

# Social Movements, Law and the Politics of Land Reform

## Lessons from Brazil

By **George Meszaros**, Associate Professor at the University of Warwick, UK

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SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, LAW AND  
THE POLITICS OF LAND REFORM

LESSONS FROM BRAZIL

GEORGE MÉSZÁROS

*Social Movements, Law and the Politics of Land Reform* investigates how rural social movements are struggling for land reform against the background of ambitious but unfulfilled constitutional promises evident in much of the developing world. Taking Brazil as an example, *Social Movements, Law and the Politics of Land Reform* unpicks the complex reasons behind the remarkably consistent failures of its constitution and law enforcement mechanisms to deliver social justice. Using detailed empirical evidence and focusing upon the relationship between rural social struggles and the state, the book develops a threefold argument: first, the inescapable presence of power relations in all aspects of the production and reproduction of law; secondly their dominant impact on socio-legal outcomes; and finally the essential and positive role played by social movements in redressing those power imbalances and realising law's progressive potentialities.

**"This is a superb analysis of the challenges facing land reform in Brazil. Its unique contribution is to describe the relationship between the landless movement MST and the State, and to explain the challenges faced by prosecutors, judges and administrative lawyers in advancing land reform. It is a major contribution to the law and society**

**literature, showing how a social movement can shape legal reform."**

*Olivier De Schutter, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food*

**"Meszaros has produced a well written, engaging and highly informative work. His account is rich in empirical detail, yet broad in its scope. He has marshalled the evidence intelligently and persuasively. *Social Movements, Law and the Politics of Land Reform* will be of interest to scholars, practitioners and activists who want to understand and advance the global prospects of land reform in the twenty first century."**

*José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations*

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Introduction 1. Shocking the System: Social Movement Pressure as the Catalyst of Political and Legal Change 2. To Criminalise or not to Criminalise? Conflicting Legal Responses to Social Movement Pressure 3. Why Law Fails: the Administration of Land Law in the Context of Power Relations 4. The Limits of Progressive State Action 5. Pushing and Redefining Legal Boundaries through Social Movement Pressure

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