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# LATIN AMERICA

*Reflections on the Tendencies of Capital  
in Agriculture and Challenges for Peasant  
Movements in Latin America*

João Pedro Stedile

The aim of this chapter is to briefly present information to foment debate and reflection on the main forms of capital activity in agriculture, and in particular through transnational corporations. There is a natural logic to how capitalism operates in agriculture, now in a phase dominated by financial capital. There are specific characteristics determined by the recent crisis of financial capital that have consequences for the organisation of agricultural production and the life of peasants. The chapter also highlights contradictions that need to be understood in order to act upon them. For one thing, it presents what could be the main elements of a peasant programme for agriculture, especially for the countries of the South, where the peasant way of living in the countryside predominates, and where they suffer more under the power wielded by international capital agricultural technology, production and trade. The chapter also presents some organisational and political challenges for peasant movements at local and international levels because of the current disadvantageous power correlation, where international capital is on the offensive to control nature, production and agricultural goods. This analysis results from the experienced reality in Latin America, especially in Brazil, as a result of the control of agriculture by large capital, and from struggle and resistance by peasant movements and their reflections on how to face capital with an alternative, popular and peasant development model.

## Capital Trends in Agriculture

*Capital mobility in its current hegemonised phase by international financial capital*

The development of the capitalist mode of production has gone through several phases. It started in the fifteenth century as mercantile capitalism and then evolved into industrial capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the twentieth century, it developed as monopoly and imperialist capitalism. For the last two decades we are experiencing a new phase of capitalism that is dominated by globalised financial capital, which means that capital accumulation or wealth is concentrated primarily in the sphere of financial capital. This financial capital needs to control the production of goods (in industry, mining and agriculture) and trade around the world to seize the surplus value generated by agricultural workers in general (Carcanholo, 2014).

Internationalised financial capital took control of agriculture through various mechanisms. The first of these was financial surplus capital. Banks began to buy stocks from hundreds of medium and large-scale companies operating in different sectors related to agriculture. Through controlling most of the stocks, they promoted a process of concentration of the companies working on agriculture. In a few years, these companies had achieved an astronomical growth of capital through investments made by financial capital (Vitali, Glattfelder and Battison, 2011). They moved on to control many different sectors related to agriculture, such as trade, production of inputs, agricultural machinery, agro-industries, pharmaceuticals, agrochemicals and tools. It is important to understand that this capital was accumulated outside of agriculture but was applied within it and quickly accelerated the process of growth and concentration, which by normal means of wealth accumulation for agricultural goods would have taken many more years (Herrera, Dierckxsens and Nakatani, 2014).

The second mechanism of control was the process of dollarisation of the global economy. This allowed companies to take advantage of favourable exchange rates to enter national economies and easily buy up companies and take control of the production markets and trade of agricultural goods (Nakatani and Herrera, 2010, 2013).

The third mechanism was the free trade rules imposed by international organisations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as well as multilateral agreements, which regulated the trade of agricultural goods in accordance with the interests of large companies, forcing subservient governments to liberalise this trade. Thus, transnational corporations were able to enter countries and control their national markets for agricultural goods and inputs in virtually the whole world (Berthelot, 2001).

In practically every country, the development of agricultural production has been increasingly dependent on industrial inputs and has been put at the mercy of the use of credit to finance production. These loans facilitate the funding of the offensive of this mode of production in 'industrial agriculture' and the companies that produce inputs. In other words, banks finance the implementation and control of industrial agriculture worldwide.

And finally, in most countries, governments have abandoned the public policies protecting the national agricultural market and the peasant economy (Nicholson, Montagut and Rulli, 2012). They liberalise markets and implement neoliberal subsidy policies only for large capitalist agricultural production. These government subsidies are mainly tax exemptions on exports or imports and implementation of favourable interest rates for capitalist agriculture.

As a result of two decades of the logic of financial capital control on agricultural production, there are now approximately 50 major corporations that control most of the world agricultural production and trade (CETIM and GRAIN, 2012).

*The recent crisis of financial capital and its consequences for agriculture and nature's goods*

During the years 1990–2008, there was an offensive of financial capital in agriculture (Stedile, 2007b), which in recent years has been intensified by the recurrent crises of financial capital in the United States and Europe. This crisis of financial capital is further aggravating the effects of the control of international capital on peripheral economies, that is, on agriculture and the peasant economy. This has been happening for several reasons.

Large economic groups from the North, due to the crisis in their own countries – low interest rates, the instability of the dollar and their currencies – have fled the North to peripheral economies trying to protect their volatile capital, and have invested in fixed assets such as land, minerals, agricultural raw materials, water, high biodiversity territories, productive investments and agricultural production, as well as in the control of renewable energy sources, such as hydroelectric power or ethanol mills (Transnational Institute, 2007).

The crises of oil prices and their consequences on global warming and the environment has led the automobile–oil complex to start investing large sums of capital in the production of agro-fuels, especially in the production of sugar cane and maize for ethanol, and soybean, peanut, rapeseed and oil palm (African palm) for vegetable oil. This has resulted in an unmitigated attack by financial capital and transnational companies on the Southern tropical agriculture (GRAIN, 2007).

Finally, there is the crisis in which this financial capital has entered the futures agricultural and mining markets to invest its assets and speculate in the futures

market or simply transform money into futures goods. This movement has generated a steep rise in the prices of agricultural goods traded by companies in the world futures stock exchange markets (FAO et al., 2011). The average international prices for agricultural goods are no longer related to the average production cost and the actual value measured by the socially necessary labour time, but are rather the result of speculation and oligopolistic control of agricultural markets by these large companies.

*The current situation of the transnational corporation and financial capital control over agriculture*

There are many aspects one could analyse of the situation and consequence of the action of transnational corporations on agriculture. Here, we will consider only the economic aspects. A few transnational corporations have consolidated the production and world trade of agricultural goods, especially standardised goods like crops and dairy, and now exercise worldwide control over them (CETIM and GRAIN, 2012). They also control the whole production chain of inputs and machines used in agriculture.

An accelerated process of capital centralisation has meant that the same company can now control the production and trade of a range of products and industries (UNCTAD, 2008), such as the manufacture of agricultural inputs (chemical fertilisers, poisons, pesticides), agricultural machinery, pharmaceuticals and GM seeds, as well as of a wide range of products arising from the agro-industry, like food or cosmetic and superfluous goods.

Interdependence among industrial, commercial and financial capital within a company has grown. Now there is an almost absolute control over the prices of agricultural goods and agricultural inputs worldwide. Although prices should have their basis in real value (average labour time), the oligopolistic control of goods generates practices that price goods above their real value, and therefore companies obtain extraordinary profits. At the same time, this leads to the bankruptcy of small and medium companies that cannot produce at the same scale as international corporations (Berthelot, 2008).

A company hegemony has taken hold of scientific knowledge, research (which requires increasingly greater resources) and technologies applied to agriculture, imposing a technological model of so-called 'industrial farming' worldwide, dependent on inputs produced outside of agriculture. This model is presented as the only, the best and the cheapest way for agricultural production, ignoring ancient techniques available in popular knowledge and agroecology. This company hegemony is a consequence of the lack of state investment in agriculture and husbandry research. Throughout the twentieth century, many national states invested public resources in agricultural research and the results were democratised and made accessible to all farmers in each country. Now

agricultural knowledge and research have become privatised and the results are used as commodities in order to obtain higher returns (Delcourt, 2010). Often companies charge farmers for using new technologies by embedding royalties in the high market prices of genetically modified seeds or agricultural machinery and pesticides.

Corporate private ownership is imposed on goods available in nature, in particular on genetically modified seeds, and more recently on sources of drinking water and reservoirs for power generation or irrigation. An offensive is also under way in the South attempting the privatisation of territories with a wealth of plant and animal biodiversity (CETIM and GRAIN, 2012).

Excessive concentration exists in the production of agricultural goods, especially those intended for foreign markets, by an ever smaller number of large landowners allied to corporations. The case of Brazil is illustrative of this: about 10 per cent of all agricultural dwellings in the country control 80 per cent of the production value (Stedile, 2002).

These developments are on course for a dangerous standardisation of human and animal foods all over the world. Humanity is being misled into eating more and more food standardised by companies. Food has become a mere commodity that must be consumed, massively and fast. This has incalculable consequences, such as the destruction of local food habits, culture and high risks to human and animal health.

Throughout the world, there is a generalised loss of sovereignty of peoples and countries over food and the production process, through the denationalisation of landownership, corporations, agribusinesses, trade and technology. There are already more than 70 countries that can no longer produce what their people need to eat (FAO, 2013).

Large tracts of homogeneous industrial plantations of eucalyptus, pine, African palm crops, etc., have been utilised for the production of pulp, wood or agro-energy, seriously affecting the environment, causing massive destruction of biodiversity and altering the groundwater table (Miller, 2010).

A Machiavellian alliance has been built in the South among the interests of large landowners, landlords and Creole capitalist farmers, and transnational corporations. This alliance is imposing the industrial mode of agriculture in the global South at a very fast pace and is concentrating landownership in astonishing ways. It is destroying and rendering family agriculture impossible and depopulating the countryside in our countries. This mode of farming uses intensive mechanisation and agrochemicals, evicting the workforce and causing the migration of large contingents of the rural people.

A new international redivision of production and labour is under way, which condemns most of the countries in the South to being mere exporters of agricultural raw materials and minerals.

Most of the governments, although chosen by electoral processes considered to be 'democratic', are in fact driven by the logic of capital and all kinds of media spin, which has resulted in them becoming subservient to those interests. This has also translated into their agricultural policies, which have been fully subordinated to the interests of transnational corporations (Delcourt, 2010). They have forsaken state control over agriculture and food and public policies to support farmers and food sovereignty and to protect the environment.

*The model of capital for agriculture: Agribusiness*

In short, capital and its capitalist owners, represented by large landowners, banks and domestic and transnational corporations, are implementing the so-called production model of agribusiness all over the world.

Agribusiness is characterised by the following:

1. Agricultural production is organised into monoculture (single crop) in increasingly larger areas.
2. There is intensive use of agricultural machinery, at a progressively larger scale, evicting labour from the countryside.
3. Agriculture is practised without farmers. There is intensive use of agricultural poisons, agrochemicals, which destroy the natural fertility of the soil and its microorganisms and pollute groundwater; even the atmosphere is polluted when defoliants and desiccants are used, which evaporate and then return with the rain. But above all, the food produced gets contaminated, resulting in grave consequences for the health of the population. More and more GM seeds are being used, with standardised production techniques that seek only the highest profit rate in the shortest amount of time.

This production model that seeks to produce dollars and commodities, and not food, has become dominant and, to an increasing extent, has also been using fertile land for the production of agro-fuels for 'feeding' fuel tanks of automobiles, and is engaging in industrial plantation of homogenous trees for pulp (for the packaging industry) and energy in the form of charcoal (GRAIN, 2007).

### **The Contradictions of Capital Control over Agriculture, Especially in the South**

The description of economic power over agriculture, nature and agricultural products scares everyone. And it can lead to pessimism about the possibility of reversing this situation, such is the force that international and financial capital exerts. However, all these economic and social processes bring with them

contradictions. These contradictions generate riots and anger, adverse effects that will continue to return in the medium term.

Some of these contradictions of capitalist control over agriculture and nature are highlighted here, so that one can understand them and act on them, bringing about the necessary changes.

- The production model of industrial agriculture is totally dependent on inputs, such as chemical fertilisers and oil by-products, with their natural physical limitations like shortage of global oil, potassium, lime and phosphorus. Therefore, its expansion is restricted in the medium term. And its cost-to-price ratio is above the actual value.
- Oligopolistic control by some companies has raised food prices above their value, which will lead to hunger and unrest among the population that cannot access the food due to lack of or insufficient income. That is, simply conditioning food to profit rates will bring grave social problems in the short term, since the poorest, starving and hungry population will not have enough income to become consumers of foods that have become mere commodities. FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) revealed that more than one billion people go hungry every day (FAO, 2013) – we have reached this magnitude of hunger for the first time in human history. Meanwhile, the production of food grows systematically.
- International capital is controlling and privatising the ownership of natural resources, represented by land, water, forests and biodiversity. This affects national sovereignty and will provoke reactions from a wide range of social sectors that oppose it, not just peasants.
- Industrial agriculture is based on the need for an increase in the use of agrochemicals as a way to save labour and to produce by means of large-scale monoculture. This produces contaminated food, which affects the health of the population. People living in cities, who have more access to information, will certainly react. The wealthy classes are already protecting themselves, and in large supermarket chains the consumption of organically produced foods is constantly on the rise.
- Large-scale production evicts labour from the countryside and, as a consequence, there is an increase in the population living on the outskirts of large cities (Delcourt, 2010). These people have no employment alternative and income. This increase in social inequality and rural exodus worldwide reveals a contradiction in capitalist control over agriculture.
- Companies are expanding agriculture based on GM seeds. But at the same time, there is an increase in the number of negative reports about the consequences of GM crops on the destruction of biodiversity, climate and the threats to human and animal health. Nature's reactions to this



homogenisation of plant life are becoming increasingly clear. GM seeds contaminate other seeds and cannot coexist with other similar species. Moreover, new diseases emerge in plants that are resistant to the poisons used in combination with the GM seeds (GeneWatch UK and Greenpeace International, 2008).

- Monoculture industrial agriculture systematically destroys all biodiversity. The destruction of biodiversity alters rainfall patterns and climate, and contributes to global warming. This contradiction is unsustainable and the population living in cities will begin to realise and demand changes.
- The privatisation of ownership of water, whether rivers, lakes or groundwater, will increase its price and restrict its access by low-income populations, with grave social consequences. In several countries in Latin America, the three biggest corporations in this segment are Nestlé, Coca-Cola, and PepsiCo, and together they control most of the market for bottled drinking water (CETIM and GRAIN, 2012).
- The increased land acquisition by foreign corporations and the uncontrollable denationalisation bring contradictions for the political sovereignty of countries.
- The expansion and use of industrial agriculture to produce agro-fuels will further expand monoculture and the use of oil-based fertilisers. This will not solve issues of global warming and carbon emissions. The main cause of these problems is the growing use of individual transport in cities fuelled by the greed of auto companies. Therefore, fostering the agriculture of agro-fuels will not solve the problem; it will only aggravate it leading to the destruction of biodiversity.
- The project of international redivision of labour and production turns many countries of the South into mere exporters of raw materials, and undermines national development projects that could ensure employment and income distribution for their populations. This will generate income concentration, unemployment and migration for countries of the North.
- The agriculture companies, coupled with financial capital, are also advancing towards concentration and centralisation in supermarket distribution with global oligopolistic networks like Wal-Mart and Carrefour. This process will destroy thousands of small stores and local merchants, with incalculable social consequences.
- Industrial agriculture must increasingly use hormones and industrial drugs for the mass production in the shortest time of animals for slaughter, such as poultry, cattle and pigs (CETIM and GRAIN, 2012). This will have adverse consequences on the health of the consumer population.
- Large landowners are no longer in control of the production process and profit margins. They are hostages of companies that control production and trade (Stedile and Görgen, 1993). Therefore, most of the profits

remain in the hands of trade companies. To compensate for the split in the profit rate, agriculture capitalists have increased the exploitation of wage workers, imposing a seasonal work system, by which temporary employment is available for only a few months in the year (Stedile and Fernandes, 1999). In several countries, work practices analogous to slavery, or the super-exploitation of labour, have re-emerged, with wages that are insufficient to guarantee survival and workers in constant debt to the 'bosses'. There has also been a rise in the exploitation of female and child labour (UNICEF, 2009), especially during periods of harvest when there is high labour demand, stimulating the migration of temporary labourers without assuring them any social rights (Social Network for Justice and Human Rights, 2007).

- In the model of domination used by capital in agriculture, there are no jobs and income alternatives for the youth. This is a huge contradiction, since if a productive sector cannot rely on the youth, it will have no future (Caldart, 2000).
- Vast regions within countries are becoming depopulated, and it seems as if human survival is dependent on concentrating the population in large cities (Delcourt, 2010). And there, in such demographic concentration, the living conditions deteriorate even further. Agriculture is being practised without people. The best example of this contradiction is the United States, where the prison population is greater than the population living in the rural areas.

### A New Peasant Programme for Agriculture

In the literature on political economy and sociology, there is much confusion about 'peasant' as a term and concept (Evenson and Pingali, 2007). The term is usually used in association with forms of production of the past, to refer to the pre-capitalist class of farmers. In the history of industrial capitalism, capital used different forms of coexistence with and exploitation of peasant farm work in its logic of accumulation. In general, it combined dialectically both the destruction of peasant forms and their reproduction.

In *La Via Campesina* (the International Peasants' Movement) we have accumulated debates and theories that propose a new model of agricultural organisation, based on the hegemony of rural workers who live in peasant-like conditions (see, for example, Stedile, 2005, 2006, 2007a, and Nicholson, Montagut and Rulli, 2012). But the ways of organising this new model depend on the objective conditions of the productive forces and the nature of each country, as well as the degree of social expression of this segment of workers.

We call it a new programme because it is actually a popular anti-capitalist programme – the anti-model of capital control, a new production model under workers' control – to produce according to the needs and rights of all people.

It is virtually impossible to systematise the proposals that peasant movements in each country have defended on a single principle – a universal alternative platform for an agricultural model – since each country has its natural specificities in terms of its productive forces, class and power correlation (Stedile, 2007a).

The list that follows represents a summary of what has been proposed by peasant movements within Latin America for a new organisation model of agricultural production in the countries of the region. The main proposals are:

- *To implement a programme for agricultural production and hydropower that prioritises food sovereignty and the production of healthy foods for every country.* This means that states must develop policies of incentive and support, enabling each region of a country to produce the total amount of food its people require, thus achieving food sovereignty in the entire country. To ensure food sovereignty of the people must be the main objective and the first priority of any programme of agricultural and rural development. International agricultural trade between countries should be reduced to exchanges of the surplus or complementary staple products, acknowledging people's diverse eating habits. This should be the main goal of the organisation of agricultural production in every country and in all countries of the world.
- *To prevent the concentration of private land, forests and water ownership, and to organise a broad distribution of the largest farms, establishing a maximum size limit for the ownership of nature's goods.* The essence of the agrarian reform should be a broad democratisation, for workers, peasants and the population living in rural areas, of the access to landownership and land use, as well as to water and other goods of nature.
- *To adopt systems of food production based on agricultural diversification.* Monoculture destroys natural equilibrium and imposes the use of pesticides. Practices of diversified agriculture must be developed in all areas. There must be production and work throughout the year and this must happen in a balanced way respecting biodiversity and the environment.
- *To adopt production techniques that seek to increase the productivity of labour and land, with due consideration for the environment and biodiversity, and to fight the use of agrochemicals, which contaminate food and nature.* In general, these techniques have received the designation of agroecological practices. However, in each country different terminology is used to explain similar methods of production.

- *To develop the organisation of agricultural industries on small and medium scales, in a cooperative manner under the control of industrial workers and peasants who produce the raw material.* Agro-industry is needed in the modern world in order to preserve foods and transport them to cities. But we must ensure that agro-industries are under the control of workers and peasants so that the income from the value added to products is distributed among the workers. Also, adopting a smaller scale allows for an easier dissemination to all regions and rural municipalities, generating in rural areas more employment and income opportunities for young people, who are more open to working in such agro-industrial ventures.
- *To adopt agricultural machines to reduce workers' over-exertion, but which are best suited to the environment, and must therefore be of small scale and adapted to peasant agrarian structures of small and medium-scale production.*
- *To prevent foreign companies from controlling food production, production of agricultural inputs and food in any country.* These should be controlled by social forces in that country, whether that is the government, business workers, rural workers or peasants.
- *To defend a 'zero deforestation policy', protecting nature and using appropriate natural resources that favour those who live in the area.* It is possible to produce the necessary food for the local population in all countries of the world without the further destruction of a single hectare of forest biome or native vegetation. In addition, governments must promote massive reforestation plans using native and fruit trees in the already degraded areas in every country.
- *To preserve, disseminate and multiply native and improved seeds, according to the specific climate and biomes, so that all farmers have access to them, and to prevent the spread of GM seeds.* Farmers have the right and duty to produce their own seeds, control them and to have access to technologies that can improve them genetically, adapting them to local biomes. They must also be allowed to search for greater productivity.
- *To ensure that access to water as a common good is the right of every citizen.* It cannot be treated as a commodity and must be accessible to everyone. Aquifers (underground water) and all naturally existing sources of water in our countries must be preserved. Similarly, states must develop policies to reforest riverbanks and lakes, to protect water springs, and to provide proper storage for rainwater.
- *To implement a popular energy plan for each country, based on energy sovereignty, and to ensure that the control of energy and its sources is with the people.* This means that every town, municipality and region of our countries can develop for its needs and uses the production and

distribution of energy from renewable sources, non-damaging and non-predatory, such as agro-fuel, hydropower, wind and solar energy.

- *To ensure legal recognition to all native communities, to their cultures and to their rights of possession and use of indigenous and traditional lands or territories.* In all countries there are many native communities that, according to the local culture, are called indigenous peoples, native communities or autochthonous communities. In Brazil and other countries that have suffered under slave-labour plantations, many communities remain of the descendants of African slaves who have lived in the occupied territories for decades, but are not legalised. These communities have resisted all forms of advancement from private property and capitalism. It is essential to build a new agricultural production model for democratic occupation of the territories, whereby all these communities have assurance by the state of their historical rights over goods of nature and the territories and lands they occupy.
- *To prohibit any foreign company to own land in any country of the world.* As part of the internationalisation of capitalism through transnational corporations sponsored by financial capital, there is a land purchase rush in most countries of the South by imperialist companies of the North (Miller, 2010), or sometimes even by large companies in the South operating in mining, hydroelectric plants, pulp, etc. It is essential to ban the denationalisation of land use and the ownership of land and nature's goods (such as water, biodiversity, minerals) by these foreign companies. People's sovereignty should be protected, preventing control of their territories by foreign companies in any country.
- *To promote the development of public policies for agriculture through the state by assuring the following:*
  1. priority of production of food for the domestic market;
  2. profitable prices for small farmers, guaranteeing purchase through various state or social mechanisms;
  3. a rural credit policy, particularly for investment in small- and medium-sized agricultural businesses;
  4. a state policy to control agricultural and husbandry research, prioritising research on food production and agroecological techniques that provide broad access to farmers, and democratising their findings to the entire population;
  5. sanitary regulations of agro-industrial production adequate for the conditions of peasant agriculture and small agro-industries, thus expanding the possibilities of food production;
  6. appropriate public policies for agriculture according to the regional realities of each country.

- *To ensure social security policies for the entire rural population, as well as a public and universal system of solidarity for all workers in order to have access to health, social welfare and retirement services.* In most countries, peasants and (temporary or permanent) rural workers are excluded from public health systems and social security that provide the possibility of retirement and social assistance. Therefore, it is essential to universalise these services through appropriate social security policies for the entire population. The historical gains of the working class after years of long struggles in the twentieth century should be extended to all rural areas.
- *To review and modify the current model of individual transport in force in most countries, which is highly pollutant and can lead to distortions due to the production of agro-fuel.* A national public transport programme must be developed to prioritise rail systems, subways and waterways, which require less energy and are less polluting and more accessible to the whole population. This condition will allow for the development of more rational agro-fuel policies that will prevent large tracts of land being shifted from food production to fuel production for private automobiles, as is the case with the current production of ethanol and biodiesel.
- *To promote education in the countryside for everyone; to ensure the implementation of a broad educational programme in rural areas, which is inclusive of the reality of each region and aims to raise the social awareness of peasants; and to universalise the education of young people at all levels, in particular, high school and university, and to develop a massive literacy campaign for all adults.* The programmes giving young people access to university must be combined with housing in rural areas and designed in rotation, articulating theory and practice, in order to avoid higher education becoming an encouragement for rural exodus. Instead young people must be motivated to apply their university knowledge in their rural communities.
- *To change the current international agreements of the WTO, European Union and Mercosur/Mercosul conventions and United Nations conferences, which only promote the interests of international capital and free trade to the detriment of the interests of peasants and the people from the South.* The current agreements merely reflect the needs of capital accumulation and control over the production of goods and world trade, and are conducted by governments that only represent the interests of capital. It is necessary to break these unlawful impositions and create a new landmark for international representation, which will ensure the representation and the interests of the people.
- *To adopt the production of pulp and paper in smaller-scale industries to meet the needs of the local people and avoid the extensive monoculture of large homogeneous tree plantations that upset the balance of the environment.*

- *To develop policies to improve living conditions in villages and rural communities, ensuring access to electricity, transport and housing appropriate to their micro-climates.*
- *To encourage all social relations in our societies to be based on nurturing values shaped by humanity over millennia, such as solidarity, social justice and equality.* These values are not merely statements of principle, but should guide our daily behaviour, our movements, organisations, political regimes and states. Society will only have a future if it cultivates the historical humanist and socialist values. All societies based on individualism are doomed to failure.
- *To defend and enhance the cultural habits of each village and community as a political and cultural resistance against the standardisation imposed by capital.*

### Political and Organisational Challenges for Peasant Movements in Latin America

The advent of the new phase of capitalism, in which its companies and corporations have become international, has brought with it a contradiction: it has forced peasant movements, which are in general more concerned with local and national themes, to become international too. Thus, since the 1990s, initiatives and networks have multiplied among various peasant movements in the world. These networks have resulted in the constitution of the Latin American Coordinating Committee of Rural Organisations (CLOC) and other similar initiatives in Europe, Africa and Asia. From this movement, La Via Campesina was born as a network for unity and international exchanges of experiences, principles, debates, ideas and the building of joint mobilisations in order to face a common enemy in the international arena: transnational corporations, GM seeds, and international agreements, such as those of the WTO and the World Bank, which are only in the interest of capital and implemented against the peasants (Stedile, 2007b; Nicholson, Montagut and Rulli, 2012). From these exchanges, collective reflections and experiences that have been accumulated in bilateral meetings and international conferences, we can surmise the main challenges still facing the peasant movement in the international arena today, particularly in Latin America. They are common to all countries, but must be tackled at the national level by each nation's own movements. The challenges are:

- *To transform the struggle for land into a struggle for territory.* The struggle for land is no longer a mere struggle of the peasant family for a space to work, produce, survive and reproduce. It has become more than an individual need and must be addressed as a collective need of all

communities in defence of their territory. The peasants as a class must defend their territorial spaces against the interests of capital in order to survive. In earlier times, the fight around land was aimed at eliminating ground rent and the exploitation that landless peasants suffered at the hands of large landowners and landlords. Today, capital is fighting for land in order to control seeds, water, biodiversity, minerals, rivers and the production of agricultural commodities. Thus, the struggle for agrarian reform should be carried forward by all categories of peasants and rural workers, not just by the landless.

- *To build a new model of agricultural production managed by workers and peasants.* Historically, peasants have been used to defend only their immediate interests (Casanova and Herrera, 2014). Therefore, they fight for land, better prices and better living conditions in their communities, which are measured by improvements such as electricity, roads, schools and other public services. Today, two models for agricultural production are at stake. How are we going to use our land and territories? Are they destined to serve the capital accumulation of some companies that only exploit them to produce goods and to profit from nature? Or are we going to allocate a social function to them that benefits those living in rural areas and the entire society? Thus, there is a dispute between the two models of occupation and use of land and territories, and they are incompatible. We are aware that the model of control of capital over production and nature puts at risk the very survival of biodiversity, nature and humans; it is predatory and socially irresponsible, and it aims at quick and easy profits. It will have serious consequences for the balance of the environment and human health. Consequently, it is imperative to defeat the project of capital for agriculture.
- *To address the interests of transnational corporations and their control mechanisms.* Earlier, during the mercantile and industrial phase of capitalism, the main enemies of peasants appeared to be large landowners, the local oligarchies, and intermediary traders, who exploited farmers and prevented them from reproducing as a class. Nowadays, there is a new class of common enemies of peasantry in all countries: it is the transnational corporations, which control territories, productions, technologies, inputs, and prices and the world market of agricultural goods. These companies operate in partnership and are sponsored by financial capital. Therefore, the new and powerful common enemy of all peasants around the world has spread. Peasants need to identify it and act to stop its advance, as a condition not only of improving their living conditions, but of their survival as a class
- *To build a new technological matrix based on agroecology.* During the twentieth century, peasants were generally misled by the intensive



campaigns of industrial capital that the only way to increase labour productivity and cultivated areas was the intensive use of inputs produced by industry: machines, chemical composts, fertilisers and agrochemicals. Throughout the century this production matrix was developed based on chemical products and machinery from the industry at ever-increasing scales. Many peasants were deceived into adopting them. They did not realise that by embracing the technological matrix of capital, besides having to work to pay for it, they were becoming similar to capitalist farmers. However, when their production methods were compared, they were not able to match the scale of the capitalists.

This resulted in deficits, bankruptcies and loss of land by millions of peasant families worldwide (Amin, 2005). Peasants urgently need, in all countries, to develop a new standard, a new technological matrix for agricultural production that allows for an increase in productivity of labour and yield of cultivated crops in equilibrium with the environment – to produce more, but in a healthy way. This technological matrix is summarised in the techniques brought together by agroecology.

Nevertheless, in order to do that, we need an enormous effort to collect the practices and knowledge from popular wisdom that has been in existence for decades and has been passed on from generation to generation in our communities. We need to systematise these scientific findings, aggregate them, and develop agronomy courses based on agroecology. Most agronomy universities and colleges have been taken over by the interests of capital and are contemptuous of agroecology as an important branch of science. It is up to peasants and their organisations to recover and systematise this knowledge, organising university courses in agroecology in all countries in order to give a scientific basis for a new productive matrix, which benefits farmers and the society and also maintains the equilibrium of the environment (Caldart, 2006).

Hence the importance of the efforts in which *La Via Campesina* is engaged all over the world, particularly in Latin America, in partnership with several progressive governments as well as university professors aware of the importance of organising and multiplying in our universities agroecology courses that are accessible to the peasant youth farmers. This connects them with networks in the continent within the Latin American Institute of Agroecology (IALA). We must make an effort to have in each biome of our countries courses in agroecology that prepare agronomists and systematise a production matrix adapted to each region.

Therefore, we need new networks of knowledge and of appropriation of production techniques in order to implement them in rural development programmes. In that sense, we can underline the importance of the experience that Cuban peasants have acquired from the methodology

for the dissemination of knowledge and techniques of the Campesino a Campesino (Peasant to Peasant) Movement, in which peasant leaders themselves are encouraged to create conditions to share knowledge and experience with farmers from other regions (Holt-Giménez, 2006). Furthermore, it is also necessary to develop new methods for dissemination of agroecological techniques.

- *To implement and support schools at all levels in the countryside.* The access to knowledge is as important as having land, controlling territory and producing goods. Knowledge is the only thing that truly frees people. Knowledge is culture. Accumulated knowledge is science that humanity has been amassing to understand and transform the world. Therefore, it is essential for peasant movements and people living in rural areas to have access to knowledge. Knowledge is ordered in our societies through books and schools. Peasant movements have to transform schools into ideological territories of class, to incorporate them into their programmes of struggle, to have schools at all levels for young people and adults, from elementary school (up to the eighth grade) and secondary school to higher education and university. Schools have to be situated where people live. We must avoid programmes that move our youth and children to the city, as many governments advocate. This destroys rural roots, imposes enormous sacrifices, and slowly alienates the youth from their environment and social class. We must fight for programmes and books at all educational levels that are appropriate to the needs of our people; for teachers and educators that are in tune with the interests of the people; for public and free education in rural areas and society, under the responsibility of the state; and for these things to be considered as rights assured to every individual.
- *To develop an ongoing training process for the grassroots, militants and cadres.* Peasant movements urgently need to invest all available energy, and human, economic and material resources, in creating the necessary conditions for the development of training programmes. Training means to have class awareness combined with scientific knowledge, and training programmes help us to use the scientific knowledge developed by humanity to interpret the reality we live in and to enable us to transform it. Without scientific knowledge, or study, it will be impossible for peasants to interpret reality and transform it in the correct way. Therefore, it is necessary to develop training programmes at various levels:
  1. Mass training at the social basis for all age groups and with organisations offering employment services. In general, mass training is imparted by practising being part of mobilisations, massive forms of struggle, and making use of the media. Another

possibility for mass training is the use of cultural expression, such as theatre, music and painting.

2. Training in small clusters in an organised way, that is, basic training.
3. Training of activists, aimed particularly at young people to prepare them to be active agents and disseminators of ideals, programmes and actions. Activists compose the active body of our movements.
4. Training of leaders, which requires a higher and more complex level of scientific knowledge about the current situation of the struggle between agricultural production models.

To develop these various levels of training, it is necessary to use a broad range of forms and methods according to the culture and idiosyncrasies or specificities of each region and nation.

- *To develop our own means of mass communication.* Class struggle in the current phase of finance capitalism and globalisation is increasingly involved in the use of mass communication. The ruling classes in our countries as well as internationally have complete hegemony over mass media – television, news agencies, radios, newspapers and magazines – and use them to reproduce their ideas, ideologies, projects and programmes for society. They use them to fight against the working classes, to disseminate untruths, to affect the thinking of the masses, and to manipulate the masses of workers in the countryside and the cities (Herman and Chomsky, 1988).

It is vital, therefore, for all worker and peasant movements to develop their own media. We must not debase ourselves by speaking in the dominant class's language. Although in adverse economic and technological conditions it is essential for us to have under our control the most diverse means of communication with the people – local news, community radio, television, newspapers, etc. –, we must also develop other media that generate a real dialogue with the population and use all forms of cultural expression to spread our ideas and programmes among the masses.

- *To potentialise mass social struggles.* The strength of farmers' organisations is not measured by their programmes or by the fairness of their proposals and ideas. Their strength is measured by their ability to mobilise large numbers of people around the same objectives. And to mobilise many people is to conduct mass struggle.

Our enemies are becoming more powerful. Nowadays, we do not only face the rural oligarchies and backward landlords, but the large international capital and its corporations, banks and puppet governments, when they defend their interests. It is only possible to confront these

dominant interests and economic power concentrated by capital with great mass strength. Therefore, peasant movements more than ever need to develop a new methodology for grassroots organisation and work towards drawing together the greatest possible number of families and make them aware of the necessity for mass struggle.

Only mass struggle can face capital, halt its offensive on our territories and start securing better living conditions for the people. Meetings, hearings, negotiations and representations are useful, but will be inefficient if not backed up by the power of the mobilised masses. In each country, we must discover and develop the many forms of mobilisation and mass struggle, demonstrating the accumulation of power and organisation to defend the interests of the peasantry and to build a new agricultural production model that serves the interests of the society as a whole.

- *To build national alliances with all categories of rural workers, peasants and people living in rural areas.* In all countries, there is a huge variety of peasant categories and workers who live in rural areas. Diversity is the result of the much differentiated development of capitalism in each region or country, which goes on reproducing different and more complex social relations. Thus, in most of our countries, we have remedied peasants, landed but poor peasants and landless peasants. In terms of categories of rural worker, there are those with steady employment, temporary rural workers, seasonal workers, and an ever-growing segment of workers known as subproletarian or even lumpenproletariat (Stedile and Fernandes, 1999). There are huge challenges involved in discovering the common needs of these different social categories living in rural areas, and in developing alliances around programmes and common forms of struggle. A single section of peasants, no matter how determined and radical, will not be enough to face the power of the enemy. We must always remember that the biggest challenge is to accumulate social power; and social power is the number of people organised around the same goal.

In many countries, there is also a need to build alliances with other social sectors living in rural areas, which do not identify themselves as social categories of capitalism, namely, indigenous peoples, native communities, Afro-descendants, populations living on riverbanks, and fisherfolk.

- *To build alliances with city workers.* Social changes in our countries will only be possible and feasible when we can build a broad mass movement bringing together the entire working population from the countryside and the city. No social force alone will make the necessary changes for the

entire society. We need to build a major national alliance among all the working classes and the oppressed and exploited peoples.

There are two classic ways to go about building this major and necessary alliance:

1. With the development of common struggles around issues that concern everyone. For example, problems of workload, education, employment, income, public services, public health, agrochemicals and environment are issues that affect the entire population. Therefore, developing forms of struggle around them may bring together broad masses.
2. With the establishment of a national programme by the working classes and the people for the country, representing a single political project.

Thus, peasant movements must be aware of this need to break free from corporatism and sectorism in agrarian issues in order to add numbers to other categories of the working classes and the people living in the cities, and to be able to build a broad movement that can have enough power to implement a new socio-economic programme of structural changes. Peasants increasingly depend on alliances with the city (Stedile, 2007a) to defend themselves against the exploitation and plundering they are subject to in the countryside. It is a huge challenge to break down barriers that separate those who live in the countryside and those in the cities in order to create common ties of goals, programmes and forms of struggle.

And finally, we have to articulate joint international mobilisations against the same enemies. Today, if the class enemies are articulated internationally through their banks, corporations and international agreements, it is necessary for peasant movements to develop their own international forms of articulation and mass struggle. The questions that are before us are: How to challenge price and market control of the crops if they are determined by five or six transnational corporations worldwide, such as Monsanto, Cargill, Bunge, ADM and Dreyfus. How to address the issue of agrochemicals if a few international companies, including Bayer, BASF, Syngenta, Monsanto and Shell Chemical have complete hegemony over technology and the market in all countries. How to develop a new dairy production model if companies like Nestlé, Parmalat and Danone influence the world's markets. How to protect our drinking water supplies if a few companies – Nestlé, Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola and Suez, for example – want to control it worldwide. How to fight against the privatisation of our seeds or genetic modifications that

eliminate biodiversity if these practices are regulated by just a few GM seed companies around the world. How to face the advance of eucalyptus and pine monoculture if a group of pulp companies, such as Stora Enso, Botnia and International Paper, dominate the markets. To handle these questions, peasant movements must develop strategies and forms of popular struggle that are more and more internationalised.