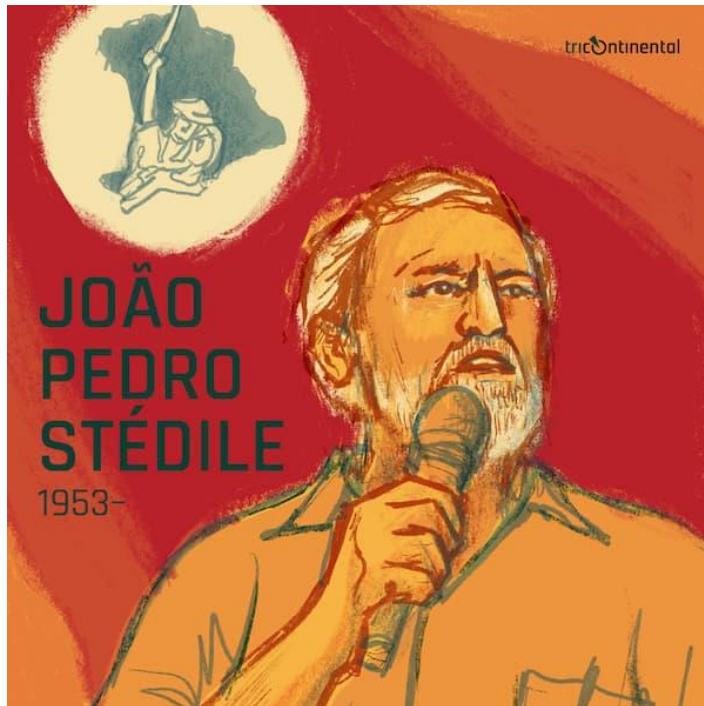


## Interview with João Pedro Stédile by Vijay Prashad

João Pedro Stédile is a member of the national leadership of the MST. I spoke to him this week about how Brazil is dealing with the CoronaShock, and about the imperative of agrarian reform.



*What is your quick assessment of why the Brazilian ruling class refuses to address the fact of land hunger in the country?*

Brazil is the country with the highest concentration of land in the world. This is rooted in our colonial past; for 400 years, land was owned by the monarchy, who relied on the labour of slaves, indigenous peoples, and Africans. Our dominant class is essentially still based on slavery today; it considers workers to be merely objects to be exploited.

We missed the opportunity to enact agrarian reform when slavery was abolished in 1888, as occurred in other countries such as the

United States, Haiti, and other countries in Latin America. Then we missed the opportunity again when we entered into industrial capitalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and did not build a market for domestic consumption. We again missed the opportunity in the 1960s, when even the Kennedy administration in the United States – scared by the Cuban Revolution – defended agrarian reform as a way to contain the advance of revolutions on the continent.

In Brazil, economic power and the dominant class are made up of large landowners, industrial capital, banks, and transnational agricultural corporations, all of which merge and act together; these actors prefer a model that concentrates agribusiness over one that enables agrarian reform.

*Is Brazil ready for a new historic project against the impasse of neo-fascism? Will Bolsonaro's decadent response to Corona make a dent in neo-fascism?*

Brazilian society is immersed in its biggest crisis in history. We have been in the throes of a deep economic crisis since 2014, which generated a social crisis rife with unemployment, precarization, and a greater dependence on finance capital, which then developed into a political crisis with the coup against Dilma, followed by the election of a neofascist government.

The outbreak of the coronavirus has deepened this crisis in every way, which has been made worse from a social perspective, since – as we have seen in other countries – the only way that we can confront the virus is with a strong government, with people's organisations and leadership at the forefront.

The neofascist government is the complete opposite of this, representing a mere 8% of fanatic followers, neofascists, Pentecostals, and a lumpen bourgeoisie. I believe that the coronavirus is going to help us lift the awareness of the people and divide the bourgeoisie and the middle class and that – when we return to the streets – we will overthrow the fascist government.

The neofascist government is demoralized. It has been left with merely following the ideology of the Trump administration; they are both on the same sinking ship. The United States Empire will also be defeated by this crisis.

*What will make the non-rural population accept the imperative of agrarian reform?*

The economic, social, political, and coronavirus crisis are helping us show the general population – 85% of whom live in cities – that we need to organise a new anti-neoliberal, anti-imperialist economic model. We hope that we can build new paradigms of social organisation.

One of these paradigms is that – to ensure the health of the entire population – we need to have healthy food. Only small farmers and peasants can produce healthy food; agribusiness doesn't produce health food – it produces commodities and is exclusively interested in profits. This is anti-social.

In the near future, we will have better conditions to explain to the people that new agrarian reform will not only redistribute large landed estates give work to the peasants. This new type of agrarian

reform is based on new paradigms: producing healthy food for all based on an agroecological model that is in harmony with nature and that protects water and fights against inequalities and environmental crises such as climate change. This new agrarian reform will also produce food using agroindustry and scientific knowledge to support our food sovereignty. In other words, each region or territory will produce its own food, avoiding dependence upon international trade with transnational corporations. We will carry out international trade of food only with the surplus that is produced after ensuring that all of our people are fed. We will value local cuisine and the culture of our people. We will guarantee access to education for the entire population, including in the countryside. This popular agrarian reform will benefit not only the peasantry but the entire population – much of which is already living in cities.



Sebastião Salgado, *The struggle for land: the march of a human column*, 1997.

Such is the agenda that looks ahead and does not marinate human anxiety in hatred.

Of such a vision of the world, the MST leader and poet Ademar Bogo offers us this lovely poem, *It Is Time to Harvest*:

*There are moments in history  
in which all victories  
seem to slip away from us.  
But it is those who do not get discouraged who win  
and seek in their self-worth  
the strength to be persistent.*

*Time passes slowly, but with it passes  
the glory of the emperor.*

*Those who have hands to build  
will have to get up and decide on  
the day that they will bury the pain*

*and rise from everywhere  
to say that it is time to harvest  
everything that was planted.*

*People are like the water from the sea:  
even as it moves slowly,  
it shows through its swaying  
that it can never be bent.*

*We watered the desert of conscience  
and a new being was born;  
it is time to go ahead comrade;  
you are the fighter that history has given us.*

**Source:**

“Without a Country in Which to Live, a Field to Plant, a Love to Cherish or a Voice to Sing, One is Dead”: The Sixteenth Newsletter (2020), APRIL 16, 2020.

[https://www.thetricontinental.org/newsletterissue/16-2020-land-hunger/?utm\\_source=Tricontinental+subscribers+single+list&utm\\_campaign=d9d3dec756-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2020\\_04\\_15\\_06\\_53&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_bb06a786c7-d9d3dec756-190642745](https://www.thetricontinental.org/newsletterissue/16-2020-land-hunger/?utm_source=Tricontinental+subscribers+single+list&utm_campaign=d9d3dec756-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_04_15_06_53&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_bb06a786c7-d9d3dec756-190642745)