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Education of the countryside at a crossroads: rural social movements and national policy reform in Brazil

Rebecca Tarlau

This contribution explores the strategies used by popular movements seeking to advance social reforms, and the challenges once they succeed. It analyzes how a strategic alliance between the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST) and the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG) transformed the Ministry of Education's official approach to rural schooling. This success illustrates the critical role of international allies, political openings, framing, coalitions and state–society alliances in national policy reforms. The paper also shows that once movements succeed in advancing social reforms, bureaucratic tendencies such as internal hierarchy, rapid expansion and 'best practices' – in addition to the constant threat of cooptation – can prevent their implementation.

Keywords: education of the countryside; MST; CONTAG; state-society interactions; national advocacy

Introduction

From 10 to 14 February 2014, the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement (MST) held its VI National Congress in the capital of Brasília, with 15,000 peasant-activists participating. On Wednesday 12 February 2014, 500 children – the *sem terrinha*, or sons and daughters of the families living in MST settlements and camps across the country – rode in buses to the Ministry of Education (MEC). Several MST activists who had been waiting by the Ministry jumped in front of the doors as the first bus arrived, allowing dozens of children to run into the front lobby before the guards tried to shut the doors. Hundreds more children soon followed. The message of this protest was clearly written on banners the children were holding: '37 thousand schools closed in the countryside'. 'Closing a school is a crime!' 'Sem Terrinha against the closing and for the opening of schools in the countryside!' Meanwhile, inside the MEC, the recently appointed head of the 'Education of the Countryside' office – a long-time ally of the MST – tried to convince the Minister of Education to meet with the children.¹ Eventually, after three hours of occupation and protest, the Minister came downstairs to address the children, promising them that the federal government was committed to providing quality education in the countryside.²

How do popular movements advance social reforms? And, in what ways do state actors, social movements and the goals themselves transform through this process of national

¹Informal conversation with Edson Anhaia, 12 February 2014.

²This vignette comes from participant observation in this protest.

advocacy? In this contribution, I analyze how MST activists engaged in a national campaign that transformed the federal government's 'official' approach to rural schooling. I first explore the strategies that MST activists utilized to advocate for these educational reforms, which included developing a network of powerful allies, taking advantage of political opportunities created by previous social mobilizations, strategically framing their struggle to build a broad coalition and developing alliances across the state–society divide. I analyze the tensions inherent in this process of national coalition building, and how social movements transform each other through united struggle. Then, I outline the administrative and bureaucratic barriers activists face implementing social reforms in practice, within the context of a changing political economy. Finally, I reflect on the dangers of 'cooptation', or, in other words, attempts by powerful actors to take on the language of successful policy reforms to promote their own goals.

Background: the educational initiatives of the MST

By the early 1990s, the MST was already deeply embedded in the sphere of public education. Activists were collaborating with municipal governments to improve educational practices, helping to train teachers to work in schools on MST settlements and camps, publishing texts elaborating on the movement's educational ideas and partnering with local universities to run literacy campaigns. The MST's educational approach, known as the 'pedagogy of the MST', garnered increasing recognition among left-wing groups.

While the MST's educational practices were similar to the popular educational programs that many other Latin American social movements incorporated into their political struggles (Arnové 1986; Hammond 1998), the MST was unique in its concern about public schooling. During the first half of the 1990s, MST activists won legal recognition from several municipal governments in Rio Grande do Sul to administer their own teacher-training programs. Then, in 1995, activists founded their first 'movement' school – a private secondary school independent of the public school system, that the MST could oversee with almost complete autonomy.³ Hundreds of activists received their high school degree through this educational institution. Nonetheless, despite these achievements, the reach of these initiatives only extended to the families living in MST settlements and camps. Activists had not yet discussed the implications these practices held for the entire rural public school system.

Over the next decade, the MST's educational initiatives transformed from a set of isolated practices in agrarian reform communities to a nationally recognized proposal for all rural areas, known as *Educação do Campo* (Education of the Countryside). A national coalition of grassroots movements, union federations and university professors came together to support these ideas, and actively worked with the government to implement them in practice. By 2004, *Educação do Campo* was not only nationally recognized but also become institutionalized within the Ministry of Education. In 2010, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva signed a presidential decree giving *Educação do Campo* more legal force, and, in 2012, President Dilma Rousseff announced a multi-ministry federal program that would put this presidential decree into practice. The MST still actively participated in these debates but was now only one of the dozens of groups laying claim to the meaning, content and purpose of these educational ideas. How had the MST succeeded in building a coalition that had such an impact on national educational policy?

³The Institute of Education Josué de Castro (IEJC), also informally known as ITERRA.

Social movements, social reforms and national advocacy

In a recent collection of successful national-level advocacy campaigns in the Global South, Gaventa and McGee (2010, 10) note a major contradiction: on the one hand, the literature on 'how citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) interface with national policy' does not acknowledge social movements as a critical base for advocacy; and on the other hand, 'the vast literature on social movements and collective action focuses on explaining the hows and whys of these movements themselves, but not necessarily the policy changes to which they contribute'. This lack of emphasis on national advocacy campaigns may stem from the definition of a social movement itself. McAdam (1999, 37), writing from the 'political process' approach, defines social movements as 'rational attempts by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through non-institutionalized means'. Following this definition, collective efforts to advance social interests can only be described as a social movement if they occur through non-institutional channels. This discounts the fact that many social actors engage in a range of strategies to pursue their goals, simultaneously inside and outside of the state.

In contrast to this literature, the relationship between social mobilization and state reform has long been a focus among agrarian scholars. In analyzing the success of a state-initiated food reform in Mexico, Fox (1992, 6) argues that 'Most explanations of distributive reform tend to emphasize one-way causation, relying on static distribution of power, and they rarely capture the dynamic interaction between state and society'. Fox (1992, 8) proposes an interactive approach to state–society relations, arguing that successful implementation of social reforms depends on a 'sandwich strategy' wherein reformists strategically situated within the state create opportunities for social mobilization. Borras (2001, 548) also advocates for this interactive approach in analyzing land reform initiatives in the Philippines, arguing that state-centered and society-centered approaches cannot explain 'why societal actors attempt to influence and transform state actors, but in the process are themselves transformed – and vice versa'. Similarly, in literature on the Latin American feminist movement, Alvarez (1990, 21) promotes a 'dual strategy', whereby activists engage in contentious politics while also working with policy makers and politicians.

Following these previous scholars, in this paper, I analyze the strategies MST activists utilize to promote social reforms at the federal level. I draw extensively on Gaventa and McGee's analysis of national advocacy campaigns in the Global South, and the strategies these authors highlight as critical to successful reform. Then, in addition to examining the process of policy reform, I outline the 'long chain of actions and reactions that runs from a change in or adoption of a law or policy, to the actual implementation on the ground' (Gaventa and McGee 2010, 31). An analysis of the administrative and bureaucratic barriers that social movement activists face during policy implementation, and how these groups navigate the threat of cooptation, offers important nuance to previous studies of social movements, advocacy and social reform efforts.

Focus and methods

This contribution focuses specifically on the process of policy reform in the Ministry of Education (MEC). Despite the decentralization of public education in Brazil, which devolves authority over schooling to state and municipal governments, the MEC remains one of the most important educational authorities in Brazil. First of all, the MEC is charged with developing general policies and laws for education, which municipal and

state governments are legally obligated to follow. Although the implementation of these policies does not always occur in practice, these laws can become important tools for local social actors attempting to implement reforms at the municipal and state level. Secondly, the MEC can influence municipal and state governments through conditional funding and federal–state/municipal partnerships around specific programs. Finally, the MEC also has shared authority over the provision of higher education. These three methods of influence – federal laws and policies, conditional funding and partnerships with municipal and state governments, and higher education provision – in addition to MEC’s large budget, make it a powerful agency in the educational landscape in Brazil. Therefore, the recent national campaign to implement *Educação do Campo* in the MEC merits particular attention.

Research for this essay was conducted over 17 months, between 2009 and 2011. I conducted 70 semi-structured interviews with MST activists, including both statewide leaders and local educational activists. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with 60 government officials, five activists from the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG) and 10 members of other rural social movements. Since the focus of this paper is on policy changes in the MEC, I draw extensively on 13 interviews I conducted with government officials in Brasília, and information about national-level politics I collected in interviews with MST and CONTAG activists. In addition, I coded data from the Pastoral Land Commissions (CPT) database on yearly agrarian protests to identify numbers of protests concerning education between 2002 and 2012. I also participated in several educational events organized by the federal government, and examined federal documents concerning *Educação do Campo*.

Strategies for success: from local experiments to national recognition

Powerful allies: UNESCO, UNICEF and university supporters

The MST’s investment in educational access in the countryside in the early 1990s stood in stark contrast to the Brazilian government’s historical disregard for rural schooling. In the 1990s, the rural public school system in Brazil was still in a dire state. During the two decades of military dictatorship (1964–1985), there had been heavy investment in secondary and tertiary education, levels of schooling that were seen as critical for Brazil’s economic development and urban industrialization. Primary education – which was the only level of educational access in rural areas – was largely ignored (Plank 1996, 174–75). The constitution of 1988 brought important structural reforms to the public school system, such as the devolution of schooling to states and municipalities; however, educational improvement was difficult due to the impoverished condition of local governments. Consequently, throughout the first half of the 1990s, rural education did not significantly improve (Plank 1996). Rural schools were seen as an embarrassment to a ‘modern’ Brazilian state: a system that still contained multi-grade classrooms, teachers without higher education and collapsing infrastructure.

At the same time, in the early 1990s, international organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) were becoming dominant voices in global educational debates (Samoff 1999). These organizations primarily focused on eradicating illiteracy and providing universal access to primary education in high-poverty countries. International program coordinators often criticized the priorities of national governments and tried to circumvent ‘inefficient’ bureaucracies by working directly with local communities. In this

context, UNESCO and UNICEF began to directly fund the MST's educational initiatives, simply because MST activists – in the absence of the state – were organizing the most impressive educational programs in the countryside.

The head of the educational unit of UNESCO-Brazil in 2014, Maria Rebeca Gomes, explains the funding relationship that the agency developed with the MST during this period:

The MST was the only group working in the settlements ... it is hard to work in these areas if you are not connected to the MST, these are very poor areas. The MST created the infrastructure for these programs, and the families living in the settlements already had a relationship with the MST.⁴

As this official suggests, the imperative for expanding educational access in high poverty areas led the program coordinators of several international organizations to begin establishing programs in areas of agrarian reform. Given the MST's organizational networks in these communities, it made sense to ask the movement for help in the agency's literacy campaigns. Similarly, in 1996, the University of Brasília convinced the Ministry of Education to sign a contract that would allow the MST to train 7000 literacy agents to attend to these agrarian reform areas (Carter and Carvalho 2009, 309). In 1995, the MST even received a prize in 'Education and Participation' from UNICEF for the teacher certification courses MST activists developed for rural teachers (Caldart, Pereira, and Frigotto 2012).

As Gaventa and McGee (2010, 17) argue, 'successful reform campaigns depend on careful navigation to link international pressures with differing and constantly changing local and national contexts'. The support of elite public universities, UNESCO and UNICEF was critical in legitimizing the MST's educational initiatives during the mid-1990s. Nonetheless, although these educational programs were significant, they were still isolated initiatives; it was only with a new political opening in the late 1990s that the MST was able to build a broader national coalition.

Contestation and political opening: education 'free rides' to the capital

The mid-1990s brought both violent conflict and some of the largest social mobilizations of the MST's history. On 9 August 1995, military police killed 11 landless people who occupied a rural property in the poor northwestern state of Rondônia. Less than a year later, on 17 April 1996, 19 MST activists were killed by military police in a march in the northern state of Pará. Perversely, this massacre created a political opportunity, as there was a general public dismay at these government actions that increased national sympathy for the MST and the agrarian reform struggle (Ondetti 2008). In commemoration of this latter massacre, in April of 1997, the MST organized a National March on Brasília for Agrarian Reform, with 100,000 people participating. This march succeeded in pressuring President Cardoso to make many concessions to the movement, including land reform. By the end of Cardoso's first term, 260,000 families had received access to 8 million hectares of land – almost double the amount given in the previous 10 years (Branford and Rocha 2002, 199).

It was within the context of this new political opening – caused by these previous social mobilizations – that MST educational activists began to push the movement's education

⁴Interview with Maria Rebeca Otera Gomes, 24 February 2014 (via Skype).

proposal into the national debate. According to MST activist Edgar Kolling, the movement's educational proposal gained national recognition because of its '*carona*' (slang for 'free ride') with the larger movement for agrarian reform.⁵ In July of 1997, a few months after the national march, MST educational activists organized a National Meeting of Educators in Areas of Agrarian Reform (ENERA). This meeting was encouraged and financed by UNICEF and UNESCO, in recognition of the MST's educational initiatives. The original plan was for 400 people to attend the first ENERA meeting, but in the end, over 700 people participated (Caldart, Pereira, and Frigotto 2012, 503). Out of these discussions came a proposal for a federal program that would provide educational access specifically for the children, youth and adults living in camps and settlements, known as the National Program for Education in Areas of Agrarian Reform (PRONERA).⁶ Gaventa and McGee (2010, 15) argue that 'while political opportunities create possibilities for collective action for policy change, these openings themselves may have been created by prior mobilization'. The fact that the MST's educational proposal was able to 'free ride' on the movement's larger mobilization for agrarian reform supports this assessment.

Framing and coalition building

Up until this point, all of the MST's educational initiatives, including PRONERA, were directed towards populations in 'areas of agrarian reform'. However, during the ENERA meeting in 1997, representatives from UNICEF and UNESCO encouraged MST activists to expand their educational initiatives to include other populations, such as indigenous groups, black communities and rural workers. The MST activists perceived this as a strategic opportunity to receive more financial support for their educational initiatives. They began referring to their educational proposal as *Educação do Campo* (Education of the Countryside).

The MST's new use of the term *Educação do Campo* in the late 1990s – and the quick disappearance of the phrase 'education in areas of agrarian reform' from the movement's public discourse – was a top-down and conscious process of framing (Benford and Snow 2000). The MST's choice of frame resonated with dozens of rural movements, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals who were not connected to the agrarian reform struggle. For example, a year after the first ENERA meeting in 1997, the MST hosted the first National Conference for a Basic Education of the Countryside. Participants at this conference included 19 federal and state universities, several government agencies and a dozen other rural social movements and grassroots NGOs.⁷

The 'education of the countryside' frame was also strategic because the federal government was beginning to acknowledge the extreme inequality among public schools, especially between rural and urban areas. In 1998, there was a reform in the financing of primary education, and the federal government began to guarantee a minimum level of spending per student through the National Education Fund (FUNDEF). This provided a surge in financial support for schools that could not reach this minimum (Schwartzman 2004), and increased national attention to the issue of rural education. The MST's strategy

⁵Interview, Edgar Kolling, 18 November 2010.

⁶PRONERA was put in the Ministry of Agriculture Development, and has had a very different institutional trajectory than the programs in the Ministry of Education.

⁷All of these organizations and institutions are listed in the final conference document.

to ‘frame issues carefully, adjust to changing circumstances and audiences, and draw upon a wide repertoire of strategies’ (Gaventa and McGee 2010, 29) succeeded in bringing dozens of new actors into its educational coalition.

Unstable alliances: reconciling labor-peasant tensions

Despite these advances, there was one group conspicuously absent from the National Conference for a Basic Education of the Countryside, which was preventing the coalition’s ability to move forward: the Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG). This union confederation is made up of dozens of rural federations that consist of thousands of unions representing more than 15 million rural workers.⁸ The absence of an organization representing millions of rural workers meant that convincing the federal government to support an educational policy for the entire countryside would be unlikely.

In order to understand CONTAG’s absence from this national conference in 1998 – and its decision to join the coalition for *Educação do Campo* several years later – it is necessary to trace the history of rural activism back to the years prior to the 1964 coup. During these two decades, Communist Party members and left-leaning Catholic activists were organizing rural workers through the formation of peasant leagues and rural associations. These two groups were often in competition for the allegiance of rural workers, as the Communist Party took a ‘quasi-revolutionary approach’ and the Catholic organizers ‘a moderate, but persistent and firm, demand for the extension of already codified urban workers’ rights to their rural counterparts’ (Maybury-Lewis 1994, 68). With the passage of the Rural Labor Statute in 1963, CONTAG was founded and, to the dismay of rural elites, communist activists were able to elect themselves to the leadership of the confederation (Houtzager 1998). This situation was short-lived, however, as the military coup took place on 31 March 1964.

When the military government took power, it systematically expelled communist activists from the ranks of the union movement. Simultaneously, the military government *stimulated* the growth of the rural unions in an attempt to foster national integration (Houtzager 1998). Especially important was the Fund for Assistance of the Rural Worker (FUNRURAL), which was established in 1971 to provide medical and dental services for rural populations. CONTAG experienced its biggest growth during this period, from less than 300 unions in 1963 to over 2000 in the 1980s. Almost all of these rural unions had partnerships with FUNRURAL, illustrating CONTAG’s ‘huge role in dispensing, organizing and managing the regime’s rural medical and dental services, in accord with the military government’s plan’ (Maybury-Lewis 1994, 41).

However, this is not the whole story. While most rural unions functioned as social service providers, some unionists took advantage of the limited space they had to wage a national campaign for workers’ rights. These were primarily the activists who had been organizing closely with the Catholic Church prior to the coup. In contrast to the communist party activists, who had largely been purged from their unions, these unionists

understood that excessive provocation of rural elites and the authorities, given the power relations in the countryside, would hurt them and set back their organization drive ... They learned the value of respecting the law. Indeed, the unionists became champions of the law,

⁸Maybury-Lewis (1994, 56) groups rural workers historically connected to CONTAG into three groups: small holders and sharecroppers (people with modest access to land they use to plan subsistence and cash crops), wage workers (with no autonomous control over land) and *posseiros* (homesteaders or squatters).

pushing for enforcement of legislation on the books ostensibly to protect their rights. (Maybury-Lewis 1994, 73)

In 1968, a group of unionists that came out of this organizing tradition took control of CONTAG. Under this new leadership, CONTAG became a progressive force in the countryside, winning concrete legal gains for workers during a highly repressive period. Although most local unions continued to follow a service-oriented path, CONTAG activists helped to develop the leadership of many progressive unionists during this period (Maybury-Lewis 1994). However, the downside of this strategy was that an entire generation of CONTAG labor activists became accustomed to non-confrontational approaches to unionism (Houtzager 1998).

In 1979, in the context of a more general political opening, CONTAG initiated a series of annual strikes in Pernambuco and began calling for large-scale agrarian reform (Maybury-Lewis 1994, 76; Welch 2009). By this time, other rural organizations were also beginning to engage in direct action in the countryside, such as the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), founded in 1975. The CPT was critical in helping workers occupy land in the early 1980s, the first actions of the soon-to-be MST. These rural activists joined with other urban movements, neighborhood associations and militant unionists to found the Workers Party (PT) in 1979 and the Central Union of Workers (CUT) in 1983. In contrast, the CONTAG leadership ‘made a virtual religion out of its autonomy from political parties’ (Houtzager 1998, 135).

The relationship that developed between CONTAG leaders and the emerging landless movement is complex. Many unionists developed strong connections to the CPT, the MST and the PT, and with the help of these social movements they took over their local unions (Maybury-Lewis 1994, 173–97). In Pernambuco, in the early 1990s, local union activists actually hosted MST activists in their headquarters and helped the movement organize its first land occupations in the sugar cane region. This eventually led the state union federation in Pernambuco to organize its own land occupations in the mid-1990s – despite a deeply embedded culture of ‘following the law’ (Rosa 2009, 471–72).⁹

At the national level, however, there were serious ideological divides between CONTAG and the CUT, CPT and MST leaders. First and foremost, CUT believed ‘that a rapid separation of the union movement from the money, flows, job sinecures, and state policy orientation’ was necessary, while CONTAG ‘felt that this would create tremendous organizational difficulties, given the extreme poverty of the workers they were representing’ (Maybury-Lewis 1994, 242). In many local unions, a competitive relationship developed between CONTAG and CUT, as CUT activists – often in tandem with the MST and the CPT – ran their own candidates in local union elections. This fed into a general mistrust between the national MST leadership and CONTAG, in addition to other ideological disputes.

A critical moment occurred in 1995, at CONTAG’s VI National Congress, when CUT activists won enough local elections that they tipped CONTAG’s internal power balance, leading CONTAG to affiliate with CUT. At this congress, delegates also began to discuss a proposal for broader social policies in the countryside, which became known

⁹However, CONTAG’s choice to occupy land is not necessarily in contradiction to its historical tendency to ‘follow the law’, as occupations are generally conducted on land that is arguably subject to the land reform law. Therefore, CONTAG can be seen as promoting one dimension of the rule of law.

as the Alternative Project for Sustainable Rural Development and Solidarity (PADRSS). A leader in the CONTAG federation in Pernambuco explained how these developments related to education:

In 1995 there was a national congress of the rural workers, and we discussed the alternative project we were trying to construct for society ... we wrote the PADRSS proposal ... it was a document that discussed the public policies we wanted for the countryside, and education entered there.¹⁰

At CONTAG's 7th National Congress, in 1998, the delegates passed the PADRSS proposal. Two years later, CONTAG was at the forefront of the national coalition for *Educação do Campo*.¹¹

A legalistic turn

Between the first National Conference for *Educação do Campo* in 1998 and the second National Conference that took place in 2004, CONTAG became one of the most important participants in the national alliance for *Educação do Campo* – at times surpassing the role of the MST itself. CONTAG activists did not take on this struggle simply because MST activists changed how they ‘framed’ their coalition; there were also internal shifts occurring within the confederation itself. CONTAG's new focus on social and cultural demands in the countryside – emphasized by the PADRSS program – facilitated the decision to make *Educação do Campo* a political goal of the organization. Subsequently, these interactions between social movements – with distinct histories and relationships to the state – transformed the MST's original educational goals. Decades of experiences with a legal approach to workers' rights were still engrained within CONTAG. Consequently, as soon as CONTAG activists joined the coalition for *Educação do Campo*, they sought out ways to work with the government to pass a federal resolution ensuring rural workers' legal rights to this educational proposal.

CONTAG's strategy succeeded, and on 3 April 2002, the National Education Advisory Board¹² approved a federal resolution supporting the ‘Operational Guidelines for a Basic Education in the Schools of the Countryside’. Rosali Caldart, a national MST educational activist, admits: ‘We participated very little in writing the guidelines, the union movement was closer ... This is not because we decided not to participate, but because this was not our world’ (quoted in Marcos de Anhaia 2010, 84). According to Caldart, the MST's ‘world’ was one of protest, while CONTAG had decades of experience working with the Brazilian state to enforce workers' rights. The coalition between the MST and CONTAG resulted in a slightly different version of Fox's (1992) ‘sandwich strategy’ and Alvarez's (1990) ‘dual strategy’, in which MST activists continued to engage in disruptive protest, while CONTAG activists lobbied government officials and drafted public policy. Another factor in this legal victory was the government official who wrote the *Educação do Campo* guidelines, Edla Soarez, a long-time educational activist in Pernambuco with deep connections to many rural social movements. Edla acted as a supportive state reformer

¹⁰Interview with Sonia Santos, 2 March 2011.

¹¹The first two coordinators of the *Educação do Campo* within CONTAG also confirm that the PADRSS proposal solidified the importance of public education (Costa Lunas and Novaes Rocha n.d.).

¹²*Conselho Nacional da Educação/Câmara da Educação Básica (CNE/CEB)*.

(Fox 1992) within the Cardoso government, contacting grassroots groups to help her write the educational proposal.¹³

After the *Educação do Campo* guidelines were passed, both the MST and CONTAG claimed it as a huge victory; however, President Cardoso took no further actions to put the resolution into practice. The rural social movements also stopped advocating for actions to be taken in respect to this educational proposal; it was an election year and these social movements were focused on bringing the PT to power.

New state–society alliances

When President Lula came to office in 2003, he had a long list of promises to fulfill for the activists who had mobilized his support. One of these demands was the implementation of the *Educação do Campo* Guidelines. In 2004, the President created a Secretary for Continued Education, Literacy and Diversity (SECAD), which included a Department for Diversity and Citizenship. Within this department, an office for *Educação do Campo* was created and an Advisory Board for *Educação do Campo* was established, which included dozens of civil society groups (MEC 2004). While the national coalition for *Educação do Campo* had succeeded in transforming federal law during an antagonistic government, it was only in the context of a more supportive administration that these reforms were implemented. Gaventa and McGee (2010, 16) seem correct in their assertion that ‘competition for formal political power is also central, creating new impetus for reform and bringing key allies into positions of influence’.

As soon as the federal government created an *Educação do Campo* office in the Ministry of Education, the historical conflicts between the MST and CONTAG began to reemerge. Both of these organizations demanded that the coordinator of the *Educação do Campo* office come from their own ranks. Under these circumstances, Professor Antonio Munarim – an academic not overtly associated with either movement – was approached by the new Secretary of SECAD to become the first coordinator of the *Educação do Campo* office. In August of 2004, Munarim attended the Second National Conference for *Educação do Campo*, to be vetted for the position.¹⁴

Unlike the First National Conference, which the MST and a few allies organized, over 38 groups officially sponsored the Second National Conference in 2004.¹⁵ Despite the plurality of voices present at the second conference – ranging from university professors to NGOs and members of the Brazilian legislature – the MST and CONTAG continued to drive the reform process in a tenuous and contentious partnership. When Munarim arrived at the conference, he immediately ran into Rosali Caldart, a national activist in the MST Education Sector. Caldart exclaimed, ‘Professor Munarim, what are you doing here?’ In response, he told Caldart that he had been tapped as the coordinator of *Educação do Campo*. Laughing, Caldart said that she had better not give him a hug yet, because if CONTAG activists saw him interacting with her, his name would be rejected from the nomination.¹⁶ On 6 August 2004, Munarim became the first coordinator of the *Educação do Campo* office, representing an institutional compromise between CONTAG and the MST, mediated by the MEC. While the Second National Conference for *Educação do*

¹³Edla Soarez went to every state to collect data for these guidelines, and she also admits it was difficult to convince MST activists to be part of this process. Interview with Edla Soarez, 6 April 2011.

¹⁴Interview, Antonio Munarim, 28 November 2011.

¹⁵These groups are all listed on the conference’s official final document.

¹⁶Interview, Antonio Munarim, 28 November 2011.

Campo in 2004 represented the pinnacle of hope for the national *Educação do Campo* coalition, frustration quickly followed. The rest of this contribution analyzes the challenges and barriers to implementing successful policy reforms.

Policies in practice: administrative and bureaucratic barriers to social reform

Hierarchy: 'a tiny door that opened to a waiting room'

From the beginning, the creation of an office for *Educação do Campo* within the MEC was followed with intense debate and contestation. Armênio Bello Schmidt, a PT activist from the state of Rio Grande do Sul, became the new director of the Department of Education for Diversity and Citizenship in 2004. He recalls the significance of this re-structuring within the MEC: never before had an educational department thought about the diversity of the Brazilian population. 'Now all of these debates were on the table, and there was an institutional space for civil society to participate'.¹⁷ In contrast to Schmidt, Edgar Kolling remembers these institutional changes with anger: the MST had supported the creation of a Secretary of *Educação do Campo*, reporting directly to the Minister of Education. Instead, the minister made *Educação do Campo* an office, within a department within a secretariat.¹⁸ The decision-making power of the coordinator of the *Educação do Campo* office would be highly restricted.

Indeed, from the beginning, Antonio Munarim faced huge barriers sparking interest in *Educação do Campo* within the Ministry of Education, given the low status of his office. Even though dozens of MEC officials worked with rural education, they had little interest in adhering to the new rural educational proposal. Munarim's inability to change the rest of the Ministry led to the increasing isolation of the *Educação do Campo* office. He explains:

We needed an organizational structure that was strong, with professionals that were competent, and this never happened. The contracting of more people never happened ... In that moment the MEC showed what it really was, a heavy infrastructure. SECAD was an opening, a tiny door that opened to a waiting room, but it never let anyone into the kitchen.¹⁹

Munarim refers to the 'heavy infrastructure' in the Ministry of Education, or in other words, the hierarchical structures and bureaucratic processes that became barriers for carrying out institutional change. Even though *Educação do Campo* was now part of Brazilian law, the location of the *Educação do Campo* office in a lowly position within MEC's bureaucratic structure meant that influencing other departments was almost impossible.

Munarim says he waited two years for someone with power to enter the waiting room and hear the demands of the social movements participating in the advisory board. No one ever showed up. In beginning of August of 2006, he wrote a letter denouncing the MEC:²⁰

The creation of the Coordinating Committee for *Educação do Campo* signaled a strong commitment within the Ministry of Education for these proposals, and opened up the possibility of inviting civil society groups into these discussions ... The opposite has happened. Representatives from rural social movements have been the only effective presence in these meetings.

¹⁷Interview, Armênio Bello Schmidt, 10 November 2010.

¹⁸Interview, Edgar Kolling, 18 November 2010.

¹⁹Interview with Antonio Munarim, 28 November 2011.

²⁰Antonio Munarim emailed the author a copy of this letter.

In his letter, Munarim expresses frustration with the weak relationship between the Advisory Board for *Educação do Campo* – where civil society was participating – and the MEC decision-making structure. Although Munarim himself participated in the advisory board, the office of *Educação do Campo* did not have the power to implement any of the advisory board's decisions. In August of 2006, only two years after he was appointed coordinator of the *Educação do Campo* office – as an explicit MST–CONTAG compromise – Munarim was fired.

Rapid expansion: 'losing everything it was supposed to be'

It was only after Munarim left the MEC that a few of the *Educação do Campo* programs were implemented, most likely as a response to the protests that followed his firing. One of these new MEC programs was a bachelor-level certification course for teaching high school in rural areas, known as LEDOC (Bachelor Degree in *Educação do Campo*). This program was adapted from a bachelor-level pedagogy program that the MST had created in 1998, through the federal program PRONERA. The first LEDOC program was administered in one of the MST's own secondary schools, the Institute of Education Josué de Castro (IEJC), in Rio Grande do Sul. The fact that the pilot program took place in one of the movement's own spaces – where activists had been implementing their pedagogical approach for over a decade – meant that the program adhered closely to the MST's previous educational practices. Although the LEDOC pilot program was implemented through an official partnership between the MEC and the University of Brasília, MST activists were the daily participants, administrators and directors of the program (Caldart et al. 2010).

The first year of the LEDOC pilot program had not even ended when MEC bureaucrats launched a second program located at the University of Brasília's own campus. The MEC officials also proposed that the university make LEDOC part of its internal structure, so the MEC no longer had to administer the program. By 2007, LEDOC had been implemented in three more universities.²¹ Four years later, in 2011, there were 32 universities that had LEDOC degree programs²² – with assigned staff, tenured professors, a standardized curriculum and an annual application process. The MEC officials were thinking about quantity: they wanted to reach the largest number of rural students possible. Unfortunately, with this rapid expansion, MST activists lost much of their ability to monitor these educational programs. The MST's lack of capacity to participate – given the fact that the MEC bureaucrats and university professors running the program often lacked a real commitment and knowledge of the original spirit of the proposal – resulted in a significant dilution of the movement's original intentions.

The MST's perspective on these university degree programs is mixed. On the positive side, activists acknowledge that the mere existence of the LEDOC program is a huge advance over traditional urban-centric bachelor-degree programs in pedagogy. Furthermore, the LEDOC courses increase the general level of access to tertiary education for populations in the countryside, since spots are reserved for students from rural areas. On the negative side, activists feel they have lost their ability to be protagonists in the implementation of these courses.

Vanderlúcia Simplício, an MST activist attempting to oversee the LEDOC programs at the University of Brasília, laments that 'the proposal is expanding, but it is losing

²¹Interview, Monica Molina, 10 November 2010.

²²Interview, Antonio Munarim, 28 November 2011; Luiz Antonio Pasquetti, 17 November 2011.

everything it was supposed to be'.²³ When I spoke to Simplício she was observing the fifth LEDOC degree program offered by the University of Brasília. She said that each year it is harder for the program to adhere to the original proposal. Part of the problem is that students may come from the countryside, but many have no previous connection to any social movement. Therefore, these students are more resistant to the collective orientation of the program, such as the shared housing, student collectives and group chores. Simplício attempts to intervene, and remind students about the principles of *Educação do Campo*. Nevertheless, it is difficult, and she fears the situation is worse where LEDOC is being implemented and there are no MST activists present. The case of LEDOC illustrates that even when social movement activists help develop a pilot program, the scale of implementation the MEC hopes to promote as a large government bureaucracy hinders the movement's ability to participate.

Best practices: closing down other experiences

The most far-reaching program that MEC officials implemented through the *Educação do Campo* office was *Escola Ativa*, a program designed to support teachers in multi-grade classrooms. In 2011, *Escola Ativa* was functioning in almost every state in Brazil, with over 1.3 million students enrolled.²⁴ However, *Escola Ativa* has a very different history than the LEDOC program. The Brazilian government adapted *Escola Ativa* from an internationally renowned educational program first implemented in Colombia in the 1970s, *Escuela Nueva*. In May of 1996 – a few years before the MST's educational initiatives began to receive national recognition as *Educação do Campo* – the World Bank invited a group of MEC program directors to Colombia to participate in a seminar about this program. Impressed, Brazilian officials decided to implement it in Brazil. Renamed *Escola Ativa*, the program was placed under the administration of the National Fund for Educational Development (FNDE), the financial arm of the MEC. In 2007, the program was relocated to the *Educação do Campo* office, due to its similar focus on rural education (MEC 2010).

Activists from both the MST and CONTAG were furious about the imposition of *Escola Ativa* in the office they had mobilized to create. For them, this office was an institutional space for grassroots movements to implement *their* educational ideas. Although there was still disagreement between the movements about the content of *Educação do Campo*, neither the MST nor CONTAG wanted their own educational practices to be replaced by a Colombian program, particularly one sponsored by the World Bank. The MST and CONTAG joined together to oppose the program. Despite their protests, MEC officials insisted that *Escola Ativa* fit into the goals of the *Educação do Campo* office. These officials claimed that the movements were ideologically opposed to the program simply because the World Bank was involved.²⁵

Nonetheless, the MEC officials who supported *Escola Ativa* could not completely ignore the MST's and CONTAG's united critiques. In an attempt to appease the activists, they allowed them to help re-write the program's curriculum. The result was a new hybrid curriculum that included aspects of both the Colombian program and the major philosophical underpinnings of *Educação do Campo* (MEC 2010). Thus, *Escola Ativa* represented

²³Interview, Vanderlúcia Simplício, 9 November 2010.

²⁴Interview, Armênio Bello Schmidt, 10 November 2010.

²⁵Interview, Armênio Bello Schmidt, 10 November 2010.

both an imposition – of an external program on an office that had been created by rural social movements – and a process of accommodation – state actors allowing activists to reform the program. Nonetheless, the MST and CONTAG continue to denounce *Escola Ativa*.²⁶

Increasing levels of education protests

Despite these challenges in the administrative and bureaucratic realm, the social movements in the national coalition for *Educação do Campo* still engaged in Alvarez's (1990) 'dual strategy' and Fox's (1992) 'sandwich strategy' throughout this period: working with MEC officials while also mobilizing contentious actions to support their educational demands. Figure 1 illustrates the rising number of protests concerning education during this period.

As Figure 1 indicates, between 2002 and 2012, the number of MST protests concerning education rose significantly, from less than 5 percent to around 20 percent. The number of total educational protests in the countryside shows a similar trend. This suggests that successful policy reforms actually increased levels of social mobilization around education.²⁷

Eventually, this combination of internal and external pressure led to a new development: On 4 November 2010, two months before he left office, President Lula signed a Presidential Decree in support of *Educação do Campo*. This type of legal recognition from a President was unparalleled, and gave activists significant leverage to continue pushing forward their educational demands. Immediately following the signing of the decree, President Lula shook the hands of Fernando Haddad, the head of the Ministry of Education, José Wilson, the head of the Social Policies Department in CONTAG, and MST activist Vanderlúcia Simplício. These three people represented the main protagonists in the process of implementing *Educação do Campo*, up until that point: the MEC, CONTAG and the MST.

Educação do Campo at a crossroads

When PT candidate Dilma Rousseff became the president in January of 2011, the supporters of *Educação do Campo* were at a crossroads. On the one hand, there was no turning back; *Educação do Campo* was now the Ministry of Education's official approach to rural education. There were dozens of universities with *Educação do Campo* departments, hundreds of master's and doctoral students conducting research within this new disciplinary concentration and several massive federal programs attempting to implement *Educação do Campo* in practice. On the other hand, the institutionalization of *Educação do Campo* in the MEC was a far cry from what the MST, CONTAG and other civil society actors had wanted. Activists were frustrated with the dominance of *Escola Ativa* and the expansion of LEDOC without a concern for quality and movement participation. For many, this educational proposal was no longer linked to a socialist development model for the Brazilian countryside. To the contrary, many of the new social actors supporting *Educação do Campo* were interested in *reinforcing* capitalist modes of production.

²⁶These protests eventually resulted in the termination of *Escola Ativa* in 2012. It was replaced with a program called '*Escolas da Terra*' (Interview with Edson Marcos Anhaia, 7 February 2014).

²⁷These mobilizations were not usually focused entirely on education. For example, only an average of 30 percent of the MST educational protests between 2002 and 2012 were single-issue protests.

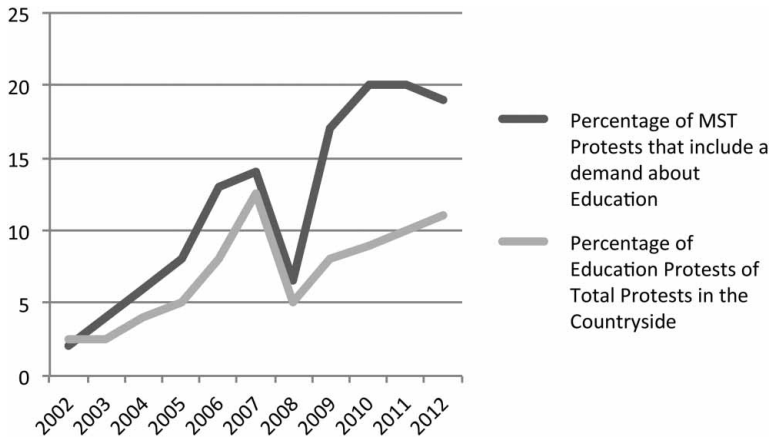


Figure 1. Percentage of protests concerning education relative to total protests in the Brazilian countryside (2002–2012).

MST: Landless Workers Movement.²⁸

Agribusiness, agrarian reform and the PT

The current challenges that the campaign for *Educação do Campo* faces cannot be understood without analyzing the overall agrarian context in Brazil, and particularly the rising importance of agribusiness in the 2000s. The 1980s were a period of transition for the Brazilian economy, when the previous golden-age levels of growth began to slow and social mobilizations increased. Agribusiness groups began to realize a need for more coordination, in the face of economic crisis and land conflicts. The Democratic Rural Union (UDR) was created in 1985 to represent a diversity of elite rural interests. Despite the shifting political and economic context, ‘the UDR showed that it had strength to make its interests prevail in the face of new development conditions’ (Bruno 1997, 63). In 1993, agribusiness sectors founded the Brazilian Association of Agribusiness (ABAG), in order to ‘raise the consciousness of the nation about the importance of agribusiness’ and to create ‘an institution representative of the common interests of all the agents of the agricultural production chain’ (Bruno 1997, 36).

It was during Cardoso’s second term in office (1999–2002) that the government began to invest heavily in agribusiness sectors, especially in feed grains such as soy (Delgado 2009, 107). In terms of agrarian reform, while Cardoso had expropriated an unprecedented amount of land during his first term – primarily due to the fallout after the massacres of landless workers in 1995 and 1996 (Ondetti 2008) – the administration shifted to supporting market-based agrarian reform approaches. The justification was that ‘market mechanisms will provide access to land without confrontations or disputes and therefore reduce social problems and federal expenses at the same time’ (Sauer 2006, 182). This form of market-based agrarian reform was supported by the expanding agribusiness sector.

When President Lula took office in 2003, there was a general assumption that he would reverse these policies and implement a program of agrarian reform based on expropriation.

²⁸Figure 1 was created by the author, using the Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT) database on rural mobilizations (<http://www.cptnacional.org.br>). I went through the databases from 2002 to 2012 and marked all of the protests (MST and other movements) that included a demand about education. I started in 2002 because the CPT protest database pre-2002 does not indicate the type of demand.

Consequently, right before Lula took office, thousands of families moved into camps to take advantage of the new agrarian reform program. However, once in office the Lula administration did not take any actions concerning agrarian reform, and social movements had to mobilize to pressure him on this issue. In response, the government recruited Plinio Sampaio, one of the most prominent agrarian specialists in Brazil and founding member of the PT, to develop a program for agrarian reform. Sampaio created a plan that would settle approximately one million people in one year. However, according to Miguel Rosseto, the head of the Ministry of Agrarian Development, Sampaio's proposal was not realistic, 'given the actual correlation of social, economic, and political forces' (Branford 2009, 423). In other words, rural social movements were fairly weak and agribusinesses were becoming increasingly stronger. Sampaio was fired shortly after presenting his proposal.

Instead of breaking with Cardoso's previous policies, Lula continued many of Cardoso's market-based agrarian reform initiatives while also publically supporting the PT's previous position on agrarian reform:

In other words, without criminalizing the struggle for land and still counting on the support of the agrarian social movements and unions, the Lula government was able to operate in a type of 'accommodation' between constitutional agrarian reform and the loan programs for buying land that were supported by the World Bank. (Pereira and Sauer 2006, 198)

Lula also began to incorporate agribusiness allies into his governing coalition during his first term. Consequently, there was a huge expansion of soybean, corn and sugarcane production, also partially driven by an increased investment by international capital in Brazilian agriculture (Sauer and Leite 2012). By 2005, agriculture represented 42 percent of Brazilian exports, and became the principal source of income for the federal government to pay off external debt (Carter 2009, 68). A comprehensive program of agrarian reform through expropriation never moved forward.

Rural sectors, for their part, continued to follow a two-decade long strategy of building up influential networks in congress. As Bruno (1997, 85) argues, 'Although the UDR [Democratic Rural Union] despises the rules of party politics, it recognized the importance of these political-constitutional spaces and bet on the electoral road as a means of increasing its representation'. Between 1995 and 2006, the average representation of landowners in congress was 2587 times more than the representation of landless workers and small peasants (Carter 2009, 62–63). Delgado (2009, 108) argues that this 'powerful political representation – the Rural Block – is structured in various political parties and has between one fourth and one third of all congressman and senators voting in Congress'. This congressional power has also resulted in a series of judicial attacks against the MST and other rural social movements over the past decade, in the form of Parliamentary Inquiry Commissions (CPIs).²⁹ These developments are in addition to a general criminalization of rural social movements in the media, and attacks through other judicial bodies such as the Public Ministry and the Federal Court of Audits (TCU).³⁰

The administration of President Dilma Rousseff has seen a continuation of this support of agribusiness sectors, and currently powerful congressional representatives – such as

²⁹These include the 'CPMI da Terra' in 2005, 'CPI das Ongs' in 2009 and the 'CPMI do MST' in 2010. (Note: A CPMI, as opposed to a CPI, is a mixed inquiry between both the congress and senate).

³⁰The state Public Ministry in Rio Grande do Sul initiated a series of cases against the MST (from 2009 to 2011), and the TCU was the judicial body responsible for preventing the federal educational program PRONERA from functioning for two years (2009–2010).

Kátia Abreu, a senator and president of the National Confederation of Agriculture (CNA) – are part of the PT governing coalition. The current context for *Educação do Campo* cannot be understood independently of these PT-agribusiness relations and the current economic context.

Navigating cooptation

On 20 March 2012, President Dilma Rousseff formally launched a new inter-ministry program, the National Program for Education in the Countryside (*Programa Nacional da Educação do Campo*, or PRONACAMPO), which would dedicate unprecedented funds to rural schooling. At the ceremony announcing PRONACAMPO, a new combination of actors were invited to participate, illustrative of the rising influence of agribusiness in the PT governance coalition. These included Aloizio Mercadante, the new Minister of Education; José Wilson, a CONTAG activist; and Senator Kátia Abreu, one of the most vocal public advocates of agribusiness and infamous among MST activists for her hatred of the movement. While many MST activists were also present in the audience that day, they were not given a chance to speak.

The speeches given at the PRONACAMPO ceremony were illustrative, first, of the tremendous success the campaign for *Educação do Campo* has had transforming national policy; second, of the principal role social movements have played in this campaign; and third, of the contemporary conflicts that exist over the future content of these educational practices. The speech of the new Minister of Education, Aloizio Mercadante, was representative of the success of the national coalition:

We are sure that this program will contribute to the value placed on the populations of the countryside. Rapid urbanization is not the way forward. We need to value these populations, their stories and culture, and the huge contribution of rural workers to this country.³¹

Less than a decade before, statements such as these from prominent public officials were few and far between. Quality education was considered universal education, which did not differentiate between urban and rural populations. Now, in 2012, the Minister of Education was referring to a ‘social debt’ the government of Brazil owed populations living in the countryside, and their right to an education that addresses their particular needs.

The choice of a CONTAG activist to speak at the ceremony demonstrates the critical role social movements have played in this national campaign, but also the tensions that still exist. For the Brazilian government, CONTAG is a more moderate organization with a long history of collaboration with the state. Allowing the MST to speak at such a prestigious ceremony might have been controversial, especially given the PT’s support of agribusinesses. Nonetheless, CONTAG activist José Wilson gave the MST a space to participate during his speech, pausing to allow MST activist Vanderlúcia Simplício to recite a poem about agrarian reform and deliver a recently published book, the *Dicionário da Educação do Campo* (Caldart, Pereira, and Frigotto 2012), to President Rousseff. The choice of CONTAG to formally represent the social movements, and the informal inclusion of the MST, exemplifies the compromises these two organizations continue to make. Finally, Kátia Abreu was invited to the podium amid loud hisses from the MST activists in the audience. Abreu began her speech by emphasizing the lack of investment in the countryside: ‘There have been decades of abandonment of the countryside ... there are schools without

³¹These speeches can be watched online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPtcdDSqcgk>.

internet, without infrastructure, principals of schools absent, teachers earning much less than in the city'. Up until this point, Abreu's speech could have been given by any one of the MST activists in the audience. However, ideological differences quickly appeared. Abreu exclaimed, 'Education is extremely important, so agribusiness can be stronger... The youth in the countryside need to be qualified workers, whether they are farm laborers or bosses'. In this statement, Abreu claimed *Educação do Campo* as an educational proposal that could support agribusiness, in direct contrast to the origins of these educational ideas.

This situation is indicative of agribusiness' long-standing practice of attempting to influence and manipulate the policy direction of the Brazilian state. As Bruno (2008, 92–93) explains, the preoccupation of the rural elite and agribusiness sectors with poverty emerged at the end of the 1990s, when the quality of life of poor populations began to be considered a 'principal tool' of Brazilian society, due to their potential as consumers. The emphasis agribusiness sectors are currently putting on education is a similar attempt to ensure that any investment in schooling in rural areas adheres to their vision of a qualified workforce that can support the agribusiness sector. This is in contrast to the MST, whose conception of rural education is explicitly tied to a socialist development model centered on workers' ownership of their own means of production, and collective agricultural practices. Six months after the PRONACAMPO ceremony, the National Forum for *Educação do Campo* (FONEC) – an alliance of civil society groups – publically critiqued PRONACAMPO, arguing that agribusiness had an 'interest in appropriating a discourse that defends the education of rural workers, in order to affirm (and confuse) society into believing that agribusiness is also interested in overcoming inequality' (FONEC 2012, 8).

MST activists are well aware of the challenges they face, as *Educação do Campo* becomes more entrenched in the federal state apparatus. National MST educational activist Rosali Caldart even admits she is unclear about *Educação do Campo*'s future:

The fact is that *Educação do Campo* was originally developed by the social movements, and was only practiced within these movements. Now, *Educação do Campo* exists in relationship to the governments, to the universities, or in other words, it exists in a relationship with these other actors ... Those that defend agribusiness are going to have one vision of *Educação do Campo*, and those that defend peasant agriculture are going to have another educational project.³²

As Caldart articulates, the concept of *Educação do Campo* no longer belongs to the social movements that first developed the proposal; now dozens of groups are laying claim to these ideas. MST activist Edgar Kolling expresses a similar sentiment:

The creation of SECAD in the MEC was a huge victory; now there is clearly more focus on education of the countryside ... But the MST has been swallowed up in a lot of these SECAD programs, subsumed. We never thought we could create something so big.³³

According to Kolling, MST activists never imagined the degree of expansion that *Educação do Campo* would achieve. However, this success has also created a new set of challenges, as MST activists must now expend energy navigating both the administrative and bureaucratic barriers of the Ministry of Education, and the potential threat of elite sectors coopting and transforming their proposal.

³²Interview, Rosali Caldart, 17 January 2011.

³³Interview, Edgar Kolling, 18 November 2010.

Conclusions

The national campaign for *Educação do Campo*, which began in the late 1990s and continues into the current moment, is not a typical story of policy reform. It involves a coalition of social movements that are pushing forward educational policy reforms through both political negotiation and social mobilization. The success of this national advocacy campaign, and the challenges activists still face, offer several lessons for scholars analyzing contemporary state–society dynamics in the Brazilian countryside. First, this study follows Gaventa and McGee and other scholars in illustrating the critical role that social movements play in promoting national policy reform. The MST – through the movement’s alliance with CONTAG and other social actors – has been able to publically condemn the trend towards closing down rural schools, legitimize the idea that rural schools should have a unique educational approach and convince the federal government to create dozens of new educational programs designated for rural populations.

Second, this paper outlines the strategies that social movement activists utilize in promoting national-level policy reform. The strategies that MST activists employed to implement *Educação do Campo* in the MEC align with Gaventa and McGee’s six propositions concerning successful national advocacy in the Global South. Initially, powerful international and domestic allies were central to the legitimization the MST’s educational initiatives (proposition 3). Then, MST activists capitalized on a political opening caused by previous social mobilization, to bring their proposal to the national level (proposition 1). Through a strategic process of framing and coalition building, the MST garnered significant recognition for their educational reforms (propositions 4 and 6). However, this national coalition was only successful in transforming federal policy once CONTAG embraced these initiatives, which was a complex and historically contingent process. Finally, although the national coalition changed federal law during an antagonistic government, putting this law into practice was only possible once the PT took power at the national level, allowing for influential allies to enter the federal government and new state–society relations to form (proposition 2 and 5).

In addition to illustrating the strategies social movements utilize in national advocacy campaigns, a third contribution of this paper is outlining the many administrative and bureaucratic barriers movements face in actually implementing these reforms. Once inside the Ministry of Education, the MST and CONTAG faced a hierarchical structure, the mass implementation of educational programs, and the imposition of global ‘best practices’ that competed with the movements’ own educational proposals. In response, the national coalition for *Educação do Campo* increased their levels of social mobilization throughout the 2000s.

Fourth and finally, this essay illustrates how the political and economic context affects policy reforms. As soon as *Educação do Campo* became the MEC’s official approach to rural schooling, and began receiving significant funding, agribusiness sectors took on the language of the reform to promote their own goals. This is directly related to the surge in the agricultural export sector in the 2000s, and the incorporation of agribusiness interests within the PT governing coalition. Currently, if the federal government takes a stance on the future of the countryside – even if it is only about education – agribusiness interests are invited to participate. Nonetheless, and perhaps this is the most important take-home point, the current terrain of educational struggle is not the same as it was in the early 1990s. Agribusinesses lobbies can certainly deny the relationship between *Educação do Campo* and socialist models of rural development; however, they can no longer publically contest the importance of expanding the access to and the quality of education in the

countryside. MST activists have clearly remade the Brazilian state; however, they did not remake it just as they pleased.

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