

Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

The MST's 'Long March'

President Cardoso and the NGOs bear the political blame for the tragic clash of "Landless" peasants and military police.

On April 17, a bloody confrontation between an enormous contingent of peasants led by the Landless Movement (MST) and the Military Police in the town of El Dorado de Carajas, in the Amazon state of Para, resulted in the tragic death of 20 peasants. As *EIR* warned in the *Special Report* of Nov. 10, 1995 entitled "New Terror International Targets the Americas," the government of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, through his inner circle, was fomenting the MST's actions, and a climate of violence and unrest was being created throughout Brazil.

At the end of January, the national MST leadership held its eighth national conference, to map out a strategy for 1996, calling for stepped-up land invasions in multiple locations throughout the country, as a low-intensity irregular war. This action program has proceeded apace, as seen in Para and other major land invasions this year.

Chief among the tactics agreed upon were: to continue large-scale land invasions, maintaining intransigence against negotiations, and incorporating the growing mass of urban jobless into the movement. This is why the land invasions in the interior of various states, are now culminating with "Grand Marches" on the state capitals.

In the case of El Dorado de Carajas, the ranch owned by the state of Para was invaded by some 3,000 people. The decree of expropriation and distribution of the land was already ready, but its execution was delayed, so the national MST leadership decided to march on Belen, the state capi-

tal (ruled by a crony of President Cardoso), blocking the highway. That is where the bloody showdown took place.

Even though the January meeting coincided with one of the MST's violent actions, the planned offensive was unconditionally supported by the Workers Party (PT). PT Chairman José Dirceu, on hand for the meeting, proposed joint action by leftist parties "against a very strong adversary. The unity of the left is fundamental, and the MST, in this sense, is an example in the Brazilian left."

Since 1995, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso has encouraged the Landless at the expense of the genuine demands of farmers who are being bankrupted by a policy of very low prices for rural products. During the huge march of farmers on Brasilia in July 1995, the President refused to meet with their leaders—then met with the MST leaders, who were demanding the bankrupt farmers' land. The President could not have given a clearer green light to the MST's course of confrontation.

Moreover, thanks to the policy of wiping out agriculture, the monetary stabilization plan is swelling the MST's ranks with many of the 100,000 bankrupted small farmers who lost their land, and the hundreds of thousands of peasants who lost their jobs when farms were idled. "There was a strong adherence to the movement by a part of the unemployed. Jobs today are being created in the same number as in previous governments. But there are a lot more people now, multitudes. . . . The economic crisis broadened the movement," MST

economist João Pedro Stedile admitted to *Gazeta Mercantil*.

Other figures show that in the last two years, more than 500,000 rural workers lost their jobs in the south of Brazil and in São Paulo.

Contrary to President Cardoso's kid-glove handling of the MST, high-ranking officers of the Armed Forces are warning of the true nature of the problem. In a commentary published April 20, Gen. Benedito Onofre Bezerra Leonel, chief of general staff of the Armed Forces, commented, "There are two visions of the conflict—one political and one military. I only answer for the military one. The Landless Movement is a low-intensity conflict."

Just like the narco-guerrilla warfare of the Zapatistas in Mexico, MST irregular warfare in Brazil enjoys the support of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) deployed by the British oligarchy. Right after the Para clash, operatives of Amnesty International, Americas Watch, and Anti-Slavery International, the oldest "human rights" outfit, founded by the aristocratic Buxton family of England, poured into the region to back the MST's list of demands, which goes beyond rural issues, to urge demilitarization and surrender of national sovereignty, as in the case of the Yanomami Reservation! The demands are focused in such a way as to twist the juridical basis for actions by the military police, so that they would henceforth be tried by civilian courts.

These NGOs are acting under the protection of the secretary general of the Justice Ministry, José Gregori, a Cardoso crony who was commissioned to oversee the investigation into the peasants' deaths. Independently of the criminal responsibility ultimately established for the massacre, political culpability unquestionably lies with the Presidency.