

## INDIGNATION ABOUT THE ORANGE TREES

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### **Why not to be indignant at the broader phenomenon of the capture or privatization of the public property that happens every day in our country?**

A week ago, two dear friends expressed their indignation about the invaders of a farm and the destruction of orange trees. One of them asked me before anything else: "And the orange trees?" - as if everything had been said in the question. This reaction was probably repeated by many Brazilians who saw those images on television. I won't defend this action of the MST (Landless Workers Movement), although it is obvious to me that this Movement is one of the only organizations to actually defend the poor in Brazil. But I won't sentence it to hell either. I don't accept to transform orange trees into new lambs sacrificed by the "orange of irrational militants".

When I heard the indignant account, I asked my friend why the MST had done it. Her answer was what she had heard on television from one of the women taking part in the invasion: "to grow beans". She didn't have another answer because the television news left out the reasons: first, that the farm results from "grilagem" [*illegal possession*] disputed by INCRA [*Brazilian Agrarian Reform Institute*] second, that, according to the equally indignant words of one of MST's leaders published in this *Folha* (Oct. 11, 2009), "orange juice has been transformed into human beings, as if we had destroyed a generation what MST wanted to show is that we are against monoculture".

Maybe the two arguments are not enough to justify the action, but we should not forget that the logic of popular movements always implies some kind of disrespect to the law. It is really astonishing to witness such a great indignation about such a small offense, if we compare it,

for instance, with the payment by the Brazilian State of billions of Brazilian reais in interests at unjustifiable rates, or with the formation of cartels to win public competitive biddings, or with payments to civil servants without any connection with the value of their work, or with the illegal possession of public lands. In other words, why not to be indignant at the broader phenomenon of the capture or privatization of the public property that happens every day in our country? One answer to this question would be that conservative minds are concerned with protecting their paramount value - the principle of order - that would be threatened by the disrespect to property.

While the reader thinks about this issue that may favors the MST, I have another equally disturbing question, but, this time, disturbing on the other side: why the economists who criticize the purported superiority of the large agricultural exploitation and defend family agriculture by arguing that it reduces social inequality, increases employment, and is compatible with efficiency in the production of a significant number of food products do not make studies to demonstrate this fact? The answer to this question may be in the 2006 Cattle and crop raising Census: although it occupies only one fourth of the cultivated area, family agriculture corresponds to 38% of the production value and employs nearly three fourths of the workforce in the field. The minister of Agrarian Development, Guilherme Cassel, in this *Folha* listed those facts and said that a "long journey of social struggles" led the Brazilian State to recognize the economic and social importance of family agriculture. It may be so, but I still dont understand why good agricultural economists are not able to demonstrate this fact more clearly. This demonstration would not be so difficult - and maybe would help my dear friends not to be so indignant about the orange trees.