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**Brazil**

# **The Landless Workers Movement under attack**

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**Brazil's main social movement, the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST- Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra), is the target of “an offensive that includes pressure from agribusiness, linked to former president Jair Bolsonaro, and the creation of a parliamentary investigation commission (CPI) to investigate the movement and the land occupations”, according to the Brazilian daily *Folha de São Paulo* (27 April).**

## An orchestrated campaign.

Since the beginning of this year, circles close to the big landowners and agribusiness have been waging a noisy media campaign to denounce the unproductive land occupations (renamed “invasions”), which are the main tool of the MST in its struggle for agrarian reform. [1] This offensive has just gone up a notch. On Wednesday 26 April, the President of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, Arthur Lira, launched the establishment of a Parliamentary Investigation Commission (CPI) targeting the MST. The official objective of this commission will be to “investigate the ‘real objective’ of the country’s main social movement, and look into its sources of funding”. According to the *Folhã de São Paulo*, deputies Luciano Lorenzini Zucco and Ricardo Aquino Salles are expected to head the commission.

## Extreme right and “bancada ruralista” at the helm...

Originally from Rio Grande do Sul (south of the country), Luciano Lorenzini Zucco, better known as “Lieutenant Colonel Zucco”, is an elected member of the Republicans, a party linked to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and a member of the allied base of former president Jair Bolsonaro. On his website, Mr Zucco makes no secret of his convictions: “After 27 years serving the country in the army, I received from my friend General Mourão [vice-president under Bolsonaro] and from Jair Bolsonaro, at the time a federal deputy, the call to serve my country on another front of struggle: politics. I understood the reasons for this and accepted my mission, which was and continues to be the rescue of the real Brazil, the conservative, patriotic Brazil, respectful of laws and freedoms, defender of the family and of children.”

The other key figure in the ICC targeting the MST is MP Ricardo Aquino Salles. A member of the Liberal Party, Salles served as Environment Minister under President Jair Bolsonaro from 1 January 2019 to 23 June 2021. He was forced to resign from his post after two judicial investigations were opened against him: one for obstructing an investigation against an illegal deforestation programme in the Amazon; the other for his alleged involvement in a timber smuggling network. In 2014, while campaigning for the Chamber of Deputies, Salles publicly claimed that ‘bullets’ were the ‘solution’ to counter MST activities.

In their (successful) search for the 171 parliamentary signatures needed to open an ICC, Zucco and Salles worked hand in hand with the leader of the “bancada ruralista”, the parliamentary faction representing large landowners and agribusiness firms, MP Pedro Lupion (Progressive Party).

## The MST’s response.

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## The Landless Workers Movement under attack

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The ICC's announcement was made in a highly symbolic month, April. Every year, the MST mobilises throughout the country during "April Days" to demand agrarian reform and to commemorate the sad anniversary of the Eldorado de Carajás massacre - on 17 April 1996, twenty-one rural worker members of the MST were murdered by the military police of the northern state of Pará.

For João Paulo Rodrigues, a member of the national leadership of the MST, this CPI - the fifth targeting the MST since the movement's creation in the 1980s - is part of an overall plan by conservative circles: "The right-wing is going to use the federal parliament and the legislative assemblies throughout the country to confront the MST. In addition, they will use their media, fake news and the armed militias of the shooting clubs of collectors, sport shooters and hunters. It is an evil combination. The aim of these manoeuvres is to muzzle the country's main social movement and prevent a resurgence of the struggle for land reform under the new Lula government."

In the interview given to the *Folhã de São Paulo*, João Paulo Rodrigues reaffirms however the determination of the movement to fight against this CPI and to continue its struggle for land reform. He also recalls the two main demands of the MST to the current Lula government: on the one hand, the allocation of land to the 60,000 families currently living in settlements; on the other, the implementation of a comprehensive plan to develop food creation and preserve the environment - which requires the redistribution of the 200 million hectares of unproductive land in the country.

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Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [A l'Encontre](#).

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[1] See my article ["Brésil. «La faim et la misère sont directement liées à la question agraire»](#).