

Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

Landless Movement scores a victory

Waving the "bloody shirt" from recent clashes with police, the MST is drawing support from the international NGOs.

The violence at Brazil's El Dorado de Carajas on April 17, in which the pro-terrorist Landless Movement (MST) provoked a confrontation with police that led to the death of 19 peasants, delivered a strategic victory to the MST, an organization that is active in the orbit of the Castro-spawned São Paulo Forum. The MST-provoked massacre represented a crucial advance in the organization's "Long March," launched in January of this year under the inspiration of Mao Zedong's military policies, which has already prompted at least nine more land invasions under MST direction.

The strengthened MST has succeeded in imposing a number of its demands on the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government, including placing its sympathizers in key government posts and winning government-decreed expropriations of some occupied lands. And, through the efforts of dozens of UN-linked non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the MST has managed to portray itself abroad as legitimate fighters for justice in Brazil, just as the Zapatista terrorists in Mexico have done.

In fact, the pro-MST lobby has grown so powerful that, according to Brazilian press reports of a meeting between Pope John Paul II and several Brazilian cabinet ministers, His Holiness asked: "How are things in Brazil? Every bishop who comes to Rome always talks to me about the landless."

In response to MST demands, the Cardoso government has taken steps to accelerate its so-called agrarian reform, including the creation of a Special Minister of Agrarian Reform, which was given to neo-Communist

Raul Jungman. In an earlier crisis created by the PST, Cardoso handed the leadership of the National Institute of Settlements and Agrarian Reform over to Francisco Graziano, an MST founder.

Jungman inaugurated his post by announcing that he would meet the MST's demand to negotiate a deal, whereby the Banco do Brasil would foreclose on land held by debtors unable to keep up payments on their debts. Jungman also announced the expropriation of lands belonging to the Army, representing some 6.2 million hectares in the Amazon, and of other large landholdings which have been invaded by MST hordes in the states of Minas Gerais and Para.

An alarm over the potential for widespread violence in the countryside was sounded by Antonio de Salvo, president of the National Agricultural Federation. "Logically, violence is going to grow. If we are stripped of our right to turn to the courts, all that will be left for us is the right to use force," he stated, in reference to the latest expropriation decrees.

During a recent trip to the state of Rio Grande do Sul, this correspondent had the opportunity to visit the town of Cruz Alta, where the MST was born nearly 20 years ago. It became evident that the objectives of the MST's political leadership have nothing to do with the economic justice they supposedly seek for the Brazilian peasantry. Rather, the MST is an instrument of destruction aimed at the sovereign nation-state.

Cruz Alta is a political powder keg. While rich in food production,

with highly productive land and an average property size that does not exceed 150 hectares, it has been ravaged by the free market economic policies of Cardoso's so-called Real Plan, in particular the sky-high interest rates. According to growers in the area, the next harvest will be very low and lead to corn shortages for at least two months. An image has become popular in the region to describe the period from 1994, the beginning of the Real Plan, when the financial burden on producers began to intensify, to the present time, in which production of basic grains and parity prices are collapsing: It is called "the open mouth of the crocodile."

Last August, farmers from the area organized a "march of the tractors" to the capital city of Brasilia, to protest against the government's usurious policies. The MST, however, has also tried to feed on this discontent, by organizing people for land seizures and adopting overtly terrorist tactics. We also received well-documented reports that the MST is being advised and trained by the Peruvian narco-terrorist group Shining Path, especially with regard to the security systems the MST puts in place in occupied territory.

The MST has received strong support from the international NGOs, which see in its actions over both ecological issues and peasant struggles, the opportunity to boost their campaign in favor of limited sovereignty and one-worldism. Military sources report that the MST's true objective is to create "islands of self-government" within Brazilian territory, on the model of the "liberated zones" sought by Colombia's narco-guerrilla army.

Encouraging this scenario is Danielle Mitterrand, widow of the late French President François Mitterrand, who recently visited Brazil after having met in Mexico with the leadership of the Zapatistas.