

Landless Movement Is Out To 'FARC' Brazil

by Silvia Palacios

When the unofficial "ambassador" to Brazil of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), former Jesuit priest Francisco Antonino Cadenas Collazos (a.k.a. Oliverio Medina), went to renew his visa on Sept. 21, instead of filling out paperwork, he found himself behind bars. Brazil's Federal Police arrested him, on court-ordered grounds that he was a "threat to national security." He remains jailed, pending deportation to Colombia, where he is wanted for 61 crimes, including homicides and kidnappings.

For two years, no one had bothered Cadenas as he travelled throughout Brazil, giving speeches, organizing on campuses, and lobbying the government of Brazil to grant the FARC, the largest narco-terrorist force in South America, belligerent status (that is, diplomatic recognition). The FARC's "ambassador" had not limited himself to pressing the FARC's diplomatic agenda. Cadenas spent much of his time moving between the city of São Paulo and the western towns of the state of Paraná, where Brazil's Landless Movement (MST) has built its southern stronghold, and where Cadenas maintained close ties with the MST's militants.

The collaboration between Brazil's MST and Colombia's FARC is extensive, and one of the most dangerous threats to hemispheric security. While international attention focusses on Colombia, the fact that the largest country in South America by far, Brazil, will soon face a similar situation, goes ignored. Someone in Brazil, however, apparently wised up.

Feeding Off Rot

During the course of this year, the MST of Brazil has carried out increasingly violent acts, which have turned it into the vanguard of a Jacobin-style mass movement, with a leadership well trained in irregular warfare, which, at any moment, could cross the line from "legally constituted" to open insurgency, along the lines of its Colombian FARC allies.

The MST leadership is deploying its forces with precision, in a unique period of international crisis, comparable to that which made possible the seizure of power by Lenin in Russia. "In our opinion, there is a crisis of the international agreements, a crisis among the elites. All government institutions are demoralized. Who has confidence in the United

Nations? Does anyone have confidence in the International Monetary Fund? In the World Trade Organization? No one. The traditional organizations of the left and the world labor organizations are also in crisis." This evaluation was expressed by top MST leader João Pedro Stedile, in a revealing June 2000 interview published in the magazine *Caros Amigos*.

The MST is tailoring its actions to capitalize on the vacuum of power created by the ever-increasing weakness of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's government. The government's stubborn commitment to dismantling the productive capacities of this potential South American agro-industrial giant, has led to a collapse in infrastructure, productive employment, and food production, which in turn has driven a mass of hungry, unemployed people, condemned to live in slums, into a state of desperation that stirs the cauldron of social unrest. That, even as the government drowns under successive corruption scandals which have even begun to seriously worry spokesmen of the Anglo-American establishment. In its September issue, the influential military paper, *Ombro a Ombro*, characterized the state of rot, by quoting from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: "What's the newest grief?/That of an hour's age doth hiss the speaker;/Each minute teems a new one."

In this state of affairs, the MST is in a privileged position to negotiate increasingly advantageous concessions from the government, concessions granted willingly, in any case. In the *Caros Amigos* interview, Stedile boasted: "Before the Fernando Henrique government, the average number of [land] occupations we carried out in a year was about 100. Since the Fernando Henrique government, the average is 400-500. The greatest promoter of the MST is the government. When it departs, we are going to award it a medal." Leaving no doubt of President Cardoso's empathy for the MST, Stedile continued: "In meeting with us, in all fairness, Fernando Henrique never said, 'Stop the land occupations.' He never had the courage to say that. The only thing he asked of us was: Stop speaking badly of my government abroad, because it is not a question of me, but of Brazil's image abroad."

Phase Change Toward Revolution

The conclusions of the Fourth National Congress of the MST, held Aug. 10 in Brasilia, are unequivocal as to the intent to unleash a civil war in the countryside. After an inflammatory speech by one of its leaders, Jair Amorin, declaring it "necessary to transform everyone without land, without a roof, into a soldier of the revolution," the Congress approved a resolution calling for the invasion of all properties larger than 700 hectares, in the south of the country. This incendiary proposal received the immediate support of the Secretary of Agriculture of Rio Grande do Sul, Jose Hermetto Hoffman, who was present at the MST Congress. Together with the state's governor, Olivio Dutra, a leader

of the Workers Party (PT), Hoffman keeps the agricultural producers of this strategic state in check. The state's government is known for its close links to Cuban intelligence services, maintained through Fidel Castro's São Paulo Forum.

The Congress was attended by 11,000 participants from throughout the country, plus 45 foreign representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from 23 countries of Europe, the Americas, and Africa. "It was a surprise to see so many people organized and committed to a popular cause," gushed Joana Walker, a British member of Christian Aid, the philanthropic organization of the Anglican Church, which has backed the MST since its birth and which is the principal liaison between the MST and the European nobility, and especially with the House of Windsor and its instruments of colonial domination.

The Congress merely formalized the phase change which the MST began to make public in May of this year, when one of its leaders declared during one of its large national mobilizations, that their objective was to seize power, and that "agrarian reform" was but a means to negotiate concessions. In a May 21 interview in *Jornal do Brasil*, Stedile stated, "Our plan, from now on, is to join with other movements. If the government does not respond, there will certainly be many more mobilizations and they will become increasingly radical."

This is the conception driving the successive waves of MST actions, whose terrorist nature is becoming increasingly evident, and which are described by MST ideologues as the "accumulation of forces for changing the structure of power in the country." The first big simultaneous invasions of land and public buildings, highway blockades, and marches occurred in April, around the Commemoration of the 500 Years of the Discovery of Brazil, which the MST, preferring tribalism, denounced as centuries of "domination." On that occasion, the Secretary of Security of Belen (in the MST-plagued state of Para) said that a paramilitary "Cabanos Brigade" was operating with the MST. The Brigade was activated following the so-called Second Meeting for Humanity and against Liberalism, held in Para last December, organized by the São Paulo Forum. The mineral-rich state of Para, where the vast Carajas project is located, is, together with Rio Grande do Sul, one of two areas targeted by the MST for strategic intervention.

A second round of MST mobilizations took place in July, following the same pattern as the first. In Recife, the demonstrators seized the port, and a boat filled with genetically modified corn was attacked with stones and Molotov cocktails. Asked if the MST were becoming a guerrilla force, MST leader Gilmar Mauro told the *Jornal do Brasil* of Aug. 14: "We stimulate the mass struggle. The decision to become guerrillas or not, is not currently on the horizon. It is useless to have 10,000 rifles, if the masses are not organized."

His response is not surprising, in light of the MST's links

to the Colombian FARC narco-guerrillas. The armed confrontations between the MST and the police, Army, and private security forces of the ranches they have occupied, could drag Brazil into an armed conflict like the one that is ravaging Colombia. "Open your eyes to this. That's how it began here," FARC commander Ivan Rios advised, in an interview with the Brazilian newspaper *Jornal da Tarde* of May 24, from the town of Los Pozos, in the FARC's "demilitarized zone." Rios admitted that his organization maintains relations in Brazil with the MST and with the Workers Party, co-founders with the Cuban Communist Party of the São Paulo Forum. The MST also maintains a link to Colombia through Via Campesina, an enormous NGO created in Belgium in 1983, which joins peasant organizations from various countries around the world. In September, Via Campesina sent an "observer mission" to Colombia, in which a representative of the MST was included, and which gave support to the FARC in its opposition to the so-called "Plan Colombia."

Urban Arm in Action

The MST is also moving rapidly to extend its influence into the big cities, especially the most violent ones, such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, using as its vehicle the Center of Popular Movements (CMP), whose head is the demonic Liberation Theology ideologue Fray Betto, the *éminence grise* of the MST and political son of Fidel Castro. Since its creation in 1993, the CMP has pulled together all the "have-nots" being created in the wake of globalization. In April of this year—coinciding with the public turn of the MST—the CMP held a conference in Belo Horizonte, which was attended by that goddess of terrorism, Danielle Mitterrand, the former French First Lady, and an apologist for the MST and Mexico's Zapatistas.

In July, the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST), a CMP affiliate, carried out two well-conceived propagandistic actions in Rio de Janeiro: first, an "orderly" invasion of a large shopping center, and then, of a supermarket. They achieved their effect, since the city is already terrorized by the drug traffickers who dominate the vast slums of the city. Both the MST and the MTST support the People's Struggle Front, which organized a protest on Aug. 29 against "police violence" in the slums. The main leaders of the Front come out of NGOs linked to evangelical sects, and one of them issued a provocative call to the drug traffickers to join their mobilization, because they are "also part of the community."

Not coincidentally, the state police reports that one of the most infamous drug traffickers from São Paulo's slums, is currently a fugitive, hiding out in Colombia under the protection of the FARC.

Thus, especially in Rio de Janeiro and in São Paulo, the elements of a narco-terrorist movement in the cities is beginning to combine with a terrorist insurgency in the countryside, presaging bloody warfare on the Colombia model.