vazquez, 2007). On October 16-17, the movement blocked CVRD’s principal train tracks and prevented 250,000 tons of iron ore from being delivered (Reardon, 2007; Sequera, 2007;

Kuyek, 2007). On November 7, the MST blocked another railroad and the same amount of iron was halted (Reardon, 2007; Kuyek, 2007). On November 27, the MST, together with the oil workers’ union (FUP), occupied the seat of Brazil’s National Petroleum Agency (ANP) to stop the auction of oil blocks (i.e. exploration rights) (Radowitz, 2007). On January 10, the MST and 108 leaders and representatives of diverse organizations and social movements came together to draw up a manifesto calling on the government for a fair tax reform and the reformation of the country’s economic policy (MSTbrazil, 2008).

Charles Tilly writes that in the age of globalization, social movements might undergo a number of changes, such as a change in campaigns, repertoires, and WUNC displays (i.e., participants’ concerted public representation of Worthiness, Unity, Numbers, and Commitments on the part of themselves and/or their constituencies) (2004:107). This is certainly true for the MST, especially concerning its campaigns. With the introduction of neoliberal policies in Brazil the MST had to undergo a number of adaptations. An entire campaign is now dedicated to the fight against privatization and in favour of re-nationalization, as exemplified by the activities described above. The change in campaign focus is necessarily connected to a shift in targets. In 2003 Joao Pedro Stédile stated in an interview that MST’s tactics and targets slightly changed when Brazil’s Workers Party (PT) and President Lula assumed power. Under former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the MST occupied offices of the agrarian reform agency, but now they “occupy roads, estates – there is a different focus because the government is no longer

[MST's] enemy" (Stedile as quoted in Hochstetler, 2004:17).

The actions on October 16 – 17 and November 7, which both involved the occupation of CVRD train tracks, show that both the government and the company are targeted. The government is urged to expropriate the company and the owners of CVRD are told to leave the country. The plebiscite in the first week of September, the occupation of the ANP seat (November 27), and the 62-day march during September and October 2007 were primarily directed at the government. However, the government is usually not targeted as the primary cause of any given problem (institutions or businesses that endorse neoliberal policies are more often considered to be the originators of the problems); rather, it is targeted for the "absence of positive action" (Hochstetler, 2004:17). In many protests, the MST targets the businesses directly. This happened to Stora Enso and Votorantim on October 16, 2007 and March 7, 2008. The MST raided two of their plantations (October 16) and occupied a factory run by Stora Enso because the two companies are seen as harming land reform and family farming (Colitt, 2007). As well, Syngenta is one of MST's primary targets facing direct action. One of its fields was occupied on October 21 and two were invaded on December 10, 2007; a letter campaign was started on January 16, directed at the U.S. National Headquarters of Syngenta; and numerous demonstrations targeting the company took place in various cities across the country on March 7, 2008 (MSTbrazil, 2007; Colitt and Allen, 2007). Monsanto, a multinational agricultural corporation specialized in biotechnology, herbicides, genetically engineered seeds, and "efficient animal

breeding" (Monsanto, 2008), was targeted directly as well when one of its research sites was occupied on March 7, 2008 (MSTbrazil, 2008). We can see a trend here in agribusinesses being targeted directly.

I will now turn to the movement's success. I will show that the movement has been successful in the past, that it is successful now, and that it will be successful in the future. Furthermore, I will try to illustrate why this is the case. First, let me define what exactly I mean by "success". By "success" I have two things in mind. The first corresponds to something like a "favourable outcome". What I mean by this is that success is not only defined in terms of the accomplishment of a particular campaign goal (e.g. to halt the Sao Paulo river diversion). An increase in frequency of the protests, an increase in numbers of protestors, the spreading of the protest to other cities, etc., are all examples of what I would consider a "favourable outcome" and therefore success. The second definition of success I have borrowed from William A. Gamson, who claims that success is a set of outcomes falling into two clusters, namely: acceptance and new advantages (1975:28-29). Gaining acceptance means being recognized by the antagonist as a legitimate negotiating partner representing a constituency. Gaining new advantages, e.g. in the form of concessions or policy changes, is considered success as well. Success can involve both – acceptance and new advantages – or only one of these. I have in mind "favourable outcomes" as well as Gamson's criteria when I assess the movement's success.

MST'S PAST SUCCESS

The MST is Latin America's largest (MSTbrazil, 2007) and "one of the most significant social movements for land reform in world history" (Carter, WP: 1). Since its formation, the MST has organized over 250,000 occupations and won land for over 350,000 families in 2000 agrarian reform settlements (Wolford, 2003a: 201; MSTbrazil, 2007). This means that the government formally recognized 350,000 families as the legal owners of the land. Undoubtedly, this is a success for the MST – by anyone's definition. Some 180,000 families are currently living on occupied land and are waiting for government recognition of their ownership of that land (MSTbrazil, 2007).

But the MST is not only known for acquisition of land. It has established a considerable network of profitable cooperatives at the local, state, and national levels (Martins, 2000). Furthermore, it provides social services to its members in the encampments, including medical clinics and even training centres for health care workers (Mark, 2001). The MST's educational system, inspired by the philosophy of Gilberto Freyre, is especially impressive, taking a work-and-study approach (Martins, 2000; Wolford and Wright, 2004). So far the MST has created 1,000 1st to 4th grade schools and one hundred 5th to 8th grade schools teaching all kinds of courses, including agronomy (MSTbrazil, 2007; Doc.visualab, 2004). Some 3,800 teachers (who must meet educational standards) are employed in MST's schools and teach about 150,000 children at the elementary and secondary level (Mark, 2001;

Wolford and Wright, 2004). Some 25,000 adults are attending literacy classes supported by a grant given by the UNESCO (Mark, 2001; MSTbrazil, 2007). Furthermore, the MST has established teacher-training programs in seven national universities with the help of UNICEF and the Catholic Church (Wolford and Wright, 2004). About 250 daycare centres have been established and the MST even has its own agricultural college (Mark, 2001). The movement even established its own credit cooperatives (three of them), called "Popular Bank", with 5,400 associates (MSTbrazil, 2007).

It can be said that the MST gained much acceptance under the Lula government. A commission was created for the NPAR (National Plan for Agrarian Reform) to elaborate a plan for an agrarian reform. President Lula called Plinio da Roda Sampaio, an MST member, and made him one of the coordinators of this reform. To be fair, one could also make the argument that this tactic was meant to co-opt the movement, but the members of the MST do not see it in this way (Doc.visualab, 2004).

The MST has also been recognized on an international level, which speaks for the movement's success. As mentioned above, it receives grants from the UNESCO and UNICEF. In addition, it has received awards from the UN for its accomplishments in agrarian reform, rural health care, ecological farming, and education. It was even presented with Sweden's "The Right Livelihood Award" (i.e. "The Alternative Nobel Prize") (Wolford and Wright, 2004).

MST'S PRESENT SUCCESS

In the dataset on the movement's activities, I found a number of trends that speak for the movement's success. For example, the movement occupied the train tracks of the CVRD twice, once between October 16 – 17 and on November 7, 2007. For the first occupation, 2,600 activists came out to protest (Reardon, 2007). This already is quite a large crowd, but for the second occupation, more than double the number of people showed up. Some 6,000 people occupied the train tracks on November 7, which constitutes an increase and therefore success⁶. Both of the occupations had a positive outcome. The first occupation ended because federal authorities promised to meet with the MST to hear its demands (Reardon, 2007; Sequera, 2007). This is an example of acceptance, because it gives the MST the status of a legitimate negotiating party.⁷ The second occupation even led to a more definite result, namely new advantages. CVRD representatives and federal

⁶ The same occupations, which stopped 2700 trains, led to a congestion of the CVRD's ports. The result was a delay of the company's shipments and renegotiations with its clients. Even the freight rates out of Brazil fell by three percent (Kinch, 2007). The CVRD mentions the MST indirectly in its annual report. The company claims to have underachieved its predicted iron ore output for the year 2007. Reasons given were bad weather conditions, equipment problems, and delivery problems due to "landless peasant protests on one of its railways" (Samora and Ewing, 2008).

⁷ However, till this day I was unable to find information on whether the meeting actually took place or if anything came out of it. But even if no new advantages were gained, one could still talk about the invitation to the meeting as a form of success. Gamson calls a situation in which the movement achieves acceptance but no new advantages, co-optation (1975:29). This situation is still a form of success.

officials conceded to the MST funding for local agrarian reform projects and investments in educational health programs (Reardon, 2007; Kuyek, 2007).

Success was achieved in the campaign to stop the Sao Francisco River diversion. The number of organizations involved increased considerably from a handful on December 3, to 230 on December 14. Secondly, on December 11, a federal judge expressed doubts about the government's legitimate authority over the land and water and ordered the immediate halt of all construction on the project site (Villaverde and Colitt, 2007; Frayssinet, 2007; Gomez, 2007).

The occupation of Syngenta's illegal testing field (the one on which the MST activist was killed) eventually – after months of protest – resulted in action by the government. Brazil's environmental agency (IBAMA) fined Syngenta \$500,000 for a violation of the country's biosafety law (Ruiz-Marrero, 2007). Furthermore, the high voter turnout of 4,000,000 people in the first week of September 2007 can also be seen as a success for the movement and its allies.

REASONS FOR SUCCESS

So why was the MST so successful in the past and why is it so successful now? I want to suggest three reasons; namely, the movement's reliance on alliances, political opportunities (partly created through the movement's alliances), and its tactics. Building alliances leads to a higher number of protestors involved, which, in turn, can lead to other organizations joining in. The collected data as well as secondary literature on MST's history show many different coalitions

or alliances. In only 9 out of 19 protests between September 2007 and March 2008 did the MST act alone. More than half of the movement's activities involved different allies.

During that time span, the MST entered into alliances with the Unique Workers' Centre (CUT), the oil workers union (FUP), other Via Campesina groups, the Movement of Dam-Affected People (MAB), the Movement of Small Farmers (MPA), the Pastoral Land Commission (CPP), local fishing communities, and hundreds (!) of smaller movements⁸. For the creation of the manifesto, for example, on January 10, 2008 a diverse number of individuals and representatives came together. Besides the CUT and the CPT, which are familiar allies, there were media representatives, professors, student unions, the journalist union, an economist, the assessor of Caritas, the coordinator of Via Campesina Brazil, and even a member of the military police (MSTbrazil, 2007). The groups come together, (despite their different backgrounds) because they have a common enemy. It becomes evident that the reliance on alliances contributes to the movement's success. Let's consider the Sao Francisco River diversion, for example. When the movement started protesting against the diversion on December 3, 2007 it had entered into an alliance with a handful of other movements. There was no response from the government to the letter and email campaign started on December 3. However, only two weeks later, the alliance had already grown to 230 organizations, in-

⁸ The allies listed on MST's homepage come from various sectors of society; for example: environmental groups, religious groups, indigenous groups, labour unions, parties on the left, NGO's (e.g. Amnesty International), etc. (MSTbrazil, 2007).

cluding influential allies like Caritas Brazil and the Brazilian Catholic Church (Frayssinet, 2007). And only then, as the number of groups involved increased, a federal judge ordered the government to immediately stop all construction on the diversion (Villaverde and Colitt, 2007; Frayssinet, 2007, Gomez, 2007).

As mentioned before, the second occupation of the CVRD train tracks (November 7) led to new advantages. Instead of only being promised a meeting, the MST actually was granted concessions. This occupation lasted only one day, as opposed to the first one, which was carried out over two consecutive days. What was different? More than double the number of people came out for the second one. Even though in this case the MST acted alone, it still illustrates the power that lies in numbers⁹.

Also, getting 4,000,000 people to cast their vote in a plebiscite is a considerable success and could only be accomplished with the help of other organizations. The MST worked with the Unique Worker's Centre (CUT) and 200 smaller social movements. This alliance managed to recruit 100,000 volunteers who traveled through the country in order to mobilize people (Reardon, 2007; Vazquez, 2007). I highly doubt that the MST could have achieved the same result by itself.

Finding influential allies and building alliances can also create political opportunities. According to Sidney Tarrow, a movement has better chances of being successful "when institutional access

⁹ I do not mean to give a mono-causal explanation, but a higher number of protestors certainly does seem to contribute to the movement's success.

opens, when alignments shift, when conflicts emerge among elites and when allies become available” (1994:81). Political opportunities are both seized and created (Tarrow, 1994:81) and with the building of strong alliances a split among the elites can be created and a political opportunity opened up.

The plebiscite, for example, can be seen as a political opportunity. The mobilization for the plebiscite as well as its result put considerable pressure on the government and, indeed, resulted in a split in the government structure. President Lula’s Workers’ Party (PT) supported the plebiscite, and individual party leaders (e.g. Ana Julia Carepa, the governor of Para State) even voted. However, President Lula was quoted as saying: “any discussion on the topic of the CVRD shall not reach my desk” and that it “will not be discussed in government” (Vazquez, 2007).

Furthermore, the movement already has access to the authorities, which, according to Tarrow, makes it more likely to be successful (1994:81). As already discussed, the movement was invited to sit on the commission for the NPAR (National Plan for Agrarian Reform) and the occupation of the CVRD train tracks (October 16-17) ended with the promise for a meeting. Thus, the movement is already seen as a legitimate negotiating partner.

But political opportunities can also simply open up without being created. We can see evidence for this in the movement’s formation, which happened precisely when the dictatorship was replaced by a democratic system that allowed for organization and collective action.

The last factor I was able to observe as one contributing to the movement’s success is its tactics. It becomes evident from the event catalogue that the movement has a wide range of tactics in its repertoire. There was a 62-day march, a plebiscite, numerous occupations (of land and railways), raids and the destruction of seeds and saplings, email and letter campaigns, a collective day of action (national fast day), the publication of a manifesto, and ordinary street demonstrations. Although the wide range of tactics might already contribute to the movement’s success, I want to emphasize one tactic that stands out. That is, its mass-direct action approach (e.g. in the form of occupations and raids), which I believe contributes considerably to the movement’s success. The movement identifies unproductive land and simply takes it. Through its history, the movement has gained land for 350,000 families precisely through employing this type of action. The event catalogue shows 11 events (out of 19) in which the MST used direct-action. William A. Gamson asserts that violence (“deliberate physical injury to property or persons”) appears to marginally benefit social movements, and terms it the “success of the unruly” (Gamson, 1997:357). The MST usually does not use violence against people, but it does deliberately injure property (to use Gamson’s words). Two events on October 16, one on October 21, two on December 10, and two events on March 7, illustrate this. The MST uses violence against property: takes over land, squats on it, and engages in active resistance. I believe that all of these actions can be classified as “unruly”. Therefore, I think that Gamson’s claim about the ““success of the unruly” applies to the MST and

that this is one reason why the movement is and has been so successful.

CONSTRAINTS

The MST faced numerous constraints in the past, as it does now. But, however big the obstacles were and still are, none has had a detrimental effect on the overall dynamic of the movement. Under Cardoso's government, in the mid-90s, the MST faced challenges in terms of acceptance. The government tried to impose various conditions on the MST. One of them was the denial of negotiations unless the land occupations completely stopped. Only then would the government listen to MST's demands. But the movement increased and intensified the occupations (Martins, 2000). The government continued its effort to intimidate the movement. Two massacres took place, one at Corumbia in 1995 and the other in Eldorado dos Carajás in 1996 (Martins, 2000; Wolford and Wright; 2004). Indeed, in the period from 1988 until 2001, 1517 rural workers lost their lives due to attacks from military police or landowners' private militias, according to the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) (Mark, 2001). Furthermore, the Cardoso government tried to denounce the movement by accusing them of growing marijuana, calling their occupations "illegal", even making changes to the legal apparatus, and framing them as "backwards" and as "standing in the way of modernization". There were attempts of co-optation and isolation. But despite all of that, the movement grew tremendously in size and influence (Martins, 2000) in 1996 (Martins, 2000; Wolford and Wright; 2004). As noted, between 1988 and 2001, 1517 rural workers lost their lives over the

fight for land (Mark, 2001). As the event on October 21 shows, activists still risk their lives. The killing of MST activist Valmir Mota de Oliveira certainly was a drawback.

Another constraint is closely linked to one of MST's biggest successes, namely the provision of social services. The MST provides its members with services the government cannot or does not want to supply, such as health care, schooling, etc. However, this provision of services not the movement's primary objective, and is certainly a drain on its resources. What it does best is help people to obtain land; taking on major responsibilities like the provision of social services could change the movement. How much this dilution of effort and resources might restrain the movement and how much it could take away from its dynamism has yet to be seen. The movement also experiences problems with pattern maintenance. It is hard for the MST to keep families active that have already acquired and settled on a piece of land.

The World Bank presents an ongoing obstacle to the MST. The World Bank tries to push for its own idea of land reform, called "The Land-Based Poverty Alleviation Project of Brazil" (WB, 2008). This project was already partly implemented in 1997 (Wolford and Wright, 2004) and basically incorporates the idea that all the land should be privatized and the constitution changed so no one has claim to "unproductive" land. The landless could apply for loans "to purchase agricultural properties from willing sellers" (WB, 2008)¹⁰.

¹⁰ Naturally, the MST has a problem with this, as the interest rates would be as high as 18 percent, the grace period only three years, and no loans available for seeds or supplies (Mark, 2001).

The eviction of the Elizabeth Teixeira encampment was certainly a major drawback for the movement, even if it responded with a blockade of the Anhanguera motorway on November 29. Some 250 families found themselves without a home, even though they were promised negotiations promised negotiations over ownership and had lived there for almost seven months. But despite all these constraints, the movement grew and continues to grow in size and influence.

PREDICTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Looking at the MST's past and current success, we can certainly make out a trend that supports the notion that the MST will also be successful in the future. The movement's history shows that it was and still is very successful in building and maintaining its alliances, as well as in maintaining its support from the vast majority of the population. This can be connected to the way the movement frames or defines itself. The movement wants to create a shared identity. It represents itself as the unified voice of the people. The manifesto on tax reform created on January 10, for example, had the title "*people's project* of tax reform" (MSTbrazil, 2007; emphasis added). The movement also uses an "injustice frame" (Gamson, cited in Tarrow, 1994:122). It tells people that their situation is unjust, that it is not a result of their own individual doing but a result of neoliberal policies (diagnosis), and that a solution can be found through collective action in the creation of a "just and fraternal" society (remedy).

As briefly mentioned before, Tilly claims that WUNC displays (i.e., participants' concerted public representation of Worthiness, Unity, Numbers, and Commitments – WUNC - on the part of themselves and/or their constituencies) change in the era of globalization (2004:107). Besides signaling worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment, they also have to display something that is recognized instantly anywhere in the world. The WUNC display is demonstrated at particular protests. But it can also be connected to the way the movement frames itself, because, in my opinion, WUNC displays are manifestations of the frame the movement uses. This means that the frames used by the MST are not only intended for the Brazilian population, but also for an international audience. Joao Pedro Stédile speaks of "common enemies" and the need to build a common ideology opposing war, neoliberalism, and imperialism (IPS, 2008). Another member of the MST said: "We are living in a very important period, not only for the Brazilian people, but for the whole of humanity" (Doc.visualab, 2004). If issues are framed in a way that can be understood or related to across borders, then cross-border alliances can easily result. Thomas Olesen points out that never in human history have the same processes affected so many people and that "this situation has facilitated the potential for constructing transnational injustice frames with a broad appeal on a world scale" (2005:55). Already, the MST has influential allies across borders, such as the network of the "Friends of the MST", NGO's (e.g. Amnesty International), and revolutionary guerrillas (such as the EZLN) (a data entry for December 29-31 exemplifies this). Furthermore,

not only do other social movements support the MST, but so do very influential institutions like the UN (MST-brazil, 2007). This can create political opportunities for the future. Considering the movement's success in the past and present, the fact that the reasons for this success have not changed, and the fact that it now applies frames that can be recognized internationally (which will most likely lead to more allies across the world), I firmly believe that the movement will also be successful in the future.

Throughout this paper I argue that the MST has been successful in the past, that it is successful now, and that it will be successful in the future. Reasons for the MST's success are its strength (achieved through use of allies), combined with its "unruliness" (expressed in its tactics) and the political opportunities it has created and seized upon. The movement has experienced several constraints and failures, but none of them severe enough to have a detrimental effect on the overall dynamic of the movement. Tarrow writes that changes in political culture brought about by social movements may be "difficult to demonstrate" but "it is hard to avoid the impression" that this relationship exists (1994:184). I dare say that, in the situation of the MST, this relationship is rather evident.

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Appendix: MST dataset

Date	Location	Target	Tactic	Result	Issue	Actors	Number
Sept 2-9	polling stations all over Brazil	CVRD (mining giant); government	week long meeting + plebiscite	3,729,538 people (94,5%) voted against private ownership of CVRD and in favor of state control	privatization; demand that government regains ownership of CVRD	MST, Unique Workers' Centre (CUT), "Cry of the Excluded" mobilizations, 200 smaller movements	1 Million
Sept-Oct (62 days)	Rio Grande do Sul	government	march	3 columns of workers marched for 62 days in the direction of Fazenda Guerra, in Coqueiros do Sul	urge expropriation of this area for Agrarian reform	MST	
Oct 16	Rio Grande do Sul, southernmost state	Votorantim and Stora Enso paper companies	raided 2 tree plantations (destroyed saplings)	20 hectares of eucalyptus tree saplings destroyed (Votorantim); cut down 40 trees on Stora Enso plantation	protest multinational agricultural firms for harming family-farming and land reform	MST	Over 100
Oct 16-17	Carajas railroad	CVRD, government	occupation and blockade of CVRD's principal train tracks	2700 train carriages stopped; 250,000 metric tons iron ore/ day stopped; promised meeting with federal authorities to discuss land reform and public work	privatization and re-nationalization; demand redistribution of profit to people	MST	Over 2600
Oct 21	Parana, nature reserve	Syngenta	occupation of experimental field of transgenic crops	one activist killed, one security guard killed, 6 protesters wounded, 3 security guards wounded	illegal production of genetically modified seeds; Syngenta urged to leave	MST, Via Campesina	150
Nov 07	Parauebas (Para), Carajas mining complex	CVRD, government	occupation of CVRD's railway	forced concession from state and federal officials, and CVRD representatives	privatization and re-nationalization	MST	6000
Nov 27	Brazil's National Petroleum Agency (ANP), Rio de Janeiro	ANP, government	occupation of ANP seat to stop bidding	bidding took place somewhere else; not stopped	privatization and re-nationalization; auction of oil blocks (exploration rights); reinstatement of state-run Petrobras;	MST, oil workers union (FUP)	
Nov 29	Ribeirao Preto	Sao Paulo State government and Federal government	blockade of motorway	315 km of the Anhanguera motorway were closed down	protest was a response to police violence used in Limeira encampment	MST	200
Dec 03	Salvador, Bahia state	government	letter campaign + email campaign	alliance built, support for bishop Luiz Cappio who resumed hunger strike	Sao Francisco River diversion	MST, Movement of Dam-Affected People (MAB), Movement of Small Farmers (MPA), Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), Pastoral Fishers Commission (CPP), local fishing communities	
Dec 10	Sao Paulo	Syngenta agribusiness	occupation	50 workers expelled, some greenhouses destroyed, production shut down	genetically modified crops; want Syngenta out	MST	hundreds
Dec 10	Ceara	Syngenta agribusiness	destruction of seeds	destruction of genetically modified corn and soy seedlings	environmental violations; genetically modified crops; want Syngenta to leave	MST, Via Campesina	
Dec 14	action nationally; issue in Bahia state	government	national vigil and fast in solidarity day - collective action	call for nationwide solidarity day by MST, Caritas Brazil, and CPT in support for bishop Luiz Cappio. Millions are expected to fast on Dec. 17	Sao Francisco River diversion: protest against government + solidarity act for bishop		230 community, religious, and fisherfolk organisations + ? (number of people across the country)
Dec 17	Brasilia, 3 Bahia cities	government	public vigil and prayer	dozens of people in Brasilia and thousands of people in 3 Bahia cities came out to pray and hold vigils in front of Congress and other government buildings.	Sao Francisco River diversion	230 community, religious, and fisherfolk organisations (incl. MST, MAB, MPA, CPT, CPP, Catholic Church, Caritas Brazil, and many more)	dozens in Brasilia, thousands in Bahia
Dec 29-31	La Garrucha, Chiapas	everybody? Larger society, patriarchal power structure	international all-women's meeting	MST women and hundreds of international feminists came together to an all-women "encuentro" hosted by the EZLN	status of women in larger society and social movements; anti-neoliberal globalization	EZLN, MST, Via Campesina Senegal, militant women from Italy, other feminists from various organizations	Mexican women + 300-500 non Mexican

Jan 10		government	written manifesto + call for people to participate in a "people's project of tax reform"	108 leaders and representatives drew up and signed a manifesto for fair tax reform directed at the government and the Brazilian people.	Tax reform and reformation of economic policy	leaders of people's movements, social movements, intellectuals, and clergy (as diverse as MST, CPT, media representatives, professors, economists, CUT president, journalists union, assessor of Caritas, presidents of national student unions, coordinator via campesina Brazil, member of military police....)	108 people (representing whole movements and organizations) drew it up and signed it
Jan 16		Syngenta	letter campaign + email campaign	letters directed at U.S. National Headquarters of Syngenta + the Swiss Embassy in Washington D.C.	put pressure on Syngenta to disband armed militias (response to Oct 21 incident) + to ensure punishment of security guards	MST	
March 7	Rio Grande do Sul	Stora Enso, paper company	invasion and occupation	invasion of factory and blockade of 8 major roads	police violence (summoned by Stora Enso) that took place a day earlier + Stora Enso's planting of trees on illegal land (bad for ecosystem)	MST	900
March 7	Sao Paulo	Monsanto	occupation of Monsanto research site	women occupied research site of agricultural biotechnology giant Monsanto, destruction of crops	governments decision to legalize Monsanto's GM Guardian® corn	MST and Via Campesina	dozens
March 7	several Brazilian cities	Syngenta	demonstrations	people went to the streets and protested	ongoing impunity for murder of MST activist	MST	