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FMF-24  
Northeast Brazil: A Strike in the Sugar Zone

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Dear Mr. Nolte:

About 11:00 on Friday morning, October 11, I located the bus stop on a small Recife plaza back of a people's market of open stalls. I hopped aboard the first one that came along, marked Ipojuca, and checked to be sure it stopped in Cabo. I took one of the few vacant seats, toward the back, alongside an old man in a soft suit, many times washed, who dozed throughout the journey. A young mulatto across the aisle cuddled a transistor radio which keened the forlorn love life of Roberto Carlos, Brazil's ye-ye-ye idol.

For some ever-unknown reason the bus stopped near the edge of the city; the driver and conductor got off, leaving the motor idle, and we sat for ten minutes---probably a break for a cafezinho or stronger stimulant. In the heat and humidity common to the Recife area, my sun glasses immediately steamed upward from the lower brim, and my hands, holding a plastic camera case, became damp. The interior of the bus was loaded to capacity, parked in the mid-day sun, blocked from the ocean breeze. But no one complained, accepting the discomfort as routine.

Moving again, we continued southward over the concrete highway, passing the airport and a series of newly-constructed industrial plants, each fronted by a bold orange and black sign trumpeting the collaboration of SUDENE, the governmental development agency for the Northeast. Boys standing on the berm enticed travelers to buy bunches of cashew fruit, bound together with strings around their nut-bearing curly-cue protruding from the flamboyant fruit of apricot and saffron-colored skin.

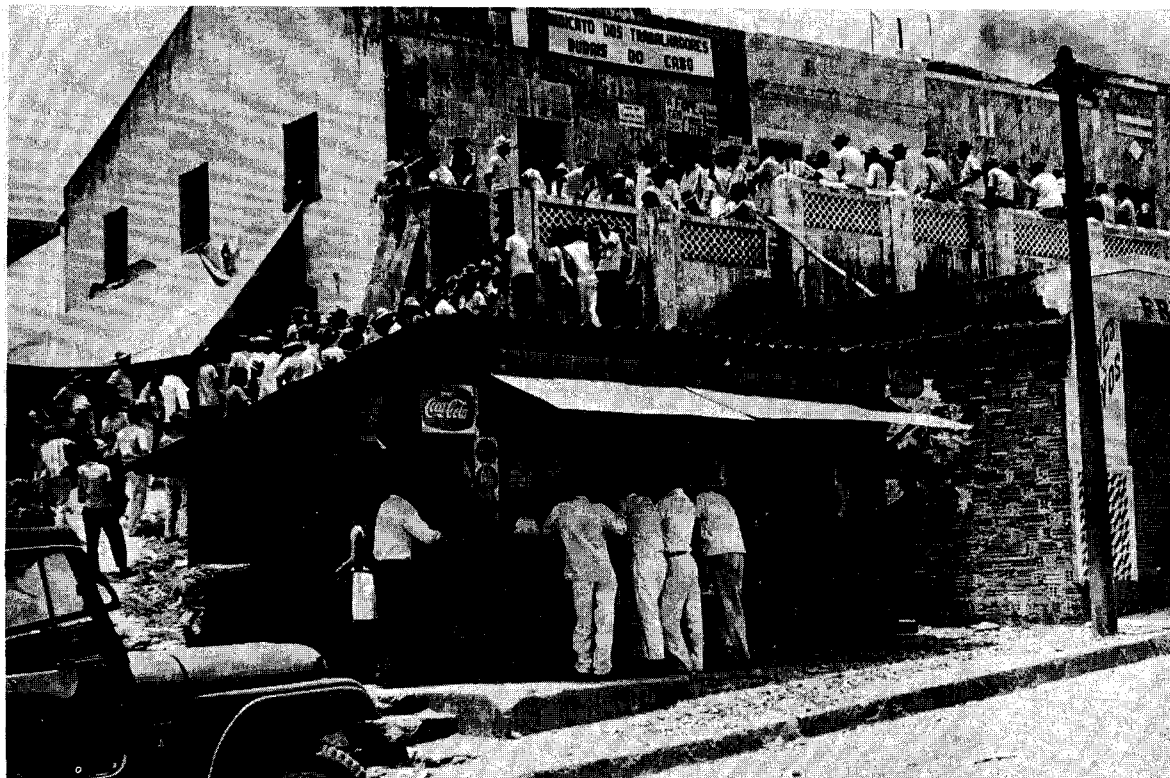
Veering inland from the coastal strip of coconut palms and cashew trees, we speeded through the transitional zone of tabeleiros, sandy tablelands of poor soil long since stripped of their scrub growth for fireweed purposes. Then, gradually, the hills took on a cover of sugar cane, the crystalline soils clay red. Adobe houses were capped by tile roofs, nettled by an ashen fungus. At the village stops small boys hustled aboard skittering down the aisles to hawk "Amendoim", "Pipeca---400 cruzeiros", "Laranjas---saborosissimas"---"Peanuts", "Popcorn---10 cents", "Delicious oranges". The driver waited patiently until sales were concluded. Passengers eating oranges leaned out over the aisle as juice ran off their hands.

After a ride of about 45 minutes, we stepped in front of the synthetic rubber plant of COPERBO---on a hill just beyond it is Cabo. I was surprised to see fumes from the exhaust stacks but learned later that a strike had been settled there only a few days before. This SUDENE project has wrought considerable disillusionment among laborers and planners. (FMF-9, p. 8)

From the Cabe bus stop at the edge of the Pirapama River, one cobblestone street hooks up the slope. Seeing a small church dominating the rise, I presumed it should be close to my goal, Padre Mele, the priest of the municipio. As I started up past the one-story blocks of houses and sheps, each a different time-muted pastel—rose, moss, citrine, copen—I soon skirted a crowd of men, a hundred or more, standing packed against each other. Their spare frames draped with worn work clothes, they focused on the door of an olive-colored building bearing the sign "Sindicato de Trabalhadores Rurais do Cabe"—Union of the Rural Workers of Cabe. The men stood passively in the hot sun.

A couple of inquiries near the church directed me to a small house. As all typical buildings in country towns of the Northeast, its facade was flush with the sidewalk. Stepping through the open door, I was immediately in the living room and amid a group of some ten men welling with spirited discussion. In casseck, Padre Mele sat awry on a mustard-colored vinyl couch. One leg propped on the other knee showed a pair of duck trousers below the vestment unbuttoned and askew at the neck. Though in his mid-30's, his cherub face first gives the impression that he is younger. Thick, dark hair curls forward and falls carelessly over his forehead. He laughs much, with vigor, and his dark eyes have crow's feet.

Dom Hélder and his assistant, Zezita Cavalcanti, had set up the appointment for me on Tuesday, and Padre Mele had asked me to have lunch with him on Friday and then visit his agrarian reform project. Through that week



ABOVE. The Syndicate of Cabe—Friday morning, October 11.

The headlines of the Recife papers announced: "Nineteen sugar farms (engenhos) and two sugar factories (usinas) paralyzed by the strike in Cabo"—"Three thousand peasants of Cabo on strike"—"Minister of Labor arrives from Brasilia"—"Minister of Labor will leave Recife only when the Cabo strike is over." On Friday morning I read that negotiations would continue that day, the Minister to arrive in Cabo at 8:30 a.m. To reach Cabo by telephone is practically impossible—the lines seem constantly "com defeite", out-of-order—and, even so, what could a phone call tell me amid the chaos that must prevail in Cabo. I resolved to go directly and take my chance on talking with Padre Melo.

Therefore, when I went up to him in his living room, I was not surprised to see he had no glimmering of who I was nor why I was there. Reminding him, he said, "Oh, but of course, we'll have lunch in a few minutes. Sit down here beside me."

In a few sentences he finished telling the group what my entrance had interrupted and then abruptly turned to me and said,

"All right. Let's begin.

"Agrarian reform is simple—it can be explained on one page." He smacked a small notebook he held to emphasize the size.

"It concerns land and peasants. Simple—only this—you put the two together.

"Then, there is the other agrarian reform—the technical one—it takes books to explain. Go to GERAN, SUDENE, IBRA—all those government agencies—and you'll find piles of studies this high." He held his hand above his head.

"To me this is not agrarian reform. Here in the sugar zone one-third of the land is used, two-thirds is not."

There was a sudden commotion in the street. A man ran into the house and said, "The Minister has come again."

The group was surprised. Padre Melo said, "Oh, these stupid people", and went outside. Only I and one young man, Padre Melo's driver, stayed in the room.

The Minister, Jarbas Passarinho, is in his late 40's, well-built and tall for a Brazilian. Straight brown hair combed back firmly gives some hint of Robert McNamara. It is rumored that he may be the Government's choice to be the next president of the country.

He had come to Cabo early that morning, conceding seven of the eight demands of the union. The eighth concerned the Cooperative of Tiriri, a sugar farm placed under the control of SUDENE with the professed aim of effecting an agrarian reform. An ICWA colleague described it in 1967 as "a resounding failure" (Fanny Mitchell, "Tiriri: An Experiment"). According to informants in the Padre Melo camp, SUDENE has appropriated almost a

billion cruzeiros to the project, had 44 technicians working there, was regularly selling sugar cane from its fields, and yet the residents had not been paid in weeks. Furthermore, all who know the project dispute the use of the word "cooperative" since no training in cooperativism was given to the peasants, they continue in their menial laboring roles, and the government agency has merely replaced the former traditional patron.

The eighth demand asked that Tiriri's operation be investigated, with particular attention to the possible misuse of funds and then that it be turned over to IBRA, the government agency empowered to divide and distribute land.

Passarinho left Cabo that morning at 10:30 to visit Tiriri and talk with SUDENE authorities. He was now back to settle the last point.

In the United States strike negotiations take place behind closed doors and with a great deal of hush-hush attached to the discussions. In Cabo Padre Mele and the Minister of Labor walked up and down the middle of the street, arm in arm. Naturally, in a small town the populace gathered for the show, hanging out windows, lining the sidewalks, hovering around the two protagonists as they walked or stopped to face each other at critical moments. The conversation was animated with Padre Mele, a half head shorter than Passarinho, seeming to dominate it. At one point he jabbed his finger repeatedly toward the Minister's face and said:

"What would you do if you worker all day, earned 400 cruzeiros (about 10 cents) and then didn't even get paid that?"

I had been watching the performance from door and window but deliberately kept myself in the shadow because of my obvious American appearance. With camera at hand, however, I could not resist longer and went out to take a few shots.

An aide said quietly to the Minister, "We have a couple of Americans here." If there was a second one in Cabo, he was certainly well camouflaged.

The two walked down the hill toward the church, the Minister saying, "Maybe they won't catch us in there."

But they didn't bother with the church. Soon they came back and into the house, going beyond the living room into a narrow corridor where they and their entourage crowded into a tight circle as the talks continued. The front room swelled with a motly collection of men who plopped on the cheap plastic furniture or gathered in bunches for heated discussion.

I sat quietly on the arm of the mustard couch, observing the masculine array. Glancing at Padre Mele, I saw he was gesturing for me to come to him. He took my arm, walked away from the Minister, and we sat down in two old rocking chairs in the back room. He picked up where he had been interrupted:

"My thesis is simple---two-thirds of the land of the zona da mata is unused ---the Government should expropriate this and distribute it.



Cabo, October 11:  
To the left, Padre  
Melo in front of  
his house.

Below. Padre Melo  
walks down the  
street with arm  
around the Minister  
of Labor.



The Government says the peasant is not capable, but I have proved here with my project that he is."

Another interruption. The Minister was leaving. As I waited in the rocking chair, I observed the house. I was a simple rectangle, concrete floor with no rugs and open from front to back except for two small rooms cut out by low partitions in the middle. There was no ceiling, and the crooked rafters supported cracked tiles, many with large pieces missing through which the sky was clearly visible. It rains a lot on the Pernambuco litoral.

The farewell extended and I went to the front to watch the departure. Just before getting into his car, the Minister paternally patted Padre Melo and the top of his curly head.

"We got it---everything we asked, all eight points." Padre Melo's grin was wider than usual as several of us settled around the oil cloth covered table for lunch. Eight of us sat on the wooden benches, a couple got up before the food came and three more arrived and crowded it. There were no introductions. Most were women and all were young and seemed to fill the role of attendants and sounding boards for Padre Melo.

I asked what were the eight points. He remembered three and said I should go past the syndicate office to get the list.

The rice came and, after a considerable delay, the black beans, followed finally by a platter of coarse chunks of beef. Everyone took care of himself, not passing the platters but putting them back down when they had served themselves. The three ingredients were spooned one on top of the other and then stirred into one gallimaufry.

While eating, Padre Melo continued:

"There is land and there are peasants to farm that land. Technically and physically agrarian reform is possible---politically, it is not."

I asked: "If politically impossible, then there will be no agrarian reform. Then what will happen?"

"The same thing that happened in France."

"Two centuries ago?"

"Two centuries ago."

He reached for a toothpick and, juggling it in his mouth, switched to talk to his assistants. I got the conversation again and asked if he didn't think this strike would have an impact throughout the sugar zone. It was the third strike in as many years that the Cabo syndicate had threatened, but it was the first time they actually stopped work and the first time they did not make significant concessions to the patronal class. To my question I got a vague answer from Padre Melo which implied that he did not much care. I persisted:

"But don't you think that the other syndicates of the area will take the example of the Cabo strike?"

"I don't believe in syndicates. They are under the power of the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry is under the Government."

Padre Melo's presentation of his ideas is concise, direct and vigorous. I summarized in the same way:

"So it amounts to this—on the one hand, there is land to give to the peasant but the power structure will not allow it—simplesmente. On the other hand, if there is not an agrarian reform, there will be a revolution—simplesmente."

"Simplesmente. It's just that simple. Do you think I'm a burro?"

By this time, he had finished eating, ahead of the rest of us. He had gone over to a small sink nearby and begun brushing his teeth. As he did so, he came back to stand by the table, talking, the lavender brush sticking out one side of his mouth.

About this time a boy, probably 18 years old, came in and started his lunch alongside of us. I gathered that the Minister had gone from Padre Melo to the syndicate office, and the young man had come back from watching that encounter. Padre Melo questioned him closely about the reaction of this man and that one, how the Minister and syndicate president acted, etc. Satisfied with the interrogation, he sat down in one of the rocking chairs in the same room.

Throughout the luncheon one radio had blared from the front part of the house. Padre Melo got up and put another one on the table, turning it loud enough to drown out the first. He sat down again and for a couple of minutes read a newspaper. When the news came, he listened carefully but was disappointed that the only Cabo mentioned was Cabo Kennedy where the Apelle-7 launching was in its final stage.

Seen he left for the rest of the day, briefcase in hand, cassock still open at the neck. He placed me in the care of the 18-year old assistant to show me the reform project, telling the youth not to be an adolescent but to explain it straight and well.

Since no car was at hand, we walked about 20 minutes to the back edge of Cabo to see the area dubbed "Rurópolis". Some 200 families had built their own homes there, most of them decent adobe structure, though recent arrivals depended upon temporary shacks. Nearby each family had the use of a small plot of land, one or two hectares, where they could have crops and livestock for their own consumption. The parish church had leased the land from a factory.

Padre Melo conceived of Rurópolis as a transitional stage for the peasant migrating into Recife. Unskilled and jobless, the migrants usually settle in unhealthy urban slums where the ramshackle huts are tight against each other. In contrast, Rurópolis gives the city-bound

peasant a chance to feed himself and family until he becomes integrated in the new environment. According to my guide, most of the men had jobs, and the family tended the plot. From some three different sources I was later told that the experiment was a success.

Back in front of Padre Melo's house, I bid the young man good-by and went walking on, past the tightly-closed church and down the hill to the syndicate office. By this time only some 20 men or so clustered in small groups outside the building. Many who waited stoically that morning had already gone back to work in the fields. Inside, several were stood in the first room, which had no furniture. I plunged through the first to the smaller second room trying to spot someone who looked as though he worked there. I was feeling a bit out of place, being a woman, light-haired and blue-eyed.

A question got me into the third, last and smallest room. Several men stood around and, sitting behind the one desk, a man with his mouth full of bread said something to me. I could not understand but I gathered by his gesture that I might sit down on the one other chair.

Within minutes a young man came in, his hair wet and freshly combed, his face splashed with water. We introduced ourselves, he being João Luis da Silva, president of Cabo's rural syndicate—slight but sinewy, intelligent eyes and easy smile, skin neither light nor dark but burned by the sun and product of the miscibility common to the Northeasterners. His manner was modest and gentle. I liked him immediately.

Asking him for the eight points which Padre Melo had mentioned, I was given a document from which to take my own notes. It was headed "Authentic Copy of the Permanent General Assembly of the Strike"; it opened "At 12 noon on the 11th of October of 1968 the rural workers of the Municipality of Cabo...in general assembly...voted unanimously to suspend the general strike decreed on the 7th of October..."

Then the motives for the strike were listed, unnumbered and it seemed to me there were more than eight. The first demand concerned social welfare which is highly institutionalized for Brazilian urban workers who receive free medical and dental care, injury and sickness benefits, recreation clubs, etc. But the rural worker has so far been denied these advantages. By the settlement, the Cabo cane workers will pay in 8% of their salaries and, since the plantation employers refuse to contribute their counterpart funds, the Government through the Ministry of Labor will fill out the other 8%. Precedent breaking, the Cabo peasants will be the first in Brazil to receive the services of the National Institute of Social Provision (INPS, Instituto Nacional de Previdência Social).

Three of the items concerned payment of back salaries. Some of the private operations owed several months' salaries to their workers. In addition, the Usina Maria das Mercês, under the intervention of the Institute of Sugar and Alcohol (IAA, a government agency) and the Cooperative of Tiriri, administered by SUDENE were both in arrears



several weeks. The grievances concerning salaries of these two establishments were the first settled, a week earlier, when in ministerial consultation the national government decided to release NCR\$20,000 to Tiriri and NCR\$39,000 to Maria das Mercês so that back salaries might be paid.

Besides the salaries there were other significant complaints against the two government-administered plantations. One was the distribution of land at Tiriri, authorized by law but long overdue. At Maria das Mercês, the IAA had shirked its responsibilities by merely taking on renters who proceeded to run the farm as a fiefdom.

Since the 1963 Law of the Rural Worker, the employer has been legally obliged to pay the minimum wage which is set by the national government, varies from region to region and is lower in the Northeast than in the South. At the present time the minimum for rural Pernambuco is NCR\$80, about \$21 per month; few receive but about half of this amount. The daily wage paid the cane gutter, however, is geared to the amount of work he does. As employers see themselves threatened by having to pay the minimum salary, many find ways of getting around it. One is to demand an ever-increasing tarefa, i.e. production per day, until a man is physically incapable of such work and so loses his claim to the day's pay and the fringe benefits. For instance, a patrão sets 18 braças, about 40 meters, as the strip to be cut. Few men can exceed 10 braças and so they lose their right to holidays and year-end bonus. One of the strike demands was, therefore, that officials survey the tarefas set by the employers to determine if they are just.

Other items concerned the personal well-being of the workers. Many tasks are involved in the preparation and care of the cane fields, including the spreading of fertilizer and lime by hand and the spraying of insecticides. Since many of these products are toxic, the cases of skin burns and lung damage have been innumerable. Strike conditions demanded proper protective equipment, such as gloves and face masks.

As I copied the terms of the settlement, the young man, new in the chair behind the desk, pulled on his shoes and socks. I stopped the note-taking to ask him if I could take his photograph. He said, "Like this—all wet?" I said it didn't matter, and he obliged. Then, explaining he had no lunch as yet, he asked my permission to eat. As I wrote on one side of the desk, he used unleavened bread to scoop a bowl of black beans into his mouth.

Finished, I asked João Luis if he were pleased with the settlement. Knowing that every demand had been met, I was surprised to receive an equivocal answer... "Well, more or less."

Having what I came for and feeling that many others were pressing in for his attention, I got up to leave and when we reached the first room, he said, "I'm going, too." Out of the syndicate office we turned away from my bus stop, but I was pleased to go any direction to have a chance to talk with him. The two of us walked down through



João Luis da Silva  
President of the  
Union of Rural Workers  
of Cabo, Pernambuco.



the main street of Cabo. He was obviously dead tired but as he passed friends, particularly shopkeepers, he grinned and gestured with fist and thumb up. Victory was his.

We stopped in two of the small shops for him to chat briefly with the owners. I learned from the newspapers later that some of the local merchants gave food to the strikers during their five days without income. In addition, Dom Helder Câmara, the Archbishop of Recife, visited Cabo earlier in the week, pledging moral and material support to the workers; he and the university students in Recife sent out quantities of food which helped calm the very real fear of the poverty-stricken sugar workers that the strike would lead to starvation.

As we got through the center of the town, João Luís flagged a friend driving a jeep and said to me, "I'm going into Recife. I want to rest and talk with friends there. You're welcome to ride along if you wish."

Of course, I did, and we climbed into the jeep for the hour's trip into the city.

I was amazed at this chance to talk quietly with the syndicate president just at this apogee of the strike's success. But, at the same time, I was concerned for him as a human being, obviously wrung by the weeks' crises, and already beleaguered by journalists' questions. National magazines, such as O Cruzeiro and Veja, published October articles featuring him under such headlines as "The New Julião" (Francisco Julião, described in FMP-23) and "The Bitter Sugar of Cabo". In one-month the 24-year old syndicate president had become a national figure due to mass media.

Through the trip I avoided bombarding him with incessant questions, trying to make comments to which he would respond or at least pace the questions to allow quiet spells between. During those intervals he peered out the window at the passing cane fields, preoccupied, his eyelids heavy with fatigue.

I first said I did not understand why he was not fully satisfied with the course of the strike.

"These have been bad days. We got what we wanted, but I cannot forgive all the pressures that were put upon me and the syndicate to give in."

I urged him to be specific, and he named threats of physical violence against him from the patronal class—the owners or renters or administrators of the sugar land. An article in Veja mentions the renter, Rinaldo Lins, as one who brandished his pistol before João Luís saying, "I'll put you under the dirt."

Secondly, there were the attempts at intimidation by the Minister of Labor who first severely chastised the young president for not coming to terms with the ministry's subalterns who were sent ahead to try to

prevent the strike. When Passarinho arrived, João Luís said the minister's first threat was to intervene in the syndicate—i.e., remove its elected leadership and appoint outside men to run it—of course, men amenable to the government's wishes.

"But there is no law that would allow this, I said to receive the retort I expected:

"Ah, but they will find a law—or they will make one."

João Luís is the third president of the Cabo syndicate since it was founded in the early 60's. The first one, elected, was removed after the 1964 "Revolution" and replaced by an interventor from outside. João Luís is, therefore, the second elected president and completes his two-year term this December.

"At first the Minister could only think that we wanted to make a revolution. He looked at us through red-colored glasses. Then he came to understand that our grievances were legitimate."

But the young man's deepest hurt from the events of the strike was his disillusionment with Padre Melo. Before I went out to Cabo, João Luís had been described to me as Padre Melo's protégé. Now, the peasant scorned the priest.

Twice during the journey, a silent spell was broken by his embittered laughter. In both cases it sprung from his remembering how the Minister of Labor had insisted on João Luís and Padre Melo's being photographed shaking hands in front of the parish house that noon.

"As though a photograph could make a reconciliation," he said sardonically.

"Padre Melo is only interested in himself, in his power over the people—in his own fame. He really doesn't care about the people, nor about the syndicate."

As casually as possible, I returned to the issue of Padre Melo three times during the ride. At the last, to test the degree of alienation, I said bluntly:

"You are disillusioned with Padre Melo?"

"Yes, completely."

"Just since this strike and because of his actions related to the strike?"

"Since and exactly because of this strike. I will not work with Padre Melo again."

"How about Dom Helder?"

"He is excellent. A good and sincere man."

Though I have it from no direct source, it is my impression that the divergence between Padre Melo and João Luís began with their differing views on how aggressively the strike should be executed. There had been strike threats by the Cabe syndicate in each of the two previous years with settlement coming before the walk-out and resulting in compromise on the part of the workers. The gains did not equal their rightful due; it should be noted that peasant strikes are prompted primarily by what is due them from the past and only secondarily by requests for future improvements in working conditions.

Notice had been given of the possibility of a strike as early as July or August. Padre Crespo disparaged the action saying it was a farce since its aims were only to gain what the laws already granted; on the other hand, in this preliminary stage Padre Melo gave his full support. Having completed all the steps required by the Strike Law, the syndicate in general assembly voted to strike on September 23 if their demands were not met. The Government, plagued by strikes of bankers and metal workers in the South, was anxious to avoid trouble in Pernambuco, especially since one such break might lead to others. The Ministry of Labor sent the Director of the National Department of Labor to try to delay the walk-out and find a compromise. At his bidding, the syndicate agreed to postpone the strike for ten days, until October 3. The Government wanted a longer stay but the workers felt that as soon as the strike was judged legal they should leave the fields .

The Government asked for 15 days, the workers granted 10, and at this point there was overt disagreement between Padre Melo and the syndicate, the former having urged the workers to have faith in the Government's intent and grant what it asked. When the workers voted to go their own way, Padre Melo said he no longer was on their side and he did not believe in syndicates.

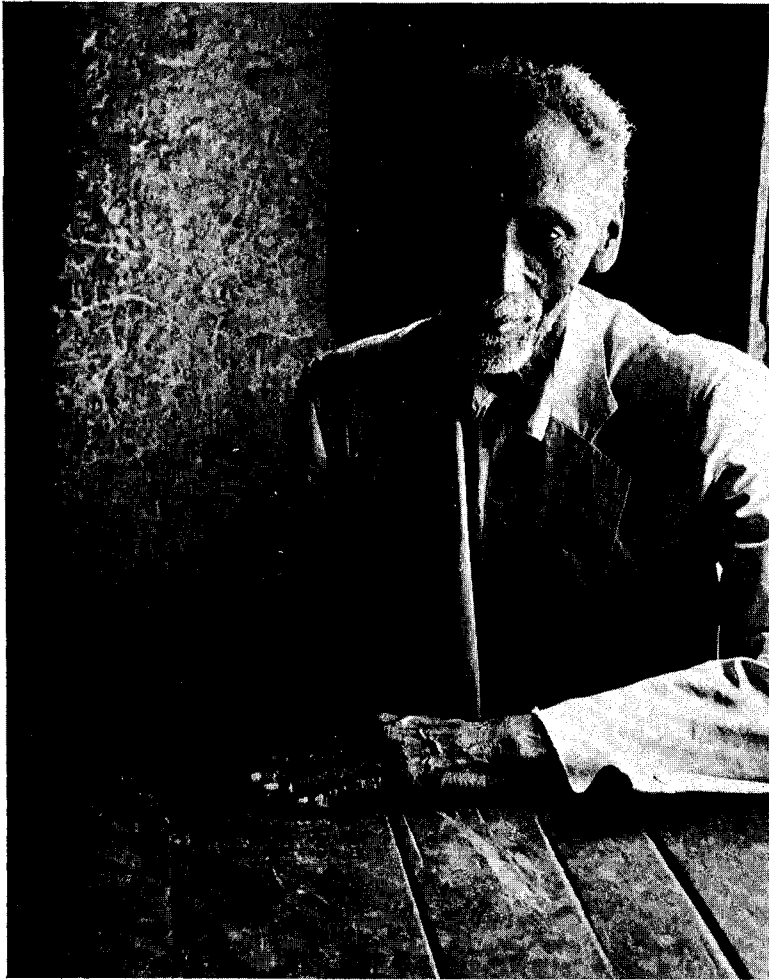
It was João Luís' opinion that:

"The men can no longer wait for conciliatory solutions because they are hungry, very hungry. This time we won't accept just a part of the back salaries that are owed us, like the other times, because we see that the employers don't even fulfill the accords which, in fact, benefit them.

"We can no longer afford to conciliate. We must now demand that which is legally ours. It is only possible to conciliate when there is honesty on the part of all. As to the problem of hunger because of the strike, we are used to it. And we are hopeful, because our cause is just."

In fact, the strike was delayed until October 7. On the 5th Padre Melo distributed a document explaining his stand:

"I was literally defeated because the agrarian reform did not come in time. I lost, therefore. They are right, those who no longer



Peasants of  
Northeast Brazil.



follow me to seek a conciliation. Violence is a historic determinism but not a solution for the problems of humanity. We will have violence until we accept an honorable conciliation, the only condition for true and authentic solutions...When the syndicate tended toward radical decisions, aggravated by the blind egotism of the patronal class, I used all methods to conciliate, except selling my soul to the devil. I was accepted and trusted for a long time...For those who followed me the tonic was caution, care and firmness in order to achieve conciliation. To conciliate is for me a religious, mystical, even a fanatic issue.

"My head will be devoured by the reactionaries because I do not join them in violences against the people. My feet will be eaten by the violent who are with the people, because I did not side with them in their just and defensive violence against the reactionaries..."

Regardless of the schism between Padre Melo and the syndicate, the government representatives persisted in negotiating with him almost exclusively. The newspapers again and again reported that the ministry representative, Idélie Martins, "did not contact the president of the Cabo syndicate nor any of the cane workers, talking only with Padre Melo." From the Padre's assistants, I learned that on the critical Friday morning of the 11th when the final terms were being worked out, Minister Passarinho came to the parish house and the two sat at the oilcloth-covered table to discuss the issues. João Luís, the syndicate president, was not there; he was not invited to participate. Only after the noonday meeting, described above, did Passarinho proceed to the syndicate officials to inform them of the settlement. I commented on this to a Brazilian friend and he lamented, "I am sorry, but it is our way. Our officials don't respect unions, and matters are settled on the basis of personalities."

Perhaps, therefore, the break between Padre Melo and the syndicate will result in the latter's maturing and gaining its own independence. The relationship has been one of paternalism, Padre Melo's vigorous personality and traditional training resulting in his imposing his will upon the syndicate. Until now it has been his "child". Judgement of João Luís, on the other hand, is that he is democratic in his leadership, bringing issues to the assembly for debate and vote and abiding by the majority's decision. The decision to go out on strike was taken by the syndicate itself, against the will of all other parties concerned. Both the organization and the president survived the various pressures brought upon them and, united, held to their resolve, gaining a significant victory. Its example may serve for other syndicates of the sugar zone, though João Luís admitted to me that no other union president had come to him to consult or to pledge support. Pressed to explain why this might be, he said, "They are afraid."

I could not help but make my own judgment on the two men, Padre Melo and João Luís. In talking with the padre I found myself struggling not to use the Portuguese "você", the more informal and less respectful pronoun. Whereas in addressing João Luís, though he is

much younger, there was no question but what I would refer to him as "o senhor". I felt that as leader of the workers he had taken on a heavy responsibility and proved himself capable. I felt that Padre Melo had risen to a level of prestige and fame which exceeded his capacities.

Complimenting João Luís again on the success of the strike, I said that it would probably not be easy for him to quit the presidency in December. He said quietly, almost with resignation:

"No, they will not let me leave."

All opinions are that the syndicate will have to threaten another strike next year. As each year in the past, there again will be unpaid back wages to wring from the employers, and all the conditions of this settlement will not be fulfilled.

Smiling, I said to João Luís, "With your experience in the labor field, you yourself may someday be appointed Minister."

"No, I shall never associate with the Government. I shall always be a \*reinvidicador\*—a defender of the people."

The traffic in Recife was snarled and, in the middle of the street, we both jumped from the jeep as it crawled forward. The parting was brief and warm. He zigzagged through the cars to one side, I to the other.

I watched him as he took off down the sidewalk, running, a boy again after a man's work. Young, idealistic and hopeful, he had a very important job ahead of him. But I could not but wonder if the tremendous forces opposed to his position would not destroy him, either physically or morally.

Sincerely yours,



Frances M. Foland

Photos: FMM

Received in New York December 2, 1968.