

BASE COMMUNITIES AND URBAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS :
A CASE STUDY OF THE METALWORKERS' STRIKE 1980 -
SAO BERNARDO, BRAZIL

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I. Introduction

In a recent reader dealing with the political situation in Brazil after 1964, a leading sociologist, Ruth Cardoso, strikes a critical balance of recent urban social movements and Brazilian research concerning them.¹ Concluding her contribution, she asks: what is new about these movements? First, are they acting against the authoritarian State? Her answer is no. Do these movements mark the presence of the oppressed in Brazilian society? Her answer is yes, but they are easily co-opted by the State. Third, do they have an innovative influence on political parties through their democratic character? Cardoso's answer again is negative. Why are her conclusions so negative? The underlying question in her paper is: are the new urban social movements in confrontation with the State, and can they contribute to radical structural changes? But is this a right and fair question? Is Cardoso not asking too much of the subjects of these movements? It reminds one of the remark of a peasant to a Brazilian anthropologist observing a popular feast: those who know, dance; those who don't, study. This sharp remark is not only valid for popular feasts, but also for the struggle of the people. Modesty is a necessary virtue for the intellectual outsider. We should listen carefully to the actors themselves.

In this paper we shall not be very preoccupied with the differences between recent urban social movements and the traditional ones such as unions. Even if we can define the first as aiming at redistribution of the urban infrastructure and collective facilities, all in the sphere of reproduction, and the second at defending class

interests against capital, in the sphere of production, this distinction is purely analytical. There is a risk that we shall forget that often the same people are involved. Next to this we are interested in a moment of collaboration between the two movements such as occurred with the metalworkers' strike.

The central theme of this paper concerns not only power but also ideology. It tries to answer the question of why religion, a basic element of Brazilian subculture, and working traditionally as an alienating factor, can become an element of change. What is the function of faith in the Catholic grass root communities? Related to this question: what is the relation between hierarchy and the basis of the church? And how do both relate to the State?

II. The Church in Brazil

In the first section of this paper we shall consider the circumstances that made possible the birth and growth of the (grass root) communities in Brazil. In order to situate this new socio-religious movement correctly, we will consider first, very briefly the recent history of the Catholic church and the cause of the changes that it has undergone.

II.1. From fraternities to base community

During the last three centuries the history of Catholicism in Brazil was determined by the concordat between the Holy See and the Portuguese Crown. The system of the 'Patronate' made the king the supreme lord of the church. The religious life of the colony was controlled locally by the big landowners and by the fraternities of lay-people in the town. The latter group organised religion in accordance with the different segments and categories of the population. Fraternities were composed of landowners, officers, manual workers, slaves and freedmen. In each of these categories lay leaders started and controlled their fraternities and contracted priests as their functionaries. In a certain way the whole society shared the same symbolic capital: there was no distinction between high orthodox beliefs and popular religious beliefs. With the advent of the Republic things began to change.

Some innovatory bishops came into conflict with the State, when they were trying to make the church independent of the positivist State. In order to regain control over religious matters and the believers the role of the fraternities had to be reduced. For this reason the bishops started to import pious associations from Europe, and these were introduced to the people by a clergy which was also imported. Devotional groups of laypeople were created around a saint under the direction of a priest called the director. The power of the clergy increased dramatically. The introduction of these associations constituted one of the elements of the romanisation of the church. The reorientation of the clerical organisation towards Rome and its ideology was also realized by the appointment of *nuncios*, by the clerical training in Rome of Latin American candidates and by the first Latin American Council held in Rome. Fundamental in this process was a new type of seminary, from that time on exclusively reserved for the training of future priests and closed to laymen. The result was a clergy alienated from the people and with a disdain for popular culture and folk-religion. The official orthodoxy and popular religion each went their own way.²

From the thirties onwards a new pastoral approach emerged characteristic of the social-christian church. The isolated church opened up to society in order to Christianize it. Under the influence of Jacques Maritain's writings, an ideological renovation was inaugurated. The church widened its range of influence by organizing its own educational institutions and by organizing laymen in a new way, again imported from Europe: 'Catholic action'. The bishops saw 'Catholic action' as an organisational form in which laymen participated in their hierarchical mission and tried to establish the universal kingdom of Jesus Christ, where they could not operate. The bishops delegated their authority to clerical advisors, who controlled lay-activity. It was a new attempt to realize the old ideal of Christianity, the identification of church and world.³ Under the influence of the French model, 'Catholic action' was differentiated into categorical branches in the early fifties: JUC for university-students, JEC for college people, JAC for the

rural youth and JOC for the urban working youth. It was only a decade later that the JUC liberated itself from this exclusive spirituality and assumed responsibility for a more just and equal societal structure. In 1961 members of the JUC participated in the elections for the National Students Union (UNE) and soon the A.P. was founded, a political movement of its own, opting for socialism, that broke with the old social order. At the same time the Movement for Basic Education (MEB) started a literary campaign and an organisational programme for the rural population in the very poor North East. Although it was taken over by the bishops it did radicalize and the title of one of its publications indicates its efforts to mobilize the people: 'Life is a struggle.'³

Only half way between reform and revolution, these attempts at social commitment in the name of the church evoked a lot of opposition from outside as well as inside the church. The hierarchy was divided on social problems, and in a divided manner the bishops reacted to the coup of March 1963. The hierarchy needed much energetic diplomatic juggling in order to maintain its image of unity. Only when the State's repression started to hit priests and even some bishops, did the conservative wing of the hierarchy allow the CNBB a critical stand against the regime. In the early seventies a growing number of bishops became defenders of human rights. In the meantime all channels of political expression were blocked by the repression. Church organisations became the only place where freedom of speech and criticism were tolerated. The church became a shelter for the people without a voice. A growing number of priests and also bishops identified themselves with the victims of the economic model which only aimed at quantitative growth. A new type of church emerged, no longer identifying itself with the elite or middle class, but with the subaltern classes. A prophetic church, denouncing injustice and structural 'sins', no longer imposed its own Christian models on the society, but participated in the liberating struggle of the masses.

II.2. The causes of recent change

In analysing changes in the organisation and ideology of the church we depart from the idea that these changes are related to transformations in the society as a whole. As an independent symbolic institution the church has its own dynamics, such as competing theological schools. At the same time, for an understanding of this process of renovation it is necessary to take into consideration the Latin American context. On the first level one has the international socio-economic situation and at the level of the church links such as the conference of Latin American bishops, the CELAM. This organisation was responsible for the meetings of Medellín and Puebla, and also for a range of pastoral institutes influential in the continent as a whole.⁵

On the first level the end of *desarrollismo* is quite crucial. The reform attempted especially by Christian-democrats to form an alternative between capitalism and communism proved to be an illusion. There was no third way. Even the Alliance for Progress, started by Kennedy, failed. Then there was the impact of the Cuban example, showing that radical changes were possible in the Latin American context. Based on the analysis of this reality some sociologists developed an alternative model of explanation: the theory of dependence. They rejected development theories and saw a radical structural change as the only remaining possibility. The repression by military dictatorships showed, often in a very cruel way, that the road of reformism was blocked.

As we consider the renovation process within the church, the absence of a Latin American representative to the second Vatican Council is striking. Neither bishops, theologians, nor priests were prepared for this event. Western European problems and solutions determined the outcome of this meeting of the world hierarchy. Certainly, the '*aggiornamento*' stimulated the use of sociological tools in the Latin American church. New organisations such as FERES (*Federación Internacional de los Institutos Católicos de Investigaciones Sociales y Socio-Religiosas*), DESAL (*Centro para el Desarrollo Económico y Social de América Latina*), ILADES (*Instituto Latino Americano de Doctrina y Estudios Sociales*), were founded in order to investigate their own socio-re-

ligious reality. They made the church aware of Latin American reality, which is so different from Europe. Theologians trained in Europe, when confronted with local problems, started to criticize the European pastoral solutions and developed their own ways. Inspired by the sociological rejection of development policy and basing themselves on dependency theory they developed what is now called the theology of liberation. In the first instance it was a rejection of the 'political theology' developed in Europe as too abstract, not dialectic, and without relation to the masses of the oppressed in the Third World. In itself the theology of liberation is not revolutionary in content but in method. Its point of departure is the conduct of the people in the periphery. It is a systematic reflection on the experiences of Christians and others committed to the process of liberation. The theologians themselves are participating in this process and share in the repression like anyone active in the liberation struggle. The new approach of liberation theology reshapes traditional concepts: sin is no longer a merely personal matter but social injustice. God's Kingdom has to be realized here and now and takes form where people are active in reshaping their world towards fraternity and justice. A re-reading of the bible is presupposed: centrality is given to the passover (Pesach), God's choice for the oppressed and their struggle for liberation.

Also the relation church - world is reconsidered. There is no need to christianize the world, and the church is seen as a minority without any need for power. The functionaries of the church are to serve the poor and oppressed. The development and diffusion of these new ideas occurred in a process in which the meetings of Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979) were crucial and they included considerable internal struggle. For instance, bishop Trujillo, secretary of the CELAM, organized Puebla in order to stop the influence of liberation theology. The preparatory documents clearly reflected a neo-christendom vision. In spite of support from the Vatican the machinations of Trujillo failed against the strong opposition of progressive hierarchies, such as the Brazilian.

In this renovation process the pressure from below, from the grass

roots level of the church was decisive, as already indicated. Therefore it is time to turn our attention to the movements at this level of the church, the CEB's.

In the next chapter we shall analyse their characteristics and, especially important for the topic of this paper, their relation to (urban) popular movements.

III. Base Communities and Popular Movements

III.1. Characteristics of the CEB's.

A song very much in use in the (rural) CEB's contains these words:

we are the people, we are many
we are God's people
we want land on earth
we have it already in heaven.⁶

This song illustrates a real inversion in the outlook of popular religion. In the old days people waited patiently for a better future after death, but now people claim land here and in the immediate future. Faith songs in the cult meetings inspire action and struggle. What are the CEB's? Friar Betto, active in the movement himself, gives the following characteristics.⁷ They are communities, because they bring together people with the same beliefs, living in the same rural region or urban neighbourhood. These persons, inspired by their faith, live in unison dealing with problems of survival, housing, and struggle for a better life. The CEB's are ecclesiastical because they belong to the church as a nucleus of religious community. They are basic because their members are persons who work with their own hands and belong to the popular masses.

This description raises a number of questions. Starting with the last characteristic: quantitative data about the class origins of the CEB-members are not available. Catalogues of groups are quiet common, such as Betto makes: housewives, workers, subemployed, rentiers, people working in the urban periphery, rural workers, small landowners, peasants, tenants etc. It is clear that the members of the CEB see themselves as 'the people', 'the poor' as opposed to 'the rich, the exploiters', using a dichotomous

model of society. C. Boff, a theologian active in the CEB's, writes: 'grass root communities are not class organisations in the strict sense, their members do not determine themselves by the fundamental class criterion: their position in the system of production'.⁸ Another point of discussion is the relation to the hierarchical church: in what sense are the CEB's ecclesiastical? We return to these two questions later.

What are the activities of the communities? Before looking at their social and political activities, it has to be made perfectly clear that they are primarily cult communities, where people celebrate their faith and hope. Brandao's warning is particularly to the point for sociologists: 'The daily urgency to criticize society could make one forget the dream of a society without classes'.⁹ It is not only necessary to interrogate the principles of social doctrine and pastoral praxis but also to investigate the utopian imagination, the dream about a new society and a new man. The CEB is the place where the commitment is celebrated and faith is recreated as a feast.

People love to sing and so cement the feeling of fraternity, anticipating a new fraternal world, that has to come. This is how the celebration of the eucharist is experienced: by sharing the bread together, people anticipate a society without shortage of food.

As Betto says: 'people who almost always live in a sphere of necessity now for a moment live in a sphere of liberty'.¹⁰

Yet daily problems are not forgotten or repressed: there is no question of alienation. The situation of people is dealt with by the following method: see, judge and act, a method very popular in 'catholic action', especially the JOC. The participants of a meeting tell each other about actual problems, such as danger of removal of their houses, the need for electricity or water-supply, etc. One or two cases are chosen as most urgent and the participants comment on the problem and add facts and information. Then comes the moment of judgement: what would Jesus do in this situation? On the suggestion of someone present the gospel is opened and an appropriate passage is read. People meditate and comment on the reading. What are the causes of the problem? Is it just to suffer this injustice? In the third and last

stage the question what to do is dealt with. What are the possibilities for our community to solve the problem ? What action can be taken ? Suggestions are discussed and a concrete plan is agreed upon.¹¹

The method is flexible, and it can happen that a community is concentrating on the same problem for a long period. It is not a linear method, but a dialectical one. The perception of the problem already contains elements for a judgement and ways of action. Each moment is interrelated with the other two. The evaluation of the action during the next meeting will not return to the start, but intensify the action, learning from errors and mistakes made. They discover that they are the subject of their own history. They start to speak in their own name and in their own language. The CEB is an exercise in practical democratic behaviour, because everybody has the possibility to speak up and give his/her opinion.

Is this not an overly optimistic or naive view ? How is the leadership in the communities exercised ? This is indeed an important problem, that needs some special attention. The leaders of the CEB's are called pastoral agents and can be priests, nuns or lay-people, sometimes students, teachers, etc. but all of them are of middle class origin. If the leaders come from the community itself they are sometimes called agents of 'the base'. They emerge in the action and struggle of the community, but continuous training is organized in order to strengthen their skills. So the CEB becomes a real school for leaders of the popular movement. The pastoral agents live among the people in the popular neighbourhoods, sharing the hardship of precarious urbanisation and earning slightly more than the minimum salary. But nevertheless a cultural difference between community and middle class agents remains. Most of the articles on the CEB point to this problem and stress the need for adaptation to popular culture. One of the difficult issues in the communication between people with different social class backgrounds is popular religion. The reasons for processions, the veneration of images, the devotion to certain saints, are not easy to understand for members of the middle class.

The pastoral agent is also the heir of a long intellectual tradition which considers all that is not orthodox, i.e. legitimised by the hierarchical church, as superstitious and erroneous. This is one of the bitter fruits of the Romanisation process we wrote about earlier.

Objective and unbiased research on popular religion has only started recently. One of these researchers is Rolim.¹² He points out that we have to understand the religion of the poor in relation to their precarious life conditions, which especially affect their bodies. For that reason it is understandable that in an overwhelming majority of situations the religious practices of the poor are appeals for protection against anything that can damage their physical integrity: illness, lack of food, lack of decent housing, etc. They appeal to a power outside and above the oppressing society. Therefore religion for the poor is the only outlet to feel protected from the constant and innumerable difficulties of life. This short summary does not do justice to Rolim's analysis, but this is not the place to go further. Besides there is not only the difference between popular and clerical beliefs, but also more generally between theoretical, scientific knowledge and popular knowledge. This is clearly reflected in the discussion on popular education.¹³

Now let us return to the CEB. It is the function of the pastoral agent to assist the people in analysing their situation, starting from their faith and religious motivation to become aware of the causes of injustice.

Especially when the agent is in a hurry, he can overemphasize the political aspects of his message and use the religious discourse as a mere peg on which to hang the political message. Betto gives the rather ridiculous example of a priest who, after reading the Gospel passage about the Lord's ascension, closes the book and starts his sermon in the following way: brothers, just as Jesus rises to heaven, the prices of food are rising everyday.¹⁴ No doubt this is a violation of popular culture and religious sensibility.

Certainly class differences cause communication problems, but they

can also be looked upon in a more positive way. This is the approach of brother Michel when he compares the behaviour of the CEB members and the believers of the Pentecostal cults.¹⁵ He states that both groups share the same social and cultural background and then asks why their religious behaviour is so different. The pentecostals maintain their traditional religious beliefs, but concentrate them around the person of Jesus Christ. The Catholic members of the CEB's have introduced into their religious practices the dimension of social awareness. Why this difference? According to this author the explanation can be found in the fact that the CEB's are guided by people with a middle class origin. In this class it is quite normal to give attention to the social dimension of faith and to criticize society. They now pass this attitude on to the subaltern classes. This is an interesting point of view, but one that needs more investigation. A rural union leader like Manuel de Condição, who emanated from the pentecostal movement, could falsify the absolute difference between pentecostals and CEB-members as Michel does. After having considered the characteristics of the base movements, we conclude that they are indeed communities, ecclesiastical and representative of the base. We will now analyse their relation to the other social movements in present day Brazil.

III.2. Base communities and social movements.

The first CEB's emerged around 1960 and since that time this movement has passed through several distinguishable stages. Betto isolates four phases:

1. The first one is formation; the community is concentrating on religious motivations, searching through the Gospel. It is the stage of locating its own identity.
2. The second stage is social action. The organisation of popular movements starts with the participation of CEB members. Not only Catholics enter these movements, but also Protestants, 'spiritualists', non-believers on the side of the oppressed. The line of division is not faith but identification with the poor.
3. In the next stage the topic is the reinforcement of the labour-movement. Many CEB members participate in the 'union opposition'

and the authentic unions aiming at a labour movement which is more representative of the interests of the working class. They are active in strikes and labour struggles.

4. The fourth stage, which is going on now, is the reform of political parties; the search for new channels of political expression.¹⁶

This division in stages already gives a clue to understanding the relationship between CEB's and other social movements. There is no need for us to deal with the other social movements in general, since others will do that in this volume. Here we will only make some short remarks on the social movements in order to situate the stages of the CEB mentioned so far.

It is only in the second stage of the CEB development that we can speak about a relationship with other social movements. It has to be placed in the early seventies. We have to remember that at that time the church was a shelter to all opposition that did not have an outlet elsewhere. Important too, is to know that the Brazilian left realised at that time that work on the base level had been neglected and consequently it changed its tactics and strategy. Guerrilla warfare adventures were over, the tedious work on the popular base began. Even during the time that military repression was very strong, urban movements arose. This was probably because, as Kowarick states, the State in the dependent Latin American economies shows more flexibility in relation to 'urban problems', than in the economic sphere. The little flexibility that the system has in this field is used in order to integrate and to co-opt the urban social movements.¹⁷

In the second half of the seventies a new form of unionism developed, particularly in the industrial region of São Paulo: the '*oposição sindical*' and a new type of leader emerged, of which Lula is the best known. These new leaders resented State control. During long and extended strikes the unions showed a new antagonistic behaviour towards the State, something quite unknown in Brazilian history. Since the thirties the unions had played a key role in the State strategy to force industrial relations into a model of harmony: they were an essential element in the State's

system of control over the working class. The codification of labour legislation (CLT) in the Vargas period views the unions in a cooperative relation with capital. Any potential problem in this relation could be resolved by the mediation of the State with the assistance of a Regional Labour Office or the Labour Court. So there was neither a reason for conflict, nor a need for strikes. The function of the unions was reduced, especially after the 1964 coup, to one of mere assistance and recreation.¹⁸ What is this new approach of the unions? Moisés gives the following characteristics, which we will summarize here. The new unions are active among the workers of the strategic and dynamic sectors of Brazilian industry; they use new forms of struggle, not only the ones allowed by the CLT, but also new forms like mobilisation of the workers on the factory floor by the salary commission; they are mass movements, not only because they are able to attract tens of thousands to the strike meetings, but also by the active participation of many workers in all sorts of activities; last but not least they set new demands, not only in relation to salaries, but also to the unions themselves and political demands.¹⁹ The new form of unionism is the result of long and arduous work at the base since 1966, the starting point of the union opposition. The church contributed to it by providing its militants formed in the JOC and ACO. The church reacted to the growing strength of the unions and labour movement by organizing the Labour Pastoral (P.O.). This new branch of pastoral activity was to represent the church in the world of labour. Betto defines its aims as follows: 'P.O. is the presence of the workers in the church and the presence of the church among the workers'.²⁰ P.O. is not seen as a parallel movement to the union nor as a Christian union: 'the workers act according to the orientation of the unions. When the workers come to the P.O., they reflect on their activities in the light of the Gospel'.²¹ A clear purpose of the P.O. is to increase the church's credibility among the working class. It seems that the CEB movement is not enough for the church to ensure its presence in the sphere of production. In the pastoral plans of the major industrial dioceses special attention is given to the pastoral among the workers. P.O. is also

seen as an advisory council to the bishop in labour matters and it coordinates the diocese's activities, its support and collaboration with the unions. P.O. is not only active on the level of the diocese but also on the parish level, nuclei of reflection are formed.

At the end of the seventies the new international economic order and its repercussions on Brazil, the end of the economic 'miracle', forced the regime to adapt forms of self-legitimation: the opening, 'abertura' was the answer of Golbery. General amnesty for the exiled, reform of the political parties, abolition of censorship: these were all elements of a process, strictly under the control of the regime, to maintain and safeguard the essentials of socio-political domination. The decision of the most advanced sectors of the working class to organize their own political party did not fit in this scheme, but nevertheless the foundation of the workers party (PT) became a fact. This is not the place to analyze the origin and composition of this party. We will only give some attention to the consequences of the existence of this party for the church.

Until 77-78 the activities of the church were the most important form of mobilisation and organisation of the people. From then on new agents and new proposals arose. Pastoral agents became aware of the fact that the activities of the church pastoral are limited and that it is not the role of the church to be the vanguard in the process of social and political change. The struggle for political power cannot be the task of the CEB's but the commission of the political parties. The extensive discussions in specialized periodicals shows that this insight was not immediately clear and was to some agents a difficult and painful one.²² Next to that, in many of the CEB's the traditional popular distrust of professional politics²³ showed itself again.

According to Betto, the different categories of ecclesiastical leaders reacted in their own way to this new situation. Perhaps he generalizes too much and exaggerates a little, but he gives an interesting conceptual scheme. The bishops reacted by over-exaggerating the importance of the pastoral discourse, without

concretely indicating the ways forward. Priests and nuns tried first to defend their flock against the outsiders by stressing the importance of the religious and pastoral elements in the CEB activities. The lay leaders tended to reduce the pastoral praxis to political praxis. At the grass root level one tendency was to stress specific Christian values exclusive to the believers. The other, more frequent tendency, was dialectical combination: they do not sense a conflict between prayer and action, faith and political struggle, pastoral activities and union action.²⁴

The fourth national meeting of the CEB's movement dealt explicitly with the problem of politics and the question of which political party to support. In contrast with the idea broadcast by the media, there was no clear option for the P.T. but a discussion about the criteria for the choice of a political party. The participants in this meeting agreed that every member of the CEB is free to make his own political choice, but only after studying their programmes, the interests they defend and the social change which they opt for. It is interesting to diagnose that the bishops, in their annual meeting of 1980 held in Brasilia on the political parties, showed a preference for the P.T.²⁵

The elections of 1982 show that even in regions where the CEB was strong its members did not necessarily vote for the P.T., but took very much into account what could be realised by for instance the election of PMDB candidates. We will conclude this section by summarizing the relation between the official hierarchical church and the popular movements. Brandão distinguished three categories:

1. Popular movements of the church. This means movements created on the initiative of the hierarchy for lay activities or movements created by laymen and legitimised by the hierarchy. Popular here means committed to the popular liberation struggle. Not all popular movements of the church are in this line: e.g. '*curdinho de cristandade*'; the Christianity courses are neo-Christian not only in name but also in content.

2. Popular movements of the community. These are perhaps originated by initiatives of leaders or members of church movements, but they are autonomous and active in the sphere of housing, water, costs of living, etc.

3. Popular class movements. These are active in the sphere of production and their members act according to their position in the production process as working class e.g. industrial and rural unions.²⁶

What is the attitude of the church towards these three types of movements ? In relation to the third category it is one of support; the unions are independent. In respect to the second type the church's role is one of helping and here influence is sometimes stronger because the leadership is often under its control. In relation to the first category the church considers the work among the popular classes as part of its ministry, too long neglected, but essential for its task. The basic question: are the CEB's ecclesiastical movements among the people or are they popular movements invading the church, affecting the traditional hierarchical structure, still remains.

Brandão emphasizes the flexibility of the Roman church in comparison with the Protestants and umbanda. These tend to split themselves up into small new communities every time there is disagreement. The Catholic church has an immense power to maintain and to preserve its structure, by accepting new movements, stressing the '*communitas*' into its midst.²⁷

It is time to come into closer contact with concrete reality in order to check the various theoretical points of view. In the next part we will study the metalworkers' strike of 1980 which offers a good case for the analysis of the relation between church and unions. We will try to find an answer to some of the questions that have arisen, for example:

What is the relation of the CEB in the large ABC region to the unions there ? What is the relation with the workers pastoral ? Does the church show respect for the unions' autonomy ? Furthermore, what is the attitude of the hierarchy, concretely Cardinal Arnts of S. Paulo and bishop Hummes of S. André and their clergy towards the laymen ? Finally, what is the influence of the new church ideology, the theology of liberation, on the praxis of social movements in this period ?

IV. The Strike and its Actors

First we will reconstruct the events before and during the strike of 1980, taking into account, especially, the role of the church at its different levels. Then we will look at the analysis made by the actors, union members and church leaders, of the events and their own roles therein.²⁸

IV.1. Development of the strike and the role of the church.

Humphrey describes the tension building up between the unions on the one side and government and the industrial bosses on the other towards the end of 1979 thus:²⁹ 'the attitude of the government and some employers appeared to be that labour unrest could be curtailed by a series of minor reforms that would demobilize the working class and isolate the radical elements in the unions from the mass of workers'.... 'At the end of 1979 there was little sign of significant concessions from the management. On the contrary many firms believed that 1980 would provide the opportunity for a definitive defeat of the union. The government, too, has its reasons for wanting to inflict a defeat on the metalworkers of São Bernardo'. The unions of the ABC knew about this. The government gave a warning by taking a tougher line against the militant union of Bankworkers in Porto Alegre. The unions started to prepare for a confrontation. In the factories meetings were organized and after three months of intensive mobilisation the union was able to form a committee of Mobilisation and Wages with representatives elected from all over the district. The unions also organized in the districts in order to evaluate the strike of 1979, often on the initiative of local CEB's. In the workfloor discussion a long list of demands for the 1980 negotiations was produced, including a 15 percent wage rise based on an increase in productivity, compensation for inflation, job security, a 40 hour week, the end of overtime and union delegates in every factory.

During negotiations a compromise over the increase in real wages seemed possible, but for the employers the security demand was unacceptable, and negotiations broke down over this issue. In the

opinion of the union, wage rises were useless without a guarantee of job security: workers would be dismissed before they would benefit from them. The strike started on the first of April without the use of pickets - so firm was the determination of the workers. Initially the metalworkers' union had the support of 23 unions in the '*Unidade Sindical*'. Later on it became clear that this coalition was dominated by the Communist party, the PCB, which found the strike too risky, in relation to the possible dangers, for the opening of the political process.³⁰

The Regional Labour Court of S. Paulo considered the legality of the strike and for the first time in Brazilian history declared itself incompetent to judge the case. This was in itself a victory for the union. Later on the Employers Federation of S. Paulo, the FIESP (*Federação das Industrias do Estado de São Paulo*), asked for a new judgement, and under clear pressure from the government the Labour Court came to the verdict that the strike was illegal. At this moment the way was open for the regime to intervene and on April 17 the leadership of the metalworkers' union of the ABC was replaced by bureaucrats appointed by the Ministry of Labour. Early Saturday morning, April 19, 15 union leaders, including Lula, and 14 members of the opposition, including members of the Commission for Justice and Peace, were detained by the army. The local bishops had already declared their solidarity with the strikers. On Sunday, the 8th of April, an Easter Mass was celebrated for the workers on their request. The liturgy, prepared by the P.O., made a comparison between the struggle of the strikers and the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. The bishops criticized openly the new discussion of the Labour Tribunal, pointing to the injustice of the legal system. President Figueiredo accused D. Paulo of 'inciting the strike', which according to the existing laws was a criminal offence. In the same interview the president declared that the support of the bishops for the strike was not in accordance with the opinion of the majority of the hierarchy. The next day Dom Paulo challenged Figueiredo to give the names of bishops opposed to the church support of the strikers. In the name of the bishops conference the secretary of the CNBB, D. Ivo Lorscheiter, gave open support to D. Paulo. A new crisis

in the relations between church and State became a fact. On April 23, Dom Ivo and Dom Rocco, the papal nuncio, each visited Golberry in order to smooth the tensions. In this conversation the nuncio gave assurances that the visit of the Pope to Brazil would start with a meeting of John Paul with the president. This leaked out to the press and was seen as a victory for the regime.

In the meantime intimidation and repression of the mass of the strikers was growing too. An impressive display of the armed forces was organised. Helicopters were flying extremely low above S. Bernardo. Meetings in public squares or in the football stadium were prohibited, and only allowed inside the churches. The strikers were not intimidated and the strike continued. The direction had been taken over by the previously elected committee of 16. The activities of the strikers were shifted from the factories to their neighbourhoods. There, CEB's and other groups were active in the collection of food supplies and money, the distribution of supplies to strikers in financial problems, the visiting of families and distribution of bulletins.

The pressure on the workers exercised by the mass media was very intense. Radio and television broadcast only the point of view of employers and government officials. In small factories with personal relations between employer and worker strike participation petered out. In big factories strikers were replaced by the unemployed and pickets became a necessity. In the formation of these pickets CEB members and even priests were active.

On May 1, in spite of police prohibition, a mass meeting was organized on the square of San Bernardo's main church. Strikers determined to celebrate labour day marched to the Stadium and were confronted by the army. The danger of a bloody clash was real. At the last minute General Milton Tavares, commander of the second army and virtual ruler the S. Paulo state, withdrew his men. An impressive march started in support of the strike, in which 120.000 people participated.

In spite of the fact that no concessions were made, some firms suffered great losses during the strike. FIESP was not allowed to negotiate and the State took full control of the conflict.

Delegations of the strikers, travelling to Brasilia, including the bishop of S. Andre, were not received. Finally after forty-one days of the strike the workers had to accept defeat. The outcome of the strike seemed an outright victory for the employers: there was no concession on wages and no return of the sacked union leaders. Ex-leaders like Lula faced the threat of prosecution under the National Security Law, and many people, including Lula's own brother, predicted that he would be transformed from a prestigious union leader into an effective politician of the Workers Party.

The impact of the strike can be seen in a different light, as for example Moisés sees it.³¹ He sees the importance of this strike in its rupture with the labour legislation. The institution of labour justice had lost the trust of the working masses in a complete and absolute way, while before they believed in its objectivity. The strike also clarified the limits of State control over the workers movement. Finally, as we said before, the strike of metal workers was the only break with the political process of '*abertura*', controlled by the government.

The discussion about the success or failure of the April strike is still going on in Brazil.³² It is noteworthy that negative judgement on the strike comes generally from members of the Communist Party, who are active in the *pelegos*-unions, collaborating with the Ministry of Labour. From this side too comes the rejection of Church participation in the strike of 1930.

The absence of large scale strikes in recent years does not mean that the Brazilian labour movement is in retreat or is defeated. Smaller and shorter sit-down strikes in early 1982 were highly successful. They established the practice of direct negotiations between company and union, breaking down the united front of employers. Important too is the establishment of a workers' commission at Ford. This assures effective shop floor representation. They provide a forum for dealing with ongoing issues in a particular plant. Unlike the commission organized at Volkswagen at the end of 1980, which was set up under the complete control of the company, the commission at Ford resulted from negotiations between management and both the metalworkers' union and elected

representatives from the workforce.³³

IV.2. The vision of the actors.

For the purpose of this paper it is not important to study the ideas of the employers or the State bureaucrats. Here we are interested in the vision of the other side. There are reports by D. Claudio, interviews with Friar Betto and Lula, and last but not least an extensive interview with the members of the Workers Pastoral in S. Bernardo. We will compare their statements on four topics: the autonomy of the social movements; the relation of the different movements with the church; the influence of the theology of liberation; and their attitude to the State. Before proceeding further we will give some biographical data in so far as it is of importance for the subject.

1. Dom Claudio Hummes, born in the most southern State, Rio Grande do Sul, has been bishop of S. André since 1975. In his rural background and past as a seminary professor he was not very well prepared for his job. The diocese of S. André encloses the whole area of the ABC, S. André, S. Bernardo de Campos and Caetano do Sul, the most industrialized region of Brazil. Fifty-five per cent of the active labour force, 406,000 persons, are working in industry. Only 1% of the population has a rural occupation. This farmer's son succeeded D. Jorge Marcos, the first and progressive bishop of S. André, who early on had identified himself with the social problems of the workers. In his own words, D. Claudio has been converted by the workers to a different view on society and a new pastoral attitude. This process of conversion was intensified by his participation in the strike of 1979. By request of the union leaders, and after the explicit consent of the strikers' assembly, D. Claudio became a member of the committee of representatives of the strikers, negotiating with the employers after intervention in the unions. During the preparations for the 1980 strike Lula himself asked for the bishop's support. In an oral report to the members of the P.O. the bishop related the fact that he had consulted the fold about this request, and consented only after their approval. For each town of his diocese a priest

was chosen to maintain contact with the unions.

D. Claudio coordinated his line of action too with Cardinal Arnsts of São Paulo.

During the strike the bishop was present at the striker's meetings. Later on he opened the churches for the strikers when meetings elsewhere were prohibited. Special services for the workers were organized also: On Sunday, April 8, where Lula spoke during the mass, and on May 1, when a mass of workers was in the Main church of S. Bernardo. The bishop himself, together with thirty priests, went in front of the strikers' march when the threat of intervention by the army became very dangerous. The church took responsibility for the strike fund, but not as D. Claudio stresses, for the financial administration. His participation in the strike provoked the DEOPS, the security police, to threaten him with prosecution.

After the strike the bishop of S. André felt obliged to justify his behaviour to other members of the hierarchy in a report to the CNBB. The emphasis on the peaceful and non-violent character of the strike methods stands out. The report deals extensively with the question of the legality of the strike. A distinction is made between legality and legalisation. For the bishop the fact that the strike was subsequently declared illegal does not diminish the justice of the workers' demands and action. 'If the law is unjust, there is no obligation to observe it'. The bishop stresses the autonomy of the unions and the service character of his support. He mentions in relation to the church structure the parishes, but not the grass-root communities. The bishop states further that if the strike has become political, this was caused through the intervention of the State itself and its repressive measures, which he condemns sharply. The theology of liberation is not absent from his statements, but it was more explicit both in the liturgy of religious ceremonies during the strike and in his actual behaviour.

2. Because the person and the conduct of Lula have received attention in the international media we can here omit biographical data. For Lula faith is a question of roots: he was born a Catholic and educated as such by his mother. He recognizes that in 1978 he made strong criticisms of the church, while now he seems to be flattering the same institution. In Lula's opinion this is not true. Traditionally the church was on the side of the oppressors and even now not the whole church is an ally of the working class. It shows two faces: there are bishops on the side of the rich and the oppressors such as the cardinals of P. Alegre and Rio, and others on the side of the people and the poor. Only the latter are the true church, because they are doing what Jesus Christ did: working for equality between men. Even as a political leader, president of the P.T., he very much dislikes ideological debates. The ex-union leader is very proud of the autonomy of the S. Bernardo union. It has no ties with the church, the government, employers, Communist Party nor other leftist organizations. The only responsibility is to the working class, which elected it. Certainly there was support from the church. 'The support from the grassroot communities was extraordinary in the 1980 strike. The church never intervened in the strike. The only thing the church did was to open its doors for the protection of the workers and offer its structure for the support of the strikers. D. Claudio always said: what do you want to be done? He never said, I will do this'. The base communities of the church were points of fundamental support, not only here in São Paulo, but in Brazil as a whole through their role of fundraising and solidarity. Lula is conscious of the fact that the 1980 strike was not only a struggle against employers, against Capital, but also against military power. The strike became a conflict between workers and State due to provocation by the government. Although the workers were defeated, they know now, that the causes of their problems can be found not only in the factory, but in the system of the economic model applied in Brazil.

3. The third actor is Friar Betto, a Dominican but by his own choice not a priest. He was born in Belo Horizonte and was active there in the Union of College students and as a member of the

national direction of the JEC. Studying theology in Rio Grande do Sul he was imprisoned in 1969 for helping persons wanted by the police for political activities. He spent 4 years in prison. From 1974 till 1978 he assisted in the organisation of CEB's in the diocese of Victoria. Since 1979 he has lived in São Paulo. He was invited by D. Claudio to become responsible for the Labour Pastoral in S. Bernardo. He is a member of the International Association of Theologians of the Third World. Throughout this paper we have already discussed the ideas of Betto, so we will now be brief. It is important to deal with the relationship between Betto and Lula. They have known each other since early 1980. They soon became friends, so that Lula asked Betto to sleep in Lula's home during the strike in order to accompany and protect Marisa, Lula's wife and their children. No wonder that some people see Betto as 'the man behind Lula'. The friar is sharp in denying this. In his opinion such an idea is the consequence of a colonialist idea about workers: if a worker is intelligent, decisive and knows what he wants, as in the case of Lula, it is because there is somebody behind him, a petit-bourgeois orientating him. No. The workers movement is autonomous and very conscious of its qualities and capacities.³⁴

4. The fourth vision comes from a collective, one of a group of lay members of the Labour Pastoral of S. Bernardo, interviewed together with Betto and a local priest, soon after the organisation of their group in June 1980.³⁵ The two ecclesiastics made very few interventions and these were mostly of an informative character. Of the eight lay members, four were active in grass root communities, two also in the pastoral of youth, and one was an active member of the P.T. All participated in some way in the strike. One of them was even a member of the commission of 16, the deputy strike leadership.

On the autonomy of the social movements, all agree that the union determines the line, and where the people go the church follows. The task of the church is to serve. In particular, the union of S. Bernardo has a strong basis in the masses, and that is the reason why they participated there in the strike. Elsewhere, in São Paulo

or in Osasco, there are more groups active on the grassroots level, but the unions, those of the '*pelegos*', are not the authentic ones. The contribution of the political parties or groups in S. Bernardo was insignificant. The contribution of the church and the grassroots communities was important, but the Christians participating in the organisation of the strike did this as members of the working class, not as members of the church. In the last part of the interview a discussion between the workers starts about the function and aims of the Labour Pastoral. It does not seem very clear for everybody, understandably so, because they have just started their group. But finally after an intervention from Betto, they agreed that the P.O. is not a parallel union, that it has a function of service in respect of the union and has its own function of reflection in the light of faith.

How do these workers see the role of the church and their relation with the hierarchy? For them the figure of the bishop is very important: he represents the church and makes the church visible. The only priest present has to remind them that the bishop can do anything without his priests (!). They mention the conversion D. Claudio experienced too. But talking about the role of the church they stress the importance of the grassroots communities. A difference is made between the western region of São Paulo, where the base communities had existed longer and S. Bernardo where they were a recent phenomenon. They called attention to the fact that not all the priests supported the strike. There were some parishes, the rich ones, where middleclass people were living, which did not give support. One case is remembered where the priest called the police in order to prevent a meeting in his church.

There is agreement about the fact that the church also gained by its participation in the strike. There was a barrier between the average metalworker and the church; this is now disappearing. Before the strike, if meetings in the quarters were organized by Catholics, only a few people came, mostly housewives. After intervention in the unions these small groups increased very much in number. The fact that they started a Pastoral of Labour after the strike again is proof that the church improved its image and

strengthened its influence.

Throughout the interview the strong influence of the theology of liberation is noticeable: for example, 'with that big struggle of Christ to liberate the oppressed during this life, he would stay on our side'. The workers also think that the church played an important role in changing the traditional faith of people from the countryside migrating to S. Bernardo: 'a backward religious mentality of conformism, of impossibility to struggle against the employer because he is God's child too'. It is important to have a 'different vision of Christianity, one related to the liberation of the working class and with a total commitment to the struggle'. In this interview no explicit statements are made about the attitude of the working class towards the State. But people agree, in contrast to their bishop, that a moment could come where the union should be forced to use violent means 'because I don't believe in societal change with lemonade'.

The vision of all these actors may be summarily presented thus:

1. The labour movement of S. Bernardo is autonomous.
2. They have a positive judgement on the church in so far as it is committed to the struggle of the working class, especially in the grass-root communities.
3. There is a visible influence of the theology of liberation except on the religious ideas of Lula.
4. Their attitude in relation to the state is antagonistic, but their ideas about the state are not very elaborated.

V. Conclusions and Questions

In this paper we have seen in a nutshell the changes that the Brazilian Catholic church has gone through in the last hundred years, from a church of laymen open for the culture of subaltern classes to a closed clerical institute, and opening up again in the last few years to the 'oppressed' and the 'poor'.

We have analysed the grass-root communities, their characteristics, their leadership and relations with other social movements, the importance of faith and cult as motives of social commitment.

Finally the collaboration between unions and church during the metalworkers strike in 1980 was analysed, especially the views of the actors. Now it is time to draw some conclusions.

1. It is very risky, if not impossible, to present generalized findings about the collaboration among the union, church movements and hierarchy during the metalworkers' strike. The situation in S. Bernardo is very specific. The workers themselves are conscious of the fact that the concentration of large masses of working people makes the exploitation more visible, and at the same time gives a sense of power in the case of strike action. The unions run the risk of forgetting the reality of the rest of Brazil. The reality of the majority of the unions too, which are official, falls under the control of the Ministry of Labour. Yet we share the opinion of Humphrey that the ABC metalworkers' unions may be trendsetters in giving shape to the forms of work conflict between labour and capital in Brazil.³⁶ The attempt to hold a one-day national strike in July 1983 might be another indication of this.

2. The events before and during the strike of S. Bernardo make clear that collaboration between unions and church movements is possible and fruitful. This is not necessarily a threat to the independence and autonomy of the labour movement. This collaboration can be advantageous for the church movements too: the church improves its image and its own organisations reach more people.

3. The collaboration of members of church movements in the strike proves that faith can play a positive role in motivating people into social commitment. At the same time the existence of basic church organisations is not a sufficient cause to explain the rise of a vigorous labour movement. On the contrary the differences between the union situations in S. Paulo and S. Bernardo indicate that.

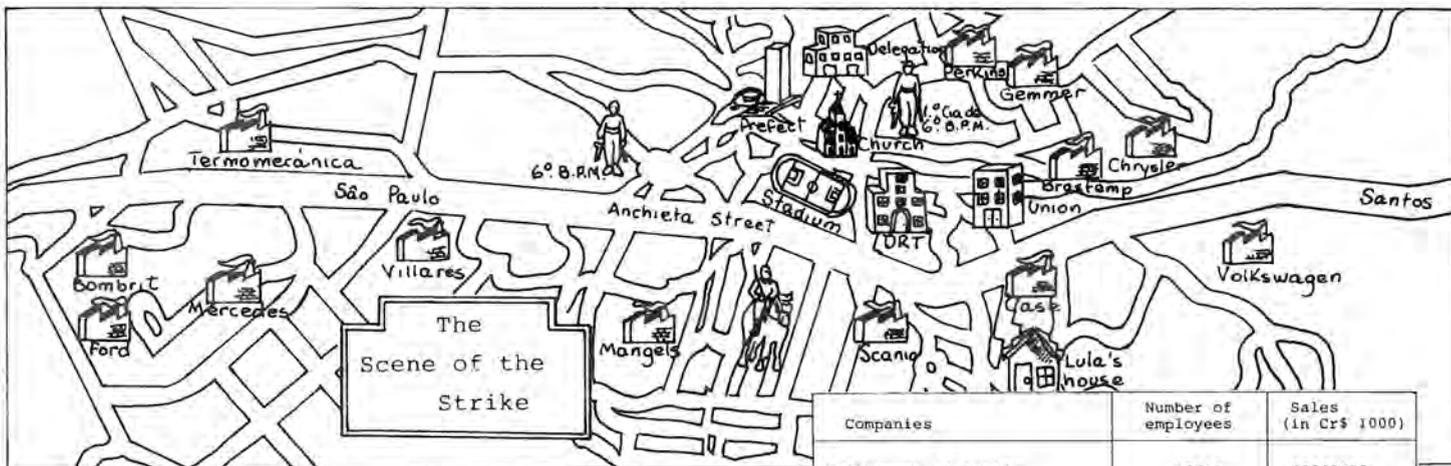
4. The relations between the two levels of the church, base and hierarchy, need further investigation. Clearly the role of the bishop is important. But even when he is independent and autonomous in his diocese in relation to the pastoral approach, he is a member of the national hierarchy at the same time. Especially

in times of crisis confrontations with the State, the support of his colleagues is very important. If in this moment the course of the Brazilian hierarchy as a whole is progressive and critical in relation to the State, history teaches us that this can easily change.³⁷

Via nominations of new bishops, 'Rome' has effective means of influencing this course. The Curia exercises censorship over theologians too as in the case of Boff.³⁸ Also the role of the nuncio is important, especially in State-Church relations. Next to this the Celam has a certain influence.

5. For the survival of the church, base communities are very important. The number of priests is decreasing every year by 0.4%. The church has to deal with strong competition from the pentecostal communities and Afro-religious cults, umbanda and batuque, which are very popular among subaltern and even the middle classes and they are becoming respectable. To what extent are the CEB's able to force the hierarchical structure of the church in a more democratic direction? Up till now no case is known in which a popular community clashed with the hierarchy. In the matter of celibacy and functioning of married priests the communities had to obey the official rules.³⁹

6. In this paper we have not dealt with the relation of the CEB's to politics. A new study is necessary in order to understand how the church movement is dealing with the problem of power. One very positive point is that the CEB movement did not fall into the temptation of starting a CEB party.



Companies	Number of employees	Sales (in Cr\$ 1000)
Volkswagen of Brazil	42611	40643185
Ford Brazil	11793	24172277
Mercedes-Benz of Brazil	15084	21257665
Saab Scania of Brazil	2402	4204256
Brastemp	3533	3127793
Equipamentos Villares	2246	2698739
Perkins S.A. Motores	1850	2535718
Chrysler of Brazil	2068	2526163
TRW Gemmer Thompson	1680	2318748
Termomecânica São Paulo S.A.	1608	2073090
Bombrit S.A.	829	1702698
J.T. Case of Brazil	692	1472468
Mangels Industrial	701	1215358

↑ sales

↑ number
of
employees

The Scene of the Strike

(source: Veja)

NOTES

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37. D. Ivo Lorscheiter, progressive president of CNBB, has been re-elected with a small majority, 12.4.1983, see: *Isto é* 20.4.1983, p.56.
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39. In spring this year the CELAM elected the conservative bishop of Avellaneda (BA) as president with 40 votes, against 16 for the progressive Brazilian Aloísio Lorscheiter, cousin of D. Ivo, *Isto é*, 23.2.1983.

