

Xico Graziano: Reinventing the Agrarian Reform

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Executive Summary

Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (MST) no longer regards the government as its enemy but – as ever – the big landowners. Following this logic, it recently occupied two small farms in Taubaté. Words and deeds do not match.

There are terms that brand itself on the memory. Latifundium is one of them. In Brazil, a *latifundio* is a large, unproductive landed estate which stands for backwardness and *coronelismo* and is ruled autocratically by an agrarian oligarchy.

In the sixties, parcelling up such estates was the best formula against underdevelopment. 'Land for exploitation' developed into 'land for production', and the oligarchy of the big landowners became the new enemy. Today's agriculture, however, is modernised. The challenge of the future is employment, not land ownership.

Why does the MST occupy small farms in São Paulo instead of huge landed estates, the enemies of humankind, as they did before? The answer is: There are no more latifundia. Along with modernised agriculture, they have turned into agricultural enterprises that are both large and productive and have helped give the country a balance of trade with an enormous surplus.

The pressure of the MST ignores the change the latifundia have experienced. The National Institute of Colonisation and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), however, is still searching for estates to expropriate. Classifying highly productive cattle farms as unproductive on the basis of legal loopholes, it produces latifundia on paper.

Brazil has changed; production rules, leaving unemployment the source of all evil. Lula's election might prompt the people to recognise that the agrarian reform has been overtaken by history. To be sure, it was justified in the past, but today it would have to be reinvented.