



CLIMATE VANGUARD

The MST

Movimento
dos Trabalhadores
Rurais

RECLAIMING
COMMUNES PT. 5/6

Sem Terra





CLIMATE VANGUARD



Though not a conventional commune, the MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra) is one of the most enduring examples of **working class self-organisation and communal production** in recent history.

Image: MST.



Background

Between 1964 and 1985, Brazil's military dictatorship entrenched export-oriented monoculture production and large-scale land ownership, which dispossessed and displaced millions of farmers.

This triggered a wave of peasant occupations of large estates from 1979 onwards. The MST emerged from this process through a meeting of 92 peasant leaders in the southern state of Paraná in 1984.



In its early years, the MST focused primarily on its strategy of *acampamentos* and *assentamentos**, as well as mass public demonstrations which raised the movement's profile and rapidly expanded its membership.

**Acampamentos* (encampments) are organised land occupations.



**Acampamentos* become *assentamentos* (settlements) after land rights were legally granted to the families.

This approach successfully forced land redistribution from large landholders to peasants. These expropriations were made possible by Article 184 of the 1988 Brazilian Constitution, which requires rural property to fulfil a social function, be productive, and respect labour and environmental rights.



Popular Agrarian Reform

More recently, the MST has used reclaimed land to **transform the entire model of food production from agribusiness to agroecology.***



*Agroecology is a transformative model for agricultural production that combines ecological science and indigenous knowledge for sustainable crop production. Agroecology emphasises food sovereignty, the self-determination of food, and agricultural systems.

With a **focus on ecological restoration and the production of healthy and affordable food**, the MST has been able to expand its base, reaching urban workers for whom the cost of living and healthy food are major concerns.

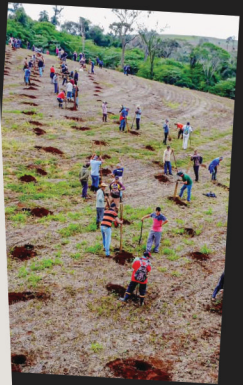
Today, the MST is a national movement operating in 24 of Brazil's 26 states.



“Communitary Socialism”

This model of “communitary socialism” has generated considerable benefits for the Brazilian working class:

- 450,000 families have gained legal tenure of their land
- 1,900 peasants associations have been formed
- 185 cooperatives organise everything from local agricultural production to regional service provision
- 120 MST-owned agro-industrial sites are operational
- 2,000 public schools in acampamentos throughout Brazil established



Key to this success has been a strategic orientation that ensures acampamentos and assentamentos avoid becoming localised microcosms →



Coordinating Productive Capacity

To carry out the strategy of popular agrarian reform, the MST has adopted a union-like structure. Members are organised into teams which carry out the daily tasks involved in running the *acampamentos* and *assentamentos*.

As issues and needs become more complex, these teams are incorporated into sectors at the national and regional levels, which coordinate activity across production, education, and “the mass front”, responsible for organising protests and occupations.



Challenging the State

The MST has been subject to more parliamentary criminalisation attempts than any other organisation in Brazilian history. This repression has been led by the 'Ruralista Caucus', which represents the interests of agribusiness and large landowners, controlling 61% of Congress and 35% of the Senate.

The MST has used its popular power to engage the state as a key terrain of struggle. It was a key force in freeing Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva from his 580 day imprisonment in 2019 and securing his presidential election in 2022. The MST has also successfully contested elections, winning a record eight seats in the legislature in 2026.



Internationalism

Communes, in service of national self-determination, are a form of anti-imperialist struggle. The MST not only fulfils this function in Brazil, it also maintains international solidarity brigades across Latin America and Africa, with a strong presence in Venezuela and Cuba.

Members of the MST brigades carry out political and agroecology education. For example, the Ghassan Kanafani Brigade aids in the harvesting of olives in Palestine. During the Covid-19 pandemic, MST brigades also played a major role in securing access to healthy food for the poor and working class within Brazil and abroad.



Looking Ahead

Amidst a rapidly changing political landscape in Brazil, the MST plans to struggle along three political fronts: land, food, and representation in political institutions.

Buoyed by Lula's victory in the 2026 presidential election, the MST model for "communitary socialism" will continue to grow as a vehicle for working class power in the coming years.