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# Social Movements, Hegemony, and New Forms of Resistance

by  
Harry E. Vanden

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*In Latin America, new social movements are vigorously and creatively engaging in grassroots organization and local and national mobilizations. Social movements in Bolivia, Brazil, and elsewhere have challenged the conduct of politics in their countries and the region. Their growth and militancy have generated whole new repertoires of action. Indeed, they raise the possibility of at least some form of "rule from below." They have left the traditional twentieth-century parties far behind to create a nonauthoritarian, participatory political culture. Using existing political space to maximum effect, they are substantially strengthening participatory democratic practice and significantly altering political life. Less clear is whether they are, as Gramsci might conclude, coming together in a new cycle of subaltern actions that can break down the hegemony historically exercised by Latin America's ruling classes.*

**Keywords:** Social movements, Resistance to globalization, Bolivia, Brazil, Gramsci

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*The history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic. There undoubtedly does exist a tendency to (at least in provisional stages) unification in the historical activity of these groups. . . . It therefore can only be demonstrated when an historical cycle is completed and this cycle culminates in a success.*

—Antonio Gramsci

*The emergence of new political and alternative movements despite their scant participation in [traditional] political life marks the start of a new way of conducting politics which responds to the legitimate demands of the marginalized majorities.*

—Juan del Grando, Mayor of La Paz

The masses have resisted elitist rule in Latin America in a variety of ways. Since the initial rebellions by the native peoples against imposed European rule there have been innumerable uprisings and other forms of resistance by the exploited masses. With the notable exception of the slave uprising in Haiti led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, most have been brutally suppressed and the particular offending segments of the masses returned to their subaltern position. But even these outbreaks were rare, and it was more commonly vanguard movements or political parties dominated by elements of the urban elite that led the revolutions that enjoyed some success in Bolivia, Cuba, Chile,

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and Nicaragua. The daily hegemony exercised by the ruling classes generally managed to prevent such unseemly eruptions of popular anger. With the growth in literacy and the widening of the franchise, the national media, elite opinion makers, and globalized communication networks such as CNN/CNN en Español exercise more subtle but no less pernicious forms of hegemonic control over the Latin American masses.

Seen against this background, the backlash against economic neoliberalism and the globalization process is all the more interesting. As has been the case in the United States, the national and international economic elites have used all the mechanisms of intellectual and cultural domination at their disposal to convince all classes of Latin Americans of the virtues of globalized neoliberalism. Despite their best efforts, however, there has been a genuine change in Latin American politics. Indeed, the progression of events suggests that there is a more profound realignment afoot—one that that may well represent a political sea change in the region.

The origins of what we now term new social movements can be traced to mobilizations like the Peasant Leagues in Brazil's Northeast in the 1950s and early 1960s or those of mass organizations in El Salvador in 1979 and the very early 1980s. These and other movements were repressed before they could fully develop a praxis that would challenge traditional elitist decision-making practices. Yet even under brutal military governments in the 1970s and 1980s, new forms of organization began to develop in neighborhood and women's organizations in Chile and Argentina and in the countryside in Brazil, where the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (Landless Rural Workers' Movement—MST) was forged in the early 1980s (see Slater, 1994a; 1994b; Jelin, 1994; Schild, 1994; and Vanden, 2005). And even in those countries that did not fall victim to bureaucratic authoritarian rule in those decades, the masses began to assert themselves in new forms of contentious action such as land takeovers and the blocking of roads in Ecuador in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In Venezuela the urban masses exploded over the imposition of neoliberal austerity measures by the government, and in Argentina similar looting erupted (for Argentina, see Serulnikov, 1994). The Caracazo in 1989 saw the mass mobilization of thousands of mostly poor, mostly urban, mostly marginalized Venezuelans forcing their way into the political process. Their contention was so effective that the Venezuelan elite was forced to do what its Dominican counterparts had felt obliged to do when confronted with a similar situation in 1984—call on the armed forces to repress the popular mobilizations. Forcing the less politicized Venezuelan armed forces into a repressive role to sustain very unpopular neoliberal policies set in motion a series of events that led to the formation of a Bolivarian movement in the armed forces, coup attempts in 1992, and the eventual popular mobilizations that gave Hugo Chávez and the *Movimiento V República* (Fifth Republic Movement—MVR) victories in the elections of 1998 and 2000 and the support to overthrow a coup attempt in 2002 and defeat the anti-Chávez referendum in 2004. Other manifestations of popular protest against the austerity measures and elements of the conservative economic policies that came to be called neoliberalism in Latin America include the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico in 1994, the national indigenous movement led by the *Confederación Nacional de Indígenas del Ecuador* (Ecuadorian National Confederation of

Indigenous People—CONAIE) in Ecuador, the regime-changing popular mobilizations in Argentina, the MST in Brazil, and the massive mobilizations of different movements in Bolivia in 2003 and 2005.

The nature of these protests suggests a political sea change even though one could argue that such movements are also a recent and vociferous manifestation of the specter of mass popular mobilization against the governing elites that has haunted Latin America since colonial—if not precolonial—times. In recent years, a great many of the lower class—and some of the middle class—seem to feel that the much-touted return to democracy, celebration of civil society, and incorporation into the globalization process have left them marginalized economically if not politically as well. The reactions in Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Argentina, Nicaragua, and even Uruguay have been strong and significant and, in varying ways, make one wonder whether the political project advocated by the international financial elite and its national allies is working for the common people. Democracy and effective government have evolved slowly. All too often, the traditional forms of bourgeois democracy and limited citizen participation have not served the people. The mechanisms that were ostensibly designed to transmit the popular will to the decision makers so that they could govern in accordance with popular desires and needs have historically been weak at best. From the 1980s on, U.S.-inspired democratization and economic neoliberalism have been offered as the preferred, if not the only, ways to remedy these weaknesses. Neoliberalism and a democratized government based on Western liberalism have been promoted by international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and by the U.S. government as prerequisites for a golden age for democracy and economic development patterned on its own experience and as such were being held up as the model to follow.

Yet, as the linked models of Western, capitalist-style democratization and neoliberal economics have taken hold throughout the hemisphere, their suitability as a form of governance and a viable economic system is being called into question. There is growing skepticism that neoliberal economic policies will remedy the residual poverty and maldistribution of income and wealth that have plagued Latin America. Brazil, for instance, had a Gini coefficient of 0.59 at the end of the 1990s (Franko, 2003: 357). Indeed, despite growth and macroeconomic stability during that decade, no Latin American country experienced a decrease in income inequality, and many, including Argentina, Bolivia, and Nicaragua, saw income inequality increase (Franko, 2000: 355). Worse yet, statistics from the World Bank indicate that economic performance was disastrous in 2002, with overall negative growth of 1.1 percent (Shifter, 2003: 52). Even though economic growth has improved in 2003, 2004, and 2005, countries like Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador are still in severe crisis. Poverty is persistent throughout the region and has increased in many countries. A large segment of the population seems to have been left out of any growth that has taken place. As the masses and segments of the middle classes have expressed their frustration, the past few years have seen popular uprisings, aborted presidential terms, economic chaos, attempted coups d'état, and continued impoverishment of the lower class if not segments of the middle class. This, in turn, calls into question the legitimacy of the governments and their ability to govern. The progression of events suggests that there is a realignment that is profound and that may well represent a

radical change in politics in the region. The ascendancy of new, progressive political parties like the Partido dos Trabalhadores (the Workers' party—PT) in Brazil, Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Toward Socialism—MAS) in Bolivia, and Tabaré Vázquez's Frente Amplio (Broad Front) in Uruguay underline this trend. Further, it can be suggested that it is the democratization and celebration of civil society that have created the political space where the masses can maneuver and mobilize and in which political movements can grow.

Dissatisfaction with elite rule, exclusionary political projects, and policies that cause or perpetuate the economic or ethnic marginalization of the masses is certainly not new in Latin America. It has engendered rebellions like those led by Tupac Amaru in the 1780s, Toussaint L'Ouverture in Haiti in 1791, Hidalgo and Morelos in Mexico in 1810, and Farabundo Martí in El Salvador in 1932. Indeed, it was the generalized dissatisfaction with Porfirio Díaz's political ruling class in *fin de siglo* Mexico that induced *los de abajo* (the underdogs [see Azuela, 2002] or those on the bottom) to enroll in the various armies and thus the revolutionary project of the Mexican revolution. Such dissatisfaction has led to other less successful political rebellions such as the Bogotazo and the ensuing *violencia* in Colombia from 1948 to 1956 and the Bolivian revolution in 1952.

The economic slowdown during the "lost decade" of the 1980s combined with greater mobilization as political repression declined to create a new political dynamic in many of the Latin American nations. Civil society became the locus of action, and new forms of political action followed. The projection of an elitist armed vanguard as the spearhead for change began to fade in the face of unarmed political and social mobilizations. The assertion of popular power that had been seen in popular mobilizations such as the precoup Peasant Leagues in Brazil's Northeast began to bubble up in new and different forms. By the time neoliberal economic policy became more widespread in the 1990s, there was a growing realization that the extant political systems in much of Latin America could no longer meet the needs of the vast majorities. Indeed, there was a growing consensus that the traditional politicians' political enterprise was leaving the great majorities behind and effectively further marginalizing specific groups within those majorities, including indigenous people and peasants in southern Mexico, Ecuador, and Bolivia, rural laborers and the poor in Brazil, those who live in the slums and have been left out of the diffusion of oil wealth in Venezuela, and large segments of the lower and middle classes in Argentina and Uruguay. Changing attitudes have often led to the abandonment of established political parties for new, more amorphous, ad hoc parties like Hugo Chávez's MVR in Venezuela or the Frente Amplio in Uruguay and to the upsurge of new political/social movements and mass organizations and a plethora of national strikes, demonstrations, and protests such as those that washed across Argentina at the end of 2001 and the beginning of 2002 and swept across Bolivia in 2003 and 2005.

As has all too often been the case in Latin America, the political systems have become unable to provide basic security in food, housing, education, employment, or monetary value and banking to wide sectors of the population. Large segments of the population have been marginalized from the national project, and the governing institutions have been unwilling or unable to provide solutions for their situations. Indeed, in the eyes of most of the Latin American popular sectors, the structural adjustments and neoliberal reforms advocated by

international financial institutions like the IMF and the Washington consensus have threatened their security and well-being. The insecurity and dissatisfaction felt by the popular sectors and segments of the middle class thus drive them to protest in new ways—to expand their repertoire of contentious actions, as Sidney Tarrow (1998) might suggest—and to seek new political structures that might better respond to their needs. Old-style parties and governments dominated by the elites are increasingly seen as unable to respond.

These current mobilizations seem different from the popular uprisings that preceded them. The systems of mass communication and related communication technology and easy, low-cost access to the Internet have combined with higher levels of literacy, widened access to higher education, and much greater political freedom under the democratization process (United Nations Development Program, 1999: 3–9). This has occurred when ideas of grassroots democracy, popular participation, and even elements of liberation theology and Christian-base-community organization have been widely disseminated. However, in contrast to the radical revolutionary movements of the past few decades, these new movements do not employ or advocate the radical, revolutionary restructuring of the state through violent revolution. Rather, their approach is to work within civil society and push government and society to their limits to achieve the necessary change and restructuring. As the 1990s progressed, dissatisfaction with traditional political leaders and traditional political parties became more widespread, as did a growing tendency to doubt the legitimacy of the political system itself (see Vanden, 2004). Traditional personalism, clientelism, corruption, and personal, class, and group avarice became subjects of ridicule and rage. The effects of neoliberalism and continued classism and racism amidst ever stronger calls for equality began to be felt. They were cast against a background of continuing corruption and clientelism in the face of calls for a return to democracy and honest government.

The traditional political institutions seemed too far removed from the masses spatially, politically, classwise, and with regard to political culture. Though not always well articulated, new demands were registered. They were, however, addressed not always to the political system *per se* but to society more generally, since there were growing questions about the system's relevance and legitimacy. Different groups were looking for new political structures that allowed for—indeed, encouraged—their participation. Specific segments of the population sought forms of political organization that they could call their own. There was a search for new structures that would respond to the perceived—and not always clearly articulated—demands being formulated by the popular sectors. Further, their mobilizations were shattering the cultural and political hegemony historically exercised by the dominant classes and transnational capitalism. It remains to be seen whether such forms of contention can force sufficient change in the national economic and political power configurations to achieve greater economic equality and ensure effective political participation. Some suggest that these new forms of contention will ultimately fail to force the restructuring of Latin American society and prove ineffective in generating the change that is so sorely needed. However, in the meantime these movements represent an intense challenge to the extant neoliberal capitalist systems and the established parties and politicians and are extremely subversive of the status quo.

## BOLIVIA

Events in Bolivia are illustrative of these developments. In October 2003, the U.S.-educated Bolivian President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada was forced out of office by massive displays of popular power. A staunch advocate of globalization and neoliberal policies prescribed by the IMF and the World Bank, Sánchez de Lozada was also symbolic of the upper-class Western-oriented political elites that have governed Latin America in an authoritarian way since the Spanish conquest. His tormenters were equally symbolic of those the political class had long ruled and repressed—small farmers, indigenous peoples, miners, workers, students, and intellectuals who dared to challenge the status quo. Historically, the masses have been continually usurped by various political elites and rarely permitted to rule in their own right. This established a traditional pattern of rule and governance in the region that was more authoritarian than democratic and always elitist. Rarely were the masses allowed to determine policy. Indeed, in Latin America people of popular extraction and of color have been few in the rarefied halls of national government. (Mexico's great national hero, Benito Juárez, is a notable exception.) And even when people of color or those from the popular sectors were in the governing circles, they rarely ruled in favor of the masses. It was all the more amazing, then, that the departure of Sánchez de Lozada was effected by *los de abajo*. The groups that converged on the Bolivian capital of La Paz and other large cities were predominant lower-class miners and agricultural workers and peasants, people who were mostly indigenous, and the poor generally. Theirs was a struggle that had been going at least since the indigenous and peasant uprisings led by Tupac Amaru and Tupac Katari in the 1780s, but this time it was coordinated, effective, and successful. Long before this mobilization occurred, local communities had been forming their own organizations to fight some aspect of colonial rule, exploitation, or, more recently, globalization. This reaction can, for instance, be seen in the strong grassroots movement against the privatization of the public water supply in the mostly indigenous community of Cochabamba in 2000. There, the *Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida* (Coordinating Committee to Defend Water and Life) remained locally rooted (see Schultz, 2003: 34–37), but unlike previous local actions this struggle was always framed in an international and national context. The protesters publicized their cause through the Internet and sent delegations to international meetings like the World Social Forum. Further, they were very aware not only of the international dimensions of their struggle and of its globalized causes but of the possibilities of international links with similar struggles and the international antiglobalization movement. This awareness and the electronic and personal links they established with other movements in Bolivia and outside later facilitated their integration into the broad national coalition that set forth a national agenda through support for Evo Morales and his MAS party in the 2002 and 2005 presidential elections. Extensive networking with other new social movements allowed this and other local or regional movements to become part of a nearly unstoppable national mobilization that toppled the Sánchez de Lozada government and would eventually carry Morales and MAS to power. By linking the local effects of the neoliberal privatization of the water supply in Cochabamba to global policies and national politics, they linked their struggle to a growing regional and international consensus and to a national movement with concrete, achievable objectives.

The intensity of the politicization of this and other social movements in Bolivia was demonstrated by the massive protests and the popular mobilizations that rocked the nation in 2003 and again in 2005. As had occurred in Ecuador in 2000 with CONAIE and its allies, the popular mobilization of indigenous peoples and peasants were through a newly formed mostly peasant indigenous federation. The Union of Bolivian Rural Workers under the leadership of Felipe Quispe was quickly joined by those who grew the coca leaves that the Sánchez de Lozada government was eradicating under the direction of the U.S. government—the *cocaleros* (coca growers) of the Coca Growers Federation and its indigenous leader, Evo Morales (who had finished barely a percentage point behind Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in the 2002 elections). Other groups such as the above-mentioned Cochabamba Coordinating Committee to Defend Water and Life also joined. An ongoing economic crisis and a crisis in traditional politics combined with strong U.S. pressure to open Bolivian markets and virtually eliminate the centuries-old cultivation of coca leaves stimulated the masses to meet and mobilize at the local, community level and to respond to the movements' calls for action. Communal organization was also strong and had increased since the 1952 revolution distributed land to the indigenous peasants. There were peasant unions and local community organizations throughout the Andean region of the country (Gonzalo Muñoz, interview, La Paz, July 4, 2005). A strong Landless Movement had also developed in the non-Andean Santa Cruz region and became an instrument of peasant mobilization there (Silvestre Saisari, interview, Tampa, Fla., February 17, 2006). As indigenous groups had met in congresses and assemblies—often termed “Assemblies to Take Sovereignty”—in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they realized that they needed mechanisms to achieve political power. As their consciousness developed, they began to speak explicitly of the “Sovereignty of the People” and the need to create “Political Instruments for the Sovereignty of the People” (Antonio Paredo, interview, La Paz, July 4, 2005, and Silvestre Saisari, interview, Tampa, Fla., February 17, 2005). As their thinking evolved, they formed peasant unions, social movements, and political movements like Pachakutic and MAS.

Yet even in what might be termed one of Latin America's most organized societies (Ballvé, 2005), a precipitating event was needed for action, and this was a U.S.-backed proposal to sell Bolivian natural gas through a port that landlocked Bolivia had lost to Chile in the ill-fated War of the Pacific (1879–1881). The disastrous failure of the neoliberal model that Sánchez Lozada had advocated added to the widely shared perception that this new trade deal was but one more ruse to extract wealth from the nation and leave the indigenous masses even more poverty-ridden and totally subject to the influence of outside forces (Rother, 2003). Historically, most peasant and indigenous uprisings and even many strikes by the tin miners had been characterized by their local nature and lack of linkages to national movements and international conditions. As is suggested by comments from the protesters themselves, this uprising was quite different:

He has governed the country for the benefit of the gringos and the multinational companies and the Chileans, not for the Bolivian people. (R. Clavijo, cited in Rother, 2003)

Globalization is just another name for submission and domination. We've had to live with that here for 500 years, and now we want to be our own masters. (N. Apaza, quoted in *Chicago Tribune*, October 17, 2003)



The Union of Rural Workers and the cocaleros were soon joined by other social movements, urban unions, and students as they mobilized in massive demonstrations in La Paz and other cities. The government futilely tried to repress the demonstrators, causing the loss of 80 lives. This enraged the opposition even more and increased the president's isolation. Meeting in their villages and union headquarters, many more people decided to join the uprising. Bolivian miners and others across the country also joined the protests and decided to march on the capital. As his political backers dropped away in the face of the mass mobilization, Sánchez de Lozada was forced to resign and leave the country.

By the beginning of 2005 there was a growing popular perception that the essential rights of the people were not being honored by the successor government of Carlos Mesa and that the natural gas reserves were once again being looted by foreign interests. This occasioned popular mobilizations in May and June 2005 by the same movements that had driven Sánchez de Lozada from office. With Morales and his MAS taking a prominent leadership position, the coalition of new social movements and labor unions pushed even harder. It was unwilling to allow the president of the senate—constitutionally the next in line—to assume power when Mesa left. Both he and the head of the Chamber of Deputies were seen as old-line politicians who would betray the indigenous people and other mobilized popular sectors once in office and as such were deemed unacceptable. Further, the mobilized movements made it clear that a constituent assembly was necessary to draft a new constitution that would restructure the state to make it more responsive to popular interests and that new elections for the national legislature were necessary to get more legislators who were from the common people and were linked to their interests. Only when these conditions were met and the President of the Supreme Court had assumed power until new elections could be held did MAS and the mobilized movements accept a settlement. This struggle culminated in the formation of a new government after elections were held in which Evo Morales was elected with an outright majority in the first round of voting.

This represented a substantial change in politics. The new social movements had been able to take politics out of the presidential palace and the halls of congress, where elitist politics and the traditional political class dominated, and into their space—the villages, neighborhoods, and popular councils and the streets and rural highways that they could control. They had taken the initiative and had been able to forge a broad national coalition that cemented the two presidents' downfall and established the viability of their social movements as key political actors whose demands had to be heeded. In contrast to the situation in Ecuador in 2000 and the Bolivian revolution of 1952, they had done so without seizing power themselves but had demonstrated how effectively they could use and mobilize massive political power on a national scale. They had done so *from below*, through a broad coalition of social movements with strong identities and deep, democratic ties to their constituencies. They had initiated a form of participatory governance that would radically alter the nation's decision-making practices and that suggested that government must indeed serve the people if it is to endure.

Morales and MAS were able to ride this wave of protest and mobilization as he was elected the first indigenous president of Bolivia and MAS secured substantial representation in the national legislature (12 of 27 seats in the Senate

and 73 of 130 in the Chamber of Deputies) in the elections of December 2005. Indeed, Morales seems to have captured the dynamic essence of the combined movements that brought him to power. As he said in his inaugural address (Morales, 2006),

We can continue to speak of our history, we can continue to remember how those who came before us struggled: Tupac Katari to restore the Thuantinsuyo, Simón Bolívar who fought for this larger nation (*patria grande*), Che Guevara who fought for a new more equal world. This democratic cultural struggle, this cultural democratic revolution, is part of the struggle of our ancestors, it is the continuity from Tupac Katari; this struggle and these results are Che Guevara's continuity. We are here, Bolivian and Latin American sisters and brothers; we are going to continue until we achieve equality in this country.

## BRAZIL

Politics in Brazil has also been altered by the entry of the largest Latin American social movement into the national political arena. The MST was formed as a response to long-standing economic, social, and political conditions in Brazil. Land, wealth, and power have been allocated in very unequal ways in Brazil since the conquest in the early 1500s. Land has remained highly concentrated, and as late as 1996 1 percent of the landowners owned 45 percent of the land (Petras, 2000: 35). Conversely, as of 2001 there were some 4.5 million landless rural workers in Brazil. Wealth has remained equally concentrated. In 2001 the Brazilian Institute of Government Statistics reported that the average income of the upper 10 percent of the population was 19 times greater than that of the lowest 40 percent (*Folha de São Paulo*, April 5, 2001, cited in Lewis, 2001). The plantation agriculture that dominated the colonial period and the early republic became the standard for Brazilian society. The wealthy few owned the land, reaped the profits, and decided the political destiny of the many. Slavery provided most of the labor in the early plantation system and thus determined the nature of the relationship between the wealthy landowning elite and the disenfranchised masses who labored in the fields. Land has stayed in relatively few hands, and the agricultural laborers continue to be poorly paid and poorly treated. Further, after the commercialization and mechanization of agriculture that began in the 1970s, much of the existing rural labor force became superfluous. As this process continued and became more tightly linked to the increasing globalization of production, not only were rural laborers let go but sharecroppers were expelled from the land they had farmed and small farmers lost their land to larger family or commercial estates. This resulted in growing rural unemployment and an increase in the number of rural landless families with few prospects. Many were forced to migrate to the cities to swell the numbers of the urban poor, while others opted for a government-sponsored Amazon colonization program whereby they were transported to the Amazon region to cut down the rain forest and begin to cultivate the land. Few found decent jobs in the city, and the poor soil of the former rain forest would allow for little sustained agriculture. Thus their plight worsened.

The immediate origins of the Landless Workers' Movement go back to the bitter struggle for survival under the agricultural policies implemented by the

military government that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985. The landless rural workers in the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul began to organize to demand land in the early 1980s. Other landless people soon picked up their cry in the neighboring states of Paraná and Santa Catarina. These developments were the beginning of the MST (see Stedile and Fernandes, 1999; Wright and Wolford, 2003; and Bradford and Rocha, 2002). They built on a long tradition of rural resistance and rebellion that extends back to the establishment of the *palenques* (large inland settlements of runaway slaves) and to the famous rebellion by the poor rural peasants of Canudos in the 1890s. In more recent times it included the famous Peasant Leagues of Brazil's impoverished Northeast in the 1950s and early 1960s and the Grass War and peasant struggles in São Paulo State in the 1950s (see Welch, 1999 and 2001). When the MST was founded in southern Brazil in 1984 as a response to rural poverty and lack of access to land, wealth, and power, similar conditions existed in many Brazilian states. Thus the MST soon spread from the South to states like Pernambuco in the Northeast and Pará in the Amazon region. It rapidly became a national organization with coordinated policies, strong local participatory organization and decision making, and frequent state and national meetings based on direct representation.

By 2001 there were active MST organizations in 23 of the 26 states (Geraldo Fontes, interview, São Paulo, September 17, 2003). Today the MST is a vital, vigorous, and often militant national organization that is arguably the largest and most powerful social movement in Brazil and Latin America. The ranks of those associated with it number over a million (Fernandez, 2005). It has a high mobilization capacity at the local, state, and even national level. In 1997, for instance, the organization was able to mobilize 100,000 people for a march on Brasília. Its views are well articulated. It has a clear understanding of the consequences of the increased commercialization of agriculture for the organization of production if not rural life. Similarly, it is fully conscious of the way globalization is strengthening these trends and threatening the livelihood of its members. In small classes, meetings, and assemblies and through its newspaper, *Jornal dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra*, its magazine, *Revista Sem Terra*, and numerous pamphlets, it carefully educates its base through a well-planned program of political education. It even establishes schools in its encampments, settlements, and cooperatives to make sure that the next generation has a clear idea of the politics in play. In this way, it effectively challenges the cultural hegemony exercised by the dominant national classes and the international capitalist system.

The Landless also facilitate the organic development of highly participatory grassroots organization, beginning with groups of 10 families organized as nuclei of neighborhoods. Local general assemblies are frequent, and all members of the family units are encouraged to participate. Regional, state, and even national assemblies are also held on a regular basis, with representatives of the lower-level units attending. Leadership is collective at all levels including the national, where some 102 militants make up the National Coordinating Council (Coordenação Nacional).

The movement's culture and decision-making processes break from the authoritarian tradition and are subversive of the dominant political culture. The MST has been heavily influenced by liberation theology and the participatory democratic culture that is generated by the use and study of Paulo Freire's

self-taught, critical approach to education. Indeed, the strongly participatory nature of the organization and the collective nature of leadership and decision making have made for a dynamic new democratic, participatory political culture that challenges traditional authoritarian notions and vertical decision-making structures (MST, 2000, and Rodrigues Brandão, 2001). One of the characteristics of new social movements like the MST is their broad national vision. Thus the Landless envision a thoroughgoing land reform and complete restructuring of agrarian production in all of Brazil. The MST believes that it is impossible to develop the nation, construct a democratic society, or eliminate poverty and social inequality in the countryside without eliminating the latifundio and that agrarian reform is viable only if it is part of a popular project that will transform Brazil's economic and social structures.

Like many of the new social and political movements in Latin America, the Landless are well aware of the way their struggle is linked to international conditions. Thus they begin by challenging the positive view of neoliberalism presented by the globalized media and the hegemonic control that it seeks. In a draft document entitled "Fundamental Principles for the Social and Economic Transformation of Rural Brazil," they note that "the political unity of the Brazilian dominant classes under Fernando Henrique Cardoso's administration (1994–2000) has consolidated the implementation of neoliberalism [in Brazil]" and that these neoliberal policies have led to the increased concentration of land and wealth in the hands of the few and the impoverishment of Brazilian society. The document goes on to say that "popular movements must challenge this neoliberal conceptualization of our economy and society" (MST, 2001b).

Mass political mobilization is another fundamental organizational principle, and this vision is widely disseminated to those affiliated with the organization. A pamphlet disseminated by the organization, "Brazil Needs a Popular Project," calls for popular mobilizations, noting that "all the changes in the history of humanity happened only when the people were mobilized" and that in Brazil "all the social and political changes that happened were won when the people mobilized and struggled" (MST, 2001a).

This type of national organization had not been seen in Brazil before. Previously, identity had been much more locally rooted. Traditional elite-dominated politics and bourgeois political parties had proven unable and unwilling to address the deteriorating economic conditions of marginalized groups who were suffering the negative effects of economic globalization. The new movements' response was grassroots organization and the development of a new repertoire of actions that broke with old forms of political activity and began to tie individual members together in a strongly forged group identity. Progressive organizations concerned with economic and social justice aided this process. In the case of Brazil and the MST, this role was played by the Lutheran Church and especially the Pastoral Land Commission of the Catholic Church. Segments of the PT were also most helpful. Nonetheless, the movement never lost its autonomy. It was decided from the outset that this was to be an organization *for* the landless workers *by* the landless workers *for their benefit as they defined it*. The Landless engaged in direct actions such as land takeovers from large estates and public lands, the construction of black-plastic-covered encampments to call attention to their demands for land, and marches and confrontations when necessary. They even occupied the family farm of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso shortly before the 2002 election

to draw attention to his landowning interests. They were at times brutally repressed, assassinated, and imprisoned, but they persevered, forcing land distribution to their people and others without land. Their ability to mobilize as many as 12,000 people for a single land takeover or 100,000 for a national march suggested just how strong their organizational skills were and how well they could communicate and coordinate at the national level. They created a great deal of national support and helped to create a national consensus that there was a national problem with land distribution and that substantial reform was necessary.

The movement considers itself part of the international antiglobalization struggle, participates in the World Social Forum, and sends representatives to demonstrations and protests throughout the world. At least one recent work suggests that its actions are part of a developing global backlash against economic globalization (see Broad, 2002). Struggles that were once local and isolated are now international and linked (see de la Porta and Tarrow, 2005). The news media and growing international communications links such as cellular phones and especially e-mail have greatly facilitated the globalization of struggle. Dramatic actions like massive land takeovers by the MST have generated considerable support at the national and international levels and helped to define what might be considered a local problem as a national problem requiring national attention.

The interaction between the MST and the PT is also instructive. Although relations between the two organizations at the local level are generally excellent, with overlapping affiliations, the national leaderships have remained separate and not always cordial. While the MST has maintained a militant line with regard to the need to take over unused land and assert its agenda, much of the PT leadership has wanted to be more conciliatory. The MST backed and supported Lula (Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva) and the PT in most local campaigns and the national campaign for the presidency and thus helped to achieve significant regime change in Brazil, where Lula was elected with 61.27 percent of the vote in the second round of voting in 2002. Indeed, recognizing the PT's historic challenge to neoliberal policies and elitist rule, the Landless turned out heavily in the election to join some 80 percent of the registered voters who participated in the voting in both rounds. Once the election was over, the movement did not press to become part of the government. Rather, it continued to press the government for a comprehensive land reform program and a redistribution of land and wealth. There would be no return to politics as usual. The PT would press its "Zero Hunger" program and other ameliorative social and economic initiatives, and the MST would press the PT government for comprehensive agrarian reform and economic restructuring. Indeed, this pattern was similar to the strained relationship that the Zapatistas had had with progressive parties in Mexico. Beginning in 2004, the MST displayed considerable dissatisfaction with what it considered the relative inaction of the PT government with regard to land reform and was threatening to engage once again in massive land takeovers, even though such actions were often portrayed quite negatively by the media. The Lula government was facing increasing pressure from international financial institutions and national economic interests to moderate its policies and was beset by scandals in 2005. By functioning in civil society and not becoming part of the government, the MST remained free to pursue its original demands for land reform and socioeconomic

transformation and to offer some critical support to the besieged PT government. However, it could continue to push for real change from below.

## CONCLUSION

The Bolivian and Brazilian examples suggest that as new social movements grow and are politicized, they come to represent a clear response to the neoliberal economic policies that are being foisted on Latin American nations by international financial institutions, the U.S. government, and national economic elites. They have become bulwarks of resistance to neoliberal globalization and have aggressively resisted the implementation of neoliberal policies. Unlike the governments and ruling parties like the PT, the MST, and other new social movements are imbedded in civil society and can take advantage of the considerable political space that has opened up as nominal democratization becomes institutionalized.

As they engage in grassroots organization and massive local and national mobilization, the diverse groups in Bolivia, Brazil, and elsewhere have challenged the way politics are conducted in their countries and the region. Their growth and militancy have generated whole new repertoires of action that include national mobilizations so massive that they can topple governments (Bolivia, Ecuador, and Argentina) and/or force them to change their policies. Indeed, they present the possibility of at least some form of "rule from below." They have left the traditional parties far behind as they envision new political horizons and create a nonauthoritarian, participatory political culture. In the process they are strengthening participatory democratic practice substantially and altering the way politics is conducted in Latin America. What remains to be seen is whether this is sufficient to achieve the necessary structural reforms—whether such mobilizations are, as Gramsci might conclude, coming together in a new cycle of subaltern actions that can break down the historic hegemony exercised by Latin America's ruling classes.

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