STATE AND UNIONS IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE BRAZILIAN COUNTRYSIDE, 1964–1979*

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In the early 1960s, the dramatic mobilization of rural wage laborers and small farmers placed the agrarian question at the top of the Brazilian political agenda. The question facing governing elites was how to modernize an archaic agrarian sector that was widely perceived as posing a major bottleneck for development and a breeding ground for agrarian radicalism. Until that time, wage laborers and small farmers in various forms of land tenure had effectively been excluded from existing labor legislation, social security, and coverage by national law in general. Instead, various traditional and clientelist forms of social control regulated rural social relations. The new rural movements were led by relatively moderate urban groups or individuals seeking to create a rural political base. Their appearance soon after the Cuban Revolution however, and in the larger context of the cold war, triggered fears of possible revolution. National debate quickly centered not on whether but on how the Brazilian state should intervene in the countryside. Attempts by the populist government of President João Goulart to address the agrarian question were cut short by the military coup of 1964. In its wake, the fledgling rural movements were brutally repressed in a wave of state-sponsored repression and private landowner violence.

In the ensuing fifteen years of military rule, however, Brazil developed for the first time in its history a rural union movement of truly national scope. In 1979 delegates of the Movimento Sindical dos Trabalhadores Rurais (MSTR), representing 2,275 rural unions and 21 state-level federations, gathered at their Third National Congress to chart a course in the transition to democracy. Led by the Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura (CONTAG), delegates cast a dramatic series of votes approving the use of strikes in wage campaigns, calling for massive and immediate agrarian reform, and demanding an end to the existing labor regime: the extinction of the union tax; ratification of Convention 87

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of the International Labour Organization, which guarantees unions the right to free and autonomous organization; and the creation of a labor central.[1] The labor congress was followed by a wage campaign in the Northeast of Brazil in which 20,000 sugarcane workers went on strike. The following year, 240,000 rural workers crossed their arms and refused to work in a similar strike.

How did this movement succeed in organizing millions of small farmers and rural wage laborers during a period of extended military rule? Was the movement as militant as the congress's resolutions indicated? Several countries in Latin America faced the agrarian question during the 1960s and 1970s, but the outcome in Brazil was unique. It contrasts sharply with that in Chile, which experienced a similar but more intense period of rural mobilization, followed by sixteen years of military rule. In Chile the rural union movement never recovered from the repression that followed the coup in 1973.[2] This article will argue that the Brazilian military, after having eliminated the Left as an organized force, deliberately stimulated the growth of the union movement as part of a larger transformative project for the countryside. The military developed a relatively coherent project that sought to resolve the agrarian question once for all. The growth of the rural union movement resulted from its role in this agrarian project.

The agrarian project, in place by 1968, consisted of three intertwined parts: increasing agricultural production, fostering national integration, and incorporating rural labor into national society. Agricultural production would be increased by pushing the frontier northward and, more important, by creating a dynamic agro-industrial sector to help redefine Brazil's insertion in the international economy. This agro-export sector would then act as a lever to pull the rest of the economy into a new and prolonged period of economic growth. The concern with national integration was driven by officers' cold-war-induced nightmare of a Cuban-style revolution in the dark, vast, and unknown interior of Brazil and by the dream of making Brazil a world power. National integration required the economic integration of new regions and the extension of the state's reach across national territory, including areas where the authority of local and regional oligarchies prevailed.

The state-regulated rural workers' union movement would incorporate rural labor into national society and institutionalize a new relationship between the state and rural labor. This new relationship was built on state control and the depoliticization of labor. The corporatist labor regime that regulated urban labor relations and unions was therefore extended to "rural workers," a new legal category that included wage labor-

1. The delegates also demanded direct presidential elections and a constitutional assembly to rewrite the Constitution of 1967 (see CONTAG 1979, 1993).

2. On the rural union movement in Chile, see Kay (1992) and Kurtz (1996).

ers, sharecroppers, and small farmers.[3] Rural unions became an important part of the state's distributional arm, providing a social wage in the form of social security and health-care services. They also sought to draw the state into the countryside by educating members about national legislation and demanding its implementation. Conceived in this manner, the unions had the added virtue of tying the rural oligarchies' client workers to the state, thus helping to strengthen the national state vis-à-vis regional oligarchies and local elites. This agrarian strategy and the ongoing threat of repression set the parameters within which the union movement could grow.

State elites alone cannot remake the relation between state and society. In Brazil, a progressive union leadership played a central role in building the union movement from within, occupying the institutional space created by the state. This union leadership came to head CONTAG in 1968, a group I call "the Generation of '68." These leaders worked within the parameters set by the military's agrarian project in building the movement. They created a new political identity to integrate the movement's diverse membership and sought to draw the state into the countryside to mediate rural social relations. This strategy, while hardly militant, was distinctively progressive in the conservative and socially exclusionary Brazilian agrarian context.

Unlike many of its urban counterparts, CONTAG escaped becoming a *pelego* (co-opted) labor confederation. A majority of rural unions, however, became pseudo-state agencies because of their dependence on the state, inability to mobilize members, and delivery of social services.[4] The movement that gathered for the Third Congress in 1979 was therefore in many ways precarious. It was led by a progressive minority strategically placed within the union apparatus, one capable of organizing strikes in a limited number of regions, surrounded by a majority of conservative

3. Rural workers included rural wage laborers, sharecroppers, *posseiros* (literally squatters, but in Brazil a recognized legal category with a set of rights), tenant farmers, and smallholders. Women were not covered and had to wait until the 1980s for the right to join unions (won in practice) and to achieve parity with men in labor rights and social benefits. Perhaps the most nuanced interpretation of corporatism is offered in Collier and Collier (1991). See also Schmitter (1971), Erickson (1977), and Stepan (1978).

4. The size of the union movement and rate of unionization are difficult to establish in a meaningful way. CONTAG represented 6.2 million rural workers in 1979. The share of dues-paying members, however, may have been less than half of that figure, probably between 2 and 3 million. In 1974 CONTAG found that in the northern state of Pará, dues-paying members accounted for only 30 percent of total membership, in comparison with 64 percent in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul. What kept many unions financially afloat was income from the mandatory union tax and from government contracts to deliver social services. The rate of unionization is also difficult to establish but was high, over an estimated 50 percent. The census of 1980 estimates Brazilian economically active male workers (over ten years of age) in agriculture at around 11.4 million, of which probably 1 million were boys under fourteen. Women were excluded from rural unions during this period. See CONTAG, "Pará: Sindicalismo, alguns dados e informações sobre a evolução do movimento no estado" and

unions that blocked the movement as a whole from shifting to a more militant stance in the years that followed.[5]

The account that follows focuses on how the military's labor policy, as part of the agrarian project, led to the emergence of the union movement in the period from 1964 to 1979. Although most scholarship on rural movements has been grounded in changes in agrarian structure or rural standards of living, a political-institutional approach can better explain the emergence of the union movement in Brazil.[6] Brazil experienced significant social dislocations and a dramatic rearranging of rural social relations as a result of the modernization of agriculture and the economic integration of the Amazon region during the 1960s and 1970s. But it was the military's effort to rearticulate state-society relations in the countryside, as part of the agrarian project, that foreclosed the organizing drives of the period preceding the 1964 coup and that, through a mix of incentives and constraints, created an alternative organizing opportunity. The growth of the Movimento Sindical dos Trabalhadores Rurais should therefore be understood in terms of the union leaders' response to the new, if greatly constrained, institutional opportunities for rural organizing created by the military-state elite.

A number of scholars have recently called for a more disaggregated understanding of state-society relations, which seems particularly appropriate in explaining the emergence of the union movement.[7] The agrarian project led to a dramatic expansion of the state's presence in the countryside and was a key part of the struggle between a centralizing national state on one side and regional oligarchies and local political elites on the other. The expansion of state institutions during this period of military rule created new arenas of political struggle, including the rural union movement itself. Local political forces, and local Catholic churches in particular, played an important role in shaping how unions were constituted in the different regions of Brazil. There is a caveat of a practical nature, however. Despite extensive research on military rule in Latin America, academic production on military policy in specific areas remains sparse,

"Rio Grande do Sul, 4: Aspectos históricos do movimento sindical no estado," CONTAG mimeos, Brasília, undated; IBGE (1981); and Maybury-Lewis (1994, app. A).

5. Two analysts have argued that the movement as a whole was progressive and that its rapid growth was due primarily to the effective leadership of CONTAG. Such assessments, however, ignore CONTAG's intense dependency on the state and the fact that it represented a progressive minority in a generally conservative movement. See Palmeira (1985) and Maybury-Lewis (1994).

6. A recent variant of such approaches is Grzybowski (1987, 1990). For a partial review of recent literature, see Foley (1991). Classic studies include Wolf (1969), Scott (1976), and Paige (1975).

7. See the collection of essays in Migdal, Kohli, and Shue (1994), Hagopian (1996), and Evans (1995). An early application of such a perspective in Brazil is Bunker (1985).

and agrarian policy in particular has received little attention.[8] To fill this void in the literature on military rule, I will tell the story from the center outward, or from what Joel Migdal has called "the commanding heights" of executive leadership (see Migdal 1994, 39).

The first section will sketch the failed populist attempt (1962–1964) and the first military attempt (1964–1967) to resolve the agrarian question. These efforts laid the legal groundwork for the unequivocal answer offered by the hard-line military after 1968. A detailed account will follow of the military's agrarian project and the role played by rural unions. The next section will show how the Generation of '68 built the union movement from within. The conclusion will compare the incorporation of rural labor with the initiatives that Getúlio Vargas took regarding the urban working class in the 1930s and 1940s. This comparison will demonstrate the importance of the struggle between the centralizing national state and regional and local political elites in the development of labor policy and the union movement.[9]

A POPULIST PRELUDE, 1962–1964

The legal foundation of the military's policy toward rural labor was laid during the populist government of President João Goulart. The Goulart government was confronted with a sudden surge in mobilization by rural wage laborers, sharecroppers, landless families, and other types of small farmers. Virtually ignored up to then, these workers became the object of fierce competition among an array of urban groups seeking to build a rural political base: the Partido Comunista Brasileiro (PCB), progressive and conservative segments of the Catholic Church, the *ligas camponesas*, the Movimento dos Agricultores sem Terra (MASTER) of Leonel Brizola (governor of the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul), and a vari-

8. One of the common assumptions found in the literature on military rule is that modernizing military regimes, with the exception of Peru, neglected agriculture in favor of the urban-industrial sector. In reality, creating a modern agro-export sector was widely viewed as a way to renew economic growth and stimulate further industrialization. Merilee Grindle has noted that the prioritization of agricultural modernization became "evident by 1966 in Brazil, Colombia in the late 1960s, Mexico by 1970, in Chile and Uruguay after the military takeovers of 1973, by 1976 in Argentina, and by the late 1970s in Peru" (Grindle 1986, 54). See also De Janvry (1981). A specialized literature in Brazil has emerged on the expansion of capitalist agriculture and integration of the Amazon region. On the former, see Delgado (1985), Sorj (1980), and Kageyama et al. (1990). On the latter, see Bunker (1985), Cardoso and Müller (1977), and Ianni (1986).

9. Field research for this article took place over a ten-month period in Brazil between 1994 and 1996. The material is drawn from interviews with officials in the Ministries of Labor, Finance, and Agriculture and with union leaders in CONTAG and several state-level union federations. Valuable archival material came from the libraries of the Ministério do Trabalho and the Câmara dos Deputados and the CONTAG archive, all in Brasília, as well as the Centro de Documentação e Pesquisa Vergueiro in São Paulo.

ety of minor political notables and not so notables.[10] In response, the government attempted to assert state control over the rural movements, extending the corporatist labor regime that regulated urban labor to the countryside with the Estatuto do Trabalhador Rural of 1963 (ETR). The ETR brought existing rural labor legislation into a single body of law, just as the Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho (CLT) had done for urban labor in 1943.

The government was also faced with several years of economic stagnation and in 1963 proposed agrarian reform as one of its "base reforms." It was the most important structural reform contained in Celso Furtado's economic plan (Plano Trienal). Agrarian reform failed to get off the ground, but the ETR had an enduring impact.[11]

Surprisingly, when the ETR passed in the Brazilian Congress early in 1963, it "created hardly a ripple" (Page 1972, 156–57). One of the few who comprehended the legislation's significance at the time was Caio Prado Júnior. The ETR, he observed, "constitutes without a doubt the most important event relative to the much proclaimed base reforms . . . because if effectively applied . . . , it will promote one of the greatest economic and social transformations witnessed in this country. It will be a true fulfillment of the law that abolished slavery in 1888." He went on to remark, "the lack of interest in the Statute revealed during its transit through Congress on the part of the Left and progressive political forces is truly appalling."[12] Traditional landowners assumed that the new legislation would go unenforced like preceding rural labor laws and showed no greater interest (see Cehelsky 1979, 44).

The Catholic Church and the coffee planters of São Paulo, organized in the Sociedade Rural Brasileira (SRB), however, had worked

10. The mobilization that ensued was nowhere near that experienced in Chile under Allende but was substantial nonetheless. In Pernambuco, the state with the strongest rural organizations, an estimated 280,000 persons belonged to peasant leagues, PCB unions, and Catholic unions. In 1963 a strike of 200,000 workers brought 90 percent of the state's sugar industry to a halt. In the state of São Paulo, the Federação dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias de Alimentação was organizing agricultural labor alongside sugar-mill workers, and rural strikes increased substantially between 1960 and 1964. In Trombas and Formosa, in the Center-West state of Goiás, a movement of posseiros successfully fought large landowners and by 1957 had created a ten-thousand-square-kilometer "liberated zone" with a popular government. Further to the south, landless families organized MASTER (Movimento dos Agricultores sem Terra) and invaded public lands or privately owned land with dubious titles. A number of these movements gained enough political weight to attract the support of the governors in Pernambuco, Goiás, and Rio Grande do Sul. See Hewitt (1969), Mallon (1978), I. Martins (1962), Welch (1990), Moraes (1960), and J. S. Martins (1981).

11. The legislation that Goulart introduced was aimed not at structural reform but at reducing social tensions in areas of intense conflict over land. The bill was defeated in the Congress, and the coup followed shortly after it was reissued by decree. See Flynn (1978, 245) and Skidmore (1967).

12. According to Caio Prado Júnior, the Left's myopic concern with agrarian reform as the only way to resolve the agrarian question was largely to blame (Prado Júnior 1964, 1, 5).

closely with the conservative Catholic labor minister in 1962 to lay the groundwork for the ETR. In the rush to organize the countryside, the main cleavage fell between the Left (primarily the PCB and the ligas camponesas) and the Catholic Church. The church saw state regulation of rural unions as a way to defend its dominant position in the countryside. According to the labor legislation, once a bishop, priest, or Catholic lay activist obtained legal recognition of a union, no other unions could be recognized in that same geographic area.[13] The SRB, working with the conservative Catholic Círculos Operários, adopted a similar strategy but had different concerns. The Communist-controlled Federação dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias de Alimentação of the state of São Paulo was organizing strikes in which rural workers and sugar mill workers participated side by side. The planters wanted to keep urban Communist-led unions from organizing rural workers. In 1962 the labor minister, in consultation with Catholic priests and Workers' Circles militants, issued a ministerial instruction that extended existing labor legislation to rural workers.[14] This step effectively separated rural and urban workers and created the representational monopoly desired by the church.

The Estatuto do Trabalhador Rural came soon after and closely resembled the Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho, completing the corporatist edifice that remained intact until the Constitution of 1988. The statute originally created five categories of rural labor unions and three categories of rural employers, but in 1965 these were collapsed into two categories: "rural worker unions" (*sindicatos dos trabalhadores rurais*) and "employer unions" (*sindicatos rurais*).[15] These unions were the smallest unit of a "federal system"—unions had to belong to state-level federa-

13. The Catholic Church began organizing rural associations and unions in response to the peasant leagues and PCB initiatives. Catholic entities such as such as SAR (Serviço de Assistência Rural), in the Northeastern state of Rio Grande do Norte, trained peasant leaders to "withstand the lure of Marxist ideologies and revolutionary political organization." SAR defined itself as "a midwife to rural trade unions" (de Kadt 1970, 109).

14. The minister, André Franco Montoro, was president of the Partido Democrata Cristão and had close ties to the Círculos Operários. He issued Portaria Ministerial 209-A in July 1962 and in his final month in office recognized eleven unions in São Paulo alone, all belonging to the Workers' Circles movement. Montoro's successor issued Portaria Ministerial 355-A in November 1962, which extended legal coverage to "small proprietors" and "autonomous workers." See Welch (1990, 262–70) and Barros (1987, 62, 114–16).

15. While urban workers unionized by sector (such as bank workers and petroleum workers), all rural workers belonged to a unitary union structure. The original ETR created five professional categories of rural workers: agricultural workers, workers in cattle raising or rural extractive production, independent workers (squatters, renters), and smallholders. Smallholders were in a complicated position. At first they were classified as rural workers if they engaged in family farming without the use of wage labor. Then in 1969, property size, not labor utilization, became the basis for deciding whether smallholders were workers or employers. If a family farmed a property over a legally established minimum (*módulo rural*), they were considered "employers," irrespective of whether they used wage labor. The issue at stake for the worker and employer unions was who would receive the reclassified family's

tions, and the federations to a national confederation.[16] Unions also had to obtain legal recognition from the Ministério do Trabalho, which had the right to intervene in unions' finances and elections. In return for this state regulation, unions had a guaranteed source of revenue—the union tax—and a representational monopoly (no other union could be organized to represent the same professional category in that geographic area).[17] A basic goal of corporatism is to depoliticize labor relations, and the law accordingly prohibited ties between unions and political parties. The ETR guaranteed a minimum wage and a number of social rights, including a paid weekly rest day, paid vacation, advance notice of dismissal and compensation. In addition, labor disputes would be arbitrated by the state through a system of labor courts. Social security, an important part of the corporatist regime, was legally extended to rural workers in separate legislation in November of 1963.

The impact of the ETR on rural organizing was immediate, but the reverse of its sponsors' intentions. Goulart seized on the legislation to mobilize a rural political base, and the PCB converted its rural associations into rural unions en masse. In the veritable rush to organize the countryside that followed, the Communists (with support from a new and left-leaning labor minister) fought a victorious battle with the Catholic Church to create the peak rural-labor organization CONTAG. By 1964, 270 unions and 10 state federations had been legally recognized. Another 557 unions awaited recognition.[18] The reality of rural unionization was somewhat less impressive. John Dulles observed that in the competition between the Left and the Catholic Church, "men from [the Left] traveled around Brazil in jeeps, getting signatures on [union] registration forms, or sometimes just writing in the names of people. . . . [I]n this way, over one thousand new rural [unions] were created in 1963" (Dulles 1970, 221). This incipient organizational drive was cut short by the military coup in 1964.

THE MILITARY STALEMATED, 1964–1967

The military coup produced a fundamental shift in national policy toward the countryside. The national Congress remained open, but the

union tax. See Price (1964, 11–12), Pearson (1967), and Fröhlich (1985, 231–35). For a general account of corporatism, see the sources cited in note 3.

16. Employer unions affiliated with state-level Federações da Agricultura, which were represented nationally by the Confederação Nacional da Agricultura (CNA). Under the "federal system," each tier of union organization enjoyed a degree of autonomy, mirroring the federal government structure. See Forman (1971, 20) and Price (1964, 66).

17. The union tax, later relabeled *contribuição sindical*, was collected from all members of a professional category, whether they belonged to a union or not, and equaled one day's labor per year. In rural areas, it was collected along with the land tax.

18. Plans were drawn up in the Ministério do Trabalho to increase the number of rural unions to two thousand and to register three million new voters. CONTAG had in fact been

dominant position of the military and of urban-industrial groups centered in São Paulo and abroad was unassailable. The rural oligarchies, among the most vocal supporters of military intervention, found to their dismay that they were now further from the halls of power than ever—even in agricultural policy, urban-industrial interests dominated (Cardoso 1979; Sorj 1980). The first military government, led by Humberto General Castello Branco, made transformation of the agrarian sector a national priority. A set of factors convinced many inside and outside the government that swift and dramatic action was required: the food crises of the early 1960s, concerns that a "backward" agrarian sector posed a severe bottleneck to economic growth, and fears that the radical mobilization of rural sectors was a prelude to a *fidelista* agrarian revolution.[19] The government's primary concern was to modernize agriculture, a step seen as a requisite for renewed economic growth. The blueprint of the military's strategy (the Estatuto da Terra) was enacted by Congress only seven months after the coup. Policy toward rural labor, after the initial brutal repression of all progressive elements in the fledgling union movement, did not develop beyond a regional response in the Northeast, where it was feared that a Cuban-inspired revolution would start. The government project for the countryside, however, barely got off the ground. It was stalemated in part by the regional oligarchies, an outcome revealing the great difficulty of any state effort to intervene more decisively in the countryside in an "open" authoritarian regime in which Congress was allowed to function.

The Castello Branco government (1964–1967), like the Left prior to the coup, apparently did not see the transformative potential of the Estatuto do Trabalhador Rural of 1963. Its implementation was not a priority, and the slow resurgence of rural unions resulted from local efforts by the clergy and political elites. Policy toward the Northeastern state of Pernambuco was the important exception. In Pernambuco the national government worked with the U.S. government and the Catholic Church to protect the unions that remained after the original repression of the Left (that is, those unions tied to the Catholic Church) from complete elimination by the region's plantation owners. The central government then sought to rebuild the union movement in a more conservative mold. This effort was part of a strategy to induce the structural transformation of the

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founded earlier by federations tied to the Catholic Church, but Goulart's new labor minister refused to recognize this effort. Several months later CONTAG was refounded by the PCB and the Catholic radicals of Ação Popular and was promptly recognized. CONTAG's president was Lyndolfo Silva, president of the PCB's rural organization, União de Lavradores e Trabalhadores Agrícolas do Brasil (ULTAB). See Price (1964, 69), Forman (1971, 9), Page (1972, 157–58), and de Kadt (1970, 115.).

19. The Programa de Ação Econômica do Governo (PAEG) of 1964, for example, stated that the "archaic" and "feudal" agrarian sector would block rapid industrial growth (quoted in Goodman 1986, 52).

region's archaic sugar industry and was vigorously supported by the U.S. Alliance for Progress. Through the AIFLD (American Institute for Free Labor Development), the United States provided three union centers, equipment, and leadership courses. The Catholic Church provided leadership, manpower, and more courses. Although government initiatives encouraged plantation and sugar mill owners to modernize production, they also sought to organize labor into rural unions, to formalize labor relations, and to introduce the state as a mediator of rural social relations. This regional initiative proved important because the future leadership of CONTAG was to emerge from the state of Pernambuco's sugarcane region. The policies also foreshadowed parts of the strategy that the military hard-liners would take after 1968. By 1969 this northeastern state had 104 rural unions.[20]

The Estatuto da Terra, enacted in 1964, was accorded a higher priority than rural unionism but fell victim to the national state's struggle with regional and local political elites. The statute was presented as a law of agrarian reform, but as Martins has suggested, it was "a law of rural development" that aimed to "rationalize" agriculture by modernizing latifundia and consolidating minifundio into capitalist enterprises. Agrarian reform became a matter of national security, a means of diffusing explosive rural conflict in particularly volatile regions. The law reflected the interests of the São Paulo business groups who had supported the coup and was opposed vehemently by the more conservative representatives of the landed classes in Congress.[21] When their substitute bill floundered, the oligarchies offered four hundred amendments to the legislation submitted by Castello Branco. Notwithstanding the president's strong support and lobbying of Congress, the oligarchies were able to modify the legislation in important ways. The resulting law was "complex, confusing, and vague . . . and allowed the maximum room for reinterpretation."[22] The principal instrument contained in the law to induce landowners to modernize production, the Imposto Territorial Rural, proved to be completely ineffective.[23] The state had neither the administrative apparatus to enforce its

20. See "First Brazilian Rural Centers Approach Completion," *AIFLD Report* 4, no. 1 (Jan. 1966), pp. 1, 3, 8; GERAN (1971b); and Driefuss (1981, 301–3).

21. The Estatuto da Terra was based on the studies of the Instituto de Pesquisas e Estudos Sociais (IPES), the research institute created in 1961 by São Paulo business groups opposed to Goulart and headed by the influential General Golbery Couto e Silva, one of the military's principal strategists. See J. S. Martins (1981, 93) and Dreifuss (1981, 299–301). Interview with Roberto Campos, former Minister of Planning, 8 Nov. 1995, Brasília; and Roberto Campos, "Reforma agrária: Para que e para quem?" *Jornal do Brasil*, 21 June 1994, p. 9.

22. They succeeded, for example, in eliminating a proposed judicial system for agrarian questions, which would have taken land issues out of civil courts where oligarchic interests often dominated. See Cehelsky (1979, 205–12, quote on 208).

23. The tax was based on a tremendously complicated mathematical formula that required 42 articles to explain and took into account property size, degree of land utilization, proximity to urban centers, and other factors. In 1996 the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* (19 May)

collection nor a land registry on which to base the assessment of the tax. The state-led modernization of agriculture occurred only after 1968, largely outside the parameters set by the Estatuto da Terra.

By 1968 the legal bases for the state's new role as a regulator of rural labor relations and unions had been established. The regional experiment in Pernambuco gave an early indication of the military officers' vision of the unions' role: they were expected to preempt future organizing efforts by the Left, give the state a stronger presence in the countryside, and help rationalize agriculture. The fate of the Estatuto da Terra, however, demonstrates the difficulty faced by the national state in asserting authority in the countryside.

THE MILITARY'S AGRARIAN PROJECT, 1968–1979

The consolidation of the military's agrarian project and the definitive answer to the agrarian question emerged after 1968, when the hard-line officers asserted themselves in the government of General Artur da Costa e Silva. Guided by the national-security doctrine and especially concerned with the country's vast and unknown interior, the hard-liners made transformation of the agrarian sector a top priority. Despite extensive repression after the 1964 coup, which had eliminated the Left in the countryside, the fear of an agrarian insurgency remained acute.[24] The military officers also had a strong sense of historical mission—to make Brazil a world power, "*o Brasil potência*," which required the occupation of the interior and exploitation of its presumed tremendous natural wealth (e.g., Stepan 1971, chap. 8). The hard-liners brought in a new group of technocrats who understood the modernization of agriculture to be critical to stimulating economic growth and reestablishing economic growth. For the new economic team, agriculture was not only a source of cheap food for the cities and a potential market for industry but a strategic sector through which Brazil could redefine its insertion into the international economy. The hard-line officers engineered an unprecedented degree of autonomy for the state—most political channels, including the Congress, were closed. Despite numerous compromises, detours, and setbacks, a clear strategic vision guided decision making and a new set of policies and

quoted the Secretary of the Federal Reserve complaining that the Land Tax, with 60 different tax rates and 180 different situations in which they are applicable, is both "inefficient and impossible to supervise." Besides land reform and the Land Tax, the statute also provided for colonization programs as a means of expanding agricultural production and resolving land-tenure problems.

24. Interview with former Labor Minister Jarbas Passarinho, 24 Nov. 1995, Brasília; interview with Armando de Brito, 20 Nov. 1995, Brasília. Brito was Secretary General (second-in-command) in the Ministério do Trabalho under Passarinho and then under his successor, Júlio Barata.

institutions emerged to constitute an agrarian project. The project reached its height during the government of General Emílio Garrastazu Médici (1969–1974), and although important policy changes occurred thereafter, its essential contours remained in place until the late 1970s.

The three components of the agrarian project—rapid growth in agricultural production, national integration, and incorporation of rural "labor" into national society—were unified by the broad notion of national security. The incorporation of labor was in several respects part of the strategy for national integration, which fell under the purview of the Conselho de Segurança Nacional, the Ministério do Interior, and the Ministério do Trabalho. Integration meant the demographic occupation of national territory and extension of the central state's reach across national territory. The unions were to be an important part of the state's distributive arm in the countryside, delivering social security and health services on behalf of the state. This social wage would help counter the communist threat by robbing communists of their social base. It would also "fix man in his habitat" in keeping the population in the countryside by raising rural income indirectly. Unions were also expected to help build the state by teaching union members their rights under national law (in effect, creating citizens) and by demanding implementation of legislation through the labor courts. In this manner, unions were expected to draw the state into areas where it had been largely absent, including those dominated by local and regional oligarchies.[25]

The more strictly economic part of the project was developed and implemented by a new team of technocrats, led by Finance Minister Delfim Netto. The team believed that developing a modern export-oriented agro-industrial sector could help Brazil redefine its role in the international economy and achieve a period of sustained growth. Additional gains in production would come from bringing new land under cultivation with the expansion of the agricultural frontier into the Amazon region.[26] The previous economic team had prioritized modernizing agriculture within the parameters of the Estatuto da Terra of 1964. But in practice, its attention had been focused on economic stabilization and fighting inflation.

25. The cooperative movement was similarly brought under direct state control and became an important means for the economic integration of small farmers in the southern half of Brazil. The cooperatives were an important channel for dispensing credit and diffusing new agricultural technologies (see Sorj 1980, 74).

26. Interview with Delfim Netto, former Minister of Finance, Agriculture, and Planning, 8 Nov. 1995, Brasília. Interview with Paulo Yokota, former director of rural credit at the Banco Central and former president of INCRA, 10 Apr. 1996, São Paulo. See Ministério de Planejamento e Coordinação Geral (1967). A modern agro-export sector would help in several respects: in keeping foreign accounts stable by balancing the increased imports of capital good; in driving down food prices in the cities and thereby helping contain inflation; in supplying nascent processing industries; and in providing a critical market for industries producing agricultural inputs and farm machinery. See Skidmore (1973, 12–13; 1985).

The new economic team essentially ignored the land statute. It made agricultural credit, abundant and heavily subsidized, the single most important instrument in the modernization of agriculture. Agrarian reform, even in the limited form envisioned by the Estatuto da Terra, died in the process.[27]

In 1970 President Médici summarized the new economic strategy:

> The [government's] central goal is development. . . . Here is, exactly, the greatest novelty of [our] policy. . . . Since the 1950s, our development effort has been predominately industrial, in an unbalanced form with the agricultural sector. . . . Our [new] development policy will target substantial growth in agricultural production and the increase of exports, which will lead to the rapid expansion of the domestic market and will induce an expansion of the industrial sector. . . . We expect to increase our exports to strengthen the capacity to import indispensable equipment for the implementation of a current technology and to end the external imbalances already experienced, bringing to the country all the advantages of integration into an extremely dynamic world economy.[28]

Policy toward agriculture was inevitably intertwined with national integration. It required the national state to enter rural areas where it historically had neither authority nor bureaucratic capacity to act. The agrarian project therefore represented a direct challenge to local authority—it entailed gaining a degree of control over labor, land, and capital in the countryside. At the time of the coup, the regulation of land and rural labor relations, agricultural policy, and research and extension services had been almost entirely in the hands of the regional oligarchies who ran state-level governments. In short, the project required a period of state building not seen since the Estado Novo (1937–1945). The military attempted just that. It sought to centralize authority out of the hands of the oligarchies by enacting new legislation and created new bureaucratic machinery in rural areas to circumvent existing state and local governments.[29] Among the most significant of these new institutional appendages were the Banco do Brasil, which as the principal conduit for credit became the state's arm for capital accumulation in rural areas; INCRA, which regulated legal land-tenure issues and colonization; and the national extension and research services EMBRATER and EMBRAPA, which provided the technical un-

27. The debate over the merits of land reform continued within the government because many officers believed it to be a prerequisite for long-term social stability. But the economic team's disdain for agrarian reform was absolute, and Médici himself was a *latifundiário*. Brazil's profound regional variation gave the project different faces in different regions: in the southern half of the country, it was the capitalization of production and creation of agro-industry; in the Center-West and North, the incorporation of new land into cultivation; in the Northeast, the structural transformation of the archaic and uncompetitive sugar industry (see Goodman 1986).

28. Speech to the inaugural class at the Escola Superior de Guerra, 3 Oct. 1970, reprinted in *Nova consciência de Brasil: Emílio Garrastazu Médici* (Brasília: Imprensa Nacional, 1970), 67–68.

29. One of the few scholars who has interpreted this period of Brazil's agrarian history along similar lines is Elisa Reis (see Reis 1989, 1988).

derpinnings for agricultural modernization.[30] The rural union movement, while not legally part of the state, became a de facto part of the state's distributional arm.

The agrarian transformation was a complicated and uneven affair. The efficacy of state policy varied by sector and by region, a point well illustrated by the evolution of the rural workers union movement itself. This article will not attempt to assess the degree to which the new state elite succeeded in establishing the primacy of central authority nor the success of its economic policies. Various analysts have begun this process from different perspectives.[31]

The sections that follow will trace the development of the military's rural-labor policy and lay out the role rural unions played in the agrarian project. This discussion will close with a brief review of the government's land and agricultural policy. It will show how the labor strategy fit in with, and was shaped by, the agrarian project as a whole and will indicate the magnitude of the transformation involved.

Rural Unions and the Agrarian Project

Although legislation regulating rural labor relations and unions already existed by 1968, in practice various forms of clientelism superimposed on a wild array of land-tenure arrangements continued to predominate in most of Brazil. Few unions existed outside Pernambuco. This situation began to change in 1968, when the state began to assert itself as an arbitrator of rural labor relations and bring rural workers into national society through the union movement.

The military hard-liners' policy toward rural labor first developed in the Northeast of Brazil, in response to a strike in the coastal sugar zone. While factory workers and university students took to the streets across Brazil and in various parts of the world in 1968, a strike involving 5,000 rural workers was in progress in Cabo, a small region in the state of Per-

30. INCRA stands for the Instituto National de Colonização e Reforma Agrária, EMBRATER for Empresa Brasileira de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural, and EMBRAPA for Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisas Agropecuárias. These state reforms were part of a broader effort by the military to depoliticize the state. For an analysis and evaluation of this larger effort, see Hagopian (1994) and from different perspectives Schneider (1991), Bunker (1985), and Weyland (1996). In rural areas, a baroque assembly of agencies and programs was created to stimulate the development of particular regions and particular sectors of the economy. Among the regional agencies was SUDAM (Superintendência do Desenvolvimento da Amazônia), which was responsible for attracting southern business groups to the Amazon region. Programs such as PIN (Programa de Integração), PRODOESTE (Programa de Desenvolvimento do Centro-Oeste), PROTERRA (Programa de Redistribuição de Terras e de Estímulo à Agro-indústria do Norte e do Nordeste), and others sought to build physical infrastructure and stimulate economic activity in the less-developed regions.

31. See the sources cited in the previous note as well as Goodman (1986).

nambuco where rural unions had played an important role in the period before the coup. The sugarcane cutters enjoyed strong support from university students, local commerce, and various groups in the state's capital, including Archbishop Dom Hélder Câmara, and attracted daily coverage in the state's major papers. An earlier strike in 1966 (the first since the coup) had also made front-page news but had elicited no response from the Ministério do Trabalho. The regional labor court had settled the strike by imposing a collective labor contract favorable to the striking workers. In 1968 power was shifting within the armed forces, however, and the apparent generalized social unrest of the late 1960s created great anxiety among hard-liners. The officers convinced themselves that the Cabo strike represented a new phase of left-wing agitation that threatened to sweep through the impoverished Northeast.[32] This time the labor minister himself flew to Pernambuco to resolve the strike. The military's response was to recognize the legitimacy of the union's demands, offer a number of social benefits to be delivered through the region's unions, and threaten severe repression if the strike was not ended. They created a pilot program in which unions would deliver to their members the social benefits legally granted in the Estatuto do Trabalhador Rural but never distributed.[33]

Unions as the Distributional Arm of the State

The pilot program was extended to the entire country in 1971, at the height of a guerrilla war in Araguaia, in the northern state of Pará. The state in effect made unions a central part of the its distributional policies. The Partido Comunista do Brasil (PC do B), a Maoist group that split off from the PCB in 1962, had set up a logistical base in Pará's rain forest to prepare a guerrilla war. The military preempted the PC do B, and fighting started in the Araguaia region in 1970. The war lasted two years, and the extensive repression reached well beyond Pará into the Center-West region (Martins 1994, 81–82). Along with repression came PRORURAL (Programa de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural), a program that for the first time gave rural workers social security, health care, and other social benefits. The labor minister commented in 1973, "the rural worker

32. Interview with Jarbas Passarinho, 24 Nov. 1995, Brasília; and with Armando de Brito, 20 Nov. 1995, Brasília. The military's fears may have been overblown but were not entirely unfounded. Several leftist groups opted for the armed struggle after 1968, including the PC do B (Partido Comunista do Brasil) and the MR-8. Moreover, the opening of new highways into sparsely populated regions of the interior in the 1950s and early 1960s had been accompanied by considerable violence and land conflict. See J. S. Martins (1981, 81).

33. See "Passarinho diz no Recife que dará terra a grevistas" and "Trabalhadores do Cabo ganham apoio de todos," *Jornal do Brasil*, 1 Oct. 1968, caderno 1, p. 12; "Passarinho chega hoje para resolver greve do Cabo," *Jornal do Comércio*, 1 Oct. 1968, caderno 1, p. 3; and "Cabo, em greve mais ou menos santa," *Jornal do Comércio*, 9 Oct. 1968, caderno 2, p. 1. The program was called the Plano Básico de Previdência Social (Pinto 1978, 138).

was society's stepson, abandoned and forgotten. The enemies of the nation, sectarians of spurious doctrines, thought to find in the countryside the cultural climate for their subversive designs. However, the third government of the Revolution has already erected the highest barrier against this criminal effort and, by instituting PRORURAL, integrated the Brazilian of the countryside into the national community, forever granting him the 'status' to which he has a right" (Barata 1973, 79).

PRORURAL had a great impact on the rural union movement, as well as on the lives of millions of Brazilians in the countryside. The program was designed to bring greater state control over rural unions while encouraging the growth of the union movement. It was to "attract [rural workers] to the orbit of the government, as soon as they recognized the benefits they would receive and transfer with their membership."[34] PRORURAL was part of the government's broader response to the urban and rural strikes of 1968, which had led to the creation of the Programa de Valorização Sindical. The military's labor strategy was to provide an increased social wage through unions. This approach simultaneously raised workers indirect income and resulted in unions' "structural demobilization," as they were forced to dedicate increasing energies to delivering public services.[35] The strategy was particularly effective with rural unions because few if any alternatives existed to the new services delivered by unions.

PRORURAL benefits were hardly generous—retirement pensions were only half of the minimum wage—but the combination of medical and dental care, retirement and disability pensions, and other services amounted to a substantial social wage at a time when traditional forms of assistance were eroding. PRORURAL represented a radical departure from conventional social security programs. It was funded in such a manner as to transfer income from urban to rural areas. In addition to pensions for retirement and disability, it also provided payment for a range of health care services and financial help for funerals. Most notable was the fact that rural workers did not pay into the program directly (Malloy 1981).[36] The labor minister announced that it was time "for the city to help the countryside, as the countryside has for so long helped the city," and to "correct imbalances between the rural population and urban population" (Barata 1973, 79). Revenue came from two main sources: a 2 percent tax on the commercialization of agricultural products and a 2.4 percent payroll tax on urban companies. In 1973 the payroll tax contributed almost twice as much as the commercialization tax.

With PRORURAL, the military created a game in which the cost to

34. Passarinho as quoted in Maybury-Lewis (1994, 43–44).

35. On social policy in Brazil, see Malloy (1981) and Weyland (1996).

36. FUNRURAL, a fund managed by IAPI (Instituto de Aposentadoria e Pensões dos Industriários) that was supposed to pay out the benefits promised in the ETR of 1963, was turned into an autarky within the Ministério do Trabalho to execute PRORURAL.

unions of not playing might well exceed the cost of playing.[37] FUNRURAL (Fundo de Assistência ao Trabalhador Rural), the program's executing agency, was prohibited by law from delivering services directly. Instead, it subcontracted the delivery of services to rural worker unions, employer unions, municipal governments, and charitable entities. If unions refused to participate and did not accept PRORURAL contracts, the programs would be executed by traditional politicians heading local government and employer unions, thereby reinforcing their stranglehold on rural communities. Consequently, CONTAG set aside serious misgivings and encouraged unions to play the game.[38]

The resulting transfer of resources had a considerable impact. In December 1973, the number of rural workers' retirement pensions approached one million and disability pensions exceeded forty thousand (Ministério do Trabalho e Previdência Social 1973, 2, 7–8, t. 1). By 1980, rural workers' unions held half of all the medical contracts granted by PRORURAL, and dental contracts outnumbered unions (2,447 unions held 2,506 contracts).[39] Not surprisingly, the surge in union membership coincided with the program's implementation. Membership mushroomed from an estimated one million in 1971 to over six million by 1978 (Maybury-Lewis 1994, app. A).

A scholarship program for union members and their dependents, PEBE (Programa de Bolsas de Estudos), was also part of this labor strategy. The program was national in scope and gave priority to rural unions. Created in 1966 with USAID money, it became part of the Programa de Valorização Sindical and was greatly expanded. Unions had to match the PEBE scholarships one for one and were responsible for distributing them to the membership. The Ministério do Trabalho's allocation of scholarships to the national labor confederations reflects the government's priorities. CONTAG, the weakest of the confederations, received 13 percent of all scholarships, second only to the giant confederation of industrial workers, the Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Indústria (CNTI). By 1974 CONTAG's share of the total had risen to 28 percent. At this point, three out of four rural unions were distributing PEBE scholarships.[40]

37. There were also practical reasons for relying on unions. The cost of extending the INPS (Instituto Nacional de Previdência Social) into the countryside would have been substantial, and serious difficulties existed in identifying who was eligible for the services. Unions verified the status of rural workers and helped them secure the required legal documentation.

38. Interview with José Francisco da Silva, president of CONTAG from 1968 to 1989, 4 Dec. 1995, Recife, Pernambuco; and with current CONTAG President Francisco Urbano, 14 Nov. 1995, Brasília.

39. One study estimated that medical and dental care delivered through unions amounted to 50 percent of all medical care and 83 percent of dental care provided in 1980. See Balbachevsky (1983) as cited in Ricci (1993, 84) and Maybury-Lewis (1994, 40–41).

40. See "Bolsas de estudo distribuidas pelo PEBE en 1971," *PEBE Boletim* 3, no. 9 (Nov.

Strengthening the State

The military also intended for rural unions to help draw the national state into the countryside. Unions' role in the implementation of national law came by pressuring for enforcement of labor legislation in the labor courts. This role was more complicated than delivering services, however. Unions became important local institutions—the union president was a local authority alongside the priest and mayor—and union revenues in smaller rural municípios (similar to U.S. counties) could be larger and more reliable than those of local government.[41] Unions therefore became an important political fact of life in rural communities, and local elites attempted to establish their influence within the new institution, with varying degrees of success. Several scholars have noted that unions' ties to a larger national movement and to the state endowed them with a degree of autonomy from other local institutions. Whether by forcefully representing rural worker's class interests or simply by delivering social services, the new unions eroded the monopoly of power that Brazilian local elites traditionally enjoyed. It was the union, for example, that provided workers with documentation of their professional status, which gave access to pensions and other government services.[42]

The government strategy and its difficulties are well illustrated by the example of the short-lived government agency GERAN (Grupo Especial de Racionalização da Indústria Açucareira do Nordeste).[43] GERAN was created in 1966 to induce the modernization of the archaic sugarcane industry in the Northeast, a region where traditional landed oligarchies were particularly powerful. It attempted, on the one hand, to induce plantation and sugar mill owners to modernize production and, on the other, to formalize labor relations and draw workers into unions. It became operational only in 1968 when, days after the Cabo strike, a new fund was created to finance its operations. GERAN had a specific union program that conducted research on rural workers' unions, established guidelines for a "model union," and sought to foster unionization. Unions, in GERAN's

1971), pp. 6–7; "Bolsas distribuídas—1966/1974," *Revista PEBE* 6, no. 11 (Sept. 1974), pp. 8–9; and Ministério do Trabalho e Previdência Social (1971).

41. Interview with CONTAG President Francisco Urbano, 14 Nov. 1995, Brasília; and Paulo Yokota, 10 Apr. 1996, São Paulo.

42. Hagopian has argued that "traditional elites" in effect occupied the new state institutions created during military rule and that in this manner, they were able to sustain their political power. In the case of the rural worker unions, tremendous variation occurred in the extent to which and how unions were involved in local political life, and the issue seems less clear cut. The six case studies of rural worker unions undertaken by Maybury-Lewis, while too small a sample from which to generalize, illustrate this diversity. Weyland observed that FUNRURAL was an important source of political patronage in rural areas. See Hagopian (1996), Maybury-Lewis (1994), and Weyland (1996, 100).

43. It was hoped that increases in productivity would free land that could then be used in a regional agrarian reform. Hence, to qualify for financing from GERAN, plantation owners

conception, should deliver a variety of services, from health care to sewing classes for women, but they should also teach members about national labor law, promote its enforcement, and encourage associational life among union members. In this manner, unions would contribute not only to "professional legalization" but also to expanding "citizenship" (GERAN 1971b, 12). The oligarchies, however, did not respond to the various incentives that GERAN offered, dooming its efforts.

The extent to which unions played the role assigned to them and provided the state with a stronger presence in rural communities varied considerably across regions and is difficult to gauge. According to Lygia Sigaud (1979), in areas of Pernambuco where unions did not exist, the labor courts were more likely to favor "the local dominant classes," facilitating the expulsion of resident labor and the exploitation of wage labor. Regina Novaes observed that in the neighboring state of Paraíba, rural unions often "disrupted a network of pre-existing social relations based on dependence and subordination of workers to bosses" (Novaes 1987, 213–14; see also Sigaud 1979, chap. 1). Moacir Palmeira commented, "The possibility of a large landowner being called before a labor tribunal or civil court to pay the 'rights' owed to a worker delegitimizes . . . the power of the landowner and, by extension, of all large landowners who exercise their power within the same framework" (Palmeira 1985, 48). In Minas Gerais, for example, unions encouraged sharecroppers and other types of small farmers with land disputes to bring cases through the labor courts. The idea was that the labor courts enjoyed greater autonomy from the local landed classes than civil courts and were more likely to provide some form of compensation. This supposition proved correct. (see Moura 1986). An indirect indicator of the state's expanding influence exercised through the rural unions was landowners' mass expulsion of the "internal peasantry" (resident laborers) and their shift to temporary wage labor in several regions. There is some agreement among researchers that the threat of enforcement of rural labor legislation contributed to this shift to temporary labor in the Northeast's sugarcane region and in the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais.[44]

Regional variation in union activity was pronounced in the 1970s. In Pernambuco, a 1971 GERAN study found that 93 percent of the unions were providing legal assistance—that is, informing members of their legal rights, helping bring cases before the labor courts, and conducting similar

had to accept redistribution of some of their land (GERAN 1971a). See also Wanderley (1979, 102–11) and Szmrecsányi (1979, 283–89).

44. Goodman notes, however, that economic policies stimulating capital-intensive farming and highly favorable international prices for crops suitable for mechanized farming also played an important role in producing this shift (Goodman 1986). See also D'Incao e Mello (1975), Spindel (n.d.) as cited in Hagopian (1996, 90–92), and Sigaud (1979, 39–41).

activities. Other Northeastern states followed closely behind: in Rio Grande do Norte, 82 percent; in Bahia and Alagoas, 71 percent; and in Ceará, 67 percent (GERAN 1971b, 10-iii–19-vii).[45] But in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, a 1975 survey found that a mere 2 percent of unions were providing legal assistance. Here unions brought the state into rural communities in a different way—53 percent of the region's 227 unions were providing "technical agricultural assistance" as a principal activity. Unions employed more than a hundred agricultural technicians. These were provided to unions at no cost under a government program to help implement the state's agricultural policy, encouraging small farmers to shift to export or industrial crops (such as soybeans) and to employ modern farming technologies.[46] Virtually all the unions were delivering medical assistance as a principal activity.

Unions' role in drawing the state into the countryside was therefore uneven and differentiated. By 1978, however, the rural union movement had achieved an enviable "capillarity," reaching into the far corners of Brazil in a manner that few national institutions could match. In many small towns in the interior, the union headquarters sat alongside the parish church and city hall on the town square, now a prominent symbol of local authority.

Establishing Control over Land

State initiatives to gain control over rural labor through the union movement were accompanied by efforts to centralize control over the disposition and regulation of land. In Brazil the distinction between regulating labor and land was not sharp because the legal definition of rural labor included sharecroppers and other small farmers. Regulating land-tenure contracts and land titles therefore meant exercising control over many rural union members as well. Asserting state control over land was critical to the agrarian project, not only to rationalize land tenure, which modern agriculture required, but also to integrate the final and greatest frontier region—the Amazon. Considerable conflict occurred between the states and the central government during the populist period (1945–1964) over who would title and distribute public lands as the agricultural frontier moved south in the 1940s and 1950s, then up through the Center-West

45. It should be noted that Pernambuco had far more unions than the other states in 1969, 109 versus 23 in Rio Grande do Norte, 16 in Bahia, 29 in Alagoas, and 53 in Ceará.

46. The difference between the Northeast and the South reflects in part the fact that union members were predominantly rural wage laborers in the Northeast but small farmers in the South. The Programa de Assistência Técnica do Produtor was created in 1972 to provide unions with agricultural technicians. As the public extension service expanded operations, it took over this role. By 1979 the union movement in Rio Grande do Sul had only 28 technicians left (see Varonese 1993; FETAG-RS 1975, 63).

region in the 1960s. Until 1964 the regional oligarchies who ran state-level government held the upper hand, even in the few areas that fell under federal jurisdiction.[47]

The Estatuto da Terra of 1964 began to shift the balance of power and substantially expanded the state's legal authority to title and regulate land. In legal terms, this process culminated in 1971 with Decreto-Lei 1164, which gave the federal government control over a hundred kilometers on either side of federal highways, including those still in the planning phases, in the newly defined jurisdiction of Legal Amazonia. It was an unprecedented federal land grab that added up to an astonishing one-third of national territory (Foweraker 1981, 100). But if expropriating the states was a relatively simple legal maneuver in the closed political regime, regulating land titles, running colonization schemes, and settling land-tenure disputes were not. The bureaucratic apparatus created to carry out the new federal mandate took seven years to consolidate and left an impressive institutional wreckage along the way. The land statute replaced the ineffective land-reform agency created during the populist period with two no less ineffective agencies. Only in 1971 did the state consolidate an instrument for dealing with land matters, the agency INCRA.[48] It issued hundreds of thousands of land titles, settled competing land claims, and carried out a limited number of colonization programs. INCRA's mandate also included collecting the impossible land tax (formerly the prerogative of state-level governments), fostering a cooperative movement, and the unlikely task of disbursing the rural union tax. INCRA was frequently accused of incompetence, fraud, and undue influence by the landed classes, but it nonetheless helped establish the central state's prerogative in the disposition and regulation of land.[49]

Agricultural Policy

At the heart of the agrarian project was the ambition to increase and diversify agricultural production, a key part of the effort to restart

47. Federal efforts to assert national authority on land matters were routinely thwarted by the courts, which generally favored state rights, and by the lack of an effective institutional presence in disputed areas. In 1937 Vargas used his new powers under the Estado Novo (1937–1945) to establish federal control over a frontier strip of 150 kilometers, but in practice little changed (Foweraker 1981, 84–87, 90).

48. SUPRA (Superintendência de Política e Reforma Agrária) replaced INIC (Instituto Nacional de Imigração e Colonização) in the early 1960s. The Estatuto da Terra replaced SUPRA with IBRA (Instituto Brasileiro de Reforma Agrária) and INDA (Instituto Nacional de Desenvolvimento Agrário). IBRA was responsible for agrarian reform, the land tax, and land-tenure issues, INDA for agricultural development.

49. The point here is not that the military triumphed over various regional elites but rather that the state acquired legal authority and a significant institutional presence that shifted the bases for this ongoing conflict between central and local authority. This point is also made in Reis (1989). For a detailed analysis of INCRA, see Bunker (1985).

economic growth and redefine Brazil's role in the international economy. Rural unions played only a limited part in the modernizing of agriculture, and most agricultural policy bypassed union members.[50] My purpose here is twofold: to show that the military hard-liners clearly prioritized resolving the agrarian question in its political and economic manifestations (a point rarely made in the literature on military rule in Brazil), and to demonstrate the magnitude and historical significance of the transformation of which rural unions were a part.

As had occurred with labor and land matters, agricultural policy making was centralized into federal hands, and various new state agencies were created for implementation. Agricultural policy was centralized into the Ministério do Planejamento (planning), the Ministério da Fazenda (finance), and the Conselho Monetário Nacional (CMN). All three were dominated by the new group of technocrats with close ties to urban industrial groups. The two ministries formulated monetary and fiscal policy for agricultural production. The CMN set agricultural credit policy, minimum prices for agricultural products, exchange-rate policy, and fiscal incentives to foster production of particular commodities and agroindustry in general. The Ministério da Agricultura was taken out of the hands of the regional oligarchies and strengthened but became a subordinate member of the cabinet. The most important policy instruments in the decade following 1968 therefore represented the interests of the urban-industrial sector (Delgado 1985; Sorj 1980, 78–79; Kohl 1981, 146, 245–46; and Kageyama et al. 1990).

Heavily subsidized rural credit underwrote the modernization of agriculture. It was the most important policy instrument in inducing the transformation of large estates into modern rural enterprises and capitalizing production of a select group of small farmers. Through the Sistema Nacional de Crédito Rural (created in 1965), the state brought about an unprecedented transfer of capital to agriculture. Agricultural credit increased threefold between 1965 and 1970, then another fivefold in the 1970s (averaging 18 percent annual growth). Its share of total credit rose to 33 percent by 1975.[51] The subsidies involved were no less dramatic. Real interest rates on rural credit dropped to minus 35 percent in 1979. As a result, total loans to agriculture as a proportion of net agricultural output amounted to an astounding 102 percent in 1975 (see Kohl 1981, 149).[52] The

50. An important exception were small farmers in the three southern states—Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná, and Santa Catarina—which were targeted by agricultural policy. The cooperative movement played a more important role in this process than the unions, however. In practice, membership in the unions and cooperatives overlapped considerably (see Sorj 1980).

51. Other policy incentives included a tax schedule that favored semi-processed and manufactured agricultural products. Tax subsidies for semi-processed products ranged from 9 to 25 percent, and between 25 and 50 percent for manufactured agricultural products. See World Bank (1982, 78) and Delgado (1985, 117–24).

52. On the distribution of credit and various other incentives, see World Bank (1982) and

credit largesse was carefully targeted: export and industrial crops were favored over food crops, larger producers over small producers, and the southern half of the country over the rest.[53]

The Banco do Brasil was the state agency responsible for this extraordinary transfer of capital to rural areas, which lacked even the most rudimentary financial infrastructure. According to Finance Minister Delfim Netto, the bank became "the ears, eyes, and arms" of the economic team in the countryside.[54] He told the bank's managers in 1970, "Of all the national problems, perhaps the most serious, today, is to construct an effective bureaucracy . . . in the Weberian sense, with effective functionaries, conscious of their role, where the merit system is pursued almost sadistically. . . . The basic instrument that the government wields to mobilize Brazilian society for development is the Banco do Brasil."[55] The bank disbursed the lion's share of agricultural credit (between 60 and 70 percent of the total). It also served as a direct link between the technocrats and farmers and rural enterprises, and as a critical link to the international market.[56] The bank therefore stood at the center of capital accumulation in the Brazilian countryside. Its administrative tentacles spread at a rate paralleling the growth of the union movement: from 578 agencies in 1964 (most in the urban centers of the Southeast) to 1,226 agencies in 1978 (92 percent of them located in the interior). The number of functionaries—the sadistic Weberian bureaucrats hailed by the finance minister—tripled to 117,498.[57]

Goodman (1986, 43–44). The freewheeling with credit created serious distortions and waste, which were duly noted by the president of the Banco do Brasil in 1978. According to Karlos Rischbieter, "The financing of production by the National Rural Credit System has already reached the value of production itself, [leading to] the excessive indebtedness of producers, the leaking of resources to other [non-agricultural] sectors, poor use of inputs and equipment, exaggerated elevation of land values and the concentration of credit in higher-value loans." See Rischbieter (1981, 10–11).

53. Agricultural production and exports grew rapidly. Annual growth rates of processed and industrialized agricultural exports ran as high as 23 percent between 1969 and 1978 (almost four times the growth rate of cereals) and by 1978 accounted for half of all agricultural exports (and 30 percent of total exports in dollar value). Between 1969 and 1973, industrialized agricultural exports (in dollars) grew 56 percent annually, compared with 42 percent for manufactured goods of a nonagricultural origin. This pattern inverted after 1973, but agricultural industrialized products maintained a brisk growth rate of 24 percent. The highly favorable international conditions (world trade grew rapidly between 1969 and 1973 and prices for agricultural commodities were high) contributed to these growth rates. See World Bank (1982, 73, 75).

54. Interview with Delfim Netto, 8 Nov. 1995, Brasília.

55. Delfim Netto, "O Banco do Brasil no Desenvolvimento," DESED 19 (May-June 1970), supplement, 3.

56. In 1973 the Banco do Brasil proclaimed itself "the largest rural bank in the world" (Banco do Brasil 1973). See also Calazans de Magalhães (1987).

57. When the military left power in 1985, the bank had more than 3,314 branches. Its international presence multiplied from 5 agencies in 1964 to more than 40 by 1985, according to Banco do Brasil annual reports and Rischbieter (1981, 10–11, 16).

To employ this new wealth productively, technical infrastructure such as federal agricultural extension and research services was similarly brought under centralized control and greatly expanded. In the early 1960s, for example, the federal extension service had only 219 offices staffed by 582 technical personnel for all of Brazil. In contrast, the state of São Paulo's extension service alone had 400 offices and a technical staff of 900. By 1969 the picture had changed. São Paulo maintained its own structure, but the federal service ABCAR (Associação Brasileira de Crédito e Assistência Rural) grew to 138 regional offices, 1,025 municipal offices, and a technical staff of 2,423.[58] ABCAR's growth continued until it was replaced in 1974 by an entirely new agency named EMBRATER (Empresa Brasileira de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural).[59]

BUILDING THE UNION MOVEMENT FROM WITHIN

While the agrarian project set the political and institutional parameters for the rural union movement, it was the generation of rural unionists heading CONTAG after 1968 who built the movement. The Generation of '68 pursued a highly pragmatic strategy and had a significant impact on how the movement developed. Union leaders recognized that in many ways the agrarian project was revolutionary—the implementation of national laws and payment of a social wage would transform rural labor relations.[60] They also realized that the military's initiative was a historic (although far from perfect) opportunity to build a national union movement for the first time in Brazilian history. In reality, CONTAG had few options, and rural workers had much to gain by placing the modernizing state between them and the rural oligarchies and local political elites. In the ensuing decade, the confederation succeeded in extending the movement across Brazil's expansive national territory.

The new leadership faced an extraordinarily difficult task. It needed to unify both local movements from Brazil's diverse regions and the different labor categories that it was legally mandated to represent. Close supervision by the state—the constant threat of intervention and the inability to mobilize members—placed a fundamental limit on its ac-

58. Agricultural research followed a similar path. See Kohl (1981, 186–91), Nicholls (1972, 155, 167), and Alves and Contini (1992).

59. An important component of creating infrastructure for modern agriculture and for bringing new land into production was the expansion of the national highway system. Increases in agricultural production historically had been achieved by extending the highway system, which gave access to new land. This "extensive" or horizontal growth of agriculture continued alongside the capital-intensive pattern after 1964. The highway system grew substantially, with the federal system alone doubling in size between 1960 and 1979, continuing a process begun in the 1940s.

60. This was Caio Prado Júnior's point when he analyzed the ETR after its passage in 1963 (Prado Júnior 1964).

tions. The restrictive corporatist labor legislation imposed an unfavorable union structure, which I call "union federalism." Moreover, the movement was no richer than its members, the poorest segment of Brazilian society. To meet these challenges, CONTAG pursued a three-pronged strategy. First, state resources such as the PRORURAL contracts were used to build the union movement. Second, in order to strengthen the movement from within, the confederation undertook to socialize new union leaders into a class-based identity that superseded diverse regional identities and was based on the ETR's legal definition of "rural workers." Third, because unions were barred from mobilizing the rank and file, CONTAG sought to draw the state into mediating rural labor relations by using the labor courts to demand full implementation of legislation enacted in the 1960s. This strategy became known as the *campanha pelos direitos* (Palmeira 1985, 45; Novaes 1991, 181).[61]

This moderate but progressive strategy reveals a remarkable degree of continuity with that of the Catholic Church and the PCB in the 1960s. The strategy reflects the unionists' origins in church- and communist-sponsored movements of that period. The repression following the 1964 coup was especially unforgiving in the countryside, and only unions tied to the more moderate and conservative segments of the Catholic Church survived (Palmeira 1985, 45; Novaes 1991, 181).[62] Consequently, the Generation of '68 was largely a product of the moderate but progressive Catholic Church of the 1960s. Many of the union leaders had learned to read and write through the Catholic Church's popular education program MEB (Movimento de Educação de Base) and had received their leadership training at various Catholic entities. In 1968, unionists from Pernambuco's sugarcane region led a broad coalition that ousted the military's interventor from CONTAG's presidency, a militant from the Catholic Círculos Operários. The new president, José Francisco da Silva, led the national effort to build a single movement out of embryonic and disparate local efforts. He had risen to national prominence through SORPE (Serviço de Orientação Rural de Pernambuco), the Catholic entity created in 1962 to develop a Christian union movement in Pernambuco. From 1964 to 1968, SORPE played a critical role in rebuilding that state's unions and federation.[63] The

61. Considerable energy also went into participating in a multitude of government committees, where the union perspective was always in the minority, and into defending the movement from the ongoing effort by the landed classes (represented in the CNA) to redefine the *enquadramento*, the legal boundaries determining who could belong to rural worker or employer unions. The CNA attempted with some success to define rural workers so as to exclude substantial numbers of small farmers, who would then belong to the employer unions (Palmeira 1985; Tavares 1992).

62. The radical Catholic Church of the 1960s, best characterized by Ação Popular, suffered the same repression as the ligas camponesas and the PCB (see de Kadt 1970).

63. In Pernambuco, SORPE virtually ran the state federation FETAPE. It was modeled on SAR of Rio Grande do Norte.

pedagogical campaign launched by CONTAG in 1968 to create "rural workers" was based in large measure on the consciousness-raising method used by the MEB.

The PCB, which had founded CONTAG in 1963, managed to retain a surprising degree of influence within the confederation. Although the PCB's fragile organization in the countryside was dismantled following the coup of 1964, several CONTAG advisors and unionists maintained ties with the Communist Party throughout the 1960s and 1970s. These included José Francisco and other unionists who had entered the movement through the Catholic Church. For the union leaders, the shift from the church to the PCB was in many ways less dramatic than it might seem. Palmeira observed that the demands made by the Catholic Church and the PCB during the pre-1964 period were quite similar, a fact obscured by the fiery rhetoric surrounding their competing organizing drives.[64] The importance that CONTAG assigned to agrarian reform and to occupying institutional space within the state were PCB trademarks that predated the coup. CONTAG's legalist strategy of demanding "workers' rights" was common to both the PCB and Catholic Church but was most fully developed in Pernambuco under SORPE's guidance from 1964 to 1968 (see Tavares 1992, 102–4, 119–200; Palmeira 1985).

In 1968 CONTAG decided to work from Brasília outward and build the movement from above. To create unions and state-level federations, the national union leadership established alliances with a variety of local figures—priests, political notables, and others whose "personal integrity" was apparent and who were not outright opposed to unions. Grassroots organization and the ideology of local allies were sacrificed (these would be addressed later through consciousness raising in the courses run by the confederation). What mattered was occupying the new institutional space—the unions—before forces contrary to the movement succeeded in creating and controlling unions, and thereby capturing the valuable union tax and (after 1971) the PRORURAL contracts.[65] Rapid growth followed, and by 1970 there were 1,218 unions and 17 state federations. Membership expanded greatly after 1972, when unions began distributing PRORURAL services. CONTAG officials viewed PRORURAL as an opportunity to gain access to unprecedented resources (see Novaes 1991, 178–79; Tavares 1992). In 1971 the confederation's planning document optimistically suggested, "the social service policies should not be contested. Instead, its resources should be used to reach the other objectives of the union movement."[66] CONTAG's strategy henceforth was to demand the

64. During this period, the PCB was following a reformist line associated with the *frente única* strategy (Palmeira 1985, 45).

65. Interview with Francisco Urbano, 14 Nov. 1995, Brasília; and José Gonçalves da Silva, 18 Nov. 1995, Brasília. Da Silva served as a CONTAG advisor from 1968 through 1988.

66. Interview with José Francisco da Silva, president of CONTAG from 1968 to 1989, 5 Dec.

expansion of PRORURAL services to match those received by urban workers.[67]

This rapid growth came at a cost, however. A 1974 CONTAG report reversed the earlier optimism and forewarned that union "leaders have not known . . . how to carry out their pro-service work in a manner that does not compromise other more important objectives; that is, those that address the causes, not the effects. This has provoked accommodations and *peleguismo* [co-optation]. . . . The consequence . . . has been a loss of capacity for making demands and a loss of the representativeness of the movement."[68]

Challenges of Corporatism and Union Clientelism

This rapid growth within the existing political and legal confines created challenges of its own. Brazilian labor law denied CONTAG the most rudimentary organizational tools for integrating new members or exercising some form of control over them. It could not collect and allocate revenues, select who came into the organization, or exercise basic bureaucratic controls such as regulating the relationship between different levels of the union hierarchy—confederation, federations, and unions. Particularly problematic were the system of "union federalism," the union tax, and the representational monopoly granted to unions (*unicidade*), all three pillars of the corporatist labor regime.[69] Delivery of health services had a dual effect. It gave CONTAG and the federations an instrument of control because they mediated between unions and the Ministério do Trabalho, which allocated contracts, but it also accentuated oligarchic and undemocratic tendencies within the unions.

Union federalism robbed CONTAG of much of its ability to control the layers of the union apparatus. Unions were legally required to belong to state-level federations and the federations to the confederation, but each layer enjoyed autonomy in its own sphere of authority and had guaranteed revenues. This arrangement meant that CONTAG had few means

1995, Recife, Pernambuco; "Relatório do encontro de avaliação e planejamento da CONTAG, 1971," CONTAG mimeo quoted in Pinto (1978, 74).

67. Accepting PRORURAL contracts was a hotly contested issue within the confederation, and CONTAG numerous times called for FUNRURAL to assume the burden of delivering the services directly because unions "representation function" was being undermined. But over time, the institutional interests in favor of delivering such services apparently became stronger, and CONTAG began to demand the expansion of the contracts. See Pinto (1978, 141) and CONTAG (1974).

68. See "Encontro de estudo e programação integrada," CONTAG mimeo, p. 20, quoted in Pinto (1978, 84).

69. In addition, elections within the movement were closely supervised by the Ministério do Trabalho. Lists of candidates had to be approved prior to elections, and the victorious candidate required ministerial approval before taking office.

at its disposal to induce federations or unions to adhere to nationally articulated policies. The movement's general strategy and goals were negotiated with the federations, and after that, implementation depended on goodwill. Union federalism also produced a corporatist oddity. Only the state, through the labor courts and the Ministério do Trabalho, could hold each level of the union bureaucracy accountable. Consequently, at various instances union officials appealed to the ministry or the courts to intervene in other unions (and even federations) to establish even a precarious form of control.

If there was little accountability from above, there was even less from below. The oligarchic impulse was exceedingly strong. The representational monopoly and union tax virtually guaranteed that the first union directorate elected could keep itself in power indefinitely. The representational monopoly meant that all challenges to the sitting union directorate had to come from within the union itself (it was illegal to establish a rival union). This avenue proved difficult. In addition to outright illegal maneuvers such as rigging elections, the compulsory union tax and government contracts provided incumbents with considerable discretionary revenue independent of membership size. These resources were often dispensed to ensure continued tenure of the sitting directorates. Moreover, in poor rural communities, becoming a union president meant a change in class position. Income could double or more, and the new president became a local authority and often moved to the area's principal town. All these changes made the sitting president more unchallengeable in the eyes of small farmers and rural laborers (Novaes 1991; Pereira 1991).

Creating Rural Workers

Aware of the enormity of the challenge posed to it, CONTAG early on developed a coherent strategy for strengthening the movement from within. The confederation resorted to one of the few organizational tools at its disposal, the socialization of its members. It developed an aggressive educational campaign that drew heavily on the Catholic Church's consciousness-raising work in the 1960s, based on Paulo Freire's pedagogical methods. The confederation sought to socialize new union leaders into a class-based identity constructed around the legal category "rural worker," as defined in the ETR of 1963. The "rural worker" was supposed to supersede the old Left's *campesino* (a revolutionary term) and the multitude of regional identities that still prevailed. The identity would embody a common vision of the movement's origins, goals, and methods. All in all, creating "rural workers" subtly politicized a legal category originally intended to depoliticize rural social movements.

The political significance of this strategy cannot be overstated. It was through the unions, rather than the political parties, that the oligar-

chies' former clients acquired a new political identity and were incorporated into the political system. The absence of political parties able or interested in recruiting rural workers between 1964 and 1978 forced CONTAG into the role of creating "political material." The split between union and political party activity, central to the corporatist labor legislation, became a major tenet of the movement and was continually reaffirmed by CONTAG to increase its legitimacy in the eyes of its members and the state.[70]

Rural workers were, before all else, citizens with a set of legally defined rights spelled out in the ETR and the land statute. The movement's struggle was to seek full enforcement of those rights. Rural workers were also members of a class whose roots lay in the heroic pre-1964 struggles.[71] At the center of the workers' struggle was the fight for "massive and immediate" agrarian reform. Such reform was legally provided for in the Estatuto da Terra of 1964, and CONTAG formulated its position to match the legal text closely.[72] CONTAG's position was in fact a clever distortion of what the military had intended with the statute. It interpreted the law as calling for wholesale restructuring of the land-tenure system, while the statute's intent was clearly a localized agrarian reform in areas of high social tension, and then only after all else failed. The call for agrarian reform was the "political cement" of the movement, the unifying banner under which its diverse membership could unite. It was not pursued in more concrete actions, however (Novaes 1991; Tavares 1992). Through its pedagogical campaign, a union document summarized, "CONTAG is pursuing the education of union leaders to . . . raise rural workers' consciousness and inform them about rural reality, the organization of unions, the

70. The anti-communist campaign of landowners and the Catholic Church in the period before the 1964 coup contributed greatly to this split. Unions had to go to great lengths to convince potential members that they were not "political agitators" (Communists) and that participation in union activities would not provoke reprisals from the local authorities. The church, in its competition with the PCB for the souls of the rural poor, routinely associated Communists with the devil. See Novaes (1991, 178) and Palmeira (1985, 47–48, 50). See also "Relatório do encontro de avaliação e planejamento da CONTAG, 1971," quoted in Pinto (1978, 3) and Welch (1990, 259–60).

71. CONTAG stressed the movement's roots in the pre-1964 struggles, especially in the Zona da Mata of Pernambuco. The confederation rewrote history to a considerable degree by emphasizing the unity of the movements during the 1960s, arguing that the ligas camponesas, the PCB, and the Catholic Church had operated parallel to one another in different regions and omitting entirely how the movement was rebuilt between 1964 and 1968 (Tavares 1992, 48, 54, 62).

72. The Costa e Silva government (1967–1969) had reopened the debate on agrarian reform and in 1969 decreed the Ato Institucional 9, which facilitated the expropriation of land for agrarian reform. Many within the government advocated agrarian reform, including the labor ministers during much of the 1970s. Hence CONTAG could hold a series of union gatherings in 1969 to discuss agrarian reform and call for "an agrarian reform that must be massive and immediate." It even held a Semana Nacional de Reforma Agrária in the Northeastern state of Ceará that year (CONTAG 1969, 20, 26).

fulfillment of legislation, and the realization of Agrarian Reform" (CONTAG 1969).[73]

An elaborate system of courses and evaluation seminars was developed to train unionists and to bring local, state, and national leaders together to forge a common conception of the movement. One longtime advisor of the movement ruefully observed that the courses became such a central part of union culture that when unionists were asked in 1978 how to turn union principles into action, in preparation for the Third Congress of 1979, the most frequent response was "the organization of new courses to disseminate those principles" (Palmeira 1985, 21; see also Tavares 1992, 121–22, 125). A new journal, *O Trabalhador Rural*, was created to disseminate this identity, as well as changes in legislation and information on union activities in the disparate regions of Brazil.[74]

Drawing the State In

Precluded from mobilizing rank and file and engaging in any form of collective action, CONTAG undertook instead a "campaign for rights" in which unions would educate workers about their legal rights and encourage them to bring individual cases before the labor courts. CONTAG also sought administrative redress by working through the various government bureaucracies. This legalistic strategy sought to draw the state into mediating social relations between large landowners and wage laborers by fighting the arbitrary power of landowners through labor courts and forcing implementation of national legislation. The strategy fit well with the military's goal of extending central authority to rural areas.

Much of the movement's work consisted in providing legal assistance to union members who brought cases in labor courts and sending official letters requesting resolution of a particular problem up and down the union hierarchy and to the Ministério do Trabalho. This administrative strategy consisted of sending official correspondence. When a significant problem arose, "the union communicated it to the federation, the federation to CONTAG, CONTAG to the proper authorities (the President of the Republic, chief of staff, or Minister of the Interior, Agriculture or some other department), with copies to the federation and union involved. It was up to the union to do the same at the municipal level, and the federation to communicate and appeal to state authorities" (Novaes 1987, 202). Letters were sent requesting government intervention to settle land disputes and to enforce labor contracts drawn up in the courts, inter-union

73. See also "Encontro de Ipanema" (Apr. 1971), in Pinto (1978, 144–45).

74. The journal dedicated much space to disseminating labor and land legislation and to documenting infringements of workers rights. During the early 1970s, its cover slogan proclaimed, "É importante a participação do Trabalhador Rural na Reforma Agrária." See *O Trabalhador Rural* 4, no. 4 (Nov.-Dec. 1972).

disputes over representation, and compensation for workers expelled by landowners from their land (Novaes 1991; 1987, 202).

The labor-court strategy had considerable appeal in the context of an authoritarian regime. Writing about urban labor in the 1940s, John French has pointed out the logic of such a strategy: "For trade unionists, the labor court system, even without the right to strike, still provided a mechanism for contesting unjust employer actions. . . . In this regard, the worker's interests coincided with those of the growing federal bureaucracy, which sought to centralize effective control in the hands of the state" (French 1992, 87). Studies of rural unions indicate that the labor courts were often responsive to workers' claims. Such was the case, for example, in the Cabo strikes of 1966 and 1968. In rural areas, being able to appeal to the labor courts allowed rural workers to bypass the far more conservative civil courts, which were tied into the local power structure. CONTAG therefore called continually for the creation of additional Juntas de Conciliação e Julgamento, a form of local labor tribunal.[75]

CONCLUSION

The agrarian project of the military hard-liners set the parameters within which the Generation of '68 built the Movimento Sindical dos Trabalhadores Rurais. The agrarian project sought the rapid growth of agricultural production, national integration, and the incorporation of rural labor into national society. Rural unions were assigned the task of incorporating the previously excluded social groups and fostering national integration. They did so in two ways. First, unions became part of the distributional arm of the state and delivered an array of social services. This social wage was intended to combat the influence of the Left in rural areas and to keep the "man of the countryside" from migrating to the cities. Second, unions sought the enforcement of national law and labor law in particular. In this manner, unions helped bring rural labor into national society as citizens while strengthening the state in the countryside. Although unions extended the social wage to a significant share of the rural population, their ability to create citizens and strengthen the state varied by region and depended on a constellation of local factors.

How did the union movement's participation in the agrarian project affect its capacity to become a political force capable of mobilizing its membership and securing real gains? When the movement gathered in 1979 at its Third Congress, delegates were aware that they stood on the threshold of a new political era. The year before, CONTAG had organized a battery of courses to prepare some six hundred union leaders for the congress and the challenges ahead (Tavares 1992, 123). As a result of this care-

75. Interview with Francisco Urbano, 14 Nov. 1995, Brasília. See also CONTAG (1974, 1979).

ful preparation, the Third Congress was a model of progressive unionism and a marker in the "awakening of civil society" in the countryside. The movement as a whole balked, however. Many of the resolutions passed during the congress went unfulfilled in the years that followed. After initial successes in the wage campaigns in the sugar fields of the Northeast, the Movimento Sindical dos Trabalhadores Rurais scored few victories.[76] By 1985 it faced serious challenges from other groups on the Left, including an array of social movements and a well-organized group of dissident unions tied to the labor central CUT (Central Unica dos Trabalhadores), created in 1983.

The legacy of the agrarian project shaped the movement's capacity to act in the transition to democracy in the 1980s in two principal and detrimental ways. CONTAG had considerable difficulty in sustaining mobilization and in finding a place for itself within the political party system. These two factors together have limited the movement's ability to become a national political force. The capacity to mobilize the rank and file and to disrupt production is the primary source of union power and means of pressuring employers and the state. Although not necessarily effective without other pressure tactics, any successful strategy must rest on a credible threat of mobilization. Another important source of union power in a democratic context is participation in the party system and electoral politics. Historically, peasants, wage laborers, and small-farmer movements have become national political forces when they have entered alliances with other sectors, usually the urban middle class or working class, institutionalized by political parties.[77]

The movement's national leadership in CONTAG emerged during the political opening as a progressive island in an ocean of conservative unions.[78] The conservative unions effectively blocked the movement as a whole from switching to the more militant and mobilizational stance endorsed in 1979. The unions' role as part of the distributional arm of the state had severe consequences. Extrapolating from observations made in two states, it can be estimated that in 1979 some two-thirds of the unions were either clientelist or *assistencialista* (engaged primarily in delivering social services).[79] As the union structure grew during the 1970s, the forms

76. One of the few exceptions was the welfare reform undertaken in the Constituent Assembly in 1988. It gave rural workers parity with their urban counterparts (raising minimum benefits from half to full minimum wage) and extended the labor protections and social security benefits enjoyed by men to rural working women (CONTAG 1993, 28; Weyland 1996, 141).

77. This was the case in the early post-revolutionary period in Mexico and in Chile from 1970 to 1973 (Hamilton 1982; Scully 1992). For a comparative perspective, see Collier and Collier (1991). For an example from Europe, see Leubbert (1991).

78. This perception is held by many Brazilian scholars and trade unionists (see Grzybowski 1987; Novaes 1991).

79. The head of the São Paulo state federation admitted that around 80 percent of the state's unions fell into this category. In Rio Grande do Sul, one observer noted that two-thirds of the

of state control became embedded in the structure of the movement and continued to exert influence in the 1980s, well after direct state control decreased. During the 1970s, a layer of bureaucratic and conservative unionists developed with little experience beyond delivering services and CONTAG's many courses (Ricci 1993). Many union members had come to see the legitimate functions of unions as pulling teeth, prescribing medications, and filling out legal documents. The federalist union structure limited CONTAG's ability to push more conservative federations and unions toward a militant stance (Ricci 1993).[80] Finally, the movement's resource dependence on the state left it in a vulnerable financial position. Over the course of the 1980s, the union tax was eroded by inflation, and contracts for the delivery of state social services declined precipitously. This outcome significantly eroded the movement's resource base.

The union movement also found it difficult to become a force in the party system, which assumed increasing importance during the transition to democracy. Despite representing the largest category of organized labor in Brazil, the movement could not assert itself as a political force in electoral politics nor establish a close association with any single party. The depoliticization of labor relations and strict separation between union and political party activity were explicit goals of the ETR. Although no such separation existed in practice under the Goulart government in the 1960s, it was strictly enforced by the military, and CONTAG made a virtual religion out of its autonomy from political parties. CONTAG socialized union leaders and members into a political identity in which these two realms were understood to be worlds apart. As a result of this union-party dichotomy, parties from the far Left to the far Right are represented within the movement, and any effort by CONTAG to move closer to any particular party could rupture the movement. Its timidity in the party system is exemplified by José Francisco, who joined a party (with great trepidation) only in 1995, six years after leaving the CONTAG presidency.[81] The confederation attempted to modify its stance gradually as the 1980s wore on. It urged union members to vote for the first time in 1982 and in 1986 encouraged union leaders to run in the election for the Congress, which doubled as a constitutional assembly. Sixteen candidates emerged

state's unions qualified. In the more progressive movement in Pernambuco, the number is undoubtedly lower but still significant. Interview with Vidor Faita, president of FETAESP (Federação dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura do Estado de São Paulo), 20 Oct. 1994, São Paulo. See also Maybury-Lewis (1994, 204) and Pereira (1991, 283–90).

80. See also DNTR-CUT, "O sindicalismo rural da CUT na região sul: Relatório de pesquisa," DNTR-CUT in-house document, São Paulo, Nov. 1993.

81. He joined the Partido Socialista Brasileiro (PSB). The current president, also of the Generation of '68, joined the Partido Social Democrático Brasileiro (PSDB) of Fernando Henrique Cardoso back in 1988, when the party still had Center-Left pretensions. Interview with José Francisco, 5 Dec. 1995, Recife, Pernambuco; and Francisco Urbano, 14 Nov. 1995, Brasília. For an example of this dynamic at the regional level (in Pernambuco), see Pereira (1997, chap. 7).

from within the ranks, but none won. Only in 1994 did the movement elect its first congressional representative, the president of the federation of Rio Grande do Sul.[82]

As a consequence of CONTAG's "structural" inability to assume a more militant position and establish greater proximity to political parties, an important union dissidence developed during the 1980s. The dissident unionists, with vital support from sectors of the Catholic Church inspired by liberation theology, created union opposition movements that were far more ideologically coherent and militant than the CONTAG unions. The defining feature of this "new unionism" in the countryside was the struggle against the authoritarian state and the conservative modernization of the agrarian sector. In 1983 the dissidents participated in creating CUT and over the decade established strong ties with the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT). The ensuing CUT-CONTAG rivalry became a dominant feature of the rural union movement. In 1996 CONTAG affiliated with CUT, but the division between the camps remains profound, revolving in part around the new unionism's close identification with the PT.

A major theme in the preceding analysis has been the role played by rural unions in the struggle between the centralizing national state and the regional oligarchies and their local political allies. This struggle affected the timing and the manner in which rural labor was brought into national society. A comparison with an earlier episode of Brazilian history, under the government of Getúlio Vargas in the 1930s and early 1940s, will illustrate the significance of the struggle and place the emergence of the rural union movement in a broader historical perspective. The agrarian project that emerged after 1968 can be understood as the final step in the process begun by Vargas to integrate Brazil's diverse regions, centralize political authority, and assert state control over the working classes. The Vargas era is generally viewed as having laid the institutional foundations of modern Brazil.

In the 1930s and early 1940s, Vargas succeeded in enacting a battery of legislation that established state regulation of urban labor relations and unions. Mounting industrial strife and working-class organizing by the Partido Comunista Brasileiro, Trotskyites, anarchists, and others had stirred up the ongoing national debate over the "social question"—how to bring the new working class into the political system and establish harmonious labor relations. Vargas succeeded in asserting state control over existing unions, incorporating the working class into a heavily state-

82. Progress was slow. In 1989, for example, CONTAG recommended that members vote for one of five presidential candidates, representing parties from anywhere on the Left to the Center (the PT, PDT, PSDB, PCB, and PMDB). Interview with Alóisio Carneiro, 16 Nov. 1995, Brasília; interview with Ezídio Pinheiro, 9 Nov. 1995, Brasília. Carneiro was president of CONTAG from 1988 to 1991, and Pinheiro the first congressmen elected by the movement (see CONTAG 1993, 25).

regulated labor movement codified in the Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho of 1943 (CLT). In addition, a system of labor courts was created, and social security was expanded to cover most of the working class. It was the most complete system of corporatism in Latin America.[83] Rural labor, however, was not included. Vargas had attempted to incorporate rural labor alongside the urban working class as early as the 1930s. The São Paulo coffee planters, organized in the Sociedade Rural Brasileira, correctly perceived this initiative as a challenge to their political power and undermined Vargas's successive efforts to extend state control over rural labor relations. The weaker Confederação Rural Brasileiro (CRB) also opposed the idea strongly. As a result, rural labor was excluded from most of the CLT's provisions, except for articles that explicitly referred to rural labor.[84]

The Estatuto do Trabalhador Rural of 1963 (the CLT of the countryside) was twenty years in the making. In 1944 Vargas proposed a statute to regulate rural labor relations and unions. It passed, but not before planters succeeded in taking the teeth out of the bill. Rural labor gained the right to organize unions, but they would be subordinated to the Ministério de Agricultura (not Trabalho), where the influence of the rural landed classes predominated.[85] In the ensuing twenty years, the CLT provisions that applied to rural labor were rarely enforced. Obtaining legal recognition of unions under the 1944 law was difficult—only six rural unions succeeded between 1945 and 1961. In 1954 Vargas, now an elected president, tried a second time; and his labor minister, João Goulart, submitted the predecessor of the ETR to Congress. The initiative once again ran into vociferous opposition from the SRB and was defeated (Price 1964, 66; Welch 1990, 176–77).

The third initiative, a decade later when Goulart was president, succeeded in formally extending the CLT to the countryside. The ETR became national law in 1963 amid mounting fears over rural upheaval and the PCB's organizing drive. The democratic effort to institutionalize a state-regulated rural labor movement, however, was aborted by the 1964 coup. Only with the turn to a more closed authoritarian rule after 1968, when the hard-liners consolidated control over the upper echelons of the state and closed the Congress, did the state begin to regulate rural labor relations on a national scale and finally bring rural labor into an institu-

83. On the incorporation of the Brazilian working class, see Collier and Collier (1991), French (1992), and Erickson (1977).

84. These items included the minimum wage, the right to annual vacation, and prior notification of dismissal (Welch 1990; Pearson 1967, 59–65).

85. Pearson, for example, notes that SRB pressure resulted in 100 agriculture ministers over the past century. The SRB also succeeded in eliminating the union tax for rural unions, an important source of revenue for urban unions. In 1956 Brazil ratified the ILO's Convention 11 (of 1952), which expressly granted agricultural workers "the same rights of association as unions of industrial workers." See Pearson (1967, 63), Welch (1990, 41–44), and Price (1964).

tionalized relationship with the state. The change was part of a larger shift in the balance of power between the national state and regional elites as the pendulum swung from local to central authority.

The emergence of the Movimento Sindical dos Trabalhadores Rurais in Brazil offers an important lesson about rural social relations and popular movements in Latin America today. The role played by the state in the transformation of the countryside (or more modest efforts to modernize agriculture), and its labor policy in particular, has significant impact on opportunities for rural organizing. The state organizes a critical part of the political and institutional environment in which movements may emerge. At least in Brazil, the state mediated the ways in which the profound socioeconomic changes that accompany agrarian transformation would affect rural mobilization by sponsoring a state-regulated union movement. Consolidation of the resulting union movement, led by CONTAG, has in turn transformed the institutional landscape in which future rural popular movements will organize.

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