



The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra, MST (Brazil)

Joint Award with CPT (1991)



MST demonstration

"...for winning land for landless families and helping them to farm it sustainably."

Brazil has the most inequitable distribution of land ownership in the world. Two per cent of its landowners hold 60 per cent of its arable land. Some 90 million people, two-thirds of the population, are landless peasants or slum dwellers excluded from land by this concentration of ownership. Their conditions of life are among the worst in the world: high infant mortality, millions of destitute street children in the cities and, in the countryside, situations sometimes akin to slavery, where workers may be watched over by the landlord's hired gunmen.

Those who seek to organise to challenge this situation risk everything, including torture and death. Beatings, death threats and intimidation are commonplace. Yet despite scores of farmers, priests, social workers and Indians killed every year, only a handful of murder cases have ever come to trial.

From 1979 local groups began to be formed through the struggles in the countryside and in 1985 they founded the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, the Movement of Landless Peasants (MST). It was formed as a mass movement inside the trade union movement with the aim of struggling for land for its members. The formation of MST was encouraged and assisted by the Comissão Pastoral da Terra, CPT (also a 1991 Right Livelihood Award recipient).

MST's slogan is 'Occupy, Resist, Produce'. It organises occupations by landless peasants of unproductive land, on the basis of which it negotiates with the state or federal authorities to transfer that land to the peasants. MST then supports the farmers in forming agricultural cooperatives to produce effectively in competition with the big estates.

MST is organised in 23 Brazilian states, but not in Amazonia because it opposes colonisation of the forest. Its political demands include: legalisation of past land occupations and demarcation of Indian lands; maximum farm size of 500 hectares; expropriation of land belonging to multinational companies and of land obtained illegally; an end to colonisation policy; appropriate agricultural policies for small farmers; environmental conservation and regeneration, and punishment of the murderers of rural workers involved in land conflicts.

Quotation

"Land reform is the solution for the economic, social, environmental and political problems of our country. We fight in the ways we can, but land reform will not be brought about solely by Brazilian

workers and Brazilian society. Land reform in Brazil also depends on international solidarity."

Fatima Ribeiro

RIGHT LIVELIHOOD
AWARD FOUNDATION

