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AGRIBUSINESS HEGEMONY AND ACCELERATION OF AGRARIAN COUNTER-REFORMATION: BOLSONARO GOVERNMENT POLICIES FOR THE FIELD

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Introduction

By making an initial analysis of the Bolsonaro government, it is possible to affirm that its policy for the countryside is marked by the acceleration of the agrarian counter-reform, contributing to the strengthening of the hegemony of agribusiness in Brazil. Clearly delineated since the campaign times and reaffirmed after the assumption of the presidential chair, its policies totally paralyzed the creation of rural settlements, the demarcation of lands where indigenous peoples live and territories of quilombola communities, in addition to inciting violence against these populations and the social movements of the countryside – especially the movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST) –, allowing us to evaluate that there are clear elements of fascistization in the actions developed by this government.¹

It is important to highlight that the priority for agribusiness as a basis for the development of the Brazilian countryside, established by the current Bolsonaro government, actually intensifies (through continuities with some differences) trends that have been delineating in governments since the late 1990. Relying on the state apparatus and under the reins of financial capital, agribusiness has been fundamental in defining the movement and strategies of social classes in the countryside, confronting it with the proposal of peasant and popular agrarian reform built by social movements. According to Fernandes (2004), agribusiness is a new (and broader) type of landowners, whose power of concentration and domination is not only restricted to land, but also to production technology and development policies; an euphemism to conceal the land owner image of the predator, expropriatory and exclusionary model of the economic development of capitalist agriculture, which carries with it all the inheritance of political and economic backwardness, slave labor, coronelism and subservience.

In this sense, in order to understand the hegemony of agribusiness – and the consequences that its model of economic development highlighted in agroexport brings to the current Brazilian conjuncture – it is necessary to recover, in this chapter, some historical

¹ The very appointment of Luiz Antonio Nabhan Garcia to the Secretariat of Land Affairs indicates this trend – after all, it is about the licensed president of the Democratic Rural Union (UDR), the most astounding employer organization in the Brazilian field, historically associated with violent practices to combat land occupations and murder of rural workers.

mediations that particularize the agrarian question and the struggle for agrarian reform in Brazil. To analyze the Brazilian agrarian question, taking into account the numerous transformations suffered by agriculture, as well as to situate the theme in the current situation, without leaving aside all the history of the struggle for land in Brazil and the great territorial dimension of the country, it makes the subject increasingly complex and the subject of discussion in academic and political circles.

The issue of land structure has always been present in the national political scenario, forming the basis of a policy of extreme social concentration of land ownership that not only generated the latifundium but also demarcated the structures of monopolization of power by reduced elites. Linked to the historical process of colonization of the country, the land occupation structure based on the existence of latifundia crossed the various economic cycles without major changes. As Martins (1999) points out, just as the issue of slavery was rooted in the constitution of the monarchic state in imperial Brazil, the agrarian question is nuclear in the constitutive process of the republican and oligarchic state in the country.

The transition from “democracy of the oligarchs” to the “democracy of the great capital” deepened the bonds of external dependence, at the same time that it did not effect a radical breakdown of the colonial heritage in the context of the Brazilian agrarian structure (Iamamoto, 2006). The implementation of the policy of “modernization of agriculture” in the post-war period, with profound transformations in the productive sphere from technologies originated from industry entities, has worsened this scenario. This process of continuous modernization led by the military regime instituted after the April 1964 coup intensified the conflicts in the camp, the expropriation of the rural worker,² and the very insertion of the State through policies that enhanced the expropriation and concentration of land.

With the capitalist crisis opened in the 1970, a new cycle of accumulation was formed characterized by globalization and financialization, whose development reached agriculture. From the 1980 onwards, a scenario opens in which the role of agriculture nucleated the management of the various macro-economic conjunctures of the period, and the territorialization of capital promoted the installation of large agro-industrial complexes in the field, via monoculture, for export, enhancing the expropriation and expulsion of workers from the countryside to the cities. The expansion of globalized and financialized capital to the agricultural sector gains a new dynamism from the 1990/2000, driven by the foreign strategy (and internal agricultural policy) of prioritization of agribusiness, which has become

² We understand that the concept of peasant is current for the analysis of the understanding of the Brazilian agrarian reality, because it allows us to know the complexity of the historical subjects it establishes, diversely from the concepts of small production and family agriculture. For the understanding of this concept, we start mainly from the reflections of Marques (2008) and Fernandes (2008), from which we understand that the peasantry is formed by a diversity of social forms based on the relationships of family work and different forms of access to land such as the tenant farmers, the partner, the foreman, the lessee, the small owner, etc. In this sense, we understand that the centrality of the role of the family in the organization of production and in the constitution of their way of life, together with work on earth, constitute the elements common to all these social forms. Finally, we start from Marques (2008), which says that, although the peasant is an expropriated migrant, he does not completely break his ties with the land. For this author, the majority of expropriated peasants maintain some relationship with the countryside, whether it is closer or more distant – direct work relationship, family bond, origin relationship, etc. What explains, in part, the permanence among them of a set of symbols and values that refer to a traditional moral or logical order and the possibility of access to land presents itself as an alternative to the poor of the countryside and of the city who seek to ensure their survival while maintaining the dignity of workers.

a structuring part of the governments that have assumed the presidency since then, and that intensified with the arrival to power of Jair Messias Bolsonaro in 2018, whose actions have contributed to the advance of this hegemony through the intensification of the agrarian counter-reform.

These are the questions that will be developed in the chapter presented here, in order to reinforce how the current hegemony of agribusiness potentiates problems historically present in the rural environment and that the fight against this model of capitalist development in agriculture raises to higher levels of larger and economic growth. the challenges to be faced by social movements in the struggle for land and land reform within Brazilian society are complex.

Historical particularities of the agrarian question in the Brazilian social formation

Upon analyzing the essence of our social formation, Prado Jr. clarifies that when the country was divided by the Portuguese into large tracts of land, centralizing production for the supply of external markets, the Brazilian society and economy have organized and worked to produce and export to Europe some tropical or mineral genera of great importance; that is, everything that existed in it was subsidiary and intended solely to support and make possible the achievement of the essential external objective, contributing to the occurrence of land concentration and to a form of land use based on the great agromarket exploitation (Prado Jr., 2000, p. 117). The development of the main economic activities throughout the colonial period presented two fundamental characteristics: a significant regional diversity and a policy of occupation of territories that directly interlinked with the most profitable activity at the moment (Prado Jr., 2008).³

In the framework of an emerging colonial world, the maintenance of the state stratification, which served as a social basis for the existence and strengthening of the patrimonial state in the Brazilian colonial world, was under the historical condition of granting land grants,⁴ that demarcated the power structures that could not and should not be destroyed, forming a policy of land-based control that not only generated the latifundium, but also:

[...] excluded, *ab initio*, the mass of the free population, whether or not belonging to the state, from the possession of the land and, so on, from the control of power and the right to have direct ties with the state. In

³ It was seen, for example, the peak of the sugar economy during the 17th century, especially in Bahia and Pernambuco, due to the favorable climate and the possibility of production flow due to the proximity of the ports. In the 18th century, the discovery of the auriferous and diamantiferous deposits in Minas Gerais directed to this region the productive focus, which also boosted the development of cities around it, such as Rio de Janeiro (which becomes the capital) and São Paulo. With the depletion of the mines, the production scene again highlights agriculture – especially with sugar, tobacco and cotton – and also livestock and its derivatives (such as milk, cheese and leather), which developed particularly in the regions of Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Sul and Mato Grosso.

⁴ There was undoubtedly a structural injustice in the land grant regime: only free man could be a land owner and, until the mid-eighteenth century, pure of blood and pure of faith. The acculturated Indians and the mestizos were, in general, forbidden the concession of the sesmaria, because they were classified in the category of administration, that is, protected by a white and free lord” (Martins, 2002, p.164).

itself, the land was not a wealth and it would take some time for it to assume this meaning (even as a connection of the commodity capital). But it is based on the material basis of the transfer and perpetuation of an entrenched estate of privileges and patrimonialist domination itself (Fernandes, 1981, p. 69).

Understanding that the way in which the emancipation of Brazil was operated was the character of “political arrangement” (Prado Jr., 2012, p. 51), we can affirm that the particularity of the development of this transition contributed to the characterization of the whole process as a “hooded revolution” (Fernandes, 1976), under which Independence assumed both a revolutionary and a conservative element. Its revolutionary element emerges from the fact that it represents a definitive historical milestone of the extinction of colonial status and a reference point for the formation of national society. Its restorative process is solidified by the fact that the depth of rupture with the past was confined by the predominance of historical and social influences:

Large farming and mining, under the conditions in which they could be exploited productively, imposed the perpetuation of the structures of the colonial world – from slavery, to the extreme concentration of income and to the movement of power by reduced elites, with the permanent marginalization of the huge mass of free men who could not classify themselves in civil society and the invisible erosion of national sovereignty in economic, diplomatic or political relationships with the great powers (Fernandes, 1976, p. 33).⁵

The period that opens from the 1850's marks the route of several modifications that sought to change the physiognomy of the country, aiming to direct it to what was then considered modernity: the reduction and extinction of slave trade, with the consequent release of capital and business experience for productive investments in other sectors;⁶ Land Law that instituted private property of the land and its commercialization; the centralization of the National Guard; and the approval of the first Commercial Code. Throughout the imperial period, most of the reforms proposed by the liberals had been exclusively political (except for abolition), so they did not modify the deeper economic, political and social structures. The result of this development process was the survival of command structures that implied the marginalization of broad sectors of the population that, in practice,

⁵ The concentration of power in the hands of a minority explains “[...] the survival of traditional production structures and forms of political control characterized by the manipulation of local power by large owners and the marginalization and apathy of the majority of the population” (Costa, 2010, p. 60).

⁶ According to Medeiros (2003, p. 10), “when, in the mid-19th century, difficulties began to arise for the continued use of slave labor, since slave trade was publicly condemned and harshly persecuted on the international level, the debate on new forms of work for large crops has also become a discussion about land use and the conditions of their appropriation. At that time, although voices in favor of a division of land were already appearing in Parliament, the power of the great landowners prevailed. The result of the controversy surrounding land ownership and use was the Land Law, approved in 1850. Through it, mechanisms were ensured that allowed the maintenance of land concentration and the availability of labor. The Republican Constitution of 1891 and the Civil Code of 1917 maintained them.” Promulgated by a parliament consisting of large farmers and slave lords, the Land Law “[...]transferred to private domain and possession, creating a kind of absolute right that is the main cause of Brazilian latifundism and the difficulties to give the land, fully, a social function” (Martins, 1999, p. 122). The consequences of this legislation are evident years later, around 1920, in the landmarks of the Old Republic, where “[...] 4.5% of those who could buy had almost half of the country's rural properties” (Coggiola, 2007, p. 3).

guaranteed and reiterated “[...] the monopoly of the state apparatus by the owners of slaves, sugar mill lords, coffee makers, stationers, landowners, traders, foreign interests” (Ianni, 1985, p. 11).

During the Old Republic, Brazil remained as a country predominantly agricultural until the 1930. According to the last census carried out in this period (1920), only 16.6% of the population lived in cities of 20 thousand inhabitants or more, and 69.7% engaged in agricultural activities, while 13.8% engaged in industry and 16.5% to services (Fausto, 2012). In rural society, the large landowners dominated, who before 1888 were also, in the vast majority, slave owners. With the support of power rooted in land ownership and wealth, the “colonels” began to perform public functions through a system of reciprocity and exchange of favors toward their dependents, through State resources. Coronelism thus conforms as an indicator phenomenon of “[...] Rarefaction of the public power against private power or the privatization of public functions and resources in the functions of private interests” (Iamamoto, 2007, p. 139).

The dominant political liberalism in the federalist organization of the first Republic instituted the autonomy of the states, which was of interest to the coffee oligarchy and the particularism of their businesses. In Article 64 of the Federal Constitution of 1891 (Brazil, 2020a), the transfer of federal public lands to the patrimony of the states of the federation is guaranteed, giving them the prerogative to legislate on them. This measure contributed to the formation of large land areas, prevailing the landowner order of the imperial agrarian elites.⁷

The policy of governors developed throughout the First Republic established a political structure that represented the return of land owners to power and “[...] it allowed the ruling classes of the most powerful states to add up the disputes of state oligarchies and regional inequalities, in order to preserve and strengthen the power of the group that dominated the state apparatus” (Ianni, 1985, p. 15). There were several forms of exploitation of labor within the relations of production in force, making the first public privileged scenario of what Candido (1989) called the “decidedly draining scheme” rooted in our society. In the field, employment bonds contaminated with the vices of the not too distant past confided situations bordering on slavery, where employees found themselves trapped by debts often impossible to pay off. The excess of rural population that facilitated the exploitation of easy and cheap labor; the obstacles to access to own land; the predominance of large landowners and “colonels”, all this made the semi-existence of those who veiled in it in extreme need. The conditions of an agrarian structure of colonial character - with the great property and monoculture that persisted as occupation of the land and as a regime of exploitation - prevented the improvement of the conditions of the man of the countryside even with the shocks of abolition. This situation has not been changed by the Republic. On the contrary, the great concentration that develops until the crisis of 1929–1930 not only contributed to the expansion of the area of agricultural crops, but also generates the misery

⁷ According to Rodrigues (1982, p. 83), the allocation of the land returned to the states brought as a consequence “[...] not only the fractionation of the territorial mass, but also allowed the concessions of public interest, made in isolated acts of favor that favored the landowners or allowed the sharing of almost a whole state, such as the Amazon, divided into eight zones, delivered to foreign companies for the exploitation of their mineral wealth.” Another measure adopted by the Republican government was the regularization of public land tenants – large landowners who occupied public land without any legal mechanism, making them legal owners of large leased areas.

and famines that dramatize the daily Northeastern life in the time of droughts.

The increase in conflicts was the inexorable consequence of this process (Barboza, 2014). The intensification of the “social issue” triggers a conjunct of social struggles in the field for the guarantee of the rights of peasant workers.⁸ There is an explosion of hundreds of strikes for wages and working conditions, such as those that occurred in the coffee farms of São Paulo. Economic collapse, social destruction, political subjugation, the desert of moral and cultural values motivate the reaction that is manifested in different forms in the backcountry. Against the monopoly of land, against the exploitation of the rural worker by the landowner, against drought, against periodic famines and even against police repression flooded with abuse and bloodshed, the *cangaço* represented a form of struggle, a response against the social organization (Rodrigues, 1982). In these milestones,

The rural world reveals the weight of state violence as a mark of dependent capitalism, advancing on the right of workers in embodying and overcoming pre-capitalist forms of exploitation and their ideologies of conservation that hold the exploited the rural worker accountable for his or her social and economic condition (Barboza *et al*, 2019, p. 62).

After the “revolution of 1930”, which decreed the end of the Old Republic, a facet was formed of the modernization of Brazilian society; a transformation that inaugurated, still under the hegemony of the oligarchy, “a recomposition of the structures of power, by which bourgeois power and bourgeois domination would be historically configured”, a recomposition that marked the passing of the “feudal era” (or former regime) of the “bourgeois era” (or class society) (Fernandes, 1976, p. 203). The “Constitutionalist Revolution” of 1932 and the promulgation of the Constitutional Charter in 1934 (Brasil, 2020b) would require that the political force of rural oligarchies had not been entirely removed, which forced the need for the recomposition of the power pact in these oligarchies and the rising industrial and commercial bourgeoisie. This process culminated, on the one hand, in the preservation of the structures owned by them of four centuries past, without signs of changes in the Agrarian Reform. On the other hand, it implied the maintenance of the political conditions of the large landowners to exercise power in rural areas, with the monopoly of state institutions, a strong control over the rural population, thus ensuring the maintenance of its political representation force (even on a secondary plane).

Absorbing the population surpluses of export agriculture and characterized by the substitution of imports and the concentration in the production of durable consumer goods, industrialization took place without effecting a break with both the economic dependence of central countries and the rural oligarchy (from which the new ruling elites originate).

⁸ The fact that the numerous struggles and resistances concerning the question of power crystallized in the form of land monopoly have developed since the Portuguese invasion is incalculable. These are some examples of this period: the constitution of quilombos by black people and enslaved Indians, having been Palmares a historical reference around 1629, the indigenous confrontation led by Sepé Tiaraju (1753–1756), the Baiana Conjunction (1798), the insurrection of the Malês (1835), the Balaiada (1838), the Cabanagem (1835), the Sabinada (1837), the Praieira Revolution (1848–1850), the Canudos War (1896–1897) and the Contestado War (1912–1916). In the decades following the period referred to in the paragraph, we can highlight: the Revolt of the Cauldron (1935), the Pau de Colonar Movement (1935), the guerrillas of Porecatu (1944–1951), several organizations of Tenant Farmers around 1957–1961, the Revolt of Trombas and Formoso (1955–1964), The Union of Farmers and Agricultural Workers of Brazil – Ultab (1954), the peasant leagues (1955 – 1964), the Landless Farmers Movement – MST (1960) and the advance of rural union in the 1960.

Thus, a long period is formed in which the close relationship between capital and land ownership is in force; a pact where the large crop is built as the basis of capital accumulation and economic diversification. Under these circumstances, unlike the classical economic models in which the ownership of capital and land ownership were separated – and, at the same time, the class of capitalists was also separated from the class of landowners – here, they both merged; and, not infrequently, into great property, the owner made himself not only a landowner (in the traditional sense of the word), but an entrepreneur (Martins, 2002, p. 170). The old agrarian oligarchy recomposes and remakes alliances to remain in the power block, modernizing itself economically and decisively influencing the conservative bases of bourgeois domination in Brazil.

The ties of the process of capitalist modernization of agriculture in Brazil

During the 1950's, with the model of dependent industrialization that resulted in the necessary import of machinery from Europe and the USA, it was the generation of foreign exchange from the continuity of agricultural exports that made it possible to pay this amount of machinery derived from the import of machinery.

According to Stedile (2005, p. 31), from this process there is an industrial sector linked to the production of inputs for agriculture (such as the tools, machinery, chemical fertilizers, poisons, etc.); and another sector linked to the implementation of the agricultural processing industry (the so-called agro-industry), a model that also brought forth an agrarian bourgeoisie, of large landowners, that aimed sought to modernize their farm and intended it to the internal market, in a process of capitalist modernization of large rural property. In the structure of land ownership, a contradictory and complementary logic was thus built:

On the one hand, there was the multiplication of small properties, by the purchase and sale and reproduction of family units. And, on the other hand, in vast regions, great capitalist property advanced and concentrated more land, more resources. And, in general, there was a historical trend, natural of the logic of capitalist reproduction, that land ownership, which was already born on land-based bases, remained on average concentrating even more (Stedile, 2005, p. 32–33)

If the import of means of production considered more modern marked the first steps, still in the 1950, of the process of capitalist modernization of agriculture in Brazil, it will be from the 1960, specifically with the start of military governments derived from the 1964 coup, that agriculture will be inserted more strongly into the reality of capitalist production, through the implementation of economic development plans that would aim to adapt the production of primary goods to financial capital (Delgado, 2012, p. 13–15). When the country is now headed by civil autocracy – bourgeois military, from the mid-1960 to the 1980, a new stage of conservative modernization is implemented. The State has directed this change of course by creating the basis for capital accumulation, through the regulation of capital-labor relation, fundamentally by labor laws; the transfer of resources to the industrial enterprise and the promotion of qualitative change in the field of agricultural production;

which remained important to the international capitalist dynamic, but also has a primary role to feed the urban masses, that is, in production for the internal market.

With regard to agricultural development policy, a series of mechanisms for large-scale agricultural production improvement are implemented – mainly through credits for chemical inputs and machinery for large owners, implementing the so-called Green Revolution.⁹ This gave a boost to the process of modernization of agriculture, starting mechanization and poisoning of agricultural production, as a way to increase productivity and ultimately profitability. Furthermore, with the internationalization of the Amazon lands, the growth and development of the landowners, and an Agrarian counter-reform associated with the colonization of the border areas, agrarian conflicts intensified, and thus the role of trade union militancy. Not by chance, the military-business dictatorship pursued, arrested, tortured and disappeared with peasant leaders and, from 1972, pushed the rural unions to provide medical and dental care and also to send them to support and pensions in order to bureaucratize and depoliticize their struggles.

This economic model of modernization of agriculture in the country, which maintained the concentration of land and potentiated the export monoculture, had as main factor of strengthening the interest of international capital that was invested in the national industry, which needed both to expand the production of goods and inputs for agriculture, and to increase production and export from the Brazilian raw material (Palmeira, 1989). In this case, agricultural or agro-industrial production has been invaded by large economic groups, which have started to immobilize capital in land, in the sense of benefiting not only from the valorization of them, but also with the possibility of raising public funds for the realization of financial applications that were more profitable at that time. According to the analyses of Müller (1989, p. 34):

With the integration of industry and agriculture in the period 1960–80, we are faced with companies and economic groups that have a powerful influence on the dynamics of agricultural activities, with profound repercussions on their structures. But in agriculture itself companies and economic groups arise, which with their industrial counterparts, are part of the economic power with interests in agricultural activities.

Delgado (2005) signals us that the 1980 was formed as a moment of transition and contradiction to the Brazilian Agrarian Question, with the resumption of breath, after the end of the military regime, of the social forces that for two decades had been subjugated by the authoritarian rule of the movement of agriculture.¹⁰ In addition, if between 1965–1981

⁹ On the post-World War II, in opposition to the Red Revolution (which proposed a radical social transformation, changing the structure of the productive system that generates social relationships with profound inequalities, as expressed by misery and hunger), the Green Revolution was created as a technical alternative to increase productivity and solve the problem of food supply in the world (Carneiro, 2015). Ironically, we come to the 21st century with 1 billion of famished, as the UN itself, through the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), recognizes.

¹⁰ “With the environment of political openness there is a wide articulation of social movements and agrarian advisory entities: The Rural Workers’ Movement without Land (MST) is born, the National Confederation of Agriculture Workers (Contag) is reorganized, the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (Contag), the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (Contag), the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (Contag). The Pastoral Land Commission of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB), created in 1979, is strengthened by the Church and several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) emerge in support of the

Brazilian agriculture completed a cycle of technical modernization and growth without making a substantive change in the agrarian structure, from the 1980, a scenario will open up in which the role of agriculture will conform as crucial for the management of the various macro-economic conjunctures of the period. The Mexican moratorium of 1982 triggered an international liquidity crisis, which has continued for the long period of relative stagnation of the Brazilian economy, largely established by successive macroeconomic “adjustment” operations to the external debt crisis, carried out in order to try to adapt the internal economic dynamics to the limits imposed by the new restrictions.

Thus, this process of “constricted adjustment” to the globalized economic order (to which the country undergoes over the 1980/90 and which the years 2000), had as basic characteristics the restrictions of external and internal order, expressed by high public indebtedness and external dependence,¹¹ in addition to the influence of the international economy on the political economy of the agrarian question.

The way in which the economic establishment will promote the management of the crisis of external dependence from the reversal of the economic cycle of cement in 1982 requires a significant participation of the agricultural sector and the related agro-industrial chains in the generation of external trade balances. These become essential to meet the financial needs of the current account deficit of the balance of payments. The way foreign economic policy will incorporate the agricultural sector into the “solution” of external indebtedness reinforces the strategy of concentration and latifundium speculation in the land market. The greatest sign of this is the liberality with which it promotes the appropriation of land income by the large owners (Delgado, 2005, p. 62)

During the 1990/2000 decades, globalized capital increasingly expands its “tentacles” for agriculture, which is now required to meet the requirements of this “constrained adjustment” and domestic and foreign debt. Thus, a new moment of impulse to the external strategy of prioritization of agribusiness and promotion of the agro-export sector, associated with the new global economic policy of capital financing, where the commodification of land and exports of primary products are potentially valued. The policy previously used in the conservative modernization scenario of the 1960/80 – of investments in industrial complexes associated with large private land ownership to respond to the external trade balance – is resumed in this new threshold period of the 20th and early 21st century, with prioritization of agricultural agriculture in the foreign macroeconomic agenda and in the domestic agricultural policy, as a way of generating foreign trade balances to supply the current account deficit.

The development strategy based on the implementation of “development fund” from the “integration axes” with alternatives of regional integration tends to perpetuate the spatial fragmentation of development according to the international flow of goods, expressed

“National Forum for Agrarian Reform” (Delgado, 2005, p. 61).

¹¹ It should be noted that, in essence, these “macroeconomic adjustments” were not able to equate these debts, “on the contrary, they prolong this phase of stagnation of the Brazilian economy for more than two decades” (Delgado, 2005, p. 62).

in the Initiation for the Integration of South American Regional Infrastructure (IIRSA).¹² Thus, another stage is materialized of structural reforms of neoliberal character, thus perpetuating the spatial fragmentation of development and the intensification of conflicts in the field in the face of the reprimarization of exports, considering that the agricultural areas are being disputed by the national corporations. The country is placed “[...] in liquidation for the capital seeking re-production in the portentous commodity exports business” (Leher, 2009, p. 72, emphasis added).

The responses of the neoliberal federal governments to the broader context of the national agrarian question and agricultural development were, in summary: promotion of land access policies via markets; credits aimed at vertical integration of producers considered efficient; promoting technological packages that associate the use of transgenic seeds with the use of pesticides that cause acute and chronic damage to rural workers, environmental damage through poisoning of soil, water, air and the food that reaches the consumer's table; the reprimarization of exports by means of the prevalence of latifundium, associated with the domestic capital for the production of *commodities*, and the predatory exploitation of mines; the combination of high technology used in agribusiness with work analogous to slave labor; lands foreignation;¹³ growth in the occupation of indigenous territories and traditional populations, in the name of development; sustainable territorial development projects combined with compensatory social policies that do not alter the structure of agricultural production; among other expressions. More intensely and more widely, the Brazilian state combines the criminalization of peasant social movements with public policies that depoliticize the agrarian question and cool off the social struggles.

The hegemony of agribusiness in the Brazilian field

From these reflections, it is important to emphasize that the priority for agribusiness as a basis for the development of the Brazilian countryside, established by the current Bolsonaro government, deepens trends that have been deleting since the second term of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government (FHC), crossed the PT governments of Luís Inácio da Silva (Lula) and Dilma Rousseff, and they despaired in the Michel Temer government. Agribusiness was defined by Delgado (2006, p. 1) as an “[...] Association of large agribusiness capital with large land ownership, under fiscal, financial and patrimonial sponsorship of the State”. We consider it important to add to this definition the political-ideological support of the big business media – not for nothing, the large media business groups are part of the Brazilian Agribusiness Association (ABAG).

The political priority given to agribusiness comes from the end of the 1990: when pressed by the exchange crisis of 1998/1999, the FHC government stimulated the exports as a way to obtain balances on the trade balance to pay the debts of the country. Among the sectors stimulated was the agribusiness, free from the payment of taxes on the export of

¹² This is a program involving the twelve countries of South America, which aims to promote the integration of this region with the modernization of infrastructure, transport, energy and telecommunications. Financed by the IDB, CAF and FONPLATA and also national governments, it has been the target of several criticisms, especially by environmental movements, due to the causes of the various environmental impacts of the enterprises adopted.

¹³ According to Stédile (2013, p. 29): “[...] It is estimated that foreign companies should control more than 30 million ha of land in Brazil.”

primary products, since Complementary Law 87/1996, known as the Kandir Law (Brasil, 1996).

From then on, a movement to raise the agribusiness to the condition of one of the pillars of the Brazilian economy, at the same time that agrarian reform was presented as anachronistic and the social movements of the countryside as violent and backward. With the increase in the world demand for so-called *commodities* in the 2000, driven by the growth of the Chinese economy, Brazilian exports of agricultural products were strongly expanded in quantity and value, and agribusiness was increasingly strengthened. The average annual value of exports rose from 50 billion in the 1995/99 period to about 200 billion in the late 2000, with the share of basic products going from 25% to 45% of the export tariff in 2010 and, added to semi-manufactured products, this number goes to 54.3%, setting up the reprimarization of foreign trade (Delgado, 2012, p. 95).

This political strategy of anchoring the economy in the export of *commodities* was not exclusive to Brazil, spreading throughout Latin America, configuring what Svampa (2013) called “consensus of *commodities*”, that is, a kind of political and ideological consensus that the only possible or possible path for development is through intensive, large-scale exploitation of natural resources for the production of primary products.

To this growth of agribusiness contributed decisively to the adoption of a set of policies: labor, which promoted the flexibilization of labor relationships; environmental, whose regulatory frameworks were reviewed; infrastructure, especially production flow; territorial planning and land regularization; and financing (Heredia; Leite; Palmeira, 2010).

Leveraged by this set of public policies, agribusiness was also favored, contradictorily, by the economic-food-energy-environmental crisis of 2007/2008, since it triggered a strong growth of foreign investments in the sector, either to invest in food and agrofuel production, whose prices increased, either because in crisis periods the land is seen as a reserve of value. Although this scenario has suffered a certain inflection from 2010, with the fall in the price of *the agricultural commodities*, in particular soybeans, there was rapid price recovery, and Brazil’s incorporation as China’s main supplier allowed the continued growth of agribusiness throughout the 2000, although with oscillation.

The result of this development model has been the intensification of land concentration, revealing that Brazil was not able to transpose the land structure. On the contrary, the maintenance of concentration on our lands was and is functional for capitalist rule. According to Incra (2020a), there are 5,766,542 million rural properties in Brazil registered in the agency that together account for 521,837,119 million hectares (ha) of land. The last IBGE agricultural census, of 2017, proves the concentration of land in Brazil, pointing out that 77% of the land of agricultural establishments are in the hands of agribusiness (IBGE, 2019).

However, the growth of large property does not translate into broad rural employment or better wage conditions, as the data found in the same document shows. Of the 5 million agricultural properties in the country, just over 51 thousand own 47.6% land used for agricultural production. On the other hand, small owners, landowners up to 10 ha, occupy only 2.3% of the total. The research also points to another trend: the decrease of establishments occupied by family farming and, consequently, the shrinking of jobs. The reduction was 9.5 percentage points compared to 2006. The segment was also the only one

to lose labor force: while there was an increase of 702 thousand jobs in other sectors of agribusiness, family agriculture lost a contiguous of 2.2 million workers (IBGE, 2019).¹⁴

With this, according to data from IBGE (2020a), between 1990 and 2018, the area planted with temporary crops in Brazil increased from 45.98 to 73.23 million ha (that is, it grew 27.25 million ha), concentrated increase in three products primarily aimed at export or processing industry – the so-called *commodities* – soy, sugarcane and corn. The area planted with these three products increased from 27.2 million ha in 1990 to 61.43 million ha (a growth of 34.2 million ha). On the other hand, the production of three basic foods for Brazilian food, rice, beans, and cassava, decreased from 11.44 million ha in 1990 to 6.04 million ha (a reduction of 5.4 million ha).

Another revealing of the paths of Brazilian agricultural production is the expansion of cattle breeding in Brazil, an activity that is due to the extensive character, and whose number of heads (213.5 million) is already greater than the number of Brazilians (210 million). In this case we observed that cattle breeding expanded in all regions of the country, but with emphasis on the Amazon, where the expression was more significant, from 17.8% of the Brazilian herd in 1990 to 40.6% in 2018 (IBGE, 2020b).

The expansion of agribusiness did not mean the improvement of food conditions for the Brazilian population, on the contrary, increased food insecurity in the country. Between 1990 and 2018, the Brazilian population went from 149 to 208.4 million inhabitants, a growth of 39.9%. In the same period, rice production increased by 58.3% and beans increased by 30.5%; that is, rice outnumbered the population growth, but bean production fell below this. The case of cassava is even worse, as production decreased by 27.5%. Thus, when we considered the availability of food per inhabitant, we observed that this reduced by 1 kg in the case of beans and almost 80 kg in the case of cassava. In the case of rice there was an increase of 6.6 kg per inhabitant (IBGE, 2020b).

On the other hand, the corn production increased by 285.5%, sugarcane production was 184.3% and soybean production was 492.5%, this confirms the priority of the current Brazilian agriculture for products aimed at export or the production of raw materials for the industry to the detriment of food production for the population, pointing to the inexorable expansion of our insecurity there, resulting from a productive model that expands *the* production of *commodities* to the detriment of food production (IBGE, 2020b).

In the wake of economic growth, agribusiness was also politically strengthened. Not for nothing, practically all the ministers of agriculture in the last two decades have been prominent figures of agribusiness, such as Roberto Rodrigues (then president of ABAG) in the first Lula government, Kátia Abreu (at the time president of the National Confederation of Agriculture) in the Dilma government, Blairo Maggi (one of the largest soybean producers and owner of the largest Brazilian soybean processing and marketing company) in the Temer government, and Tereza Cristina (then leader of the “Ruralista Bench” in the chamber, officially called the Parliamentary Front of Agriculture – FPA) in Bolsonaro government.

Perhaps the greatest political expression of the strengthening of agribusiness is the growing power of this “Ruralist Bench”, which has been acting in the defense of agribusiness interests in Congress and has become the largest and most influential sector bench of the

¹⁴ However, in terms of volume of production and income generation, small units exceeded the medium and large, showing that agrarian reform is not an outdated agenda, but a concrete necessity for the present and future of the country.

Brazilian parliament. In the legislature 2014–2018, the Bench had 214 members and 24 senators associated – respectively, 41.7% of the total of congressmen and 29.6% of the total senators. The Bench grew even more in the current legislature, which began in 2019, adding 225 congressmen and 32 senators – which corresponds to 43.9% of the Chamber and 39.5% of the Senate.

The strengthening of the “Ruralist Bench” implies the increase in the capacity of agribusiness to press for public policies that favor the sector; but it goes far beyond that, because it is a segment with sharp and strong links with other benches that have strengthened in recent years, like the evangelical and the armamentist, conforming what has been called “BBB bench”¹⁵ – the ox, the bible and the bullet – to which some acres have another B, the banks, indicating the association of financial interests with the most retrograde sectors of Brazilian society.

The acceleration of the agrarian counter-reform

Backed by the support of agribusiness and politically supported by the “Bs” benches, the Bolsonaro’s government, elected in 2018, suspended the destination of land for the creation of rural settlements, indigenous lands and quilombola territories; it created the mechanisms to break the land of settlements and indigenous peoples for the expansion of agribusiness and other capital interests – such as mining and hydroelectric construction – and intensified the legalization of land grabbing in the Amazon. In addition, he extinguished programs like Pronera¹⁶ and Terra do Sol.¹⁷

Marx said that, in order to unravel social relationships, we need to go far beyond appearances. Nothing more fallacious than the discourse of agribusiness ideologues that the land is no longer fundamental to contemporary agriculture, because it is intensive in capital and technology. Land is not only fundamental for agribusiness, but today it is also for a number of other strategies of capital, among them the speculation driven by large transnational companies, as well as the most diverse financial funds, which increasingly invest in land as financial assets.

¹⁵ The expression refers to a television program and was used for the first time by the congresswoman Mrs. Erika Kokay of the PT. See Rocha (2015), disponível em: <https://epoca.globo.com/colunas-e-blogs/felipe-paturo/noticia/2015/02/kokay-aumenta-bancada-bbb-biblia-boi-e-bala.html>, acesso em: Sep. 07th 2020.

¹⁶ Through Pronera, the young people and adults from settlements have access to basic education courses (literacy, elementary and high school), high-level professional technicians, higher and graduate courses (specialization and master’s). The program also empowers educators to work in local settlements and coordinators – multipliers and organizers of community educational activities. The actions of the program, which was born from the articulation of civil society, are based on cultural and socio-territorial diversity, processes of interaction and transformation of the field, democratic management and scientific and technological advancement.

¹⁷ Program to promote agro-industrialization and commercialization through the elaboration of business plans, market research, consultancies, training in economic viability, as well as management and implementation/recovery/expansion of agro-industries. Non-agricultural activities – such as rural tourism, handicrafts and agroecology – are also supported. The action was created in 2004 and is part of the National Plan for Agrarian Reform (PNRA) and the Multiannual Plan (PPA), which defines the priority Programs of the Federal Government. During this period, R\$ 44 million was made available in resources, which provided the implementation of 102 projects and benefited 147 thousand families throughout Brazil.

Thus, agribusiness, at the same time, acts to prevent the expropriation of unproductive lands located within its properties and to advance on public and community lands in Brazil, that account for 39% of the Brazilian territory and are now outside the land market – because it is land under state control (Conservation Units, Indigenous Lands and Rural Settlements) or collectively titled (Quilombola Territories).

The process of incorporation of new areas is a fundamental condition for the dynamics of agribusiness, expanding territorial domain and opening up borders through accumulation by plundering (Harvey, 2004), violent process of appropriation and expropriation of natural resources, lands and territories, it prints in the territories patterns of conflict expressed in systematic evictions, irregular assignment of land, foreclosure of public access, encampment of land for collective use, impediment of access to water, industrial scale capture of water resources, deforestation, among other conflicts.

In this perspective, areas of environmental preservation, indigenous lands, quilombolas, rural settlements and common use are obstacles to be removed, aiming to expand the supply of land in the market that is experiencing a moment of intense warming.

The abandonment of land reform and the recognition of lands traditionally occupied by indigenous and quilombolas has lasted more than a decade. Data on the creation (and recognition)¹⁸ of settlements indicate that, in the second Lula government, there has already been a retreat to lower levels than those of the FHC government. In the period covering the Sarney's, Collor's and Itamar's governments (1985–1994), 868 settlements were created out of a total of 9,415 created between 1985 and 2019 – which corresponds to 9.2% of the total. In the two FHC governments (1995–2002), 4,281 settlements were created, 45.5% of the total, mainly in the first term, before the primary-export turnover. In the Lula administration (2003–2010), 3,544 settlements were created, 37.6% of the total, but with a big difference between the first term, when 2/3 of these were created and the second term, with only 1/3. Since 2011, in Dilma's and Temer's governments (2011–2018), the fall in the creation of settlements is even more brutal, with annual inferior numbers every year between 1995 and 2010 and a total of settlements created in the 2010 of only 722, corresponding to 7.7% of the total, less than in the period 1985–1994.

Therefore, Bolsonaro's determination to completely paralyze the creation of settlements only radicalized a policy that had already been outlined earlier, in line with the interests of agribusiness.

It was not very different the scenario in relation to indigenous lands (TIs) and quilombola territories (IQs). With regard to the demarcation of indigenous lands, the number falls sharply in the 2010 until zeroing in the Bolsonaro government, as announced by the president himself in August 2019, in flagrant disregard of the Constitution which, in its article 231, provides for the determination of indigenous lands: “As long as I am president, there is no demarcation of indigenous land” (Verdêlio, 2019).¹⁹

The largest number of TI approvals occurred in the years immediately following the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, the assassination of Chico Mendes²⁰ and on the

¹⁸ Recognition refers to settlements created by state and municipal governments that are integrated into the Incra database and their beneficiaries considered eligible to receive the policies developed by the body supporting the development of settlements.

¹⁹ Cf. <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/politica/noticia/2019-08/bolsonaro-diz-que-nao-fara-demarcacao-de-de-terras-indigenas>. Access on: Aug. 16th 2020.

²⁰ Chico Mendes was an important leadership of the rubber tappers of Acre that was notable for the defense of

eve of Rio-92, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, A context in which there was great international pressure for the adoption of measures to preserve the Amazon and the indigenous rights until 1992, 39.9% of the total TIs created between 1985 and 2019 were homologated. The second period of greatest creation of TIs was the FHC government, with 32.3% of the total. In Lula's governments, 19.4% of the TIs were created. Already in 2010, a period that includes the governments Dilma, Temer and Bolsonaro was only 4.9% of the total.

Thus, once again, what we observe is that the Bolsonaro government radicalizes a tendency already outlined previously of abandoning the policy of demarcation of TIs.

In the case of quilombola territories the scenario is also no different. As in the case of indigenous peoples, with explicit racism demonstrations, the president rejects compliance with constitutional provisions that ensure the right of quilombolas to the territories that traditionally occupy: "these demarcations of quilombola lands, have 900 in front of me to be demarcated, cannot occur. We are one people, one race" (Paraguasu, 2020).²¹

The Pro-Índio Commission that follows indigenous and quilombola policies points to the existence of 182 quilombola communities, registered by Incra and by state land bodies. According to this survey, up to 2014 84.6% of all the registrations were made, and the period 2011–2014, which corresponds to the first Dilma government, was the one that had the greatest amount of registrations. This is not to say that this government was responsible for the registrations because, according to the survey of the Pro-Índio Commission, federal agencies were responsible for only 23.2% of the registrations throughout the period, while state agencies made 76.8% of the registrations – especially the Institute of Lands of Pará (Iterpa), which made 30.3% of all the registrations carried out in the country, and the Institute of Lands of Maranhão (Iterma), which made 29.2%, both overcoming Incra, which made only 20.5%.

Thus, we can conclude that the policy of recognizing quilombola territories was already slowing even before the Bolsonaro government, therefore, as in other cases, what Bolsonaro does is radicalizing a trend already underway.

The first objective of agribusiness in relation to land policy is to prevent new areas from being intended for agrarian reform, the creation of indigenous lands and quilombola territories. This objective was being contemplated increasingly since the late 2000, still in the second Lula government, and was accentuated throughout the 2010, reaching the current stage of full service in the Bolsonaro government.

The second objective is to open new frontiers for agribusiness in Brazilian public terms, replacing the land of settlements on the market and allowing the private exploitation of indigenous lands, even if they remain public.

The definitive registration of the lots of settlements was the way discussed by agribusiness to remarket the unsuitable land for the purpose of agrarian reform or to put on the market public land that was intended to the creation of rural settlements.

Although it has been part of the Brazilian legislation on land reform since 1993, the practice of granting definitive registrations has not been applied in Brazil since then,

an agrarian reform adapted to the Amazon and the way of life of rubber tappers and other forest peoples. His defense of the preservation of the Amazon rainforest earned him international fame, but his fight against land invaders and landowners earned him enemies who eventually murdered him in December 1988.

²¹ Cf. <https://www.terra.com.br/noticias/brasil/bolsonaro-diz-que-nao-ira-demarcar-mais-pedidos-de-terras-quilombolas,c84b0e29893073548b2d922fc2c843b43hikpw6z.html>. Access on: Aug. 16th 2020.

prevailing the provisional registration that prevented the replacement of land on the market.

According to Fernandes (2020, p 7), in 2017 26,563 Domain Registrations (TDS) and 97,030 Concession-of-use Contracts (CCUs), more than in the previous ten years, and in 2019 there were 852 TDS and 14,868 CCUs. Whereas, the Incra Management Report of 2018, without detailing what type of registration was distributed, points to the issuance of 87,751 titles in 2017 and 112,846 registrations in 2018.²²

Thus, what we observe is that the actions of the Bolsonaro's government in relation to privatizing the land of settlements represent a continuation of what was carried out by the Temer government, being distinguished, in this sense expressively of what the policy of the PT governments was (Alentejano, 2018).

The second fundamental movement of incorporation of new lands to the expansive dynamics of agribusiness is the opening of the exploitation of indigenous lands. This goal, long cherished by the landowners and object of numerous legislative projects, was championed by the Bolsonaro government in 2020, by sending to Congress the Bill 191/2020, which regulates economic exploitation in indigenous lands by third parties (Brasil, 2020c). The activities released are the lease of indigenous land for agricultural production, including transgenic products, mining, oil exploration and the construction of hydroelectric plants. According to Project, the indigenous peoples could only veto mining, all other activities can be authorized, even against their will.

It is estimated that there are 3.1 million ha illegally leased in TIs that would be immediately legalized, in addition to the possibility of expansion to another million ha (Gonzales, 2019).²³ In the case of mining, in the Amazon alone, there is a request for research and mineral mining on an area of 30 million ha located in TIs, especially in the Yanomami lands, Raposa Serra do Sol (Rondônia) and Alto Rio Negro (Amazonas) (Prizibiszki, 2020).²⁴

But, the most scandalous of the ongoing processes in the Brazilian field today is the escalation of land grabbing, of which the most recent episode was the edition of MP 910 by the Bolsonaro government at the end of 2019. But Bolsonaro was not the only one to propose, in recent years, actions favorable to the land grabbing. Lula and Temer also did so.

Since the beginning of Portuguese colonization in what is now Brazil, which instituted the latifundium and with it the land grabbing practices, until the end of the twentieth century, there were two moments of legalization of large-scale land grabbing in Brazil: the Land Law of 1850 and the Decree of 1931 of Vargas (Oliveira, 2010, p. 38).

In the two decades of the 21st century, no fewer than four legislations were created to regularize the occupation of public land in Brazil, favoring land grabbing processes: Laws 422/2008 and 458/2009 in the Lula government (Brasil, 2008; 2009), Law 13.465/2017 in the Temer government (Brasil, 2017) and PM 910/2019 of the Bolsonaro government (Brasil, 2019a). This profusion of new legislation meets the interests of agribusiness that needs legal land documents to access credits and other public resources.

PM 910/2019, proposed at the end of 2019, lapsed in the face of difficulties to hold votes in Congress in the context of Covid-19 pandemic, but was transformed into Bill

²² INCRA (2020b). Available at: <http://antigo.incra.gov.br/pt/relatorios-gestao>. Access on: Sep. 13th 2020.

²³ Cf. <https://brasil.mongabay.com/2019/03/brasil-quer-legalizar-o-arrendamento-agricola-de-terras-indigenas>. Access on: Aug. 16th 2020.

²⁴ Cf. <https://www.oeco.org.br/reportagens/mineracao-em-terras-indigenas-a-proposta-do-governo-bolsonaro-em-10-perguntas-e-respostas>. Access on: Feb. 09th 2020.

2.633/2020 and follow the pressures of agribusiness for its approval. The PM proposed three fundamental changes in the land regularization policy in force, which were already broadly in favor of land grabbing: (1) reaffirms the expansion of the maximum area to be regularized, for 2,500 ha; (2) it exempts supervision or inspection for regulation; (3) it extends the term of occupation.

The most scandalous aspect of the PM is the prediction of self-declaration as a basis for land regularization. The PM extends from 4 to 15 fiscal modules the size of the area that can be regulated without any local verification of the situation, without being checked if there is a conflict involving the area or crimes against environmental or labor legislation. It suffices the presentation of self-declaration of the alleged owner. It is worth saying that the tax module in Brazil ranges from 5 to 110 ha, which means that areas of up to 1,650 ha can be regularized without any supervision, unless the “owner” declares that he or she has submitted any worker irregularly to slavery work or murdered someone in conflict for that land (Brasil, 2019a).

PL 2.633/2020, which replaced PM 910, hardly differs from this, the only significant difference being the reduction of the size of the area that can be regularized by self-declaration from 15 to 6 modules, in order to reduce the criticism that large land grabbers would be benefited from (Brasil, 2020d).

As we know long ago, land grabbing, deforestation and violence are processes absolutely associated in the historical dynamics of occupation of the Brazilian territory, since the colonization when the original peoples were decimated and expelled from the coast once inhabited by them in the midst of the Atlantic Forest, of which there was also little left. This historical genocidal and ecocide practice, fortunately, is constantly updated in the Brazilian field, now under the control of big capital, renewing violence against social movements, peoples and traditional communities.

Not by chance, the struggle for land against this model, which extracts in a predatory way the natural resources and overestimates the labor force, is accompanied by the protagonism of Brazilian social movements. Unlike previous governments, which sought ways to divide, co-opt or control social movements and indigenous and quilombola peoples, opening up channels of dialog with them – albeit often selectively, choosing the interlocutors and marginalizing movements regarded as more combative – the Bolsonaro’s government has established a deliberate policy of coping with these movements, qualifying them, more than as political advisers, as enemies. The response of the State to these subjects who fight for agrarian reform, with the agenda of food sovereignty and agroecology, is criminalization. Still in the campaign, he referred to the occupations of lands done by MST: “Private property is sacred. We must typify the actions of these marginal people as terrorists. Did they invade? Shot them!” (Agência Estado, 2018).²⁵

In line with this position, he proposed Law 13.870/2019 (Brasil, 2019b), approved by Congress in September 2019, which establishes extended possession, that is, the possibility that rural owners not only maintain weapons at home, but can carry them throughout the perimeter of their properties. The effects of the new law in terms of increasing violence in the field in the period of *agribusiness boom* are not yet measurable, since the law came into force in the last quarter of 2019, but data from the Pastoral Land

²⁵ According to: <https://www.otempo.com.br/politica/invadiu-e-chumbo-afirma-bolsonaro-em-palestra-no-rio-de-janeiro-1.1789465>. Access on: May 22th 2020.

Commission (CPT) on conflicts and violence in the countryside show that 2019 was even more violent than previous years, with the largest number of conflicts of the decade, with an increase of 23% compared to 2018. There was a 14% increase in the number of murders (from 28 to 32); 7% in assassination attempts (from 28 to 30); and 22% in death threats (from 165 to 201). The same report also included the highest number of murders of indigenous leaders of the last 11 years (of 9 indigenous people killed in conflicts in the countryside in the year, 7 of them were leaders). In addition, there has been an increase in land conflicts among conflicts in the countryside in the last decade. Between 2007 and 2009, land conflicts represented 40% to 50% of conflicts in the countryside, this level changed to 50% to 65% between 2010 and 2015 and jumped to more than 70% in 2016, remaining at this level in the years 2017 and 2019, with slight oscillation to 65% in 2018 (CPT, 2020).

It is also worth noting the growth of land conflicts in absolute terms, as these went from the 1,000 cases for the first time in a decade, in 2016, which is repeated in 2019, when it reaches the peak of 1,254 conflicts, more than double the annual average of the years 2007 to 2010. More astonishing is still the shot in the area disputed in these conflicts in recent years. From an initial level of between 13 and 14 million ha between 2009 and 2012, there was a fall in the years 2013 and 2014 to about 7 million ha, but from then on the figures skyrocketed to about 22 million ha in 2015 and 2016, 38 million ha in 2017 and 2018 and an impressive 53 million ha in 2019 (CPT, 2020).

We can infer that conflicts in the field are not isolated cases, but a killing project. The CPT, the academic community, political representatives and social movements related to the fight for land and the environment play an important role in denouncing these cases so that we can change this situation and propose a new form of development different from the market proposal aimed at profits and not lives. We are facing a real explosion of the land dispute in the Brazilian countryside, highlighting the fallacy of speech of agribusiness ideologists that the land does not matter to the sector. It is important and does not hesitate to resort to violence to obtain it, after all, the capitalism of the 21st century makes violence a method of renewal of the dynamics of accumulation, as Bartra reminds us (2015, p. 128, our translation):

[...] in the third millennium we have a shrewd capitalism that systematically uses the violent economy of “accumulation by dispossession”, we also have an imprisoned and authoritarian bourgeois order that, both globally and nationally, systematically uses permanent primary political violence [...].²⁶

It is the old primitive accumulation described by Marx being reformulated in the 21st century, combining expropriation and violence, or, in the words of Harvey (2004), accumulation by despoliation in progress, accelerating the march of agrarian counter reform.

²⁶ “En el tercer milenio tenemos a un capitalismo desmecatado que recurre por sistema a la economía violenta de la “acumulación por desposesión”, tenemos también a un orden burgués atrabancado y autoritario que tanto en el plano global como en el nacional, recurre sistemáticamente a la violencia política primaria permanente [...]”.

Final considerations

In general, it can be said that governments change, but without structural changes in the agrarian question in favor of workers. That is, the Brazilian land-based “frame” has been maintaining, and now intensifying, the same violent and authoritarian offensives, with a mix of archaic and modern elements.

The Bolsonaro government, in its first year of mandate, complied with what was announced during the campaign regarding policies for the field, prioritizing agribusiness, stimulating land grabbing and violence against the social movements of the countryside, in particular the MST, indigenous and quilombola peoples.

However, not everything in these policies represents a rupture with the previous governments. The priority for agribusiness, for example, dates back to the second FHC government, went through the PT governments unscathed, and waned in the coup government of Temer. The abandonment of agrarian reform, the demarcation of indigenous and quilombola lands and the setting in motion of the agrarian counter-reform were also already being delineated. Land grabbing, in turn, has been stimulated by a series of legislations created since the second Lula government and deepened in the Temer government. Violence against social movements and rural peoples has already been growing in previous governments, although it is true that Bolsonaro was a pioneer in openly stimulating such practices and seeking mechanisms for their legitimation.

Therefore, the Bolsonaro government is taking broad steps to ensure mechanisms that enable the expansion of agribusiness over public lands, although not all of these mechanisms have been set in motion in this government, some have already been implemented previously, such as the private registration of land from settlements, started under FHC, practically suspended by PT governments, put back in accelerated march by Temer government and intensified even more in the current government. Whereas, the opening up of indigenous lands for agribusiness (and other businesses) is an old ambition of the landowners that the current government has invested in an unprecedented way.

Thus, we can affirm that, more than rupture, the policies of the Bolsonaro government for the countryside represent a deepening of the logic of the slow and predatory that marks the development of the Brazilian countryside under the agribusiness hegemony. The difference is that this is now done in a wide way, without any varnish and without any concession to social movements and peoples of the countryside, contrary to what happened in previous governments, in which, in different degrees, there were dialog and policies that, without affecting the hegemony of agribusiness, they met some of the demands of these segments, now considered enemies to be eliminated.

The PT governments, by abandoning agrarian reform and putting the agrarian counter-reform in motion, ignored that, since the early days of colonization, land is synonymous with economic and political power in Brazil. By economically establishing agribusiness, successive governments also became politically the most backward sectors of Brazilian society. And these, strengthened, turned not only against the PT governments, see the coup against Dilma, but against the movements and peoples of the countryside. The egg was being hatched, now the monster is on the loose, spreading terror on the field.

However, if we turn the arrow to the left to build another mode of agriculture, it is up to us to bet and engage in peasant struggles, because this process did not happen

peacefully, but filled with resistance by rural workers, who launched themselves in a process of struggle for land. Contrary to the development of this project, which expands by combining corporate economic advances with lack of democracy, socio-environmental damage and violation of rights, social movements resist and fight for the right to housing, land, work in traditional and peasant activities, such as fishermen, caíçaras, indigenous, quilombolas, and squatters, small family farmers, as well as, fight for labor and social rights and a sociability beyond rights.

Seeking to build alternatives to the consequences generated by this model, the various peasant organizations and rural workers, articulated to Via Campesina,²⁷ carry out struggles for a new agricultural model that primes for the preservation of natural resources, for agroecology, for the production of healthy food for the population, for the viability of the permanence of the small producer in the field, among other elements, for the construction of a new society.

In the meantime, the peasant worker has been creating and recreating his production space resisting the repressive and dominant forms of control of territories that violate the right to land of peasant communities, even in the conflicting and contradictory movement of capital in the various regions of the country. In a reality in which bourgeois society expropriates not only the material conditions for the reproduction of life, but also the immaterial conditions that relate to the social means of producing knowledge, more audacious projects are needed to strengthen class identity for transformations that point to better times. It is essential that the working class radically resume its autonomy, its role, its identity and reformulate its agenda of struggles and political strategies to consolidate a new corporate project in times of barbarism.

This analyzed conjuncture hinders and even tends to make impossible the possibilities of carrying out a progressive agrarian reform, which is synonym in the name of social justice, economic development and environmental conservation. Thus, the indigenous peasant and quilombola resistance in the struggle for land is legitimate and necessary to prevent the unbridled and greedy advance of agribusiness. The agrarian reform will only succeed if it takes into account the implementation of a project that enables the lives of the rural peoples, ensuring that the needs of material and social reproduction are met, using their life experiences and thus transforming the struggle for land into a struggle for a new sociability.

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²⁷ International organization that articulates social movements of the countryside created in 1993, which brings together peasants, landless workers, indigenous peoples from all over the world. It defends truly sustainable agriculture and a way of providing social justice and dignity. It is declared contrary to agribusiness and multinationals. It is an autonomous, pluralistic and multicultural movement. Its main defense is food sovereignty and the struggle to prevent the neoliberal destructive process. More information available on the website: www.viacampesina.org.

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