

# MEXICAN Situation Analysis

## *Digital ENVIO*

Number 206 | Sept 1998

### **Fighting Poverty With Democracy**

*An important topic in Latin America is the need to link economy and democracy more closely. Electoral democracy is not enough; the market needs to be democratized. It is a wide-open struggle in which liberal democracy is incapable of responding adequately to the demands of thinking citizens in a globalized society.*

#### **Jorge Alonso**

The new stage of capitalism has increased poverty by geometric proportions. They tell us it is the result of a natural process. We know it is the consequence of the plans and projects of finance capital, which has tried to mitigate the disaster with world programs to combat poverty—programs that cannot solve the problems generated by the dominant economic policies. This has opened a space for organized groups of civil society to propose basic alternatives in the face of the poverty explosion. But this fight cannot seriously proceed without authentic social and political democracy.

#### **Poverty is remediable in one generation**

The practices arising out of neoliberalism intensify poverty. Structurally, neoliberalism is incapable of remedying poverty because its economic model concentrates wealth in the hands of a few and aggravates the problem of limited opportunity for the majority. Neoliberalism's basic principle of attaining profit and relegating the general well-being of humanity legitimizes an economic order in which a minority becomes very rich and sinks an increasing majority of men and women—especially women—into poverty. Women of the popular sectors have been called the "administrators of poverty." It is estimated that women comprise 70% of the 1.3 billion persons who suffer poverty worldwide. Women face staggering segregation, discrimination and exclusion. Neoliberalism has also increased the number of "street children." The neoliberal model also encourages a predatory development that endangers

the environment. As the head of the United Nations' Commission for Commerce and Development recognized in 1996, the neoliberal formula, applied to the letter, has had negative social consequences. Beyond the problem of economic income, the poverty produced by the neoliberal system is a symptom of profound structural imbalances in all spheres of human activity. This poverty deprives human beings of basic necessities, of the elements essential to physical, mental, and spiritual dignity.

There are those who, invoking the theories of Malthus, claim that the rising poverty is rooted in the imbalance in growth rates between the world population and the means of food production; that the population is growing exponentially while the means of subsistence is progressing arithmetically, so we will never have enough resources to combat poverty. In opposition to those with this viewpoint—whose only proposed remedy is birth control—others argue that poverty is the result of a logic that excludes vast segments of humanity and that we have a duty to remedy it.

Poverty is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. Its principle causes are an imbalance in the accumulation and distribution of wealth and consumerism. Both of these destroy rights, identities and lives and place people in a position ripe for economic, political and social domination. Overcoming poverty demands a holistic approach. The administrator of the United Nations' Development Program pointed out in 1997 that extreme poverty could be eliminated in the space of a generation if there were a serious commitment to do so. He calculated that the cost of wiping out worldwide poverty would amount to an investment of 1% of the gross world product over a period of 20 years.

### **Millions of people enclosed in parentheses**

Neoliberalism has caused untold suffering. The list of evils, horrors and misery is long. The neoliberal agenda has bolstered financial capital, which seeks profit at any cost and does not stimulate production; this capital multiplies without the need for industrial investment. The huge international economic groups play in savage markets. Ecological disaster has ensued. The capacity of states to provide for the well-being of their citizens has been severely impaired: social programs and personal security have been reduced while unemployment, inequality and social problems in general are on the rise. Work relations and the structure of employment have been changed. Local forms of super-exploitation have been linked into modern productive networks. Crime, drugs, racism, xenophobia and violence have assumed enormous proportions.

Globalization has minimized the role of politics and increased the role of the market. Policy has been reduced to technique and economy has been reduced to growth. Global competition is becoming more and more ruthless. The opening of national borders to market forces has meant that international financial flows

predominate over national capital. The traders thrive on their associated dependence (capital movements-production chains-negotiation units). Governing bodies find themselves under the power of the financial markets. The world's most powerful economic centers impose on poor countries structural adjustments that not only exacerbate unemployment and low wages, but also induce acute malnutrition and the resurgence of diseases that, even though curable, take many lives. Capital flight and corruption have increased poverty in Latin America. Over half of the foreign debt of these countries is found deposited in private accounts in tax havens.

Communications increase, but there is mediocrity, vulgarization and dispossession of learning. Corruption is not controlled. Globalization has been destroying the most prominent social actors of the former industrial society. It has enclosed millions of people in parentheses—marginalization has become merciless. Resources are underutilized. The majority of young people are condemned to unproductive lives. There is destruction of social rights; social spending is forgotten, even condemned. They pretend that the people will become accustomed to their excluded existence. They would like the enormous masses of the dispossessed to do away with themselves in an uncontrollable violence accentuated by discrimination and unleashed anxiety. Insecurity denies the exercise of citizenship; the economic elite control money, information and political debate. Decisions are not arrived at democratically.

### **The class war is not over**

Globalization appears incapable of equality. The rich and powerful organize in worldwide networks to ensure the continued flow of power, communication and money within a closed, lopsided system that escapes regulations. As the world's wealth continues to increase, the disparities between and within countries have reached unprecedented proportions. Neoliberalism undermines citizenship and true solidarity and destructures the common good, putting the market before society. Human beings don't count, only profitability. Social Darwinism is fostered.

World statistics on poverty and inequality are crushing. The United Nations Development Program informed us in 1996 that more than half of the world's population had incomes of less than \$2 per day. While the world's poorest 20% received 2.3% of the income in 1980, thirteen years later that percentage had dropped to 1.4%. On the other hand, the wealthiest 20% held 70% percent of the world's wealth in 1980, and the same thirteen years later, that percentage had leaped to 85%. A billion people do not have clean drinking water; the same number are illiterate; 840 million go hungry. Life expectancy for a third of the population in underdeveloped countries is just below forty, while 17 million people die annually of curable diseases—the majority of them children from illnesses related to malnutrition.

The net wealth of the world's ten richest individuals is equivalent to 1.5 times the gross national products of the world's least developed countries. In Latin America, almost a quarter of the population lives on less than a dollar a day and the richest 10% have 84 times more resources than the poorest 10%. The World Bank said in 1998 that the economic measures applied in Latin America had not been sufficient to reduce poverty. But poverty is not a prerogative of the underdeveloped nations; in the richest country, the United States, 20% are poor. In the developed nations, over 100 million people live on less than 50% of the median per-capita disposable income, 37 million are unemployed and more than 5 million are homeless.

This horrific reality has led those responsible for neoliberal policies to design policies to address poverty that are simply palliatives to avoid social upheaval. They recommend that attention be given to "highest vulnerability" groups. Neoliberalism proposes a structural move from state-as-benefactor to a benefactor society. It has nothing to do with rights. Rather, it employs a selectivity that goes against the universality of social policies. The slogans of globalization and flexibility are repeated like a litany. Neoliberals are dogmatic; they defend an aggressive individualism and disguise their ideology as scientific theory. It is a conservative dogmatism based on a domineering discourse and economic fatalism. It aims to destroy the social state and establish a police state. It seeks to convince the people that they can do nothing against the power of the market economy. Neoliberalism impedes logical thought.

But the manifestations of poverty cannot be controlled only by the policies proposed by the neoliberal ideologues—whose sole thrust is to foster economic growth. And even if it is true that the welfare state was incapable of realizing its social goals, neoliberal "solutions" are even less adequate for remedying the root causes of poverty. "Neoliberal discourse, filled with references to 'modernity,' does not have the force to do away with social classes and decree the nonexistence of different interests among them, since it does not have the force to do away with the conflicts and struggles between classes," said Paulo Freire in his book *Pedagogy of Hope* (1993). Struggle is a constant between those who try to impose domination and those who resist it.

### **The World Bank: Healthy macroeconomics and education**

Programs to combat poverty have delineated three main tendencies: that of the international monetary institutions, headed by the World Bank; that of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP); and that of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

The World Bank attempts to complement its structural adjustment policies with programs to combat poverty. The measures it has imposed have emphasized

economic growth with assistance programs. Instead of analyzing how its plans have exacerbated poverty, the World Bank adduces that the increase in poverty is due precisely to the fact that its directives have not been followed. It recognizes that little has been achieved in reducing poverty and suggests that many theories exist in the poverty debate, while underscoring two key elements about which there is near total agreement: the need for a sane macroeconomic policy and for a rapid increase in the level of education.

In this same vein, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has emphasized that, in the near future, the level of education will determine the difference between rich and poor both individually and nationally. The International Development Bank has joined ranks with this analysis and declared the lack of adequate education as the most important isolated factor in explaining the existence of inequality and the increase of poverty in Latin America. It recommends that the quality of basic education must be improved if poverty is to be reduced. The World Bank proposes promoting more productive use of the labor force of the poor, in addition to providing them with basic services. Unemployment and underemployment will be the most important problems to reverse. In this same sense, the UN's Economic Commission on Latin America (ECLA) puts the emphasis on investing in human resources and seeks an intersection between political economy and social politics.

#### **UNDP: The potential of the poor**

The UNDP—recognizing that the number-one challenge to assure the planet's future is overcoming poverty—proposes developing the capacity for growth undergirded by equity. This implies economic reactivation, an increase in salaries, support of popular economies and the development of a participatory, flexible and adaptive style.

The UNDP's role in reducing poverty through community participation needs to be highlighted. The UNDP has suggested that the most effective potential strategy for the 21st century is not money, land or market fluctuations, but rather the world's 2.3 billion undereducated, undernourished and underemployed. It reminds us that the eradication of poverty was a commitment made by the world's governments in the Copenhagen Summit, and that this commitment implies an ethical, social, political and economic imperative for humanity. It proposes substituting band-aid solutions with skills development. The UNPD has thus emphasized a strategy based on sustainable human development, social mobilization and empowerment of the poor. This approach contains a criticism of the theory that economic growth automatically leads to the elimination of poverty.

The UNDP not only sees the poor sectors as a potential work force, but argues that economic growth and human development go hand in hand. It suggests that

social development will not simply result from the free interaction of market forces and argues for official policies that correct the failings of markets. It does not release governments from their principle responsibility for eliminating poverty, but insists on expanding the poor's access to social services, professional training, technology, credit, land and natural resources, productive employment and decent incomes. It defends the rights of the poor to the exercise of their fundamental liberties, public safety, plurality and cultural diversity.

The UNDP takes gender inequalities into account, demands efficient resource utilization and has shown the need to find non-conventional methods of credit acquisition to bolster production. It proposes the protection and restoration of the environment. It offers help in developing the capacities of countries, especially those undergoing political and economic transitions. It is in favor of dialogue, harmonizing of interests and consensual solutions between government and civil society.

### **NGOs: Living the alternative**

Nongovernmental organizations share the conviction that it is necessary to end poverty and hunger, achieve a more equal distribution of income, and develop human resources. They are in agreement with the creation of new jobs, with the public and private spheres joining forces in a productive strategy, and with the provision of basic services (education, health care, potable water) to sectors with the least resources. NGOs hold that social programs should be decentralized and social spending more efficient, that the population be involved in implementing social policy, that social spending—which frequently ends up benefiting the government's political aims—be made more transparent and care be taken to avoid the clientelism that social spending can generate.

NGOs stress environmental sustainability, arguing that overcoming poverty cannot be based on sacrificing the development opportunities of future generations. They have defended the idea that sustainable resource administration means conserving and protecting those resources to avoid an increase in poverty. Their goal is for everyone to have a means of sustainable subsistence and for the degraded resources to be replenished. The NGOs' ideas in the battle against poverty have produced analyses and proposals for alternative economic models that emphasize both commerce and sustainable development in new consumption and life style forms.

### **The North's debt to the South**

NGOs criticize neoliberal ideology for seeing social relations as economic variables. They oppose the wealth-concentrating economic model because it makes expansion an end in itself. They believe that social and economic indicators should not only consider material growth and technological progress, but also individual, social and environmental well-being. They stress that the fundamental function of economic organization is to satisfy a community's basic

needs: food, housing, health, education and culture. They bring attention to the fact that a dominant alternative system should be based on autochthonous models and base communities that place value on people. They defend the central role of women.

One of their stated objectives is to achieve maximum happiness with minimum resources and no waste. In their alternative model, the state should cease being an instrument for big business and reorient itself to prioritize people's needs and support development strategies of interest to the communities. NGOs propose that the international debt be annulled; that the unjust system on which it is based be dismantled. They argue that the foreign debt has been transformed into an instrument of exploitation and political domination, used by creditor nations as a pressure mechanism to impose the liberalization of debtor nations' economies. They see the need to incorporate new legislation to avoid capital flight and tax evasion. They call on cultural, professional and religious institutions to discuss the ethical question of the debt and of the adjustment programs, citing that the North's ecological debt to the South should be compensated.

NGOs are fighting against the distortions caused by the prevailing trade policies. They accept multilateral mechanisms but only if they are open and even-handed, and ask that the unjust protectionist measures imposed by the North be dismantled. They oppose the adverse conditions brought about by structural adjustment programs and demand that the conduct of international corporations be democratically regulated. They want to see just policies that better the conditions of all social classes. They reclaim people's right of access to all scientific information. They are opposed to military spending and put forward the urgent need for a national and international redistribution of income, wealth and access to resources. They believe that increased quality of life has to be buttressed by the development of creative human relations and, from this point of view, propose a restructuring of the macroeconomic systems to include the social and ecological costs of all goods and services. They suggest that everyone has the right to a fair share of water, food, air, land and other resources—within the Earth's capacity to supply these necessities sustainably. They propose a closed-cycle production of goods, insisting on the need to reduce, reuse and recycle.

#### **All this requires a democracy that does not end with the vote**

NGOs are convinced that none of the above will be possible without a new democracy that includes full participation and a consolidation of citizenship everywhere in the world. Poverty is the principal factor of political instability and social inequalities are the result of unequal access to resources and the exclusion of peoples from policy decision-making. Poverty does not exist because there is a lack of resources but because there is a lack of political will to eradicate it. If a democratic world based on social justice and ecological balance is to be built, poverty must be dealt with through substantial changes in political structures.

Poverty can not be fought without popular mobilization, without a horizontal and democratic interchange of information, without joint discussion and decision-making. Decision-making needs to be democratized. The sectors of society most affected by poverty have to acquire power and strategies have to be drawn up from the base so that individuals and communities can make decisions directly about the problems that interest them. Decision-making processes should be dependent on a deliberative, dialogical and participatory democracy.

The democratic project does not end with the game rules of political institutions, the methods of forming a government. Democratization extends to the very condition of civil society; it has to do with a way of life, with the everyday world of relationships. Formal democracy has to combine with social democracy. Not even formal democracy could be consolidated within the generalized misery that affects democracy in Latin America—a misery that eats away the citizenship of the majorities at a time when we are supposed to be enjoying political emancipation. When the poor become indigents and the rich become magnates, liberty and democracy succumb. Democracy is in danger, as much in its conception as in its method, when the masses do not have access to health care or education and find themselves in a society paralyzed by an economy of penury. Democracy implies controls on state administration and conduct as well as a system that permits full participation by the majority—and in conditions that enable them to exercise this right. Democracy has to do with freeing individuals and groups from the stifling control of the elite who speak in the name of the people and the nation.

With such a paradigm of democracy, relations among nations founded on equality could also be cultivated. Multilateral institutions should also be configured in a democratic manner. This would require a powerful mobilization of civil society. NGOs, social movements and grassroots organizations could delineate common interests so that electoral democracy could use the vote to support options that favor the general interest. Aware of this danger, those in command of neoliberal politics have proceeded to bind governments to their policies, so that they prevail even in the event of a change in government. But the power of a popular convergence could force real political alternatives.

The electoral process is important, but is not enough to assure this change in orientation. Transparency and accountability are also needed in the exercise of power, and the citizenry needs to be included in all levels of decision-making. NGOs have proposed working to construct democratic institutions at subregional, regional and international levels, independent of the state and with the power to monitor, regulate—and sanction when necessary—the global economic agents and their transactions. They are working for transparent, democratic and ecologically responsible institutions at all levels. It is necessary to find forms of participatory decision-making to guarantee economic and gender equity and to

protect natural resources and the environment. Space has to be made for vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly, the handicapped, indigenous peoples, migrants and ethnic minorities. Emphasis should be placed on the empowerment of women in decision-making processes. Each group will have to continue defining its own needs, while at the same time recognizing the need for articulation and coordination of the general welfare. This struggle will face old and new forms of authoritarianism, bureaucracy, opportunism and favoritism. The control of a few will oppose the self-determination of the rest. Autonomy will have to play a crucial role in this, forming and linking together new federated structures. Townships will also be relevant to this dynamic; they will have to be modernized in a context of democratization to assume their particular responsibilities and to act as motivator and stimulator of community growth. This will lead to new functions, new areas and new tasks. Democratization will stimulate activities and mobilize to attract resources. Democracy will be solid if there is fortitude in the civil societies at the local level.

### **The goal is to democratize the market**

The proposals of the NGOs, like those issuing from center-left personalities, have emphasized the centrality of democracy in combating poverty. Umberto Rainieri has stressed that the decisive theme in Latin America is to link the economy more and more closely to democracy. For a year and a half a group of Latin American political activists, convened by Jorge Castañeda and Roberto Mangabeira, met to discuss alternatives. Their findings were published in part in *The Economist* (Jan. 17, 1998) in an article titled, "The Latin American Alternative," and appeared in their entirety in the Mexican journal *Nexos* (March 1998, No. 243) under the title, "Después de neoliberalismo: un nuevo camino." They came to the conclusion that both the prevailing market fundamentalism and its predecessor, protectionist/populist "developmentism," have become inoperable. They call for neoliberal policies to be overridden, noting that neoliberalism has extracted the market from its function as an instrument and elevated it to the status of religion. They assert that neoliberalism, as the extreme theoretical outcome of the market economy, has failed to generate growth and development and has particularly failed to meet the challenge of delivering a more just distribution of income and wealth. On the contrary, it has profoundly increased the impoverishment of vast sectors of the population.

They declared that they wanted more than just to humanize neoliberalism; alternative approaches need be adopted that consist precisely of democratizing the market economy. They made clear that they were not calling for a return to either populist nationalism or the import substitution strategy, which ended up protecting the inefficacy of local oligarchies. They also rejected the return to inflationary public financing. They endorsed neither the state we have nor the one we had, rather a strong, democratized state. They reiterated the need to

democratize the market economy and to forge a democracy able to deal with the issues of inequality. They agreed that the market should be the principal assignor of resources and that, as a counterweight, conditions should be created in which the needs of the poorest could be translated into solvent demands that the state itself could process. They emphasized that they were not proposing a third way—because there is no longer a second way—but rather demanding a democratizing alternative to the way falsely proclaimed as the only one.

In addition to doing an assessment that coincides in many points with the NGOs, they grouped their proposals in separate chapters referring to an economically strong democratic state, a confrontation with inequality that offers real opportunities for all, and the search for sustainable and enriched stability. To avoid confusion, they rejected partial democracy: respect for popular suffrage is not enough. The influence of money on politics must be diminished; the media will have to be truly opened to society; the binomial will have to be a fortified civil society with a transparent government. They also raised the fundamental issue that Latin American citizens have to be able to know their rights and defend them, which means multiplying the practical instruments.

The center-left politicians who spoke through this alternative document associate proposals for production with those for redistribution: they unite a deeper understanding of democracy with overcoming socioeconomic dualism; they support the coexistence of a strong, active and refinanced state with a decentralized market, made up of small and medium businesses. They want to lay the groundwork for a high-intensity popular policy and radically democratize the market economy. They are aware that this process will require gradual change, but affirm that it should be cumulative in the changes in economic, political, and social institutions. They repeat that they are not seeking to humanize the inevitable, but rather to construct what they call a possible and necessary alternative to a fate the Latin American people don't deserve.

### **Redistribution: The problem is political**

There are theses that emphasize that poverty and democracy are incompatible, that achieving democracy is very unlikely in poor countries and that democracy is most stable in countries that have reduced economic imbalance. Although these theories state that poverty is not inevitable, they would put the poor in a position of being unable to accede to democratization. Surveys reveal that the poorest and least educated sectors are the easiest prey for authoritarian governments. Democracy will never come as a gift from the elite; pressure from below is indispensable. Among the impoverished, active and organized minorities can already be found proposing alternatives to the poverty-generating models. Local, national and international coalitions are forming to exchange experiences, information and resources, and to develop joint strategies, campaigns and policies to confront the issues of poverty. They have proposed significant

changes in the current model of development and in international relations, beginning with local political structures, improving standards of living and transferring power to the communities. Against submission, they have erected the right to choose.

Democratization must grow from the citizenry and implies a constant conquest of independent space, opening debate to all. The combination of capitalism and liberal democracy offers few means of generating social solidarity. The dynamics of moving to and consolidating democracy require an organized civil society and a political arena where self-organized groups, movements and individuals with relative autonomy from the state can try to pool values and build solidarity. The struggle against poverty can only be waged via radical democracy, through which the citizenry can build their own participatory space and have an impact on public policy and in the debates related to all areas of social life. Only through democratic practices is it possible to achieve a redistribution of wealth. Redistribution is not just an economic problem, it is also a political problem. Radical democracy produces emancipated ways of life agreed to by the citizenry. The communicative power of the people can approximate the bureaucratic power of functionaries.

### **The immense power of critical reason**

The future of democracy lies in democratizing the international system. As people have been dispossessed in political decision-making processes, so their political competence has atrophied and their sense of civic duty has been degraded. As politics continue to be fragmented into various dominions together with the possibility of conceiving them together, so the possibility of solidarity and participatory politics is disappearing. The alternative must grow from a community of active citizens who can confront these obstacles. Following the example of Antigone, they must be erected against the reasons of state and unleash a process of including the excluded. Democracy does not eradicate conflicts, but it opens them up and makes them negotiable. With conflicts now internationalized, mechanisms for democracy must be sought on a planetary scale. A major contribution to this goal is found in today's resistance to the suffering engendered by neoliberalism. One indispensable task is to deconstruct neoliberal mythologies and delegitimize the prevailing rhetoric of its proponents.

### **All is not hopeless**

Not everything proposed here is mere aspiration. There have already been some successes. Communities already exist in which popular organizations have succeeded in creating local alternative structures, acquiring control and administration of some socioeconomic processes. Social movements and local communities have created committees for the evaluation of concrete projects and solutions.

Globalization has not just subjected the masses to the designs of the few huge financial groups. It has also done much to facilitate the international networking of NGOs and the global organization of social movements. The communication of successes and failures, of problems and struggles has generated globalized solidarity. A mobilized civil society, while not gaining great power, has created spaces that put the existing great power in check through diffuse powers present in the many trenches of society. Institutional diversity has made it possible to test out a great number of social, political and cultural programs.

We have seen that there are alternatives but today, as always, any change that is undertaken has many enemies. First, those who thrived in the former situation and want to see it perpetuated. Change does not come easy and sometimes it seems that the new world disorder will continue under the command of neoliberalism. But possible change is not pure illusion. Although the majority is passive, there does exist an oppositional minority. As long as a critical mass of thinking citizens exists, capable not only of altruistic actions but also of the exercise of critical reason, change will be possible. The liberal democratic model alone is not well prepared to deal with the demands of thinking people in a universalizing world. The classic formulas for integrating society, the state and the nation have entered into crisis.

### **The Struggle of the Citizenry**

We live in a globalized society. The signs and the technology are seen everywhere. Another spatial logic is being created, one characteristic of the new processes of capital accumulation, the new organization of production, integration of the markets, mass communication and the exercise of planetary power. The space in which all of these currents are flowing is a globally integrated one.

In this context, despite the difficulty, global indicators already point to the construction of a new citizenry. We must not forget that the first claims of citizenship came on the scene when equal rights were demanded in the face of *de facto* inequality. And equal rights did not stop with the inequality of individuals or domination of one class over the other. Citizenship, which at first was defined as belonging to a nation, as the source of individual rights and obligations, as collective membership in a political community, has been expanding. Today, we can perceive a global civic ethic—though not one without contradictions.

An important example of the international pressure that has been misrepresented at the national and local level is related to the International Labor Organization's Convention 169. Mexico signed the agreement, and the Mexican Senate ratified it. In the context of indigenous peoples' struggle for autonomy, the agreement served as the basis for the San Andrés Agreement

between the Mexican government and the Zapatista National Liberation Movement (EZLN) in 1996. Nevertheless, the government has not respected that agreement and thus has not fulfilled its international commitment. For their part, the indigenous communities have created autonomous municipalities in the zone controlled by the Zapatistas. While the government has used military and other force to try to dismantle them, the communities have held firm. This example has not been circumscribed to the region of Zapatista influence, which has obliged a reflection on the consequences of social participation. This whole struggle has been an learning experience.

One of Mexico's specialists on indigenous affairs, Luis Villoro, has stressed that the autonomous municipalities forming in Chiapas and other regions during 1997 and 1998 are attempts to return power to real men and women in their native localities so they can freely decide their way of life and their social organization. The government has declared these communities illegal. Villoro notes that, according to state legislation, they are, because the function of that legal order has been to replace the direct power of the people with a group that pretends to speak in their name, but without consulting them. He adds, however, that they are not illegal if inspected from the constitutional point of view. If the autonomous municipalities are the creation of the majority of a community, they express a form of real democracy that returns power to the place where men and women act. Villoro has drawn attention to the fact that the repression enacted against the autonomous municipalities amounts to the destruction of a privileged form of democracy.

### **The emergence of world citizenship**

The dynamics of a cultural democracy that appeals to moral philosophy have given rise to a struggle to diminish economic and social inequality insofar as possible. An ethics of justice principle currently exists that can be shared by peoples of different cultures; it promotes a logic of reciprocity. Equality is not just a principle; it is an accomplishment. Obviously, with neoliberalism, we have been living a regressive period in which globalization has been imposed and an attempt has been made to deprive the base of its already limited ability to analyze local and global problems.

Major paradoxes become evident, like the one we see when international power centers praise globalization and open borders to the interests of capital—at the same time discarding the idea of humanity. A techno-industrial-bureaucratic civilization is now imposing its logic. Nonetheless, the conviction has grown in nucleuses of the base that it is indispensable for us to redefine communal life; that we must learn how to live together in a new way, with a new working and living organization. This conviction has been called the elaboration of a politics of civilization—and there is already talk of the existence of a world citizenship.

### **Little by little consciousness grows**

Democracy is the society of citizens. Citizenship does not exist if there is no legal equality, if there is social exclusion. The concept of citizenship has become central. It is a concept that has developed with different meanings through political practice. Today we can discern a new civil society in formation. The era of globalization is also that of a boom in civic identity. This citizenry creates a synthesis between belonging and justice. On one hand, we see the urgent need to control the absolute power of the markets and financial capital, to make the dealings of market economy public and transparent, to redefine the goals and priorities of technology. On the other, we see the equally urgent need to generate solidarity from the base and this is already perceived as being necessarily global. A new civil society already exists that opposes the empire of the globalized economy. It holds up the principle of "liberty and justice" against the pure economic rationalism. It is a more defensive society, and more ethical than political.

Reactive responses are conducted in the name of diversity and solidarity. They condemn crimes against human dignity. They protect the rights of liberty and diversity. They defend the right to difference, to be recognized as different and equal at the same time. They urge the recognition of the diversity of efforts to wed identity with participation. New models are being created that put solidarity and social citizenship into practice in daily life. Tiny molecules are interconnecting, and creating a global moral consciousness. Human society is becoming conscious of its existence as a world community. More people see the necessity of policies at a world level to establish regulatory systems that would guarantee just balances and exchange. They call for democratic control of the new technologies. Global social demands are rising against exclusionary, poverty-producing globalization. There is a growing awareness of the fact that the world as it is, with all its injustices, is intolerable, and that we must seek radical remedies. There is an internationalization of popular culture and the migrants are the promoters of this mobilization.

### **There is no solution without pluralism**

There are also other tendencies that run in opposition to globalization. There has been a resurgence of nationalism, regionalism and racism. But not all of these are flows; some tendencies are static, rigid, closed. Territorial, regional and ethnic religious, gender and individual identities are being reaffirmed. There are contradictory processes between techno-economic globalization and the growing specificity of identity. We must learn to live together, defending equality and difference at the same time. Given the world's universal and plural nature and because world governability is desirable, ethical principles have to be recognized, rules and institutions must be established, and cultural creation must be respected. We should not lose sight of the fact that human rights have been an historical construct, which have expanded over time through social struggle. Without the recognition and protection of human rights, there is neither democracy nor peace, since the minimum conditions necessary for peaceful

solutions at the regional and world level are being stripped away.

There is no democratic progress without the recognition of otherness. Citizenship is structurally linked to recognition of the other. It is the crystallization of a series of demands relating to surmounting all forms of discrimination. It implies being taken into account in public decisions. The viewpoint of civil society includes all citizens, just as it appeals to common norms. For this reason the members of modern societies try to cooperate with each other in an equitable and non-violent way. And they assure equal liberties to all citizens without considering their cultural origins, religious convictions or life projects.

It is possible to build consensus within pluralism. In spite of diverse opinions, political agreements are possible. But the traditional principles of human rights must be completed with the rights of minorities. In a multicultural state—as the majority of states are at the end of the 20th century—it is necessary to safeguard both universal rights, assigned to individuals independent of their group identity, and differentiated rights for ethnic minorities. Naturally, the rights of minorities are limited by the principles of individual liberty, democracy and social justice. The rights of self-government constitute a delegation of power to minorities through some kind of federalism. Individual and collective rights are not counterposed. There is a "differentiated" citizenry. Globalization has made the myth of state cultural homogeneity unreal. Justice among groups requires that members of the different groups be conceded specific rights that grow out of their group differences. Accommodation to difference is the essence of true equality. The resources and policies essential for the survival of minority cultures can be undervalued, which creates an inequality that, if not corrected, becomes a great injustice. Differentiated rights in function of the group can help correct these disadvantages. External protections assure that members of a minority have the same opportunities as the members of the majority to live and work within their own culture.

Cultural diversity should not be looked on with disdain. The right to community has to be combined with the rights of the individuals within it. In societies that recognize differentiated rights proper to a group, the members of such groups are incorporated into the political community not only as individuals but also through their group. These differentiated forms of citizenship should be admissible. Citizenship is somewhat more differentiated and less homogeneous than classic theory supposed. The rights of traditionally disenfranchised groups to representation are claims in favor of inclusion.

### **Minority rights: The future for us all**

Citizenship does not just consist of a legal status. It is also an identity, an expression of belonging to a political community. It must include poliethnic rights and rights of representation to accommodate ethnic and other groups

disenfranchised within the national community. To assume that it is only necessary to treat their members as individuals is to paper over ethnic injustice. We should guard against the possibility that one group dominate another, just as we should avoid oppression of members within groups. Equality should exist among and within groups. Minority rights are fundamental for the world's future. Citizenship is not a list of rights and responsibilities delineated in universalist terms. Universality and citizenship have to be integrated recognizing specific features and linkages. Citizenship could be considered as entitlement to access to a certain level of well-being based on civil, social and political rights. This access has always been achieved through political struggle leading to the securing and amplifying of rights. The challenge is enormous. We must reorganize individual and collective life, and link autonomy with interdependence. We have to live together with tolerance.

### **The anti-democratic empire**

Today they want us to believe that globalization is a natural and inevitable phenomenon to which we must surrender for lack of any other option. For some time now, capitalism has had a globalizing dynamic. In its latest stage, stimulated by the third industrial revolution, the rhythm of this dynamic has accelerated rapidly. Current globalization discourse belongs to the field of ideology, not science. An alternative to this impoverishing globalization requires, more than anything, a critical attitude that can unmask current neoliberal capitalist propaganda. Next, the reorientation of investment and the design of public policies must be examined; emphasis must be put on productive activity and limits imposed on speculative plundering.

Neoliberalism has proclaimed, on the one hand, an economy freed from state invention, while on the other hand, the long arms of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have intervened to subdue those who dare doubt or contradict its directives. Neoliberalism has fought against social struggle and its gains. Exploitation of workers is on the rise, the system generates vast numbers of unemployed, real income is dropping and benefits to capital are rising. This installs misery. There is no end to the plundering of the resources of poor nations. The financial elite of both the North and the South are the beneficiaries. The great financial bourgeoisie has usurped the decision-making power that once belonged to nations. A *de facto* anti-democracy reigns.

Paradoxically, the World Bank acts as if it is the protagonist in the fight against poverty when, in reality, it is a key cause of increasing global poverty. 1996 was proclaimed the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty and a ten-year period was set to fulfill this goal. Undaunted, the trans- nationals continue to impose their laws. Globalization implies that every day the poor become poorer thanks to the tactics of speculators and the restructuring measures.

### **The elected or the electorate?**

Governmental promises to deal with extreme poverty—emanating from political calculation rather than humanitarian convictions of justice—amount to no more than palliative measures and propaganda. So-called sustainable development, as put in practice by those in power, has only generated more concentration of wealth and political power. Evaluations of their programs to combat poverty, carried out by the programs' designers themselves, have reported very poor results. Neoliberalism has seen many successes in its drive to dismantle the welfare state, while it is pushing for the construction of a "nursemaid" protectionist and subsidizing state for the rich. Wealthy debtors have found ways to translate debt into funds to pay off creditors. These practices require organized opposition that can control finance capital. And this goes far beyond the ballot box. Proponents of alternative policy options find their hands tied in the face of the real decisions, which are no longer being made at the parliamentary or congressional level. All this serves to undermine democracy's legitimacy. The majorities think democracy is not functioning well, and the electorate is getting fed up. More and more are convinced that elections only serve to bolster the interests of the elected, not to defend the interests of the electorate. Electoral game-rules manipulation and electoral-process intervention are on the rise. A state that is powerless to resolve the problems of the majority generates indifference in the electorate. The popular classes feel defeated.

### **Still weak, still the minority, but...**

All is not lost, however. Since we have seen that the causes of poverty lie in the economic system, the search for alternatives must occur through political organization. Neoliberalism has rubbed against the social grain. The structuring of aware social organizations in a way that allows them to protect themselves and exert pressure on the economic system is still very weak. But this does not mean that ways cannot be found to resist first, and then begin to take up the challenge, once the correlation of forces begins to shift. Democratization as a goal implies controls on industry, trade and banking—a control exercised from the base. This is extremely difficult, but not impossible.

Until now, the financial groups have had a strong sense of class and no organized resistance has blocked them, because they have led us to believe that stopping them is impossible. A nucleus of resistance, however, has begun to question this dogma. The responses to this power can become interlaced through the diverse social movements. Today, they are a minority, but a minority rooted in everyday life. They can begin by opposing in practice the supposed fatality of the economic laws and support humanization of the social world. They can take advantage of globalization to weave an international resistance to neoliberalism. The only way to achieve this will be through the dynamics of democratization from the base, so it can begin to build a new citizenry.

## The right to happiness

The new citizenry is starting to place renewed value on the principle of the common good. It thus defends everyone's right to a just access to food, housing, energy, education, health care, transportation, information and democracy. The new citizens are demanding a world society more just in the social aspects, more effective in the economic aspects, more democratic in the political aspects, and more attentive to caring for the environment. They seek a sustainable economy that is an alternative to the one that is masking the present powers, one that does not destroy human and natural resources. Tendencies are arising in opposition to ennui, selfishness and irresponsibility. New forms of participation are being sought and alternative networks are being built. There is an attempt to combine participation and decision-making. The search is for a world regulated by men and women, not by the market. The answer to economic globalization is ethical globalization. The demand persists to guarantee the common minimums and the worldwide task of ending poverty. Development logic needs to be combined with people's logic. A shared civil ethos is being formulated, which proclaims the need to recognize the value of human life. Goals are being proposed that link the economy with other objectives: the rights to work, liberty, equality and, above all, happiness. Each day, the creation of an alternative, humanist project becomes more urgent. This project requires that the economy and the state function according to the needs of humanity, and not the reverse. It requires a policy that places people back in the center, that regenerates a citizenry that feels the Earth as our common motherland. For all of this, it is necessary to invent the possible, even though, today, it may seem improbable.

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## The Hurricanes of a Model in Crisis

*Mexico's transition to democracy seems more distant than ever, with drug problems, financial scandals, and more recently the disruption of an early debate over presidential succession. Then, as the year was coming to an end, volcanic eruptions and hurricanes struck Mexico. More than a few people see these natural disasters as emblems of what is happening in society. Before hitting Mexico, Hurricane Mitch spent most of its fury on Central America, especially Honduras and Nicaragua. The devastation is so extensive that Central America's Presidents have urged that there be a kind of Marshall Plan for the region.*

Jorge Alonso

### **Zedillo's solicitousness, people's solidarity**

Governments around the world sent aid to the disaster victims in Central America. Mexico's President Ernesto Zedillo seemed especially solicitous in encouraging aid from several governments as well as from the Mexican people. But he was motivated more by practical than humanitarian concerns: Zedillo hoped to forestall a flood of thousands of impoverished and newly homeless Central Americans into Mexico, bringing with them the risk of spreading diseases contracted through the contaminated waters.

One anecdote reveals the limits of how "close to the people" Zedillo really gets. During one of his recent tours, he was approached by an indigenous woman carrying a small napkin on which she had embroidered an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. When she tried to sell it to him, the President quickly sidestepped her, saying aloofly and half in English, "*no traigo cash*"—"I don't have any money on me." Ignoring such posturing and stinginess on the part of some politicians, people around the world have responded to Central America's tragedy with true solidarity, proving that neoliberalism's inhuman blows have not hardened their hearts.

### **The FOBAPROA debate is still going on**

Nature has been cruel, but the worst disasters afflicting the majority of Mexicans today can be blamed on the government's economic policies. The FOBAPROA case, the Chiapas crisis and the 1999 budget that the government presented to Congress have already had and will continue to have devastating effects.

Controversy is still swirling around the problem of FOBAPROA, the Bank Fund to Protect Savings, which was used not only to bail out big investors after the bubble of their speculative investments burst but also to cover up illegal campaign contributions to the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). In the third quarter of 1998, the financial system received a subsidy of over 380 million pesos (around US\$47 million) from the federal government via FOBAPROA. The PRI and the opposition National Action Party (PAN) hammered out an agreement around PAN's proposed technical procedures to resolve the FOBAPROA case. The PAN proposal, which is to create an institute to protect bank deposits, would cost taxpayers the equivalent of about \$28 million (41.7% of FOBAPROA's debt), to be paid over an as yet undefined period of time.

The PAN agreed to ensure the plan's approval in the Mexican House of Representatives on the condition that Guillermo Ortiz, the current head

of the Bank of Mexico, not be on the new institution's governing board. But Zedillo was not ready to lop off his friend's head. Instead, the PRI has sought a transitional agreement: Ortiz will not be involved in the new institution during the audit—a process that in any case is being carried out without all the necessary information.

For its part, the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) has said that, although Ortiz is responsible, his head is not worth so many millions. The PRD bench described the PAN proposal as an attempt to legalize robbery, since it would make a state institution responsible for FOBAPROA's illegal debt. It accused the PAN of taking contradictory positions and attempting to deceive the public. While the PAN insists that nothing in its 552 billion peso (\$67 billion) package will become public debt, its proposal seeks to regulate a way to transfer this debt to the new institution. In essence, its proposal is simply that the government agree to use taxpayers' money to pay for everything that cannot be recovered from FOBAPROA's overdue loan portfolio.

### **The corrupt get away, everyone else pays**

In response to this proposal, questions are increasingly being raised about why everyone should have to pay for the losses incurred by a small group of inept, crooked people. While PRI representatives respond with cynicism, PAN representatives are trying to confuse people by presenting themselves as "responsible" politicians who want to keep the financial system from collapsing, when their real objective is to get the government out of its bind.

In mid-November, Zedillo raised the price of fuel to 45% above what it costs across the border, in the United States. With this hike, and the additional revenue from taxes imposed on those higher fuel prices, the government hopes to bring in some 13.3 billion pesos with which to make the first payment on FOBAPROA's promissory notes, due in one year's time. The 1999 budget presented to Congress includes the interest that has to be paid on FOBAPROA's debt, thus treating these liabilities as though they were already public debt. It also includes steep price hikes in goods, telephone and other public services and taxes—another turn of the screw against the poor.

According to official figures, ten million people joined the ranks of the poor during the first two years of the Zedillo government. The salaries of those privileged enough to still have jobs are 60% lower in terms of buying power than they were 38 years ago. And the budget debate had not yet even begun when the prices of basic goods rose even more as a result of the higher fuel prices. In December 1998 a worker needs to put

in 34 hours of work to purchase the same products in the basic food basket that could be bought in 1987 with only 8 hours of work.

### **The model is breaking down**

Zedillo appears confident that his budget proposal will pass, and proclaimed that he will accept the political responsibility for its design. A group of PRI legislators expressed their discomfort over the political cost involved in approving it, but were promptly disciplined. The PAN announced that it would not agree to the proposed tax hike, which even private enterprise opposes, while the PRD called for a national strike against the fiscal package.

The PRD argued that poverty and misery already afflict 60 million Mexicans, while the wealth of the nation doesn't reach even 2% of the population. It also described the proposal to allot 25 billion pesos to cover FOBAPROA's interest payments as extremely unjust.

The government is bent on pushing the tax hikes through despite this opposition from all quarters. The Secretary of Government dismissed the possibility that the higher taxes and the new price increases would lead to social upheaval. Meanwhile critics have described the 1999 budget proposal and the obstinate government attitude as clear evidence of the breakdown of a model of government that refuses to recognize its limits and inequities.

The PRI representatives got so nervous that the secretary of the treasury stepped in to assure them that they have nothing to fear. To try to calm them down, he pointed out that the FOBAPROA scandal had no serious repercussions on the 1998 local elections. Grouping together the results of all 15 local elections held this year, the PRI got 47.3% of the vote, the PAN 28.9% and the PRD 17%. What happened was that the PRI recovered municipal votes in the large state capitals while the PAN was the big loser. Based on this, the PRI is making optimistic predictions for the next presidential elections. Other analysts, however, have begun to suggest more nuanced readings, noting that the state party in fact lost votes in absolute terms. They also argue that if FOBAPROA has not yet cost them votes among the electorate it is simply because people's pockets have not yet been hit by the case. The price hikes occurred after the elections. Furthermore, the electorate behaves differently in local and federal elections.

### **A drugged economy**

On another front, the Federal Electoral Institute's General Council finally decided to investigate PRD charges regarding the PRI's 1994 presidential

campaign financing. It has been proven that trusteeships with financial engineering mechanisms to benefit the PRI were set up through the Banco Unión. This bank, owned by Cabal Peniche, a big PRI contributor who fled justice when accused of tax evasion, provided loans to fictitious companies as a cover for channeling the money to the PRI, and of course these defaulted "loans" later found their way into FOBAPROA. Ernesto Zedillo's election was tainted by such illegal maneuvers.

The PRD offered proof that Peniche had contributed US\$30 million to PRI coffers, in addition to a 50 million-peso remittance. This was a scandalous violation of legislation on campaign spending limits, personal contributions to political parties and reports on party spending. The fraudulent origin of these funds is a whole other factor in the scandal.

The Federal Electoral Institute's decision to investigate the PRD's denunciations led the PRI to withdraw its representative from this autonomous institute and launch a campaign to lynch the electoral council members. The fact that the state party has resisted the investigation, to say nothing of resorting to its old tactic of buying votes in the local elections held over the course of 1998, illustrates that Mexico's political panorama is still a spectacle of involution. The notion of a free vote is again under attack in what is a perverse phenomenon: the state party buys votes from the very people it has impoverished with its economic policies, so that with the support of these votes it can intensify these same impoverishing economic policies. It is no exaggeration to say that the goal of a transition to democracy is still very distant.

Even the annual report of the Geopolitical Drug Observatory, published in France, charged that the Mexican economy has been "drugged" and that what was once described as the state party's "perfect dictatorship" is being held captive by the disorder and violence of an early debate over presidential succession.

### **Chiapas: misery and mistakes**

One of the Zedillo government's biggest debts has to do with its failure to follow through on agreements regarding indigenous rights and culture that it signed with the Zapatistas. Zedillo has simply refused to comply with the agreements. A group of PRI senators in the "Galileo group" used a recent study of Chiapas to show that social deterioration not only persists in this state, but has gotten worse in indigenous regions. The figures are shocking: 90% of Chiapas' population lives in poverty, 75% of them in extreme poverty. They live alongside a politically reactionary oligarchy that is unable to modernize the state and is ready to defend its

privileges at any cost. The study notes that the government's development projects may well form part of a war strategy.

The group of senators called on the government to rise above its stubborn refusal to recognize its errors and seek a new way to solve the Chiapas conflict. The disasters caused by the hurricanes that struck Chiapas this year revealed many of these errors. The government has boasted of making huge investments in the area, but when the effects of the flooding were analyzed, it was impossible to see where this investment had gone.

### **Difficult peace talks**

At the end of November, during celebrations to mark the 88th anniversary of the Mexican Revolution, the new generation of Zapatistas met with representatives of civil society organizations to search for peace. At the same time, the rulers were busy defending their anti-popular measures—ones worse than those that had sparked the revolution in the first place.

The peace talks between the EZLN and the government had broken down over the government's refusal to fulfill the San Andrés agreement signed in early 1996. Instead, Zedillo's government decided to wage war against the indigenous communities that had supported the Zapatistas. The Acteal massacre in December 1997 was part of this strategy. Despite national and international demands that the government disarm the paramilitary bands made up of PRI members that have caused the displacement of so many indigenous people in Chiapas, the government has harassed groups of international observers, persecuted indigenous people demanding autonomy and supported the paramilitary bands. Its pressure led to the resignation of CONAI, the commission to intermediate in the peace talks headed by Bishop Samuel Ruiz.

Finally, the Commission for Harmony and Pacification (COCOPA), the legislative commission collaborating in the dialogue, managed to contact the Zapatista leadership, which set up a meeting in San Cristóbal on November 20-22, during its talks with civil society organizations. Several days before this meeting, Subcomandante Marcos gave an interview to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the EZLN's founding. Marcos stressed that the Zapatistas have learned to listen to civil society groups and recognized that they have made some mistakes, including hasty judgments of some social and political actors. The Zapatistas see two issues as fundamental: resolving the indigenous question and making the transition to democracy. Marcos has concluded that the government is determined to maintain its economic model without losing any sleep

over the political costs of its decision.

### **Hurricanes and poverty**

Zedillo could not care less about the transition to democracy. In contrast, a group of actors that are often portrayed as in the minority—civil organizations—are demonstrating that they can build another agenda for the transition, based on the problems of the poor. The dialogue between the Zapatistas and these groups does not aim to create a program of government, but rather a program for the nation. This year the government tried to wear down the Zapatistas' discourse, so they responded with silence for a long time. This made the government even angrier and it wore itself down with a monologue of intolerant power.

The Zapatistas spoke again when the time was right. They have sought to send a message not only to people's heads but also to their hearts. Commenting on the floods caused by several hurricanes in Chiapas this year, they noted that the rains swept away not only roads, but also the government's pretense that its investments in Chiapas have resolved all the social problems there. Once the stage set fell, the colossal poverty and misery of people who supposedly no longer lived like that became patently clear. In response to the PRD's referendum on FONAPROA, the Zapatistas suggested that it is also important to ask what people who disagree with the government should do.

### **In civil society's hands**

With respect to talks with the government, the EZLN has been perfectly clear: the talks cannot resume until the government unequivocally chooses to resolve the conflict through peaceful means, which implies fulfilling agreements and abandoning all hopes for a military solution. To the government's tiresome accusation that the EZLN is responsible for holding up the talks in order to influence the presidential elections in the year 2000, the Zapatistas have responded that it is not an issue of a particular candidate being elected, but of particular conditions being met. Although the PRI may win the elections using its traditional methods, it will then face a problem of legitimacy, which the PRI is in short supply of, together with credibility. The Zapatistas believe that democratic spaces will be opened up not by the political class but by civil society. They also know that Zedillo's economic model will further deteriorate political relations. In this context, the Zapatistas have renewed their commitment to civil society to explore all possible means to peacefully resolve the conflict.

### **Success and a mission**

The EZLN's meeting with the legislative commission COCOPA was not an

amiable one. COCOPA felt that the EZLN was treating it as a counterpart rather than as an organization collaborating in the talks. But the rough edges were finally smoothed over and an agreement was reached to meet again. The government attempted to send proposals through COCOPA but the EZLN refused to receive the letters, pointing out that COCOPA is not a mediator. The government tried to publicize this as evidence that the EZLN doesn't want to talk. It also claimed that the civil society groups participating in the talks are not representative—as though the government should be able to define who makes up civil society! The meeting between the civil groups and the EZLN, however, was a success. Representatives from 28 of the country's 32 federations and some 400 different organizations participated, along with observers from 18 countries. The meetings were open and inclusive. Over 3,000 people, most of them young, discussed forms for a national referendum on indigenous rights.

The indigenous people's representatives explained how they not only shared the pain that dampened their land and sky throughout this period of cyclones and hurricanes, but discussed with each other how to create another, better world, one that would give room, respect, an ear and a voice "to the others we all are." Civil society was mobilized for this meeting, and another mobilization is being prepared for the referendum: the EZLN will send a man and a woman to each of the country's municipalities, making up a contingent of nearly 5,000 indigenous Zapatistas on a political mission. After this, a demonstration will be organized to give out the results of the national referendum with civil society, and another to take these results to Congress.

### **Zedillo finds the Zapatistas intolerable**

The Zapatistas see all these actions as part of the people's struggle for democracy and justice. They analyzed how the government has made a business out of its war against indigenous people. They demonstrated how, each time a sign appears that raises the hopes for peace, the government—or the army, which has 60,000 soldiers in Chiapas—creates provocations to stifle the search for that peace and tries instead to annihilate the EZLN. Indigenous people are harassed on a daily basis. They have to put up with a campaign of lies and pretences against them. Attempts are periodically made to buy their dignity and their shame. The Zapatistas have been attacked in a war of extermination, but have resisted by organizing collective work to solve their food, health, education and housing problems. The communities' few resources are used not to buy arms, but to organize projects to improve their material conditions, and not so they can live better, but so they can go on resisting and fighting until the rights of all indigenous people in Mexico

are recognized.

The indigenous Zapatistas showed that Zedillo's government can't tolerate the fact that a handful of indigenous people have dared defy its empire of lies and corruption. They denounced the fact that Zedillo's campaign propaganda promised Mexican families well-being, but his government has actually offered "austerity," another name for poverty. Neoliberal policies promised bonanza and brought catastrophes. Unemployment has risen, prices are higher than salaries, small and medium-sized businesses are going bankrupt. Plans are made only to save the rich, as in the FOBAPROA case. The Zapatistas warned that the government might change the name of this plan but not its objective, and that all Mexicans were being obliged to pay for FOBAPROA in order to bail out the rich.

The Zapatistas already negotiated with the government, to the point of reaching an agreement in 1996, and they want to see it fulfilled. The government did not comply with it yet now wants to see the Zapatistas come back to the negotiating table with no guarantees. The Zapatistas are insisting on the path of genuine dialogue, but say that to return to it, the government has to honor its agreements, get the army out of the communities and back into their barracks, disarm the paramilitary bands and free the political prisoners. The government pretends it wants dialogue but then vents its cruelty in a war against indigenous people that it resents for not being submissive. When the war began in 1994, civil society stepped in and obliged the parties to seek the path of peace through dialogue. The Zapatistas want a peace that resolves the very social problems that led them to take up arms, a peace with justice, democracy and dignity. Now, four years later, civil society is a key force in the search for this peace. Analysts have shown how dialogue has a prominent place in the government's rhetoric, but not in its concrete actions. The government's willingness to talk has been subordinated to its war strategy. By dialogue it understands surrender, not negotiation. But the EZLN's dialogue with civil society has helped stave off the war.

### **The EZLN's power to mobilize**

The EZLN's meeting with civil society demonstrated once again its power to mobilize people, and pleased the Zapatistas greatly. They praised the fact that civil society, this force that so exasperates governments and political analysts, refused to stay hunkered down. They proved that people are already more critical and active. They insisted that the solution will not come from above, but will be built from below and with those from below. New social and civic movements, with a variety of different banners, have begun to push for another way of doing politics,

to struggle not just for representative democracy, but for direct democracy. For these movements, the problem is not who will be the next President, but how to end the authoritarian presidency and the state-party system. With these goals, they know they are different and are fighting for the right to join together with others without giving up what makes them different.

In their conclusions to the meeting, the participants called on the legislative commission COCOPA to comply with its institutional democratic mandate and concentrate on pushing through and defending its own bill on indigenous rights and culture, which is an acceptable interpretation of the San Andrés accords. They denounced the unconstitutional use of the armed forces in this war. In response to the militarization policy, the civil society represented there proposed following other paths in the search for peace: getting the army out of the communities, freeing political prisoners, providing displaced people with the conditions necessary to return to their homes, presenting those who have been "disappeared," establishing a tribunal against impunity, putting peaceful civic resistance into practice, and redirecting military spending towards programs that create jobs, self-supporting development and social welfare. They demanded that a new mediator between the EZLN and the government be established immediately, one that is pluralistic and morally principled, with a national and international presence. And they praised the EZLN's "sensitivity" in contrast with the increasingly aberrant deafness of those in power in response to the nation's demands and feelings.

### **Mexico's gruff volcano**

The poorest of Mexico's people have taken a pounding this year, both from nature and from harsh neoliberal policies. Every day there is increasing evidence of something an old politician warned about a long time ago: Mexico's gruff volcano is being provoked. Fortunately, faced with the stupidity of their rulers, groups of civil society have been emerging that are imaginatively looking for a peaceful social change that brings democracy, justice and dignity, and that will calm the volcano's rumblings.

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**Mexico**  
**The Pope, Poverty and Chiapas**

*The government wanted to show the Pope a clean image by hiding what is really happening in Chiapas. It wasn't able to do so and neither could it hide the poverty that has affected 15 million more Mexicans during this administration. In the end, neoliberalism was condemned and the right of the indigenous peoples vindicated and defended.*

### **Jorge Alonso**

The main motive of Pope John Paul II's trip to Mexico in January 1999 was to present the conclusions of the Synod of the Americas, held in Rome at the end of 1997. The document is the fruit of collective reflection, legitimated by Rome. The first document produced by the Catholic Church's teachers in the Americas, it strongly criticizes corruption, drug trafficking and neoliberalism, and makes significant contributions to discussions of democracy, human rights and the dignity of indigenous peoples.

When presenting the document in the Basilica of Guadalupe, the Pope emphasized its "Guadalupan spirit." His visit thus gave new backing to the Virgin of Guadalupe, a popular symbol of the Virgin Mary. The Pope's trip, his 85th, also had a commemorative side, since it coincided with the date of his first trip as Pope, which he made to Mexico in 1979.

The most positive aspect of the Pope's visit was his insistent condemnation of neoliberal economic policies, which impoverish the majority, and his sensitivity towards the issue of indigenous rights. The dark side was the elitist organization of the visit, which was scandalously commercialized.

### **Like the biblical Simon Magus**

Mexican and transnational companies sponsored the events during the Pope's visit at an estimated cost of US\$2 million. The electronic media and marketing techniques played leading roles, and when the organizers were questioned on this, they replied, "a Papal visit is priceless." Historian Jean Meyer warned that there was even danger of simony, an allusion to the activities of the Samaritan sorcerer from the 1st century AD who bought and sold church offices: "What we are seeing here is a business deal put together by the companies and some Catholics who, unlike the businesspeople, don't know what they're doing and are very close to following the example of Simon Magus. It seems that the idea originally came from them, not the businesspeople." Others recalled that Jesus expelled the merchants from the temple.

### **Covering up Chiapas**

Days before the Pope's arrival, the Zapatistas charged that the Mexican government was trying to cover up the war in Chiapas. They asked how it planned to hide the 45 indigenous people massacred in Acteal in December 1997, who were praying for peace when they were executed by paramilitary troops. Nor is it easy to hide the Catholic churches closed by these groups, or the chapels transformed into military quarters by the Mexican army. The Zapatistas wondered how the government would make people forget the declarations of an army general, who said that the translation into Tzeltal of the Gospel according to Saint Mark was evidence of the link between the Church and the Zapatistas.

A legislator in the Commission for Harmony and Pacification (COCOPA) spoke out against the government's attempts to cover up its low-intensity war against the Zapatistas. Nongovernmental organizations sent a letter to the Pope before his visit explaining that respect for human rights in Mexico is especially weak since, in addition to the misery that prevents millions of Mexicans from fully exercising these rights, they must also confront impunity, the country's increasing militarization and the presence of paramilitary groups in Chiapas.

The Mexican government did everything it could to ensure that the topic of Chiapas not arise during the Pope's visit and carried out an intense diplomatic effort to avoid declarations on Chiapas in the Papal events. Although the issue was not raised in the meeting between the Pope and President Zedillo, it came up in a veiled way many times during the visit, and openly at least once. During his flight from Rome to Mexico, John Paul II said that the solution to the armed conflict in Chiapas requires a dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous people and emphasized that peace there depends on recognition that the indigenous people are the original owners of the land. Later, in his message before President Zedillo at the airport, he spoke of the need for concord among Mexicans.

### **Allusions and pressure**

Human rights activists believe that the "concord" spoken of by the Pope was an allusion to the war in Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca. The legislators in COCOPA saw particular significance in the fact that the Pope spoke during his flight of the need to resume talks between the government and the EZLN. The Pope's reference to the property rights of the indigenous people was interpreted as a way to pressure the government to honor the San Andrés agreements. It was also clear that, despite the smokescreen the government tried to raise around the war in Chiapas, the Pope was informed on the subject.

### **A finger in the nation's wounds**

In giving John Paul II the keys to Mexico City, the head of the Federal District's government, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), praised the Pope's fight against poverty, marginalization and inequality. Cárdenas recalled that, from Chiapas itself, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas defended the rights of indigenous peoples during the Conquest. He also charged that the policies imposed on the country by the last several federal governments have had grave consequences for the majority of the population.

The writer Jaime Avilés pointed out that the Pope was welcome in a country wrecked by the crudeness and corruption of the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). One PRD legislator sent the Pope a letter saying that the deterioration in the quality of life of the majority of Mexicans was due to the government's poor administration and the diversion of state resources by federal government officials, many of them mixed up in activities related to drug dealing; he mentioned the brother of former President Salinas de Gortari as an example. At the start of his Sunday Mass, Cardinal Rivera presented John Paul II to an impoverished, betrayed, suffering country in need of peace.

### **The words of John Paul II**

The Pope greeted the indigenous people from all regions of Mexico present in the activities, told them he was very close to them, and called on them to keep up their hopes in order to overcome the difficulties they were facing. In front of President Ernesto Zedillo, one of Latin America's strongest champions of neoliberalism, the Pope condemned neoliberal policies that marginalize the weakest, and said that the debt that weighs so heavily on Latin America is due to speculation and corruption. In his speeches, the Pope called for an end to corruption, violence and racism. He asked that the conditions of small farmers and indigenous people be improved. He called on people to deal with the extremely diverse social and human situations that coexist in Mexico through dialogue with great respect and justice. In concluding, he emphasized that only dialogue will strengthen democracy, and blessed a country with numerous indigenous peoples in whom he recognized rich human values and the willingness to work to build a better future. The Pope was emotionally applauded throughout his visit by the multitudes who thus demonstrated the depths of their religious roots.

### **Trick scenery and trap doors**

In the second half of January, shortly before the Pope's visit, the government official in charge of coordinating the negotiations in Chiapas presented a document to COCOPA with a new proposal for the EZLN. The

document proposed private meetings, the formation of a new national intermediation committee, and consideration of the five conditions for resuming negotiations laid down by the EZLN. The new proposal formed part of an elaborate plan to brush up the government's image before the Pope's visit. It was not, however, evidence of any government determination to seek genuine solutions to the conflict, since it is common knowledge that the EZLN will not return to the negotiating table until the government honors the agreements it has already signed.

The government's now traditional doublespeak was once again evident in its efforts to discredit the EZLN before the Pope's arrival. Just days earlier, the army destroyed drug plantations in abandoned plots in the area under Zapatista influence in Chiapas. Although the army itself admitted that these plots did not belong to the Zapatistas, a government spokesperson tried to accuse the EZLN. COCOPA legislators rejected the government's insinuations of links between the EZLN and drug trafficking, and said that they would only serve to polarize the situation and create a climate of confrontation. Some people even suggested that paramilitary groups in the area might well have planted the drugs in an effort to undermine the search for peace. The EZLN said it has no dealings with drug traffickers and accused the federal government of launching a slanderous media campaign to try to link the Zapatistas with such activities. It emphasized that Zedillo's government had lied again, and used the occasion to denounce the attempt by the Chiapas government to approve an amnesty for paramilitary and military troops involved in criminal activities.

### **Chiapas: Five years later**

January marked the fifth anniversary of the Zapatista uprising, and provided an occasion to weigh up the course of events over these past five years.

Some of the salient points in the analysis: since January 1, 1994, Chiapas has been central to Mexican affairs. The conflict was created and is maintained by neoliberal policies that exclude and impoverish the majority, obviously including indigenous people, and have favored only a handful of powerful people, who thus defend it at all costs. The EZLN rose up against this policy. Zedillo's government has shown through its actions that it wants not peace but rather the defeat of those who dare question its economic policy. The peace talks between the EZLN and the government broke down because the government refused to comply with the San Andrés accords, signed in early 1996. Zedillo's government chose instead to make war against the indigenous communities that have supported the Zapatistas. This strategy is what led to the Acteal

massacre in December 1997. In response to national and international demands that the government disarm the PRI's paramilitary bands, which have displaced many indigenous people in Chiapas, the government has harassed international observers, pursued the indigenous people who demand autonomy and supported the paramilitary groups. The government also put pressure on CONAL, the mediation commission in the peace talks headed by Bishop Samuel Ruiz, until the commission had no choice but to resign its role.

In this climate, two positions have emerged: some sectors are calling for a policy that resolves the conflict and leads to a dignified, just peace, and others want to continue the oppression, exclusion and domination even at the cost of war. This bellicose policy has led to genocidal acts, including the displacement of whole communities, ongoing harassment by paramilitary groups and attacks against members of international NGOs.

The policy of war is wrapped up in a hypocritically nationalist discourse, which the government uses at the same time it is selling out the country to serve the economic interests of the international financial groups that direct Mexican economic policy. What it wants from globalization is subordination by the elite, condemning any horizontal links among groups defending human rights.

The government policy—instigated by advisers who belonged to leftist Maoist groups just a few years ago—has exacerbated the contradictions and polarized society. The government is immersed in the great contradiction of talking about peace while carrying out a counterinsurgency war. In this context, it systematically resorts to doublespeak. There is also a sharp contradiction between legality and pretense. The government constantly provokes. Zedillo doesn't want dialogue but rather surrender, and having stalled the negotiations, he ceaselessly blames the EZLN for the fact that there is no dialogue. He offers his hand in a gesture of friendship only so that he can, in the same act, strike with the other hand.

### **Zapatista achievements**

Despite the resurgence of the government's dirty war against the rebellious indigenous people, the Zapatistas have learned to listen to civil society groups and have succeeded in putting a discussion of the rights of indigenous people on the national agenda. It is clear that the EZLN has committed mistakes—which they themselves have recognized—like judging some social and political actors too hastily. On balance, however, they have been right in insisting on two fundamental issues: that the

situation of the indigenous peoples be addressed and the transition to democracy guaranteed. The Zapatistas have also managed to revive civil society groups around a new cultural movement. In this age of society networking, in which the power of flows has superceded the traditional flows of power, the Zapatistas have succeeded in weaving new national and international solidarity networks that demand respect for diversity. They have challenged the power of the state party regime and opened the door to cultural innovation and social transformation. They have engaged in a struggle for new codes of interpretation and social coexistence and have encouraged the reformulation of social identities. They have emphasized alternative values and inspired the assertion of autonomous identities. In doing so, they have found new forms of resistance to the power they have unmasked, revealing its crisis. The Mexican philosopher Luis Villoro has stated that the Zapatistas have sparked a pluralistic movement for a new project of state and nation.

### **Worse in 1999 than in 1994?**

Government spokespeople claim that the indigenous communities in Chiapas are worse off in 1999 than before the EZLN uprising. The government now wants to lay the blame on the Zapatistas for the poor conditions in which the indigenous people of Chiapas are living. But it requires a stunning lack of perspective to attribute the lack of social improvements in Chiapas to a group of indigenous farmers, given the enormous resources that have been squandered through government corruption. The EZLN insists that the true responsibility for the deterioration in the indigenous communities' standard of living lies with the government. Zapatistas point out that now, just like before, indigenous people have no schools, no teachers, no hospitals, no doctors and no medicine, their products still sell for next to nothing and their houses are still bare. And conditions are no better in communities that do not sympathize with the EZLN. The only difference now is that the Zapatista communities have decided to refuse the government's alms, while the other communities accept them. These alms do not improve their lives, however.

The Zapatistas emphasize that the difference between what they did not have before and what they do not have today is that before, no one in Mexico cared that the basic needs of the indigenous people went unfulfilled, which is no longer the case. They stress that what they have lost since 1994 is the despair, the bitterness and the resignation, and that they now have something they did not have then: a voice. They also credit the government with bringing about many "changes": maintaining half the army in indigenous communities, organizing paramilitary groups, paying for costly media campaigns against the rebels, bringing

prostitution and alcoholism to the areas under the army's influence, preventing the Zapatista farmers from sowing and harvesting their crops.

The Zapatistas insist that it would be irresponsible to sign the peace offered by the government when the fundamental causes of the indigenous people's marginalization have not been resolved. One of their strongest arguments against returning to the negotiating table is that it makes no sense as long as the government refuses to respect the agreements already reached in the San Andrés accords. If it refuses to comply with these accords, what guarantees that it will honor any agreements coming out of new negotiations?

### **March 21: Consulting the Mexican people**

While the government plays at wanting peace while waging war, the EZLN, convinced that the only solution is dialogue with civil society, called for a mobilization against the war to exterminate indigenous people and announced a consultation on the recognition of indigenous rights for March 21. In this consultation, four questions will be asked of the Mexican people:

- 1) Do you agree that the indigenous peoples should be included in the national project, in all their richness and vitality, and take an active part in building a new Mexico?
  - 2) Do you agree that indigenous rights should be recognized in the Mexican Constitution in accord with the agreements reached by the Commission for Harmony and Pacification?
  - 3) Do you agree that we should achieve true peace through the path of dialogue, demilitarizing the country by returning the soldiers to their barracks, as established in the Constitution and the law?
  - 4) Do you agree that the people should organize and demand that the government "rule by obeying" in all areas of national life?
- The Zapatistas have also raised the possibility of carrying out an international consultation on the recognition of indigenous rights and end of the war of extermination, and have called for an international campaign on behalf of the world's excluded, with demonstrations and other public events on March 21. They argue that these demonstrations would be important in showing that the excluded have a weapon to defend themselves— resistance— and will use it so that they not disappear.

### **Saramago: Chiapas is "the world"**

The 1998 Nobel Prize laureate in literature, Portuguese writer José Saramago, declared that, deep down, Chiapas represents the world since it is a place where practically everything negative in human behavior can be found: racism, cruelty, indifference and contempt for a minority. Saramago said that, considering Chiapas' enormous wealth in petroleum,

coffee and cocoa, it is not hard to understand why capitalist ambition has extended its claws into the area. He said that situations like that in Chiapas can be found all over the world, and emphasized that when you consider this situation and then add to it a massacre committed with impunity as in Acteal, indignation is the only natural response.

### **Everything's fine**

At the beginning of 1999, President Zedillo ordered his ambassadors abroad to tell the people of the world that there is no war and no paramilitary groups in Mexico, and that the Mexican economy is doing fine. Nothing could be further from the truth. Accumulated inflation in the four years of Zedillo's administration tops 166%—and this despite the fact that neoliberal policies focus on trying to keep inflation down. The economy is in crisis, and the war is there to be seen by all those who care to open their eyes. The army maintains some 70,000 troops in Chiapas, and the 1999 budget gives the Secretary of Defense over \$62 million to spend on arms.

However hard it tries, the Mexican government cannot cover up what is happening. Given the financial crisis in Brazil, Itamar Franco, that country's former President and now governor of the state of Minas Gerais, announced a moratorium on the debt payment. When President Zedillo criticized the move, Franco answered that Zedillo should concern himself with Mexico's poor and with Chiapas instead of commenting on events elsewhere, and called the Mexican government "corrupt."

### **15 million more poor**

Zedillo's government is not concerned with the poor. At the end of 1998, it authorized an increase in the price of tortillas, their staple food. And this came after a hike in gasoline prices had already raised the price of 90% of foods. Economic analysts agree that most Mexican people have gotten poorer with each passing year. In the past five years, 15 million more have swollen the ranks of the poor. And several indicators show that not even those most favored by Zedillo's economic policies trust them. By the end of 1998, Mexicans had deposited some \$38.5 billion in US banks, while the Bank of Mexico's international reserves during that year fluctuated between \$28 and \$31 billion.

The IDB has been forced to admit that the dogmas of opening Latin America's markets and liberalizing its economies have not improved people's living standards. Latin America continues to have the most unequal income distribution of any region on the planet. Several economists point out that Latin American economies have become increasingly dependent on the foreign capital that finances them, and that this has led to an increase in interest payments on the debt and

increased fiscal deficits. Furthermore, far from encouraging greater efficiency and competitiveness, the policies have encouraged a greater concentration of property, wiped out whole sectors of production and accentuated territorial disintegration.

Mexico's faithful implementation of these neoliberal recipes—it consistently receives top marks for its submission—brings disastrous economic consequences for its population. According to World Bank figures, 80% of Mexicans live in poverty, yet this does not take away one whit of Zedillo's stubbornness in applying neoliberal policies. Faced with the evidence, he resorts to the argument that Mexico would be in even worse shape without these policies.

#### **PAN allies with the PRI in the fraud of the century**

The alliance between the PRI and the National Action Party (PAN) to push through Zedillo's 1999 budget and approve the solution to the financial scandal involving the Bank Fund to Protect Savings (FOBAPROA) was considered by some analysts as a betrayal of the will of the electorate. In 1997, Mexicans voted to create a majority in Congress opposed to the ruling state party. But the reality is that, in the crunch, the PAN has deserted the opposition bloc and allied itself with the PRI in order to resolve the President's problems. With the help of the PAN, the PRI government got more than it wanted, and the population less than it needs. The PRI and the PAN have covered up illegal actions in the management of the banks and made the Mexican people pay for the frauds committed by those in power.

What actually took place in the case of FOBAPROA—which was used both to bail out big investors after their speculative investment bubble burst and to cover up illegal campaign contributions to the PRI—was an agreement not so much between the PRI and the PAN as between the presidency and the PAN, which PRI delegates then adhered to according to strict party discipline. There was a vote, but no discussion in Congress. The PRD charged that FOBAPROA's beneficiaries include several PAN leaders and presented new evidence to show that more funds were diverted through FOBAPROA into PRI campaign coffers than the \$30 million initially estimated.

With the approval of the following "solution" to this scandal, what had already been called "the fraud of the century" was consummated. The agreement opens the way to replacing FOBAPROA with the Institute for the Protection of Bank Savings (IPAB). The banks will have to return the promissory notes unconstitutionally issued by the executive branch in exchange for the defaulted loans of the credit institutions. If this cannot

be done, the sums will be guaranteed through payment instruments that IPAB will back with public funds.

### **Mexico betrayed**

With this "solution," taxpayers will ultimately bear the cost of the agreement. The PRI and PAN legislators tried to cover up the unconstitutional creation of FOBAPROA, but could not do it. The new bank bailout law is a secondary one that cannot supercede the constitutional article that was violated. For this reason, the PRD has appealed it. To see who won or lost with the FOBAPROA agreement, it is enough to look at who is saying what. Bankers and businesspeople heaped effusive praise on the results, while most small debtors said they had been tricked. Many analysts have demonstrated that the Mexican people are the biggest losers. Immediately after the vote, the PAN spent over \$4 million in television ads to clean up its image, resorting to Zedillo's argument that the situation would have gotten worse had they not reached an agreement. In return, the PAN was accused of resuscitating a dying party—the PRI—and a spent system. The "fraud of the century" was calculated at some 774 million pesos (\$94 million) and the agreement will mean a lower quality of life for the majority of the Mexican people over the next 30 years. The opposition parties charged that the scandal and its "solution" have betrayed the nation.

The PAN added its votes in Congress to the representatives of neoliberalism and validated the FOBAPROA fraud—before the audit results were known—then paid for a shameful publicity campaign to justify itself with taxpayers' funds. The PRI and the PAN then took revenge on the PRD for not having lent itself to the game as well. They did so by cutting the budget of the PRD government in the capital, calculating that the increased suffering caused among Mexico City's residents by the shortage of resources would undermine Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas' leadership.

### **The electoral panorama**

This year will be marked by the rhythm of preparations for the presidential elections. Even though these elections will not take place until the end of 2000, the race is already well underway. Within the parties, the struggle for the presidential candidacy has begun and efforts to discredit possible contenders are increasingly evident. The former head of the Federal District, Manual Camacho Solís, now in the opposition, has organized a new party, the Democratic Center. Its first action was to call for an opposition alliance to defeat the PRI, charging that its abuse of power has been so extreme that it has endangered the nation's security, integrity and peace. According to a Louis Harris poll, over half of those surveyed disapprove of Zedillo's performance.

There is no doubt but that the elections will be very close, and the PRI may well lose power. But as 1999 gets underway, an opposition alliance seems very difficult to achieve, and this would favor the state party. What is much easier to predict is that the issues of poverty and peace will not be missing from anyone's agenda.

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### **Government's Armor, People's Awakening**

*The government's financial policy has been placed in the dock as never before by the FOBAPROA audit, the students continue to defy the system, Subcomandante Marcos is strongly questioning the United Nations and the PRI could lose the presidential elections. These are novel and encouraging processes, but it is impossible to foresee their end results.*

#### **Jorge Alonso**

Several important and interconnected processes took place in Mexico in June and July. First, the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) continued to rob society blind. The government said that the banking system would be cleaned up by resolving the case of FOBAPROA, the Bank Fund to Protect Savings, which was scandalously mismanaged then bailed out at taxpayers' expense last year in a move that outraged the country. The investigation into the mismanagement of that fund, however, had not yet been completed when the government went to the rescue of another bank, SERFIN, which had illegally issued thousands of international credit cards to PRI activists and sympathizers from 1992-1994. That bailout totaled US\$85.5 billion—over twice the annual budget of the Mexican National Autonomous University (UNAM).

#### **The robbery of the century**

In the summer of 1999, yet another incident demonstrated that behind FOBAPROA's operations lay an attempt to cover up deals worked out between bankers and government officials with no regard for the country's best interests. In the course of the FOBAPROA audit requested by the legislature, the National Action

Party (PAN) recalled accusations made last year by the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) about improper donations to the PRI. Documents have now revealed how the PRI and the government used FOBAPROA to commit fraud. It has been proven that the 1994 elections were marred not only by inequity, as President Zedillo himself admitted, but also by fraud. It is estimated, for example, that the Banco Unión alone illegally contributed \$30-\$70 million to the PRI campaign.

But the worst part of this train of events is that, in response to these revelations, those in power have behaved like a mafia. The government threatened to throw the PAN deputy who denounced the scandal into jail. This caused eight opposition parties to come together to repudiate this threat and the illegal, immoral strategy the Treasury and Government Secretaries are using in their attempt to cover up for Zedillo and keep this unprecedented plundering under wraps.

The PRD and the PAN have both charged that the government and its ruling party received illegal contributions in the 1994 presidential campaign. There is also evidence of links between the PRI's campaign coffers and drug trafficking. The opposition parties have demanded that the party return its ill-gotten money, but the PRI has refused.

### **Risky, misguided policies**

The auditor's report in the FOBAPROA case took six months and \$20 million to produce. It attributed the excessive costs of the bank bailout, which it described as one of the most expensive financial salvage operations in the world, to mistakes made by the government entities in charge of the process when they decided to keep nonviable institutions in operation. According to the report, the financial system broke down because of a policy of selling the banks off hastily and for political ends, a lack of official supervision of bank operations, and the 1995 financial crisis, itself the result of the government's adventuresome policies. The banks were given to groups linked to the PRI to create a financial system that would sustain its political activities. The result was abuse: huge debtors benefited while many people are now chained to debts that began small but have become unpayable with the passage of time.

The auditor, the Canadian firm Mackey, said the report did not get to the very heart of the matter because the government did

not cooperate by providing the required information. The constraints went far beyond what they had initially imagined, as the government hid evidence to keep the nature of its handiwork from coming to light.

### **Populism in reverse**

By blocking the audit, the government revealed its failure in what is most important in a democracy: accountability. But despite the obstacles, the auditor's report clearly shows that the highest authorities committed serious mistakes as they raced to inject international market rules into Mexico's economy without first dealing with two large problems—corruption and authoritarianism—that must be resolved for the market to work even according to its own logic. It was a case of populism in reverse, which only benefited a few wealthy people. The earlier nationalization of the banks had been done poorly, but their privatization was even worse. The process was laced with corruption, in that banks were sold to inexperienced individuals and without any collateral or guarantees. While never tiring of telling society that it must submit to the rules of the market economy for its own good, the government protects from the hazards of the market the greedy, inept individuals who are its accomplices.

The auditor believes that the bank crisis could have been contained, that the bailout came too late and was poorly done, and that the decision to keep failed banks operating was a very costly one. The report sharply criticizes not only the banking system but also the government's role as expropriator, privatizer, overseer and rescuer of the banks. But in the end, it could only show the tip of the iceberg that the opposition is still trying to fully measure.

### **Time bomb**

The government's response to the Mackey report? That the irregularities reported are not worth troubling over. The opposition, however, is using the document as evidence that the number of irregularities reported is indeed a serious matter: while the government insists that these questionable operations account for only 1% of FOBAPROA, the opposition says the figure is more like 35%. It also believes that a more in-depth investigation would find a higher proportion of irregularities. The PRD argues that the treasury secretary and the president of the Bank of Mexico should be tried for the irregularities that took

place in the bailout.

One thing that is clear is that the government does not want to open its books. Nonetheless, in a way never before seen, the government's financial policy—its dance of millions with many friends benefited and very few punished—has been put on the bench for the accused. The rescued banking system is now in a precarious situation, and is certainly not the engine of development. Furthermore, despite the bailout's enormous cost, the Mexican financial sector is still considered a high risk for the economy; predictions are that it will explode again soon. *The Wall Street Journal* has described the Mexican banks as a potential "time bomb." While the government tries to prevent the new crisis from breaking during the upcoming electoral process, the episode has tragically revealed how economic and political power reinforce one another.

### **Between Labastida and Madrazo**

Four pre-candidates are seeking to become the PRI's presidential nominee. They will stand off against each other in primary elections to be held for the first time ever in the party, which *The Washington Post* has already predicted will be a simulation of democracy "with more of the same." The official candidate, former Government Secretary Francisco Labastida, is up against an astute challenger, Tabasco's governor Roberto Madrazo. To cover their bets, PRI leaders and businesspeople have chosen to light candles at the altars of both saints.

The other two pre-candidates, former Puebla governor Manuel Bartlett and Roque Villanueva, PRI bench chief in Mexico's House of Representatives, have no real chance. Villanueva is known among other things for an obscene gesture, made after pushing through a new tax that seriously affects the whole population, to indicate his macho prowess in overcoming those who opposed the tax. Three of the four pre-candidates have been accused of drug-trafficking links.

Despite official support from top party leaders, Labastida has not been able to get his campaign rolling because of mistakes and lack of charisma, and because he has been on the defensive. The daring and corrupt Madrazo has the merit of having beaten Zedillo's challenge on four occasions: when Zedillo tried to force him out of the governor's office, when he tried to prevent him from using public resources to promote himself personally, when

he tried to block his pre-candidacy, and when he tried to steal his campaign slogan. Madrazo uses the language of opposition, and has the support of prominent Mexican politicians, money from dubious sources and the sympathy of the party's grass roots. He has spoken out against the Zapatistas and the university movement. In the surveys, he remains ahead of all three other PRI pre-candidates.

### **Stanley's assassination**

The two television networks have put themselves at the service of the PRI campaign, since they fear their own corruption would be uncovered if the opposition comes to power. Taking advantage of the assassination of Paco Stanley, a popular comedian, they produced shows that sought to whip up public fury against the government of the Federal District, led by the PRD's Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, without mentioning the federal government's responsibility in the affair. The comedian's links with drug trafficking soon became known, however, along with the Government Secretary's role in protecting him. The episode showed at least two things: the television networks will do anything to prevent an opposition victory, and the media does not respond to anyone for its crimes.

### **Opposition coalition?**

In the House of Representatives, the opposition majority approved electoral reforms to make it easier to form coalitions, establish stronger oversight of party money and allow Mexicans living abroad to vote. The PRI majority in the Senate, however, blocked them all. Without the reforms, the PRI can continue using its impressive skill at avoiding campaign spending limits and accepting illicit funds. While making alliances and overseeing campaign funds are common practices in any democratic country, the PRI believes that these measures would undermine its ability to stay in power. And it's right: democracy is venom for a state-party regime.

Recent local elections have shown that the opposition wins when it is united, but not when it is divided. In local elections in the state of Mexico, the opposition did not form an alliance and lost, though it refused to recognize the results because of fraud by the PRI. In Nayarit an alliance was formed, and even the PRI's fraudulent maneuvers could not block the opposition victory. Both Vicente Fox, the PAN's only pre-candidate, and Cárdenas, who could win the PRD nomination, agree that an opposition

coalition is needed to defeat the PRI, reconstruct the country and make the transition to democracy.

A survey released on July 30 by Indemerc-Louis Harris shows that over half of Mexicans favor an opposition coalition to bring about a change in the regime. Among pre-candidates, Fox leads in voter preferences while Cárdenas has been losing ground.

### **Primaries or polls?**

The first obstacle to an opposition coalition has been defining a method to designate the single opposition candidate. The PRD maintains that the candidate should be elected in primaries in which all citizens who so desire can participate, like the ones to be held by the PRI. The PAN proposes using surveys. The PRD says that polls can be manipulated, while the PAN has expressed its concern that elections can as well, as was the case in the PRD's internal elections in March.

After going around on this several times, eight opposition parties, including the PAN, the PRD, the Labor Party and the Green Party, plus four of the six recently established parties—Camacho Solís' Central Democratic Party, Dante Delgado's Democratic Convergence, the Nationalist Society Party and the Social Alliance Party—agreed to a third way: a combination of polls and primaries.

A sample will be taken of 400-500 citizens in each of the country's 300 districts to make up a total sample of 120-150,000, which will give very high sample reliability. Observers will certify the vote and the coalition will form its own citizens' organization to carry out the elections and ensure their cleanliness. In addition to candidate preferences, the survey will reveal the specific weight of each of the coalition parties in the 300 districts.

### **The new student movement**

The student movement has gone through many phases since it was created in March, when the University Council—largely controlled by university authorities subordinated to the state—approved obligatory tuition fees for UNAM students. In April the students' strike spread through all of UNAM's schools and colleges.

The movement has broken free of traditional patterns in both its make-up and its manner of acting. It has sustained itself without

any leaders, though some students stand out more than others. Decision-making has been carried out through a structure of 40 assemblies, one for each UNAM school and college. Issues are discussed and agreements reached in each assembly, and each one counts in the whole.

The students have drawn up a petition with the following demands:

- \* repeal the tuition regulations that sparked the protest;
- \* repeal the 1997 reforms related to a single admissions test given by a private institution separate from the UNAM (the students argue that this violates university autonomy and annuls the evaluations the university itself makes to pass students from level to level),
- \* revoke the time limit for completing studies (since some people have to work to pay for their studies, they need more time than is now allowed to complete each level),
- \* end the repression and sanctions against students, workers and faculty,
- \* dismantle the police apparatus created by the university president to spy on, control and repress the students,
- \* reprogram the school year, and
- \* hold direct, public discussions to resolve the conflict and examine the situation at the university.

In all of their demands, the students have made clear that they are fed up with authoritarianism and the antidemocratic nature of UNAM authorities.

### **Expensive campaign**

By the end of July, the conflict had been going on for over three months. To understand why it has dragged on so long, one has to know those involved. The authorities thought they could break the rebellious students with a costly media campaign against them, and in two months spent over \$1 million trying. Most of the media joined in the attack, as did the Catholic Church hierarchy; even President Zedillo, violating the principle of university autonomy, made threatening statements. The leader of the business council COPARMEX called for closing down the UNAM, while some rightwing intellectuals proposed that two universities be created, one offering excellence to an elite, another for the poor. The university president himself, accompanied by his staff and students who oppose the strike, organized public events but they were never as large as the

events the striking students held.

In one of the activities organized to attack the students, drivers on the Peripheral Highway around Mexico City were asked to turn on their car lights to demand that the students give up the installations they have occupied. The Economists' Association suggested that university authorities and students who oppose the strike retake the buildings. The PRI tried to pressure the Federal District government to join in the repression, to kill two birds with one stone: crush the movement and escalate the campaign to disparage Cárdenas. Two lawyers linked to the regime went so far as to file a suit against the students with the Attorney General's office, using pseudo-legal subtleties to argue that student leaders should be condemned to 11 years of prison without bail.

### **Siqueiros' mural**

Another incident was exploited to the full against the movement. The university administration building houses a mural painted by the revolutionary artist Siqueiros. In the mural, the artist included some dates of symbolic importance in Mexican history and left a string of question marks at the end. Someone covered over the question marks and wrote in "1999," alluding to the importance of the student movement. Authorities denounced this as a serious attack on the nation's cultural patrimony.

All of these events served to make the atmosphere more tense and ripe for repression. At the end of June only 20% of citizens surveyed said they would support the use of force against the students, but by the end of July that number had grown to 46%. As in the case of Chiapas, authorities say they want dialogue but are putting up all sorts of obstacles to wear people down. And it works.

Nonetheless, 650,935 citizens participated in a consultation on the issues that the students conducted in Mexico City. An overwhelming 90% agreed that higher education should be free, 83% felt that the government should increase the university budget, 71% disapproved of the fact that a private, independent institute controls admissions, and 81% expressed their support for the movement's demands.

### **Learning democracy**

The consultation was one example of the students' efforts not to

close themselves up in their assemblies, but to try to connect with other grassroots sectors. They have organized several marches, and even a pilgrimage to the Basilica of Guadalupe. They have visited neighborhoods to explain their reasons, and held meetings of all kinds with many different sectors.

There have been difficulties and disagreements, but the students have been learning to negotiate, discuss, and be democratic and tolerant of internal dissent. Of course, one can also find yelling, pressure, insults and extremist positions in their meetings, just as one can, for example, in the House of Representatives.

Despite the internal tensions, the movement has not been broken, as its enemies predicted. The students have continually stressed that they seek not to destroy the university but to democratize it. They propose, among other things, that the community elect the university president and directors and that plebiscites be held to decide on issues that get bogged down in the University Council.

The students are not alone. The workers' union from UNAM and other universities supports them, along with the electrical workers' union, groups of workers from various factories, small farmers and tenant farmers from nearby rural areas, teachers, transport workers, street children and the debtor's organization. They have woven strong new social networks, and even with their predominate postmodern forms—no single line of discourse, no clearly consolidated organizations—they now know what class struggle means at the end of the 20th century: those benefited by the system against those excluded by it. Their slogans include, "There's no money for education, just for corruption"; "The future is denied us; there's nothing for us."

### **Marcos: Support unconditional**

One source of support for the student movement that the state tried to use against it came from Subcomandante Marcos. At one point, his support was one reason alleged for the repression. Marcos has stressed that the national project is being played against the neoliberal one in the conflict with the UNAM. This, he says, explains why the government is trying to get the students to fight among themselves, just as it tries to get indigenous people to fight among themselves.

In one statement to the national and international press, Marcos

alluded to those who had turned on their lights on the Peripheral Highway against the striking students. He said that the Zapatistas don't have cars or drive on Mexico City's highways, but that they had lit candles in the forest to show their support for the student movement.

He also linked what the Zapatista communities are suffering with the university students in another way. He said that even if the government continues to throw the police and soldiers at the indigenous communities, to occupy towns and arbitrarily detain indigenous people it accuses of being Zapatistas, they would continue to support the students because, quite simply, they can see what is right.

Marcos charged that the radical changes in higher education proposed by the World Bank respond to the demands of the neoliberal market: the World Bank sees education as a private good, a service in the market, and thus wants to turn public universities into self-financing businesses. The coincidence between the World Bank's proposals and the privatizing zeal of Zedillo's government is clear. Marcos is cheered that this strategy has found firm resistance in a significant part of the student body. He discussed how the media has joined the government to accuse the striking students of going too far, of being "ultra," even though they are not the ones who have attacked or incarcerated any student, or tried to impose tuition regulations behind the community's back. Finally, Marcos declared that the Zapatistas will support the strike's General Council whether it decides to continue the strike or end it.

### **Proposed solution**

Concerned by the enormous damage done to the university and the country by prolonging the conflict, eight emeritus professors proposed a solution to the strike at the end of July. They did so after talking with the faculty of various departments, researchers, academics, university authorities, students who belong to the movement and those who don't.

Their proposal contains the essence of the student movement's demands: free education, democratization and participation. Its defenders have pointed out that, although the authorities are to blame for prolonging the strike, a long strike weakens the movement.

Opposition to this proposal can be found, however, among both professors and students. First of all, some feel it is a trap set by the university authorities. They insist on defending in full the points in the students' petition, rejecting the proposal because it does not take all the points into account, and only partially addresses some points it does include. They argue that accepting the proposal would be unconditional surrender.

### **Frictions, not divisions**

The fact that the authorities have shown no flexibility or willingness to hold an authentic dialogue has meant that extreme positions are beginning to prevail among the students. As the professors' proposal went into discussion, thus opening the door to a possible solution to the conflict, it emerged increasingly clearly that the student movement has managed to check the efforts to bring neoliberalism into the university. The students have expressed their firm opposition to subordinating higher education to the market forces, and shown that the public university is the patrimony of Mexicans and not of the multinationals.

The threat of repression persists. Zedillo's government treats the various sectors of society differently. While it bails out and offers impunity to thieves who have illegally enriched themselves as bankers or highway builders, it tries to crush those who protest or make demands. The entire 1999 UNAM budget represents just 1% of the money spent on the bank bailout. The regime believes it can break the student movement, wear down the students or divide the schools. This has been an unusual movement, however, with enormous tensions but no divisions. What makes it intolerable for the powers that be is that it questions the system as a whole. This is its great achievement, a victory already won. Even if the movement is broken by repression, there is no doubt but that other multiform expressions of youthful nonconformity will spring up.

### **War continues in Chiapas**

Meanwhile, the Zedillo regime is continuing to escalate its war against the Zapatistas. Dialogue has not been resumed and the Army is still making incursions into Zapatista indigenous communities. The harassment, reprisals and persecution persist as the Army, the authorities and paramilitary forces continue to fabricate crimes supposedly committed by Zapatista sympathizers. The military infrastructure is being consolidated in

Chiapas: landing strips, barracks, new roads. And although the legislative Commission for Harmony and Pacification (COCOPA) has repeatedly insisted that the government halt its police-military incursions, the government continues to vent its fury against the pacifists.

The paramilitary groups operate with impunity. They have sown terror in the indigenous communities, assassinating and ambushing, detaining and torturing, burning down villages, stealing cattle... And it has been proven that these groups operate in coordination with the state security forces and have been trained and supported by the Army.

### **Denunciations rain down**

Amnesty International's 1998 report gives evidence of human rights violations by the Army and by paramilitary forces linked to the Mexican government. It cites a total of 21,159 indigenous people displaced from their villages by mid-1999.

An internationalist group named Peace without Borders, with members from Denmark, Switzerland, Ireland, Nicaragua, France, Spain, Argentina and other countries, published a statement in June 1999 demanding an end to the war in Chiapas. And at the end of that month, a delegation of Swiss observers denounced the serious escalation of the conflict in Chiapas and the repression against the indigenous people.

At the beginning of July, a number of human rights organizations launched an initiative called SOS for Chiapas in response to the increase in violence against the indigenous communities. These charges will be brought before the Inter-American Human Rights Commission. Then on July 8, human rights promoters in the US Senate included a section condemning the militarization of Chiapas in a document on financial support for the Mexican government.

The initiatives and denunciations are raining down, but the government seems convinced that the use of force is the only solution. Zedillo has chosen massive troop deployment and military incursions into the communities, in which the Army, the security forces, the federal judicial police, municipal police, paramilitary groups and PRI activists go in together. These actions violate the law of dialogue and reconciliation in Chiapas, and aim

to stretch the Zapatista's capacity to resist to the breaking point.

### **Marcos criticizes the UN**

In July, Asma Jahangir, the UN's special envoy dealing with extra-judicial, summary and arbitrary executions, visited Mexico. Marcos sent her a letter in the name of the women, men, children and elderly of the Zapatistas, stating that political opportunity is not as important as political ethics, and for that reason he had decided not to use the opportunity to denounce the Mexican government for its genocidal policy against the indigenous people, but rather to talk about the UN.

Marcos said he did not consider it ethical to turn to an international organization that had lost all credibility and legitimacy and signed its own death certificate with NATO's bombing of Kosovo by trying to sell the idea that this was a "humanitarian war with collateral damage and mistakes made in good faith." He said the UN's complicity in that war was clear and that, if UN silence offered tacit support for the crime and destruction in Kosovo, the organization has taken a more active role in the war being waged by the Mexican government against the indigenous people. He recalled that, at the request of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the government militarily occupied the community of Amparo Aguatinta in May 1998, striking children and imprisoning men and women, because the community had declared itself an "autonomous municipality." In the list of affronts he also noted that, on July 19, 1999, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan awarded the United Nations Vienna Civil Society Award to the Azteca Foundation, which has been strongly questioned by many honest people in Mexico.

Marcos explained that the Zapatistas distrust the UN not out of chauvinism but rather because of actions like these, and have always been happy to receive international observers—unlike PRI pre-candidate Labastida, who has expelled international observers from the country. He reaffirmed that the Zapatistas defend the concept of national sovereignty and will continue to welcome those who truly support peace. The Zapatistas have recognized the important work for peace of Amnesty International, America's Watch, Global Exchange, the Mexico Social Network, the National Commission for Democracy in Mexico-USA, Pastors for Peace, the Humanitarian Law Project, Doctors of the World, Bread for the World, Doctors without Borders, and many other organizations. Marcos insisted that

these groups have more moral authority and far more legitimacy than the United Nations.

### **Paramilitary groups: Collective hysteria?**

The UN is not the only international agency collaborating with the government's counterinsurgency campaign, Marcos noted; the Red Cross is doing so as well. Its representatives in San Cristóbal have declared that displaced people left their homes because they were lazy and preferred to be supported by the Red Cross. With statements like these, they have tried to suggest that the paramilitary groups are just an invention, the product of the collective hysteria of thousands of displaced indigenous people.

Marcos went on to explain how, in an effort to improve the Army's battered public image, the government has given the green light to paramilitary groups organized by active-duty military personnel, in more than a few cases made up of military personnel, and trained, supplied, protected and directed by the military. These groups take various forms, but there is one constant: the presence of PRI activists. The groups are being used to try to make the conflict look like an inter-ethnic war.

He described some of the strategies that the government uses in its efforts to force the Zapatista communities into submission. For example, when a group of Zapatista families on one farm demanded that the supply of drinking water be reestablished—it had been cut off by the PRI—the government responded by mobilizing the security forces. PRI activists attacked the people with blows and bullets, seriously wounding two Zapatistas. Instead of apprehending the aggressors, however, the police detained Zapatistas saying that, by demanding water, they had disturbed the peace. Marcos commented that this case and many others like it do not appear either in the newspapers or on television, and he warned people to pay special attention to NGOs working for human rights, since they are among the army's main targets.

Marcos did say, however, that the Zapatistas had information confirming that the UN special envoy was an honest person. For that reason, he could do no less than express to her the problems he had with an organization that endorses wars and supports and awards those who kill and humiliate the excluded of the world. In the end, he did not miss the opportunity to give the UN official a detailed account of the Zapatistas who have been summarily

executed since 1994. He said that the torturers and murderers have not been imprisoned and that the government has recently resumed armed attacks against the Zapatista forces. While the Army declared it was sending 7,000 unarmed soldiers to Chiapas to plant trees, they came armed and ready to attack. Marcos' conclusion: the Acteal massacre and Zedillo's whole policy must be considered as genocide.

The Zapatistas, Marcos warned, are aware that a number of international financial powers would like to appropriate the rich oil and uranium deposits lying under Zapatista land for their own benefit. These powers hope for divisions among the Zapatistas, since they would rather negotiate with small groups.

### **Impunity is a reality**

When the UN's special envoy came to Chiapas, many indigenous people told her how the government's failure to fulfill the San Andrés accords had led to stepped-up militarization of communities, violence, torture, evictions, disappearances and unjust incarceration of many people. The envoy replied that she had heard the testimonies of relatives and survivors of the Acteal massacre and their clamor for justice, and would take all of this information into account. She also asked them to forgive. The indigenous people took the floor again in indignation to emphasize that what they wanted was justice and in Mexico there is none, as many murderers run free.

The envoy was also given a special report produced by the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center, which emphasizes that, over a year after the Acteal massacre, the survivors and other people displaced from Chenaló are still being threatened by the paramilitary groups that the authorities deny exist. Furthermore, not all perpetrators of the crime and none of its planners have been detained. The report notes that the authorities have shown a willingness to offer some material aid but not to change their conduct in the administration of justice, or to provide guarantees of security and respect for citizens' basic rights. The indigenous people do not want gifts, however; they want justice and respect for their dignity.

Before leaving the country, the envoy questioned the army's presence in Chiapas. She said that without political and legal changes impunity would continue, and that Mexico is at a critical moment, facing various challenges in its democratization process.

She recommended that international observers participate in the 2000 elections. She especially stressed that Mexico knows the sad experience of individual and mass executions, and named some of the most notorious cases: Aguas Blancas, Acteal, El Bosque, El Charco. She said she was concerned not only by these tragedies but also by a selective impunity that is a political reality in Mexico. She said it hurt her to see how marginalized people continue to be caught up in the armed conflict in Chiapas, and spoke out in favor of demilitarization.

Chiapas will be a central issue in the presidential campaigns. The government has chosen not to resolve the conflict but just to administrate it, leaving the resolution up to its successor.

### **Zedillo's economic armor**

Obfuscation on all fronts. The havoc that neoliberal policies have wrought on the Mexican population has become increasingly damaging, yet Zedillo criticizes those who, even within his party, have suggested that today's poverty is the result of these policies. He blames earlier politicians and continues his dogmatic, swashbuckling crusade to defend the neoliberal model.

In order to save investors from any scares during the change in government, the President came up with a plan for what he calls economic armor and negotiated \$23.7 billion in financial support for the country with international organizations. Commentators immediately warned that something was wrong with the model if it needed this kind of armor, and *The Financial Times* called the armor an exaggerated measure. But the government has its reasons for incurring this new, enormous debt: it wants fresh money to keep the PRI in power.

The conditions required in exchange for this support have to do mainly with privatizations. A World Bank document that has not been widely circulated calls on the Mexican government to privatize the electrical sector and accelerate the introduction of private capital into areas such as the ports, railways, airports and communications. It also calls on the government to break up the oil industry and continues to demand the privatization of higher education.

### **Country of seven billionaires**

Technocrats never suggest that the armor Mexico needs is social. Global inequality is troubling enough: the richest 20% of the

world's population consumes 86% of its goods and services today compared to 70% in 1970. But in Mexico, this inequality has reached especially appalling levels: the fortunes of only seven Mexicans equal 5% of the national GDP, totaling some \$20.4 billion. These fortunes were created quite recently, under the shelter of Salinas Gortari's government. Official World Bank and IMF figures show that the percentage of Mexicans living in poverty has increased to over half the rural population, while four out of five indigenous people live in extreme poverty. According to official figures, two out of three indigenous people in Chiapas are unemployed. Among those who have work, half receive no salaries, and those who do are not paid the minimum wage.

A United Nations report on development places Mexico 50th on the list of the world's countries, below Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Costa Rica. Mexico's economy is not growing, but is increasingly concentrating more resources in fewer hands.

Despite these clear setbacks, the government has not altered its rhetoric of privatization. Zedillo said the companies were being sold to meet the population's social needs, but the nearly half of the country's population that now lives in poverty may well ask if the enormous resources put into FOBAPROA met some of their needs, or if the highway bailout alleviated their poverty, or if the reduction in the education budget has helped them. They won't get an answer.

### **The armor of impunity**

Poverty is growing alongside the government's social debt. Nobel Prize Laureate in Economics Amartya Sen has called for an end to the nonsense about the market and proposes the need to stress the social aspect: education, jobs, a priority on social development. But the Mexican government turns a deaf ear to such advice. It is stubbornly continuing its attempts to privatize higher education and transfer the care of the country's cultural patrimony over to private companies. It has chosen the path of authoritarian imposition, which it tries to cover up in both Chiapas and the UNAM with the appearance of a dialogue that has nothing to do with the true meaning of that word.

The government is donning armor insulated with thick layers of impunity, gambling that it can wear down all popular resistance. For how long? The answer lies in the irrepressible dignity of the

excluded.

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## Alliances, Students And Chiapas: All Talks Aborted

*The natural disaster afflicting the country just adds to the other man-made disasters. It is lamentable that the Alliance for Mexico—all of the opposition against the PRI—died before it was even born. Meanwhile, the students are still on strike and the government is trying to prolong the conflict. And in Chiapas, the government is calling for dialogue and activating war.*

### Jorge Alonso

During the summer of 1999, Mexicans bore witness to the similar fates of three proposed talks that never came about, as the country's pressing need for communication was frustrated yet again. The Alliance for Mexico—a united opposition against the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)—died even before it was born, a casualty of the opposition parties' inability to act effectively, either alone or together, on the presidential campaign. Negotiations to resolve a student strike that has been going on for over five months also led nowhere, as government maneuvers successfully prolonged the conflict. And the "dialogue for peace," offered by the government even as it fires up its war against the indigenous people of Chiapas, is no more than a ploy.

### The race for the PRI nomination

As the PRI's November 7 internal presidential primary draws near, the four candidates have stepped up their attacks on each other. One of them, Roberto Madrazo, is using his last name—a "*madrazo*" is slang for a sharp blow—to strike especially hard at his main opponent, former Government Secretary Francisco Labastida. Although Madrazo enjoys broad support among disaffected members of the party, Labastida makes a show of being the "official" PRI candidate, and indeed the machinery that will organize the party's first-ever primary elections is working in his favor.

The big loser in a debate held among the PRI's four candidates was the PRI itself, as each man acted like a candidate for the

opposition, accusing the others of violating campaign spending limits. They all, however, avoided answering accusations on the origins of their campaign chests and their own personal fortunes. The four men also accused each other of being linked to former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, who now lives in self-imposed exile in Ireland, where he fled to avoid questioning on a number of events—including corruption and murder—that took place under his administration. All four even challenged the achievements proclaimed by President Zedillo in his annual report to Congress, which he gave just before the debate. They denounced the poverty in which the majority of Mexicans live, decried the alarming levels of insecurity, and pointed to corruption within the circles of power.

The government has yet to give convincing answers to several pending questions. First, Mario Ruiz Massieu, brother of the PRI general secretary assassinated in 1994, committed suicide in mid-September, leaving a letter implicating Zedillo in the murder of his brother and of Luis Colosio, the PRI's original presidential candidate that year. Second, further proof of illegal contributions from the Banco Unión to Zedillo's presidential campaign continues to emerge, but the President refuses to provide any information in response. Third, López Obrador's book on the scandal in FOBAPROA, titled *FOBAPROA: expediente abierto* ("FOBAPROA: Open File"), reveals how Zedillo converted the private debts of a group of bankers and big businesspeople into public debt by acting through the network of deals and favors that links economic and political power in Mexico.

#### **President's report: Intolerance**

In his fifth annual report to Congress, Zedillo came across as an insensitive and authoritarian president; one who does not deign to respond to questions and shamelessly rigs official statistics. He did not mention the bank bailout, the strike at the National Autonomous University (UNAM), or Chiapas.

Carlos Medina, the leader of the National Action Party (PAN) bench in Congress, responded to the President's report. He stressed that Mexicans are demanding clear answers, that the government has offended the people too many times, and that the number of Mexicans living in poverty continues to grow. He also mentioned the appearance of evidence proving that the PRI looted the national treasury in the 1994 elections. But angry PRI representatives noisily cut him short, while the television stations

ignored the content of his response and chose instead to insult the man who dared to confront the President. Although Zedillo had spoken of tolerance, the PRI representatives' intolerance was quite apparent, and was endorsed by the President's complacent silence. The regime's intolerance thus became the central message of the report.

### **Searching for an alliance**

The PAN representative's brave stance stirred hopes that a coalition among the leading opposition parties could yet be achieved. The leaders of eight parties had made progress in designing this alliance, though their efforts were hampered by the personal concerns of Vicente Fox, the PAN's presidential candidate, and of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the candidate of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD).

The commissions established in the eight parties managed to draft the key documents for an alliance, taking into account all of the relevant legal questions, and to agree on how they would put forward candidates for Congress. They failed, however, to reach agreement on one essential point: how to nominate the alliance's presidential candidate. The PAN refused to consider primary elections, fearing that they could be manipulated, while the PRD insisted that primaries were the only way people could really get close to the alliance candidate.

To resolve that one point, the parties decided to form a citizen's council charged with designing a candidate selection method. The council proposed doing three polls before the candidate's election and establishing 12,000 voting booths to hold an open consultation. Instead of resolving the problem, however, this proposal aggravated it. The PAN accused the majority of council members of proposing a solution that served PRD interests, and of simply splicing together the PAN and PRD proposals. The PAN asked for clarifications and received them, but was not convinced.

### **An aborted alliance**

The PRD and five other parties accepted the council's proposal, but the Green Party, under pressure from the Government Ministry to break the alliance, took advantage of the moment to opt out. Although supporters of the alliance see it as essential to democratize the country, establish a pluralistic government of reconciliation, guarantee governability and put an end to the six-

year crises, the alliance aborted. It is a shame, since hope had grown among many Mexicans that this alliance—which had already been baptized the Alliance for Mexico—would be the golden opportunity to finally defeat the state-party regime. Now, with the opposition divided, it will be much easier for the PRI to hold onto the presidency by virtue of hardcore supporters, together with its illegal tactics, coercion and vote buying.

#### **UNAM: Five months of strike**

Talks have fared no better at the UNAM, where the student strike has dragged on for over five long months. With the government trying to discredit the movement, arguing that a radicalized minority is trying to impose decisions and solutions on the majority of students, the movement has been losing some of the support it enjoyed at the start.

After faculty in the Peace with Democracy Association acknowledged that the General Strike Committee has succeeded in placing the right of all Mexicans to higher education on the national agenda, they asked the striking students to reopen the campus and accept the solution proposed by a group of eight distinguished retired professors. The students want guarantees, however. They know that if they end the strike without having firm commitments from the authorities, the promises will not be kept. The specter of what has happened in Chiapas hovers over the conflict in the UNAM.

The solution proposed by the eight professors emeritus includes the students' most important demands, but the majority of the student assemblies do not feel that this is the case. A consensus around this solution has been growing in society at large, however. For his part, President Zedillo has tried to use the proposal as an ultimatum, warning the students that they could either accept this path or expect the use of force.

The authors of the proposal explained that it was meant only to be a starting point for further negotiations by the parties involved. While the university authorities pretended to accept it, they postponed acting on it while pressuring the government to forcibly evict the students. Groups of student infiltrators, paid by the university authorities and the Government Ministry, tried without success to enter the occupied campus buildings, and on several of their attempts also tried to provoke violence.

After several very tense meetings, the University Council formed a “liaison” commission to find out what the striking students are proposing—which is perfectly clear to everyone else, since their demands have been repeatedly broadcast through the media. The students agreed to work with this commission to arrange talks.

The University Council, which the university president controls, has repeatedly postponed the issue, however; it seems that the intransigents are prevailing. Intransigence has also been seen in the General Strike Committee, and some of the hard-liners within the student movement have been pushed into the violent positions of the infiltrators.

The Zapatistas repaid the students' visit to them in the jungle by going to see the students in Mexico City, where they participated in three important events. The first was a march against the militarization of Chiapas, another was a march against the privatization of university education in solidarity with the student movement, and the third was an Independence Day celebration on the campus esplanade.

Taking a phrase from the national anthem, the Zapatista delegates who visited Mexico City declared that the government was treating them as a “foreign enemy” and that the army was destroying the forest and contaminating its water. On September 15, the delegates gave the “cry of independence” on the City University campus while the indigenous communities gave the “cry of the excluded” in Chiapas.

### **The strike's big achievements**

In response to everything that has been said against the student movement, the striking students have become more flexible. They have reduced their initial six, seemingly immutable demands, down to four: repeal of the new tuition regulations; an end to any actions and legal sanctions against the movement's participants, along with the dismantling of the UNAM's repressive apparatus; the extension of the school year to reschedule lost class time; and a democratic congress with decision-making power. The other two points, which have to do with the regulations on admissions and promotion and with the agency in charge of making these evaluations, would be left up to this congress.

One lucid opinion on the conflict was offered by Octavio Rodríguez Araujo, who has emphasized that the students, in striking to protest the new tuition regulations and later adding other demands, were trying to counter the government's neoliberal education policies, not to show how many things they oppose. Thus, the purpose of the strike is not to close down the UNAM but to oblige the authorities to discuss the university's current legislation, forms of government and study plans. Sergio Zermeño, in turn, has shown that, between the radicalism of some students on the one hand and the radicalism of the authorities on the other, a sizable number of people have chosen to repopulate the middle ground in order to rebuild the university community. Many of the striking students who are proposing talks can be found in this middle ground, along with the University Council members who dissent from the positions of the president's bureaucracy and want to find genuine solutions rather than see the proposed university reform imposed from above and outside.

The student movement's biggest achievement is to have unleashed a debate about what structural reforms are needed in the national university, a discussion in which all members of the university community must participate.

### **War in Chiapas**

Four hundred representatives of over 20 organizations went to La Realidad in August to meet with the Zapatistas. There Subcomandante Marcos spoke with them about the intensification of the terror campaign against the movement. He also said that the Zapatistas would continue to support the student movement as well as the electrical workers' struggle against the privatization of electrical service. They also support the struggle of the faculty and staff of the National Institute of Anthropology and History, and of the teachers and students of the National Anthropology and History School, against an attempt to enact a law privatizing culture. Marcos denounced the government's decision to put the country's cultural patrimony up for sale: "For those who govern us today, history has no value if it is not priced on the stock market. If they can't sell the country's cultural patrimony, it's useless."

Because this meeting was still underway on August 14, its participants bore witness to the militarization that Chiapas has suffered for several years. That day 10,000 soldiers, together with

a platoon of paratroopers, tightened the military cordon around the Zapatistas by invading the Amador Hernández communal farm.

The official coordinator of the nonexistent talks defended the military action by explaining that highway construction companies in Ocosingo and Las Margaritas had asked the army to provide security. If true, this reveals yet another illegal act, as the army cannot be put at the service of private entities.

An increasing number of indigenous communities are obliged to live surrounded by federal troops, who have declared a silent war against them. The army arrives with armored cars, sophisticated weapons, helicopters, airplanes, prostitutes, alcohol, arrogance and violations of all kinds. The situation is complicated by the fact that many indigenous communities and autonomous municipalities are located on or near oil deposits, and the government wants these natural resources. It also wants to punish the Zapatistas for their struggle and their solidarity with other national struggles. What's more, if roads are being built, it is not to provide a service to the communities but to allow the army to move more rapidly and buttress the military cordon around the Zapatistas.

### **US advisers in Chiapas**

As if this were not enough, civilian communities that sympathize with the Zapatistas are harassed by planes buzzing the area, arbitrary and violent detentions, the occupation of communal land and attacks against observers. The government claims the conflict involves only 4 municipalities, but the army has broadened its radius of action to over 70. Furthermore, in an effort to smash the Zapatistas and their social base, it has extended the armed violence through at least a dozen paramilitary groups, while the Defense Ministry has created five counterinsurgency units with sophisticated weaponry. A foreign delegation visiting Chiapas reported seeing US weaponry and advisers in the area.

Such a war requires privacy, which explains why observers bother the government. It also explains why the human rights organizations insist on having national and foreign observers in Chiapas, so their presence might help prevent conflicts.

### **Need for talks**

It has been said that Chiapas is short a governor and long on provocateurs. What it is really long on are superfluous coordinators of nonexistent talks, and what it is really short of are the talks themselves. At the end of August, the United Nation's Subcommission to Promote and Protect Human Rights formally expressed its concern over the situation of human rights and basic freedoms in Mexico, placing particular emphasis on the rights of the indigenous peoples and communities.

On August 30, a caravan from Mexico City carrying 20 tons of humanitarian aid arrived in Chiapas. And following up on a counterinsurgency proposal recommended by US advisers to destabilize the Zapatistas and their support base, a group of PRI businesspeople created a foundation to collect some US\$20 million for the people of Chiapas. The idea is to make these organizations look like new NGOs, to counteract the independent ones.

#### **The government's "open letter"**

Although Zedillo did not refer to the problem of Chiapas in his fifth annual report to Congress, the Government Secretariat published an "open letter" to the EZLN several days later, calling on it to return immediately to the talks broken off three years ago. In the letter, he proposed opening up the President's initiative on indigenous rights and culture to the Zapatistas' opinion, creating a new body to intermediate in the talks, restructuring the monitoring and verification commission, freeing imprisoned Zapatista sympathizers who are not implicated in violent acts, and studying the harassment charges that have been made by various human rights groups, the communities and the people affected. He also promised that this time the government's representatives would have decision-making power. The letter made no mention whatever of either the military or paramilitary presence in the region.

The PRD gave its opinion on the proposal, insisting that it is unacceptable as long as the federal government refuses to withdraw the troops stationed in indigenous communities and fails to fulfill the San Andrés accords. It called the proposal nothing more than rhetorical demagoguery, since no one sits down to talk with a gun to the temple. When the government argued that it had met the conditions laid down by the EZLN in 1996 to resume the talks, the PRD answered that those conditions had changed since the situation had worsened since

then. It said that all the government has to do if it really wants to resume the talks is accept the proposal presented in 1996 by the now marginalized Commission on Harmony and Pacification (COCOPA).

### **One soldier for every nine people**

Many NGOs have also described the government's proposal as insufficient. While recognizing that the letter shows a change of government attitude, which for a long time was closed to any new contact with the Zapatistas, they argued that the proposal is unaccompanied by any signs of sincerity and appears only to be a public relations move.

The indigenous organizations went even further, describing the proposal as "a step backward" as it proposes to resume the talks as though an agreement had not already been reached—one the government refuses to honor. They also pointed out that a full third of the army's troops are now stationed in Chiapas, and that the ratio of these troops to the population is 1:9. Other figures on militarization are equally alarming. For example, while there were 7 army barracks and 5 camps in Chiapas in 1995, today there are 26 barracks and 57 camps.

### **More of the same**

While the papal nuncio in Mexico asked the EZLN to accept the government's proposal, a US State Department report revealed that armed men had profaned 48 churches in Chiapas and murdered 5 catechists between 1994 and 1997. The bishops' commission for peace in Chiapas asked the EZLN to give signs that it was interested in resuming the talks, and called on the government to reposition its troops. The Mexican House of Representatives called on the federal government and the EZLN to fulfill the San Andrés accords and assume their responsibility to the nation to resume the talks.

It is quite clear that the government is maintaining the same position in the proposal that led to the breakdown of the talks in the first place. It is trying to present the same official policies as though they were new, in an apparent replay of the logic it used when it tried to renegotiate what had already been agreed upon. Also again, the threat hangs over the conflict that a law on indigenous rights will be pushed through with the support of the majority of PRI senators that respects neither the letter nor the spirit of the San Andrés accords.

On September 13, the ex-mayor of Chenaló and 23 indigenous people were sentenced to 35 years in prison for the Acteal massacre. Of the 102 people detained, only 5 admitted their participation in this horrendous crime. Ninety arrest warrants are still pending, including those against 11 former government officials and mid-ranking police officers. The planners of the massacre have not been touched.

The same day as the sentencing, thousands of indigenous people marched and blocked highways in six regions of Chiapas. They rejected the government's proposal and demanded fulfillment of the San Andrés accords. They also demanded that political prisoners be freed, that safe conditions be established so displaced people can return home and that the paramilitary groups be disbanded. Finally, they demanded that interim governor Roberto Albores be removed from office and tried for his foolish and dangerous management of the region's affairs, for illegally using public resources to support Labastida's presidential campaign and for pitting the people of Chiapas against each other.

Contradicting emphatic official declarations that paramilitary forces do not exist, the attorney general timidly admitted that 15 "probably armed" groups are active in Chiapas.

### **Zedillo's irritable look**

In mid-September, Marcos referred to the Government Secretariat's open letter. "And how can we respond quickly if 'el supremo' refuses to give up the microphone, and keeps adding declarations, rectifications and postscripts to his open letter?" He then put in his own postscript, insinuating that Ruiz Massieu's suicide should not be taken at face value, because it has to do with a frequent practice in the US justice system: the witness protection program. The government replied that his statement was not an answer, and that it is still waiting for a response to its open letter.

While the opposition and many civic groups, especially indigenous groups, unmasked the government's hypocritical call to the EZLN to talk, Marcos analyzed the current national dynamic in a communiqué. There he called attention to something that is evident in quite a few photos of the President: his irritable look. He described the decision to send tens of thousands of troops

from the National Palace to southeast Mexico as the postmodern remedy for the plague of Indians and students, adding that the government's actions enjoy the support of the local strongmen who govern, destroy and kill on indigenous lands. Killing Indians and persecuting students has become, he said, a fashionable sport in Chiapas. Marcos described armies as the most absurd structures in existence, which is why the EZLN's aspiration is to disappear. He also offered a chilling piece of information: soldiers who disapprove of the use of paramilitary groups in Chiapas, arguing that carrying arms requires discipline and a sense of responsibility, have disappeared.

### **Three violations of the cease fire**

A review of the events of the past two years shows that the federal army is the main cause of destabilization in southeast Mexico. Where federal troops appear, tensions rise and conflicts break out. Marcos recounted the government's failure to comply with the law on the talks as well as international resolutions, and pointed out that, since Zedillo rose to power thanks to Colosio's assassins, the federal army has broken the cease-fire at least three times: in February 1995, when five Zapatistas, one army colonel and ten soldiers fell in combat; in June 1998, when eight Zapatistas were executed in El Bosque after being taken prisoner by the army; and in August 1999, when two Zapatistas were struck by bullets and eight soldiers by sticks and stones in San José La Esperanza.

### **"Humorless" students**

Marcos didn't forget the student movement in his analysis. He said that few other social movements in recent years have suffered such a crude media war. Private television, which in Mexico represents the far right, as well as radio have gone well beyond what might have been expected, and with the government's evident complacence. The students have been branded as agitators, subversives, assailants, kidnappers, delinquents, imposters, extremists and much more. Some of the students dubbed one of the television channels "narco-TV," a reference to the case of Paco Stanley, a popular comedian on the station who was recently killed under murky circumstances that apparently had to do with links to the drug trade.

And in Chiapas, large amounts of money originally destined for the indigenous communities have been diverted to the media. As Marcos detailed, the local government picked up a new theme

once parading “Zapatista deserters” had fallen out of fashion: that of “evil striking university students who have come to sow discord among the previously placid indigenous communities.” Governor Albores has decided that he must prevent these young people from “violating” Chiapas’ sovereignty, since he apparently sees anything outside of the PRI as foreign.

Marcos offers a different vision of the students who go to Chiapas. While he praises their courage and thanks them for their solidarity, he is critical of their solemnity, the fact that quite a few of them seem to lack a sense of humor. He refers to that missing ingredient as “a lamentable thing in anyone fighting for change, and a terrible thing in a young person.” To learn more about the student movement, Marcos had spoken at length with the students who visited the Zapatistas. Some of them described their movement as worn out; others said it was gaining strength. Some argued for remaining firm, while others said it was necessary to be more flexible. Marcos saw much right on both sides. After listening carefully, he spoke to them, with no slogans. He said the Zapatistas respected, loved and admired them, and followed closely what they are doing and what they are no longer doing. He added that the Zapatistas see many new things in them but also many old things, including the fact that they are very closed in on themselves—as though everything turned around their own movement. He criticized their lack of humor, their stiff seriousness and, above all, their failure to listen more to others.

Marcos asked the General Strike Committee some questions: “Is the way to win an argument by imposing silence on the other side? Does the committee become stronger by ‘purging’ dissent and becoming a homogenous entity? Is this the university the committee wants?”

#### **Similarities between Zapatistas and students**

Marcos found 12 important similarities between the Zapatista movement and the student movement.

\* While the protagonists in Chiapas are scorned and forgotten indigenous Mexicans, the movement in the UNM is made up of Mexican youth, also scorned and forgotten.

\* From the very beginning of the Zapatista uprising, the two leading private television stations have clamored for crushing the

indigenous people and, along with the government and some newspapers and radios, organized a campaign to discredit them. Since the strike broke out in the UNM, TV Azteca and Televisa have dedicated themselves to slandering the students with particular virulence. In this they have been joined by a large share of the country's newspapers and radios, and seconded by the government and university authorities. "They're just a few manipulated Indians," the television shouts. "They're just a few lazy, manipulated young people," TV Azteca and Televisa scream at the top of their lungs. The government insists that "obscure interests, white students, the red church and the PRD" lie behind the indigenous uprising. The government and the university authorities keep reiterating that "outside interests, Zapatistas and the PRD" are behind the student strike in the UNAM.

\* The Zapatistas' main demand is, "We're here; we want a country that includes us, a more free, democratic and just country. We're not fighting for daily provisions or corn grinders. We took up arms for a better Mexico." And the students' main demand is, "We're here; we want a country that includes us and free public education. We're not fighting so that they don't charge us for the semester. We're on strike for free education for all Mexicans."

\* The government offers roofing and provisions to the indigenous people who have taken up arms. "What more do you want? Put down your arms and surrender!" cry the media. The university authorities offer to hide the fees under another guise. "What more do you want? Vacate the buildings and surrender!" the media cries.

\* The government names clumsy, inexperienced and repressive negotiators, and instructs them to sabotage the talks with the Zapatistas. The university authorities name an authoritarian, intolerant, fascist commission, which sets out to sabotage the talks with the striking students.

\* Two lawyers representing the country's far right, Carrancá y Rivas and Ignacio Orihuela, demand that the San Andrés accords be thrown out and state force be used to make an example of the indigenous rebels by massacring them. They also demand the use of state force against the students.

\* During the most difficult, complex moments in the talks in Chiapas, President Zedillo made things worse with his threatening

declarations and reiterated his ultimatum to the EZLN. Zedillo has also hampered the talks between university authorities and striking students with his declarations and torpedoed the proposal of the eight professors emeritus by threatening to use "the legitimate force of the state" if the proposal is not accepted.

\* Right-wing intellectuals spare no ink in asking for the federal army's intervention and annihilation of the Zapatistas. Rightwing intellectuals also ask for a strong hand against the striking students.

\* Business associations call for repression of the indigenous Zapatistas. They also call for closing down the UNAM and repressing the students who participate in the movement.

\* During the talks, the EZLN does everything possible to keep them going while the government does all it can to sabotage them. In the UNAM, the students make concessions in their proposal and give clear signs of wanting to talk, while the government and the university authorities stop at nothing in their efforts to undermine the talks.

\* The government accuses the EZLN of being intransigent and not wanting to talk. The government and the university authorities accuse the students of being intransigent and not wanting to talk.

\* The government and its lackeys spread the tale that within the EZLN are "hard-liners" who reject dialogue and are imposing their position on a "conciliatory" tendency. The government and its lackeys spread the tale that the student movement is divided between "extremists and moderates" and that the majority of the striking students are being manipulated by the extremists.

### **A new phase begins**

The Zapatistas have attracted broad sectors of society to support the indigenous cause. The student movement has put authoritarianism up against the wall, and has won the support of many grassroots movements. But the state party regime, with its eye on the 2000 elections, has a strategy for dealing with this broad, democratic movement.

Polls show that over 60% of Mexicans had hopes that, through a broad opposition alliance, the state party regime could be brought down in order to take solid steps towards a democratic

transition in Mexico. The parties, blinded by their own interests, were unable to respond to this demand and incapable of giving form to this alliance. Beginning in October, they will be facing the PRI divided, or, at best, with partial alliances.

The PRI has breathed a sigh of relief. Now, with its hardcore supporters, vote buying and the use of state resources, it can hold onto power. It is also hoping that many voters will become disillusioned and stay home on election day. To achieve this, it has designed two tactics. One is to use its subordinates in the media to shower us with news about the electoral campaign until we're completely fed up with it. With the primaries barely underway, signs are that it is already succeeding in this.

The PRI's other tactic is to till the soil in order to harvest the vote of fear. This explains its determination not to resolve conflicts but rather to aggravate them and draw them out. This is what it is trying to do in both Chiapas and the UNAM.

Despite the PRI's enormous power, however, the pressure exerted by citizen groups may be able to limit or even reverse its efforts. Although the opposition parties will enter the race alone, it is still possible that once the presidential campaign is well underway, this pressure could encourage candidates who are way behind in the polls to withdraw in favor of the one in the lead. Though this may seem unlikely, it is not impossible. Nor are the other bold moves and sacrifices that must be made.

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### FOBAPROA: Another State Party Crime

*In a democratic country the FOBAPROA scandal would have sufficed to bring a government down, but in Mexico the party regimen of the state makes the president untouchable. Clinton tottered because of an act of perjury in regards to his private life, but Zedillo is impervious to sanction even in the face of wholesale illegality and the economic disaster of an entire country.*

Jorge Alonso

Paraphrasing President Clinton's confession in the Lewinsky case, US professor George Grayson described the Mexican Bank Fund to Protect Savings (FOBAPROA) as a time bomb because of inappropriate conduct in the way it was set up. This potentially dangerous time bomb is now front-page news in Mexico, and must be seen within the framework of what is already a very long story.

### Centuries of corruption

From the colonial period on, corruption in Mexico has been encouraged by a separation between the law and daily life. Corruption came to be identified with the illegal use of political power for economic gain and personal, family or group advantage. It was not a marginal phenomenon, but rather formed an important part of the system. Bribery and extortion, the sale of political posts, contraband—these crimes have been systematic, tolerated transgressions ever since.

The legacy continued after independence into the 19th century, when new forms of corruption were favored, especially the practice of taking advantage of public works to divert resources into private hands. When a provincial governor complained to Porfirio Díaz that his campaign had cost him far more than the meager salary provided by the post to which he had been elected, Díaz gave him the solution: Don't be stupid, my friend: do public works. The revolution changed little in this respect; one of President Madero's brothers was heavily criticized. And Carranza's government was so infamous that the verb *carrancear* entered the vocabulary as a synonym for to rob.

Obregón lost his arm in the battle in which he defeated Villa. A popular joke explained that in order to find the missing limb among the dismembered remains of the soldiers, coins were thrown into the air; one dead hand sprang back to life to catch them, resolving all doubts. As President, Obregón maintained that no one could hold out against a blast of 50,000 pesos.

Mexicans have always complained about government corruption, but the scandals have been especially outrageous during certain periods. During Alemán's government, for example, the President and his closest collaborators took all they could get their hands on. López Portillo shamelessly described in print how he traveled around the world for several months as a great potentate after leaving office. The Salinas family has been accused of illicitly amassing fortunes. As one of the politicians most representative of the PRI regime summed it up in an oft-quoted phrase, "A poor politician is an inept politician.

### The reign of impunity

Corruption is also rampant in Mexico among businesspeople and government officials who have gone into business. It has played a major role in the accumulation of a large share of the country's private capital. Considerable private wealth has been amassed from public property and funds. The country's eternally ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and one of its central tenets—a powerful, authoritarian presidency—are both decisive factors in the increasing levels of corruption. This is true not only because the party has bought and stolen votes, but also because it has endowed the highest office in the land with a great deal of discretionary power, without legal checks and balances or any need to give a true rendering of accounts. The result has been a dense web of complicity and impunity.

Francisco González, in his article "El México impune", has described impunity as the country's greatest problem because power must be corralled or it will overrun everything.

### **Plundering the nation**

The bank privatization carried out by Carlos Salinas de Gortari's government provides one example of this network of corruption. The privatization of the banks represented 83% of all privatizations carried out before 1991. The banks were sold through what has been described as high-tech political patronage. Both the President's office and the Treasury Secretariat took part in the sale, with no real supervision by the legislative branch. The reports turned in to the Mexican House of Representatives in 1995 were incomplete and incoherent, and the legislators were not given the studies or appraisals drawn up when each bank was sold. Illicit profits were made throughout the whole process. Among those who benefited from the privatization were the owners of many of the brokerage houses that had first attracted and then swindled small depositors under Miguel de la Madrid's government—with its complicity. The fact that some people had privileged access to public funds for their own private enrichment was more evident than ever under the Salinas government. At the time, the opposition charged that the privatization of the banks, highways and social security system was a fraudulent plundering of the nation. The FOBAPROA scandal, which has been called the greatest fraud in the history of Mexico, followed the same path as these scandals.

### **The seed of the scandal is sown**

Filled with great expectations over implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which President Salinas praised as Mexico's door to the first world, businesspeople went deeply into debt. In 1993, credit grew to 41% of that year's gross domestic product. The recently privatized banks fell over each other to offer loans.

But the day NAFTA went into effect—January 1, 1994—celebrations took

second stage as the Zapatista Army (EZLN) burst into the headlines, opposing a treaty that would further impoverish the majority of the Mexican people. 1994 was a disastrous year. The PRI, which had usually provided an arena to peacefully resolve conflicts among the power groups, had to resort to assassination to block Colosio's candidacy. Ernesto Zedillo was the main beneficiary of that political crime. The assassination of the PRI's general secretary followed soon after. The bloody trail led to fortunes, made under the wing of power, linked to drug trafficking.

Because of the "December mistake," Zedillo was forced at the beginning of his term to make an overdue and poorly implemented devaluation, which left Mexico insolvent and faced with imminent payments in dollars. To overcome the crisis, the Clinton administration organized a US\$50 billion bailout in exchange for drastic measures and guarantees of oil. Interest rates shot from 20% at the end of 1994 to 109% by the third month of 1995. Salaries fell. Over 7,000 businesses went bankrupt. The domestic market shrank and unemployment rose. A good number of those who owed money to banks could no longer pay. While the portfolio of loans in arrears amounted to 20% of total bank capital in 1990, it had soared to 93.8% by 1995.

Some individuals or businesses had put up collateral for the loans, but found it devalued by the 1995 crisis. In other cases, little or no collateral had been put up, with the collusion of bank owners or officials, and the credit had been used for personal ends. Bankers had lent to each other and to themselves and even to nonexistent companies.

#### A bottomless pit

Zedillo's government came to the rescue of the business elite in December 1994. Signals went out encouraging bankers to transfer many of these irregular loans to the bailout fund—that is, to FOBAPROA, which is a trusteeship used by the Mexican government through the Bank of Mexico to protect the capital of depositors in the banking system. Both wealthy bankers and banks on the verge of collapse did so. Even bankers who had financed the PRI's 1994 campaign—which played a part in decapitalizing their banks—transferred to the bailout fund the sums they had donated to the PRI.

At the time of the crisis, FOBAPROA served both to save the banking system and to cover up a chain of crimes. Through it the government issued promissory notes for the banks' liabilities, retaining bank stock in exchange. Unlike other countries, the Mexican government guarantees 100% of deposits. Thus, without moving a finger, bankers began to receive the flow of interest payments that these promissory notes generated. The government has insisted that if it had not done this, the country would have been ruined, but it is slowly coming to light that many of the liabilities assumed by the Fund resulted from

bank losses due to speculation.

FOBAPROA contains 1,275 loans of over 20 million pesos each, and just 600 of them make up more than 55% of the Fund. Some 700 loans were granted without collateral. Quick fortunes, illegal private financing of PRI campaigns and the indiscriminate transfer of public companies to private interests have all disappeared into FOBAPROA's bottomless pit. Its liabilities equal 5.5 times the banking system's available capital, which shows that operations far in excess of available capital were authorized with the complicity of the officials in charge. At the end of February 1998, the executive branch assumed liabilities totaling over 552 billion pesos, or roughly \$67 billion.

Not only did FOBAPROA illegally issue the promissory notes for the banks' liabilities by doing it without the required capital backing, it also violated the Constitution in the process. By assuming these obligations without requesting congressional approval, the government violated article 73 of the Constitution, which expressly states that the executive branch requires authorization from the Congress to contract debts. Thus, in a single move, the government broke laws, usurped functions reserved for the Congress and violated the constitutional order. In October 1997, a group of legislators meeting in the Legislative Palace with the National Banking and Stocks Commission president stated that FOBAPROA's discretionary powers needed to be reviewed.

### The Opposition Responds

In 1998, the executive branch sent the legislature a bill proposing to restructure the bank bailout, which basically meant converting it into direct public debt—in other words, a debt owed by all Mexicans. The President and his collaborators argued that the debt already existed and would have to be legalized after the fact. They assumed that the initiative would pass as a mere formality, without much debate, just as had always happened as long as the PRI had the majority in the House of Representatives. But in the July 1997 federal elections, the opposition had obtained the majority. These opposition legislators began examining not only the proposed law, but the bailout itself. Their first move was to request more information, since it was important to know who had benefited from the Fund, but the government refused to give this information, alleging bank confidentiality. The legislators, recognizing this as a pretext to cover up complicity in FOBAPROA's dealings, responded with an argument that was impossible to counter: how was it that confidentiality would be protected if the executive branch saw the lists, but not if the legislative branch saw them?

Because of this study by the opposition legislators, the implications of the presidential bill and the illegal actions that gave rise to it came to light. The injustice of the proposal itself was clear: it privatized the profits and collectively distributed the losses among all Mexicans. If it were approved, the

Mexican government would have to pay out nearly \$32 billion in interest on the debt, which would increase the public debt from 27.9% of the GNP to 42.4%. This would mean that every single Mexican, even the poorest, would owe more than 6,000 pesos.

Offering no proof, the government insisted both that it had acted legally and that FOBAPROA had served as the means to overcome the banking crisis quickly and at the lowest possible cost, using appropriate measures. It argued that refusing to recognize the debt was simply unrealistic, since it had already been incurred. Furthermore, the government accused the opposition parties of fueling a crisis. All these arguments were summarized in a costly television campaign paid for with public taxes. Government and business propaganda centered on the claim that if the presidential bill were not passed, depositors would lose their money.

The opposition retorted that the Fund had bailed out criminals disguised as bankers and that what was at issue was an alarming case of corruption, with the President trying to pass the cost of his mistakes onto the taxpayers. They described FOBAPROA, originally designed to protect savings and support the stock market, as a system for looting. FOBAPROA had permitted brokerage houses and banks to pass on to it the losses generated by their speculative operations with private and public funds. The authorities did not even require them to repay the capital that had gone into the Fund.

#### **PAN calls bailout "heroes" arrogant and incompetent**

The National Action Party (PAN) declared in August of this year that Zedillo's bill was unacceptable, and that his bank bailout was not only illegal but also unjust for encouraging default on loan obligations. That same month, PAN asked that FOBAPROA be cleaned up and those responsible for its mismanagement legally sanctioned. It argued that the promissory notes held by the Fund would have to be converted into other debt instruments to cover the cost of the bailout, and that the legislature should control the issuance and sale of these instruments through an institute that would oversee the sale of FOBAPROA's assets. According to PAN estimates, this would reduce the bailout cost to 252 billion pesos. PAN also made a proposal to relieve the burden on small- and medium-sized debtors.

For good measure, the PAN's legislative bench chief came down hard on those who tried to pass themselves off as heroes of the Mexican economy. He stressed that the arrogance of those who boasted of having acted in time to prevent an even worse calamity was matched only by their incompetence, since they were making claims that could not hold up to the most superficial

analysis.

### **PRD charges they are bankrupting the people**

The Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) organized a grassroots referendum on FOBAPROA to make people aware of the fact that, according to the government proposal, all citizens, whether or not they had anything to do with banks, would have to pay for the bank bailout. A survey carried out by Alducín and Associates, published in September 1998, showed that 53% of men and 50% of women do not have bank accounts.

The PRD refuted the threat of the government and bankers that the banking system would crumble if the presidential initiative were not approved as is, pointing out that what really put people's savings at risk was the project to bail out the illicit debts of wealthy businesspeople. The PRD began to look for a solution that would affect neither depositors nor the banking system. It particularly opposed several specific points in the presidential proposal: the plan to convert the 552 billion pesos into public debt, to issue bonds to bankers that could be sold on the market in exchange for cash, to make Mexicans pay out 32 billion pesos a year to the owners of these bonds—which would invariably lead to cuts in social spending—and to make them repay the full value of the bonds issued to the bankers within 20 years.

The PRD proposed instead to punish the high public officials, bankers and businesspeople who had caused the banking crisis by obliging those responsible for mismanaging the Fund to pay. It also demanded that all information on the case be handed over and audited. It proposed creating an institute to protect the deposits of small and medium-sized depositors, cleaning up the banking system to prevent future fraud, and returning their credit portfolios to the banks that had not been intervened by the state. According to this proposal, the banking institutions would have to return FOBAPROA's promissory notes and the rest of the arrears portfolio would go to a financial institution charged specifically with collecting these overdue debts. The recovered funds would be earmarked to help small and medium-sized debtors. The PRD further proposed that a fund be created to insure bank deposits only up to the peso equivalent of \$50,000.

Three and a half million citizens participated in the PRD's referendum, of whom 95% said NO to President Zedillo's initiative. In his annual address two days later, the President made no reference to either FOBAPROA or the Chiapas conflict. Many legislators shouted out from the audience, "No to FOBAPROA!" Despite the government's television campaign, the issue had triggered a wave of anti-government opinion.

In the middle of September, the Center for Opinion Studies did a poll on the

issue. Over 70% of those surveyed were aware of the FOBAPROA problem and over half agreed that the banks and officials who had authorized the operations should pay for them. Only 9.5% accepted the government's proposal.

### Why the cover-up?

When the scandal first broke, the government offered to provide information on amounts, but without naming names. As the correlation of forces changed, it was forced to cede ground. Given the evidence—which it had first tried to cover up—the government agreed that some guilty businesspeople be tried and said that warrants had already been issued against some of them. It even criminally prosecuted one of the businesspeople involved in FOBAPROA, although not for this reason but for tax evasion. Cabal Peniche, one of the biggest contributors to PRI campaigns as well as one of the biggest crooks, remained at large. Popular opinion held that the government did not want to arrest him because if he talked, a lot of other dirt would be uncovered. Meanwhile, the government continued to hide information, using pressure and blackmail and trying to divide the opposition parties. The head of the PRI bench accused the PRD of intransigence and the PAN of fearing to work with the government to find a solution to the problem, because of the electoral cost this would involve.

The money found in FOBAPROA that had been contributed to the PRI's electoral campaign was one of the most important issues brought to light by the scandal. The Fund had absorbed campaign spending financed by Banpaís and Cabal Peniche's Banco Unión. Thus it was proven that the PRI had not only received donations stemming from bank frauds but had not reported these donations, as required by law.

The contributions made known after the 1994 elections represented 4.6 times the national campaign spending limit. The former president of Aeroméxico's administrative council revealed that his company's donation to Zedillo's presidential campaign alone came to 12.3 times the maximum amount that can be contributed by an individual, and 2.4 times the maximum amount that can be contributed by an organization. Naturally, this explains why the government did not want FOBAPROA's contents to be known. It wanted to preserve the anonymity of its illegal donors, guaranteeing their impunity and its channels for continuing this practice in future elections.

The opposition demanded that the PRI return the ill-gotten funds. And, although the issue was not raised, there were legal grounds to demand that the PRI registry be nullified. Ironically, the PRI was not off the mark when it responded to this late-appearing evidence with the claim that its 1994 campaign had "already been judged."

### Negotiation or skirmish?

Unmasked, the government, tried to negotiate with the parties. Agreeing in principle that white-collar crimes should be prosecuted, the PRI proposed that 70% of FOBAPROA be converted into public debt and agreed to discuss a plan to support small and medium-sized debtors, then promptly declared that an agreement was near. It sketched out a program to support "debtors in compliance"— those who had restructured their debts and continued making payments—with discounts of up to 60%, and 45% on their mortgages. The plan also included benefits for the agricultural sector and small businesspeople.

But the PRI's maneuvers continued into late September. The PRD charged that the government was still insisting on converting FOBAPROA's liabilities into public debt, and refusing the PRD proposal to return to the banks the arrears due portfolio that had been absorbed by FOBAPROA. The PRD pointed out that the proposed solution made no allowances for small and medium-sized debtors who were not paying because the government's mistaken economic policy had bankrupted them. The PRD demanded the resignation of the National Banking Commission president and the head of FOBAPROA, because those who were party to the conflict could not participate in negotiations about it that might well imply criminal proceedings. It also demanded a political judging of the president of the Bank of Mexico, who had been treasury secretary during the first years of Zedillo's government.

On the last day of September, a new skirmish broke out between the legislative and executive branches over the presentation of the judicial analysis concluding that the government had violated the Constitution by not consulting the Congress about contracting public debt. The PRI bench walked out of the session to prevent a vote on the document. The executive branch and the other parties later reached an agreement on the issue—but this time without the PRD representatives present.

Among other things, the government agreed to withdraw its proposal to convert FOBAPROA's liabilities into public debt. In the proposal agreed upon by only part of the opposition, these liabilities would be turned over to an institute charged with recovering assets. An exchange of portfolios would take place with the five banks that had not been intervened by the state; they would assume the loans greater than \$5 million. A new program for smaller debtors was also proposed, as was a greater information flow and a commitment to carry out audits in accord with the law. The PAN representatives demanded that the publicity campaign in favor of FOBAPROA be stopped.

The government thus took the steam out of some of the PRD's demands, although no statement was issued. But beyond any solution that may be found,

the key issues—illegality and corruption—have not been addressed.

#### Yet another crime

In one of his communiq  s, the EZLN's Subcomandante Marcos called Zedillo not only a bad economist and worse politician but also a criminal who had sequestered the law and sought to dispose of the nation's wealth at his whim. He described FOBAPROA as a "political and economic crime" and emphasized that the Fund raised fundamental questions about the political and economic model imposed on Mexico by the state party system.

FOBAPROA is not the only crime committed by the PRI. At the end of 1997, a paramilitary band, made up of party activists protected by the army and high political officials, massacred children, women and men who were praying in Acteal, Chiapas. The crime horrified the world. Unable to cover it up, the government meted out the lightest possible punishments. Nine months later, while it has still not responded to the international community's demand that such paramilitary bands in Chiapas be dismantled, it has made progress in its attempt to cover up corruption and guarantee impunity in the case of FOBAPROA. But the government has been obliged to back down somewhat since it no longer controls the legislature—thanks to changes imposed by Mexican voters who are slowly pushing the country towards a transition to democracy. At this point, the idea in the president's office, the state party's strongest bastion, is to let a few heads to roll so that top officials can be saved.

#### From populism to opulence

Zedillo and the PRI have tried to block the trial of Tabasco's governor Madrazo, who exceeded campaign spending limits—spending almost as much as Clinton in his campaign—with money that also came from FOBAPROA. In a democratic country, the FOBAPROA scandal would have brought down the government, but Mexico's state party has made the President untouchable. While perjury over a private affair has Clinton tottering, Zedillo remains unperturbed by thoroughly illegal actions and the economic disaster wrought upon a whole country.

Mexico's ruling party regime used to be accused of populism, not exactly of trying to create a welfare state but at least to reduce some of its ills. But even after proclaiming its faith in the wisdom of market redistribution, the government came to the rescue some of some of its closest allies after discovering that they had not managed their affairs well. It has freed them from the punishment of the market to prevent their collapse, and shifted the cost to society. It has rejected populism in favor of opulence, and is systematically carrying out a reverse-Robin Hood redistribution of wealth: it is taking from everyone, even the neediest, to give to the rich. FOBAPROA is one more result of a powerful, authoritarian presidency. Even though somewhat

corralled by a new legislature that intends to act autonomously, Mexico's ruling party is using its still-strong presidential power to try to get the parties to cut deals over clear issues of legality that should not be open to negotiation.

### Towards the year 2020

Any arrangement that does not address both the violation of the Constitution and the injustice of the presidential proposal is a sham. The PRD is very clear about this. The citizens participating in its referendum rejected the presidential solution. Some solution to FOBAPROA must be found that does not involve converting its liabilities into public debt.

Some PAN representatives, proponents of political realism, proposed lowering the percentage from 70% to 50%. Thus, only half of FOBAPROA would become public debt. Others in the PAN were more concerned about the issue of legality and were reluctant to go along with the government because of the political costs involved.

The PRI has pleaded that FOBAPROA not be politicized, even though it has already politicized the Fund itself through the campaign contributions and efforts to save its allies. Those now in power would like to preserve this channel as a means of obtaining large under-the-table donations, so they can continue buying votes and undermining free elections, thus ensuring that they remain in power until the year 2020, as the current treasury secretary once predicted. This is one more sign that the PRI will tolerate only a thin layer of democracy.

### Solution or whitewash?

The government presented as a "great achievement" the proposed solution to FOBAPROA reached on September 30 by the executive branch and opposition political parties other than the PRD. Examined closely, the proposal is far from a true solution. In agreeing not to convert FOBAPROA's liabilities into public debt, the executive branch lost a battle but not the war. The opposition victory is important but incomplete. It must be remembered that Mexicans overwhelmingly rejected not merely the size of the loans but rather the whole of FOBAPROA.

Although the secretary of government announced that the agreement would involve fiscal costs well under half the sum of FOBAPROA, the PRI admitted that the cost of bailing out the banking institutions already intervened by the government—which are outside the agreement—amounts to 390 billion pesos, nothing less than 70% of FOBAPROA.

The PRD sees the agreement as inadequate, a whitewash, even a mockery. To find out what underlies it, the PRD has asked the opposition parties that agreed

to it to explain why they changed their opinions with respect to FOBAPROA's illegality. It has asked the treasury secretary to explain the extent to which this "solution" has affected the total sum in FOBAPROA and how the obligations contracted would be defined, if not as direct debt. It also asked how this cost would be paid, who would pay and how the Fund's legality would be restored if its operations are illegal— questions that must be answered if a genuine solution is to be found.

#### **TV: indirect censorship**

Through the FOBAPROA scandal, the ruling party has also shown how it uses television to bolster presidential designs. Television in itself cannot become an instrument of direct democracy, but it can become an instrument of direct oppression when it responds to the interests of the large business groups that own it. For example, Mexico's two leading chains are linked to the ruling party by shared interests and complicity. This has been seen in the case of both Chiapas and FOBAPROA. As Bourdieu said in examining this medium of mass communication, television encourages indirect censorship, hides what it shows and presents debates that are truly false or falsely true. Mexican television has been cynically seeking to impose its vision of the world on all of society. But despite its great influence, there are points on which some citizens will not let themselves be taken in. The case of FOBAPROA is one of them.

#### **Globalization is not to blame for this**

Mexico's endlessly ruling party has tried to attribute the financial crisis to global events or to the opposition for pointing out the government's mistakes in managing the economy. Unable to hide the fact that Mexico is ailing, the incredible argument of Mexico's neoliberal rulers is that things would be worse if it were not for the PRI. But this no longer convinces many people. While globalization is certainly relevant to the financial crisis, unchecked corruption is really to blame and responsibility for this falls squarely on the PRI, which has never been out of office.

In the midst of the global financial crisis, after stock markets have fallen all over the world, leaders in many countries have been forced to abandon demagogic simplifications and propose controls on speculative capital. Globalization requires regulation. And this regulation cannot be effective if it is not democratic. In the case of Mexico, our country will not achieve full democracy as long as it suffers from the state party's corrupting regime



### **Zapatista Consultation of Universal Value**

*ith a mobilization never before seen in Mexican history, the Zapatistas and civil society taught their compatriots unforgettable lessons about radical democracy, organizing from below and intercultural dialogue. The consultation and the mobilization accompanying it were like nothing before seen in Mexican history. They reappraised the role of women, encouraged mutual learning and sowed joy and new hopes. It is a gift from Mexico to the whole world.*

### **Jorge Alonso**

March 21, 1999 will be inscribed in Mexican history as the date the Zapatistas consulted Mexican society. It is worth setting the immediate context of this event. While the government announced its economic forecasts with the haughty arrogance typical of neoliberalism, the country's leading financial group threw a bucket of cold water on President Zedillo's team by cutting its official growth figures by nearly half.

The population will grow faster than the economy, but consumption is expected to remain lower than that growth because people simply cannot afford to consume. The only sure thing is that Mexico's economy will remain vulnerable. The government announced that it will cut 13 million poor people from its poverty programs. Human rights centers charged that the social fabric is worn to threads in the states of Oaxaca and Guerrero. The US Drug Enforcement Agency again criticized the country's high levels of corruption. In its annual report, Amnesty International warned that Mexicans live under the shadow of endemic impunity. Against this backdrop, Zedillo tried to privatize the energy industry to obtain resources to pay on the foreign debt, but his plan met with massive opposition.

### **People are fed up**

If the economy is bad, the political situation is especially tense. Infighting for control of the party and the presidential nomination is fierce among the various groups within the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Fraud and vote buying were carried to an extreme during the latest elections, and opposition Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) members in Guerrero marched all the way to Mexico City to denounce fraud in their state's gubernatorial elections. The opposition groups have been discussing the need for an alliance to put an end to the state-party system. But fraud also marred the internal elections for national PRD leaders. Citizens are increasingly fed up with political parties.

### **The indigenous people speak**

In early February, the state granted protection to officials accused of the massacre of 45 people while attending church in Acteal in December 1997. In

those same days, a group of prominent figures asked the Legislative Commission for Harmony and Pacification (COCOPA) to verify compliance with the Law for Dialogue and Pacification. They also described the Zapatistas' March 21 consultation as a call to eliminate racism, authoritarianism and passive conformity.

The indigenous people represented in the National Indigenous Congress reaffirmed their commitment to the national consultation as a means of gaining recognition for indigenous peoples and for the end of the war of extermination, which are key to making their right to free determination effective. They said that the consultation represented an opportunity to make progress in reconstituting their communities. They described the consultation as a campaign for democratization, and stressed that, three years after the San Andrés Accords were signed, the state has still not fulfilled its commitments. They also insisted that indigenous people do not need laws imposed on them and denounced President Zedillo's insistence on presenting a bill based on a unilateral proposal for indigenous rights as a threat to dialogue and part of his strategy of war.

In these three years, at least 136 indigenous people have been massacred by paramilitary groups in Chiapas. The actions of these groups, protected by the army, have led to the displacement of 15,000 indigenous people. They have also forced some 300 foreigners to leave the country, so that they could not testify to the government's brutality against the indigenous people. Despite this, the government commission has continued to insist that the legislature should examine Zedillo's indigenous rights bill, while the government of Chiapas has presented an amnesty bill that would guarantee the paramilitary groups' impunity.

### **With the world's support**

The context clearly shows that the government is trying to wear out the Zapatistas. But this strategy has failed. The Zapatistas proved this by preparing and carrying out their consultation to Mexican society on indigenous rights and an end to the war of extermination.

The EZLN emphasized that the consultation was a step on the road to peace, a mobilization in favor of dialogue and a means to make the transition to democracy. Subcomandante Marcos also encouraged international solidarity around the consultation. Spanish writer Manuel Vázquez Mota described Zapatismo as a seed of the future. Noam Chomsky supported the Zapatista initiative from the United States. Nobel Prize laureate José Saramago wrote that the Zapatistas and the Brazilian landless movement reveal a new mentality, proclaiming that the time has come to end the humiliations. Other writers described the preparation of the consultation as a certificate of life of civil

society.

### **Brigades all over the country**

To prepare the consultation, brigades were organized all around the country. Using new methods, quite different from those of the old political apparatus, state coalitions were formed from the base to take care of all the necessary preparations. As Marcos said, civil society was the protagonist in the search for a better country. As a result of the first preparatory mobilization, over 20,000 brigade members, mostly young people, were contacted tree-fashion throughout the country. People organized themselves better and more quickly this way. The Zapatistas made room for new actors, who taught tolerance and inclusion to many older ones who have accompanied their movement from the start.

### **Zedillo attacks and disqualifies**

The Zapatistas have said many times and in many ways that they do not want war. They understand that the Mexican federal army is made up of human beings who joined its ranks because of poverty, unemployment and the lack of a decent life. It grieves the Zapatistas that soldiers are sent to evict, repress and even assassinate their own brothers and sisters. Nonetheless, Zedillo has responded to every peace initiative by increasing military pressure, and this time was no exception. The government responded to the preparations for the consultation by disparaging it in the media, described it as rigged, and trying to block it with military provocations. On several occasions, the secretary of government charged that the questions were written in such a way that they encouraged an affirmative response. Several columnists asked the government if its officials and other PRI members would answer yes to the indigenous rights bill formulated by COCOPA or to demilitarization, topics that the Zapatistas included among their questions. If so, they pointed out, consistency requires that the government end the conflict in Chiapas.

The Zapatistas told people not to be surprised by the government's provocations, since the mobilization around the consultation was seriously questioning its policies.

### **Resistance by "those who are different"**

The biggest obstacle to the consultation was economic. The cost of the Zapatista mobilization fell on the organizations of the grassroots poor in an impoverished society.

As part of the consultation, meetings took place between the Zapatistas and people who did not know them. The Zapatistas invited them not to take up arms but rather to dialogue. They knew they would learn much from the meetings with workers, peasants, other indigenous groups, housewives, artists, intellectuals and young people from all over the country. In their messages, the

Zapatistas emphasized that they want a world in which there is room for many worlds, knowing that the triumph of a resistance movement made up by "those who are different" would have repercussions on everything that globalization has triggered. This triumph would firmly oppose financial power with a network of grassroots resistance, and its positive vibrations would reverberate around the world.

### **Ready to cover the country**

The message carried by the Zapatistas is that they can resist and survive, and live alongside different kinds of people. They emphasized that the number of votes they get is not as important as the mobilization itself and its meaning, since it would show that civil society is capable of organizing itself not only during elections. Through the mobilization, the Zapatistas and civil society groups were trying to build a new opportunity, a new movement that does not seek power but rather announces another Mexico.

The Zapatista representatives elected by their communities in Chiapas had to prepare themselves to go out and visit all the municipalities in the country. They studied and took notes in folders they would later consult in the meetings with civil society in each region.

More than a few of these messengers felt the uncertainty that grows in the face of the unknown. Some were afraid of getting lost, since it was the first time they would leave their dispersed little villages and see the life of distant towns and big cities. But they were very enthusiastic. Spanish is a second language for many of them and they do not speak it fluently, but their ideas were clear and solid.

The *brigadistas* all around the country, most of whom didn't have much experience either, also prepared to receive the Zapatistas. They raised money to pay bus fares, sought places to lodge the visitors, found ways to feed them.

Conflicts and tensions were a constant part of the process. Some bishops joined the government in deeming the consultation's questions partial. Other prelates, especially those who work with indigenous people, saw the consultation as an effort for peace and a peaceful resolution to the conflict. They joined many other social sectors in feeling that what was being sought was nothing other than a just solution to marginalization and poverty.

### **Dazzling sparks**

With the consultation to civil society, the Zapatistas were able to break the military encirclement of nearly 70,000 soldiers and spread out all over Mexico. A first meeting took place between the *brigadistas* who traveled to Chiapas by bus and the Zapatistas who would travel around the country. The Zapatistas immediately trusted the energetic young women who had come to be the first to

welcome them. The *brigadistas* from each state coalition went to the Zapatistas' five meeting points to pick them up and take them to the state capitals. From there, they moved out to the various municipalities. The trips were not free of tension, since the Zapatistas were detained at various Army checkpoints under the pretext of ensuring that they were not carrying arms.

There were cultural clashes between the young city dwellers, with their way of dressing and speaking, and the indigenous people, who dressed and expressed themselves differently and saw the world from a totally different perspective. The young people were better prepared for this clash than the indigenous people, who had to make great efforts to see into the hearts of their first hosts, with whom they spent long hours on the way to their destinations. It was the beginning of a rich intercultural dialogue that took place in the various regions of the country. The dazzling sparks lit by their differences, by the "nevers" with which they were indeed coming to grips, surprised both sides. All over the country, situations arose that none of the participants had faced before.

The indigenous people saw that Mexico is very diverse and filled with contradictions. They had been prepared for hostility, rejection and fear, which they found, but less than expected. The welcome and affection expressed by very diverse groups was greater than imagined and they were able to communicate in order to bring seemingly irreconcilable positions together. During one long week, the consultation caught hold of people's minds, wills and feelings.

### **They listened to everyone**

At the point furthest from their place of origin, in Tijuana, Zapatistas and some of the US internationalists expelled by the Mexican government held hands through the fence on the border and said that, although those on neither side could cross to the other, they stood together to demand that the indigenous people receive a just treatment. Wherever the Zapatistas went, they made clear that they had come to express their own voices and listen to the voices of those who were talking with them, and to testify that they are continuing to resist.

In the days of mobilizing before the consultation, they met with intellectuals, students of all grades, rural settlers, peasant groups, workers, professionals, businesspeople, athletes, religious base communities, nuns, priests, opposition party officials and party activists. They went everywhere, to very poor places and even to exclusive places where big manufacturers meet, though they could not go to some municipalities because of the threats of local PRI bosses. They always listened attentively to what was said to them and responded with great respect.

### **Why masked?**

In addition to the verbal communication, visual communication took place between civic groups and the masked Zapatistas. Since the only thing the Zapatistas leave visible in their faces are their expressive, sparkling eyes, these

have acquired a symbolic force.

The Zapatistas had to explain many times why they came with masks. While other indigenous groups only asked if the masks didn't make them very hot, people from the middle and upper classes asked them why they covered their faces. The Zapatistas patiently explained why. With their faces showing, they had always been invisible. They went from place to place to lodge their complaints but no one paid them any attention. They held marches, and their problems were ignored. They held hunger strikes, demonstrations, sit-ins, protests, and everything went on as though they did not exist. Then they decided to take up arms to demand that they be listened to, and they covered their faces. It was then that the world saw them. Paradoxically, when they laid down their arms in favor of dialogue, the government used the dialogue as a diversion and resorted to its war of extermination. They gave many other reasons for their masks as well: since people did not want to see their faces, they had decided to present themselves as though they were faceless. The mask was what identified them as Zapatistas. It meant that they were the forgotten, and only when their problems were resolved would they take off the mask that was the face of a collective. The government understands the symbolic force of the Zapatista mask very well. That is why, in February 1995, it tried to "unmask" Marcos, presenting him as Rafael Guillén. It thought that it had struck a fatal publicity blow in saying that it knew who he was and that he had a known face, and that this would defeat him. Once his mask was lost, he would lose his appeal; with his face uncovered, he would become a no one, defeated and finished. But society refused to play the government's game. In public events during that time, Marcos had asked if people wanted him to take off his mask. The unanimous cry was no. Society left his mask on and he remained Marcos.

### **Unforgettable impact**

In their contacts with civil society, the Zapatistas made people see that dialogue was their most effective weapon. Mexico saw the indigenous people speaking with determination. The Zapatistas were surprised to find that the kind of poverty they suffer in Chiapas exists in many other corners of the country as well. They were struck by the great inequalities in the city, the contrast between the very rich and the very poor. They also saw that there were poor areas that had services they lack: schools, hospitals, drinking water, electricity, recreation, public transport. The way the city dwellers lived and spoke caught their attention. Sometimes the Zapatistas did not understand them, especially the young people who seemed to be speaking another language, because of their slang.

Those who prepared the meetings between the indigenous and non-indigenous people explained that the indigenous people of Chiapas had proposed solutions and the government had rejected them on the grounds that the people of

Mexico would not agree. So they decided to come to the people of Mexico to ask if this was true.

The fact that an equal number of men and women left Chiapas was also very important, a symbolic demonstration with a resounding impact. The Huicholes tend to send only men to public events, but now the men are seen accompanied by women. The Zapatista women were the ones who had the most trouble speaking. They preferred to express themselves in their own languages and be translated. When this happened, although the people present could not understand the language the women used, they did understand their strength and courage.

### **From below and without resources**

Great progress has been made in the Zapatistas' efforts to reach out to the rest of the country. In September 1997, 1,111 Zapatistas marched to the capital. On March 21, 1999, 5,000 traveled the whole country on the consultation. In a 1995 consultation, 1.3 million citizens answered. This time, nearly 3 million Mexicans turned out to vote in the Zapatista consultation.

In Mexico, elections for public office are organized with public money. When a party does a consultation, as the PRD did on the FOBAPROA financial scandal, it uses its own human and material resources. But the Zapatista consultation had no established organization, or central command, or public money. Each brigade set up its own voting table.

In elections and party consultations a great deal of publicity is generated through the media. This time, the media set out to undermine the consultation. But this did not discourage the Zapatistas; it buttressed their conviction that the media's job is to disinform. They were happy to have carried out thousands of small acts rather than massive demonstrations, since this allowed them to express themselves and listen to those who invited them. The consultation was put together from below, with resources from below.

### **A success: 3 million voters**

Over 95% of the voters were in favor of indigenous rights and the indigenous rights bill drafted by COCOPA. They demanded the demilitarization of the indigenous communities and pronounced themselves in favor of peace.

The consultation was a success. The number of those who turned out to vote at the Zapatista tables equaled a tenth of the total voters in the country's federal elections in 1997. Those who supported the Zapatistas in the consultation exceeded the combined number of voters for two parties that have seats in the Mexican House of Representatives (PT and PVEM). In Jalisco, the consultation attracted more voters than the PRD consultation on FOBRPROA.

The consultation was also carried out internationally with positive results. The Zapatistas showed that they have not been worn down, but rather are a growing force.

### **Mobilization never before seen**

The consultation was a social mobilization never before seen. The Zapatistas spoke in their language and were listened to. They dialogued and debated, sometimes sharply, as with some businesspeople. They went everywhere that doors were opened for them, even to such unlikely places as the Hard Rock Café. The consultation was broad and inclusive and has led to new kinds of organizing. The government calculated that the PRD would put its infrastructure at the service of the consultation, and in its desire to block the consultation immediately accused the Zapatistas of being the PRD's armed wing. This inhibited the PRD, which was otherwise caught up in resolving its own internal disputes, inflamed by very dirty internal elections. All this turned out positively for the Zapatistas, as only groups from civil society and not the parties supported the consultation.

Many Zapatistas stayed in community houses run by nuns and priests. They got a great deal of support from the religious base communities. Groups that have long supported the Zapatistas began to see new groups moving around them in many places. This led to the convergence of these groups into networks that can be consolidated. The consultation was a new exercise of democracy, of participatory, deliberative democracy not limited to the election of candidates to public office.

The consultation was carried out through a new and independent network, in an open process whose cleanliness was especially refreshing in comparison with the dirtiness of the government and the political parties. It grew out of the organization of true citizens. The Zapatistas did not tire of demonstrating that they do not want power, but rather want the people of Mexico to participate, listen to them and hear them. It was a way of making the government see that it cannot make decisions in the name of people without consulting them. A great number of indigenous groups felt very close to the Zapatistas, who have proved unbending in their desire to achieve justice, democracy, dignity and peace.

### **Lights have been lit**

The evaluation of the consultation showed that it was a success for both the Zapatistas and civil society. In saying goodbye and returning to Chiapas, the indigenous people said they left "little shining lights" in the care of the groups that had accompanied them for over a week all around the country.

The consultation cannot be reduced to figures, although there were thousands of

meetings between the Zapatistas and groups of all kinds. The Zapatistas were able to explain themselves and to make the situation in the country better understood. New forms of solidarity arose, linking groups that had no contact before. Confidence grew in civil society's capacity to create and manage things on its own. The consultation showed the possibilities of radical democracy and gave rise to a new faith in people's strengths. One concern, however, cannot be forgotten: the government is so hardheaded that in light of the Zapatistas' success, it may well respond with new provocations of war.

### **Singing two anthems**

Those who accuse the Zapatistas of being separatists were refuted by the facts. The Zapatistas did not try to close themselves off and go their own way. They covered the whole country, contacting numerous groups of Mexicans of all kinds. They defended their difference, but also promoted pluralistic coexistence. In all their events, they sang the national anthem and the Zapatista anthem and came carrying the national symbols *par excellence*: the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the Mexican flag. At first, those who met with them joined in singing the national anthem and then listened as they sang their own anthem, whose lyrics are adapted to the music of the revolutionary song "*Carabina 30 30*." By the end of the week, however, Zapatistas and civil society groups emotionally sang the two anthems together.

### **First results bode well**

There was so much affection that both sides had a hard time saying goodbye. The grassroots groups did not want the Zapatistas to return home without gifts and the first *brigadistas*, reinforced by enthusiastic new groups, accompanied them back to Chiapas. The Zapatistas have since begun the intense task of communicating the experience to their communities: how their proposals were received, the questions they were asked and the answers they got. Later, the time will come for them to contact the groups of civil society once again to take the next step: presenting their conclusions to Congress.

The *brigadistas*, the groups of civil society who spoke with the Zapatistas, and the Zapatistas themselves have all entered into a stage of evaluating this experience. It is already clear that a new, young, vigorous actor has emerged with imaginative proposals, outside the traditional organizational frameworks, willing to work selflessly, without expecting compensation from the government or the parties. The movement generated was broad, pluralistic, convergent, and has already put together very efficient networks. Many groups that felt alone and isolated have seen that similar groups exist in many parts of the country. The Zapatistas gave them the opportunity to make contact with each other.

### **A movement that can go the distance**

Despite all efforts by the government and the media to the contrary, the

indigenous question remains at the heart of the national debate.

The Zapatistas have also encouraged a revaluing of the women's struggle. Many of the groups that have accompanied the Zapatistas' struggle from the start still use very cutting slogans; the Zapatistas have tried to teach them to be tolerant, not to divide, to join together all who support the cause of justice and democracy. For these reasons, the movement created is one that can go the distance. The Zapatistas have shown us that it is possible for very diverse actors to agree, for mutual learning to take place at a horizontal level. The consultation proved that democracy is not limited to elections and that there are more radical ways to experience it. This has left seeds and encouraged awakenings. For their part, the Zapatistas could actually see and feel what this thing called civil society is and know that they are not alone. The consultation was an important referendum, possible thanks to the potential of networks of ordinary citizens.

### **"For the whole world"**

In March 1999, the representatives of a guerrilla movement launched an impressive offensive for peace. The indigenous struggle propelled by the Zapatistas has given new energy to democratic multiculturalism, converting it into a symbol of resistance to economic globalization, into a call to seek a new national pact, showing that the world is not so much globalized as fragmented, but that it can join together through egalitarian networks, and from below. The former First Lady of France, Danielle Mitterrand, speaking from Chiapas a day after the consultation, said that what had happened was of historic importance not only for Mexico but also for the whole world.

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### **The Student Struggle Bursts onto the Stage**

*The university students' fight began with the rejection of quotas and soon included almost everything else: no to the privatization of education, yes to fiscal reform, no to PRI authoritarianism and no to neoliberal exclusion... ""We're closing the university today so that it will belong to everyone tomorrow," proclaimed the rebellious, irreverent and ingenious young protesters.*

**Jorge Alonso**

The vigorous student movement of Spring 1999 is one example among many of the new social movements that are developing in a country trying to adapt to the information age. It is not just another student protest, but is highly cultural and symbolic. It meets the three characteristics proposed by Alain Touraine for analyzing social movements: it is based on a principle of identity, is located in the opposition and, most important, proposes substantial social change. Mexico's new student movement thus takes its place alongside the indigenous movement as another sign of resistance to an exclusive economic model, one more cry of protest against neoliberalism and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) regime.

Like the recent Zapatista consultation of society, the student movement is occurring amid the maneuverings around the presidential succession, which are off to an early start. But Mexico's political parties are out of touch with the population. Surveys show that a majority of people would support a candidate who unifies the opposition in order to dismantle the state party's aging, destructive regime. The very existence of such an alliance would give another boost to the possibility of change, but party interests so far seem to be outweighing citizens' interests.

### **Students against tuition**

In mid-March, the university authorities, calculating that student activists were busy with preparations for the Zapatista consultation, approved new student tuition. Some university faculty have charged that the fees were approved illegally, since the University Council meeting was held off campus, in secret, without the knowledge of council members critical of the proposal.

The approved regulation is to enter into effect on July 10, 1999. For decades now, students have paid only 20 centavos a semester for their studies. The new fees of around 100 pesos (US\$10) a month, which only entering students will pay, were presented as a necessary adjustment. Authorities emphasized that students whose family income is four times the minimum wage or less will not be required to pay.

Student groups, seeing the change as the result of imposition rather than dialogue, called for a consultation; the result was some 100,000 votes against the fees. The demonstrations began inside the university, with some in favor of the administration's proposal and others against. The students opposing it went on strike and took over the campus. The government and university administration launched an intense and very costly campaign to vilify the student protest, accusing the strikers of being slackers manipulated by the opposition Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD). They drew up a blacklist of students.

After a sector of the faculty and students spoke out in favor of the new tuition regulations, the rector of the National Autonomous University (UNAM) said that the authorities had not expected such a negative response from students, but would not cave in to a minority. He said he did not understand how a movement could have arisen against students who were able to pay the tuition and wanted to in order to improve the university's services. The administration claimed the support of a third of the students, while another third were against the change and the rest were indifferent.

### **From the university to the streets**

As the conflict moved from the campus to the streets, it began to show a new face. There were three main tendencies: one willing to talk, one that took an intransigent all-or-nothing position, and a third that wavered between these two. It became clear that the students were not being manipulated by anyone, but were thinking for themselves. They refused to be represented by either individual leaders or groups. A more horizontal organization began to grow, through which anyone in the movement could express his or her opinions. Individual and group leadership gave way to diffuse, collective leadership. The old leaders were left in the dust by defiant, irreverent, courageous young rebels who were also fresh, ingenious and imaginative. Some of their slogans: "Let no one confiscate your voice," "We're closing the university today so that it will belong to everyone tomorrow," "Zapata said that the land belongs to those who work it, the university to those who study," "They can cut the flowers but never stop the spring."

### **Six demands**

The striking students held meetings in which they learned to find consensus, then went out to explain their movement to other students and collect money by passing the hat. Their initial five demands increased to six on May 4: repeal of the new tuition regulation, repeal of the 1997 reform to the regulations on passing the semester and the time allowed for completing studies, an end to the repression of participants in the movement, the rescheduling of classes and administrative procedures affected by the strike, the creation of a forum to discuss the comprehensive UNAM reform, and an end to the university's relation with the evaluating body.

Some faculty members called on the administration to repeal the fee regulation and form a mediating commission to establish a dialogue within the university community to end the strike. The rector offered to negotiate only on the tuition issue. The students responded by insisting on an open dialogue, in public and without mediation, that would have the power to resolve the problems.

### **Students vs. neoliberalism**

As the protest developed, the striking students rejected not only the new tuition fees but also the PRI and neoliberalism. The movement quickly changed from one

focused on student demands to one opposing neoliberal policies. The central demand became free education at all levels and all over the country. The students demanded that the federal government devote 8% of the GDP to education, as established by UNESCO.

When the debate became public, the Zapatistas voiced their support for the student movement, as did the UNAM union and some twenty other university unions around the country.

In public discussions of the strike, the students made the point that they had not taken over the campus, since the UNAM belonged not only to the authorities but also to them. They criticized the state's drastic social spending cuts as well as the attempt to turn the right to free education into an act of charity and only for the poor. The students pointed out that demanding public education was not synonymous with defending a privilege. The detonating issue of the tuition fees opened up many other problems, including the university government's authoritarian practices.

### **No to privatization**

In response to questions in the public discussion about why those not directly affected by the new regulations had gone on strike, the students responded that they spoke out against the government policy to cut the education budget because they are motivated not only by direct economic interests but also by ideals and solidarity. The new fees represent only 3% of the UNAM budget, but they open the way to increased charges in the future, and are thus a first step in privatizing education at all levels throughout the country. The students proposed that those with more resources could help pay for education not by paying tuition fees, but by paying taxes. They recalled that the privatization process in Mexico has enriched government officials and allies and questioned why there is no money for education but there is money for the costly bailout of inefficient bankers. They were referring to the case of FOBAPROA, the Bank Fund to Protect Savings, which was used last year to compensate big investors for the losses on their speculative investments. The student movement firmly opposes subordinating their rights to the market and questions the excluding logic of neoliberalism.

### **Paths to a solution?**

Pablo González Casanova, former rector of the UNAM, said that the state has the obligation to guarantee free education and that higher education should be a universal right for all those who have the necessary preparation to succeed in their studies. Explicit recognition and ratification of this right would facilitate an agreement between the authorities and striking students. He also proposed that students with family incomes above 20 times the minimum wage could make a contribution to the UNAM, if this did not affect the student's freedom within the

family and if the student agreed.

González Casanova insisted that, in any case, any measure that directly or indirectly suggests that education is an act of charity or transforms education into a commodity would have to be eliminated. He said that the goal of greater equity should not be limited to asking for contributions from students with high incomes, but that greater federal subsidizing of the UNAM and Mexican education in general would also be necessary. To achieve this, a fiscal reform guaranteeing state support to education at all levels is indispensable.

González Casanova recommended that the students recognize various duties and avoid populist or self-interested demands or concessions that confuse the right to higher education with an obligation to provide it to people not prepared for it. Thus, automatic admissions without the necessary knowledge is unacceptable, though González Casanova also opposed the current admissions evaluation system, which serves only to adjust the demand for education to the supply and leaves out a high percentage of students. The former rector proposed that the tuition regulations be suspended and the strike ended, and called for a true dialogue.

It remains to be seen how the two sides respond to these proposals. The students propose consulting society.

### **An economy in crisis**

The student movement is occurring in the context of an economy deteriorated by neoliberal policies. The recent book by Jorge Castañeda on the presidential succession shows how groups in the government have constantly manipulated official statistics on the national economy either to win the internal war for succession or to deceive the population, especially with elections coming up. The Zedillo government has insistently proclaimed that its economic policy is right on track, but figures from its own allies tell another story. In 1998, US\$4.1 billion left the country as capital flight and was deposited in banks in the United States. By the end of that year, Mexican citizens had \$38.1 billion in US banks, while the available capital in the Mexican banking system came to only 26.8% of this amount. The total deposited in the United States is greater than the foreign exchange reserves in the Bank of Mexico, which at the end of the same year was \$30.1 billion. Bank deposits fell 1.5% from 1997 to 1998.

Without fresh money or fresh loans, the banks are not playing an effective intermediation role in the economy. Instead, they have dedicated themselves to speculation. More than four months after FOBAPROA was changed to IPAB, the Institute to Protect Bank Savings, the government, the World Bank, the OEDC and even bankers themselves all recognize the fragility of Mexican banks, which have become a real risk for the economy despite the burdensome bailout

designed to "save" them.

At the end of April, the World Bank published its World Development Indicators, revealing that Mexico is among the countries with the most unequal distributions of wealth and income. The wealthiest 10% of the population consume almost 43% of the nation's total income, and the wealthiest 20% consume nearly 60%. Inequality in Mexico is greater than in El Salvador, Peru, China or India. The country has the sixteenth largest economy in the world, but its per capita GNP places it at number 81 on the list. People's economic situation has deteriorated. The disposable income in each Mexican household has been reduced and the real value of the minimum wage has decreased. Jeffrey Sachs, director of International Studies at Harvard University, is right when he says that the IMF has given Latin American countries bad advice.

### **The PRI: Nothing is like before**

The student movement is also blossoming in a political situation excessively shaped by the parties. In the past, presidential succession depended on the decision of the outgoing President, who anointed his successor. With the political changes that have taken place in the country, Zedillo can choose the PRI's candidate—though not without some difficulty—but can no longer be sure that his candidate will be elected President.

The practice in the past has been for the President to choose possible successors from among his allies in the Cabinet, thus opening up the political game and putting himself in a better position to decide. These rules have now been broken within the state party. Both Roberto Madrazo, current governor of Tabasco, and Manuel Bartlett, outgoing governor of Puebla and the man largely responsible for the 1988 fraud against Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, have launched costly primary campaigns to win the party's nomination. They have demanded that the party's grass roots have their say.

The President's first choices were Secretary of Government Francisco Labastida and Secretary of Social Development Esteban Moctezuma. When he was governor of Sinaloa, Labastida was politically obstinate, responsible for electoral fraud, repressive and accused of links with drug trafficking. Zedillo, aware of the weakness of people in his Cabinet and afraid of splits within the party that would ensure an opposition victory, chose to bring the current governor of Veracruz, Miguel Alemán, into the game. He is a favorite of the business sector and could help create unity. Among all these pre- candidates, however, Madrazo is in the lead, having already spent millions promoting his image. In his campaign for governor, he spent more than Clinton did on reelection. Obviously, the source of the money used in that campaign was questioned. In the best of cases, the money being used today comes from the public purse. The suspicion of drug-ring involvement in these campaigns is growing, as corruption and impunity reach

new heights.

PRI leaders have responded to calls for internal elections within the party by offering simulations: the public coffers are opened to promote one pre-candidate, while the majority of the groups in the party remain under top-down control, well aware that the division within the party plays against them.

### **The PRD's crisis**

The situation in the PRD is also getting more complicated. While the internal elections had to be annulled because of serious irregularities, the annulment was a good sign, proving that democratic forces prevail even though some forces in the PRD share the PRI's political culture. This internal process damaged its image, but the fact that the problem was resolved by creating an interim leadership to organize new, clean elections rather than inside deals is a sign of progress.

The PRD has two pre-candidates: party leader Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, currently governor of the Federal District, and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo. In an attempt to gain ground, Muñoz Ledo has waged a campaign to disparage Cárdenas, which has led to falling support for the PRD in general and his rival in particular, but has not benefited Muñoz in any way. The PRI has taken advantage of this, magnifying the opposition dispute even more.

### **The opposition's electoral reforms**

After the fraud against Cárdenas in 1988, the PRI changed the electoral legislation to make it as tough and undesirable as possible to create coalitions and launch common candidates. The parties opting for this route would see their prerogatives reduced and their representation in the electoral bodies would be limited to just one for the alliance as a whole. On this point, Mexican legislation is among the most backward in the world.

In an effort to reverse this legislation and facilitate opposition electoral alliances, the PRD, the National Action Party (PAN), the Labor Party (PT) and the Ecological Green Party (PVEM) renewed their alliance within the Mexican House of Representatives in late April. Since the combined opposition makes up a majority, they were able to agree on reforms to the electoral legislation despite the PRI's resistance. Among the changes proposed are eliminating barriers to coalitions, reintroducing the possibility of common candidates, guaranteeing the vote of Mexicans living abroad, eliminating the margins of overrepresentation in the House of Representatives, making progress on the issue of equal access to radio and television, increasing the electoral body's supervision of parties' income and spending in the primaries and general campaigns—including measures to prevent the use of government programs and publicity in favor of the ruling party—and prohibiting forced participation in favor of a political party. Some longstanding demands, like not using the national colors in favor of a

political party, were not included.

### **PRI rejects the reforms**

This agreement suggests that it may be possible to go ahead with the search for an opposition alliance for the presidential candidate. However, the PRI deputies immediately announced that changes in the electoral legislation require the approval of the Senate, where the PRI has a majority. Since the House of Representatives approved the changes on the last day of the session, the first obstacle to the reforms is the date on which the Senate will reconvene. The deadline for the Senate to approve the reforms, if they are to go into effect for the next elections, is the end of June. The PRI deputies announced that their senators will prevent the Senate from reconvening before that date.

### **PAN-PRI agreement**

A second obstacle is an agreement reached between the PAN and the PRI after the PAN leadership fell back on old practices and negotiated electoral legislation reforms bilaterally with the PRI without consulting its own bench in either chamber. Of the seven points that had been approved by the four opposition parties in the House of Representatives, the PAN unilaterally decided that it would adopt three and a half: guaranteeing the vote of Mexicans abroad, supervising resources in the primaries and general campaign, penalizing the practice of buying votes, and facilitating the formation of coalitions. The issue of common candidates was left out. Thus, the PAN-PRI alliance broke the agreement of the four opposition parties.

The possibility of an alliance between the PRD and the PAN is not out of the question, but mutual distrust is growing. And, out of naiveté or complicity, the PAN has shown that it prefers to act as the PRI's sidekick rather than as a firm opponent of the state party regime. The PAN is also closer to the PRI than to the PRD, especially on economic issues, where it defends neoliberal policies, though it has shown signs of moving closer to the PRD on some issues to advance democracy.

### **Will there be an opposition alliance?**

The division of the opposition would benefit the PRI, which otherwise runs the risk of losing the presidency. An opposition victory would finally bring down the antidemocratic state-party regime, but the only way to do this would be to form an alliance, and this seems a distant possibility. The proposal has been made to design a common program first and then designate the candidate in primary elections. But the problems in the PRD's internal elections do not reassure the PAN. Furthermore, the PAN's own pre-candidate, the governor of Guanajuato, has declared that he would privatize Pemex, the state petroleum company, which the PRD would not accept.

While these things are being sorted out, the PRI has shown once again, in elections in Guerrero, that it is skilled in the various ways of buying votes. Whatever reforms are finally approved, it will know how to turn them around. Willing to do anything to maintain power, it is also continuing its efforts to undermine the autonomy of the electoral body. There are signs, however, that some PRI factions may be ready for a change. The Galileo group has spoken in favor of getting rid of the corporative vote, and has recognized that its party has made excessive use of public resources in its campaigns.

Surveys show that 48% of the people believe that an opposition alliance could draft a common program of government, while 35% believe that this is not possible and 17% are unsure.

### **"Theater" in Chiapas**

The government's response to the success of the Zapatista consultation was to put together shows of purported Zapatistas disarming and handing their weapons over to the government. It was later learned that the "deserters" were PRI paramilitary troops. Once again, it was shown that the money going to Chiapas is not to improve the population's situation but to sustain the counterinsurgency campaign. The offensive against the autonomous Zapatista municipalities was also renewed, this time against the municipality of San Andrés. In a symbolic action police and PRI members took over the site of the peace talks, but thousands of indigenous people who support the Zapatistas recovered the municipality.

Commemorating the 80th anniversary of the assassination of Emiliano Zapata, the indigenous people emphasized that Mexico's revolutionary hero is the symbol of those who don't sell out, those who resist, and pointed out that the same forces that betrayed and killed Zapata are the ones governing today. The Zapatistas convoked a second meeting with civil society to evaluate the March consultation.

### **The voice of indigenous peoples**

The National Indigenous Congress's Fifth Assembly was held with 270 delegates from 63 organizations representing indigenous peoples and communities from all over the country. Participants in the meeting agreed that the Zapatista consultation demonstrated widespread consensus in favor of the San Andrés accords. They denounced the government's new attempts to deceive people by inventing false desertions, and charged that the regime's economic policy and the privatizations are bringing the country to the very edge of the precipice. The Assembly repudiated the actions of the government of Chiapas and condemned all forms of extermination and violence against indigenous peoples.

In Geneva, several NGOs requested the urgent designation of a special envoy to

Mexico to stop the human rights violations, especially in the indigenous regions. They gave statistics on the military presence in Chiapas, showing that it had doubled since 1998 and proving that the government is waging a dirty war there. Mexican and other artists produced a foldout in which they denounced the Mexican government's constant human rights violations and demanded that the government fulfill the San Andrés accords. When Manuel Camacho, the former commissioner for peace in Chiapas, declared that the situation in Chiapas is worse than in 1994, the government accused him of treason for not having broken the Zapatista movement. The bishops denounced the increase in paramilitary groups in Chiapas, a member of the legislative Harmony and Pacification Commission (COCOPA) gave proof of the training of paramilitary forces in the region, and COCOPA demanded a stop to the police-military incursions there.

### **Hope in the Workers' Movement**

The May 1 celebration of International Workers' Day demonstrated the reach of Mexico's new social movements. The regime tried to put its corporativism back together by bussing in workers, but they showed their resistance to government policies by remaining silent when speakers tried to call up the official slogans. Meanwhile, independent workers demonstrated with new force around the country. They oppose the threat of unemployment and the ever-shrinking salaries.

Like the new student movement, the new workers' movement has been developing without looking for leaders, fearful of what is to come but confident of its ability to resist. If changes to the labor code are in the works, the dissident workers want to be heard and taken into account.

### **A lesson learned from the Zapatistas**

It is curious how things that are not present can be ritually accepted. This explains the government's cult of Zapata, which coexists with its campaign against the Zapatistas. By the same token, the state and other conservative voices have tried to condemn the student movement, just as they have other social movements. The regime insists that today's student movement is not like the one in 1968, but it also persecuted that movement 30 years ago, and said it was being manipulated.

The university protest was sparked by an attempt to impose tuition fees but fueled by everything else, as students said no to the privatization of education, yes to fiscal reform, no to the ruling party's authoritarianism, no to neoliberalism's exclusion.

The new movement has moved beyond old leadership styles and is creating a new kind of politics, with clear and open forms. The Zapatistas have taught it to seek spaces for political participation outside the parties. The students were first seen as skeptics and conformist, and their capacity to respond quickly and rise

above momentary demands was minimized. But they have proven otherwise.

The current movement is not isolated. It has the support of workers, small farmers, the Zapatistas and the poor. It is not limited to momentary demands, but is rather making a coherent critique of the state's economic and social policy and proposing alternatives.

These are times of convergence, and an alliance has been growing between independent workers, striking students, the poor and the Zapatistas against the privatizations and the whole of neoliberal policies. One slogan heard in the independent May 1 celebration summed up this feeling: "Zedillo, the country's not for sale."

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### Society and Parties on Diverging Paths

*The parties are absorbed in their internal struggles and only focusing on candidacies and electoral marketing. Meanwhile, society is weaving new networks out of the disappointment, anger and dreams of many people and the government only responds to the demands of an effervescent society with injustice. How long can this continue? Injustice can also fuel rebellion.*

#### Jorge Alonso

May 1999 made it patently clear that Mexico's political parties and a large part of Mexican society have very different agendas. While the parties are already enmeshed in the intricacies of their electoral campaigns, large sectors of society are still struggling to defend themselves from the blows of the government's neoliberal policies. The media, skilled at manipulation, is paying more attention to the campaigns while society looks for new ways to make its demands felt.

#### PRI: No more anointed successors

A state party and democracy are like oil and water. The big obstacles to democratization in Mexico stem from the persistence of the Revolutionary Institutional Party's state party regime. If this regime is to be brought down, the presidency must pass into the hands of the opposition. Given this possibility, and given its waning support among the voters, the PRI has been working on a strategy to hold onto power in the 2000 presidential elections. The surveys still show it leading a divided opposition, and thus one of the strategy's main lines is

to encourage division in the opposition. But the PRI also runs the risk that division within its own ranks will undermine its strategy. The struggles among the PRI tendencies have favored gains by the opposition, which has won several gubernatorial races.

Another line in the PRI strategy is to maintain internal discipline and unity, but a number of problems must be overcome to achieve this. Things were easier before: a party member who broke party discipline would be shuffled between one government post and other, while those who kept their heads down knew that submission would be rewarded in time. But as the opposition has grown more powerful, PRI members can no longer be assured of election. Also, they have now seen that rebellion pays off: it puts them in a stronger negotiating position and they can even cross over to the opposition, where they often triumph. This was the case with the current governors of Zacatecas, Tlaxcala and Baja California Sur, who rebelled when the PRI refused to back them and sought the support of opposition alliances that ultimately brought them to power.

The race for the presidency is already underway, but the rules of the game are changing. In the past, the President quietly selected his successor. Once he let his choice be known the whole party machinery went into operation to formalize the decision. The formal election was just one more rite on behalf of an already-anointed candidate. Today things are more complicated. Candidates are competing for the nomination, and the final nominee no longer has the presidency in the bag.

### **The Madrazo case**

Five years ago, Roberto Madrazo's election as governor of Tabasco was so clearly marred by fraud that demonstrations broke out against the results. In response, President Zedillo agreed to reverse Madrazo's spurious victory, and the two men supposedly reached an agreement to this effect in the President's office. But when Madrazo returned to Tabasco, surrounded by the economic powers that had financed his campaign beyond all legal and ethical limits, he reneged. He charged that Zedillo's presidential campaign had drawn from the same coffers that had supported his campaign. In the end, the agreement was forgotten and he was sworn in as governor of Tabasco.

Madrazo learned his lesson. In 1999, he launched an extravagant campaign, financed by the same powerful economic groups, to promote himself as the PRI's presidential candidate. Party leaders have tried, without much success, to get him to back off, accusing him, for example, of having his campaign chest filled with millions of pesos from two highly questionable sources, Carlos Salinas de Gortari and Carlos Hank González. Hank also worked for Zedillo's campaign, and the DEA has accused his family of threatening US interests because of its links with drug trafficking.

But Madrazo wasn't frightened. With the slogan, "Who says you can't?" he hired a team to work throughout the country to pave his way to the PRI nomination. It is estimated that he had already spent over US\$10 million by early May; in April he was spending over \$100,000 a day on television ads alone. He's betting on a costly political marketing strategy that will build a new image for him—ignoring the substance of his political career—and carry him first to the PRI nomination and then to the presidency. It's a pretty good bet.

### **Labastida "unveiled"**

Zedillo had wanted his treasury secretary to succeed him. But powerful groups within the party put some conditions on the candidates: to ensure that technocrats wouldn't end up in important posts without having passed through election campaigns, these traditional sectors insisted that one condition for the party's presidential nomination was having previously competed in a campaign.

Although the President and his people originally thought they could get around this condition, the other PRI tendencies stood firm and thus Zedillo's first pick was out. The governor of Pueblo, Manuel Bartlett, then decided to enter the race without Zedillo's approval. Bartlett has been accused in the United States of having links with drug trafficking. As Secretary of Government in the late '80s, he was also the one responsible for the computer system's "crash" in the highly fraudulent 1988 presidential elections.

In response, Zedillo—while insisting that the nomination would be the party's decision—chose to push the candidacy of Secretary of Government Francisco Labastida, who had been using his position to prepare a strong team of regional politicians for the race. Thus, using the structure and resources of the ministry in charge of interior policy, Labastida was "unveiled" as a candidate for the PRI's presidential nomination.

Who is Labastida? When he governed Sinaloa, he too was accused in the United States of being linked to drug trafficking, while Mexico's own opposition parties charged him with repression and electoral fraud. Once he was unveiled, a practice connected with money laundering appeared in Sinaloa: people in the streets were offering dollars at half the official rate. Labastida has now left the Government Ministry without fulfilling the three commitments he made when he assumed the post: end the conflict in Chiapas, reform the state, and improve public security.

### **PRI's new rules of the game**

The PRI was created after the revolution to give the groups vying for power a nonviolent way to solve their differences, a forum through which they could divvy up government posts. This scheme broke down in the 1995 presidential

campaign, when the PRI resorted to assassinating its own candidate, Luis Colosio. The fear that this method will reappear has not been put to rest.

In an effort to ensure that the groups fighting for power would reach agreements rather than break up the official party, the PRI leadership recently proposed rules to govern this fight, which include consulting the party's membership and creating a special body to oversee the primary campaigns. They proposed that candidates avoid negative campaigning and defamation, promised that limits would be placed on campaign spending, and announced that there would be sanctions against those who do not follow the rules of the game.

It was announced with great fanfare that, with these new rules, the PRI has been democratized. It has already been pointed out, however, that not all PRI members are equal, nor will their votes count equally. The candidate who wins the majority of the country's 300 electoral districts will be the party's nominee, but by this logic a scarcely populated district is equal to a heavily populated one. It was also learned shortly after the announcement that those who control the levers of the party's electoral machinery have already moved out to the electoral districts to ensure the victory of the President's candidate, Labastida.

### **Lining up and passing the hat**

The accusations the candidates in the internal PRI campaigns are making among themselves reveal the antidemocratic methods the party continues to use. There was not to be any buying of votes, for example, but this is still one of the PRI's favorite techniques. Public money was not to be used on behalf of a particular candidate either, but this practice remains characteristic of the PRI.

The state structure continues to serve the PRI's electoral interests, which is precisely what makes it a state party. For example, the programs to fight poverty are still being used for electoral purposes. Madrazo and Bartlett accuse Labastida's team of using the state structure for his campaign, and the truth is that, though the President proclaims that he no longer hand-picks his successor, he continues to provide party and state support to one candidate.

The promises of democracy were clouded by another phenomenon as traditional as the selection of the successor. Most PRI governors, who control the party apparatus in their states, have lined up behind Labastida. Another method the state party uses is to pass the hat: wealthy businesspeople are asked to contribute money to the official campaigns in exchange for future favors outside the law. Prominent businesspeople have already offered to support Labastida's campaign.

### **Democracy in the PRI?**

A retired politician named Gutiérrez Barrios heads the commission to oversee the

PRI's primary elections. As former supervisor of the political police, he has precise information on the PRI's leading figures, many of whom have things to hide. It has been striking to see many politicians who have cynically undermined democracy in Mexico calling for democracy now. But the announcements that democracy had come to the PRI didn't last long. Reality showed that the antidemocratic tactics, learned and put into practice over the years, still operate. The simulations were so obvious that some believe Zedillo could have imposed order but didn't want to, since Madrazo and Bartlett have only launched their candidacies in order to seek a strong bargaining position. Others say that so much money has been spent—by political groups, business groups, drug traffickers—that the danger of future tensions, even bloodshed, cannot be discarded.

### **Politics as theatre**

There have been many interpretations of this unconvincing show of democratization. Some have pointed to evidence of a hardening of positions, pressure and intolerance. Others warn that politics has been converted into mere theatre, with ideas relegated to second place. The campaigns, both within the parties and between parties, are mainly just publicity. Marketing technology identifies the candidate and uses cosmetic methods to sell images, treating the candidates as commercial goods. A bad candidate with a lot of money and good techno-marketing skills is capable of winning. A survey in mid-May showed that, presented with a list of 18 possible presidential candidates, 15.9% preferred Governor Fox of the National Action Party (PAN), who makes great use of this kind of publicity; 11.9% opted for Governor Madrazo, who at the time was at the height of his image-selling campaign; 11.5% chose Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) and only 5.5% picked Labastida, whose campaign lagged months behind the others.

When it comes to preferences for parties rather than individuals, the PRI remains in the lead with 44%, followed by the PAN with 29% and the PRD with 19%. The PRD's fall in the surveys may be due to an intense television campaign against it.

### **The race of events**

Mexican business world veteran Juan Sánchez Navarro questioned the heavily publicized end of the practice of anointing the presidential successor and criticized the PRI practice of fundraising among businesspeople. To the treasury secretary's declaration that there would be no sixth-year crisis at the end of this six-year term, he replied that the crisis would come because economic crises in Mexico are closely linked to the lack of democracy. More optimistically, however, he believes that after seven decades of PRI dictatorship, the presidential elections in 2000 will open up the possibility of a transition to democracy if the opposition wins.

Events are moving so fast that one must readjust one's vision of the country every day. A basic adjustment in this changing context is that it may be a mistake to think the PRI has already achieved discipline and unity. The PRI senator in Chiapas resigned from the party, was followed by a large contingent, and called for an opposition alliance in that state. Events are moving fast<sup>14</sup>

### **Unified opposition?**

Some surveys show that if the opposition parties run a joint candidate against the PRI, they will receive 43% of the vote to 39% for the state party. Both the PRD and the PAN criticized the PRI's staged "unveiling" as mere simulation to hide the same old methods of appointing candidates, and charged that the PRI was defending established interests. Other criticisms poured down as well: that the party was using the same corrupt, unethical methods, that people were bought with money from the public coffers and from drug trafficking, that cynicism reigned. The supposed limits on campaign spending and practices were not limiting anyone. There is once again evidence that money robbed from banks—which taxpayers would reimburse through the government's shameful resolution of the FOBAPROA bank scandal that outraged the country last year—has passed into PRI hands.

Beyond the legal obstacles to coalitions and common candidates, however, what was really weighing in the minds of the two main opposition parties were their own party interests. With respect to state reform—progress in democracy, strengthening of the federal system, consolidation of the division of powers, the creation of more opportunities for citizen participation—the PAN and the PRD are in full agreement. On economic issues, however, the PAN is much closer to the PRI. Both in the legislation to convert FOBAPROA to IPAB, the new Institute to Protect Bank Savings, and in the makeup of the IPAB board, the PAN leadership reached agreements with the President behind the backs of even their own legislative representatives.

An analysis of electoral district trends shows that if an alliance between the PAN and PRD does take place, the opposition could win three-fifths of the districts. A proposal has been made to first draw up an agenda for the transition, then hold primary elections to select a unified opposition candidate. But both the legal obstacles to coalitions and the calculations of each party and their candidates suggest that it will get increasingly harder to hammer out an alliance. Supporters and opponents of this opposition alliance can be found in both the main opposition parties. The main argument for the alliance is that the presidency must pass into the hands of the opposition in order to bring down the state party regime, although the big question of what would be done from the presidency remains open and reveals important differences. For example, while the PAN's Fox has announced that he would sell PEMEX, the state petroleum company, the PRD is opposed to any privatization policies.

The fact is that the two parties just don't trust each other. Throughout the month of May, there were meetings and declarations that both encouraged the alliance and revealed the problems. The two parties flung accusations at each other, then moderated their language to avoid confrontations. For his part, Manual Camacho, the former commissioner for peace in Chiapas, called repeatedly for a social-political pact to carry out the transition peacefully, and proposed agreements to defuse the conflicts and ensure a non-partisan management of the main areas of government.

### **The right to education**

While the major mass media fill up with information on the presidential campaign already underway, significant sectors of society are concerned with other issues. The government calculated that by it could weaken the student movement by blocking dialogue over the question of tuition fees in the Mexican National Autonomous University (UNAM). But just the opposite happened, as the movement has grown stronger over time. When the Argentine government, following the same neoliberal policies, tried to drastically cut the university budget, an opposition equal to the task arose. Writer Juan Carlos Portantiero expressed a widespread belief when he said that it is society's responsibility to pay taxes and the state's responsibility to support education, which is not a service but rather a right. The Argentine government had to step back in response to the demands of a broad-based movement.

### **University protest continues**

In Mexico, the authorities have been less responsive. The government has tried to use the university conflict as a weapon against the PRD, which it accuses of masterminding the strike. The media are virtually trying to lynch the student movement, while participants have been harassed and spied upon.

The students have had to learn to build their own democracy: a rotating leadership, long assemblies susceptible to polarization, a search for consensus. Faced with the administration's inflexibility, doublespeak and refusal to engage in true dialogue, the students have been building a process of dialogue among themselves and with broad sectors of society.

The objectives of the university struggle are becoming more clearly defined: to stop the privatization of higher education and begin its democratic transformation. The students have insisted on a public, open, direct dialogue, without intermediation, to solve the problems. In response to the media's attempts to demonize their movement, they have gone through neighborhoods, schools and public transport carriers explaining their reasons and objectives. They also organized a successful citywide citizen consultation on the subject of education.

New slogans have come up: "Let's form dream committees," "Let's be pessimistic, ask for the impossible," "They can paint the walls black, but there will always be a color for truth," "Our hope can only come from despair." In an environment dominated by top-down authoritarianism, the university students have tried to establish horizontal links. They have received the support of workers from UNAM, the National Institute of History and Anthropology (INAH), the National Art Institute (INBA), the parents' society, and the teachers' feisty National Council of Educational Workers (CNTE). An electrical workers' union gave them paper and facilities for their consultation. The students printed 1.4 million ballots and set up 2,300 voting booths in secondary schools, higher education institutes, museums, cultural centers, markets, parks and plazas throughout Mexico City. Many booths were so heavily used that they ran out of ballots early in the day. In the huge popular response, a majority voted in favor of free education, showing that education is a leading concern of a large number of families. The consultation on education was one of the largest mobilizations to come out of the strike.

### **Keep at it, compaños!**

Other kinds of mobilizations have also taken place. Just before teachers' day on May 15, dissident teachers around the country held a massive demonstration, which the UNAM student protesters attended. The teachers demanded pay raises, an increase in the education budget, repeal of UNAM's tuition regulations, cancellation of the privatization of the electrical industry, fulfillment of the San Andrés accords and demilitarization of the indigenous regions.

A strike was held in the Metropolitan Autonomous University (UAM) in support of the UNAM student strike and UNAM faculty and researchers decided to march in support of several points in the student movement's demands. On May 20, there was another massive march for a larger budget and free education. The students have given a festive tone to all of these marches.

The Zapatistas's solidarity has been very evident in both the student and labor movements. In one of the marches, a statement from Zapatista leader Marcos was read in which he said that the students represent "what is new." The students sang out their appreciation to a mambo rhythm: "*Marcos, que chido es Marcos*," which can be roughly translated from student-speak as "Marcos, you're the best."

The voices of indigenous people have also been heard in the university demonstrations. "We'll never get to the university," said one of their statements. "The government keeps trying to fence us off where our voice cannot be heard. Enough of this disdain and discrimination. The government is a war being waged against us. We are not afraid, although the army moves deeper into our communities every day." The indigenous people ended their statement

encouraging the students, "Keep at it, *compañeros*, throw your hearts into it!" Many of the young people in the student movement have participated in caravans, concerts and marches for Chiapas. Thus, these diverse movements have been developing a deep sense of solidarity. In the UNAM strike, the dreams, anger and disenchantment of many sectors of society have come together. The Mexican government has responded to all these social demands with affronts, but it is worth remembering, as many social analysts have shown, that it is not privation or poverty alone that spark rebellions, but rather the affronts.

### **Meeting in Chiapas**

In early May, the Chiapas community of La Realidad was the site of the EZLN's second meeting with civil society. Over 2,000 delegates from around the country answered the Zapatista call. In the meeting, an evaluation was made of the Zapatista consultation carried out in March and the tasks left pending. Marcos referred to the need to put "the pieces of the consultation" back together. Through the consultation, the Zapatistas found other pieces that helped them imagine another, larger figure. They appraised the participation of so many new people without political experience in the consultation. They criticized the government and voiced support for the UNAM students. They also criticized the parties for being closed into their electoral concerns. They spoke of the need to widen the spaces linking all of those who seek a more just, free and democratic Mexico.

### **Weaving a broader network**

The Zapatistas asked the national, state, regional and municipal coordinators who participated in the consultation to become contact points between the EZLN and civil society. Initial tasks include informing everyone of the agreements reached in this meeting and spreading the results of the consultation. They asked that all those who participated in organizing the consultation to also help form a bridge between the Zapatistas and the social organizations, movements and individuals they worked with, since this would energize an already powerful network, helping it grow so it can support popular struggles and mobilizations of all kinds. The Zapatistas asked for support for the UNAM student movement and the electrical workers' struggle and laid out the need to build an information network effective enough to guarantee that if anyone is touched, everyone else can act quickly in response. Finally, the EZLN invited people to another meeting in July.

### **Marcos' analysis**

Marcos analyzed the current situation in Mexico along the following lines. This year is moving quickly. Those in power believed that the EZLN had lost the capacity to call people together, that it was no longer in people's hearts. But the consultation proved them wrong. On the betting table, the power put down police, the army, the parties, opinion leaders, television channels, radio stations,

newspapers, magazines, officials, and a lot of money. The Zapatistas put no more than they had already revealed on January 1, 1994.

On the table of this game, we have seen that after a disastrous opening move—the government's mistake of December 1994, which led the country to the verge of economic collapse—foreign resources have managed to momentarily shore up Mexico's macroeconomic figures. Things are going so well, in fact, that this year the government decided to start saving for its 2000 campaign. It is doing this by making cuts in education and other areas, creating unemployment and raising prices. But it doesn't care, since this is how it builds up its "petty cash box"—which is getting very large indeed—for the PRI candidate.

### **"The rotten apple of power"**

What is in dispute, says Marcos, is "the rotten apple of power." Zedillo has tried to deceive people with the story that he will not designate his party's candidate. And the PRI, reaffirming its vocation as a band of crooks, has been trying to keep its rebellious gangs in check. The PAN, playing a game with its leadership on one side and its deputies on the other, is agreeing to everything the President proposes. In the PRD, people complain that they are victims of a conspiracy and forget that the most painful blows come from those on their own side: the struggles between Porfírio Muñoz Ledo and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas for the party's nomination.

All of this is grand theatre with the collaboration of much of the media. But while the powerful are busy placing their bets, electrical workers have come on the scene to fight against privatization of the electrical industry, the student movement has emerged to oppose privatization of the UNAM, people of all kinds have come onstage to oppose the war of extermination against the indigenous people. The powerful were caught off guard and talk about conspiracies against them. Electrical workers, indigenous people, students and others—many others—keep coming. In civil society, an unprecedented dialogue is underway. On one side of the table is the weight of the Mexican political system, with its rotten apple of power, and on the other side "what is new." Marcos believes that the PRI's primary election aims only to protect the oligarchy. Whoever is designated as the state party's candidate will continue to hear from the Zapatistas, however. Whoever wins the presidency in 2000, of whatever party, will have to respond to their demand for justice for Mexico's indigenous poor. The new President will have to fulfill the accords on indigenous rights and abandon the military option, since it has not managed to rout the Zapatistas even though the current government has been pouring over the US counterinsurgency manual for the past five years.

### **Chiapas like Kosovo**

With his typical doublespeak, Zedillo has repeatedly said that he has infinite

patience with the Zapatistas and that the solution will come not through violence but through dialogue. The Mexican bishops, however, believe that the government is betting the EZLN will wear down. Many sectors are convinced that Zedillo wants to make Chiapas into an election issue. PAN charged that Labastida's political clumsiness in the Government Ministry aggravated the crisis in Chiapas and PRD Senator Carlos Payán, a member of the legislative Commission for Harmony and Pacification, charged that the government is seeking to prolong the conflict there.

In its report released in May, the organization Global Exchange said that the Mexican government has continued to harass foreign observers. And in a meeting between Mexican and Spanish legislators, the latter demanded that the Mexicans resolve the problem of Chiapas through genuine dialogue.

The Zapatista question remains in the minds of many people around the world. Canadian filmmaker Netti Wild has just finished a film titled *A Place Called Chiapas*.

There have been at least 70 other political assassinations since the massacre in Acteal in December 1997. If 145 people died in the declared war, many more have been killed in the dirty war. The movie shows the government's cynical agenda and gives proof of the existence of paramilitary forces. The filmmaker believes that Chiapas is "a state of mind." Nobel Prize laureate in literature José Saramago keeps bringing up the topic of Chiapas in his interviews. In mid-May, commenting on the war in Yugoslavia, he said that he does not believe that nationalism is bad in itself, but it can become the worst of all sentiments if it is used as a weapon against others.

And this is what he believes is happening in Chiapas: in the name of a purported unity that is really almost phantasmagoric, the Mexican government has reached the point of believing not only that indigenous people do not count, but even that they get in the way. Saramago says Milosevic also felt the Kosovars were getting in the way, so they had to be eliminated. His comparison between Milosevic and Zedillo couldn't be clearer.

### **The narrow logic of power**

It is hard to draw conclusions from process still underway. There are some leads to think about, however. The Mexican bishops have harshly criticized the government for proclaiming macroeconomic progress while health and education services are clearly deteriorating. According to figures provided by the United Nation's Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), the greatest setbacks in the region's fight against poverty can be found in Venezuela and Mexico. Other figures show that the stockholdings of Mexico's hundred leading businesspeople equal 53% of the GDP. Employment in the informal sector

represents 44% of total urban employment, and most of these activities provide barely enough to survive. Looking towards the next electoral campaign, the President has announced a new plan to fight poverty. Leading economists consider the plan to be improvised and opportunist, merely part of the state party's strategy to sway the vote and hold onto power.

The Chiapas problem remains. An UAM researcher who specializes in military matters maintains that resolving the conflict in Chiapas necessarily involves demilitarization and the unmasking and dissolution of the paramilitary groups. So far the government has tried to address the conflict in Chiapas with the logic of power and the narrow reasoning of the state, without taking the nation's needs into account.

Something similar is happening with its economic policy. A survey shows that a majority of the population opposes privatization of the electrical industry. Nonetheless, the government insists on this plan, paying no attention to what people think. An alternative economic policy is sorely needed, one that serves people rather than large capital but does not unleash the fury of the powers that are capable of destroying the economy of any country. And although a change in the party in power would not in itself resolve the country's economic problems, it would help dismantle the antidemocratic state apparatus. Democracy would also make it possible to examine many proposals made from the grass roots and bring them together to build a new kind of power.

### **Inclusive networks**

An alternative that serves popular interests remains a distant possibility. But the effervescence of popular mobilization is there for all to see. There is still no strong movement that links all the others, like a solar system, but many movements are arising that, like dots of mercury attracted to each other, tend to form a converging, growing popular force. The union movement, the student movement and the indigenous movement are coming together creatively and imaginatively. Thus, while power excludes and segregates, while power aggravates, inclusive networks of resistance are being built in society. It is just a question of time.

Number 220 | Nov 1999

### **A Natural Disaster Reveals a Social One**

*Mexico's autumn came in like a raging lion. First, an earthquake brought death and destruction to Oaxaca, cutting off thousands of communities. Relief workers*

*were still struggling to get aid through when torrential rains in southeastern Mexico brought with them the greatest destruction in people's memory.*

### **Jorge Alonso**

The equivalent of a whole year's worth of rain fell in only three days on some areas during the first week of October. But that was only the beginning. In the middle of the month it was announced that half that amount of rain was expected again from yet another tropical storm. On October 27 the water level rose higher and spread further in the already-flooded state of Tabasco. Other states severely affected were Puebla, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Hidalgo and Chiapas; Guanajuato, Coahuila, Nueva León and Tamaulipas were also affected, but to a lesser degree. Official damage figures varied. As of mid-October, the government was admitting 369 dead and 340,000 otherwise directly affected. Even earlier than that, the Catholic Church was putting the death toll at over 500, the disappeared at about 300 and those suffering material losses at around 500,000. As the days passed, the figures climbed. By the last week of October, the official death toll stood at 377 and other victims at a total of 433,000. Some 75,000 people were crowded into 626 shelters. Up to 1,000 kilometers of roads were damaged. The Church continued to insist that the real figures surpassed those released by the government.

There was no letup in the rain or in the release of excess water from the dams. Lives, homes, crops, trees, road networks and drinking water systems were lost to the rushing water. Flimsy houses were swept away by the floods, while those built on solid foundations filled with water and mud. Soon the bodies of both people and animals began to create a contamination problem. Many communities were left without safe water or electricity and many were inaccessible for weeks, adding supply shortages and untreated epidemics to their list of problems. Some were so thoroughly destroyed that their residents cannot return. The economic losses in agriculture and livestock have also been significant. Rocks and rubble were deposited on huge expanses of cultivated land. Schools, too, suffered a lot of damage; the official report speaks of 5,554 damaged school buildings. In painful contrast, 85 municipalities in the north were being affected by a severe drought.

### **The main culprits: Corruption...**

The disaster and the unnecessarily extensive destruction it caused pointed the finger of guilt at the PRI government's corruption, and at poverty, a product of the economic policy of the last several administrations. Endemic corruption joined forces with on-the-spot corruption to exacerbate the tragedy, exceeding the government's capacity to control or even hide it.

One example of past corruption that came to light was that many local PRI

political bosses had trafficked in land sales in high-risk zones, with the tacit consent of their bosses. The razed hillsides broke apart, sending huge landslides down on the communities below, and taking the homes located on the dangerous sites with them.

Corruption in the distribution of aid was facilitated by the fact that the thousands of tons of aid donated in solidarity by civil society had to pass through government channels, aggravating an already chaotic situation. Each affected town was told it would not be given all the aid it needed because other areas had needs that were more serious. As the informal information network began to kick back into action, however, it quickly became evident that government officials were repeating that exact speech everywhere they went.

The governmental corruption was especially marked in contrast with civil society's generous aid. Not only did many government officials respond slowly to the disaster, but some even stole the donated food and sold it and others only gave it out on condition that the recipient vote for PRI candidates in the upcoming elections; still others squirreled it away to use later for party purposes.

The government's actions were characterized not only by corruption, but also by inefficiency, negligence and a lack of organization for dealing with natural disasters. It has no efficient plans for providing information, for evacuation or even for attending to the population. In the majority of cases, even when adequate information could have been possible, the catastrophe arrived unannounced. By the second storm, when the government began to make feeble attempts to advise the population, it had lost credibility.

One anguishing problem was the difficulty of getting aid to the isolated communities. President Zedillo claimed that the bad weather prevented distribution of the aid received, but some of the government's land and air transport facilities were never even mobilized. In any case, a request for international help could have resolved the worst situations.

The government bristled in response to the accusations against it, but critical evaluations were soon being heard even within government itself. The Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources acknowledged that nature had taken its toll for the urban planning errors. The president of the congressional energy commission declared that the preventive work in the hydroelectric system had been faulty, and that incorrect administrative decisions around water storage in four of the country's major dams had contributed to the flooding of fields and population centers.

### **...and poverty**

Even before the earthquake, drought and flooding, 725 of the municipalities that

would be most damaged by those natural disasters were already victims of a social disaster. The map of the areas affected by the disasters coincides with the poverty map. A full 70% of the affected communities were already at the extreme poverty level, and the hardest hit of all were indigenous communities, which are also the poorest. With the infrastructure that had made possible a regional market now in ruins, the very possibility of sustainability is in question. Most victims wonder where they will be able to find work and how they will survive.

The victims of the natural disaster have also been victims of the neoliberal policy. Poverty went up 10% in the first two years of the Zedillo administration and even more sharply in the last three. In October, even as the new disaster was occurring, it was reported that one in three Mexican children suffer from acute hunger. Several civic organizations have charged that 43% of children under five years old are malnourished and that many die as a consequence. With one year left of Zedillo's six-year term, the program to fight extreme poverty, known as PROGRESA, has provided minimal benefits, and then to only two million families, which represents roughly thirteen million individuals. While that may seem a lot, over forty million Mexicans are sunk in a poverty that is not only not being alleviated but is getting worse every day. The slashing of social spending has brought very serious problems to the public health and education systems, where the shortages keep getting more acute.

### **Governmental grandstanding**

President Zedillo, who does not grasp what the concept of social policy is about, used the opportunity to step into the limelight as the country's first and foremost brigade volunteer. But he was a brigadista who responded to the affected population's needs with authoritarian bullying. The height of his insolence was to refuse to accept international aid, a stance he later corrected by announcing that money would be needed for reconstruction. The Senate had to step in to ensure that the emergency aid was accepted. Even then, many tons of the material aid sent to the country was given the bureaucratic turtle treatment awarded second-hand merchandise destined for the street markets rather than being promptly dispatched as important goods requiring quick distribution.

The presidential activism was inefficient at best and illusory at worst, only enough to get coverage on the top of the news. Zedillo made a splash, but resolved little, taking advantage of the consternation to make a falsely bountiful gesture.

Meanwhile, the Church reiterated that not all communities were getting help and urged that the institutions do an end run around the government to provide aid and that they refrain from politicizing it. It argued that the President should get a grip on his inefficiency, exhibitionism and tirades against critics and take the steps needed to alleviate the grave situation. In a homily, the primate archbishop

went so far as to condemn the PRI for using the donations for the victims to proselytize and labeled the theft of and trafficking in aid as criminal.

Though many communities were still cut off and some were even still under water by the end of October, clean-up operations were underway in other places. The army announced that it had removed well over eight thousand cubic meters of rubble in 183 towns and villages. The main challenge now is how to reactivate the economy. The Church argued that humanitarian aid would be needed for several months, since thousands of people lost not only their belongings, but also their means of subsistence. Honest professional assistance is needed to identify safe areas where people can be relocated and to begin a plan of housing reconstruction.

### **A pre-ordained tragedy**

Market forces, guided only by the logic of the profit motive, have no capacity to bring about investment in things like preventive drainage systems or to halt the voracity of those who speculate in real estate deals with risky land. The victims of the earthquakes, flooding and drought are doubly victimized, first by a dominant economic project characterized by huge holes in its ecological, urban development and social policies. The Zedillo government has confused social policy with paternalist compensation works and these in turn with vote-getting. It is demonstrating a clear disinterest in investing in works that would reduce the dangers, and its fight against poverty has been pitifully superficial.

A policy that only recognizes individual initiative must be revised in light of its dramatic consequences when natural disasters occur. It is even more scandalous when combined with an inefficient and corrupt public administration. Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen has written that it is not nature that puts millions of people unnecessarily at risk during climatic adversities but the combination of poverty, material fragility and social disorganization. The restrictions on the social budget lead government institutions to take ever fewer actions and thus the damage from natural disasters tend to take on ever-greater proportions.

What occurred this tragic October in Mexico is thus a reflection of the system's contradictions and unresolved problems. The first evaluations speak of a tragedy waiting to happen: a lack of forewarning because of authorities who did not carry out their responsibilities, who failed to do what had to be done even when they knew the magnitude of what was coming. Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes most emphatically criticized the injustice and inequality of the corruption that was revealed, calling it the most brutal way to rob the poor.

Subcomandante Marcos expressed his solidarity with the earthquake and flood victims and called the government's way of dealing with the situation

"disgusting." He said that the torrential rains had left "children, the elderly, men and women, particularly indigenous and peasant farmers, the wretched of this pitiless, genocidal, demagogic system, with nothing." He added that "what hurts the most is the criminal violence that rains down from the heights of power onto the despairing, mutilated, ignorant, tired and pain-filled population."

Number 222 | Jan 2000

### **University Resists Neoliberal Violence**

*The student movement is fighting for free university education so that the poor will not be robbed of the chance to study and education will remain a right rather than a commodity. The central issue in this battle is whether or not knowledge will be enslaved to capital. The movement is the largest, most important challenge to the neoliberal model in Mexico thus far—which explains the government crackdown.*

#### **Jorge Alonso**

The civic rebellion against the World Trade Organization in Seattle at the end of 1999 and the civic uprising of the indigenous people of Ecuador in January 2000 are two signs of a generalized discontent with the impoverishing measures imposed by the neoliberal economic model. Mexico's student movement takes its place alongside these protests after paralyzing Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM)—which, with some 270,000 students and 70,000 teachers, is the largest university in the Americas—for nearly ten months.

On a recent trip to Switzerland, President Ernesto Zedillo expressed his disdain for those who oppose neoliberalism, calling them "globaphobic." After his return to Mexico, he ordered federal police to crack down on striking students; over a thousand were jailed in a violent police attack on February 6. Silencing all of Mexico's "globaphobics," however, would require that he take on a good 60% of the citizenry, who have been impoverished by the economic policies he defends and are beginning to resist.

#### **Student demands, Government intransigence**

It is worth reviewing the course of events leading up to the February 6 attack on the student movement. The movement burst forth in the spring of 1999, after university authorities attempted to impose new tuition regulations. Students saw the move as the first step towards privatizing higher education, and responded by taking over the UNAM, the public university system. They put forth a list of six demands, which included repealing the tuition regulations along with other recent regulations they felt to be prejudicial or exclusionary. Most important, they demanded that a democratic forum be established to discuss the

university's comprehensive reform.

In describing the student movement, analysts have mentioned its strong dose of radicalism and its distrust of the media and of traditional leaders, which has led, among other things, to a tendency to form very large, cumbersome committees. They have also pointed out that neither the authorities nor the parties seem able to understand it.

The strike dragged on through the summer and fall, as university authorities refused to consider the students' petition until they relinquished control of the campus installations, while the students refused to leave until their demands were discussed by the University Council. Throughout these long months, the students' General Strike Committee repeatedly explained that the purpose of the strike was to resolve student demands, and charged that university authorities were either refusing to negotiate or only pretending to negotiate because their true purpose was to further the neoliberal project. Ever since the 1968 student massacre, October 2 has been a day of protests and commemorations. On that day last year, over twenty thousand people marched to the center of Mexico City. The old slogan "October 2 won't be forgotten" remains true. In 1968, society had outgrown state authoritarianism; by 1999, that same system, which is still in place, is discredited, aimless and adrift, and the student movement is a sign of hope. The strike committee used the October 2 events to propose yet again that a commission be established to negotiate between the authorities and the striking students. Respected members of the university faculty formed a group called University Convergence, and called for a broad, plural and inclusive agreement within the university community to preserve the university's integrity and autonomy. It rejected any violent solution, reiterated the need for a university congress and suggested that the proposed negotiating commission attempt to reach an immediate, satisfactory agreement. The university workers' union also called for a negotiated settlement to the conflict. Three former university rectors, however, insisted that the authorities should not cede and encouraged them to apply the rigor of the law against the striking students. Thus bolstered, the authorities again rejected the idea of holding a university congress.

By that time, it was quite clear that the government's strategy was to wear down the movement and make the striking students appear to be the ones responsible for the lack of dialogue. Also around that time, the notion that ultra-radicals among the striking students were blocking a solution was frequently being heard. There was also evidence, however, that provocateurs on the payroll of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) had infiltrated the student movement. Other commentators noted that extremists could also be found among the authorities, which seemed almost perversely determined to remain unresponsive and inflexible as they sought to conserve the power called into question by the

strike. Yet others pointed out that the issue was not a dispute between hard-liners and moderates on both sides, but rather a dispute over who should control knowledge, the source of power and wealth.

The student movement is fighting for free education, to ensure that the poor would not be stripped of the possibility to study and that education would remain a right rather than just one more commodity to be bought and sold. Business leaders seeking to reform education to make it serve their immediate needs in the fight for markets oppose them. The essential issue here is whether knowledge will be enslaved to capital. The powerful wanted to appropriate knowledge by abrogating rights, while the most conservative among them pushed for a violent solution.

### **A university "Babel"**

While these discussions were going on, things began to break down within the strike committee. Its most radical members rejected those who put forth other points of view. The leaders closed ranks and expelled the internal dissidents. The PRI used the conflict to wrest votes from the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) by publicly accused it of being behind the movement. Paradoxically, at the same time, PRI infiltrators on the strike committee and other hard-liners in the movement succeeded in discrediting the PRD by accusing it of making a deal with university and federal authorities to lift the strike.

The university's research institutes had continued operating until mid-October, when the strike committee proposed taking over these institutes as well. A number of striking students opposed this step, but it was taken nonetheless. Soon after, representatives of six of the forty schools on the strike committee proposed a plan to make the demands more flexible. Some three thousand "moderate" students who held a march in favor of a third way to resolve the strike were accused by the strike committee of selling out.

As the strike entered its sixth month and the conflict grew more confused each day, commentators spoke of a "university Babel." The authorities, which did not want dialogue, hoped for and encouraged actions that would prompt state security forces to retake the campus. As the striking students became more radical, their intolerance fed this authoritarianism. Concern over the direction of the movement was growing not only in the academic community, but also in the general public.

A group of professors called a plebiscite on the strike and the proposed talks for the end of October. The strike committee called for a consultation instead, but did not block the plebiscite. In the plebiscite, 112 voting booths were set up and 26,662 accredited voters—60% students, 30% faculty and 10% university workers—cast their votes. A full 86% of the participants voted to lift the strike and an overwhelming 95% opted for dialogue and negotiation between the

parties to resolve the conflict.

The students set up 1,513 voting booths to carry out their own consultation, open to the public. Some 472,000 people participated, of whom 94,000 said they belonged to the university community. Among the results, 76% called for the university rector to resign, 86% agreed that a university congress should be held to resolve the conflict, and 69% demanded an increased education budget. The consultation, like the plebiscite, revealed that a significant sector of the university community did not support the university authorities' policy of confrontation.

### **A period of crisis**

The Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center commented that the movement was going through a period of crisis, and asked who was benefiting from the conflict, since the government was prolonging it and administrating it to use in the elections. Faculty members also asked why the university rector persisted in the conflict, knowing that the student demands were within the realm of possibilities.

Time was against the strike committee, which was becoming increasingly isolated by its intransigence, even though this was triggered by the authorities' refusal to respond. An angry spirit prevailed, as people lost sight of their goals. The striking students, increasingly desperate, began to see the strike not as a means to an end, but rather as an end in itself. Other grassroots movements nourished the student movement. Full-time activists from radical leftist urban grassroots organizations joined the striking students, but many were more interested in strengthening their own organizations through their participation than in finding a possible solution to the strike. One tactic these organizations used was to draw out the discussions until many participants gave up and left, so that the professional activists who remained were the ones who made the decisions. As a result, the direction of the student movement increasingly fell to a handful of university activists and a larger number of outside radicals. When members of these organizations moved onto campus, relations between the striking students and the university authorities became even tenser. The authorities insisted that the students separate themselves from groups outside the UNAM.

### **The largest anti-Liberal movement**

On November 10, the university rector again requested that public security forces evict the students from campus. Once the PRI's presidential candidate was chosen, however, President Zedillo asked the university rector to resign. While the strike committee celebrated this as a victory for the movement, it clarified that it did not resolve the main issue, which was its list of demands. Zedillo transferred his health minister, Juan Ramon de la Fuente, into the vacant

post, casting doubt on the university's autonomy even though formal procedures were followed. At the same time, the Treasury let parliament know that there would be no more money for education. The PRD again decried the fact that a large share of the national budget is going into the bank bailout.

Pablo González Casanova, a former UNAM rector engaged in important social research on behalf of the poor, commented that the university is facing a much more serious crisis now than it did in 1968. Nonetheless, he saw possibilities of finding a solution, not only for the university but also for the whole country, if people would move beyond purely reactive attitudes. He also said that after over seven months of strike, the student movement had become the largest, most important movement to emerge in Mexico to date against neoliberalism and its impoverishing, exclusionary practices.

At that point, as though to make the government's position on the key issues quite clear, the education ministry shamelessly proposed that the federal subsidy to public universities should be set according to the universities' ability to increase their own income. This would virtually force the universities to charge fees. The government's proposal threatened not only the constitutional right to education but also academic freedom and freedom of thought.

### **Slow, tortuous talks**

The strike committee decided to pull out of the research institutes and meet with the new university rector to insist that its demands be met. It insisted that the meeting take place in public, outside the university, at a site chosen by the striking students, and that it aim to resolve the issues. The meeting, which took place at the end of November, signaled for the first time that the authorities officially recognized the strike committee as the students' representative.

On December 10, after much give and take, the university authorities and the strike committee agreed on four points for beginning the talks. They agreed that dialogue is the only way to resolve the conflict; that the talk's agenda would contain the six points on the students' list of demands; that the talks would be broadcast by Radio UNAM and recorded by the university television, to be later broadcast unedited; and that once all the corresponding institutions had approved the agreements, without any modifications, the strike would end.

On December 11, some 500 striking students marched in front of the US embassy in Mexico City to support the WTO protesters in Seattle. Infiltrators were very active in this march, more so than in any previous student demonstration. Embassy buildings were damaged, dozens of people were arrested and De la Fuente called for an investigation to determine who was responsible. In response to the arrests, the striking students pulled out of the talks and demanded that the prisoners be freed, which they were in a matter of days. At that point,

however, the university authorities walked out over the fact that the students' negotiating committee included people not connected to the UNAM. The slow, tortuous process of the talks led an increasing number of students to express their desire to return to class.

At the beginning of January, strike committee representatives began to bog down the talks in an apparent effort to draw them out. University authorities responded by publicly announcing, among other things, that they would withdraw sanctions against the striking students, suspend the new tuition regulations and call for a democratic university congress with decision-making power once the strike ended. The University Council approved the proposal, moderate strikers felt it responded to the demands they had been making for months and the university union also accepted it. But the strike committee opposed the proposal, arguing that it only partially addressed the list of demands.

### **Youth's understandable mistrust**

Once again, the talks were at an impasse. Pablo González Casanova pointed out that the young people's mistrust was understandable, founded on good reason. The government's refusal to respect the San Andrés accords it signed with the Zapatistas—to give just one example—did nothing to enhance its credibility. He also felt, however, that De la Fuente's proposal was made in the spirit of the talks. The strike committee continued to reject it, both for its form—it was not a product of the talks—and for its content, which did not cover all six points on their list of demands.

The university rector announced that he would hold a plebiscite on his proposal on January 20. The strike committee responded by carrying out another consultation two days earlier, in which they posed three questions. 1) Do you agree that the strike committee's list of demands, which encourages and guarantees free education and the UNAM's autonomy and democratic transformation, should be resolved now, and as a consequence end the university strike? 2) Do you agree that the university authorities and the strike committee should return to the negotiating table to find a solution to the conflict? 3) Do you agree that the proposal put forth by the government and the university authorities seeks to pit students against each other and impose a solution to the conflict by force? The striking students declared that over half a million people turned out to vote in 1,500 voting booths, and that 85% voted in favor of their petition.

The university authorities asked two questions in their plebiscite. 1) Do you support the proposal or not? 2) Do you believe that this proposal should end the strike? Of the 180,088 members of the university community who cast their votes in 918 booths, 87.3% supported the proposal and 89.2% said that the strike

should end.

### **Time to end the strike?**

Although the university rector's plebiscite was well received among many sectors of society, the strike committee called it a fraud and refused to accept it. The moderates proposed holding assemblies in each school to decide whether to return the buildings and take the next step: organize their participation in the congress. Most of the schools were showing an inclination to hand over the buildings and on January 26 some began to do so. University authorities called the federal police to prevent those wanting to continue the strike from taking the buildings over again. PRI deputies applauded this, while PRD deputies felt that the police intervention on campus was a provocation.

It is significant that the mood among striking and non-striking students on January 28 was one of cooperation rather than confrontation. Both groups rejected the use of violence and denounced the police presence as a violation of university autonomy. They agreed to hold forums and meetings to discuss whether to end the strike. But within days the tone had changed again and violence predominated. Some of the buildings handed over had been vandalized and university property destroyed, which discredited the movement. By the end of January, it appeared that the strike committee had reached the limit of its capacity to represent the movement in the conflict.

Economist Juan Castaingts wrote that what had happened in the UNAM up to that point reflected a tragedy. The education system is sorely deficient, authorities are incompetent and the population's low income level has repercussions on education as well. The process of social exclusion, which began under Mexico's populist regimes, has been accentuated by the neoliberal ones. Wealth has been concentrated in few hands, while the bulk of the population feels threatened and excluded. Young people are affected the most and thus it is no surprise, according to the economist, that they adopt lumpen attitudes.

On a more positive note, the leftist writer Gilly described the authorities' recognition of the striking students' principal demands as a great achievement and said that the authorities' plebiscite won mainly because of exhaustion. He also noted, however, that the strike committee's consultation did not encourage reflection but rather sought unconditional approval of its positions. The task now, he said, was to make sure that the students would not be robbed of the congress they had won.

When people tried to make the strike committee see that it had triumphed, it replied that the authorities' concessions were merely another government ploy. This refusal to accept victory suggested to some that the young people were suffering from a culture of defeat, but they were not the only ones to interpret

the plebiscite as a maneuver. Others charged that instead of finding a quick solution to the conflict, De la Fuente was prolonging it to destroy the student movement and thus be free to meet the World Bank's demand to dismantle the UNAM. In favor of this interpretation is the fact that the plebiscite was organized as a state operation, with the mass media at its service. And the repression unleashed on February 6 would also seem to bear out this interpretation.

### **University is community**

The last analyses before the violence called attention to the existence of rightwing sectors in the university, including "women in white," led by the wife of the PRI's presidential candidate, who were encouraging violent confrontations between the students and hoping to resolve the conflict by force. The analyses also criticized the strike committee for seeking student martyrs and refusing to recognize its own achievements. Luis Villoro emphasized that the university is a community of teachers and students and called on everyone to restore that community. He urged the strike committee to honor its initial spirit, when it invoked equity and democracy. University faculty, students and workers, without any exceptions, must all be allowed to express their positions and opinions without violence, he argued.

On January 27, Pablo González Casanova again asked for a response to the question of who was being served by the conflict and its absurd prolongation. He recalled that the university conflict arose at the very time that preparations for privatizing the oil sector were underway and pressure was increasing to privatize the state-owned electricity company as well. In other words, it arose as the trend towards increasing inequalities was being accentuated. The neoliberal project needs public education to prepare workers for the *maquilas* and seeks to undermine education's role in society. González Casanova also pointed out that the movement had already achieved a great deal—not least of all, the change in the UNAM authorities. Through the long months of the strike, the striking students had defended the public character of the universities and fought for the right to free, universal education. But he suggested that it was time for them to reconsider their tactics. Ignoring their own victories, they refused to continue the struggle in new ways and on new ground: through dialogue within an open university and in the university congress. Their inflexibility, he felt, was no longer strength. To obstinately keep the university closed served those who sought to privatize education and promote an elitist, excluding education model. He accused the strike committee of falling into demagogic arguments and deemed the conflict's prolongation absurd, when what was needed was the construction of consensus through dialogue.

### **Violence unleashed**

At the end of January, the strike committee called again for dialogue, and

proposed discussing the list of demands point by point. On January 31, however, a lawyer who had once taught at the university led an armed group against striking students in the Law School. The provocateurs withdrew once the barricades were broken, hoping for a confrontation between striking and non-striking students, but the strikers negotiated rather than falling into the provocation.

Since this tactic, devised by the government, did not prosper, another repressive step was taken. Juan Ramon de la Fuente sent a group of university police to attack the students in the Preparatory School, who defended themselves with sticks and stones. Authorities next tried to involve Mexico City police so that the blood would fall on the hands of the capital's PRD administration, but the head of the city government refused, arguing that the university campus is under federal jurisdiction. The Secretariat of Government then sent a police force established when the PRI's current presidential candidate, Francisco Labastida, was in charge of that secretariat. The force made its debut by attacking the students and arresting 248 members of their movement.

At that point, the strike committee added one more demand to the six on their list: the freeing of their arrested companions, who were charged with crimes as serious as terrorism. The striking students warned that if they were evicted by force the movement would continue "in exile," and called on the authorities to continue the talks in accord with the December 10 agreements.

Power then gave yet another twist to the screw. Big businesspeople—many of them implicated in the FOBAPROA bank scandal—and members of the Catholic hierarchy published a full-page spread in the newspapers demanding that the government use force in UNAM. Among those who signed the ad were the owners of Televisa and Azteca Television, the country's two leading television companies. Both had previously manipulated the news against the movement, but at this point they abandoned any simulation of impartiality to put themselves wholly at the service of repression.

For its part, the PRD declared that the students must be freed if tensions were to be eased, and denounced the government's perverse strategy of administrating the conflict to discredit the Mexico City government authorities. By prolonging the conflict, the PRI was trying to take advantage of the fear it engendered, as in 1994.

### **Perverse strategy**

On February 3 De la Fuente, assuming that the repression had put an end to the student movement, gave the striking students an ultimatum to "negotiate" their withdrawal from the buildings. At the same time, he accused the PRD city government of being responsible for the violence in the Preparatory School.

A group of distinguished members of the university community, including Pablo González Casanova, Luis Villoro, Alfredo López Austin, Rodríguez Araujo, Miguel Concha and Sergio Zermeño (who has done a thorough study of the 1968 student movement) signed a letter warning that the use of force to solve problems in the university would destabilize the situation, with incalculable consequences on the whole of national life. They said it was unlikely that an ultimatum would encourage an agreement, and demanded the immediate release of all imprisoned students and definitive talks to achieve a dignified end to the strike. President Zedillo was the one who decided to use force, but the head of the National Human Rights Commission unwittingly revealed that the plan was first to make it seem that the university authorities favored dialogue and the students were the ones responsible for the violent end. By publicly announcing—a full hour before a meeting between university authorities and striking students ended—that the meeting had achieved nothing, this close associate of Zedillo's showed that the authorities were only making a show of dialogue.

### **Police assault**

On Saturday, February 5, 12,000 demonstrators demanded the prisoners' release and the university rector's resignation. In the early hours of Sunday, February 6, as the striking students were ending one of their marathon meetings in which they decided to keep talking with the authorities, 2,600 federal police came onto campus and arrested them all.

Big business, the PRI and the fascist right applauded furiously. The cardinal of Guadalajara demanded that the agitators be punished and said they had links with the Zapatistas of Chiapas and the "international left." Private enterprise, not content with the police assault, pressed the government to go after the social organizations that had supported the strike as well. They justified repression by claiming that dialogue was impossible. Like the repressive President Díaz Ordaz in his time, Zedillo boasted of ordering the repression. Several marches were organized that same day, in which hundreds of people demanded the release of the detained students. The students blamed the aggression on the PRI's presidential candidate Labastida, President Zedillo, the secretary of government, the attorney general and the UNAM rector.

The tally came to 745 strike committee members imprisoned on February 6, in addition to the 251 students arrested five days earlier. Since 300 arrest warrants were still pending, the total would reach some 1,200. A few hours later, 138 people were released: 20 who had nothing to do with the movement, 37 university workers and 75 students under the age of 18. Two days later, 175 adults and 75 minors arrested on February 1 were still detained, along with 605 of those arrested on the 6th. They were charged with very serious crimes, such as terrorism, rioting and unlawful association to commit a crime.

The strike committee sent out messages to the people of the world, the students, nongovernmental organizations, civil society, workers, farmers and indigenous people, women fighting against all kinds of oppression, all human beings "who have the heart to embrace their brothers and sisters." The committee announced that the students would not give in and would continue the struggle "in exile." "Tell the people that we are defending the education of their children," they said. They also announced that they would not trade their demands in exchange for prisoners.

### **Overcoming intransigence**

On Monday, February 7, Luis Villoro titled his analysis "Days of mourning." The government had aggravated the conflict, raking across an open wound, he wrote, and discontent had broken out around the country because of the many affronts of power. He recalled that all of the proposals for resolving the conflict had coincided in guaranteeing that no student be persecuted for their participation in the strike. Most of the detained students had continued the strike out of personal conviction because they believe it to be just, and had to be distinguished from the provocateurs.

Villoro also emphasized, however, that intransigence in the service of an ideal can destroy it. He noted that the strike committee had had many opportunities to end the conflict with dignity and without being defeated, but had rejected them all. The lesson was a hard one. A movement, however just it may be, should not form a closed group and try to impose itself on others, nor should it exclude all of its possible allies. Holding up an ideal in an intransigent way, disconnected from reality, leads not to heroism but to useless desperation. He called for an end to sterile confrontation, and urged people to heal the wounds in the community and listen to others. In place of imposition, he said, make use of argumentation; in place of shouts, dialogue; in place of antagonism, consensus. The place for doing this was the future university congress, where the university would have to be reformed. Other people pointed out, however, that no congress could be held with students in jail.

### **They were merely buying time**

Many teachers and students who had distanced themselves from the strike committee repudiated the repression and made common cause with the striking students. In another analysis, Gilly predicted that the people would defend their own. The repression had revealed the authorities' game. They had never thought of conceding the key points and were merely buying time in order to break the movement. Just as in the San Andrés accords, it was a tactic to make a show of negotiating so they could later lash out. When the students refused to believe the government, when they accused both university rectors of lying, they were right. The rector's plebiscite was no more than a maneuver to get a vote of confidence that he could use to bring in the police. The authorities had set traps

and sabotaged the talks. Gilly said it would be a serious mistake to blame the extremists, since the federal government had shown nothing but intransigence and authoritarianism. As in 1968, the state had sent a clear message: it would allow no challenges.

Two hundred imprisoned students went on a hunger strike. They dismissed the charges against them as laughable, and reminded the government that the people's struggles were a result of the country's scandalous political, social and economic situation. They declared themselves prisoners of conscience, political prisoners. They also demanded the freedom of 70 students from the El Mexe teacher training college who had been imprisoned by the federal police that same week for demanding that the government respect the agreement it had made regarding their teaching posts when they finished their studies.

### **The struggle goes on**

Writers Elena Poniatowska, who chronicled the 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre, and Carlos Monsiváis repudiated the attack, criticizing the fact that one student had even been charged with being "a danger to society." They pointed out that it is virtually impossible to determine individual responsibilities in a collective movement, and that the movement itself was being treated as criminal. They also denounced the way the university conflict was being turned into a huge television spectacle.

The repression made it clear that the dialogue had been no more than a show. Those who celebrated the end of the strike do not realize that the conflict has not been resolved, but rather complicated, since thousands of activists have been now wounded.

One fact not emphasized in the press is that when the police entered the university, they did not find the arsenal of weapons that the students were accused of stockpiling. The students had been called violent, but put up no violent resistance when the police took them away.

The struggle goes on, while the real criminals, those responsible for enormous thefts against the nation like the FOBAPROA bank scandal, not only remain free but are the ones shouting most loudly to bring the weight of the law down on the students. The power of money and the partisans of a fascism that is beginning to show its face applauded the President's actions. Zedillo is proud of what he has done; he fails to grasp that this action has more than assured his place in the annals of the country's villains.

### **A new stage**

The strike committee met at the Xochimilco campus of the Metropolitan Autonomous University on February 7. They announced that they would keep up the struggle and had added new points to their list of demands: the prisoners'

release, immediate removal of the federal troops from the university and the resignation of the university rector for his incongruent, repressive attitude. They reiterated their desire to resolve the conflict through negotiations, called for the capital's universities and unions to hold a strike, invited people to repudiate the government's actions by turning off their lights for half an hour on the evening of February 10, and began to organize a march for two days later.

The strike committee pointed out that, yet again, the authorities were the ones who had closed off all possibilities of dialogue and violated the accords signed on December 10. They had believed that by creating a climate of terror, they would put an end to the movement, but they did not succeed. The government kept insisting that the striking students were just a handful of radicals, but they were persecuting several hundred people, not a handful. Those in power thought they had lopped off the movement's head but they were wrong, since the strike committee has no leaders, but rather a collective, horizontal leadership. This is what rattles the government.

The movement has been struck hard, but is not yet defeated. Large sectors of society have taken up its demand for free public education.

In his visit to Switzerland, Zedillo dared to call the Zapatista movement "an incident" in history. José Saramago, the Nobel Prize laureate in literature, responded that for Mexico, the "incident" was named Zedillo. The imprisoned students took up this dispute and wrote that the student movement, far from being an incident in history, "is history." And so it may be. The police handed over the university on February 9, but the decision to repress the student movement will not be forgotten so easily. It may well give this struggle a boost that will extend its reach in ways we cannot begin to predict. The repression aggravated the conflict while helping mend internal wounds in the student movement. One way or another, it has contributed to moving this just, popular struggle to a new stage.

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### **The PRI's Agenda: Manipulation, Corruption and Violence**

*Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party, which has controlled the state for the past 70 years, is loyal to only two concepts: corruption and impunity. Without a shift in economic policy, poverty will continue to increase. And if the PRI remains in the presidency, there will be no shift.*

### **Jorge Alonso**

Speaking in Paris in mid-March, the governor of Mexico City, Rosario Rosales,

said that the upcoming elections, the university conflict and the situation in Chiapas have combined to create a "very complicated" climate in her country. It is an accurate assessment of a difficult situation, and the picture becomes even more complicated if one adds the problem of poverty, which will only increase unless there is a change in the country's economic policies.

## The PRI's corruption rule

When President Ernesto Zedillo declared in Davos, Switzerland, that Francisco Labastida was "his" candidate for July's presidential elections in Mexico, the criticism was not long in coming. National Action Party (PAN) candidate Vicente Fox, for example, accused Zedillo of trying to ensure that the next President would protect his back, as has been the traditional rule in Mexico among corrupt politicians. It was soon clear that the state apparatus had been placed at Labastida's service, in line with the traditional confusion between the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the Mexican state. In one of the most blatant examples of this confusion, the PRI's candidate for Mexico City handed out milk earmarked for the most needy by state social programs as part of his political campaign. The Democratic Revolutionary Party responded by calling on the PRI to stop manipulating the country's poverty to its advantage; the PRD's presidential candidate, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, accused the governing party of looking to attract votes by trafficking in the very poverty it had created. Meanwhile, Vicente Fox accused the Foreign Relations Secretariat of having prepared Labastida's journey to Chile and Subcomandante Marcos remarked on the increased aerial patrols when the PRI candidate visited Chiapas, mirroring the treatment given to Zedillo, thus demonstrating that the army already considers him its new chief. Such state-party confusion is so entrenched that when it was discovered that Nuevo León's PRI leader had used public money for party campaigning, he defended himself by claiming that this was in keeping with his party's normal practices.

## Time for democracy?

In March, the PRI celebrated 71 years of oppressing the Mexican people. The opposition Alliance for Mexico, led by the PRD, and the Alliance for Change, led by the PAN, objected to the PRI's use of the Mexican colors in its party shield, but the judicial branch's Electoral Tribunal once again proved its allegiance to the PRI by ruling in its favor.

Some years ago, Seymour Martin Lipset wrote in his classic book, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*, that Mexico could not be fully classified as a democracy because the PRI had been in power for six decades and the country's high poverty levels made it democratically unstable. According to Lipset, corruption tends to increase when a party has been in power for a long time, and he concluded that Mexico would only achieve democracy once the PRI had left office. Along the same lines, Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa has stated that

Mexican democracy will remain illusory as long as the PRI continues to govern.

The current election campaign appeared to be making such a transcendental change seem possible. In fact, for several days the Canadian government's web page suggested that the PRI might lose control of the presidency. Many analysts therefore predicted that the PRI would play even dirtier and try to cling to power by mounting an electoral fraud. It was also suggested that the party would deliberately increase violence as a tactic aimed at encouraging people to vote for it out of fear.

Most opinion polls show that the PRI candidate's popularity has peaked and the PAN has closed the gap to produce a technical draw. Cárdenas, who is once again representing the PRD and was a long way behind the other two, has also begun to pick up ground. On International Women's Day (March 8), Cárdenas condemned the injustices suffered by Mexican women and recalled the pregnant women murdered by PRI sympathizers at Acteal and the imprisoned female university students. He also reminded his audience that while Labastida was state governor of Sinaloa a female human rights worker had been murdered there with the complicity of the authorities.

### **Imagine Mexico without the PRI...**

The PRI's campaign has not been very convincing, and its candidate keeps falling into the trap of making demagogic promises that are immediately shown to be unviable. In desperation, Labastida even tried to turn the FOBAPROA case to his own advantage, accusing some of the PAN candidate's brothers of having benefited from that bank bailout fund. Fox riposted that it was Labastida's relatives, the PRI and the PRI's top campaign organizers that had really benefited from the money. The magazine *Proceso* added to the PRI's woes by providing information on the Labastida family's involvement in the financial scandal, while a PRD parliamentary representative named some of those involved, including PRI members, former Presidents, leaders of the PRI's labor sector, businesspeople linked to the ruling party and the PRI's main presidential campaign organizers.

There were calls to name all of those implicated, but this would involve using the whole set of passwords distributed among the parties to open the diskette left by the Canadian auditor, and of course the PRI refused to cooperate. Scared and with plenty to hide, the party preferred to remain faithful to its two main principles: corruption and impunity. In an attempt to clean up his image, Labastida announced that he had broken with former President Salinas de Gortari, though the PRI's list of candidates for Senate include prominent Salinas supporters.

To make matters worse for Labastida, nobody has forgotten that he was responsible for persecuting international solidarity observers in Chiapas, blocking

the dialogue with the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) and aggravating the conflict in the Mexican Autonomous University (UNAM). At the same time, Vicente Fox has concentrated on showing that Labastida represents "more of the same," while his own party's messages highlight the serious problems facing the country, inviting voters to "Imagine Mexico without the PRI, and now!"

### **A narcostate?**

It has been suggested by international observers that Mexico is on the verge of becoming a "narcostate" due to the intricate links between organized crime and the state apparatus. The PAN accused the PRI of being linked to drug traffickers and when the PRI demanded evidence, it responded that the case of Mario Villanueva, the former governor of Quintana Roo, was more than enough: Villanueva is currently on the run, accused of being a drug baron. The authorities are also protecting a former PRI governor of Morales who headed a gang of kidnappers.

The level of PRI corruption within the very institution responsible for implementing justice was revealed when the chief clerk of the Attorney General's Office committed suicide following the discovery of bank accounts in his name containing large amounts of ill-gotten money. Speaking in the United States, Fox stated that alternating power is the only way to tackle drug trafficking in Mexico.

### **Simulated negotiation, manipulated justice**

The opposition has demanded that the Mexican government publicly declare the agreements it secretly made with the IMF to privatize a number of state companies in return for which it will receive a large loan supposedly to be used to service the foreign debt. It is feared that part of this money could find its way into the PRI's election coffers. The Executive has also announced a budget cut that clearly reflects its priorities, trimming US\$20 million from education and over \$23 million from rural programs, but only \$256,000 from the armed forces. And the government is making these cuts during a boom in which the country is receiving 50% more than expected from oil sales due the increase in international prices.

The privatizations and the education budget cuts are related to the university conflict. According to former UNAM rector Pablo González Casanova, the neoliberal goal is to turn the university into a commercial concern. Since February, the student movement has concentrated its efforts on freeing the students arrested during the violent occupation of the UNAM, accused of being a danger to society. After the students were imprisoned, the university authorities, who had at first simulated a conciliatory position, ended up filing the charges. The charges against them are both excessive and untenable, and the bail that has been set is out of all proportion to the accusations: one judge even put it at \$10,000. When the university authorities declared that they would help parents

raise the money to post the bail it seemed like a bad joke, as students who were fighting for a free education would thus run up an enormous debt with the UNAM authorities.

Later both the charges and the bail were reduced. Opposition parliamentarians accused the government of administering justice at its own convenience and using it as a negotiating tool, thus demonstrating the political manipulation of the judicial system.

### **Don't just resist, force change**

The student movement did not give in, and while most students were demanding that schools be kept open, they also forcefully called for the release of the imprisoned students, who were ultimately freed one by one. The General Strike Council retook the university rectory for several days exactly a month after the police eviction and organized a number of marches to demand the release of the prisoners, one of which attracted over 15,000 participants. Solidarity marches were organized in other Latin American and European countries. A parents' movement for the liberation of the imprisoned students was set up in the university center and the parents also took their protest to public places such as Mexico's House of Representatives and stock exchange. They also dramatized their protest by tying themselves to crosses and drawing their own blood. Finally, they took their accusations to the UN, calling for the release of the "political prisoners" and their return to the university without reprisals. In this new stage, which began with police violence, the university authorities have lost credibility and there is a strong feeling of resentment within the university.

The Mexican Human Rights Academy accused the country's two television networks of adopting a judgmental attitude rather than offering objective information during the university conflict. Pablo González Casanova declared that television had become a "court of the inquisition" where reporters fed questions to those opposed to the movement so they could condemn the students' actions. Such trial by television corresponds to a political and judicial regime that converts social problems into social danger.

In this context, a social movement emerged around a grassroots teacher training college in the state of Hidalgo. The Mexican government, determined to "resolve" the student conflicts through force rather than dialogue, sent a police detachment to take the rural college, but the local population rose up and took a number of police officers prisoner. They then exchanged them for the student teachers imprisoned by the police.

The World Bank is intent on privatizing education around the world, but as the student protest demonstrates, there has been increasing resistance to this policy in Mexico and other countries. New experiences have led to the increasing

realization that at this particular time of change, social movements have great possibilities of not only resisting but also forcing change, with the help of international solidarity.

### **Chiapas: The conflict continues**

The United States has been monitoring twelve rebel groups in Mexico and has declared that although none of them has the capacity to take power, they could destabilize the electoral process. While defending neoliberalism to the hilt in Davos, Switzerland, President Zedillo revealed his political priorities by declaring that the Zapatistas only sat down to talk in 1995 when he threatened them with repression. Back in Mexico, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas specified that the lack of dialogue in Chiapas was due to Zedillo's failure to honor his commitments and that it would be very serious if the government is thinking of employing violence to resolve the Chiapas conflict.

Days later in Spain, Zedillo stated that dialogue with the EZLN was a "very minor" affair. One PAN parliamentarian from the peace dialogue commission called Zedillo's remarks incongruous and opposition deputies on the commission requested that Zedillo be asked to define his real position on the Chiapas conflict. It is obvious that the President is not interested in dialogue and that his government is unwilling to sit down and negotiate a peaceful solution to the conflict, preferring instead to continue with a low-intensity war. One PAN representative called Zedillo's declarations irresponsible, stating that the Chiapas uprising revealed how discouraged not only the indigenous people in that particular state are but also the entire Mexican population.

### **A "minor incident" in Chiapas**

A report submitted to the UN by Bishop Samuel Ruiz and the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center interprets Zedillo's declarations in Switzerland as confirming the government's unwillingness to talk. In Chiapas, indigenous rights amount to what has been agreed minus what has not been honored.

While Mexico's government delegation was in Geneva, the head of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, which is based there, asked it to respect the San Andrés accords and spoke out in support of the work by NGOs in defense of indigenous rights. Many NGOs themselves sensed that Zedillo's comments in Switzerland had worsened the political atmosphere in Mexico. They view the President's disdain for the work of social organizations independent of the government as a serious matter, since the government had shown that it intends to ignore, silence and even persecute civil organizations dedicated to the defense of human rights.

Nobel prize winning writer José Saramago also involved himself in this discussion through the international press. He argued that a President who views dialogue

with the Zapatistas to be a "minor" incident while at the same time stationing over 40,000 soldiers in Chiapas to carry out intimidating and even repressive activities represents an unfortunate "historical" incident for Mexico.

Zedillo's disdain for the "minor incident" of dialogue has cost Mexico too many deaths and too much suffering. By failing to respect human rights, Zedillo has demonstrated over the months just how far removed from democracy he really is. Saramago asked exactly what Zedillo sought to achieve through his declarations and suggested that he was preparing the ground to move thousands of soldiers and paramilitary troops to the front line. Zedillo has feigned generosity to the Zapatista movement, but, as Saramago pointed out, the Acteal massacre revealed just how far this self-proclaimed generosity actually goes. Saramago called the EZLN the most honorable organization in Mexico today, and said that one of President Zedillo's most serious errors was to have ignored the possibility of representing all Mexicans, including its indigenous populations.

### **A cultural revolution**

Chiapas is an ethical problem, but the PRI politicians have been characterized by their lack of ethics and conscience. In his book *Marcos, el señor de los espejos* [Marcos, the Man of the Mirrors], Spanish writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán stresses the importance of the fact that the Zapatista revolution is cultural and thus offers alternatives to what is currently presented as the only option. Vázquez Montalbán sustains that the Zapatista movement is a symbol of world discontent, defining this conflict as globalization's first and predicting that the discontent will continue to spread, as evidenced by the landless people in Brazil, the unemployed in Europe and the indigenous people in Ecuador. He stressed that while foreigners were not responsible for the Zapatista revolution, they do have the right to appraise and understand it.

Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, when presenting his book *Patas Arriba* (Upside Down), declared that the military siege of Chiapas was the largest in the world and that the government's aim was to block the affirmation of the right to identity. He emphasized the enormous contribution that the Zapatistas have made to the democratization of Mexico, as the pressure they have exerted has led to important changes, adding that the movement had attracted world solidarity.

### **A violent solution**

February marked the fourth anniversary of the Mexican government's failure to honor the San Andrés accords signed with the Zapatistas. Senator Carlos Payán defined the state's relationship with indigenous peoples as authoritarian, with the government ignoring everything it has signed and waging a dirty war against the indigenous insurgents. The EZLN stressed that it has a long memory and that the air force buzzing persists in Zapatista communities because the government

is afraid of the indigenous population.

The Zapatista movement criticized the fact that judges are criminals, victims end up in jail, the government is a liar, the truth is persecuted and students are imprisoned while big fish are allowed to go free. During his campaign, Labastida offered Subcomandante Marcos the chance to become a member of the police force. Parliamentary representatives on the Commission for Concertation and Pacification expressed concern over such declarations, which show that the PRI candidate has no understanding of the conflict at all, while PRD and PAN representatives argued that his declarations show that he favors a violent solution to the conflict. One PRD representative warned that there is a real danger that Zedillo will opt for a military operation in Chiapas to "clean up the house" for his successor if the PRI retains the presidency.

### **Farewell, Samuel Ruiz**

Bishop Samuel Ruiz of the San Cristóbal diocese in Chiapas, who was loved by the indigenous population and attacked by the government, has finally had to resign as he has reached the canonical age of retirement. However, Mexican bishops linked to the political and economic authorities and to the Papal Curia—particularly former Nuncio in Mexico Jerónimo Prigione, who had close links to drug traffickers and PRI governors—did the government a favor by helping ensure that Ruiz's assistant, Bishop Raúl Vera, left with him. The powers that be did not want Ruiz to be replaced by another bishop committed to the indigenous cause. Bishop Vera, who would have been just such a committed replacement, denounced the increased presence of paramilitary troops in Chiapas both as he was leaving the diocese of San Cristóbal and on his arrival in the diocese of Saltillo at the other end of the country.

Samuel Ruiz was a key player in the Intermediation Commission's Peace Dialogue Commission. Now, on leaving Chiapas, he has published a systematic account of the peace process and of the National Intermediation Commission's historical archives. He has stressed that the principles, agenda, format, rules and procedures of the San Andrés negotiating table provide a model of dialogue and negotiation for both sides in the conflict and for getting other actors involved in the peace process. He insists that the crisis affecting the dialogue has nothing to do with the model, which is merely a social and political instrument for resolving conflicts. Ruiz leaves Chiapas convinced that for a peace process to be carried out democratically the different actors must have access to the all of the resources and experiences generated over these past difficult years.

Pope John Paul II has begged God's forgiveness for the Church's sins during its 2,000 years of existence. This is a laudable act, but forgiveness requires that the Catholic hierarchy profoundly examine its conscience and have the firm intention to reform. It would be a positive step if it were to atone for its present sins: for

the support it offered to the dictator Pinochet and for its complicity with powerful economic and political groups that exploit, oppress and violate human rights in our countries. The Pope's visit to Central America in 1983 should be minutely examined when asking for forgiveness, and the Catholic Church in Mexico should now beg forgiveness for having removed from the indigenous population of Chiapas two priests committed to the cause of the poor.

### **The voice of women**

On March 8, International Women's day, a group of Zapatista women took over a government radio station and broadcast for several hours. They said they were speaking for the poorest and most forgotten sectors, those that are triply exploited and eternally excluded. They are demanding changes in the traditional practices that oppress them and warned that the more they are imprisoned, the stronger they become. They also declared that they have not given in to the dirty war waged by President Zedillo and Governor Albores and denounced the prostitution that the army has introduced into Chiapas. Finally, they pronounced their opposition to the military occupation of their communities and to the militarization and paramilitarization of their lands and demanded freedom for the jailed students in Mexico City. The same day Marcos released a public letter explaining why Zapatista women insist on emphasizing that they are female insurgents and analyzed the problems women Zapatistas in leadership posts face getting men to obey them.

### **The new left**

In a letter to Marcos about the new left, Pablo González Casanova noted that the new groups emphasize internalized domination and exploitation in their analysis, and even consider imperialism to be an internalized phenomenon. According to González Casanova, these groups can detect the current manifestations of class struggle, which is no easy task as the struggle is very subtly hidden in the complex articulation of multinational and transnational corporations. These groups also define democracy as participation and representation, ideological pluralism and the connecting of individual and social rights.

One year after the Zapatista consultation, those responsible for organizing it across the country say they are on the lookout to prevent military and paramilitary action against the Zapatistas in the run up to the elections and the final months of Zedillo's rule.

### **UN recommendations**

The UN relateur on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions, Asma Jahangir, released a report in Geneva denouncing the persistent violence and impunity in Mexico and stating that the inefficient Mexican judicial system had brought about an increase in human rights violations. The report mentioned the Acteal massacre among the most alarming cases, prompting an angry response

from the Mexican government.

Several nongovernmental organizations had earlier prepared an alternative report on the of economic, social and cultural rights situation in Mexico showing that an increasing number of Mexican men and women live in seriously deteriorated conditions largely as a result of the structural adjustment policies implemented over the last 17 years. Among their recommendations, the organizations propose reducing military spending and effectively increasing social spending. The UN committee took this document into account and its recommendations to the government expressed the UN's concern over the living conditions of indigenous populations, with their limited access to health, education, work and housing.

The committee also stated that it was alarmed by the strong presence of military and paramilitary forces in the indigenous communities of Chiapas and other states, and pointed out that corruption has a negative effect on economic, social and cultural rights. Finally, it called on the Mexican state to deal with the structural causes of poverty and fight corruption. The PRI is incapable of acting on this recommendation, however, because the party is intrinsically corrupt.

### **A poverty-producing system**

In Davos, Zedillo went all out to defend globalization, saying he knew of no study showing that the increase in world trade negatively affects Mexico. In Mexico he was dubbed a "globalophile" and economic analysts recommended a long list of articles and books to him, many of them produced by academic centers Zedillo venerates. The President's declarations make it obvious that he gave up reading and studying long ago. Not even with his touched-up official figures could the President explain why 40 million Mexicans are living in poverty—even official figures admit that 28% of Mexico's population lives in extreme poverty, the highest proportion in 15 years—or how salaries have depreciated by over 20% during his administration alone.

Zedillo's justifications contrasted sharply with the words of US President Bill Clinton, who stated that the billion poor people on the planet surviving on under a dollar a day are also part of the world in which we live. Likewise, business magnate George Soros lamented the world's deterioration and the increasing complicity between politicians and businesspeople. Finally, even the World Bank, meeting in the Mexican beach resort of Cancún, accepted that the poorest 20% of the Mexican population receives only 3.5% of the country's income, while the richest 20% receives 55%. It lamented the fact that Latin America is the continent with the most unequal income distribution and blamed this on bad government, corruption and a failure to apply imaginative plans. All of the above clearly contrasts with Zedillo's malicious triumphalism.

Meanwhile, French writer Viviane Forrester has pointed out that globalization has been kidnapped by ultra-liberalism, which has imposed its own fallacies; Saramago has stated that Mexico's poverty is not limited to Chiapas, but affects the whole country; and González Casanova has denounced the fact that what is now offered as charity was previously regarded as a right.

The education, health and food program called Progresa, which targets the most marginalized fragments of society, those whom the government also manipulates electorally, receives just 4.2% of what the government made available in the FOBAPROA bank bailout fund. All of the anti-poverty programs put together, in fact, account for under 6% of the resources used to rescue the inefficient and corrupt bankers in the FOBAPROA scandal. These figures clearly reflect the government's priorities. Unless there is a change of direction in the country's economic policy, poverty will continue to increase, no matter how much money is pumped into poverty reduction programs. But there will be no change of direction as long as the PRI controls the Mexican presidency, so corruption and poverty will keep rising uncontrollably.

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### **On the Eve of the Elections: A Vote of Fear or a Vote for Change?**

*If the PRI wins and the destructive state party formula survives, the transition to democracy will be aborted or at least postponed. If the opposition wins and the PRI begins to crumble, however, it could ignite a transcendental democratic change and make possible advances in social democracy.*

**Jorge Alonso**

In these last weeks leading up to the July 2 presidential and congressional elections, the situation in Mexico has become very dangerous. The population has expressed a growing desire to see the presidency change hands. The ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) is trying to stifle this desire for change by manipulating events to encourage a "vote of fear" in its favor and by resorting to all of the mechanisms of power a corrupt state has at hand.

#### **"Gang leader" Zedillo**

Yet another of the many signs of the government's authoritarianism was its decision to switch to daylight saving time in the summer, which is not usually done in Mexico. Many people disagreed with this step, and several opposition governors and regional congresses criticized President Ernesto Zedillo's decision for not having taken public opinion into account. One businessperson hit the mark when he said that in Mexico it was apparently enough to talk with 200 people—the economic elite—to make decisions. In this as in everything, the

ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) leaves citizens on the margins. But while participation is in short supply, there's been no shortage of corruption. In fact, the Mexican State is globally renowned for it. A new scandal broke out around Secretary of Tourism Oscar Espinosa Villarreal, who was accused of embezzling over US\$40 million in his previous post as regent. His responsibility in the embezzlement of \$5.5 billion from a major national financial institution he directed has also come to light. Even though he continues to work in the government, he was granted an enormous pension after three years in the financial institution. He has also been accused of crimes when he was managing PRI finances. He arranged credit cards with the PRI's emblem for party leaders, and many of the debts on these cards are still outstanding and thus join the \$72 billion embezzlement of the Mexican people through the FOBAPROA bank scandal.

Espinosa Villarreal tried to defend himself by claiming that his involvement in the electoral campaign was motivating the accusations. The opposition asked that he be stripped of his immunity so he could be tried on these serious charges of corruption, but the PRI, Zedillo and big business came to his defense. The Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) retorted that Zedillo was acting like a "gang leader" and the PRI like a "criminal association" by defending a criminal like Espinosa.

It has also been repeatedly charged that the state and top army officers are involved in drug trafficking. In May, CIA officers charged that the PRI's presidential candidate, Francisco Labastida, has been linked to drug traffickers. In his campaign, National Action Party (PAN) candidate Vicente Fox charged that the PRI has fallen into the traffickers' hands. When asked for proof, he named Mario Villanueva, accused of drug trafficking while governor of the state of Quintana Roo; ex-President Carlos Salinas de Gortari and his brother Raúl; and Carlos Hank González, who worked on Zedillo's campaign team and has been linked with traffickers by the DEA.

### **The results of two debates**

The campaign has had four important moments, before and after each of the two debates. In the weeks leading up to the first debate in March, the PRI's Labastida held the lead. After it, his lead slipped while the PAN's Fox rose in the polls. PRD candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas's support remained low. During the preparations for the second debate, Fox's inflexibility cost him support, which went to Cárdenas. Cárdenas then joined Labastida in attacking Fox, which made him appear to be a man of the system. At that point, the opposition vote was split, which gave the state party an advantage, although it was still concerned about its inability to clinch the vote.

Fox also won the second debate, at the end of May. Cárdenas gained some

ground, while Labastida once again appeared as a weak candidate sustained only by the party and state apparatus. Four surveys commissioned by the PRI reported that Labastida had won the debate, but the majority of independent surveys named Fox as the winner. Cárdenas attacked Labastida, moving away from the position he took in the first debate. Fox called on voters to shake off the PRI's corruption and authoritarianism and move into a new age. He also called on Cárdenas to work with him to ensure an opposition victory, but Cárdenas declined.

Fox insists that Labastida means more of the same, that he promises change but cannot deliver because he is responsible for the current situation, and is corruption's candidate. Manual Camacho, the former commissioner for peace in Chiapas, pointed to Labastida's responsibility in the Acteal massacre and in the government's refusal to fulfill the San Andrés accords. Although Labastida promised that PRI candidates would make public declarations of their personal holdings, this did not happen. He also promised a new PRI, but accepted the support of the party's "dinosaurs." Labastida and Cárdenas accused Fox of being untrustworthy and changing his rhetoric according to the audience. The PRI insists that the change Fox proposes is a "step backwards." The major media have unleashed a dirty war against Fox, putting forth the idea that it's better to stay with the current known situation than risk the unknown.

### **A massive fraud in the making**

The presidential campaign has shown that the state party is willing to do anything to maintain its privileges and hold onto power. The enormous, flagrant frauds committed in its internal elections are signs of what it is capable of in any electoral process. The leading television networks' information chiefs are top-ranking party members: Televisa is headed up by one of Zedillo's political advisers; Televisión Azteca, by a former member of the PRI's National Committee; and Multivisión, by the former private secretary and press secretary of Emilio Gamboa, a member of Labastida's campaign team. They use these posts to promote the government and trash the opposition.

The Federal Electoral Institute had prepared a voter education spot against vote buying, but the media organization, in complicity with the PRI, boycotted this program. The PRI manipulates the polls and uses its corporativist structure to strike out in an attempt to save itself. The party's governors and central government officials have been instructed to do "everything" to ensure a PRI victory. A massive fraud is in the making.

### **Change or more of the same?**

The choice is between change and more of the same. Those who see these elections as an opportunity for a political change, in which the main objective is

to dismantle the state party, maintain that the most useful vote is for Fox, who holds the lead among opposition candidates. While Fox has called for convergence and promises to form a pluralistic, inclusive government, Cárdenas insists that if the change is not led by the PRD, a PRI win is better than Fox.

The state party regime wants it to seem that the opposition has already lost. It supports this stance with questionable polls, which will serve as an alibi in case of fraud. It is capable of manipulating the percentage of booths needed to throw the elections to Labastida through fraud, and the opposition does not have the monitoring capacity to prevent this.

The group known as Civic Alliance has called on people to defend the right to a free vote and has planned actions to fight the practices of vote-buying and coercion, emphasizing oversight and observation of the electoral process. It has been organizing volunteers and a network of citizens specializing in detecting fraud. It designed a citizens' observatory to focus this oversight, arguing the need to define "high risk" municipalities. It also plans to follow up the use of public resources, to try to detect how funds are diverted from poverty-combating social programs into the PRI campaign.

### **Pressure on two and a half million Mexicans**

On May 7, Civic Alliance released a statement noting that a fourth of the population believes that the government's social programs will disappear if the PRI loses the elections. Nearly half the people who receive such aid share this belief. These figures reveal the political culture's antidemocratic features: the official party is identified with government, viewed as the benefactor of the marginal population, and votes are seen as the way to "pay" for the social benefits received. This is the medium in which the practice of coercing votes and illegally using social programs to influence the vote can grow and thrive.

Civic Alliance proposed that the House of Representatives, through its Special Commission to Monitor Public Resource Use in Electoral Campaigns, carry out an intensive, effective publicity campaign that would reach all social sectors, especially those benefited by the government's social programs. This campaign would clarify that no party owns the government's social programs and that the budget assigned to these programs was approved by a pluralist Congress that has representatives of all the leading parties. It also proposed that the Church and civil society organizations working in marginalized areas join in this civic education campaign.

Over two and a half million Mexicans are beneficiaries of the government's social assistance programs and thus vulnerable to PRI pressure on this issue. Many of these people believe that they receive their benefits from the PRI, since the party publicizes them not as government programs, paid for with public funds, but

rather as the state party's own programs. As the campaign goes on, charges of such vote coercion in favor of the PRI are mounting. At the end of May, for example, international observers witnessed the improper use of public resources in the PRI's favor.

### **The bishops speak**

The Catholic Church has not remained quiet during the electoral campaign. The Mexican Bishops Conference released a pastoral letter titled "From the meeting with Jesus Christ to solidarity with all." The letter begins by explaining that the bishops' goal is to offer certainties in a time of confusion. They have drawn lessons from a review of the country's history and current situation in an effort to find new paths, and based the document on extensive consultations with representative sectors and groups in both the religious community and civil society.

They also recalled that many members of the Church have been martyred. On May 21, John Paul II beatified 27 Mexicans, 25 of them killed during the Mexican State's religious persecution in the late 1920s.

In their letter, the bishops describe the current situation as one in which internal demands for social justice and democratization have been seconded by the growing pressures of an increasingly globalized world. They note that the changes brought about by globalization have not been accompanied by the political and social reforms the nation requires: macroeconomic issues have been given priority, the state's social role is in crisis, the domestic economy has declined, most people's purchasing power has fallen, unemployment is high, the quality of life has deteriorated, and as wealth increasingly concentrates in a few hands the middle class is slowly disappearing.

### **Corruption, impunity, and an "anti-culture" of fraud**

The bishops recall that Mexico is among the countries in the world with the most inequitable distribution of wealth. Poverty has grown over the last 20 years. Traditional agriculture is paralyzed in many areas. Migration is up. Insecurity has also increased, as new forms of violence and criminality develop and drug rings grow.

The bishops feel that the country is undergoing a "profound and complex change." Mexico is emerging as a plural society in which people are searching for spaces of recognition and participation. In response to antidemocratic, fraudulent, obsolete and unjust structures, eroded by corruption, impunity and authoritarianism, Mexican society would like to definitively move beyond an "anti-culture" of fraud, bribes, and privileges for only a few.

The bishops believe that the current development model is unable to meet the basic demands of a dignified life in terms of work, wage, security, education and

health. They also note the increasing environmental deterioration, and describe the clamor to overcome the structural causes of poverty and exclusion through a comprehensive development model based on social justice.

The bishops propose forums for meeting and dialogue. They insist that the country is entering a new age that is transforming the traditional reference points of individual and collective existence, and find the change taking place in democratic processes to be a particularly significant one. They talk of a "democratic transition" and see one sign of it in the fact that there has been an alternation of power in some government posts. But they emphasize that "a more complete culture of democracy supposes the real possibility of this alternation."

They warn that the course of this transition is not guaranteed. They call on people to seek consensus and redirect initiatives based on principles aimed at achieving the common good. They say that the transition cannot be reduced to electoral issues, but rather includes the whole political system. They fear an authoritarian backlash, even one that comes through electoral means.

### **Electoral fraud: a grave sin**

The bishops emphasize that the effective exercise of the political right to a free, secret vote faces serious obstacles. They denounce that in some situations, intimidating coercive practices sharply diminish freedom in the exercise of the vote: "In some places there is a 'vote of fear,' where our people's multiple forms of poverty and ignorance are dishonestly taken advantage of to carry out various forms of electoral fraud."

And they strongly emphasize that "it must be stated with complete clarity that collaborating directly or indirectly in electoral fraud is a grave sin that undermines human rights and offends God."

The letter goes on to say that "the social and political changes so often announced but not carried through lead to exhaustion, mistrust, abstention and disgust among the citizenry. Political proposals made in the media based only on images and phrases, with strong visual and auditory impact but with no content that invites critical reflection and analysis, create an informational void akin to lies and deceit."

The bishops criticize corruption and describe the public's mistrust of the institutions responsible for preventing crime and administering justice. They propose carrying out a more thorough reform of the judicial branch and defining the basic premises of the economic development Mexicans require to achieve equity and better conditions for the production and distribution of wealth.

They speak of improving the educational model and ethically guiding the media so it will understand that its mission is to inform, educate and entertain in a way that serves human dignity. They raise the need for basic norms to ensure that the right to free expression does not harm the rights of the people and the

community. They encourage the recognition and promotion of the diverse cultures that make up the nation.

### **Economic growth is not development**

The bishops propose comprehensive development based on social justice. They insist that economic growth is not equivalent to development, and encourage the creation of economic models built on solidarity. They see education as a way to build a democratic culture. They stress that Christians must collaborate in an ongoing way in building a democratic, participatory and representative culture with principles of solidarity and mutual aid that promotes human rights.

They insist that the culture of democracy cannot be reduced to merely electoral issues, but rather involves all social activities that require participation, representation and human promotion. They point out that when the media only collaborates with one kind of political or economic proposal, it betrays its commitment to help build a more pluralistic society that is healthy, critical and capable of working in favor of the changes Mexico needs. They also insist that the media must be independent from the economic and political powers that limit its impartiality and transparency.

PRI members have criticized the positions laid out in the bishops' pastoral letter, which is being studied in discussion groups in the parishes, and demanded that these discussions be suspended, fearing that this kind of education will make the regime's fraudulent practices harder. The government also illegally expelled an international electoral observer and prepared a large army of "observers" among groups associated with it to endorse its antidemocratic practices. As in 1994, when the "vote of fear" yielded good returns for the PRI, situations that feed fear, such as bomb threats and guerrilla attacks in the capital, are also being fabricated.

### **The hidden war in Chiapas**

Chiapas cannot be left out of the campaign. If Labastida wins, the region's future will be increasingly troubled. Labastida has encouraged the rise of paramilitary forces and the hidden war in Chiapas, while the chances of an open war to crush the Zapatistas in order to harvest more votes of fear have increased.

While in Mexico for the signing of a trade agreement between the European Union and Mexico, a group of European parliamentarians visited Chiapas. They denounced the paramilitary presence in the region and the failure to fulfill the San Andrés accords. The representative for relations with Mexico and Central America spoke of how struck they were by the extreme poverty they saw in Chiapas, and called on the Mexican government to dismantle the paramilitary organizations.

Around the same time, a US Senate committee approved a declaration expressing its disappointment over the militarization of Chiapas and criticizing the activities of the pro-government paramilitary groups that have displaced indigenous people, exacerbating their impoverishment. The declaration also expresses the committee's concern over the treatment of international human rights observers and the summary deportation of US citizens.

### **Impunity in Acteal**

On May 17, a retired general was sentenced to eight years in prison for his involvement in the Acteal massacre. The officer was two kilometers from the massacre, heard the shots and reported to his superiors that nothing was happening, failing in his duty to protect the indigenous people from the attack. Human rights activists commented ironically about the trial and verdict that the lives of 45 indigenous people are worth just eight years of prison for one of those responsible, and total amnesty for all the rest.

Just before leaving Querétaro, Bishop Samuel Ruiz took advantage of his final moments in Chiapas to denounce the impunity of paramilitary groups. The bishop who replaced him has declared that genocide and ethnocide persist in the region.

In April, nongovernmental organizations warned that the military siege continues: while there were 197 military posts in Chiapas in 1997, three years later there are 300. Meanwhile, PAN and PRD representatives in the legislature's Commission on Harmony and Pacification (COCOPA) have insisted that the paramilitary groups be dismantled.

### **Burning the Lacandona forest**

Since March, the EZLN has called attention to an environmental attack: in constructing this military encirclement, the Mexican army has deforested an extensive area of the Montes Azules biosphere reserve, a protected area within the Lacandona forest since 1978.

When forest fires began in the hot, dry season, two broke out in the area where the army is stationed. With this pretext, and in order to increase tension in the area, the government announced that it would send the Federal Police preventive units—the same ones who arrested the students in the National Autonomous University—to relocate communities that it tried to blame for the fires. Its pretext fell apart when satellite photos showed that no fires were to be found where the communities are located. Nonetheless, to fan the vote of fear, the government sent the police anyway, alleging that they would detain those responsible for violent acts. Although the paramilitary groups are the ones responsible for ambushes and assassinations, they were not only left untouched, but also invited to work alongside the police in stepping up the siege against the autonomous Zapatista communities and municipalities.

The Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center said that the plan, put into effect supposedly to address "common violence," leads one to think that the government fabricated a situation to unleash violence and create a pre-electoral climate that would inhibit citizens from exercising their right to vote freely.

### **Chiapas: Open war and electoral coercion**

The opposition continues to charge that the government is seeking a violent solution in Chiapas and creating an unnecessary climate of tension to accomplish it. The EZLN issued a statement saying that the government, which is growing desperate since Labastida's campaign failed to get off the ground, wants to revive the fighting in Chiapas, in a climate favorable to its goal of striking a definitive blow to the indigenous communities and the EZLN.

In early May, the Zapatista Front warned that preparations were underway for open war in Chiapas. In coordination with the army and paramilitary groups, the federal government has been sowing terror and death in the indigenous communities. The Zapatistas called on civil society to mobilize to stop the war.

They feel that social movements, which are indispensable to changing the correlation of forces, are not speaking out and appear to have been seduced by the elections. They believe that while in 1988 the hopes for change had been led by Cárdenas, they are now being led by Fox, who represents the dreams of change of millions of Mexicans since he is the only one who appears capable of defeating the PRI. Although the EZLN distances itself from Fox's project, it respects the spirit of change that is surging up in people, and denounced the PRI's blatant use of state force to hold onto power.

The EZLN is not siding with any party apparatus but rather with the people who want to free themselves from the PRI dictatorship. They warn that in this electoral context, the regime is sorely tempted to carry out a major political-military maneuver in Chiapas, to launch an open war against the Zapatistas as one more means of fanning the vote of fear and thus holding onto power.

### **First scenario: The PRI wins**

Analysts stress that to achieve authentic democracy and peace in Mexico, getting the PRI out of the presidency is not enough. The state party structures must also be dismantled, because if they persist, corruption and impunity will continue. It is not that the PRI must disappear, but rather that it must stop being a state party, so it can no longer use public resources and anti-poverty programs in its favor. The PRI must become like any other party within the party system, to compete on equal standing with the rest.

One possible scenario is that the PRI wins the elections and the state party

regime survives. It may well do so with undemocratic maneuvers, and because of the opposition's incapacity. It will do it by buying votes, using public resources and ill-gotten resources—including money from drug trafficking—with the complicity of the major media. In mid-May, the media dedicated over half the time in its news broadcasts to the PRI, in violation of the law. If the PRI loses, the media will lose privileges and its complicity will come to light; if it wins, the transition to democracy will be aborted or at least postponed.

### **Second scenario: The grassroots opposition wins**

Another scenario shows an opposition convergence rising from the grass roots, since the opposition party leaders failed to form the necessary alliance to avoid splitting the vote. The vote for President would gravitate to the opposition candidate leading in the most reliable polls. If there is a massive vote for a single opposition candidate, the PRI's fraudulent maneuvers will not suffice to win the elections.

An opposition victory would create better conditions for citizens to push for dismantling the state party.

If the PRI recognizes its defeat and agrees to participate in a democratic scenario, it will abandon its characteristics as a state party, will not make illegal use of public resources, will not support itself through its corporative business-labor-party structures, will stop usurping the national colors and compete like any other party in the following elections. With these changes, an important step will have been taken in the democratic transition. If the PRI refuses to accept its defeat and tries to maintain power with the complicity of its powerful economic and political groups, it will unleash a political storm with disastrous consequences and the whole transition process will come crumbling down.

An opposition victory would make it possible to begin dismantling the state party and create the conditions for society's increased participation through mechanisms to ensure accountability and open up discussions in society on the main decisions to be made. Even so, the democratic transition will still be incomplete. The necessary progress in social democracy will still be pending, and without it, there will be no democratic transition in Mexico. But in the scenario of an opposition victory, while this road would be very long, it would be passable.

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### **Beginning of the End for the PRI? Will Fox Deliver?**

*The votes cast by the Mexican people have begun dismantling the PRI, but it will take time to wrest away all the privileges accumulated over many decades. Fox*

*will take office laden with a number of important commitments, but only steady social pressure will ensure that he delivers.*

### **Jorge Alonso**

On July 2, 2000, the first step was taken towards dismantling one the longest-ruling state parties in world history. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), corroded by corruption, made numerous efforts to cling to presidential power, scandalously managing the country's resources, protecting fraudulent financiers to ensure their complicity and making lavish use of public resources to buy, coerce and condition votes. It even organized an expensive dirty campaign against Vicente Fox, presidential candidate of the Alliance for Change, made up of the National Action Party (PAN) and the Green Party. But it was all to naught.

Despite fraud documented by observers from Mexico's Civic Alliance as well as Global Exchange and other international organizations, the youth vote was strong enough to hand Fox the victory. A large number of Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) sympathizers also chose to cast what many described as a "practical vote," which contributed to his triumph. One tendency within the PRD actively encouraged the idea of a split ticket: a vote for Fox on the presidential ballot to oust the PRI while voting for PRD candidate López Obrador in Mexico City's municipal elections. All these factors combined to make the July 2 elections a referendum on the ruling state party that finally defeated it after more than seven decades in power.

### **PRI on the way down, PAN on the rise**

The PRI vote has been steadily declining over the years. In the 1982 presidential elections, the party attracted 70.9% of the total votes, and high levels of fraud in 1988 gave it a purported 50.4%. Although it milked the fear factor in 1994 to pull 50.2% of the vote, its support dropped to 36% in this year's elections.

This downward trend is also true of support for Cuautémoc Cárdenas and his PRD. In 1988, he challenged the system and won the elections, but his victory was never recognized. After the government fiddled the figures, he was assigned 30.9% of the vote.

Six years later he ran for President again, this time attracting just 17.1% of the vote. In this year's elections, Cárdenas rejected the alliance with the PAN that many people were calling for, joining instead with a group of small parties to form the Alliance for Mexico. It won just 16.6% of the vote.

The PAN's share of the vote, on the other hand, has been steadily increasing. In 1982, it pulled 15.6% of the vote, a figure that rose to 17% in 1988 and 26.7% in 1994. This year, in alliance with the Green Party, it won 42.5% of the vote. Estimates are that Fox attracted nearly 1,800,000 "practical votes," representing

11% of his total.

### **Separating state from party will not be easy**

The electorate took the first step towards dismantling the state-party apparatus on July 2 by throwing the PRI out of the presidential office. But PRI governors will still rule 21 of the 32 state governments and the party holds the majority of the country's municipal governments.

The PRI's current composition as a state party is the result of a process that began when it was created as a mechanism for settling conflicts between armed regional chiefs. It has since involved the structuring of the state into different corporative sectors (workers, peasant farmers, urban poor and an anonymous sector consisting of big business leaders), centralized decision-making in the presidency and a whole network of relations and complicity with the country's most prominent economic forces, including financiers and the media. It has been a complex process that has gone on for decades.

By losing the presidency in the 2000 elections, the PRI lost the most important component of its state-party apparatus and the basis of its cohesion and its authoritarianism. It has yet to stop usurping the national colors and letting its state governors use public resources to benefit the party, however. The sectors of society traditionally organized by the party must become fully free and autonomous so as to put an end to the corporatism, which still has the clout to block any significant changes. For all that, the dismantling of the state party has now begun, raising the possibility that the PRI will become just another party without all the special privileges it has enjoyed in the past. This will take time and will not happen without strong resistance.

### **A very pluralist scene**

In the legislative elections, the Alliance for Change won 38.2% of the votes (compared to the PAN's 26% three years ago), the PRI attracted 36.9% (a 2.2% drop since the last elections) and the PRD fell from 25.7% to 18.8%. So, while the elections handed the presidency to Fox, they left him little room for maneuver. With the elections over, the two coalition alliances dissolved and the previously arranged pacts to share out posts had to be honored. The initial election figures, confirmed in August by the Electoral Tribunal, gave the following results in the House of Representatives: the PRI, which ran alone and therefore did not have to share posts with other parties, won 210 seats; the PAN 207; the PRD 52; the Green Party 15; the Labor Party 8; the Nationalist Society 3; the Democratic Convergence 3 and the PAS 2. The PRD came out the worst, as its Alliance for Mexico implied sharing out a large number of seats without bringing in any increase in votes. In the new Senate, the PRI will have 60 seats, the PAN 46, the PRD 15, the Green Party 5, and the Labor Party and Democratic Convergence 1

each. The PRD held onto the Mexico City government.

These figures reveal a very pluralist scene. No party has a majority in either house and therefore none can unilaterally pass a law, let alone push through any constitutional changes. Dialogues and agreements will be the order of the day.

### **Electoral agreements**

During the election campaign, Fox proposed a "government of concord" and promised to form a transitional government. He also announced that after July 2 he would invite all political forces to the Pact of Chapultepec, a major agreement he compared to the Pact of La Moncloa, which played a key role in the post-Franco transition to democracy in Spain. Fox presented ten basic agenda points for the first thousand days of his administration, which had been worked out with other political forces. The PRI and the PRD both refused to sign the pact, however.

The electoral defeat has led to increasing internal conflicts within both of these parties. In the PRI, certain tendencies are looking to take over party leadership, which is still controlled by incumbent President Ernesto Zedillo, and there are threats of breakaway movements and the creation of parties with a regional base. There has also been discontent in the PRD, generated by the reduction of posts and public funding as a result of the fewer votes received and the fact that currents within the party have become increasingly caught up in their own disputes instead of beginning a self-critical analysis. Another factor shaping Fox's presidency is a set of agreements signed with various political forces, especially the center-left. These agreements were crucial in winning their support, as many on the left have been concerned that Fox's own conservative religious beliefs would influence his government's public policies. In a formal ceremony attended by representatives of the former Communist Party and other leftist tendencies, Fox promised to maintain the secular nature of the Mexican state and of public education, promote legal and constitutional reforms that limit the President's powers, and guarantee the autonomy and balance of the state branches. He also promised to respect the freedom, diversity and plurality of Mexican society and never to use state power to impose particular lifestyles, religious beliefs or codes of behavior. Furthermore, he accepted the challenge of creating conditions to bring about the peaceful solution of the Chiapas conflict, disarming the country's armed groups and substantially increasing resources for public education. He also agreed not to privatize the state-run petroleum company and electricity services. In exchange, Fox's new allies promised to promote the "practical vote" for Fox in order to defeat the PRI, and signed agreements for a transitional government. They stressed that the platform for that transition was viable because the majority of the population was behind it.

### **The alliance that didn't happen and the one that did**

During the campaign, some said that a joint PAN-PRD coalition would be unable to rule the country. Months before, however, eight opposition parties led by the PAN and the PRD had managed to establish a program of common government. It called for peaceful, structural changes based on public policies and new political, social and economic power relations in Mexican society that would generate opportunities for those who had none. It particularly stressed that handouts are no solution to the problem of poverty. It guaranteed that public education will be free and secular, and promised that the government that emerged from the alliance would use all means possible to improve the quality of education. It also agreed that women would be given preferential treatment to help them overcome the inequality and exclusion they have suffered, and that young people would be offered better employment, education and recreation opportunities in an atmosphere of freedom and security.

Furthermore, the alliance that never happened pledged to break with the exclusivity, corporatism, "political bossism" and system of personal contacts that had made it possible to manipulate poverty for political ends. This would represent a first step forward in the area of justice, so that everyone would have access to the law. The parties agreed to rebuild and democratize the institutions responsible for supporting rural development, education, health and community welfare programs so that the communities could make decisions aimed at promoting their own development. They also agreed to fight corruption decisively and efficiently, starting at the highest levels of public service, by establishing an effective system of accountability, eliminating impunity and complicity among public officials and making public administration transparent by monitoring the results of public expenditure. Finally, the PAN and the PRD agreed to guarantee the right to information so that any citizen could find out how public affairs were being conducted within the framework of a system of rendering accounts.

The snag that ruined that alliance was neither ideological nor programmatic. It was rather a PAN-PRD disagreement over the mechanism for electing the presidential candidate.

PAN's new allies in the Alliance for Change resurrected this original platform, adding several points, and asked Fox to sign it when he became their candidate. Among the added commitments for the new government was respect for the freedom of all individuals and social and ethnic groups, mainly regarding customs and ways of life. Another was adoption of a development model recognizing nature as a national asset and the right of all Mexicans to a healthy environment, and ensuring that natural resource use and management would guarantee current and future generations access to nature's capital to satisfy their needs. A third was backing for a free, pluralistic union sector, taking a stand against

corporatism, introducing a national wage improvement program and implementing labor and productive reforms. Fox signed the aborted PAN-PRD agreements along with all of these additional points.

### **More promises to the center-left**

A week before the elections, another center-left group issued a statement declaring that the alternation of power in the presidency could be achieved through the ballot box, thus completing the transition toward democracy begun several years ago. This group recalled the failed attempt to consolidate an opposition alliance at end of 1999 despite great popular support for the idea, and concluded that the presidency would only change hands if support were consolidated behind one opposition candidate. The group therefore called on the population to vote for Fox in order to ensure the long-awaited alternation of power.

This declaration did not come out of the blue. The group had previously asked Fox to sign a series of promises with it: establishment of a plural and inclusive government; the naming of progressive Mexicans to portfolios such as SEDECOL (to fight poverty) and PEMEX (the petroleum company); tolerance of diversity and the guarantee of absolute respect for all minorities; development of a state that promotes an economy supporting small businesspeople and channels massive resources to the poorest regions to be administrated by the communities; recognition of the autonomy of indigenous peoples and immediate adoption of the San Andrés Accords; and respect for the gains achieved by women, including the ratification of international agreements on women's rights.

Then, with only four days before the elections, a network of civic organizations known as Civic Power released a leaflet calling on citizens to exercise their free vote. It included a brief history of the grouping, which had emerged out of a number of regional forums held between August and October 1999 that were used to build consensus around a National Civil Society Agenda containing 24 points. A movement of over 600 civil and social organizations was subsequently formed under the name Civic Power. In March 2000, five of the six candidates, with the sole exception of the PRI, accepted an invitation to receive the agenda and state their position on it. On June 2, the five candidates signed their commitments and responsibilities with Civic Power. Three accepted the whole agenda. Cárdenas took the point on the peace process in Chiapas a step further by promising to send the bill drafted by the legislature's Commission on Harmony and Pacification (COCOPA) to Congress immediately, while Fox accepted 12 points of the Agenda and amended the other 12. Civic Power then called on the candidates to honor what they had signed after the elections. Finally, just before the elections, the Alliance for Change also published a commitment from Fox to the indigenous peoples of Mexico. In it he promised to create a National Council for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, dedicate official media time to promoting indigenous culture and traditions, create

regional development programs with investment for and participation by indigenous communities, turn the COCOPA document into an executive initiative and send it to Congress his first day in office, immediately start disarming the paramilitary groups, resume talks with the EZLN on pending issues and name a commissioner recognized by the EZLN and the independent indigenous organizations.

Thus, before being elected, Fox made many commitments. In synthesis, he stressed that he would establish a plural and inclusive government of democratic transition that would respect the free, secular nature of public education; improve the public health system; promote Mexican culture and values; guarantee tolerance and diversity and full union freedom; recognize the autonomy of indigenous peoples; immediately adopt the San Andrés Accords; promote full respect for women's gains and unconditionally guarantee freedom of expression. But civil society groups should not lower their guard if this important and broad set of promises is to be honored.

### **PRI's objectives in Chiapas**

Chiapas is still a central issue in Mexican politics. At least 15 armed civilian groups are operating there, 10 of which are clearly paramilitary, made up of PRI supporters and financed by the government. Meanwhile, the army has increased its efforts to suffocate the indigenous communities. At the end of May, several civil organizations demanded that the presidential candidates pledge to pull the Federal Police and the army out of Chiapas, pointing out that the situation is becoming increasingly hostile there. In June, a national conference of civil society for peace and against militarization was held. Comandante David and Subcomandante Marcos sent a statement describing its participants as a rainbow of all that is best about Mexico. They stressed that the government is still waging a war against indigenous peoples in Chiapas, even if the issue was pushed offstage by the electoral process.

During the months of the electoral campaign, the Mexican state machinery was mobilized in Chiapas with two aims: to ensure the imposition of PRI candidate Francisco Labastida, the new "warlord," and to set everything in place for a major political and military operation against the EZLN. In contrast, Bishop Samuel Ruiz, no longer in his pastoral post in San Cristóbal, declared on June 16 that there is need for a new diagnosis of the conflict in Chiapas, new mediation efforts and another round of negotiations.

### **Marcos and the elections**

Subcomandante Marcos released a communiqué days before the elections warning that the voices of the media were replacing citizens as voters. He denounced the indiscriminate use of flimsy opinion polls as one more campaign strategy rather than a means of providing reliable information. The media's aim was to make citizens focus on what they were shown and thus prevent them

from basing their decision on the different political options on offer. This expression of "modernity" was also more a way of generating large profits for the media moguls than of guaranteeing the transition to democracy. Marcos pointed out that information was not being equitably disseminated since the PRI was dominating the prime-time spots; the media had opted for scandal; the candidates had chosen insults, infamy and gossip; and journalists themselves had assumed the role of judges over what they reported. The Zapatistas demanded the right to information.

In the document Marcos stated that, despite the government's scandalous support for the PRI, civic discontent was increasingly eloquent and predicted that the PRI would lose the presidency. He also reminded Zapatistas of all the misfortunes that had befallen them under successive PRI governments but did not come out in favor of the "practical vote," arguing that politics should be a "question of principles."

The message Marcos sent to the new government, of whatever political stripe it turned out to be, was that if it opted for low-intensity violence, sham and deceit, it would only generate contempt and distrust among Zapatistas, but if it wanted real dialogue, the Zapatistas were willing to sit down and talk.

When presenting his transitional team, President-elect Fox stressed that Chiapas will be one of his government's priorities. The Zapatista municipalities remained skeptical, fearing that he would pursue the neoliberal model under other guises. In an open letter to the new government referring to Fox's promise that he would end the Chiapas conflict in fifteen minutes, the Nobel laureate in literature José Saramago said it could in fact be resolved in five. All it would take would be an order to withdraw the army from the zone, disarm the paramilitary groups and approve the San Andrés Accords.

### **Peace in Chiapas?**

Following Fox's electoral victory, his team announced that it would double public spending to combat poverty and that the main area of its social policy would be a public, secular, value-based, free education. Around the same time, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Rigoberta Menchú met with Fox and announced that he had promised to work for peace in Chiapas. Meanwhile, the President-elect put the PAN's Luis Alvarez, who had done a good job on the COCOPA initiative, in charge of establishing contact with Subcomandante Marcos and drawing up an agenda with the EZLN.

The state elections will be held on august 20, and the fact that Chiapas was the state showing the most fraud during the federal elections is a worrying precedent. If the PRI retains the governorship there, it will complicate the task of resolving the conflict, because even with the withdrawal of the army and the adoption of the San Andrés Accords, local forces will continue to harass the

Zapatistas through their paramilitary groups. To win the state elections away from the PRI, eight parties—the PAN, PRD, Green Party, Labor Party, PCD, PSN, PAS, PT and Convergence for Democracy—have formed an alliance. At the end of July, opinion polls put their alliance 17 points ahead of the PRI.

Two of the outcomes of the June 2 federal elections particularly favor the forces promoting peace. The first was that the PRI lost the presidency and the second that the Social Democratic Party, a para-state party supported by the Government Secretariat, attracted so few votes that it lost its legal status and consequently ceased to exist. It was led by Salinas supporters and its candidates in Chiapas included activists of a paramilitary group denounced by the Zapatistas.

### **What will happen? A broad debate**

Before the elections, a number of Mexican and foreign academics participated in a broad debate in the national press. Pablo González Casanova supported the PRD and came out against the "practical vote," while Emmanuel Wallerstein and Noam Chomsky stated that alternating power was more an illusion than a real democratic step forward because a business dictatorship continued to make decisions behind the scenes. They accepted the idea that if the alternation of power succeeded in opening up room to debate real political options, it could lead to change, but warned that the real power structures, those of the business dictatorship, could remain hidden and intact.

Fox's victory has loosed an avalanche of analyses and polemical statements about the real meaning of the PRI's defeat. Several commentators feel that there will not be a transition so much as a simple change of the party in power, while others believe that the PRI's defeat really will lead to a regime change. There is also a debate going on among NGOs. Some see the new government as a danger and accuse it of viewing citizens as clients and working with a business conception based on the idea of "total quality," which will not lead to the resolution of the problems of the poor and marginalized. Other groups feel that the PRI's defeat represents an important opportunity.

Both the PRI and the PRD announced that they will not allow any of their members to join Fox's Cabinet, but the PRD as well as the PAN did declare their willingness to discuss a national agenda, following an initially negative response from Cárdenas' party. The PRD proposed creating a "clean hands" commission to clear up the financial scandals that have affected the country, while Fox continues to search for minimum governability agreements.

### **Relief and hope predominate**

The transition from the PRI to the PAN has been going smoothly, with no real surprises so far. The new government is under a lot of pressure, particularly to stick with the neoliberal model. But the PAN cannot rule alone, and just as it built

bridges to win the elections, it will have to hammer out a lot of agreements in order to govern. This opens possibilities for the center-left groups that agreed on such a wide range of measures with Fox when he was still just a presidential candidate. Left to his own devices, the new President will not honor these agreements, so there is clearly a need for social pressure, vigilance and social and political action from grassroots forces. This pressure is especially important in ensuring that the new government formulates a firm, visible social policy, since without one the transition to democracy will remain incomplete.

Despite all the limitations and uncertainty, the structures and practices of the state party undeniably represented a terrible burden on the political, economic and social life of most Mexicans. Thus the victory of an opposition candidate has opened the way for a civic, pluralistic convergence and mobilization that could bring about more changes and finish the task of dismantling all that remains of the state party. Meanwhile, the challenges of reducing the country's poverty and building a participatory and deliberative democracy remain, but the way forward will now be clearer. The whole of Mexico is currently experiencing a massive feeling of relief and newfound hope.

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### Fox's First Moves in a Tough Transition

*On July 2, Mexicans rejected a political system sustained for so long through corruption and authoritarianism. The task now is to prevent authoritarianism from taking root again. There is danger that the PRI will be dismantled behind people's back, but expectations are running high.*

**Jorge Alonso**

Since July 2, a feeling has been growing among the Mexican people that democracy is finally here. In June 1999, according to a survey carried out by the newspaper *Reforma*, only 38% of the population felt that Mexico was a democratic country. By last December that perception had increased somewhat, to 50%. By June of this year, as dirty campaigning fed a pessimistic mood, the percentage of people who felt that they were living in a democracy had fallen back to 42%. But now, two months after Vicente Fox's victory in the presidential elections, 66% believe that Mexico is a democratic country.

### A very tough transition

Most Mexicans fervently hope that this will be a change for the better. But from the very start, it became increasingly clear that the jolting change in the rules of

the political game had so upset the leading political forces that the smooth transition that got underway in July was bound to hit some bumps. The outgoing government no longer wields all the power and its members are bickering amidst new scandals, but Fox's transition team has not managed to gain control of the political situation either.

There are five months between the elections and the new President's inauguration, a very long time indeed for anyone to expect that the process won't run up against obstacles put in the way by the various powerful groups struggling to stay their ground.

The victory of Fox and his National Action Party (PAN) has sharpened the internal conflicts within both the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD). It could also spark a crisis in the PAN itself as the party and the new President define their relationship, although Fox has indicated that he is looking to break with the PRI's tradition of subordinating the party to presidential power.

### **Eyes on Chiapas**

Two important local elections were held in August and September, one to elect a new governor and local Congress in Chiapas, and the other to choose mayors and state legislators in Veracruz. In Chiapas the PRI ran against a virtual union of the two broad alliances of parties led by the PAN and the PRD that had been established for the federal elections. This new alliance pledged to demilitarize Chiapas, punish those responsible for the Acteal massacre and push for implementation of the San Andrés accords signed in 1996 between the government and the Zapatistas. As the most reliable surveys showed the opposition in the lead, the PRI became worried and stepped up its efforts to take the elections by fraud. PRI governors, especially Tabasco's Roberto Madrazo, threw their weight behind their party's candidates in Chiapas.

In July, the autonomous Zapatista municipalities had denounced army movements and the harassing of indigenous communities in resistance on ten occasions. Ten days before the elections, a thousand members of Acteal's "*Las Abejas*" indigenous people's association marched to celebrate the International Day of Indigenous Peoples and denounce human rights violations against the indigenous people of Chiapas, including the Acteal massacre. They asked why, nearly three years after that massacre, the government persists in lying by claiming that justice has been done, and demanded that former governor Julio César Ferro and eight of his collaborators be punished as the intellectual authors of the massacre. They also demanded that the paramilitary groups be disarmed, since displaced people cannot return to their homes as long as they continue to operate.

The paramilitary activities have been denounced for quite some time. Recently, to take but one example, a PRI-supported paramilitary group known as "Peace and Justice" forced Zapatista supporters to flee from a field. The army and federal police moved in on a supposed mission to disarm the group, but it was all for show: the army left without making any arrests, after confiscating just one weapon and a few cartridge cases.

The PRI first tried to coerce the vote...

People interpreted this "mission" as yet another action to persuade them to cast a "vote of fear" for the government. The Catholic Church called on people to vote, and called on the parties to refrain from coercing voters. Civic organizations warned that the conditions in Chiapas did not allow for clean elections. On the eve of the elections, the paramilitaries intensified their offensive and even harassed electoral observers.

On Sunday August 20, election day, electoral materials were stolen, votes were bought and opposition supporters were kidnapped for several hours. In many isolated places where there were no observers, the PRI coerced voters. The Zapatista communities did not turn out to vote because of the harassment. Chiapas had the highest abstention rate of any state in the federal elections, and because of this harassment it was even higher in the local elections. Nonetheless, thanks to the presence of national and international observers, the PRI could not carry out many of the fraudulent acts it had planned. Despite its efforts, the first results showed that opposition candidate Pablo Salazar had won.

**...then tried to fix the numbers**

When the PRI saw that these attempts to steal the elections had come to naught, it moved to the second phase of its strategy and tried to manipulate the numbers. It pressured the Electoral Council to prevent the release of the preliminary results. The PRI's national office issued its own false figures before the official results were made known, in violation of the parties' agreement. Although the incumbent governor of Chiapas recognized the PRI's defeat on the very night of the elections, Madrazo's people also tried to tamper with the results.

In response to such maneuvers, the PRD and PAN national offices communicated with the Government Secretary on the seriousness of the situation. At 10:50 that night, the Electoral Council announced the results of rapid counts made by two reliable firms. Both found that the opposition had won by a wide margin. The following day, the official figures confirmed Salazar's victory.

# Chiapas: against the PRI

## a plebiscite

Pablo Salazar celebrated his victory as a blow to the mafia of PRI governors in the southeast. He announced that he would put a halt to the re-municipalization measures implemented by his predecessor without the participation of the indigenous communities and in violation of the San Andrés accords. He also announced that his government would not tolerate impunity and recognized that as long the causes that gave rise to the Zapatista uprising persisted, it would have reason to continue.

Chiapas has been marked by a longstanding complicity between governors and big landowners, ranchers and other exploiters of the indigenous people. The elections were like a local plebiscite ratifying the PRI's national defeat, a defeat born of the conviction that there would be no solution to the problems indigenous people in Chiapas faced as long as the PRI governed.

### **Veracruz: A divided opposition**

The situation in Veracruz was totally different. The opposition did not unite and, even worse, many small parties became electoral franchises for regional power groups, while some parties that had allied with the PRD in the federal elections switched over to the PRI. In some cases, parties running as allies in one municipality opposed each other in the neighboring one. In this context, the PRI managed to agree on candidates with the Social Alliance Party, the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution and the Nationalist Society Party in 122 of the 210 municipalities. The PRD formed alliances in 34 municipalities, including 3 with the PAN, and the PAN formed alliances in 26 municipalities. The local PRI government again used public resources in its campaign in violation of the law. As in Chiapas, the abstention rate was high.

With the fragmentation of the other parties and the PRI governor's success in uniting the main groups in his party, the PRI came out the winner of 166 municipal governments and 20 out of 24 state legislative assemblies. The PAN won the other 4 assemblies and 43 municipal governments, and the PRD won 29 municipal governments.

After these local elections it became apparent that, at a national level, the PRI's power has shifted from the presidency to the state governments it still controls. This shift permitted the PRI to boast that Fox's victory did not produce the feared "domino effect."

### **Tensions in the army**

The Mexican army has never had to account for the taxpayers' money it receives. It manages its public funds in a highly autonomous, discretionary way, without having to follow the Treasury's norms. Discretionary management of its payroll represents an important source of power and internal corruption. To make matters worse, drug traffickers have infiltrated the armed forces.

Fox's victory stirred things up within army ranks and the old networks of impunity began to unravel, leading to a tense power struggle. Several groups mobilized to hold on to the National Defense Department, while one retired officer wrote Fox to ask if the discrediting and deterioration of the army would continue under his government.

In this agitated context, two high-ranking officers were arrested on charges of collaborating with drug traffickers. Eureka, a group that searches for people who have been disappeared for political reasons, charged that these two officers had also committed innumerable crimes against grassroots opposition leaders. Many officers agreed that Generals Acosta and Quiroz should be tried for their ties to drug trafficking, but not with the idea of trying them for torture, assassination and human rights violations in the counterinsurgency efforts of the 1970s. They argued that such a move would lower the morale of the whole army. They also claimed that the two officers had followed orders every step of the way, and that the entire system had been involved in the dirty work.

### **Big scandals uncovered**

Mexico ranks 59 among the 90 countries listed in the most recent world corruption index report. While Finland, the country with the lowest corruption level in the world, was accorded a score of 10, Mexico's score was 3.3. A World Bank report released on September 25 identified Mexico as the fourth most corrupt country among the 21 in its survey.

In the months following the federal elections, several cases emerged, like the tip of an iceberg, to reveal the scandalous corruption in the country. Tourism Secretary Oscar Espinosa was forced to resign over accusations of embezzlement. Fox demanded that he be tried, but with the PRI's support he chose to flee and is now being sought within the country and abroad.

Another of the big scandals marking the end of this presidential term broke out in the National Vehicle Registry, the private agency now responsible for what was formerly a state task. The manager of this company, Ricardo Miguel Cavallo, ended up accused not only of falsification and auto theft but also of the far more serious crimes of torturing and killing political prisoners and genocide under Argentina's military government. Spain's Judge Baltasar Garzón, who brought the case against Pinochet, has been requesting Cavallo's detention for these same crimes all over the world; he was finally arrested in Mexico. The very next day, the under-secretary of commerce responsible for vehicle registration was found, apparently having committed suicide. Questions mounted and everything pointed to mafia involvement. It appears that criminals have infiltrated the government and its top officials are clearly responsible.

## **Espionage and the diversion of funds**

The Supreme Court ordered President Zedillo to give Congress all information he has on Banco Unión trusts, from which funds were illegally diverted to the PRI when the now fugitive Espinosa was the PRI's finance secretary. When Zedillo did as ordered, party leaders were indignant, revealing that they are not concerned about criminal acts but only about being the possibility of being found out and punished. On September 21, the Banking Commission submitted to Congress its information on the irregular trusts that served to finance PRI campaigns. The total came to US\$11 million. This money ended up in FOBAPROA, the fund established—at taxpayer expense—to bail out banks that had lost huge sums through speculative investments and other shady deals. Money from these trusts was used in Zedillo's presidential campaign as well as Madrazo's gubernatorial campaign.

The Bank Savings Protection Institute (the institution that replaced FOBAPROA) clarified that the diversion of funds from the Banco Unión to the PRI—which contributed to the bank's failure—has already been proven and the party is obliged to return the money. Four parliamentary groups demanded that Madrazo be tried in the case, and the PRD called for an investigation of the gubernatorial campaign now underway in Tabasco to determine if the diversion of funds is still taking place. It also demanded investigation of other banks to determine whether funds have been illegally diverted to the PRI.

Still another scandal broke out when it was revealed that the government had illegally tapped Fox's telephone. And yet another came to light at the end of September, when ties between the federal highway police and drug traffickers were revealed. The very poor performance of the Attorney General's Office has been patently clear in all of this.

## **Zedillo's final report: A review of his six-year term**

During Zedillo's final report to Congress, PRI representatives, who usually applaud the President, remained silent, resentful. In his speech, the President tried to justify his six-year term, but the tally—including the official figures in the annexes to the report itself—lead to the conclusion that Zedillo's main accomplishment has been to help destroy the country. Zedillo promised well-being to all Mexican families but in fact, it reached only a few accomplices. He did not speak of Chiapas, or of the important university strike at the National Autonomous University, or of the FOBAPROA banking scandal, or of the recent scandal in the Vehicle Registry. During his government, the public debt grew by 100%. The banking system, even after a multi-million dollar bailout, is a shambles. Poverty has increased. Zedillo's record also includes the blood spilt by state and paramilitary security forces: the massacres at Acteal, El Bosque and El

Charco in Chiapas and Aguas Blancas in Guerrero.

Vicente Fox pointed out Zedillo's grave omission, particularly Aguas Blancas, Acteal, and Chiapas in general. He emphasized that it is a mistake to leave people's development in the market's hands, and that timely, selective state intervention is required to ensure the distribution of income. The PRD declared that Zedillo would go down in history as the President of FOBAPROA.

One important step that the new government should take in the future is to transform the President's report from a ritual act to a true means of communication between the executive and legislative branches.

### **Infighting within the PRI**

With the electoral defeat, the PRI lost its head, which has always resided in the presidential branch, from whence orders were given, posts distributed and resources divvied up. The result has been deep disappointment and anger. Some PRI members proposed expelling Zedillo from the party for recognizing Fox's victory. They have not forgiven him for not letting them carry out the second phase of that fraud. Internal power struggles within the PRI to determine who will lead the party through its restructuring have been sharp, and although the challenge is to maintain unity, no leader has emerged who can lead the party.

The PRI's 21 governors met several times to consider how to proceed. Those from the southeast, led by Tabasco's Madrazo, proclaimed that the party's rebirth will come from their part of the country. But their first big loss in Chiapas was not encouraging, and there were signs that the PRI was falling apart in four states.

Some 40 groups can be defined within the PRI, and all have been fighting for a place in the restructuring process. Some of these groups are very powerful, like the one led by former governor of the state of Mexico Carlos Hank; one led by Madrazo; one led by the former Puebla governor, Manuel Bartlett; and one led by Enrique Jackson, who remains at the helm of the PRI's legislative bench. The PRI's critics recognize that an elite group has been established within the party that is very strong politically and economically, albeit very weak morally and ethically.

Some party members who disagree with the PRI leaders and feel excluded damaged the PRI headquarters recently. A more serious sign of the PRI breakdown was a bloody fight over a municipal government that broke out between two groups within the party in the state of Mexico, resulting in deaths. The national party had to publicly recognize its responsibility in the events for sheltering such groups. With the loss of the presidency, the *caciques* of all sizes who previously followed party lines and enjoyed impunity in exchange for the

votes they brought to the party, have begun to rebel.

### Dismantling levers of power

the

PRI's

Luis Javier Garrido, one of the most astute scholars of the PRI, has noted that party leaders sustained its regime through agreements and shady deals made behind people's backs. This system came crashing down on July 2, when the PRI met its end as a state party. Garrido called attention to two facts. First, the remains of the power system that sustained the PRI are still alive and the mechanisms of PRI power must be dismantled if the party's authoritarian legacy is to be overcome. Among these mechanisms, he mentioned the PRI unions and associations that continue to control workers, the government subsidy to newspapers, the political police, the espionage systems and all kinds of subsidies granted to organizations that have supported the PRI system.

It is also essential to review the privatization of state companies, recover the sums stolen by the PRI's political bureaucracy, break the state's relationships with drug traffickers, and try those responsible for state crimes and those who defrauded the nation through the FOBAPROA bank scandal. Without dismantling all these levers of control and domination that have been developed over several decades in both public and private institutions, social organizations and the media, the PRI will remain alive.

Garrido's second point is that people must beware of the danger that all these changes will be negotiated behind their back. The importance of July 2 lies in its rejection of a political system and all that it has historically implied. The task now is to ensure that authoritarianism does not send out new roots.

### A drifting PRD

The PRD managed to stick together despite sharp internal struggles that flared up around its efforts to get the PRI out of the presidential office and put Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in its place. The elections led not only to the PRI's defeat—no thanks to the PRD—but also to Cárdenas' erosion as a leader. Cárdenas declared July 2 a most fateful day for the Mexican people, but it was also a day on which his party suffered a big loss, as its legislative bench fell from 125 to 50 seats.

Calls for refounding the party can also be heard within the PRD, but amid the post-electoral confusion there are also signs that a PRI-PRD alliance could be in the works. The leaders of the two parties met on the basis of their ideological affinities, but they also share some of the same vices. Critical tendencies within the PRD have called attention to the caciques who can also be found there, who do the party harm. If nothing is done about this, the party runs the risk of breaking up. What is most troubling about all this is that there is no solid Left

with a viable program to serve as a counterweight to Fox in the wake of his victory.

### **Guanajuato: A national debate over abortion**

Fox's victory aroused the PAN's extreme right wing. In Guanajuato, a majority of PAN legislators approved a law prohibiting women from having abortions even in the case of rape and punishing those who do with jail sentences. The law was widely repudiated around the country, which obliged the PAN's national directorate to clarify that it did not represent a national party strategy or respond to lines from PAN leadership or the President-elect. The directorate promised to meet with Guanajuato's legislators to find an appropriate solution.

Fox emphatically stated that he disagreed with Guanajuato's anti-abortion law, and reminded people that he had promised not to promote any initiative that would change legislation on the circumstances in which legal abortions are allowed. National legislation allows for abortion in the case of rape, but women's movements are calling for complete decriminalization, noting that women's lives are put at risk in the 850,000 clandestine abortions performed in Mexico each year.

PAN's eight governors also expressed their differences with the law. A survey done at the request of Guanajuato's own governor on the feelings of the people in his state on this issue found that 63% do not approve of the changes in the new law. In the end, he exercised his veto power on the controversial law.

Journalist Jaime Avilés pointed out that hardline sectors in the PAN were not the only ones taking an anti-abortion position. While the wife of the PRI's defeated presidential candidate Francisco Labastida made a great scandal over the law in Guanajuato, there was a case in Sinoloa—Labastida's home turf—of a young woman who had been raped and wanted to have an abortion. The PRI authorities did not allow her to have one, and Labastida's wife neither said nor did a thing.

At the end of September, the National Human Rights Commission supported the recommendation made in March by the Human Rights Ombudsperson to the PAN government of Baja California, demanding that it compensate a teenage girl who had been raped and not allowed to have a legal abortion. It proposed that a trust be established to ensure that the girl and her child would be guaranteed health care, education, clothing and housing. The Human Rights Commission also recommended that the responsibility of the state attorney general and the medical personnel involved be determined.

The Guanajuato law sparked a controversy with national repercussions. Although the PRD had not touched the topic in its two and a half years in office in the

capital, it responded to the debate by extending the cases in which abortion is allowed to include congenital defects and danger to the mother's life. Legislation was reformed in Morelos as well to allow abortion in the case of fetal malformation or artificial insemination without consent.

A	pluralist	society	blocks
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**PAN's extreme right wing**

Rightwing extremists who have come together in the organization *Pro Vida* (Pro Life) and have significant influence among some PAN sectors have tried to promote their positions and will continue to do so. In Aguascalientes, another state governed by the PAN, officials allowed a private resort to prohibit the entrance "of homosexuals and dogs." The local protest garnered national support and pressure from social movements held these homophobic efforts at bay.

Although the right wing has become bolder, it is consistently coming up against important social groups that have prevented it from imposing its rigid norms on an increasingly complex, pluralistic society.

**Diverse tendencies in the PAN**

Fox's government will have to negotiate with all forces—including those in his own party, where one finds many rightwing sectors moderated by some centrist groups. Some PAN legislators have expressed their disagreement with the San Andrés Accords while others reject the notion that they should continue to follow international guidelines on economic issues. The leader of the PAN bench in the House of Representatives has informed the members of Fox's team in charge of economic issues that he will not accept their preliminary budget proposal because of its mechanical application of World Bank recipes.

Mainly as a reply to critical remarks in the annual IMF-World Bank meeting by MIT professor Rudiger Dornbusch, guru of former President Salinas de Gortari, Fox declared that Mexico can act freely without following the guidelines set by these international institutions since it no longer has a debt with the IMF. While this statement distanced Fox from Zedillo's globaphilic declarations, his team, spurred by globalization's imperatives, quickly reassured the IMF that there would be continuity in Mexico's economic policies. They made several clarifications, however, insisting for example that the issue of labor flexibility could only be taken up after efforts were made to recover the value of people's salaries.

**Fox, the PRD and the PRI**

On August 2, one month to the day after the elections, the Electoral Tribunal declared Vicente Fox President-elect of Mexico. From that moment, Fox turned to the task of working towards reconciliation after the extremely bitter electoral campaign.

He asked the electoral tribunal magistrates to forgive him for having accused them of partiality and dirty tricks when they refused to let his picture be printed on the ballots. He met with PRI candidate Labastida to praise his honesty and serenity in accepting the election results. He also visited Cárdenas at his home and acknowledged his important role in the struggle to establish democracy in Mexico. Fox asked them all to work together in the transition.

Cárdenas responded that his party's relationship with the government would take place through institutional channels. It then took several weeks of unsuccessful efforts before Fox finally managed to contact Andrés Manuel López Obrador—head of the PRD government-elect in the Federal District—to arrange a meeting.

Cárdenas demanded clear signs from Fox on the conflict in Chiapas. He insisted that people would believe in the new government only if it withdrew the troops, implemented the San Andrés accords and dismantled the paramilitary groups. In addition to these three points relating to Chiapas, the PRD demanded a democratic reform that involves dismantling the state party, promoting federalism and encouraging free unions; a budget that responds to social demands in education, health care and housing; a national transparency commission to investigate FOBAPROA, the privatizations and the "secret party"; and a national development program to be drawn up in conjunction with the Congress.

Fox's team also held meetings with the PRI, although the party barred its members from collaborating with the new President as individuals. Fox had already met with the PRI governor of Sinaloa at the end of July and with five southern PRI governors who agreed to collaborate with Fox on a regional plan in September.

Fox promised to hold ongoing talks with the PRD and the PRI to reform the state, draw up the 2001 budget and a fiscal reform plan, define its economic and social policy and the relationship between state powers, and secure peace and justice in Chiapas.

### **Chiapas is the big test**

On the issue of Chiapas, declarations by Fox as well as his team have varied. In some statements, it appeared that they were taking up Zedillo's stance of refusing to take even one step until the Zapatistas returned to the talks. But the most persistent statements are in accord with PRD demands. Fox must keep in mind the conditions the Zapatistas established in 1996 for resuming the talks: respect for the San Andrés accords, freeing of Zapatista prisoners, naming of a government mediator with decision-making power, establishment of a follow-up and verification commission, formulation of serious proposals on democracy and justice, an end to military harassment and police persecution of the

communities, and dismantling of the paramilitary groups.

As of early October, the Zapatistas and Subcomandante Marcos had still not said a word about the new situation in Mexico or about Fox and his team. The other armed group, the EPR, announced that it would continue fighting Fox, who it described as a privatizer working against the people.

Magdalena Gómez, a specialist in indigenous rights, said it is time for Fox to act on the promises he has made. She recalled that the only thing missing from the proposal by the legislature's Commission on Harmony and Pacification (COCOPA) before it can be introduced as legislation is a statement of motives, and maintained that the initiatives by Zedillo, the PAN and the Green Party related to indigenous rights should be withdrawn.

It will take concrete decisions and actions by the state, including both the executive and legislative branches, to win the confidence of the Zapatistas and the indigenous people. Some have noted that the San Andrés accords only represented the indigenous people's minimum demands, all that could be achieved in a country governed by an authoritarian state party regime. In the new situation, they say, it is necessary to go beyond those accords, which did not take into account the situation of the millions of indigenous people who no longer live in their places of origin but have migrated to the cities.

#### **Visits to Central America, Canada and the United States**

To establish contacts and learn from other people's experiences, Fox has already made several visits abroad. In his tour of Central America, he asked forgiveness for the humiliation and abuse suffered by Central American migrants at the hands of Mexican authorities and promised to prevent these abuses.

In Canada, meeting with Canadian and Mexican nongovernmental organizations, he announced that he would take NGOs into account and promised that his government would respect human rights. He asked the NGOs to monitor that respect, especially regarding the rights of emigrants. The meeting's hosts declared that they hoped the new Mexican President would continue along this path, since it is the way to consolidate democracy. Fox also won sympathy among NGOs in the United States when he invited them to participate in the political transition and the building of a new bilateral relationship.

In the past, Mexican presidents have treated nongovernmental organizations with hostility. Fox has promised them a good relationship. His transition team received the Mexican NGOs in the grouping known as El Poder es la Gente (Power is the People) and promised to promote a law encouraging the social development and welfare activities carried out by civil society organizations,

which Zedillo's government had blocked. The Mexican NGOs put forward the need for instruments of direct democracy at a national level, including plebiscites, referendums and popular initiatives; for a policy allowing independent candidates to run; and for stronger requirements for registering political parties. Since as electoral observers they had witnessed the persistent buying and coercion of votes, they also brought up the urgent need to ensure that the Electoral Institute has adequate legal instruments to prevent these practices. Other calls for change have come from the leaders of independent unions, who have asked the President-elect to participate in labor reforms.

### Zedillo's

### legacy:

#### **Increased poverty and inequality**

The National Geography and Statistics Institute revealed that, although wealth increased in Mexico between 1994 and 2000, its distribution remains very unjust: while the wealthiest 10% of households took in 38.1% of the national income, the poorest 10% got barely 1.5%. Zedillo's last report revealed that consumer subsidies have fallen and fewer resources have been dedicated to the fight against poverty. Some 200,000 families no longer receive social assistance, and nearly 28,000 indigenous people have been excluded from social assistance programs.

In its most recent meeting in Prague, the World Bank agreed that the abysmal differences between rich and poor endanger global stability. In Mexico, 30% of the people survive on less than a dollar a day. The World Bank pointed out an obvious truth: given that poverty has increased, financial reform in Mexico is a failure.

Julio Boltvinik, one of the most astute researchers on poverty in Mexico, has demonstrated more specifically how the economic model Zedillo's government imposed led to growth accompanied by an alarming concentration of wealth and an increase in poverty among the poorest sectors. The percentage of Mexican households living below the poverty line increased from 69% to 76% in the past six years. In this context, an official policy to ensure that salaries recover their value is urgently required since nearly two-thirds of the poor are salaried workers and the policies designed to fight poverty barely reach the self-employed third of the poor without even touching the other two-thirds.

#### **The "shout" of hope**

On September 16, the anniversary of independence from Spain was celebrated with the traditional grito (shout), an event that has become an official ritual. This year an alternative shout went up in 120 municipalities in 18 states of the country: the "cry of the excluded." This was part of a campaign organized by 150 organizations from around the continent that culminated on October 12 with a continental cry of indignation over the impoverishment that has been created by

those who maintain the current impoverishing economic model.

Fox has declared that he will take everyone into account, that he wants to share power without excluding anyone, and will govern through consensus. Resolving the problem of poverty by putting the needs of impoverished areas before the dictates of the international financial centers—which never cease to talk about eradicating poverty—will be vital to democracy in Mexico.

When asked about Mexico's presidential elections, Spanish philosopher Fernando Savater declared that "they have been a definitive parting of the waters; signaling a change that has filled us all with emotion." In Mexico, people continue to hope, with more expectation than emotion, that this is the case.

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### **Fox and the Zapatistas: Clearing the Path to Peace**

*The Zapatistas, Subcomandante Marcos in the lead, are coming to Mexico City to negotiate indigenous rights. They are coming with their masks and with all their experience. What steps led to this event?*

#### **Jorge Alonso**

Between his victory in Mexico's July 2000 elections and his inauguration on December 1, President-elect Vicente Fox was wont to define his incoming administration as a "business" government. It caused some dismay since bringing the logic of business management to the work of governing the country is no way to solve its serious social and political problems, which require a different vision and different methods. Chiapas is one of these problems.

#### **Fox's position and promises**

On a trip through Europe shortly before taking office, Fox ran into demonstrators everywhere he went demanding a solution to the problem in Chiapas. There was not a single European country on his itinerary in which the issue was not raised by governments and civil society alike. Fox made his position clear: he would order the troops' gradual withdrawal from the conflict zone, and expected in exchange that the Zapatista Army would agree to talks.

The president of France's National Assembly advised him that the European Union was watching the Chiapas situation closely. Germany's Foreign Secretary expressed deep interest in the problem and full support for a solution to the conflict. In Brussels, Fox announced that he would send a bill to Mexico's

Congress based on the San Andrés Accords. When he spoke in New York with United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, Fox reiterated his determination to reach agreements in Chiapas as soon as possible and again promised that a bill based on the San Andrés Accords would be one of his government's first actions. In his speech closing the World Conference Against Racism, Fox admitted to the indigenous representatives of people from several continents that Mexico's indigenous peoples have been asking for something very basic long denied them: a country in which they are respected and can live freely and with dignity. He acknowledged that their objective is to gain recognition of their right to be different, with their own rules of coexistence and even of government, their own cultural traditions and practices. Fox promised to take actions to reverse the exclusion, neglect and marginalizing of Mexico's indigenous peoples, respecting their dignity, culture and customs, and their environment.

Meanwhile, the National Indigenous Council (CNI), a network of some 150 indigenous organizations in Mexico, insisted that the government fulfill the San Andrés Accords. It demanded that the country's indigenous groups be recognized as subjects of law throughout the state reform process, and that the document drafted several years ago by the legislature's Commission on Harmony and Pacification (COCOPA) on indigenous rights and cultures be approved as law. The CNI feared that the new government might try to simulate consultation by talking with indigenous organizations that are not genuinely representative.

### **Paramilitaries:**

#### **A dangerous legacy**

While Fox was making declarations about the Chiapas conflict, the Zapatistas chose to remain silent. Those in power interpreted this as a product of internal power struggles within the Zapatista movement, and speculated on possible splits that might emerge in response to the country's new political panorama.

At the end of October, the Attorney General's Office detained leaders of one of the most active paramilitary groups in Chiapas. The Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center stated that, although this was a positive step, the Attorney General had not investigated those responsible for creating the groups or those who masterminded the Acteal massacre. The Attorney General's Office made arms searches among the paramilitary groups in November, but in a slow and clumsy way—on purpose, it appears. The searches were thus not only fruitless but also fanned tension in the region. Later, several indigenous communities charged that both military and paramilitary groups were harassing them. COCOPA expressed fears that 29 paramilitary groups made up of Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) activists were getting out of control. Zedillo's government, which created the paramilitary groups, made a pretense of trying to dismantle them before leaving office, but these actions were also fruitless and the paramilitary groups remain as a dangerous legacy for the new administration.

Nongovernmental human rights organizations, anticipating that Fox might push for a general amnesty in Chiapas, criticized any such initiative on the grounds that the armed civilian groups responsible for so much violence—including the Acteal massacre and massive displacements of indigenous populations—would continue to enjoy impunity. This would instill even greater distrust among the people who have been affected by the paramilitary groups.

### **Marcos breaks his silence**

On November 20, a march of indigenous people led by the groups known as "*Las Hormigas*" and "*Las Abejas*"—the latter made up of people from Acteal—reached Veracruz, after passing through Chiapas and Oaxaca on a pilgrimage to the Basilica of Guadalupe. "We carry flags of peace. We have been displaced, but come with neither hatred nor a desire for revenge, simply the prayers of the people who sent us," they said. They asked that the paramilitary groups be disbanded, the army be withdrawn from their communities, the San Andrés Accords be fulfilled, and the conditions be established that will permit the displaced to return to a dignified life. They also denounced the official lies of the outgoing Zedillo government.

On November 29, the paramilitary bands regrouped and threatened the Zapatista grassroots. That was the day Marcos broke his silence. He invited the media to a press conference to December 2 to hear him present the Zapatista's posture toward the Fox government. In his presentation that day, Marcos accused Zedillo of having chosen war instead of dialogue, blamed him for the Acteal massacre and directly asked him, "Why did you order the assassination of children?" He added that Zedillo's government had represented one long nightmare for millions of marginalized and impoverished Mexicans, while facilitating the brutal, illicit enrichment of a few.

COCPA had been reactivated soon after the July elections, with new members drawn from the legislators who would take office in September. But Fox's National Action Party (PAN) announced that it would modify COCPA's proposed legislation, supposedly to "modernize" it. The PAN argued that indigenous communities should not be seen as exceptional territories with supra-constitutional modalities—a position that goes against the grain of the San Andrés Accords. Fox, apparently recognizing this, announced in his inaugural address on December 1 that he would send the bill on indigenous rights and cultures drafted by COCPA to Congress on the 5th. He also ordered the withdrawal from Chiapas of 53 army checkpoint units.

### **Starting with a clean slate**

PAN representative Luis H. Alvarez, who had participated in COCPA for some time, was named the governmental peace commissioner for Chiapas. He

described the Zapatistas' silence as understandable since they had been victims of so much deceit, and agreed that the army had to withdraw to ensure peace. Fox and Alvarez proposed opening the dialogue with actions. Meanwhile, two thousand Zapatistas marched in Chiapas to demand respect for the San Andrés Accords.

On December 2, the EZLN agreed to talk, but only under certain conditions. Marcos demanded the demilitarization of seven zones (the army has 259 posts in Chiapas), the release of Zapatista prisoners, and incorporation of the San Andrés Accords into the Constitution, and called on society to mobilize so that these conditions would be met. He announced that he and 23 other Zapatistas would visit Mexico City in February 2001. Marcos criticized Fox's proposals as superficial, since the indigenous people's problems will not be solved with "*vocho, tele y changarro*" (a cheap car, a television and a small business). At the same time, however, he applauded Alvarez's nomination as peace commissioner and said that Fox was starting with a clean slate, since the new President had not attacked the Zapatistas. Fox replied that he would humanize the armed forces and seek to comply with the Zapatista conditions for renewing talks.

### **One positive sign**

Eight days after Fox replaced the PRI in the National Palace, Pablo Salazar, who won the elections in the state of Chiapas running as an opposition coalition candidate, turned the PRI out of the governor's mansion in that state. Salazar expressed his opinion that all of the EZLN's demands were attainable and announced that the cases of prisoners who could be identified as Zapatistas would be reviewed. He also dismantled the state re-municipalization commission, which the outgoing governor had set up as part of his counterinsurgency strategy.

But not everything was going as Fox had announced. PAN and PRI representatives in Congress declared that they would not accept the initiative drawn up by COCOPA and embraced by Fox. Peace in Chiapas could yet be stalled in Congress.

Marcos spoke again. He recognized the work done between 1994 and 2000 by Amado Avendaño, the "governor in rebellion" in Chiapas, who had run for the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) and lost to PRI fraud. He repeated the Zapatistas' willingness to resume talks and supported the pilgrimage by indigenous peoples from ten states to the Basilica of Guadalupe, which they reached on December 9, after two months on the road.

The army withdrew from its encampment in Amador Hernández, one of the points demanded by the EZLN. People took this as a positive sign, but noted that there would be no peace as long the other signs of belligerence left by the

previous government remained.

### Three peace signs

Seventeen Zapatista prisoners were released in Chiapas at the end of December, and on January 1, the Zapatistas commemorated the seventh anniversary of its emergence in public. It called on society to accompany it to Mexico City in February to convince congressional representatives and senators of the justice contained within the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights and cultures. When unarmed Zapatistas advanced on the army post in Jonalchoj, the army retreated to avoid incidents and the President then ordered it to withdraw entirely from the area. Some members of Congress felt that the army had been humiliated, but Fox replied that there was no affront in this case since the army's retreat reflected its desire for peace.

The EZLN announced it would create a Zapatista Information Center, and recalled that it had asked the government to take three minimal steps as a prerequisite to talks. With respect to the first of these, the withdrawal of federal troops from seven posts in the conflict zone, the army had withdrawn from only two. Regarding the freeing of all Zapatista prisoners, 17 had been freed but many more remained in jail. And the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights and culture in accord with COCOPA's bill had not yet been ensured.

Fox replied that the Zapatistas had no need to come to Mexico City to make their demands, but that if they did, they should come without weapons or masks. Marcos replied that they would leave Chiapas on February 25 and travel through ten states before arriving in Mexico City on March 6. He added that they would wear their masks.

In January, the government announced that it had suspended the requirement obliging foreigners who wished to visit Chiapas to obtain a special permit. This was another sign of its openness to talks, as was its decision to put an end to the army's practice of buzzing Zapatista positions in its planes.

On January 10, the army pulled out of Cuxuljá in the presence of Peace Commissioner Alvarez and Latin American diplomats. While the withdrawal was taking place, the Zapatistas showed up to declare that they were pleased by this step but still troubled by the fact that four more posts had yet to be demilitarized: Roberto Barrios, La Guarucha, the Río Euseba barracks—where soldiers had harassed indigenous people—and Guadalupe Tepeyac. The latter is a Zapatista town whose inhabitants had fled to the mountains years before due to the army's presence. The Zapatistas recalled that they had declared war not only against the PRI but also against a system that had neglected and humiliated them, and that the war would not end until Mexico fully recognized its indigenous peoples and never again forgot them. Alvarez asked the Zapatistas to

establish contacts, even informal ones, and agreed that Mexico could not exist without the indigenous people.

#### "Peace.com"

Reports came out in the media of complaints among the troops over the way they had been withdrawn: under pressure in Jonalchoj and repudiated in Cuxuljá. Fox denied any ill feelings, and reiterated his call to the Zapatistas to resume talks.

Other reports also made the news: while troops were being withdrawn from some posts, reinforcements were reportedly sent to others. People in several autonomous municipalities charged that they were being harassed.

Fox was compelled to admit that the army would not be completely withdrawn, and maintained that he had agreed only to reduce its presence as a sign of good will in the search for dialogue. Obviously annoyed, he asked what more his government could be expected to do in Chiapas. He was clearly hoping that the Zapatistas would immediately express their willingness to resume talks aimed at resolving the conflict.

On January 12, celebrations marked the seventh anniversary of civil society's success in forcing the federal government to agree to a cease-fire in Chiapas. Demonstrations took place around the country; the largest in San Cristóbal de las Casas where over 10,000 indigenous people marched to demand that the new government take the three steps that had been asked of it.

A statement from Marcos was read at the march, in which he pointed out that although the PRI no longer governed either the country or Chiapas, the Zapatistas had not yet seen clear signs of a willingness to peacefully resolve the conflict. He acknowledged that progress had been made but also noted that it was accompanied by a language that was less than honest, trying to make it appear that everything necessary had been done to prepare for the talks. He said that the indigenous people wanted a genuine dialogue to achieve a true peace, and that the government would lose nothing by meeting their three demands, which were small things. He emphasized that the Zapatistas were true to their word and would ask for nothing more before resuming talks. He stressed that there was a long history behind the indigenous people's lack of trust, but they would not become mired in it. "Now that a new century and a new millennium is beginning, we insist on taking the path of dialogue to end the war." He recalled that over the past seven years, "those who were the government" had used talks to cover up war. They had lied, and the Zapatistas wanted no more lies. The key to opening the door of their mistrust was to meet the three demands. He listed them once again: while the Zapatistas applauded the freeing of 17 prisoners, 80 others were still being held in Chiapas, Tabasco and

Querétaro; they applauded the army's withdrawal from three posts, but four more remained; and the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights and culture was still pending.

Marcos sent another communiqué to civil society in which he applauded its successful efforts to organize people in various parts of the country and abroad. Noting that pilgrims from ten states were in the capital, he asked for help lodging them. He also announced that the information on the trip to the capital would be posted on the web page [www.ezlnaldf.org.](http://www.ezlnaldf.org.), and concluded with the wish that "peace dot com" come soon.

### **With or without masks?**

PAN senator Felipe de Jesús Vicencio, COCOPA's president, said that the government had not yet taken enough steps to demand that the Zapatistas immediately resume negotiations. Nonetheless, with apparent disdain for the Law for Dialogue and Peace—approved by Congress in March 1995 recognizing the Zapatistas as parties to the talks—House of Representatives president García Cervantes, a PAN representative, declared that those wishing to address Congress would have to remove their masks and lay down their arms. He added that Marcos would only be allowed to speak if he also requested a hearing under his true name.

The PAN leaders in Congress had thrown down the gauntlet: they talk to no one wearing a mask. The main obstacle facing COCOPA's initiative was the strong resistance of many PAN and PRI representatives, who were apparently unconcerned that their position inflamed the conflict. Members of Congress who said they would not speak with masked Zapatistas forgot that COCOPA, itself a legislative commission, had dealt with the Zapatistas as they presented themselves and was continuing to do so.

### **Debate in COCOPA**

Fox sidestepped the debate about the masks, claiming that the important thing was to resume the talks. He said that he took the Zapatistas at their word with respect to their three demands, and asked in exchange that they lay down their arms and get to work. Echoing Zedillo, he boasted that he would wait "patiently" for the Zapatistas' response. His spokesperson declared that the new government's first and most urgent project was to ensure peace in Chiapas and that Fox's proposal to lay down arms was not "a condition" but rather "an invitation."

Debates took place within COCOPA to establish its position. On January 15, COCOPA's president said that the executive branch should ease up on its positions, since there had been "an increasing array of conflicting press statements from various official or officious spokespeople" which were undermining the government's positive steps.

The debate within COCOPA revolved around Fox's problems with the EZLN. Although the President had sent positive signals, there were then trip-ups over mistaken or contradictory statements that fanned the conflict, undermining credibility and trust. The main criticism was that Fox was trying to make partial compliance pass for the whole thing and was manipulating the information to make the Zapatistas appear intransigent, which only aggravated the situation. Some COCOPA members accused Fox of being less than fully honest in his statements. They expressed their disagreement with the way he treated the conflict in the media and his failure to take a clear position on the Zapatistas' visit to the capital. A social rather than a business approach was required to sort out the problem of Chiapas.

### **The events of January 16**

A meeting between COCOPA and Fox had been planned, but COCOPA suspended it because the commission did not want to appear as if it was receiving directions from the executive branch. Finally, on January 16, there was an extremely important turn of events: the COCOPA members unanimously supported the proposed bill on indigenous rights and cultures. This had been one of the Zapatistas' demands in 1997, but after President Zedillo drafted an alternative bill, the PRI legislators in COCOPA were obliged to support his initiative. At that point, most PAN representatives had also dropped their support for the original proposal and drafted yet another bill which, like the President's, was rejected by the indigenous people. The most important aspect of January 16, 2001 is that COCOPA had taken a strong, consensual stand on the issue for the first time in four years.

In its official statement, COCOPA highlighted the Zapatistas' willingness to talk, and deemed that the demands they had set out as prerequisites to talks were reasonable. It also endorsed the idea that the Zapatistas talk with Congress about the bill and described the government's actions as positive but insufficient. COCOPA called on the Zapatistas, the government and other political and social actors to work for reconciliation. The presidential spokesperson responded by declaring that the executive had no disagreements with COCOPA, but then promptly announced that no more troops would be withdrawn from Chiapas.

### **Fox in Chiapas**

Government officials made several more such confusing statements about the Zapatistas and their upcoming visit to the capital. In one, the government secretary suggested that they could come with their masks, but not their weapons. He charged that while the government was speaking with actions, Marcos was responding only with communiqués, and though they contained "light" (positive recognition of the government's actions), they also included "dark" (troubling hints of demands for more).

On January 17, Fox himself went to Chiapas to issue micro-credits to indigenous women so they could start up their crafts businesses and to inaugurate other social programs. While there, he ordered the army to withdraw from the Roberto Barrios military post and explained that he had not announced the withdrawal earlier to avoid a face-off with the Zapatistas. In his tour of Chiapas, Fox saw that the indigenous people want not only education, health care and projects, but also respect for their way of life. When an indigenous woman told him that the soldiers had only increased their suffering, Fox replied that the army wanted peace and if some soldiers had made mistakes, he was sorry. He said that he would accept no more mistakes and wanted to replace the army with jobs in Chiapas.

The next day, Chiapas' Attorney General announced that another 26 Zapatista prisoners would be freed. The Government Secretary in Chiapas commented that it was not only possible but essential to meet all the EZLN's demands. Justifying the Zapatistas' use of masks as a way to protect their families, the PRI governor of Veracruz announced that he would guarantee their passage through that state with or without masks because that was not the important thing. The PAN governor of Morelos promised not to put obstacles in the Zapatistas' way, saying that it was their right to decide whether to wear their masks.

### **Powerful opposition**

But other positions were heard as well. The Business Coordinating Council's president said that no more army troops should be withdrawn from the conflict area. Business representatives asked that the Zapatistas' visit to the capital be blocked, arguing that it would discourage investment. Bishop Onésimo Cepeda, closely tied to the business sector and the PRI, spoke repeatedly and scornfully of the Zapatistas. He said they should not be allowed to come masked to the capital, since that would represent a triumph for them. Without a mask, he said, Marcos would be reduced to "a pitiful soul." The bishop of Tijuana added that the government had made concessions to the EZLN but had not demanded any gesture from them that would reflect their willingness to resume talks; he argued that it should not have ceded so much. One PAN legislator even demanded that the Zapatistas be jailed when they reached Mexico City.

On January 21, Fox consulted the biggest parties on the question of Chiapas. Representatives of both the PRI and his own party, the PAN, agreed that it was time for the Zapatistas to take actions that would show their willingness to resume talks before Fox met any more of their demands. The PRD, in contrast, maintained that the San Andrés Accords should be fulfilled and the government should continue to give signs of peace.

The next day, Peace Commissioner Alvarez said that the federal government would do as it had promised, but "in good time," as the Zapatistas offered

responses in kind. He emphasized that the government hoped the Zapatistas were receptive to the nutrition, health care, education, employment creation and housing projects it had already launched in Chiapas, and that situations like the one in Jonalchoj should be avoided in the future.

The day after that, House president García Cervantes, a PAN representative, ignored COCOPA's position and once again said that the march to Mexico City planned by the Zapatistas was illegal, since they could not leave Chiapas before signing an agreement to resume talks. He threatened that he would not speak with people wearing masks.

The coordinator of the PRD's legislative bench described Cervantes' comments as irresponsible and reflective of a profound ignorance of the pacification law. He said that congressional representatives from all parties were willing to listen to the Zapatistas and agreed with the Veracruz governor that the mask issue was unimportant, since the EZLN was legally recognized as an army and the government and COCOPA had already dealt with Zapatistas in their masks. The statements by Cervantes triggered conflicts even within his own party, while COCOPA called on him to act prudently.

### **The debate goes on**

In a conference at the Jesuit Ibero-American University, Chiapas' governor urged the passage of legislation in line with the San Andrés Accords. He called the criticisms leveled at the Zapatistas for wearing masks irresponsible and frivolous, and argued that the ultra-conservatives were trying to block progress towards peace and recognition of indigenous rights. He described the Zapatistas' show of approval over the naming of Luis H. Alvarez as government peace commissioner as a positive sign that they were implicitly accepting him, but viewed as troubling the fact that the federal government did not yet have bridges to the talks.

In an interview with journalists from Sonora on January 23, Fox alluded to periodic surveys done by his office showing that 75% of those consulted approved of the Zapatistas' visit, although 50% thought it responded to an invitation from the President. Some 40% were sure they were going to negotiate. He said that the army would not be withdrawn from any more military posts until the EZLN gave a clear sign that it was interested in talks.

That same day, COCOPA urged Fox to establish his position on the Zapatistas' visit to the capital. It announced that it would ask for measures to guarantee the Zapatistas' security. To facilitate its work, it sought direct contact with the EZLN.

### **Irreversible march to Mexico City**

On January 24, 55 days into Fox's term in office, some PAN representatives declared that receiving the EZLN in Congress would amount to apologizing for

violence. The PRD announced that if the PAN bench opposed talks with the Zapatistas, the PRD and PRI legislators would invite the Zapatistas to speak and would open talks with them. The majority in Congress seemed to be coming around to the position that they should receive the Zapatistas on the condition that they contact COCOPA first.

PRD representative Rosario Robles—who had served as mayor of Mexico City until Andrés Manuel López Obrador took over in December—challenged Fox to take off his own mask in order to resolve the conflict in Chiapas.

The analysis of many commentators was that the Law for Dialogue, Reconciliation and Peace with Dignity in Chiapas did not imply that Zapatistas be confined to Chiapas, nor that they would have to uncover their faces, but it did establish that they could not bring arms to the negotiating table. Protected by this law, 1,111 Zapatistas had come to Mexico City wearing their masks in October 1996 and Comandante Ramona had been in the capital to receive medical treatment.

At the end of January, Rosario Ibarra, a social activist and director of the Zapatista Information Center, announced that the Zapatista march would happen. She added that 2,000 representatives of civil society had signed up to accompany the Zapatistas from Chiapas to the capital.

Also in January, France's Green Party and nine organizations working in solidarity with Mexico called a meeting in their National Assembly. Acknowledging that Fox had unseated the PRI, they expressed skepticism about how genuine his willingness to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Chiapas really was.

### **The Right up in arms**

It must be emphasized that the elections that had made Fox President and Salazar governor of Chiapas radically changed Mexico's political scenario. Had the PRI held on to office, the policy of harassing Zapatista communities would have been stepped up. The change has lessened tensions and opened up the possibility of peace.

COCOPA has been a pivotal actor in this context because of its insistence that the Zapatistas' demands merit consideration, as well as its openness to having the Zapatistas participate in drafting the constitutional reforms. Its decision to again take up the initiative to convert the San Andrés Accords into law was another big step towards peace.

It is now up to civil society to exert pressure on the legislators to ensure that they become well informed on the issues of indigenous rights and culture and legislate responsibly. This pressure should also be applied at a local level, since the

approval of 20 state legislatures is legally required to pass COCOPA's initiative. The debate that has taken place so far has shown that many legislators are profoundly ignorant of the topic and many negative attitudes typical of Mexico's non-indigenous culture towards the indigenous peoples' rights prevail.

Meanwhile, the Right is up in arms against the EZLN. It has launched a huge media campaign arguing that much has been ceded in exchange for nothing, and describing the government's concessions as gratuitous and dangerous. The voices of Bishops Samuel Ruiz and Raúl Vera once defended indigenous rights. Now that the Vatican has removed them from Chiapas, the only voices heard are those of arrogant bishops tied to power.

### **Once again, civil society**

The fact that the EZLN tends to treat COCOPA as a counterpart is a serious problem since it was legally established as a commission to cooperate in the search for peace and has proven itself willing to clear away obstacles to peace. If this attitude remains unchanged, it could undermine the commission's effectiveness.

The fact that the Zapatistas have not established direct communication with the executive branch bolsters the intransigent positions of the enemies of peace. The President's office is already beginning to cave in to the pressure of hard-line sectors in the Catholic hierarchy, private enterprise and many PAN members deeply opposed to indigenous interests.

Fox's problem is having believed that he could dispatch the problem in Chiapas in short order. He has also dealt with it inconsistently, trying to put an end to it as though nothing had gone before and offering very little in exchange. The result has been a publicity war with Marcos, which, admittedly, is not the worst of wars to engage in.

Resolving the problem in Chiapas involves the federal and local executive branches, the federal legislative branch and the legislatures of the majority of states, the political parties, the mass media, the churches, private enterprise, indigenous people, the Zapatistas, marginalized sectors and a large number of groups in civil society. What has taken place so far is a deaf struggle of the powerful against the excluded. Once again, civil society has the responsibility to make moderation prevail, to build bridges and convince the parties to abandon their inflexible positions so talks can be held that will guarantee respect for indigenous rights and cultures. Despite the numerous difficulties and continuing ill will among some, the truth is that changes in the national political context have opened the path for those who want true peace.

## **Espinosa Villareal: The Tip of an Iceberg**

*In mid-November, a typical "big fish" in the ocean of PRI corruption took refuge in Nicaragua, in a shady deal apparently worked out by the Zedillo and Alemán governments. This is a brief summary of his record.*

### **Jorge Alonso**

The Mexican media have helped us learn something about the career of Oscar Espinosa Villareal, a high-ranking official in the regime of Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) who sought asylum in Nicaragua late last year. The information that has been made available goes back to the 1980s, when Espinosa was named to the Securities Commission, where his duties included covering up his predecessor's questionable operations. When the stock market collapsed at the end of Miguel de la Madrid's presidential term, impoverishing many Mexicans who had been dazzled by the high return rates promised by the market and illicitly enriching a handful of privileged allies, Espinosa was implicated in the failure of the MexFin brokerage house. Protected by incoming President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, Espinosa then became director of a very important public financial institution, the Nacional Financiera. In 1991, he arranged for that institution to grant improper loans to relatives of Salinas and his successor Ernesto Zedillo.

### **A prize for corruption**

In 1992, Securities Commission personnel were informed that Espinosa (who continued to act as the commission's president from the offices of Nacional Financiera) had decreed that they be obliged to make an annual contribution to the PRI's electoral campaigns. The contribution—one entire salary check—was to be turned back in to one of the directors, thus turning the Securities Commission into a kind of payment counter to finance the party. Some officials objected, insisting that the institution had to remain impartial and that they had personally chosen not to affiliate with any party, but it was all to naught.

Under Espinosa, Nacional Financiera was implicated in the loss of over US\$ 2 billion. The Treasury Department's report to the House of Representatives named a long list of problems to explain the bankruptcy: loans granted to associations not properly constituted, improperly drawn up credit plans, missing dossiers, credit granted without collateral and preferentially assigned to influential people, and excessive administrative costs. Despite all of these irregularities in the institution Espinosa was responsible for, he was not sanctioned in any way and the institution's debts were passed over to the Bank Fund to Protect Savings (FOBAPROA), where it fell to all Mexican taxpayers to

cover them. Shortly thereafter, the biggest financial scandal in Mexican—and, indeed, Latin American—history erupted around FOBAPROA itself.

Espinosa's skill in collecting resources of all kinds for the PRI earned him a post as the PRI's finance secretary towards the end of Salinas' term in office. In this new position, he organized a way to issue credit cards to PRI activists without any guarantees. Many of the debts from these cards also ended up in FOBAPROA. Espinosa's greatest achievement was to get Cabal Peniche—a Mexican banker now in prison in Australia—and other financiers to make big contributions to PRI campaigns, especially Zedillo's. This contributed to the failure of several banks, whose debts were passed to FOBAPROA as well. Moreover, these contributions were not declared to the Federal Electoral Institute, as mandated by law.

In payment for his dirty work, Zedillo awarded Espinosa the post of Mexico City regent. Once in the capital's municipal government, Espinosa contributed through continued irregularities to the bankruptcy of a public transport company, was responsible for the lack of supervision in the construction of metro lines, and saddled the government with an excessive and improperly accrued debt, just to name some of his achievements. To continue protecting him, Zedillo named him Tourism Secretary in the second half of his term.

On February 22, 2000, the Comptroller General's office in the Federal District—at that time under Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) administration—called Espinosa to testify in a case in which he was accused of embezzling over \$40 million. Representatives from the PRD and the National Action Party (PAN) questioned him on how he had used half of the income generated from tourism taxes. The Comptroller's representation within the Tourism Secretariat admitted that there were irregularities, but with President Zedillo's support, Espinosa left his faithful deputy in charge of Tourism and went into hiding to escape the accusations.

In August 2000, the just-elected mayor of Mexico City, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, insisted that Zedillo's illegal receipt of money from Cabal Peniche would have to come out. His insistence was based on a Supreme Court resolution directing that the House of Representatives be given information on one of the failed banks whose debts had ended up in FOBAPROA—by then converted into the Institute to Protect Bank Savings (IPAB).

López Obrador asked President-elect Vicente Fox to do his duty unflinchingly and form a Truth Commission to investigate everything related to IPAB, declaring emphatically, "I want to point out that the PRI's finance secretary at that time was Oscar Espinosa Villarreal. This is proven fact. He was the one who closed the deal between Banco Unión and the PRI."

### **Will this "untouchable" fall?**

Without the protection of the PRI in the presidential office, Espinosa fled the country. He arrived in Nicaragua on November 12, 2000, illegally carrying US\$1.5 million in cash. He asked to be granted asylum two weeks later, but was detained shortly thereafter in response to the Mexican government's pressure on the Nicaraguan government. López Obrador maintained that Espinosa had information essential to an investigation of former President Zedillo, and emphasized the importance of the case in helping put the lie to the maxim that you can't touch the "untouchables" in Mexico and thus ending the reign of impunity in the country.

Espinosa could provide information on many things, not only the irregularities committed in the Federal District under his administration (1994-1997), but also other issues of utmost importance, like PRI finances. Another line of investigation should be into those people who illegally enriched themselves from Mexico City government coffers. The PRD insists that Espinosa bears a share of responsibility in the illegal financing of PRI campaigns and irregular management of a public financial institution. Both the PRD and PAN benches in the Senate have demanded an investigation into whether Zedillo covered up Espinosa's corruption and helped him flee the country.

In early January, Mexico asked that Espinosa be extradited from Nicaragua. The Nicaraguan justice system twice refused his request for release, and at the end of January refused to grant him asylum.

Since the judicial branch is one of the areas most in need of clean-up in Mexico, it would be no surprise if Espinosa were freed when he is returned. There is still much to do to eradicate corruption in the country, since the seventy-year PRI regime turned the whole system into a solid wall of complicity, extraordinarily resistant to any effort to tumble it.

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### **The Zapatista Triumph: the Strength of Weakness**

*For 16 days, 23 EZLN comandantes—4 of them women— plus Subcomandante Marcos traveled through the cities and towns of 12 states representing ten million indigenous exicans. From its initial planning through to its culminating events, the march of those who are "the color of the earth," have created a new political scenario in the country.*

**Jorge Alonso**

When the leadership of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) left its

confinement in the mountains of southeast Mexico, a new political scenario was created for the movement. To understand this scenario, one must systematically follow the actions of everyone involved in the events that took place around the Zapatista march. Each day had its own special weight on a game board where even hours counted. A chronological run-through will show us the constants, the changes and the correlation of forces, both those that foster the Zapatista movement's goals and those that oppose it. Any summary, however sketchy, is necessarily long because of the great number of variations and counterpoints. In this case, the process is to analyze an intense period involving a new kind of class conflict and ending in an impressive grassroots triumph.

### **The strategic decision to march to Mexico City**

At the end of January of this year, the Zapatistas summed up the situation and their position in response to it. They had taken up arms on January 1, 1994, to demand, among other things, respect for and recognition of Mexico's indigenous peoples. On January 12 of that year, heeding the call of international and national civil society, they suspended armed actions and began talks. In February 1996, the EZLN and the government signed the first San Andrés accords on indigenous rights and culture. The government pledged to recognize those rights through constitutional reforms, but did not keep its word. In December of that same year, the legislature's pluralist Harmony and Pacification Commission (COCOPA) drafted a bill to resolve the problem. Then-President Ernesto Zedillo rejected it and broke off the talks. On taking office some months ago after breaking the Institutional Revolutionary Party's seventy-year political domination, President Vicente Fox promised to fulfill the pending agreements and find a negotiated solution to the conflict. The EZLN responded by expressing its willingness to take the peaceful route and demanding a serious, respectful and true dialogue. It asked Fox for three signs that would demonstrate his commitment to dialogue and negotiation and, in the process, provide the answers to three basic questions: Was Fox really in charge of the army and ready to abandon the military route to solve the conflict? Did the government recognize that the Zapatistas were committed to a social struggle and were not common criminals? Would the humiliation, disdain and racism suffered by Mexico's indigenous people be struck down for good? Until the end of January, Fox's answers seemed to be yes and no, more or less. He withdrew the army from only four of its seven military positions in Chiapas and freed only a handful of prisoners, leaving over 100 in the country's jails, as "hostages" so the government could keep the military option open.

To win approval of COCOPA's bill, the EZLN decided to send a delegation to Mexico City to talk with the federal legislators. Fox's government resorted to a publicity campaign to cast itself as peacemaker and the Zapatistas as intransigent. In response to the government's fear that the EZLN would ask for more concessions and draw out the conflict, the Zapatistas reiterated that they

would keep their word: they had asked for only three signs and would ask for no more.

After the Zapatistas announced their march to Mexico City, the Church hierarchy, the ruling political class, a sector of the business class and the army focused the discussion around the fact that the Zapatistas would march with their faces covered by masks. The EZLN explained that the masks formed part of their identity and that they would travel masked but unarmed, in accord with the law. On their way to the capital, the EZLN would talk with civil society, especially with indigenous communities and the National Indigenous Congress, but would make no contact with the government until it had fulfilled the three signs. The Zapatistas wanted talks to end the war and the causes that had led to it so they could act politically like any other Mexican citizen.

Subcomandante Marcos asked for civil society's economic support in financing the march to Mexico City, which Noam Chomsky, in a conference in Guadalajara, described as an "example of resistance to neoliberalism."

### **Support and confidence grow**

According to surveys published by the newspaper *El Universal*, in 1998, 42.8% of Mexicans felt that the Zapatista movement was just. By January 2001, this number had increased to 57.3%. A survey published on March 5 revealed that Marcos' popularity in the capital had increased from 26% in 1998 to 34% in 2001. On March 7, the TV company Multivisión released a survey showing that 62% of Mexicans believed that the Zapatistas wanted peace. Some 44% felt that Marcos was winning the battle while 25% felt that Fox was ahead.

Before the march, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Rigoberta Menchú praised the signs of peace made by President Fox and called on the government and the Zapatistas to talk. On January 25, at the Davos Forum, Fox told the world's investors that the Zapatista march should not make them nervous and that as long as a single Mexican was excluded, the Mexican government's obligation was to change that situation. From Milan, Fox called on the EZLN to sign a peace agreement now.

In response to the Zapatistas' refusal to talk with Fox's government until the three signs had been given—the freeing of Zapatista prisoners, the army's withdrawal from the remaining three points in the conflict zone and constitutional recognition of indigenous rights and culture—Fox also began to express reticence. He said that the question of whether the Zapatistas really wanted peace was being put to the test, and questioned whether they truly represented the indigenous communities. He explained that the army would remain in Chiapas because its presence was necessary to ensure security at the border and fight drug trafficking. Nonetheless, he gave one positive sign by

announcing that his government would guarantee the Zapatistas' security on the march to Mexico City. He asked that agreements be made ahead of time to define the march logistics. He also asked the foreigners who would be coming to Mexico to participate in the march to press for peace. His foreign relations secretary said that the foreigners were welcome in Chiapas because the government had nothing to hide; many of them had on earlier occasions been expelled from the country by Zedillo's government. Fox said that he recognized that Marcos was working in favor of Mexico, but didn't know Marcos and so wanted to meet with him.

#### **"We want to be part of the future"**

Meanwhile, sentiments were building against the Zapatista march in ruling political and business circles. Some insisted that the Zapatistas should be imprisoned if they left Chiapas. The governor of Querétaro, from the National Action Party (PAN), declared that the Zapatistas were traitors who deserved the death penalty. The presidential spokesperson clarified that the statements of some prominent PAN members were only their opinions and that Fox wanted peace, inclusion and democracy. Since the President had already fulfilled some of their requests, he expected a sign from the Zapatistas that they too were willing to sit down to talk. In response to their silence, which he interpreted as intolerant intransigence, Fox hardened his line: in Germany he called not on Marcos but on Sebastián Guillén to sign a peace agreement, explaining that he referred to this EZLN member by name because he was already participating in politics. But he also said that the Mexican people looked to the Zapatistas' visit to the capital with hope. The President's ambivalence was obvious.

Meanwhile, in a press conference in Mexico, Marcos said that peace was near. Since the PRI's electoral defeat last year, Mexican society had undergone a profound change. The defeat had made it possible for the country to begin make its decisions in new ways. He also emphasized that the Zapatistas had reason to be distrustful, that out in the forest, people wondered if the new government's attitudes were not merely tactics to gain time before striking a military blow. Marcos understood the contradictions in Fox's government. Important PAN members like Senator Diego Fernández de Cevallos did not want peace. Many Zapatistas wondered if Fox really wanted to abandon the military option, and Marcos believed that part of Fox did while another part gave signs that he didn't. He criticized the way Fox stage-managed the army's withdrawal as a media show, and said he had no interest in being more popular than Fox. Finally, he explained that the Zapatistas wanted to be part of the future and did not want to wear masks in the future.

In another interview in *The New York Times*—the first he has given to the foreign press in the past four years—Marcos was optimistic. "We are a group of people who have covered our faces and taken up arms to fight for what we believe in,"

he said. "We would like to show our faces, put down our arms and continue to fight for our beliefs the way people do in other parts of the world." He once again expressed his concern that Fox would not fulfill his promises and that the conflict in Chiapas would not be resolved. He insisted that if the government represented a change and wanted to show it, it was essential that it analyze all the problems that had led to the war and refrain from repeating the mistakes of the past.

### **The government supports the march**

Congress called on the Zapatistas to meet with COCOPA to set the terms for direct talks with the legislative branch, declaring that it was willing to meet with the EZLN. But many Congress members, especially several PAN leaders, rejected the notion of talking to people in masks. The Senate president, PRI Representative Enrique Jackson, said that the legislature should receive the Zapatistas with or without their masks, recognizing that the masks were part of their identity. The president of COCOPA, PAN Representative Felipe de Jesús Vicencio, urged Congress to rise to the occasion and not get lost in irrelevant debates. COCOPA threw itself into the task of preparing the meeting between the Zapatistas and Congress.

At the beginning of February, the government's Commissioner for Peace in Chiapas, Luis H. Álvarez, established the government's position on the Zapatista march, thus responding to the belligerent political and business sectors. He said the government celebrated and welcomed the Zapatista march and was pleased that they would march without weapons, but he also laid down its conditions. Before the army would withdraw from the remaining three positions, a discreet meeting should be held—which, he explained, was not the beginning of talks—to discuss the conditions in which the march would take place because the possibility of sabotage could not be dismissed. He clarified the executive branch's functions, explaining that it was up to Congress to approve the law, but that the executive would promote the bill and hold all meetings necessary with the Congress members to reach consensus. He emphasized that the executive branch could not impose its position on the legislature. With respect to the Zapatista prisoners, he said that 19 had already been freed and the government of Chiapas had announced that it would soon free others. The federal government and authorities in other states were still analyzing the specific situation of each prisoner to ensure that criminals would not be freed in place of Zapatistas. Fox reiterated his willingness to free all of those imprisoned for causes related to the conflict and called on the various authorities involved to conduct an exhaustive review of each case.

### **A multiethnic, multicultural nation**

After lengthy debates, PAN agreed to support the position of the executive branch and COCOPA and thus to negotiate with the EZLN. It asked the EZLN for clear signs of its willingness to talk by establishing direct contact with COCOPA.

The government of Chiapas urged the federal government and the EZLN not to fall into a vicious circle by putting down conditions, pointing out that patience is necessary so as not to frustrate peace.

Through the media, COCOPA invited the EZLN to meet with it in order to define the format for possible direct talks between the Zapatistas and the members of Congress. On February 7, Fox predicted that a peace agreement would be signed within a few weeks' time. Through a contact of COCOPA's, the Commissioner for Peace sent the EZLN a card expressing his desire for a discreet, informal meeting. The head of the Office for the Development of Indigenous People called those who criticized the Zapatistas "racist." On the other hand, the commentaries of some PAN members, bishops and governors reflected their profound lack of knowledge of the country, as many people expressed opinions without being adequately informed.

Despite the progress made, COCOPA was not optimistic at the beginning of February, and said that it did not see the conditions for a peace agreement anytime soon. In mid-February, the Mexican Bishops Conference issued a document recognizing that Mexico is a multiethnic and multicultural nation. It emphasized that the EZLN had decided not to resort to arms but rather sought to make them unnecessary by resuming talks instead. It called on Congress to listen carefully to the EZLN, since this opportunity to consolidate peace could not be wasted. It also asked the EZLN to respect diversity and once it had had their its, to accept the law as approved. With respect to the march, the bishops called on everyone to avoid discriminatory, racist attitudes and any kind of provocation or aggression.

### **An incident with the International Red Cross**

On February 14, Fox promised that after the Zapatista march would come peace. In addition to asking people to support the Zapatista caravan, he also asked them to demand that he and Marcos agree to peace. On February 18, Marcos informed COCOPA that he would meet with it on March 12 in Mexico City, and invited members of Congress to join the march. He also announced that he had requested the International Red Cross' intervention to transport the EZLN representatives. A few days earlier, ranchers in Chiapas had threatened to block the march if the government did not return lands. The International Red Cross responded by explaining that the conditions were not suitable for their collaboration in the march: the Zapatista request was not based on international humanitarian law and the institution would violate its historical neutrality if it agreed to participate. Marcos said that Fox would be responsible for any harm that might come to members of the Zapatista delegation and accused him of putting obstacles in the way of peace, charging that the International Red Cross had told the Zapatistas that the federal government had blocked its participation. What Fox wanted, Marcos said, was for the EZLN to negotiate the march's

security in exchange for contact with the government, to use this contact as another piece in its publicity campaign. Fox expressed surprise at Marcos' statement and called on the EZLN to avoid any action that would disturb the climate of peace, insisting that the government had nothing to do with the discussions between the International Red Cross and the EZLN. The government's official position was that it would do whatever necessary to ensure the march's security.

#### **Verbal confrontation on a tense eve**

Mexico's Red Cross offered ambulances and medicines in case they were needed. Marcos again blamed the government, specifically the foreign relations secretary, for having blocked the International Red Cross's participation, but it in turn said that no one had pressured it and that it had decided not to participate based on its statutes, since the march would not be traveling through conflict zones. Marcos replied that the International Red Cross was being dishonest, which demonstrated that the Zapatistas could trust neither the government nor international organizations, but only civil society.

In an address to the armed forces on Army Day, Fox defended his policy towards the EZLN, explaining that although some felt it had made the EZLN stronger, it would have been worse to close himself off in the unfortunate conspiracy of silence. He insisted that the Zapatista march must be respected.

COCOPA sent a second letter to the EZLN requesting a meeting to discuss measures to guarantee the march's security. COCOPA asked the government secretary to intervene since it saw three "hot spots" for the march: the ranchers in Chiapas, threats by a PAN representative in Morelos and the position of the governor of Querétaro. In the House of Representatives, PAN representatives insisted that the EZLN should meet with COCOPA before the march.

The Zapatistas accused Fox of raising false expectations that they were marching to Mexico to sign a peace agreement. Marcos warned that Fox was trying to appropriate the Zapatista march and present it as his own. Nonetheless, he insisted that he was open to talks. COCOPA agreed to the meeting offered by the EZLN, and abstained from throwing any more fuel on the fire of the verbal conflict between the Zapatistas and the government. Speaking to ministers from the European Union, the foreign relations secretary revealed that Mexico's elite had asked the government to block the Zapatista march and sweep the problem "under the rug," continuing Zedillo's policy. Fox, the secretary assured, had taken on the task of convincing them of his strategy. The European Union called on the EZLN not to ignore the Mexican government's efforts aimed at resuming talks in Chiapas.

#### **The "Zapatour" begins**

On February 24, Mexico's Flag Day, the Zapatista caravan left their camp at La Realidad and headed toward San Cristóbal de las Casas. Marcos designated a veteran guerrilla leader, Comandante Germán, who had been the main promoter of the guerrilla forces in Chiapas, to be their spokesperson before Congress. The police detained Germán in 1995, but he was freed after the Pacification Law was approved and had not been seen since. As his face was already known, he appeared without a mask.

Contradictions within the government continued. Fox declared that not even 10% of Mexico's indigenous people supported Marcos. On the contrary, said the governor of Chiapas, the march was mobilizing the whole country from the President down, and had also mobilized the international community.

Some 20,000 Zapatistas joined the first leg of the march, to San Cristóbal de las Casas. Marcos described it as the march of those who are "the color of the earth." In Chiapas, more Zapatista prisoners were freed, bringing the total to 59 out of the 103 reported. The government assigned the task of ensuring the march's safety to the federal police.

#### **"We don't want to return to the past"**

The march crossed twelve states as planned. In most of them, it was given a massive and warm welcome. The National Indigenous Congress took up the march as its own. In many of the indigenous towns the marchers passed through, the authorities gave the Zapatistas the staff of command, thus demonstrating their agreement with the EZLN's proposals. Marcos explained that the indigenous people wanted to live in the present and work together to build the future. They didn't want to stop being indigenous; they were proud of their race, their language, their culture, their clothing, the struggle of their women, their form of government, their work. They did not want to return to the past, to exchange their tractors for primitive hoes, knowledge for magic, free work for slavery, freedom for obedience to a *cacique*. The indigenous women wanted to fight for their rights, and everyone demanded that governing should be seen as a responsibility and a task on behalf of the collective and not a means to enrich oneself at the expense of the governed. The goal of the march was to ensure that it would no longer be a crime to live, think, dress, speak and love as indigenous people.

When he launched a National Health and Nutrition Program for Indigenous People during the first days of the march, Fox welcomed the Zapatista caravan with open arms and an open heart and said that he was not accustomed to deceiving anyone. In government, however, there was concern over Marcos' negative comments toward the President, and because of them the PAN described Marcos as a "provocateur." On March 1, in front of 4,000 people in Mexico City's main plaza where he was

presenting his most recent book, Nobel Prize laureate in literature José Saramago insisted that human beings must be the absolute priority of rulers and citizens alike. He said that the Zapatistas were stirring up waves of enthusiasm, love, affection and respect. He warned that, although people spoke of democracy every day, the real power was not democratic since the multinational companies acted above everyone. And he called on people not to resign themselves.

### **COCOPA's bill: Without changing a comma**

On March 3, the third National Indigenous Congress got underway in Michoacán. At this event, Marcos said it was time to hold back the machete and sharpen hope. That same day, a concert for peace was held in the Azteca Stadium in Mexico City, organized by the two main television channels after collecting 22 million signatures for peace. Naturally, the "peace" envisioned by the TV elite had no substance or content, and was reduced to a desire for the Zapatista demands to disappear and the Zapatistas themselves to return to Chiapas.

Fox praised the meeting in Michoacán, but said that the National Indigenous Congress did not represent the whole of the country's indigenous people. Indeed, some indigenous communities, among them the Yaquis, do not participate in the organization. The indigenous representatives in the congress called for working together to defend COCOPA's bill, while Fox said—as though he had not yet embraced the initiative—that the EZLN should accept modifications to the text because some of the issues it discussed were unclear, like what was understood by the terms indigenous people or indigenous territory. The National Indigenous Congress replied that the law was not open to negotiation and should be approved without changing so much as a comma.

Among the most important agreements that came out of the Third National Indigenous Congress were a demand for constitutional recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples, along with respect for indigenous autonomy, territories, ancestral lands and normative systems. The representatives to the congress demanded the demilitarization of all indigenous territories and freeing of all indigenous people detained for having fought in defense of autonomy. They insisted that the defense of autonomy was fundamental and that, by defending it, they were acting in favor of all those who wanted to live with dignity in their difference, their color, their song, their own vision of life and freedom. They said they could not accept the development plans promoted by the federal and state governments if they did not allow for indigenous peoples' effective participation. Finally, they decided to send a delegation from the congress to accompany the Zapatistas' talk with the legislature.

Comandante Germán met with COCOPA and asked it to help guarantee the march's security. In Zitácuaro, Marcos hardened his language even further. He said that the PRI and Fox were essentially the same because both sought to

govern not with the people but rather in place of the people, while the Zapatistas were demanding representation, not someone to act in their stead. In Toluca, Marcos responded to the criticisms made by some businesspeople and Bishop Cepeda by asking them why they feared a peaceful march of marginalized people.

#### **Marcos' message in Morelos and Guerrero**

Marcos continued to emphasize his distance from the President while the President insisted on presenting himself as close to the Zapatista march. Fox said that the EZLN was contributing to the country's development, and that the support people gave Marcos was conditioned by their desire for peace. He urged Mexico's ethnic groups and peoples to achieve peace and prosperity together. He offered them work to achieve sustainable development, so they would no longer be marginalized or left behind, and asked them to trust him because he was being consistent and honest. He stressed that the government was totally committed to implementing development plans and had a renewed commitment to put an end to their marginalization.

In Morelos, Marcos warned of the danger of focussing the struggle around a single person—himself. He said he was like a window frame through which people could see the comandantes and behind them, the indigenous people and all of the injustice, poverty and misery in which they lived. He said that the ruling class hoped the Zapatistas would tire of listening to people's complaints in the towns they passed through and that the whole issue would be concentrated in a single person. He compared Fox to Madero, who was elected President in 1911 by an overwhelming majority after helping lead the fight to topple the dictatorship but then broke his promises to the poor and changed virtually nothing.

In Guerrero, Marcos recognized the support that the guerrilla organizations ERPI, EPR and FARP had provided in their areas of influence. He called on the legislature to understand their historic role. He said that only with the vision of a statesman—something not learned in management courses—could Fox satisfy the Zapatista demands. He said it was time for Fox's government to understand that it was not dealing with a problem of popularity, and accused the President of having no interest in anything not related to his media image. He added that it was necessary to challenge the government to achieve peace with justice and dignity.

Fox later countered that he was willing to meet all conditions laid down by the EZLN to resume talks as long as the EZLN promised to move from the military to the political arena, and said there should be no winners or losers in the process. With respect to Marcos' attacks, Fox said that they appeared to be the words of someone on the campaign trail.

After a lengthy debate and many objections from PAN representatives, Congress decided to hold direct talks with the EZLN and directed COCOPA to negotiate the format for the meeting.

### **The continent's most important social movement**

In an article published on March 8 in the newspaper *La Jornada*, titled "Meeting with the Nation," Alain Touraine spoke of the march's repercussions. He noted that the Zapatistas had won the respect and admiration of many people around the world. He described their movement as the most important in Latin America, one transformed into a vast action to extend democracy in Mexico, where half the population remained outside the game economically, politically and culturally. He also recognized Fox's personal commitment to opening up the political system. He believed that the Zapatistas would commit political suicide if they joined a political party, but had the potential to become a movement aimed at integrating the excluded into national life. He pointed out that the EZLN has to overcome the archaic positions of a certain Left. In the same issue of the paper, Noam Chomsky warned of political leaders who sought to prevent the global influence of the Zapatista movement, which has become one of the most important in the world against neoliberalism. He suggested that if the EZLN managed to connect itself to other social international movements, it could help change the course of history.

In the second week of March, another group of Zapatistas was freed in Chiapas, raising the number to 84. The governor said that the files had been carefully examined and there were no more Zapatista prisoners in the state. On March 9, Fox sent Marcos an invitation through the media to meet with him at the presidential residence at Los Pinos on a day of his own choosing. He again compared the situation of the two men: if either of them did not keep their word, they would fall in society's estimation. He also made some unfortunate comparisons, pointing out that he had brought out more people than Marcos in his campaign. He said that one proof that his government was democratic was the Zapatista march itself, since it would have clearly been unthinkable under Zedillo's government.

### **Marcos: A rebel, not a revolutionary**

On March 10, Televisa transmitted an interview between Marcos and the respected journalist Julio Scherer. Marcos defined himself not as a revolutionary but rather as a rebel, and explained why. While the revolutionary sought to take power in order to transform society, the rebel did so from below. When asked why Zapatistas had elected Comandante Germán as their representative to Congress, despite accusations still hanging over him related to his responsibility for executions within guerrilla groups in the 1970s, Marcos said the choice was made to emphasize the Zapatistas' desire to integrate into civilian life. He also

spoke out once more against the cult of the image: people shouldn't become fixated on Marcos, what was important were the indigenous people. He explained that he didn't accept Fox's invitation to meet because it would be nothing but an ephemeral event, a photo op. He couldn't meet with the President until the three signs, which were not negotiable, had been given.

Marcos recognized that Fox's government was legitimate, a product of democratic elections, but pointed out that there are no more politicians in today's world; just political marketers with no vision of the future. On other national issues, Marcos expressed the opinion that the National Autonomous University's General Strike Council had closed in on itself and thus had failed as a movement, and accused businesspeople of trying to erase Mexico's indigenous people, since the march of people who are "the color of the earth" was making money tremble.

In an interview with the publication *Milenio*, Fox reiterated that the Zapatista march could take place precisely because his government was democratic, and noted that in the first hundred days of his government, several surveys gave him approval ratings of above 70%.

### **The Zócalo: Sunday March 11, 2001**

On Sunday March 11, while people in the Zapatistas' area of influence in Chiapas were praying for the security and safe return of their leaders, the EZLN entered Mexico City's main square, the Zócalo. The plaza was full. *Comandante David* addressed the crowd, calling on Fox and Congress to stop putting "locks" on COCOPA's bill and to give the three signs they had been asked to give. People chanted their support for the Zapatistas, shouting out that they are not alone. The main television channels, however, chose not to transmit this historic event live. Marcos said that it was time for Fox and "whoever he gets his orders from" to listen to the indigenous people and announced that the Zapatistas would stay in Mexico City until the law on indigenous rights and culture was approved.

The day after the demonstration in the Zócalo, the newspaper *Reforma* published a survey revealing that 52% of the population felt that Marcos should remain in the capital. An overwhelming 86% thought that Marcos should meet with Fox. Some 33% felt that he was willing to talk with Fox, while 44% believed Fox was willing to talk with Marcos.

During their stay in Mexico City, the Zapatistas met with intellectuals from Mexico and abroad. Saramago said that the indigenous condition was one of the hardest in the world today because it had to bear the whole weight of a global machinery that was built not only on natural wealth but also on the exploitation of human beings. Pablo González Casanova exhorted those with money and power to explain how they planned ensure the rights of the indigenous people.

Vázquez Montalbán said that the Zapatista movement had launched the 21st century's culture of resistance. Monsiváis described what had happened in the Zócalo as a grand ceremony celebrating inclusion and as a political and cultural victory. Marcos criticized Fox's position that all progressive struggles had come to an end when those who were struggling came to power, and insisted that the Zapatistas are fighting for dignity.

### A time for peace? Contradictions at the top

On March 12, the EZLN and COCOPA met for the first time in five years. The EZLN reiterated its commitment to resolve the conflict through peaceful means. In an interview that came out the following day, Fox said that a fruitful meeting between the EZLN and COCOPA and Congress would be key to determining the military withdrawal from Chiapas. In saying this, the President was clearly putting down conditions. Fox emphasized that if the meeting took place, it would be a great incentive for him to take this important step forward. He reiterated that this was a situation in which there should be no losers, and said he felt that Marcos was gaining ground, because he was becoming increasing popular and making his message better understood.

Fox and Marcos sent messages back and forth through the media. The President emphasized that Marcos should understand that they weren't preparing any traps for the Zapatistas, and that his government spoke the truth. He said he had faith in the EZLN because it constantly reiterated its desire for peace, but explained that he had to talk with other sectors to temper their positions and make the politicians and businesspeople understand that this was a great opportunity to settle Mexico's enormous debt with the indigenous people. He promised to hold more frequent meetings with the legislature to push forward the bill he had sent it in December, and said that according to surveys carried out by his office, 75% of Mexicans were in favor of resolving the conflict and signing peace accords, and that a majority felt the President was promoting peace.

The business community stubbornly continued to reject the Zapatistas. On March 9, the business organization COPARMEX described the Zapatistas as violent, irresponsible blackmailers. Four days later, the Business Council argued that approving COCOPA's bill would violate the terms of the Puebla-Panama plan. In a thousand different ways, businesspeople kept insisting that the march made people nervous in the national and international markets. And although they claimed to support the President in his decision to resolve the conflict, they accused Fox of having revived the Zapatista movement. The group known as "Private Initiative" stated its position in no uncertain terms when it said that the legislators who supported COCOPA's bill had "something wrong in the head." The right also began to criticize the foreigners who accompanied the Zapatista march. The Spanish writer Vázquez Montalbán explained why: they were annoyed that people watching from outside had prevented them from crushing the Zapatistas,

although they were not concerned about the progressive sale of Mexico's economic patrimony to global capitalism.

### **A humiliating, unworthy proposal**

COCOPA presented the Zapatistas with the proposal made by the leaders of the PAN and PRI benches in the Senate. The proposal was that the EZLN meet with the members of the commissions on indigenous affairs, which included ten representatives from the House and ten senators. The leader of the PAN bench in the Senate let it be known that his bench would not support COCOPA's bill as written. The next day, the EZLN and the National Indigenous Council rejected the idea of meeting with ten representatives and ten senators and said they expected a new proposal from Congress to discuss COCOPA's initiative. Marcos accused Congress of trying to reduce the historic dimension of the national and international mobilization that had developed around their demand.

The EZLN warned COCOPA not to get involved in these proposals because it was clear that hard-line sectors within Congress and the government were trying to use COCOPA to carry its insulting messages, instead of recognizing its place as a collaborator in the peace process, as the EZLN did. Marcos said that Congress's official position coincided with Fox's ultimatum, making the decision on whether or not to continue the aggressive policy dependent on the EZLN's behavior with Congress. He described Congress's proposal as humiliating and unworthy, since it relegated their historic demand to the level of an appearance by a minor official. The EZLN would not accept a dialogue on such shameful terms, but rather insisted on speaking with all the legislators, including those who had openly expressed their opposition, and so asked to speak to the full Congress. The Zapatistas clarified that they would be speaking with Congress, and would speak with the executive branch only after it had fulfilled the three conditions.

### **Congress shuts its doors**

On March 14, PAN's national director and the coordinators of the PAN benches in the two houses of Congress rejected the EZLN's request to speak to the full Congress. They argued that the tribunal was for the exclusive use of the legislators, the executive in special cases, and foreign dignitaries at exceptional moments, and insisted that the EZLN's appearance before the full Congress was not negotiable.

The PAN director complained that the Government Secretary had called those who opposed COCOPA's bill "short-sighted." In Televisa's news program, when viewers were asked if the EZLN should be allowed to speak to the full Congress, 58% said yes. Xóchitl Gálvez, an indigenous member of Fox's Cabinet, said that the EZLN should be allowed to speak. The government became increasingly concerned that dialogue was getting bogged down.

COCOPA held a heated meeting. Some were offended that the EZLN had dismissed them, but others explained that the EZLN was only protecting them. Finally, COCOPA agreed to act in accord with the recognition that the Zapatistas had won. On March 15, the EZLN announced that it planned to send delegates to the European parliament. If the Mexican Congress refused to listen to them, perhaps the Europeans would feel differently. Mexican and European NGOs announced that they were negotiating an invitation for the EZLN to go to Geneva. Sami Nair, a member of the European Parliament, said he regretted the obstacles to talks and didn't understand the reasons behind them. He described what was happening in Mexico as extraordinary and innovative on a national, continental and global scale: a guerrilla movement had laid down its arms and asked to talk to Congress, and Congress should be honored to listen to them. Nair felt that the EZLN's appearance before Congress would strengthen democracy, and that if this dialogue were blocked by bureaucratic trifles and haggling, the result would be to radicalize armed movements around the world. In Madrid, the Mexican researcher Miguel León Portilla used the occasion of being awarded the Bartolomé de las Casas prize to call on the Mexican Congress to open its doors so that Mexico's indigenous people could freely express their demands.

Danielle Mitterrand asked Congress to allow the EZLN to speak to all the legislatures. Workers from several unions organized a march to demand that the floor be given to the EZLN, while Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas also demanded that Congress listen to the EZLN.

#### **"Our words are our arms"**

The 24 Zapatista leaders established their base at the National School of Anthropology and History. On a visit to the National Polytechnic University, they were cheered on by the inhabitants of poor neighborhoods they passed on the way. Marcos asked for an end to racism and denounced the PAN's Diego Fernández de Cevallos for holding attitudes befitting a feudal lord. Many recalled that the PAN leader had been one of Salinas de Gortari's most enthusiastic allies.

The EZLN met with students, women, indigenous groups, artists, workers, intellectuals and other organizations in civil society that expressed their support.

Gabriel García Márquez came to Mexico City to interview Marcos. Marcos described the importance of the Zapatista demonstration in the Zócalo in defeating racism, a goal that should now become state policy and educational policy and be taken up by all of society. He explained that the EZLN hoped to disband as an army and use words as its weapons instead. He summed up the main points he had made in the places they passed through: the Zapatistas were not presenting themselves as the ones who would lead all struggles, but rather were asking for help; a great deal of suffering lies just under the surface; no one

is going to fight in place of anyone else; new forms of organization must be developed, along with new forms of political action that would not be either those dictated by the political class or those proposed by the EZLN, but rather the product of a pluralist dialogue.

### **"Back to Chiapas!"**

On March 19, the EZLN released a statement. It recalled that the purpose of the march to Mexico City had been first, to speak with national civil society to gain its support in the struggle for the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights and culture in accord with COCOPA's bill; and second, to speak with Congress in order to explain the bill's advantages and the urgent importance of constitutional recognition of indigenous rights. With respect to the first objective, the indigenous people of all of Mexico had joined with the EZLN and the National Indigenous Congress in the struggle for recognition of its rights and had expressed their support for COCOPA's bill. Civil society had taken up their struggle and transformed it into a national demand and had overwhelmingly called for an end to racism and discrimination, the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights and fulfillment of the three conditions necessary for a resumption of talks between the government and the EZLN.

Public opinion and international civil society also joined in with this demand. But Fox's government, the EZLN argued, was more concerned about the march's media impact than the obvious popular support from all classes in the country that it had won in its passage through 12 states and its stay in the capital. Instead of giving the three signs required to take advantage of the EZLN leadership's stay in the capital to resume talks, Fox made statements without acting to back them up.

Congress had been held hostage by those who preferred to turn a blind eye to the national and international mobilization. The most backward legislators had openly defied the consensus and support that the EZLN and the National Indigenous Congress had won. For a full week, the EZLN had waited for Congress to accept its offer to talk. Those who had sequestered Congress replied with a disrespectful, unworthy proposal, whose only goal was to protect the pride and arrogance of the legislators who rejected dialogue.

The EZLN lamented that in Congress, the struggle for power on the part of conservative groups who confused the floor of Congress with an exclusive club had won out. But the indigenous people would not keep knocking on doors begging to be listened to. Asked to choose between politicians and the people, the EZLN chose the people. They would never bow their heads before politicians or accept humiliation or deceit. For all of these reasons, the EZLN announced that its stay in Mexico City had come to an end and it would begin its return to the mountains of southwest Mexico on March 23. It also said it would continue to

search for and build inclusive spaces for the participation of all those who wanted a new Mexico.

This announcement caused a true political crisis. Some legislators accused Marcos of not keeping his word, since he had apparently added a fourth condition to the original three: an appearance before Congress. The businesspeople who had demanded that the Zapatistas be imprisoned accused them of immaturity and wanting to have everything their way. Representatives in COCOPA complained of Congress' attitude towards the EZLN. The Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) said that Fox, the PAN and the PRI would pay the political costs of having hardened their positions. Cárdenas declared that it was a mistake for Congress not to open its doors to an issue of such great national importance as talks with the EZLN.

#### **"Marcos, both you and I want peace"**

On March 20, Fox asked Marcos to meet before he returned to Chiapas and called on Congress to find a way to receive the EZLN. He said he would give instructions for the remaining prisoners to be freed once he had received the corresponding list from the EZLN; that he was proceeding to issue a decree to convert the military installations of Guadalupe Tepeyac, Río Euseba and La Garrucha into development centers for the indigenous communities; and that he was sending Subcomandante Marcos a letter to formally request the meeting before his return to Chiapas in order to establish a dialogue that would lead to approval of the bill Fox had sent Congress—that is, COCOPA's bill—and to discuss plans for an ambitious and nationwide human development program for Mexico's ten million indigenous people. The Government Secretary said the President was putting no conditions on this dialogue. As a result, all the pressure was on Congress and the PAN.

In the letter Fox sent Marcos, he reiterated his desire to meet with him, without any condition, to talk. "Both you and I want peace, a just and lasting peace, with recognition of our indigenous brothers and sisters, with laws that respect and protect them, with development opportunities for each one of them... Neither you nor I want the indigenous people who live in our country to continue to suffer from marginalization, extreme poverty, exclusion and neglect... Marcos, these are different times. This is a time to talk, a time to be willing to reach agreements, a time to make the struggle count that you have waged for so many years and that every Mexican has waged... I am entirely willing. The conditions you have set that fall within the executive branch's authority are being fulfilled."

#### **"We're going, our words remain"**

Nonetheless, other signs Fox gave stirred up greater distrust. He said he was sending Marcos a letter but it took 36 hours to reach the Zapatistas, even though they were in Mexico City. He said he was giving instructions to free prisoners, but

in the following 24 hours no one was freed. He said that the army would withdraw from the three remaining positions, but 24 hours later no troops had been moved. Marcos noted that the conditions had not been met, that it had all been merely talk, and that the list of prisoners—located in Chiapas, Tabasco and Querétaro—that the President had requested was public knowledge. He also pointed out that the land occupied by the army belonged to the indigenous communities and not the government, so that the government could not make plans for the land unless it expropriated it, which would not be a propitious sign of peace.

The Zapatistas met with 60,000 university students from the National Autonomous University. A Nahua Indian from Guerrero who spoke at the event sent a message to the PAN's Diego Fernández de Cevallos warning him not to be mistaken, since the people would not surrender or sell out but would resist instead. If a national indigenous uprising were necessary to respond to "that Diego's" sabotage, it would take place. Another Zapatista commented that they were going, but that the words they had spoken would remain. Marcos denounced that it was a "crime" in Mexico to be a child, a poor person, an indigenous person, or a Zapatista. He insisted that respecting others meant "respecting oneself." "There are more than a few pains that unite us, but also many hopes that we recognize in one another," he said.

Congress deliberated for eight hours without reaching an agreement. They transferred their disagreement to the Zapatistas, and invited them to join in the search for a format for the talks. The PRD asked that the Zapatistas be allowed to speak. Some in the PRI also agreed, but wanted them to appear without masks. The PAN opposed it overwhelmingly, however, with 200 of its 207 legislators insisting that they not speak. The position taken by the PRI and the PAN, especially the PAN, blocked any agreement, which is why Marcos accused the PAN and PRI representatives of having aborted the dialogue.

In the afternoon of March 21, the army withdrew from the Río Eusebio encampment. There was no movement at the other two points. Fox denied that the government was seeking the EZLN's surrender. He saw the PAN Congress members as the main obstacle, and warned that if public institutions refused to listen and respond to people's demands, the whole country would receive the very bad signal that dialogue was not the way.

### **The House opens its doors**

In the afternoon of March 22, the EZLN representatives, with the support of thousands of groups and individuals, presented themselves before the doors of the House of Representatives. There were boos for the leaders of the PAN benches in the two chambers, and a figure representing Diego Fernández de

Cevallos was burned.

Meanwhile, the Senate was discussing whether to allow the Zapatistas to speak to it. The PAN senators along with eleven PRI senators voted no, outnumbering the PRD, Green Party and some PRI senators who voted in favor. Among the arguments put forth by the PAN senators were that the EZLN had humiliated COCOPA by using it as an errand boy, and had left a PRD senator with his words in his mouth, although the senator alluded to refused to get involved in that debate. The PRD accused those who had prevented the Zapatistas from talking to the Senate of being intolerant and opposed to dialogue and peace.

In the House of Representatives a similar discussion was taking place. The PAN argued that letting the Zapatistas take the tribunal would violate the law. The head of the PAN bench insisted that neither Marcos nor Fox ruled in the House, thus putting the two leaders on the same level. Nonetheless, with the votes of the PRD, the Labor Party, the Green Party and the majority of PRI representatives, the House decided 220 to 210 to let the Zapatistas defend the bill on indigenous rights and culture in the plenary hall. The votes against were cast by the PAN bench and some PRI representatives. In order not to violate one of Congress' internal regulations, it was decided that the meeting would be organized as a working meeting with the commissions of Government and Justice, Constitutional Affairs and Indigenous Affairs, and that all the representatives and senators who wanted to participate were invited. The EZLN accepted the House's invitation and decided to postpone their return to Chiapas. Marcos praised the sensibility of the legislators who supported the proposal and said it appeared that the doors to dialogue were beginning to open. He also recognized that the national and international mobilization had made the agreement on the talks possible. Discussions immediately started up between representatives of the House and the Zapatistas to determine the format of the meeting.

### **The president keeps his promises**

At a meeting with indigenous leaders in California, Fox reiterated his invitation to Marcos and said the Zapatistas should not doubt his word because he had met their demands. He said he wanted to talk with Marcos face to face, eye to eye, and work together with Congress rather than put down one condition after another. With respect to the prisoners, he said that the government of Chiapas had already freed 80 political prisoners and that the federal government would free the remaining ones in the days that followed. He said that not only Zapatista prisoners but also 200 other indigenous people from different ethnic groups and regions of the country had been freed. As for the community development centers he had promised, he said they would be formed in coordination with the communities so they could define their own development path.

The coordinator of the Citizens' Alliance in the President's Office, Rodolfo Elizondo, reiterated that the executive branch would continue to promote COCOPA's bill. He promised that the President would honor his word in fulfilling the conditions set by the Zapatistas, and emphasized that the President was willing to try any means possible to solve the conflict, unlike his two predecessors, who refused to do so.

#### **Fox: "Marcos' PR man"**

On March 23, legislators and the EZLN's liaison with Congress reached agreement on the format of the talks. That same day, when Fox stepped off the plane from California, he sent a message to the nation. He said the military was ready to withdraw. Using three legal procedures, he freed five Zapatista prisoners under the federal government's authority; another seven remained, but they were not under his immediate power. He didn't dismiss the idea of presenting Congress with an amnesty law. With respect to the three points where the army remained, he said that there were no longer any military personnel in La Garrucha, and in the other two, Guadalupe Tepeyac and Río Euseba, the withdrawal was underway. He signed a decree transforming the military installations into indigenous community development centers. With this step, the executive branch believed it had done all it needed to do to resume talks. Fox recognized, however, that racism and intolerance persisted in the country.

The head of the PAN bench in the Senate, Diego Fernández de Cevallos, accused Fox of being Marcos' PR man and promoter. He criticized the President for indulging the Zapatistas and letting them do what they wished. The PAN decided not to attend the meeting in the House where the Zapatistas would speak, although the PAN representatives on the commissions that were officially involved would be present. In the PAN convention, Fox said he governed for all Mexicans not just the PAN, that he did not want to create another state party, and that 89% of the population approved of his actions.

#### **House of Representatives, March 28, 2001**

On March 28, the EZLN and the National Indigenous Congress spoke to the legislators in the House of Representatives. The television channels transmitted this historic event live. Comandante Esther opened the Zapatistas' presentation. Marcos wasn't there, and Esther explained why: he had fulfilled his mission of bringing the Zapatista leadership to Congress. She recognized Fox's efforts to fulfill the first condition, and said that the Zapatista leadership had instructed Subcomandante Marcos, as head of the EZLN's troops, to keep them in the jungle and not occupy the sites that the army had abandoned. One did not respond to a gesture of peace with a gesture of war. She also invited civil society to verify compliance and said that Comandante Germán had instructions to get in contact with COCOPA and the government's Commissioner for Peace to guarantee that the other two conditions were also fulfilled.

Esther said that just as each party's bench in Congress had autonomy in decision-making without breaking up Congress, the autonomy demanded by the indigenous people did not imply a multitude of states within the Mexican state. Comandantes David, Zebedeo and Tacho also spoke for the Zapatistas, as did representatives of the National Indigenous Council. The congressional representatives asked questions about autonomy and indigenous customs and traditions. The Zapatista women commented that there were good and bad customs and traditions. Among the bad were customs that discriminated against women, which also existed among the indigenous people. They argued that their situation would be better if COCOPA's bill were approved. The National Indigenous Congress emphasized that they were not asking for special privileges but rather demanding constitutional recognition of what took place in the indigenous communities.

Although there were more indigenous people than legislators in the House, the government, the political parties, the television channels, the business sector, civil society and millions of Mexicans paid close attention to everything that happened in Congress that day when the indigenous people demanded to be heard and respected.

Fox applauded the Zapatistas' appearance before Congress, describing it as a national triumph. The Government Secretary described it as very constructive, something that would lead first to negotiations and finally to the peace accords. Xóchitl Gálvez was euphoric, saying that Mexico had entered into a new age, and that this was not a game in which some won and others lost but rather that everyone had come out a winner. Even the PAN leadership described the event as positive and recognized that the President's strategy had been risky but fruitful.

### **Mexico's triumph**

It was clear that democratic changes in the country can no longer be envisioned without taking the country's indigenous people into account. The dialogue in Congress was constructive and respected differences. Although Marcos didn't enter Congress, he did preside over the party organized in the street to thank the indigenous people, civil society and the thousands of others who made that historic day possible.

Defending COCOPA's bill before the legislature was the just the start. Another stage would come in the struggle to respect indigenous rights and culture and ensure the rights of everyone, especially women. The path to peace talks had been once again cleared.

People were very happy. They said goodbye confident that they were not

returning to Chiapas with empty hands but also fully aware that COCOPA's bill would go nowhere without social pressure. That same day, Comandante Germán contacted the government's Commissioner for Peace to accredit himself as the EZLN's messenger.

### **Back to Chiapas**

After the appearance in Congress, the government's Commissioner for Peace, Luis H. Álvarez, went to Chiapas to verify the withdrawal of the military troops from the last three positions. To ensure that paramilitary groups did not try to invade the unoccupied bases, the installations were handed over to civil society organizations and the various churches that work in the area.

At the end of March, the Government Secretary appeared before the legislators to defend COCOPA's bill. Many in the PRI and the PAN remain convinced that the bill will have to be amended. At the beginning of April, COCOPA called for people to work in solidarity to ensure that the law on indigenous rights becomes a reality.

On the way back to Chiapas, the Zapatista caravan spent the night in Juchitán on the last day of March. On April 1, the Zapatista leaders spoke before a crowd of indigenous people in San Cristóbal de las Casas, then began a tour of the communities to let people know the results of the march to Mexico City. They carried the "staff of command" of the 28 indigenous communities that had presented them with this honor. They said they had fulfilled their mission to take the indigenous people's voices to Congress, and also the goal of meeting with representatives of Mexico's 44 indigenous peoples. The indigenous people's voice was also heard through the media, and only a few had "twisted" their words. Marcos said that the war was a bit further away and peace with dignity a bit closer, and that a new phase was beginning. He said that a real opportunity for peace with justice and dignity had opened up, and that people would have to take care to ensure that it would come. In the cooperative of Morelia, in Aguascalientes, Marcos paid homage to the Zapatista dead: 23 Zapatista comandantes had gone on the march because that was the number of Zapatistas killed in the 1994 uprising. Marcos celebrated that fact that the delegation had fulfilled its three missions: speaking with Congress, speaking with civil society and pressuring for the three signs it had asked the government to give. On April 4, the Zapatistas finished up the first round of meetings to evaluate the march in the communities, with information and a celebration in each one.

### **A necessary criticism of the Zapatistas**

The Zapatistas' journey of over 3,000 kilometers and their two-week stay in Mexico City revealed the movement's great qualities as well as some of its weaknesses. Among the things that stood out are the important role they play as spokespeople for all those who are marginalized in Mexico. Overcoming the

formal pretexts so they could speak to Congress was another great achievement, so that the voices of the excluded could be heard. Another triumph is having gotten the peace process back on course.

Nonetheless, although the EZLN is an indigenous movement, it continues to depend heavily on a *mestizo*, Marcos, who has not found a way to correct this limitation despite his awareness of it. The indigenous comandantes say that they lead in accord with the communities' instructions and that Marcos is only a subcomandante, but it is clear that they depend on his directions. The great affection and great hatred aroused by the class conflicts in society focus on him. It also seems that Marcos himself, despite his qualities, does not fully appreciate the extent of the political changes that have taken place in the country with the fall of the PRI and the weakening of presidential power. This is evident when he demands that the executive branch of the federal government carry out actions that correspond to other powers, like approving a law or freeing prisoners under the authority of the states.

The Zapatistas have said that they welcome criticism and debate. Throughout the course of their actions, they have shown great judgment and skill, but have also made mistakes—in their relation to election processes, for example, or their perception of certain social movements, or their evaluation of the contradictions in certain situations. Thus far, most of the Left in Mexico has not dared to criticize the Zapatistas, repeating that practice held when people chose not to criticize the socialist bloc, arguing that to do so would give ammunition to the enemy.

### **A global symbol born in Mexico**

Despite these criticisms, the balance of what the Zapatistas have achieved in this stage of the struggle is extraordinarily valuable. They have won the popular support of a broad, diverse segment of the Mexican population, who see openings in what has happened and new possibilities to build alternatives. In Mexico and from Mexico, the Zapatista movement has become a global symbol in contrast to neoliberal globalization, a symbol of the strength that can grow out of weakness and put economic and political power in check

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### **The Indigenous Law: A Mocking Step Backwards**

*The law approved by Congress, drafted by lawyers to protect landowners, is a mockery to Mexico's indigenous peoples and will not settle the country's historical debt to its roots.*

**Jorge Alonso**

At the end of April, the Mexican Senate and House of Representatives passed a law on indigenous rights and culture. Around the world, people sympathizing with the indigenous cause first heard the news as a great legal victory and the culmination of efforts headed up by the Zapatistas' recent March for Dignity. But it soon became clear that the law is a big step backwards.

The law was immediately rejected by the Indigenous National Congress and by the EZLN, which further announced that it would not resume talks with Vicente Fox's government. The Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) and other progressive social and political forces also rejected the law, which has not yet been promulgated or ratified in Mexico's state congresses. Since the ruling National Action Party (PAN) and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) hold the majority there, it may happen, but the legislature's Harmony and Peace Commission (COCOPA) declared that it would fight to amend the legislation.

Three bills were on the table before the controversial law was approved. The first was drafted by COCOPA, which took up the indigenous people's ideas and feelings and the points agreed to in the San Andrés Accords between the EZLN and the government of former President Ernesto Zedillo. The second was Zedillo's bill, which made major changes to COCOPA's. And the third was the bill now approved, which was recently drawn up by the Senate.

The following analysis of the law's four especially controversial points, comparing the letter and spirit of the three bills, was written by Sergio Rodríguez Lascano and published in *La Jornada* on April 27, 2001.

### **Public right or public interest?**

The first controversial point is that in COCOPA's bill, indigenous communities were considered as "entities of public right." In Zedillo's bill this concept was dropped and indigenous communities were defined as "subjects of public interest." The approved law recognizes the communities as "entities of public interest." Between COCOPA and Zedillo, the Senate chose Zedillo. What are the implications of these different terms? COCOPA's bill, by recognizing Mexico's indigenous communities as subjects of public right, acknowledged them as part of the state. The article taken from Zedillo's bill, now law, treats them like a National Popular Subsistence (CONASUPO) outlet, considered "in the public interest." This contradicts the spirit of paragraph 1, article 2 of the same law, which states, "The nation is pluri-cultural, originally founded by its indigenous peoples." How can the law affirm such a principle and then grant indigenous communities a legal status similar to that of a CONASUPO store?

### **The concept of "territory" is excised**

The second point revolves around the concept of territory. COCOPA's bill

established the right to "collectively accede to the use and enjoyment of the natural resources in their lands and territories, understood as the totality of the habitat used and occupied by the indigenous people, except that under the direct authority of the nation."

Zedillo's bill said, "Accede to the use and enjoyment of the natural resources in their lands, respecting the forms, norms and limitations established for property by this Constitution and the law." The approved law states, "Accede, with respect to the forms and norms of property and land ownership established in this Constitution and in the relevant laws, as well as the rights acquired by third parties or by members of the community, to the preferential use and enjoyment of the natural resources in the places that the communities inhabit and occupy, except those corresponding to strategic areas in terms of this Constitution." In this point, there is no doubt that Zedillo's bill counted more than COCOPA's. The concept of "territory," key to understanding and defining autonomy, was cut from the text. Excluding this concept severely limits the geographic space in which autonomy can be exercised. The law also violates the agreement reached at San Andrés that all issues related to land ownership would be discussed in the third round of negotiations on justice and development.

### **The law limits the scope of the right to association**

The third point has to do with the scope of the right to association, essential in reestablishing communities that have been torn apart by history. COCOPA's bill stated, "Indigenous peoples' free self-determination will be respected in each of the spheres and levels in which they exercise their autonomy; this may include one or more indigenous communities, in accord with the particular specific circumstances of each state. The indigenous communities as entities of public right and the municipalities that recognize that they belong to an indigenous community may freely associate in order to coordinate their actions." Zedillo's bill stated, "The communities of indigenous peoples as entities of public interest and the municipalities with majority indigenous populations may freely associate in order to coordinate their actions, always respecting the political-administrative division in each state." The approved law states, "The indigenous communities, within the municipal sphere, may coordinate and associate in the terms and for the effects established in this law." On this point, the approved law backpedals even from Zedillo's bill. It eliminates the possibility of associating on a regional level and limits association to existing municipalities, thus annulling a mechanism representing the only guarantee that indigenous peoples may reestablish themselves after more than 500 years of fragmentation and marginalization. Without this guarantee, the law is a mockery to indigenous peoples.

### **A serious step back: Only "when feasible"**

The fourth controversial point has to do with political participation. COCOPA's bill stated, "In establishing the territorial demarcation of uninominal districts and

pluri-nominal constituencies, the location of indigenous communities must be taken into account to ensure their political representation and participation in national life." Zedillo's bill stated, "In establishing the territorial demarcation of the uninominal electoral districts, the location of indigenous communities must be taken into account to ensure their political representation and participation in national life."

The approved law states, in the third transitory and thus non-binding provision, "To establish the territorial demarcation of the uninominal districts, the location of indigenous peoples and communities must be taken into account, when feasible, to favor their political participation." Here again, the approved law steps back even from Zedillo's bill in two respects. Not only does it refuse to grant their own specific representation to indigenous peoples, the original foundation of the nation, but it also no longer establishes that the location of the indigenous peoples must always be taken into account. That is now qualified with the term "when feasible."

### **A joke in bad taste and a pending subject**

When Ernesto Zedillo presented his proposal, he said that it took up 85% of COCOPA's bill. The problem then was that the missing 15% included the core of the indigenous autonomy project. Worse yet, the law approved by Congress only takes up 80%, and the additional 5% represents the very backbone of indigenous autonomy. These omissions cannot be replaced with abstract, general statements about autonomy or a paternalistic government proposal (the law's entire section B), whose inclusion in the Constitution is shameful not least because it was taken straight from the political platform of the former state party, the PRI, despite the Mexican people's rejection of that system on July 2 of last year.

It is truly painful that the Senate—which refused to listen to the Zapatistas and the Indigenous National Congress members—as well as the House of Representatives have again turned their backs on the indigenous peoples of Mexico. The belief that the law they approved will heal a historical wound is not only false, it is a joke in bad taste. If this law is actually promulgated, appearances will have been maintained but the serious problems that over 10 million indigenous Mexicans face will not have been addressed and the rights and culture of the indigenous peoples will remain a pending subject for the nation.

Manifesto of the  
Indigenous National Congress

*On May 1, the Indigenous National Congress issued this statement rejecting the approved law, whose complete text we reproduce here.*

*CONSIDERING that 509 years of history have meant exploitation, discrimination and poverty for our first peoples; and that the Mexican nation, born of our seed and our hearts, has been built by the powerful, denying our existence and our supreme right to walk our own path, which does not mean renouncing the country founded with our blood.*

*REMEMBERING that the San Andrés Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture, signed on February 16, 1996, correspond only to the first round of negotiations between the federal government and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, and are pledges and proposals that both parties agreed to in order to guarantee a new relationship between the country's indigenous peoples, society and the state. This set of proposals, which was sent to the national forums for debate and decision making, were taken up by the Harmony and Peace Commission (COCOPA)—made up of legislators from the various national political parties—in a bill it presented to reform the Constitution. Both the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) and the Indigenous National Congress accepted the bill on November 29, 1996, not without noting its omissions but recognizing it as the first step towards constitutional recognition of our rights. RECOGNIZING that the San Andrés Accords, as well as their legal constitutional interpretation expressed in the constitutional reform bill drafted by COCOPA, reflect the majority consensus of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, the government, and national society on the issue of indigenous rights and culture.*

*CONSIDERING that the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights and culture in accord with COCOPA's bill as one of the three signs demanded by the EZLN is a firm step towards achieving a just and dignified peace in Chiapas.*

*CONSIDERING that the march of 1,111 Zapatistas to Mexico City in September 1997, and the results of the National Consultation on Indigenous Rights and Culture conducted in March 1999, ratified the national consensus represented by the San Andrés Accords and the constitutional reform bill drafted by COCOPA.*

*REMEMBERING that our peoples, gathered together in the Third Indigenous National Congress held in Nurío, Michoacán, on March 2-4 of this year, unanimously agreed to demand constitutional recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples as subjects of right, as laid out in COCOPA's bill; the constitutional recognition of our inalienable right to free self-determination, expressed through autonomy as part of the Mexican state; and the constitutional recognition of our ancestral lands and territories that make up the whole of our habitat in which we reproduce our material and spiritual existence as peoples.*

*OBSERVING also that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, both with the rank of supreme law of the land, establish that all peoples have the right to free*

*self-determination and that by virtue of this right may freely establish their political condition and provide at the same time for their economic, social and cultural development.*

*OBSERVING that Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, also ranked as a supreme law of the land according to our Constitution, establishes the right of our peoples to assume control of their own institutions, ways of life and economic development, and to maintain and strengthen their identities, languages, territories and natural resources in accord with the law of the State in which we live.*

*DENOUNCING that once again our words and our views have served only for the mockery and cruelty of the powerful; that the primary voice of our peoples and the majority of Mexican society expressed in February, March and April of the year 2001 in the March for Indigenous Dignity led by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation is not being heard by those who claim to represent the popular will; that the political and economic interests of those who wield power are seeking, once again, to relegate to the end of the line the very first peoples of these lands, our peoples, the indigenous peoples, disregarding our fundamental rights, leaving us exposed to dispossession, ethnocide and forced integration into a national project that is foreign to our history and our will; that they are now trying to snatch everything away from every last one of us, women and men. The peoples, communities and organizations that make up the Indigenous National Congress*

*state*

*that:*

*FIRST: We resolutely reject the indigenous law approved by the Congress of the Union, because it not only violates the popular will and is unconstitutional, but also is profoundly regressive in ignoring the fundamental rights of our peoples, established in the Constitution itself as well as the international treaties, accords and agreements that Mexico has ratified and that are the supreme law of the land as established in our constitutional order. In particular, the approved law incorporates some concepts and rights guaranteed by ILO Convention 169 in a partial and distorted form, and omits many other fundamental rights.*

*SECOND: The indigenous law approved by those who claim to represent the popular will does not incorporate either the spirit or the letter of the San Andrés Accords and substantially changes the constitutional reform bill drafted by COCOPA, by establishing that indigenous peoples and communities will be recognized according to state laws and constitutions, which in effect implies that our peoples and our rights will not be constitutionally recognized. The approved law is an obstacle to the resumption of talks between the federal government and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation aimed at achieving a just and dignified peace. The legislators' vote was not a vote for peace.*

*THIRD: This constitutional counter-reform makes a mockery of our peoples and is a great affront to Mexican society, which decided to back our just cause, because it leaves the definition of indigenous autonomy and the mechanisms for its realization in the hands of the individual states, nullifying our right to free self-determination expressed in autonomy within the framework of the Mexican state, as well as our peoples' aspirations for their full restoration.*

*FOURTH: The approved law reduces the application of our autonomous rights to the municipal level. It does not resolve the issue of our access to and administration of the municipal resources that correspond to our peoples or enable the establishment of authentic indigenous municipal reservations.*

*FIFTH: The constitutional counter-reform grants indigenous communities, in the form of charity and pity, the status of entities of public interest rather than subjects of public right, as was established in COCOPA's bill so that, within the structure of the state and with their status fully recognized, the indigenous communities and the municipalities that recognize that they belong to an indigenous people can freely associate to coordinate actions. The constitutional counter-reform fails to guarantee the free self-determination of indigenous peoples at each of the levels and arenas in which we exercise our autonomy, in accord with the particular, specific circumstances of each state.*

*SIXTH: In the approved law, the possibility of redistricting the territories inhabited by indigenous peoples is omitted, and the fact that the territorial reorganization of the uninominal districts to encourage the political participation of indigenous peoples is relegated to a non-binding article of law only affirms the illusory, regressive nature of the constitutional reform that has been imposed.*

*SEVENTH: The law approved by Congress ignores the legal framework already established by ILO Convention 169 relative to our peoples' territories, and fails to recognize our lands and territories in accord with the concepts laid out in that Convention. The term "territories" is insultingly replaced by "places," which continues to despoil us of the immediate physical space for the exercise of our autonomy and the material and spiritual reproduction of our existence.*

*EIGHTH: The indigenous law they are now seeking to impose upon our peoples and society reaffirms and complements the individualist concept that inspired the counter-reform of article 27 of the Constitution in 1992, since it does not recognize our constitutional right to collectively determine the use and enjoyment of the natural resources in our lands and territories. To the contrary, it regressively restricts our exclusive right in this matter and converts it into a simple right of preference, limited by the forms and norms of property and land ownership already established by the Constitution and by the rights that have been acquired—generally, through illegal means—by third parties over our*

*peoples. We have demanded recognition of our right of access to the natural resources found in the entire habitat occupied by our peoples. The legislators, however, chose to limit rights that we have already won, in fact and in law, through primordial titles and agrarian resolutions and the sweat and blood of our ancestors.*

*NINTH: The approved law, violating the format of the talks established between the federal government and the EZLN, attempts to dodge the agrarian question by using the language contained in the current article 27 of the Constitution, without considering that our peoples strongly opposed the reform of that article and forgetting that agrarian issues are to be discussed in the round of negotiations dealing with welfare and development.*

*TENTH: The indigenous law also establishes a section "B" in the second constitutional article the text that is not only inappropriate as constitutional text, but also reproduces the indigenist policies of ethnocide that the Mexican state has historically applied by defining a series of paternalistic aid policies that the legislators, in an authoritarian way, have decided will serve our peoples, when what we demand is effective recognition of indigenous peoples so we can define our own development priorities.*

*ELEVENTH: Today as before, we say: Never again a Mexico without us! Never again will the voice of the indigenous peoples be silent in the face of injustice! In this hour of national importance, we ratify and raise up this cry of protest against the new aggression represented by the recent constitutional counter-reform. We will make everyone see that a true, just, dignified Mexico will exist only when the rights of our people are fully recognized.*

*For these reasons, we call on all of the country's indigenous peoples, communities and organizations to unite in our beliefs, our paths and our voices in order to demand the constitutional recognition of our rights as laid out in COCOPA's bill, and organize every corner of the country to mobilize and resist this new mockery by the few who control power in this country and have kidnapped this Congress of the Union and the will of the nation through the most reactionary positions that exist in our country, represented by Diego Fernandez de Cevallos and Manuel Bartlett. We call on people to exercise the rights of political sovereignty that article 39 of the Constitution grants us, since the established legal order has clearly been weakened by the unconstitutional law that was approved. We will use all existing legal means, nationally and internationally, to ensure that the voice of the very first peoples, the indigenous peoples, is heard and our presence felt by the entire nation.*

*We call on urban and rural workers and on the entire Mexican people to organize a massive national movement that will lead to unity of action and at the same*

*time allow us to build consensus and overcome weaknesses so we can gain constitutional recognition of the rights of our peoples and the cancellation of the neoliberal policies that are now destroying the whole nation. Never again a Mexico without us! For the full restoration of our peoples!*

Mexico City, May 1st, 2001

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## Peace in Chiapas: The Curse of Sisyphus?

*Mexico's new Indigenous Law legally defines native peoples as objects of protection rather than autonomous subjects of rights, including the right to free self-determination. They will have to begin again, to keep fighting.*

**Jorge Alonso**

Sisyphus was condemned to push a huge boulder to the top of a hill. When, after enormous effort, he was finally on the verge of completing his task, the boulder slipped away from him and rolled back down to the bottom. Sisyphus had to start all over again, without ever seeing his efforts bear fruit. In analyzing this myth, existentialist philosopher Albert Camus proposed one solution: we had to imagine Sisyphus happy at this task. After the March for Dignity, it seemed that the Zapatistas were on the verge of winning an important victory. But near the culmination of the long process, Congress frustrated their efforts by refusing to truly recognize indigenous rights. All the progress was undone. Now, in the age of globalized critiques, perhaps a better solution would be for Sisyphus to find new forms of resistance and new ways to break the curse.

### "We're closer to peace"

In early April, the Catalan Manuel Castells, author of *The Information Age* gave the Julio Cortázar lecture in Guadalajara. He argued that the Zapatista movement is one of the most innovative in the world today because it combines an affirmation of identity, a savvy media strategy and the ability to form alliances with diverse groups outside of its identity. For these reasons, the movement has much to teach us. It has not only become an important actor within the country, but has an impact on social action in the rest of the world as well. Castells predicted that the cultural and political forms of action tried out by the Zapatistas would be used elsewhere too.

After the March for Dignity, the Zapatistas returned to the jungle. They held 80 public events during that march, engaging in an intense outreach campaign with public opinion and, most important, forging closer ties to the rest of the Mexican people. The march was an important peaceful action. It proved that this was an army that did not use arms or carry out terrorist acts, but rather spoke,

communicated, sought to convince and win over through words. Comandante Tacho summed up the march's achievements by noting that their hopes after it ended were higher than when they began their fight, and that they were happy to find that thousands of indigenous people were with them. "We can see that we're closer to peace." Marcos emphasized a different issue in summarizing the march's achievements: "Now people won't be ashamed to be indigenous." After the march, the responsibility for peace lay in Congress hands.

The European Parliament urged Mexico's Congress to approve the bill on indigenous rights and culture drafted by its pluralist Peace and Harmony Commission (COCOPA). And on April 4, Mexico's Government Secretary Santiago Creel met with civil society organizations—including Human Rights Watch—in Washington and promised that COCOPA's bill would be approved shortly. He said that the government was proceeding to free the Zapatista prisoners under its jurisdiction, and working to free those under the authority of state governments. COCOPA analyzed the situation of Zapatista prisoners in Querétaro and Tabasco, and traveled there to resolve the remaining problems on site. COCOPA also lobbied for the bill it had drafted, which is the one President Fox sent to the Senate. The Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) announced that it would not only support the bill, but also introduce some legal clarifications to improve it. Everything seemed to indicate that peace was just around the corner. In the second half of April, the army withdrew from the last two military posts occupied in Chiapas: Guadalupe Tepeyac and Río Euseba. The Commissioner for Peace in Chiapas, Luis H. Alvarez, and the EZLN's official representative, Fernando Yáñez, witnessed the withdrawal. They agreed that the communities would determine the projects to be implemented by the Social Development Department in the places the military had occupied.

Nonetheless, although many civil society groups urged Congress to approve the law the President sent, some spoke out against it. In March, big business representatives ran an ad demanding that the legislators not approve COCOPA's bill, and in April members of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the former state party, and ranchers from Chiapas reiterated that demand.

### **Misinformation and prejudice**

The PRI legislators, using ex-President Zedillo's frequent trick, announced that they would make no substantial changes to the law but merely revise some legal details. Once people saw where these revisions were heading, however, they realized that the very core of the law would be mutilated. A majority of PRI and ruling National Action Party (PAN) legislators were acting on misinformation and prejudice. Some of the most important confusions had to do with the terms "peoples" and "territory," seen by members of the PRI and PAN as closely linked to land ownership. Specialists on the issue tried to explain the terms.

The concept of an "indigenous people" as a subject of the right to self-determination and autonomy does not refer to specific forms of land ownership, but rather to ethnic identity. The concept has been defined in International Labor Organization Convention 169 as well as COCOPA's bill. The members of an original people may be community members with common ownership of the land, small landowners or even landless and still be indigenous. The concept of "indigenous community" is likewise not associated with any particular form of land ownership. In some communities, the dominant form of property has been communal, in others small privately owned parcels, and in yet others diverse forms of land ownership coexist side by side. Community members do not necessarily have planting land. Women, young people, new residents and others are considered part of the community whether or not they own land. The same is true of many migrants who live and work outside the community but continue to fulfill their community responsibilities. Specialists in the field explained that "indigenous people" and "community" are not the same thing. Many members of an indigenous people may live in communities, but others live in cities and even in the United States without ceasing to be indigenous. Indigenous peoples cannot be reduced to the communities in which some of their members live.

Other issues also came into the debate: collective rights, language and education. Language and its discursive model constitute the organizing nucleus and symbolic reference point of ethnic identity. Only recognition of a people's collective right to create and control its educational institutions, and to expand its language and normative systems to the spheres of prestige and power—public administration, justice, the media and education within their territories—can satisfy that people's collective need for cultural reproduction as an expression of its linguistic and educational autonomy. All of this is required for the construction of a multicultural Mexico.

### **A bitter day of mourning**

Despite the many explanations and clarifications offered, the racial prejudice deeply rooted in most legislators muddied the discussion even before the legislative debate began.

On April 21, the PRI presented its own indigenous legislation. Two days later, PAN senator Diego Fernández de Cevallos explained that "positive" additions, deletions and revisions had been made to COCOPA's bill, going beyond the original proposal in many respects. The PAN and PRI justified their significant changes to COCOPA's text as a way to prevent later conflicts. On April 25, the Senate unanimously approved the altered indigenous law. The PRD bench voted in favor of it in general, pleased to have established the right to autonomy and free self-determination, which the PRI and PAN had staunchly opposed. Later events would show, however, that this favorable vote was a tactical mistake.

On April 28, the majority of the House of Representatives approved the text sent by the Senate without changing so much as a comma. The law was passed by an alliance of the PRI, the PAN and the Green Party, while the PRD, the Labor Party, four PRI representatives from Oaxaca and an independent PRI representative voted against. The PRD representatives described it as a bitter day for Mexico and a day of mourning for the ten million indigenous Mexicans.

### **COCOPA's bill substantially altered**

The new law, which has a very different structure from the bill proposed by COCOPA, is known as the Bartlett-Fernández de Cevallos Law for the PRI and PAN senators behind the new draft. The same Salinas and Zedillo teams responsible for reforming article 27 of the Constitution in a way detrimental to small farmers and blocking COCOPA's initiative in 1996 advised Bartlett.

The new law is deceptive because, while verbally recognizing the Mexican state as multicultural, it does not change the political and legal structure accordingly. For example, it acknowledges the right of a people to autonomy, but does not give this right a territorial expression. It also does not define the mechanisms through which autonomy may be exercised, referring only to communities, while COCOPA's bill emphasized that indigenous peoples are the subjects of rights and that communities form part of an indigenous people. The law cut the paragraph in COCOPA's bill that stated: "Indigenous peoples' self-determination will be respected in each of the spheres and levels in which they exercise their autonomy; this may include one or more indigenous communities, in accord with the particular specific circumstances of each state." According to this definition, indigenous peoples have the right to exercise their autonomy in the economic, political, social and legal spheres at all levels, from the community to the municipality to the region. By eliminating it, Congress effectively annulled the mechanisms to make autonomy possible and effective.

In COCOPA's proposal, consciousness of indigenous identity was the basic criterion for determining who would be eligible for the legislation on indigenous rights and culture. The approved law undermines the essence of that proposal, however. In reality, it only enunciates rights rather than recognizes them, relegating their establishment to secondary laws or state constitutions. Now the authorities have the discretion to determine when an indigenous people exists.

For these reasons, the approved legislation is not only insufficient but also contrary to the interests of indigenous peoples. Leaving it up to the states to define the characteristics of indigenous autonomy and mechanisms for exercising autonomy in itself annuls the rights of indigenous peoples to free self-determination and establishes a system contrary to that agreed upon in the San Andrés Accords. It limits a right that should by nature be established in the Constitution.

Another of the serious problems with the new law is that it omits the term "territory" and replaces it with "places," thus robbing indigenous peoples of the physical space in which to exercise autonomy. It does not recognize their constitutional right of collective access to the use and enjoyment of the natural resources found in their lands and territories. It is left as a mere right of preference, limited by the forms and norms of property and land ownership already established in the Constitution and by the rights already acquired in indigenous territories by third parties (generally through illegal means). On this point, the law Congress approved is even more regressive than the PRI's bill, which stipulated that indigenous peoples have the right of access to the use and enjoyment of the natural resources in their lands. This time, the opinions of the lawyers and big landowners in the PRI and PAN held sway, and the word "collective" and the concept of "territory" were cut from the law.

Thus, the new law ignores ILO Convention 169, which establishes that indigenous peoples' rights to their property and to the possession, use, administration and conservation of their natural resources shall be recognized, and that when these resources belong to the nation, consultation forms must be agreed upon for their exploitation. By failing to recognize the right of indigenous peoples and communities to collective use and enjoyment of the natural resources in their lands and territories and by limiting their right to use and administrate them, the law ignores an issue vital to the very existence of indigenous peoples and to the exercise of their rights.

**Not subjects of decision  
but objects of protection**

COCOPA's bill stated that indigenous communities are to be considered entities "of public right," but the new law, following Zedillo's proposal, considers them to be "of public interest." The difference between these two terms is enormous. As subjects of public right, indigenous peoples have a place within the organizational structure of the state. As entities of public interest, however, they are objects of state protection. The change in concept robs them of the real possibility of exercising the right to autonomy, which they supposedly have a state-protected right to do. Since the new law considers them objects in need of state protection rather than autonomous decision-making subjects, it includes a series of measures, congruent with the simulation of autonomy, that reproduce the authoritarian and paternalistic charitable policies already being imposed on the indigenous communities.

With respect to the right to association, the law backpedals even from Zedillo's proposal, since it eliminates the possibility of associating on a regional level. Association is limited to the municipal sphere, which prevents peoples that have been split apart by municipal boundaries from reestablishing themselves. Even

the possibility of redrawing municipal boundaries in the territories where indigenous peoples are located was omitted. The law also does not allow indigenous peoples to elect their authorities, only representatives to town hall meetings. Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination in each of the spheres and levels in which they should be able to exercise their autonomy was thus not guaranteed. And with respect to redrawing electoral districts to encourage indigenous participation, the law does not state that the location of the indigenous peoples must be taken into account, as proposed in both COCOPA's and Zedillo's bills, but only that this should be done "when feasible." As this is a transitory article with no established dates for putting it into effect, it may never be applied.

### **Huge steps backwards**

The law omits the judicial branch's obligation to validate resolutions issued by indigenous peoples' authorities. Rights apparently recognized at a constitutional level are subordinated to the discretion of lesser authorities. No substantive rights in the area of education are recognized, with full responsibility for guaranteeing education left to the state. Thus, the new law does not recognize cultural differences. Another point agreed to at San Andrés was that indigenous peoples would have their own communications media, but the new law merely states that this must accommodate to the legislation already in effect in this area, leaving indigenous peoples to compete with the big communications consortiums on extremely unequal terms. And to top it all off, the new law establishes as a specific right of indigenous peoples something that is in fact an obligation of all Mexicans, to conserve the environment.

Immediately after Congress passed the law, it was reported that several states with indigenous populations already have legislation that is more progressive. The approved law falls far short of indigenous rights laws in Oaxaca, Chihuahua, Nayarit, Veracruz, Campeche and other states, which do speak of territories and the right to association, and recognize the communities' legal status and right to collective access to their natural resources.

When PRD representatives pointed out that the Zapatistas would not accept the new law, the heads of the PRI and PAN benches responded disdainfully that this would be the executive branch's problem, not theirs. But that is not quite true. Since the law involves constitutional reforms and thus must be approved by the majority of state congresses, the debate extends to the states as well. In fact, it touches the whole nation.

### **Zapatistas: resistance and rebellion**

The Zapatistas responded immediately to the new law, declaring that it impedes the exercise of indigenous rights. They rejected it and broke off talks they had

begun with Fox's government, arguing that the law was offensive to indigenous peoples and that its approval had closed the door to talks and peace. They added that the new legislation does not begin to respond to the demands of Mexico's indigenous peoples, the Indigenous National Council, the EZLN or the national and international civil society that had mobilized around it. The law betrays the San Andrés Accords both in spirit and on specific issues and contradicts COCOPA's bill on the most important points: autonomy and self-determination, indigenous peoples as subjects of political right, land and territories, use and enjoyment of natural resources, election of municipal authorities and the right to regional association, among others.

To the Zapatistas, the law confirmed that indigenous peoples would continue to be treated as objects of charity and disdain. They felt that the name it truly deserves is the "constitutional recognition of the rights and culture of landowners and racists." They saw the law as a way of sabotaging the incipient rapprochement between the federal government and the EZLN, as it betrayed hopes for a negotiated settlement to the war in Chiapas and revealed the political class's utter failure to respond to people's demands. The new law does not resolve a single one of the causes that had led to the Zapatista uprising, and by invalidating the dialogue and negotiation process gives the various armed groups in Mexico reason to keep their arms.

### **Resisting derision**

Marcos announced that, given this new situation, the Zapatistas would remain in clandestinity, resistance and rebellion, although they could already see what was coming: an extensive campaign to present the Zapatistas as intransigent, a stepping up of military and police pressure and the reactivation of paramilitary groups. The Zapatistas called on civil society to demand that the Mexican government reconsider the legislative mockery.

The Indigenous National Congress (CNI) opposed the recently approved legislation for all the same reasons. Its members lamented that they were not understood despite all they had done to make themselves understood. The majority of senators and representatives wanted things to remain the same. On May 1, the CNI issued a statement (see last issue of *envío*) denouncing that the powerful had once again used indigenous peoples' words and sentiments to mock and deride them. They described the new law as regressive since it fails to recognize the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples established in the Constitution itself and in international conventions, pacts and treaties signed by Mexico. They announced that they would refuse to be mocked by the few who hold power and had kidnapped Congress. Meanwhile, the guerrilla group ERPI called on indigenous peoples to establish new autonomous municipalities.

### **Fox: First applause, then distance**

President Fox's first response to the Senate unanimously approving a text significantly changed from the bill he had sent and a majority of PAN and PRI representatives approving that text in the House was to praise the legislative branch for approving an indigenous law. He described the law as one more step towards definitive peace accords, a step that would allow rapid progress to be made in the development of peoples and communities.

The President was still celebrating when he learned that the indigenous people had rejected the law. At that point, he asked the Indigenous National Congress not to demonstrate but to talk. When the Zapatistas, interpreting his praise as a bad sign, broke off their talks with the government, Fox called an emergency meeting of his Cabinet members who had formed a Chiapas group. In the wake of the group's discussions, the government agreed that the law needed to go deeper into issues such as autonomy and self-determination, recognition of indigenous communities as subjects of public right and natural resource use. At the same time, it began to emphasize that approval of the law was the legislature's responsibility, and that the executive branch had fulfilled all of its own commitments.

The President's indigenous affairs representative, indigenous businesswoman Xóchitl Gálvez, criticized the new law the most cogently. She said it was not what she would have wanted, and attributed the votes cast by the senators and the majority of representatives to a profound lack of understanding of autochthonous peoples. Other government bodies like the National Indigenous Institute accused the legislators of being afraid to recognize indigenous autonomy. Officials in this institute presented a carefully prepared comparative study showing that the new law differed significantly from COCOPA's proposal and the San Andrés Accords.

### **Tension returns to Chiapas**

The government's Peace Commissioner, Luis H. Alvarez, agreed that the law should be reformed, and asked the EZLN to reflect on its decision to suspend contact with the government. Without demonstrating it, and against textual evidence, he denied that the approved law was closer to the PRI's bill than to COCOPA's.

The governor of Chiapas strongly criticized the new law, arguing that it does not address indigenous demands or contribute to peace. He described it as "retrograde" and a "product of the triumph of conservative groups," accusing the legislators of overlooking the erosion of the Mexican army and the impoverishing of the indigenous peoples. Since the governor had been a member of COCOPA when the bill was drafted, he knew very well that the legislature had left important elements of it aside. He explained that Congress had failed to include three essential sets of issues from the San Andrés Accords: those aimed at

establishing a new relationship between indigenous peoples and the nation; those aimed at eradicating the attitudes and practices, both in everyday life and in the public sphere, that create subordination and inequality; and those that enable the rights and guarantees related to use and enjoyment of territory and communal political self-management established in ILO Convention 169. He feared it would be difficult to solve the conflict in Chiapas any time soon: if the legal situation was problematic, the political situation was even more so. And this was in fact the case; tension returned to Chiapas and the army again increased its patrols.

**PAN** **and** **PRI:**  
**Conflicts and struggles**

The majority of senators insisted that the law had taken up the San Andrés Accords. The PAN argued that the law's positive aspects were not being valued and lamented the negative reactions. The head of the PAN bench in the Senate, Fernández de Cevallos, angrily warned both President Fox and his spokespersons to respect Congress, while himself disrespectfully describing Xóchitl Gálvez's advisers as "louse-ridden" hicks who use "knapsacks in place of briefcases," and declaring that he had not legislated to please a guerrilla movement. On May 9, the PAN leadership called together state leaders and heads of the PAN benches in the state congresses to marshal support for the law. They explained that the law had turned out as it had to protect the rights of "third parties." The PRI continued its traditional two-faced pretense. While publicly announcing that it had laid down no lines for the party's local legislators to follow, it quietly instructed them to support the law.

The PRI representatives in Oaxaca's state legislature announced that they would vote against the law, and were backed by the PRI governor, who described the changes to the bill as racist in treating indigenous peoples and communities as minors. He insisted that a mutilated law must not be allowed to stand. Oaxaca's PRI representatives did not stop at declaring what they would do in their state, but also called on colleagues in other states to oppose the constitutional reforms on indigenous matters because they represented a step back compared to local legislation and put peaceful coexistence at risk. Nonetheless, several PRI benches let it be known that they would follow the lines laid down by the national leadership and approve the law in their states.

**PRD: Veto the law**

In the PRD, one senator continued to defend the law, but others had to admit its shortcomings. They justified their yea vote in the Senate by arguing that the law also represented some progress, and that, realistically, was the most that could have been obtained given the correlation of forces in the Senate. Among its positive aspects, they pointed to the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights.

The PRD representatives to the House criticized their party's senators, however. Given the inadequate constitutional reform on indigenous rights and culture reflected in the approved law, the party leadership announced that it would introduce a measure to reform article 115 of the Constitution to allow indigenous peoples to organize beyond municipal boundaries. The PRD described the changes made to the original bill as legal but not legitimate and called on the President to veto the law and on state legislatures to reject it. Later, it revived COCOPA's proposal, presenting it as its own to Congress's permanent commission May 16. The PRD pledged to the Indigenous National Congress that it would push for a national debate on the indigenous law. The differences among the parties broke the unity within COCOPA, weakening the commission that had been playing such an important role. The COCOPA president for May, a Labor Party representative, described the new law as "stillborn" and a "precursor to war" and called on President Fox to veto it.

### **The bishops speak**

The president of the Mexican Bishops Conference said that the EZLN should be realistic and democratic and accept the approved indigenous rights law. Bishop Arizmendi, Samuel Ruiz's successor in Chiapas, declared that Congress could not please everyone and that the Zapatistas should respect the law. But the bishop of the indigenous Tarahumara region spoke to Fox on April 30, saying that the people involved in pastoral work in his diocese were deeply concerned about the substantial changes that had been made to the bill. Based on their experience accompanying indigenous peoples, they saw the law as a major step backward in the recognition of indigenous peoples' fundamental rights. He asked the President to veto the law and consult the indigenous peoples themselves to find out what they see as appropriate constitutional reforms.

### **"Congress is flirting with war"**

Indigenous rights specialists accused the legislators of refusing to recognize the country's multicultural reality and hiding behind a myth of national homogeneity, as though nothing were happening in society. The reform left the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights half done. Although the law recognized autonomy in words, it denied it through state tutelage. They lamented that peace in Chiapas had not been a priority for the legislators, who acted on behalf of private property, not of people. They criticized Congress for leaving out important issues that the government had recognized and even defended at an international level, and the parties for turning their backs on the country's true social movement.

A group of anthropologists made their opinions known through media spreads demonstrating how COCOPA's initiative had been substantially modified, and warned that the approved law did not respond to much less guarantee

indigenous peoples' fundamental needs and expectations. Several commentators agreed and worried that the war in Chiapas was entering a new phase of uncertainty because of the attempt to impose a reform that differed significantly from the agreements reached at San Andrés. They lamented the fact that the legislators saw indigenous peoples not as subjects of rights and of their own destiny but rather as objects of charitable state policies.

The EZLN and other armed groups had been given a bad sign: there was no point in negotiating or reaching agreements with the government. Congress's actions had effectively blocked the path of dialogue and justified the actions of those who opted for armed struggle. Commentators accused Congress of "flirting with war," of wanting to defend its own autonomy so defiantly that it paid no attention to indigenous people's demand for autonomy. They warned the legislators that while they had the right to legislate, the people had the right to be governed by just laws.

**Incomplete,  
and unacceptable** **imprecise**

The Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center described the law as an obstacle to peace for refusing to recognize the various rights of indigenous peoples that had already been accepted by the parties to the conflict, and for limiting the rights already recognized in the San Andrés Accords. The approved law fell back on the old concept of an integrationist state to the detriment of indigenous peoples. The Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center declared that indigenous people had been converted into "hostages of negotiations." In a study, it showed that the approved law was incomplete, imprecise and unacceptable since it diluted or left out already existing rights and paid more attention to business interests than the interests of indigenous peoples.

On May 11, an Indigenous Summit held in Panama titled the Millennium Conference rejected the law passed in Mexico since it had not taken up the indigenous people's demands. They deemed it "discriminatory" for giving others the power to decide the fate of indigenous peoples and called on President Fox to send COCOPA's bill back to Congress.

**Paradoxical praise**

At the end of May, indigenous people marched in Chiapas against the law, which they felt was aimed at closing their mouths and their consciences. They recalled that many years of government programs had not contributed to the indigenous communities' true development and announced that they would continue to mobilize. In Querétaro, 30 social organizations with indigenous participation demanded that local legislators not approve the indigenous law, and in Durango, PRD members demonstrated against it. Working with indigenous organizations, unions and civic organizations, they set up a Citizen's Congress in the capital to

defend COCOPA's bill and demanded that the state legislatures reject the law  
approved by Congress.

Paradoxically, although an indigenous law has been approved, no praise whatever is coming from indigenous people. Those pleased with its results are the powers behind the Puebla-Panama Plan. These include big landowners and ranchers who have stolen indigenous lands and are thrilled to see that indigenous people have no legal basis to demand them back, the most conservative groups that still treat indigenous people with disdain and the Church elite linked to economic and political powers. The law has been rejected by indigenous rights specialists, indigenous lawyers and indigenous peoples from all corners of the country.

### **Concession, not recognition**

It cannot be denied that the new law concedes some rights to indigenous peoples. The problem lies in the way it does so. As explained by respected indigenous affairs specialist Luis Villoro, the new law is framed within the homogenous legal political structure of a nation-state that for centuries has blocked indigenous peoples' development as free peoples with their own identity. Many legislators failed to understand that the issue is not to *concede* rights within a mestizo idea of a nation, but rather to *recognize* the right of different peoples to define, with each other, a new idea of nation. The legislators argued that they were defending national unity, but forgot that a plural state cannot maintain its unity when one people imposes its idea of nation on the others. Unity must be the result of an agreement among the diverse peoples that make up the state. The legislators did not understand—whether out of ignorance or prejudice—that a multicultural state requires a different structure than a homogenous one. Global reality in the 21st century requires both a pluralistic array of autonomous arenas of power, subordinated to the powers of the state but not to each other, and a corresponding plurality of legal systems in a diversity of territories.

What Congress created was a law that proclaims the existence of indigenous peoples, but does not grant them a specific place in the structure of the rule of law. It does not recognize their territories, but rather the "places they occupy." It does not allow them to reestablish themselves through the union of municipalities with indigenous majorities, as provided for in COCOPA's bill. Perhaps the crowning evidence of bad faith is that the law includes a series of state obligations that must be fulfilled for anything to happen, as well as the false idea that indigenous people will only escape from marginalization with the help of mestizos. The law clearly reflects a fear of what will happen if indigenous peoples make their own decisions.

### **Reflecting polarization**

The new law also revealed Mexico's increasing polarization. Business interests prevail in the government, but some members are open to the demands for democracy from those from below. Meanwhile, civil society is divided between the few who have become increasingly wealthy from the neoliberal policies and the majority who resist those policies. If COCOPA's initiative had prospered, a place would have been made for the country's most exploited and marginalized people, its indigenous peoples, to express their rights. The conservative line maintained by the old PRI and the new PAN, whose projects are quite similar, kept this from happening. Inside the PRD, a party apparatus distanced from people's demands squared off against minds that are more open. At times, the PRD's prevailing actions have shown it to be a card-carrying member of a political class that can't see beyond its own nose, but the party's mid-level leaders and rank and file criticized the actions of the senatorial elite and forced them to reconsider their positions.

### **The struggle goes on**

The country's economic and political power, so concentrated in such few hands, celebrated the trick of changing things in such a way that everything remains the same as a great triumph. Although their disdain for the country's most marginalized people was blatantly displayed, the indigenous people responded to the affront with dignity. They refused to accept pretenses or crumbs and will continue to fight for recognition of their rights. They know they have lost a political battle, but also know that they are right and will persevere, will continue their struggle. Those sectors of civil society sensitive to the rights of a multicultural citizenry will also prepare to keep fighting. The pluralist community is a recent, fragile acquisition of humanity. It has not yet been legally recognized in Mexico, but there are growing numbers of people who want to build it, are not getting discouraged and refuse to be condemned to a fruitless effort.

### **The Puebla-Panama Plan and the Indigenous Law: Cut from the Same Cloth**

*As the illusions aroused by President Fox's election dissipate, he is promoting the Puebla-Panama Plan as his top economic initiative. Meanwhile, the process of approving the indigenous law, which wrongs and insults Mexico's indigenous peoples, has revealed a deeply divided country.*

#### **Jorge Alonso**

Mexico is bumbling forward without a clear course. As internal divisions and wounds deepen, President Vicente Fox appears less concerned about reality than about his standing in the polls, where he is rapidly losing ground.

**The economic picture is poor; first sympathies are dissipating**

Fox recently presented a National Development Plan that reads more like a list of good intentions than a plan and says nothing about indigenous autonomy. Mexico needs to create 1.3 million jobs a year, but last year, even with a 6.9% economic growth rate, it managed barely half that. So far under this administration, 201,000 jobs have been lost, partly because a number of companies financed by foreign capital have been shifting their factories from Mexico to countries with even lower wages. While government officials continue to bicker over the figures, some say the country will only grow 2.5-3% this year, and some international agencies are predicting a growth rate below 1%, largely due to the crisis in the United States, Mexico's main trading partner.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development has described Mexico's development potential as limited due to the fall in oil prices, fiscal problems stemming from the bank bailout and the country's fragile financial system. The Bank of Mexico has used the exchange rate to keep inflation under control but the peso is consequently overvalued, which makes Mexican exports less competitive on the international market and aggravated the current accounts deficit. Financial destabilization remains a real danger. There is an increasingly urgent need to impose restrictions on the international flow of speculative capital, but the Mexican government is determined not to touch it, arguing that speculative capital has helped keep the currency strong.

The last three months have seen massive demonstrations by teachers protesting their meager salaries, and by farmers demanding fairer prices and the past-due payments from the agro-businesses that buy their production. A recent study revealed that the Mexican countryside is more depressed today than it was in the years before the revolution, and the crisis in the agriculture sector is increasing the risk of a social explosion. Fox's government sees agriculture as nothing but a business opportunity for big agro-industries, and peasant farmers as a mere labor pool for the *maquilas* or as migrants to be exported to work in the United States. Seen through this prism, the government's only task is to administer the rate of their expulsion. The conservative tendencies taking hold within Fox's government are dissipating the initial sympathy the government enjoyed. The disillusionment is most clearly focused around the indigenous legislation issue. Thus, one year after the elections that toppled the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) from power, Fox's National Action Party (PAN) government continues to give out mixed signals while vital demands remain unsatisfied. Nor has Congress been able to respond to those demands. The political parties are discredited and grassroots civil society is making its way on its own, distanced from and fed up with the politicians and businesspeople who are united in a narrow anti-grassroots alliance.

### Puebla-Panama

#### Creating an "American jaguar"?

**Plan:**

President Fox has devoted most of his efforts to promoting himself and the country abroad. One of the economic plans he has presented as a fundamental part of his project is the Puebla-Panama Plan (PPP). In his trip to Central America in mid-June, accompanied

by the nine governors of Mexico's southern states, Fox presented this plan to the region's seven heads of state in a Mexican-Central American summit meeting. He explained that the plan sought to break the passing down of poverty from generation to generation and convert the region into a development pole on a global scale.

The main points of the summit were to hammer out a strategy for financing the PPP and schedule its infrastructure projects. The plans' strategic lines were also set; they include consolidating a commercial partnership between the Central American countries and Mexico to increase trade and tourism, integrating the highway system and encouraging the integration of the energy system. One of the first steps announced at the summit was the creation of a Financial Engineering Commission chaired by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which has offered US\$2 billion to begin financing the plan. The commission will present a study to launch the PPP within the next three months. The plan also includes proposals related to security, especially the fight against trafficking in drugs and stolen cars and a so-called "democratic clause," according to which any alteration to or rupture of the democratic order in a Central American state will disqualify the government of that state from participating in the PPP. From what can be seen, the PPP is one more piece within NAFTA, following the proposal made in Quebec in April 2001. Participants at the summit euphorically proclaimed that the region would be the new "American jaguar" by 2025 and Fox predicted that the PPP would transform Mexico and Central America into a "world class" development pole in Latin America. Inviting investors to join in the PPP's economic development process, Fox made a confession already ratified in practice by his government many times over: his is a government of the businesspeople, by the businesspeople, and for the businesspeople. Critics of globalization have argued that the PPP is nothing new and is not even Mexican in origin. It stems from the old geopolitical national security strategy cooked up in the White House with bipartisan support. It seeks to ensure cheap labor and exploitation of the region's resources, consolidating transnational companies in the region in order to form an area that can compete with the Asian tigers. The goal is to attain the lowest possible industrial production costs based on over-exploitation of labor and subsidies to private capital, which will attract transnational companies and direct foreign investment. The IDB's financing follows the lines set by the World Bank and Mexico has been assigned the chief overseer role in the plan.

### **Demagogy, and counterinsurgency**

### **colonization**

Writer Carlos Fazio described the PPP as the project of "Mexico's owners." The goal of promoting the massive influx of unregulated foreign capital and subsidizing infrastructure through the state is to transform the region into an enclave of *maquilas* and mono-crop plantations, an ideal place for exports based on depressed labor and aggressive local resource exploitation.

No analysis of the PPP and its domestic and foreign promoters can avoid identifying which classes will benefit from it and which will be sacrificed to it. The PPP aims to "Americanize" the region in the sense of keeping it at the mercy of the designs and "manifest destiny" of

the United States. It is inscribed in the so-called "Washington consensus," aimed at savagely colonizing southwest Mexico and all of Central America. The neoliberal "modernization" proposed by the PPP seeks to legitimate a form of exploitation that will accentuate the already dependent nature of our economies.

The PPP is presented as a way to promote development by investing in job creation to alleviate marginalization and poverty, but left unsaid is that the jobs will be low-paying ones that can compete with cheap labor from other parts of the world. Researcher Armando Bartra has warned that the PPP combines demagogic and counterinsurgency and calls for a new colonization. While all international conventions should consider power differences, the PPP does not. It merely follows the footsteps of previous trade agreements, which have simply been licenses for investors to do whatever they please, without taking labor, migration and environmental rights into account. It can be argued that there is no other course in a globalized world, but the critics are also presenting alternatives. If the first step is to unveil the plan's true intent, it is then essential not only to call on people to resist, but also to present options. A PPP proposed by grassroots civil society must emphasize regional self-government, in which indigenous autonomy and economic self-management focused on the south's small producers would be key points.

### **Chiapas and the PPP**

A plan that would truly foster development of the peoples involved would have to begin by empowering the autonomous self-management experiences that have been developed collectively, in solidarity, in the Chiapas region of the country, so that people could regain food security and sovereignty over their labor. This would be difficult to do, but not impossible. We must not allow ourselves to be carried away by the illusions of democracy—limited to electoral democracy—contained in the PPP. The true goal must be to achieve social and cultural democracy guided by a market logic subordinated to human ends.

The plan Fox presented leaves no room for indigenous autonomy understood as the power to decide on the use of resources in their territories, which was a key point in the bill drafted by Congress' Peace and Harmony Commission (COCOPA) and endorsed by the President but cut from the new indigenous legislation. Fox's statements about the Zapatista movement at the Central American summit should be set in this context. He said the Zapatistas have begun a deactivation process and thus believes there is no need to give them more room or power, claiming that there is now peace in Chiapas, and that the PPP is "a thousand times more than the EZLN or a community in Chiapas." Trying to minimize the Zapatista movement, Fox emphasized that there was no violence even though no talks were taking place. He defiantly said that if some PPP project proposed for implementation in Zapatista territory was not accepted, it would be shifted somewhere else. Along these same lines, the PPP's coordinator in Mexico has announced that projects will not be implemented where the social groups involved don't accept them, trying to cover up the fact that in the current globalization process, the globalizers are the winners

and the globalized are dispensable.

Both the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) and the Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center criticized Fox's statements on Chiapas at the Central American summit. The center rebutted the notion that the Zapatista movement was deactivating and warned that it was not simply a local movement. The PRD described Fox's statements as irresponsible and even provocative, since they seemed aimed at inciting the Zapatistas to take up arms again. The PRD noted that when Fox said that no more room needed to be made for the Zapatistas, it carried an implicit threat that they would be cornered and repressed. One thing clear is that until the Constitution has been reformed to authentically respect indigenous peoples' rights, the PPP will represent nothing more than a new way of sacking and plundering their resources.

### **Conflict over the indigenous law**

After the alliance formed by Fox's PAN and the PRI succeeded in pushing through indigenous legislation to reform the Constitution that was contrary to indigenous peoples' demands, the problem shifted to the state legislatures. The majority of these legislatures—which means those of 16 states—must approve the new law for it to become part of the Constitution. This process has revealed a deeply divided country. In early June, Rodolfo Elizondo, the President's coordinator for the citizens' alliance, said that federal authorities supported the indigenous law as passed by Congress, adding that there was nothing the executive branch could do about it if the Zapatistas or the Indigenous National Congress did not. His remarks were cause for concern in COCOPA: was this the President's position or a personal opinion? The Secretariat of Government sketched out two scenarios: if the state legislatures approved the law, changes would be made in 30 government offices; if they rejected it, meetings would be arranged with the main actors involved. The government ministry pulled out an old line often used under Zedillo, explaining that the government wanted to see evidence of the Zapatistas' willingness to make progress in the peace process. It was an attempt to make the Zapatistas look responsible for the break in the talks, ignoring the mockery represented by the new law on indigenous rights and culture. Elizondo also said that the government was waiting for the state legislatures to decide on the law before designing actions in Chiapas.

Labor Party deputy Félix Castellanos argued that the only thing clear was that the constitutional reform had not contributed to peace. The senator who had been the only PRD member to defend the new law against the continuing criticisms responded that the objections raised by his own party and by those state legislatures that did not approve the law could be resolved through secondary laws. He argued that the new legislation required states to meet the federal norm but that nothing prevented them from going beyond that to create better legislation. PRD and Labor Party representatives refuted this argument, however, explaining that secondary laws could not resolve the problem because they must be subordinate to the constitutional reform, so that the only solution would be to reform the reform.

COCOPA expressed concern to the Government Secretary and the head of the citizens'

alliance office over increasing tension in the areas of Chiapas where the army has withdrawn. The population of Guadalupe Tepeyac showed their rejection of the government proposal by shutting down the buildings earmarked for the new development center, refusing to receive attention through federal offices. The presidential coordinator of the citizens' alliance said that regardless of the state legislatures' final decision on the law, Chiapas' problem does not lie in a law. He recalled that Fox has pledged to take strategic actions to resolve the land ownership, justice, health and education problems that gave rise to the conflict in the first place. He never referred to the indigenous peoples' demand for dignity or their right to decide for themselves. The government commissioner for peace, Luis H. Alvarez, complained that the Zapatistas have blocked implementation of the government's social projects in their areas of influence and asked COCOPA to review its legal framework, insinuating that it should disappear, although this would violate the pacification law. The governor of Chiapas had to recommend that the presidential commissioner for peace be more judicious in his opinions.

### **Chiapas: an open file**

After declaring their opposition to a reform that did not take them into account, the Zapatistas remained silent. The Indigenous National Congress has continued to object that although the reform talks about indigenous autonomy, it establishes no mechanisms by which autonomy can be exercised and does not recognize the communities' territories or recognize indigenous peoples as subjects of public right. In early June, the community network of human rights defenders in Chiapas denounced the resurgence of tension in the conflict zone. It reported that military patrols had increased in several places over the past month and denounced army movements that were intimidating communities, especially in the autonomous municipality of Flores Magón. Civil society organizations questioned the fact that members of the criminal paramilitary group sarcastically named Peace and Justice had been freed on bail despite having committed serious crimes. The impunity in this case was obvious: in making its decision, the Federal Public Ministry did not incorporate into their files the extensive evidence it had against these men. This suggests that the men were imprisoned only to project the image that the paramilitary bands were being pursued, when they were really being protected. The newspaper *La Jornada* revealed that "kaibiles," members of a Guatemalan military force that had violated human rights with full impunity during the conflict in that country, had offered to train Mexican soldiers in counterinsurgency tactics. On June 24, the governor of Chiapas said that the paramilitary forces were weakened because his government had stopped protecting and supporting them and dismissed the complaint of military harassment against the communities. He differed from the federal government, however, in recognizing that there is not peace in Chiapas but rather an open file, and said he respected the Zapatista resistance. Fox visited Chiapas at the beginning of July, where he said that Mexico and Chiapas were not made for confrontations, and presented two government projects: the National Crusade for Legal Security in the Countryside and the National Health Program. He never referred to the Zapatistas and let it be understood that the region's problems would be solved by such government programs. As July wore on, Zapatista communities increasingly

denounced growing threats from paramilitary activists, the main ones of which belong to Peace and Justice. People in the autonomous municipality of El Trabajo and the community of Roberto Barrios had received death threats; houses had been sacked and animals slaughtered; there had been assaults and pressure to accept the government programs; and a catechist was harassed for criticizing the Puebla-Panama Plan. Meanwhile, 25 army encampments surround the 11,000 displaced people living in Polo. Many indigenous people have expressed their sense that nothing has changed with the new government.

#### **"May the Virgin of Guadalupe forgive the mestizos"**

Nationally and internationally, people continue to support the Zapatista cause. On June 19, renowned intellectuals and social groups from around the world reiterated their backing of the Zapatista struggle in a statement titled "For the Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Culture," which charges that the constitutional reform approved by Congress substantially altered COCOPA's initial proposal. Presuming that a majority of state legislatures will ratify the approved reform and it will thus become law, the communiqué warned that the Zapatistas and the Indigenous National Congress will not accept it since it violates the San Andrés accords. "We recognize the rights of indigenous peoples, who, although not recognized by the law, have contributed to the struggle for dignity, democracy and justice for all people all over the world." On June 20, in accepting a doctorate *honoris causa* from Madrid's Complutense University, Pablo González Casanova described the Zapatista philosophy as one of the highest expressions of human culture because of the way it brings Mayan culture together with Spanish and universal culture, in both their modern and postmodern manifestations. On July 1, former Bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas Samuel Ruiz, along with Pablo González Casanova, Conchita Calvillo de Nava, and thousands of others including NGO representatives, religious leaders, academics, intellectuals and artists asked the state legislatures to reject the reform since it worked against indigenous peoples' interests and was a threat to peace. On July 22, Bishop Raúl Vera, who had been Ruiz's assistant in San Cristóbal de las Casas then was sent to the other end of the country instead of being confirmed by the Vatican in that diocese, expressed concern that peace was "hanging by a thread." He asked the Virgin of Guadalupe to forgive the *mestizos* for having approved a reform contrary to indigenous peoples' interests.

#### **State legislatures refused to hear the "voice from the south"**

Following intense lobbying from both sides, the state legislatures voted on the law during June and July. While Oaxaca's PRI governor called on state legislators to vote down the reform because it was not an instrument for achieving peace, PRI senator Manuel Bartlett and PAN senator Diego Fernández de Cevallos—the two men largely responsible for drafting the reform that was ultimately approved—pressured state representatives in their respective parties to support it. Both men have notorious political records: Fernández de Cevallos had worked for discredited President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, and Bartlett was responsible for managing the scandalous electoral fraud against PRD

presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in 1988.

In the end, PAN representatives voted for the reform, the PRI divided according to local interests and the PRD unanimously rejected it. The various combinations in the different states revealed the country's deep divisions. By the first weeks of July, 15 state legislatures had approved the reform and only one more was needed to make it law. A third of the legislatures had rejected it, including in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero and Hidalgo, where the majority of the country's indigenous population lives. In Guerrero, indigenous people from four ethnic groups symbolically took over the legislature to demand that its members vote against the reform law since it was "troublemaking, racist and discriminatory." Chiapas' indigenous people demonstrated outside the legislature to demand that it vote against the bill. The Chiapas legislature, in doing precisely that, argued that it would not resolve the conflict since the Zapatistas insisted that it betrayed the San Andrés accords on the substantive points of autonomy and self-determination. The governors of Chiapas and Oaxaca and the current bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas called on the state legislatures and the citizens to take note of the fact that the states where most of Mexico's indigenous population lives had rejected the law.

Indigenous people also demonstrated in the states where the legislation was approved. Huichol and Nahua Indians occupied the legislature in Jalisco and, seated in place of the representatives in a symbolic session, voted it down.

Finally, the state legislatures of Michoacán and Nayarit approved the constitutional reform on July 12, bringing the total number approving it to 17. Michoacán's legislators cast their vote in a closed-door session to prevent indigenous groups from entering to protest. With their approval, the legislators of that state ignored the results of five forums they themselves had called with the indigenous population, who had firmly rejected the reform. The person chairing Michoacán's indigenous affairs commission recognized that it was an affront to all indigenous peoples of Mexico. The morning of that same day, the governors and legislators of Chiapas and Oaxaca had issued a statement calling on all the legislatures that were still to vote to hear the "voice from the south." The authors emphasized that the indigenous people's rejection of the reform was a sign that it was inadequate and would not further the cause of peace. But they were not listened to either.

### **Debates over quorum**

In the state of Morelos, the majority vote against the new legislation was invalidated because the required two-thirds quorum had not been met. The case gave rise to questioning of whether the law's approval in other states had been constitutional, since there had been no quorum in Sonora, Jalisco, Aguascalientes, Durango, Querétaro, Quintana Roo, Tabasco or Tlaxcala. Nor had there been a quorum in Baja California Sur, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí or Sinaloa, which had voted against the reform. In the states with larger indigenous populations, quorums were met when the law was rejected. The PRD argued that the law had actually been approved by only 9 state legislatures, since

quorum had not been met in the 8 others that voted to approve, and with only 4 not yet having voted, the law could not get the 16 states required by law. PRI senators responded that a quorum was not needed in state legislatures, and Congress members from the PAN and PRI quickly signaled their intention to close the case by tallying up the state legislatures that had passed the law. The PRD then accused them of trying to avoid legal challenges.

The governor of Tlaxcala vetoed his state legislature's approval. One municipality in Puebla initiated a constitutional challenge against the legislation, arguing that during the process, Congress ignored International Labor Organization Convention 169, which establishes that governments must consult indigenous peoples whenever they plan legislative or administrative measures liable to directly affect them. The Supreme Court agreed to hear the case, the first time it has admitted a case examining the legitimacy of a constitutional reform. It added, however, that should the municipality win, it would apply only to this municipality and not the rest of the country.

The PRD declared that the reform was stillborn since it did not respect the spirit of the San Andrés accords and violated provisions of ILO Convention 169. It thus prepared to present a constitutional challenge to the Supreme Court against the legislatures where a quorum had not been present when it was approved. This would presumably imply provisional suspension of the law until the Supreme Court issued its decision. The PRD announced mass demonstrations to demand that debate on the indigenous issue be reopened.

The indigenous peoples and governors of states with an indigenous majority have spoken out repeatedly against the new legislation. Chiapas' governor has insisted that its rejection in the states with the largest presence of indigenous groups was a "traumatic" sign for Congress, which should discuss the issue again, since the law was worthless if it was unacceptable to its purported beneficiaries.

#### **July 18: The outrageous final act**

Given the signs of division the legislation caused throughout the country, some suggested that Congress should reflect and resolve the crisis by abstaining from issuing the final declaration required to put it into effect. In numerous forums, indigenous people spoke out to demand that the President veto the law, but Fox's team felt this was not an option given the correlation of forces in Congress.

On July 18, Fernández de Cevallos and Bartlett pulled off what the PRD, the Labor Party and the Green Party described as a "legislative reveille" in Congress. Although it was not on the agenda, the two men overrode parliamentary procedures and protocol by insisting on tallying up the state legislatures that had approved the law. During the debate, the opposition recalled that Fernández had spoken disrespectfully of indigenous people as "those barefoot people" and criticized him an obstacle to peace, but the PAN representative arrogantly challenged them to meet him in court, and went out drinking to

celebrate the reform's final passage. Bartlett gloated that the law had been consummated.

### **Disagreement and rejection**

The President's office announced that it would accept Congress' decision. The President's representative for the development of indigenous peoples agreed that a veto was not a viable option, although she recognized that there was discontent among the indigenous peoples. Cárdenas met with his party's executive committee to begin preparing for the constitutional challenge that it will submit to the Supreme Court. The PRD also analyzed the Puebla-Panama Plan relative to this issue, and declared that Fox's government is not responding to people's demands.

The governors of Chiapas and Oaxaca considered the option of presenting a joint constitutional challenge of the indigenous law, while several municipal governments in Chiapas decided to denounce the violation of their collective and individual guarantees implied by the law's approval and the government's failure to comply with ILO Convention 169. On learning that Congress had already tallied up the votes, state legislatures, governors, local councils and municipalities opposed to the law expressed their disagreement and rejection. Some indigenous organizations announced that they would not accept the law and called for a national meeting to analyze strategies to oppose it. Pablo González Casanova referred to two counter-reforms to the Constitution that have taken place in Mexico: one modifying article 27, which defended the rights of peasant farmers, and the other on indigenous affairs, consummated so outrageously on July 18. COCOPA criticized the approval of the new law and pointed out that the hasty, imprudent way in which Congress had reached the final stage would lead to harsh debates. It also announced that, given the new situation, it would seek alternative paths.

### **Not a single indigenous voice in favor of the law**

Once the state legislatures had approved the law in this legally dubious process, COCOPA and the government's peace commissioner announced that they would examine what had happened. The PRD accused Fox of having failed to sufficiently defend his bill to reform indigenous affairs, while excessively promoting his fiscal reform proposal. In an interview, French sociologist Alain Touraine argued that the parliamentary groups that put COCOPA's bill aside and drafted a completely different one did so more out of their fight with President Fox than their fight with Subcomandante Marcos. He warned of the danger inherent in the government's refusal to make the indigenous issue a priority.

There is no obvious sense in maintaining a law at odds with its purported purpose. The PAN, with an ideology that clearly runs against indigenous peoples' interests, has become an enormous obstacle to the recognition of their rights. It is especially aggravating that the legislation for indigenous peoples was drafted and successfully promoted by those opposed to indigenous peoples' defense of their rights to both equality and difference. With the reform, the alliance of PAN and PRI legislators has sought to ignore the struggle

carried out by significant social groups for the past seven years.

Francisco López Bárcenas, a lawyer specializing in indigenous legislation, called attention to the fact that a constitutional reform implies modifying the political pact through which society establishes the general norms guiding its members' conduct. Paradoxically, the Zapatistas, the Indigenous National Congress, the Indigenous National Assembly for Autonomy, the Mexican Indigenous Movement, the legislative and executive branches of states where a large part of indigenous Mexicans live and specialists in indigenous rights who have studied the case all repudiated this law on indigenous rights and culture. And López Bárcenas emphasized that not a single voice in the indigenous world spoke out in favor of it.

### **An historic mistake**

A few days after the law had been pushed through Congress in mid-July, COCOPA members had met with indigenous affairs specialists who amply demonstrated that the law had divided people rather than serving to build agreements around indigenous rights and culture. They demanded that COCOPA, as a commission working towards peace, adopt a firmer and more courageous attitude in drafting a new peace proposal. They warned that the indigenous peoples' situation would become more conflictive—and not only in Chiapas—if the supposed victors arrogantly persist in their "historic mistake." They suggested that the President be made aware of how deeply the reform had divided the nation and that he veto the legislation. The director of the Indigenous National Institute and the President's representative for the development of indigenous peoples declared that there was still time to rectify things. If one of the objectives of the initiative had been to resume talks to move forward in building peace, this had not been achieved, and Congress had the duty to listen to everyone.

Bishop Emeritus Samuel Ruiz's group, Services and Counseling for Peace, made a pessimistic analysis of the new legislation, stating that the old regime has not disappeared despite the electoral change. They concluded that the law has put Chiapas in one of the worst crises since 1994, increasing the risk of backtracking to conditions, criteria and strategies prevalent under Zedillo. Their analysis found that Fox's government has not given the three signs the Zapatistas demanded, that the use of arms is still the only viable route to many groups and that the actions of the dominant political class have brought the country from the great hope aroused by the Zapatista march to great disillusionment. The resurgence of the conflict is thus likely, since Fox's government has announced that it will try out social solutions imposed without dialogue, regardless of the communities' desires, and there is increasing risk that it will resort to military solutions. Bishop Ruiz's group called on people to search for a new civil peace strategy and proposed holding an international meeting for peace in Mexico.

Pablo González Casanova, in turn, called on people to fight discouragement and the idea of defeat, arguing that what had happened was the beginning of a battle that will be won by "indigenous people and grassroots civil society." Indigenous rights specialist Magdalena

Gómez commented that, despite the setback implied by the counter-reform, the indigenous peoples are still active and have closed ranks against Congress. She noted that COCOPA de-legitimized itself by not defending its own initiative strongly, and the executive branch, hiding behind the separation of powers, allowed things to come to this pass by failing to take a position congruent with its initiative. What remains now is to see how the judicial branch will respond to the constitutional challenges against the new law.

Researcher Luis Javier Garrido objected that, while there had indeed been a defeat, it was the new government's. He warned that a constitutional reform imposed by the political class against the interests of indigenous peoples could not prosper, adding that the government would learn another lesson from history if was gambling on defeating the indigenous peoples' resistance, because they would make their rights respected with or without legal recognition.

#### The indigenous law and the PPP: Cut from the same cloth

Mexico is going through a severe political crisis caused by the gulf between people's expectations and what the rulers and legislators do and have shown they will continue to do. Most of the country's citizens are prevented from exercising their basic rights in the economic and especially the cultural realms. Social outbreaks are a daily possibility. The new legislation on indigenous affairs opens the door to discouragement and discontent. The Zapatista movement continues both to defend threatened cultures and demand economic and social democratization. Now even more than before, what is required is the creative capacity of civil society's organizations to reign in the politicians, get them out of their elitist circles and oblige them to be accountable, listen to people, give convincing responses to the needs expressed and include citizens in the decision-making and oversight processes.

The new indigenous law is congruent with the Puebla-Panama Plan; they constitute two fundamental pieces of neoliberalism in the region. A strong civic movement is urgently needed, one capable of proposing a viable alternative and building conditions to make the liberating utopia a reality.

Number 243 | Oct  
2001

#### How Wide Will the War on Terrorism Cast its Net?

*Mexico's politicians may use the "war against terrorism" to try to subjugate the indigenous peoples even further. The new indigenous law is an historical mistake, but it would be even more perverse to identify indigenous discontent with terrorism.*

Jorge Alonso

While the world massively repudiated the barbaric terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, a desire for revenge followed shock and pain among the majority in the United States. A Gallup poll done in 30 countries in mid-September asked whether the US government should militarily attack any country where the terrorist perpetrators are based or should request their extradition to stand trial. Pro-attack responses in Europe ranged between 6% (Greece) and a high of 20% (Denmark), but hit 54% in the United States.

Some in the States did speak out for justice rather than vengeance, arguing that war is not the way, but the spirit of revenge prevailed as most rallied behind President Bush's declaration of what he said would be a long, hard, insidious war against terrorism. Since it will also be an information war, the media, too, is under pressure to demonstrate its loyalty in a world that Bush warned could not remain neutral.

The proposed war will reach into every nook and cranny, using the most sophisticated technology to dismantle the complicated, resilient terrorist networks. Some even called for suspending restrictions on the CIA's infamous illegal tactics, which means that civil rights and democracy will suffer many casualties. Fundamentalist fanaticism can be expected to rise around the world, fueling more terrorist acts. Authoritarianism and Manicheanism will also increase, as group terrorism is fought by state terrorism. The United States will again test new arms, increasing the danger that chemical and biological weapons will be used in response. In such a predictable spiral of violence, neither side seems to care about the lives of thousands upon thousands of innocent victims, women, men, children and the elderly who are not involved in the conflict.

Even in the face of such implications, Bush did not appeal to international law as much as once in his declaration. The United States obviously has the right to defend itself, but must do so in accord with international law, which it appears, as so often in the past, to have completely ignored.

**Will this humiliation**  
**put an end to sovereignty?**

While there is no justification for terrorist acts, the wrongs the United States has inflicted on so many countries could not go unanswered forever. Such arrogant power combined with a globalization that is increasingly marginalizing and impoverishing people breeds hatred and resentment.

Many elements of globalization were visible in this attack, one of which was that it was witnessed around the world as it happened. Another was the inescapable symbolism of the targets: the global market and international financial power in one case and the planet's greatest military might in the other. The humiliation of

having been proved vulnerable in the eyes of the world was enormous and may help explain the disproportionate response.

In this first war of the 21st century, the United States is using this tragedy to legitimate its indisputable hegemony since the disappearance of the Soviet Union by bending now not only our continent but also the rest of the world to its "Manifest Destiny." Using the new mechanisms of globalization, it appears to be moving to establish a global police state under its command, subjecting other countries, disciplining them, leaving them no room to exert their own sovereignty. This war will have numerous fronts, including a financial one: the world's banks will be supervised, which will secure the dictatorship of financial capital.

### **War is a two-edged economic sword**

Wars have always served as a way for great powers to resolve their economic crises. This will be no exception. Airlines and insurance companies—whose previous financial moves give important clues to understanding what happened—suffered the immediate impact and the financial markets are also down. The situation is volatile, but the rising fortunes of companies tied to security and the war industry will compensate for this in the medium term. Many analysts have further suggested that control over oil resources in many Arab countries also underlies the interest in enlarging the scope of action beyond the accused Bin Laden to include dispersed terrorism in that part of the world.

In countries like Mexico, the economic forecast is disastrous. The government expected economic growth to exceed population growth this year, but the US recession will hit the Mexican economy, leading to no growth or perhaps even a negative growth rate. The war may increase oil exports—which will also be subject to speculation—but the export of other products will be severely curtailed. Tourism will be sharply affected. Many companies will have to shelve technical advances. Unemployment will rise and capital investments will shrink. Despite all this, however, Mexican businesspeople have expressed their support for US policy decisions.

### **Public opinion**

Early surveys in Mexican newspapers showed the immediate impact of the terrorist attacks on the population, with 44% of those polled supporting a US attack on Afghanistan if that country were proven to be protecting Bin Laden. A phone-in tally done by a television program several days later showed that 63% felt Fox was doing the right thing, 20% felt he had done too little and 17% felt his response excessive. It must be remembered that those who respond in this kind of survey are program viewers, have a telephone and are motivated to call.

The same survey by Internet showed somewhat less support for Fox, although it

remained above 50%, and revealed some other interesting trends. While 73% said they oppose terrorism, the same percentage would not support sending Mexican troops to war. The sentiment was strong enough that the Mexican government was forced to clarify that it would not send troops. Its collaboration would mainly be related to information.

In this light, the Gallup poll question mentioned earlier becomes particularly interesting because Mexico had a world low of 2% in favor of US military intervention vs. asking for extradition of the terrorists to stand trial. In fact, all of the Latin American countries included were even lower than the vast majority of European ones (Venezuela and Colombia topped the continent with only 11% in favor of a US military response). One reasonable hypothesis for this difference is that Europe is more familiar with the threats of terrorism while Latin America is more familiar with the threats of US intervention. Just looking at Mexico, however, the more important illustration is that people respond to a blind question differently than to one offering choices, which is one of the features distinguishing manipulated public opinion from informed public opinion.

### Critical opinions awaken

The event and its aftershocks kept millions of Mexicans numbly glued to their TV screens. While the propaganda they saw and heard clearly influenced people's responses, many independent analyses were heard. And as with all terrible events, black humor and apocalyptic interpretations were not absent.

Many of the letters to newspapers echoed the sentiment of Noam Chomsky, who described the attacks as "an atrocity in response to the US atrocities." They condemned terrorism and urged a coherent position that would also condemn the inveterate state terrorism practiced by the United States with complete impunity for decades. They agreed with Umberto Eco, who described the US crusade as "insane." A large group of Mexican intellectuals repudiated Bush's speech for fanning his country's most aggressive feelings.

One very important alert warned people not to allow the internationalist anti-globalization movement to be criminalized. Preventing the movement's persecution and even annihilation under the pretext that its street protests encourage "terrorist acts" was defined as an urgent task.

Mexican analysts agreeing with Chomsky added that the holy war called by Bush would undermine the law. The rational response to an irrational crime is to bring it to justice and punish it in accord with the law, not to engage in a unilateral punitive response as criminal as the original and deliver ultimatums to any who think differently.

Fox:	Unconditional	support
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### **Fuentes: Partners, not servants**

The Mexican government was quick to line up as an enthusiastic US ally. Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda declared that the United States had the right to "seek reprisals" and that his government would not bargain with its support. President Fox asked Mexican migrants in the United States to support Bush and the US army, arguing that Mexico and the United States are more than neighbors, they are a family, and when "an evil-doer attacks their house, he attacks our house." Fox also announced to US citizens wherever they might be that they could count on the Mexican government for any help they might need. For its part, the United States hastened to finalize procedures for regularizing Mexicans' stay in that country, one of which involves enlisting in the reserves. US Spanish-language television stations reported that Latinos are ready to answer the call and have been among the first to sign up to fight because they are so brave.

Criticisms of the Mexican government's undignified subordination of the country without consulting the citizenry became increasingly sharp. The Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) called for the foreign minister's resignation, describing his statements as incongruent with international law and contrary to Mexico's noninterventionist foreign policy position and pacifist tradition. Carlos Fuentes stressed in his response to Bush's "you're either with us or against us" thinking that Mexicans are partners of the United States, not its "servants." Mexico's Inter-Religious Council, which brings together representatives of the Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Anglican Churches as well as Buddhists and Jews, called a day of civic brotherhood and spoke in favor of peace.

### **Our migrants: how many died?**

An estimated half a million Mexican migrants live in New York. Most are there illegally, from impoverished regions in the state of Puebla and the suburban area of Neza in the state of Mexico. Some worked in cleaning and cooking jobs in the World Trade Center. The government has explained the difficulty of determining exactly how many died and who they were since many did not use their real names for fear of being deported. In his visit to Washington only a week before the attacks, President Fox had proposed the need for a migration agreement between the two countries, and Bush's favorable response was seen as an important achievement for Fox's government. With the attacks, the plan was either moved to the back burner or dropped off the US agenda altogether.

An organization known as Tepeyac has done important work in the Mexican community in New York. Days after the attack, it sponsored a march by a group of Mexican migrants through the streets of New York to repudiate terrorism, mourn for the dead, denounce the manipulation in the mass media and call for peace. Although they are in the minority, many groups like this are proposing

peaceful alternatives, and the crisis might help to build a peace movement.

**Against**

**color of the earth"**

**"those**

**the**

Mexican intellectual Adolfo Gilly warned that this war is aimed against "those who are the color of the earth," pointing out that the violent act of a handful of terrorists may paralyze the organization of the oppressed and expose them to retaliation by the powerful. According to Gilly, the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon was brutal and symbolic, but rather than diminish US military and financial might it helped legitimize its terrible vengeance. And since the people hurt by that might are almost invariably people of color, we must predict that they will be the ones accused of being terrorists and vengefully exterminated. This war without borders will be waged against the wretched of the earth, with anyone who protests against injustice risking denunciation as a potential terrorist and exposure to political and even physical annihilation.

For years, many peasant farmers and indigenous people, especially in Guerrero and Oaxaca, have opted for a long guerrilla war in response to their increasing misery and the impossibility of working through local political structures. In a world war against terrorism, this guerrilla movement, which encompasses a number of different groups, could easily become a target. At the beginning of August, the FARP placed three explosive devices in Mexico City banks that had no destructive capacity and were intended only to spotlight the group's existence and demands. The government was startled and blew the event out of proportion, while the PRD demanded that it try to talk and reach agreements with the rebel groups. In mid-August, the army and the Attorney General's Office detained five suspects and announced that guerrilla cells had been organized in eight states. Those detained denied belonging to the FARP, although one admitted belonging to another guerrilla group, the ERP.

The ERP said that two of the people detained were children of one of its members but denied that any were active in its group. It also accused the government of reenacting the dirty war of the 1970s and called on the country's revolutionary armed groups to unite and prepare to respond politically and militarily to the government "witch hunt." The mayor of the Federal District urged Fox not to crush his adversaries but rather to open channels of dialogue with them. The legislature's Harmony and Peace Commission stayed out of the debate, explaining that its legal mandate only concerned talks with the EZLN.

The Attorney General's Office then announced it would seek out guerrillas in the National Autonomous University. At the end of August, Fox announced that the government had begun investigating 400 "very dangerous" people involved in guerrilla movements and working in public and private institutions, a campaign clearly aimed at discrediting the university. Many faculty members felt that a

kind of "cold war against culture and knowledge" was being stirred up and charged that the government was not looking for ties between university members and the guerrillas but rather trying to block the democratic proposals emanating from the university.

Similar actions followed the FARP lead. The Villista Revolutionary Army of Pueblo placed two explosives in the Stock Exchange and the Department of Agriculture, which the police deactivated. The group admitted that it had placed the explosives and explained that its purpose was to express its opposition to the government's economic policies, broken promises and refusal to listen to the demands of broad sectors of the population. Days later, the José María Morales y Pavón National Guerrilla Coalition claimed responsibility for two more small explosive devices. The Government Secretariat warned that people should express their social discontent through legal channels or be prepared to bear the brunt of the law. The destructive process of passing the reformed Indigenous Law and the government's failure to find peaceful responses to the demands of many indigenous groups have shown that talks are useless and seem to have encouraged such responses as these.

**Legal battle against the indigenous law**

After the executive branch published the reforms to the Indigenous Law in its official newspaper in mid-August, the EZLN went silent, while the indigenous communities and municipalities have continued to speak out against the new law in many ways. Oaxaca's state government and legislature lodged a petition of unconstitutionality with the Supreme Court, arguing that the law negatively affects 418 municipalities that elect their authorities in a traditional way; the petition was joined by 247 of these municipalities. Petitions continued to stream in throughout August and September, as indigenous communities and municipalities from several states, including Chiapas, Guerrero, Mexico, Michoacán, Jalisco and the Federal District, sought protection from the reforms. By the end of September, some 300 legal files against the indigenous legislation had piled up. Nonetheless, Fox praised the reforms in a meeting with British Prime Minister Tony Blair and again during his visit to Chile.

Indigenous leaders, anthropologists, lawyers, academics and representatives of grassroots organizations continue to insist that the new law violates several legal instruments. Its approval and publication demonstrates the Mexican state's lack of political will to recognize indigenous peoples and their cultures, institutions and rights. It is one more sign that the government has abandoned the search for dialogue and consensus with the country's indigenous peoples. One indigenous rights lawyer described the law as the political class's blow to the peace process, the national indigenous movement and the sectors that joined the resistance to a cultural hegemony that brings an economic project under its wing.

Indigenous peoples demand decision-making and organizational power, but instead of offering them autonomy, the government has offered condescending policies aimed at protecting and assimilating them. Former bishop of San Cristóbal Samuel Ruiz, who was awarded an international peace prize in Germany, together with former National University rector Pablo González Casanova, charged that the new law not only fails to fulfill the San Andrés accords but also promotes violence. The NGO forum at the World Conference against Racism held in September in Durban, South Africa, condemned Mexico's constitutional reforms on indigenous rights as failing to meet the conditions for a just, negotiated peace in Chiapas. In Tuscany, 130 representatives of Italian organizations in solidarity with Chiapas rejected the new law and voted to confront President Fox on his visit to Italy.

### **Spring died in autumn**

The head of the National Indigenous Institute in Mexico has recognized that the "war against terrorism" could be used to subjugate indigenous peoples even further. The Zapatista march in the spring of 2001 was the march of those the color of the earth. The autumn has withered the buds of that hope and the current correlation of forces is dangerous for indigenous peoples and those who fight with them for their rights.

Now more than ever, we must combat the notion that there is only one way to think, or that the revenge of wounded imperial pride seeking to use this macabre opportunity to impose globalization under its military and financial dominion can be called justice. Those the color of the earth cannot abandon an idea of justice as equal opportunity for all social groups in which respect for cultural differences is not excluded. The search for peace involves repudiating all forms of terrorism, including state terrorism. In Mexico, the grassroots forces are faced with the challenge of forcing the government to return to the principles of self-determination and non-intervention, to respect for international law and a search for balance, patience and good judgment. Even in this extremely complex global context, we must force it to return to the path of true dialogue to resolve the deep-rooted national problems that have pushed the excluded to desperation and despair.

With each passing day, it becomes clearer that Mexico's political elite has embraced the wrong solution to the indigenous question. It would be even more perverse for them to identify indigenous discontent with terrorism. Imposition always leads to new and deeper problems. This difficult global situation could offer an opportunity to step back from the wrong path and start again, with authentic talks that lead to truly consensual solutions. Will that be possible?

### The Only Thing That's Changed Is the Party in Power

*After a year in office, the Fox government has yet to deal with corruption or impunity and is still implementing the same economic policies. Real change thus remains a distant goal.*

#### Jorge Alonso

The first year of Fox's government has been disappointing, to say the least. The course of events has demonstrated that although the presidential office changed hands, the promised, deeply desired changes are not taking place. Fox has continued to implement the same neoliberal policies as his predecessors, which have done so much damage to the vast majority of the population. And he has failed to deal with insecurity, corruption or impunity. Many very important tasks thus remain pending before we can begin to speak of real change.

It was impossible for Fox's evaluation of his first year in office to be flattering. He recognized that the economic results had been mixed and that politically his image had deteriorated with the media.

#### A feared word: Recession

Fox celebrated some macroeconomic achievements. The government first announced that the inflation rate in 2001 was 4.4%, the lowest since this indicator was first measured in 1968. A few days later, however, the president of the Bank of Mexico issued a correction stating that the inflation rate had been low but not quite that low: he put it at 5.1%. Another achievement was maintaining a strong peso.

For good reason, Fox had to admit that important social tasks are still to be dealt with. The World Bank announced that 43% of Mexicans survive on only \$2 a day. As in past years, the Mexican people have not felt the country's "macroeconomic health" in their own pocketbooks. Fox initially promised a 7% economic growth rate, but with the economic crisis in the United States, expectations fell to 2.5-3%. By mid-year, the President's public policy coordinator had to admit that the much-feared word could no longer be avoided: Mexico was going through a sharp economic recession. By then, the chief economist at Merrill Lynch was predicting that the growth rate would be only 0.6%. When September's terrorist acts aggravated the US crisis, Mexico's predicted growth rate fell to zero. Companies are warning that if prospects for growth do not improve, they may have to temporarily stop production and suspend payments. Not only were the new jobs promised for 2001 not created, but thousands of existing jobs were

lost. At the beginning of January 2002, Fox set himself a year to resolve the lack of economic growth.

### **Corruption unchallenged**

Insecurity and impunity are two other major issues that the government officially acknowledges are not resolved. Fox again promised to punish corruption. He had initially shied away from touching the former state party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), in what turned out to be the erroneous hope that he could count on its votes for the bills he presented to Congress. The new government has not only left corruption untouched this first year, it has also failed to dismantle most of the apparatus of corruption. Fox consoled himself by trying to explode the myth that a simple change in government can solve everything. But according to the surveys, people aren't convinced: his approval rating has fallen steadily from 75% when he took office in December 2000 to 59% in mid-2001 to 48% in an important survey in January of this year. Those who argued in favor of a "useful vote" for Fox have been pained to discover their total lack of influence in promoting a progressive platform in the government.

### **A controversial fiscal reform**

Fox proposed two important pieces of legislation in 2001 and was beaten in both. The first was the constitutional reform on indigenous rights and culture based on the legislative Peace and Harmony Commission (COCOPA) formulation. His own National Action Party (PAN), however, joined forces with the PRI to push a different bill through Congress, one repudiated by the indigenous peoples, and the executive branch demonstrated no will to fight for the more progressive COCOPA proposal.

Fox sent Congress the other important piece of legislation, a fiscal reform that he called a redistributive reform, in April 2001. Unlike the indigenous legislation, he waged an intense publicity campaign to win the population's support for this one and lobbied legislators for their votes. But the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD), the Labor Party (PT), the PRI, and even some PAN members disagreed with the reform's proposal to extend the 15% sales tax to food and medicine. Fox argued that this would benefit the poor, because they would be reimbursed, and indeed the first surveys suggested that the middle class would be most affected. But Julio Boltvinik, a specialist on poverty, insisted that the poor would suffer the most devastating impact, aggravating social inequalities. The proposed reimbursements would be hampered by several important factors, among them the lack of a comprehensive listing of poor people and the fact that the government's listing includes only those enrolled in the official social assistance program, which does not cover people living in extreme poverty in urban areas.

### **A reform without consensus**

Fox tried hard to sell his proposal to the political class, private enterprise, and

leaders of civic organizations and unions. The banks supported the project and the World Bank announced that the 15% sales tax should be levied on all products. After two months of internal debates, the PAN agreed to support Fox's proposal.

Governors representing the three opposition parties discussed presenting an alternative: lowering the sales tax to 13% and not charging income tax on families earning less than four minimum wages, but they failed to reach an agreement. The PRD insisted on taxing the resources of the wealthiest. Its alternative plan included revising the structure of public spending, taxing speculative transactions, stepping up the fight against corruption, putting an end to special privileges, reducing tax evasion, eliminating exemptions for the wealthiest classes and expanding the taxpayer base. It emphasized that while the government planned to tax food and medicine, it left juicy stock market profits tax-free.

Workers' organizations also rejected the proposal to tax food and medicine. In September, some eight thousand workers marched to Congress from Mexico City's main square, the Zócalo, repudiating the fiscal reform and the government's economic policies and demanding increased taxation of both high-income sectors and stock market profits. An October study revealed that 90% of the population opposed any sales tax on medicine and food.

### **For the first time in history**

The President proposed a pact with Congress to pass the fiscal reform. At the end of December, the PRI made signs that it would agree to pact with the PAN on Fox's proposal, with some modifications. This appears to have been mere partisan maneuvering, however, since the PRI let the clock tick without reaching any agreement. The PAN had no other choice than to turn to the PRD, and the final modifications to the fiscal bill were hastily discussed and approved minutes after the legal deadline for making changes expired.

This haste produced shortcomings, omissions and even contradictions in the new fiscal law, as well as technical errors. The Senate announced that it would make the relevant corrections. The approved modifications focus mainly on income rather than consumption, with highly controversial results. Some taxes, like the one on soft drinks, affect people with low incomes. Furthermore, though the income tax rate for the highest bracket was reduced from 40% to 35%, the wealthy were angered by several items and threatened to seek legal protection. For the first time in their history, businesspeople accustomed to enjoying a direct line to political power faced a piece of legislation that did not serve their interests, and immediately launched a campaign to discredit the legislature.

Fox responded as he usually does, inconsistently. First he rejoiced that the new

fiscal package would bring in new resources. Next he distanced himself from the reforms yet invited private enterprise to invest since some business sectors had threatened to stop doing so to protest the reforms. The Chamber of Commerce then withdrew its opposition and offered to make "sacrifices in solidarity" with those most in need while unions, farmers and civic groups stated their intention to form a united front against powerful businesspeople who sought to maintain their privileges. The PRD insisted that there would be no true fiscal reform as long as the rich were untouched, while its legislators described the defeat of the proposal to tax food and medicine as a victory for the people. Other progressive sectors celebrated the fact that the government's tax proposal had been beaten in Congress by an alternative based mainly on income rather than sales.

In sum, of the two important pieces of legislation Fox sent Congress his first year of government, one responded to indigenous people's demands but was disfigured by the PRI-PAN alliance and the other stirred up popular outcry and was finally undone by the pressure of time, making it possible for the PRD to find an emergency solution. In both initiatives, Congress won and Fox lost. The people lost in one and won in the other, although an angry business class waged an intense publicity campaign to try to make that victory appear to be a defeat for all.

### **Scandalous bank frauds**

Fox won the elections by contrasting himself with the PRI's historical corruption and promising to put an end to that scourge. Nonetheless, scandalous acts of corruption and diversion of funds recurred in 2001 in administrations under PRI control. In June, PAN legislators warned that their support for the bank bailout did not imply that investigations into the fraud should cease. They proposed reopening the investigation into the Bank Savings Protection Institute, taking back up that unfinished task.

If the government is to get out of its debt to its citizens, who are paying for the costly bank bailout, it must get to the bottom of Banco Unión's fraudulent trusts, which financed the election campaigns of former President Ernesto Zedillo and former Governor of Tabasco Roberto Madrazo. The sale of Banamex revived the issue of the bank bailout. People are demanding that the bankers assume their responsibilities in the bankruptcies before the country sells any more state banks to foreigners.

### **Diverting funds and shredding files**

Throughout the year, millions in improper payments by PRI officials in the Mexican Social Security Institute were uncovered. One beneficiary was the brother of Senator Emilio Gamboa, who headed the institute. In Chiapas, it was proven that several million pesos had been diverted under former governor Roberto Albores of the PRI. The comptroller general's office accused Oscar

Espinosa Villarreal—who was detained in Nicaragua—of embezzling millions when he directed the Department of Tourism. And evidence was found of the diversion of over a million into the PRI campaign of Madrazo's successor in Tabasco.

PRI members still control Federal offices in many states amid accusations that corruption continues in a number of these offices. Few legal actions have been taken to set examples.

Comptroller Francisco Barrio said it would be demagogic to claim that all corruption could be wiped out in five years, adding that in the PRI's lame duck period before Fox took office, the outgoing party worked hard to "clean up" files. Consequently, although the tracks of corruption and its effects are obvious, legal proof is often missing.

The head of Banco Unión was extradited to Mexico but, like Espinosa Villarreal, was spared time in jail by friends in high places. The mayor of the Federal District lamented that these two thieves are loose only because they have enough money to buy off judges. Meanwhile, investigations also continued into the diversion of public funds by former President Carlos Salinas on behalf of his older brother.

### **The stain of corruption**

A nationwide study revealed that the judicial and security systems favor crime. While the former ombudsperson of Chiapas was detained in early November 2001 accused of embezzlement and protecting death squads, a judge exonerated two paramilitary leaders responsible for the Acteal massacre at the end of that same month. Another military officer accused of training paramilitary groups was also exonerated. At the end of 2001, journalist Andrés Oppenheimer commented that one of the pending tasks for Fox's government is to investigate the big corruption cases that have stained Mexico's recent past.

This year got off to an agitated start, as January 2002 brought more revelations of corruption. The comptroller's office announced that it was investigating diversions totaling some US\$110 million in the para-state petroleum company PEMEX, which may have been funneled into the campaign of PRI presidential candidate Francisco Labastida. In an attempt to prevent this investigation from damaging the PRI politically, some party members tried blackmail, proposing to negotiate impunity in exchange for stability. One PRI leader described the investigation as a "declaration of war against the PRI." Later, they also threatened to investigate the financing of Fox's own campaign.

### **Enormous corruption at PEMEX**

The discrepancies and contradictions soon appeared. Businessman Eduardo

Bours claimed from his Senate seat that he had obtained the equivalent of just under US\$100 million for Labastida's campaign. This figure, however, amounted to some \$43 million more than the party reported to the Federal Election Institute, and surpassed the legal limit for private contributions by some \$65 million.

The renowned journalist Miguel Angel Granados Chapa implicated PEMEX's former director and union leaders, who had organized the diversion of company resources under the cover of dubiously legitimate worker-management negotiations. The comptroller's office succeeded in documenting the flow of money, confirming that it had been diverted from PEMEX to Labastida's campaign. Journalists reported that not all of that money made it into PRI coffers since the union leaders apparently decided to take advantage of the illegal situation and kept part for themselves. Confronted by the evidence, the PRI called on its members to close ranks against what it described as "a Foxist assault" and turned up the pressure to protect its networks of complicity.

#### **Fox and the PRI: To the bitter end?**

The PRI, refusing to accept that impunity has ended, decided to take a harder line in its dealings with Fox. The attorney general tried to calm people down, pointing out that the comptroller's information was incomplete. The secretary of government maintained that Fox's government is not interested in war but rather in the law, that it would not negotiate impunity and that there had been no attack against institutions but rather investigations of individuals. The PAN leader declared that the PRI reacted in the style of "a mafia covering up its crimes," acting as a "band of delinquents" without the kind of vision befitting a party.

Fox decided not to discuss the case of the PEMEX diversions with the PRI, and the press was told that the President's instructions were to go "to the bitter end." Naturally, some wondered whether this was any more than words, since doing so could mean, among other things, that the PRI would lose its legal standing as a party. In the PRD, the feeling is that this is a maneuver by Fox to prepare the way for deals with the old regime, and that in the best of cases, the investigations will touch only a few guilty people but not the leaders, who include former President Zedillo.

In this still-pending case as in so many others, citizens hope that a true battle will be fought against the intricate web of corruption. But if nothing comes of the scandalous revelations, if all of those responsible for fraud and diversions are not tried and punished, impunity will remain the norm to the detriment of justice.

#### **Human rights: Three thick shadows**

Fox promised exemplary respect for human rights. Nonetheless, during the first year of his government, three events cast dark shadows over his evaluation of his

own government's performance. One, the first political crime occurred and has not yet been resolved. Two, the army continues to trample the rights not only of the population but also of its own members. And three, what appeared to be progress in the attempt to settle accounts with a past in which political opponents were disappeared now seems as though it will not go very far, since everything remains subordinated to the will of the military.

### Digna Ochoa

On October 19, 2001, lawyer and human rights advocate Digna Ochoa was assassinated, after receiving repeated threats since 1995. Beside her body was a note threatening the Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center. At the time of her death, Ochoa was defending two peasant ecologists from Guerrero who had been jailed for their opposition to logging and two students accused of having put small explosives in banks. Over 80 civil society organizations demanded that Fox's government promptly investigate her murder, declaring that the crime was a direct affront against the struggle to ensure respect for human rights in Mexico.

The Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center described Ochoa's assassination as "state terrorism," while the mayor of the Federal District said it threatened the country's political stability. The secretary of government promised to support the investigation, and recognized that her death was a wrong felt by everyone who wants to live in democracy.

Ochoa legally confronted the army and judicial police on many occasions. In 1993, she defended a general against an illegal detention. The next year she took a case of extra-judicial executions in the massacre of imprisoned Zapatistas, and represented three indigenous Zapatista women raped by soldiers. The year after that she took the case of peasant farmers from Guerrero massacred at Aguas Blancas, and in 1997 represented the indigenous people killed in the Acteal massacre. In 1998, when the government tried to dismantle the autonomous Zapatista municipalities, Ochoa defended those jailed. She also worked against illegal detentions and denounced extra-judicial executions that year. She charged in a video that the judicial police were responsible for the threats against her.

On October 22, the US government condemned her "brutal murder" and expressed its hope that the Mexican authorities would identify and try those responsible. Only after this condemnation did Fox declare that the assassins would not go unpunished. *The New York Times* emphasized that his government's credibility in human rights and the work of the ombudsman was called into question by Ochoa's assassination.

"Do not allow impunity to reign in this crime"

On October 29, Bishop Raúl Vera of Saltillo celebrated a mass for Digna Ochoa in

the Basilica of Guadalupe. In his homily he said, "Those who believe that the elections of July 2, 2000, marked the beginning of a change for Mexico have suffered especially sharp setbacks at two points. The first was the refusal to accept an indigenous law requested by the poorest of the poor, the indigenous peoples, so that they could live with full rights as Mexicans within their own cultures. And the second setback is this, as the pall of the assassination of a human rights defender falls over the country. These are eloquent signs of the continuing isolationism of those who believe that the world is theirs alone and they can continue to dominate it by using all means at their disposal, however dishonest they may be. Recalling the current President's visit here to the Virgin of Guadalupe at the beginning of his term, we ask for her intercession so that neither he nor his collaborators in the executive branch nor those who serve the nation in the other two branches of the union will be influenced by those who, motivated by ambition, continue to block the progress of all Mexicans. A sign that they are free to govern a free country will be that they not allow impunity to reign in the crime against Digna Ochoa." Amnesty International reported that the Mexican government had not responded to the repeated threats against Ochoa in the last two years and that the investigation by the Attorney General's Office (PGR) had been slow and clumsy. It described the investigation into the assassination as a test for Fox's government. The Inter-American Human Rights Commission demanded that the Mexican government act immediately to protect human rights activists, especially those threatened after Ochoa's death. The PGR offered protection, but the director of the Pro Center rejected it, explaining that since it is headed up by a military officer, the presence of federal judicial police would amount to more of a threat than a form of protection.

### **Little progress**

At the beginning of November, human rights organizations met again with the government secretary, who promised that those responsible for Ochoa's death and for threats against human rights activists would be prosecuted. On November 9, before one of his trips to the United States, Fox gave the order to release the two ecologists imprisoned in Guerrero that Ochoa had been defending "on humanitarian grounds." The government secretary clarified that it was neither a pardon nor an exoneration. The two ecologists said that, although they were free, justice had not been done since their innocence had not been recognized. They also charged that they had been tortured by the army and demanded that their torturers and those who had used false evidence to imprison them be investigated and punished.

Ecologists in Guerrero continued to denounce threats against them and warned that the logging and homicides by local strongmen are continuing. Mario López Dareli, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission representative to the Inter-American Human Rights Court in San José, Costa Rica, argued that the crime

against Digna Ochoa was the result of a whole framework of violence and impunity prevailing in Mexico. Over a month after the crime no one had been sanctioned, and the threats against Pro Center members continued. At the beginning of December, Amnesty International established the Digna Ochoa Award in California.

### **Guerrero: The center of the tangle**

The first inquiries in Guerrero did not begin until two months after the murder, thus giving those responsible time to cover their tracks and hide the people involved. In mid-January 2002, the PGR admitted that its response to the threats against Ochoa contained unjustified omissions, but blamed them on the previous administration. Ochoa's family said they had leads against military officers and insisted that the center of the tangle was in the state of Guerrero.

Three months after the crime, the investigation continues to move very slowly. The Pro Center believes that one obstacle lies in the Defense Department, which has not provided the information requested. In late January, the Federal District's Office of Attorney General asked the Secretary of National Defense for photographs of the members of a battalion stationed in Guerrero, to compare them with verbal descriptions of people seen close to the office where Ochoa was killed.

Bárbara Zamora, the lawyer who took over most of Ochoa's cases, charges that bureaucratic obstacles in the Government Secretariat have blocked full implementation of the preventative measures requested by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission in November 2001 to guarantee her life and physical integrity. It is clear to a majority of people moved by this crime that if it is not resolved and those who defend human rights are not effectively protected, impunity will gain even more ground.

### **The case of General Gallardo**

In its 113th regular session on November 14, 2001, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission in Washington dealt with the case of General José Francisco Gallardo. The commission gave Fox's government an ultimatum: either free the general by the 16th, or the case would go to the Inter-American Human Rights Court. For some time, the commission had been recommending that the Mexican government free Gallardo because it considers him a prisoner of conscience and also believes that the excessive number of charges against him damaged the imparting of justice.

Eight years ago General Gallardo had proposed the establishment of a military ombudsperson to monitor and evaluate the institution as well as represent its members. This proposal so enraged the army top brass that, in revenge, they imprisoned him on trumped up charges of financial misconduct. The general's

son recently declared that the army has a great deal of power within Fox's government and lacks the political will to fulfill international human rights commitments.

In its session, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission also dealt with the Aguas Blancas massacre, a case in which the government pledged to reopen the investigation and find those responsible. In considering several cases in Chiapas involving human rights violations, threats against activists, the taking of indigenous lands and impunity, nongovernmental organizations testified before the commission that impunity continues and individual guarantees are constantly violated in Mexico. The past year alone, under the new government, has seen 15 documented cases, including 8 in Chiapas. The Pro Center reported on the serious problems in the justice system.

Bishop Vera said that the General Gallardo case would show whether the groups that resist change and persist in the political system—demonstrating their power with the approval of the indigenous law—are stronger than the executive. The Pro Center warned that if the commission's recommendations are not followed, Mexico would reveal its inability as a state to respond to the indications of international human rights organizations.

### **Skirting conflicts with the military**

In mid-November, Fox's government insisted that Gallardo could turn to civilian courts. The general responded that Fox's offer was a farce. Unjustly imprisoned, he had rejected a pardon offered him by the government, since accepting it would not have exonerated him of the crimes alleged against him and would have left those responsible for his imprisonment unsanctioned. Fox and the foreign minister denied having made Gallardo any such offer.

Gallardo accused Fox of deceit and of condoning human rights violations. He argued that Fox, as commander of the armed forces, had the authority to free him and if he did not do so it was because he did not wish to confront top military commanders. On December 20, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission asked Mexico's government to take measures to protect the general's life, but all the Mexican authorities had done by the end of January was transfer him to another prison.

Gallardo's defense argued that article 133 of the Constitution obliges Fox to follow the Inter-American Human Rights Commission recommendation since it establishes that the international agreements signed by Mexico are law and must be respected. Gallardo sued Fox to get him to comply with the commission's recommendation to free him immediately. In an effort to avoid a conflict with the military, the government continued trying to get around the commission's recommendation. Finally, on February 7, Fox ordered Gallardo's release by

reducing his sentence to time served. Gallardo announced that he would continue working to establish his innocence, as human rights organizations called on the government to ensure that those responsible for judicial persecution are sanctioned and to implement the commission's other recommendations as well.

### **The disappeared reappear**

In early November, the National Human Rights Commission announced that it had files on 531 people who had been "disappeared" during the Echeverría government, 250 of whom had been executed. The group Eureka, led by Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, which has been demanding information about the disappeared for many years, expressed its concern that the commission's report will cover up the military's responsibility in these crimes.

At the end of the month, the head of the Human Rights Commission issued the report on the Mexican state's responsibility in the dirty war of the 1970s. It named 74 people among those responsible. The secretary of government concluded that an authoritarian response had been given to a political issue during those years, and that groups within the security forces violated human rights. Fox received the report and promised to name a special prosecutor to investigate tortures and disappearances. "Doing justice does not discredit an army of the people," he declared.

Although proof of assassinations, disappearances and other human rights violations abounds, PAN Senator Diego Fernández defended the army's acts, insisting that the institution is not obliged to be accountable to society. A general insisted that the massacre at the Tlateloco Plaza in 1968, in which over 400 students were killed, should be forgotten.

In December 2001, the Senate approved international conventions to punish human rights violations, establishing that war crimes, crimes against humanity and forced disappearances are imprescriptible. They did this in such a way, however, that the conventions do not apply to the dirty war of the 1970s. The decision to approve international instruments with reservations revealed the political class' lack of commitment to human rights.

### **A deficient, rigged report**

Eureka leader Rosario Ibarra de Piedra questioned the report, pointing out that the Mexican government has appointed several special prosecutors who have not produced results. She criticized the attempt to blame the violations on minor, dead or imprisoned officials and charged that the Human Rights Commission had not carried out an investigation but had merely repeated what was already known. She rejected the notion that military or police officers had acted "on their own," as the commission tried to argue, and demanded that former Presidents be sanctioned. She also demanded that the disappeared be

presented as they were and where they were found.

One question that could not be avoided was why the commission had hidden the information on political disappearances for nearly ten years. A first examination of the report revealed it as deficient and rigged. In addition to repeating what was already known, it provided false information, stating that people had died in combat who had in fact last been seen alive on military bases. Among other serious defects were not having looked at the army's files, not naming those ultimately responsible and failing to clarify the fate of the disappeared. At the beginning of December, as a macabre joke, the Attorney General's Office sent an official letter to Ibarra's home subpoenaing 27 people who had been detained and disappeared to testify. She considered the gesture a mockery by the Attorney General, a military officer.

### **Is there any will to clear things up?**

The official reports were limited to the presidential terms of Echeverría and López Portillo. Family members of people who were disappeared during the ensuing terms of Salinas and Zedillo began to press for the Human Rights Commission to report on what happened during these periods too, while the Eureka group noted that the report also ignored those who were disappeared during De la Madrid's term. Eureka also asked why it did not look into three historic massacres: the Aguas Blancas and El Charco massacres in Guerrero and the

Acteal massacre in Chiapas.

In early January of this year, the Fox government named a special prosecutor for the disappeared. Declaring that citing reasons of state for disappearing dissidents had been an immoral maneuver to abolish the legal order, he promised not to skirt the truth. He argued that it was better to clean up the army's image and assured that he would investigate people and not institutions.

Many independent human rights organizations do not trust the new prosecutor or believe he has autonomy from the officer who heads the Attorney General's Office. Ibarra insists that the current President bears responsibility as long as the cases of the disappeared are not resolved.

### **Subordinating military to civilian power**

At the end of 2001, Human Rights Watch warned Fox that military justice had encouraged and protected impunity, destroyed evidence and made it difficult to sanction military officers who tortured, raped, arbitrarily detained or disappeared people or carried out extra-judicial executions. For these reasons, the organization appealed to him to put an end to military jurisdiction over cases of human rights violations and reform the country's justice system in order to control and subordinate the military to civilian power, thus ensuring that the

military is made accountable for the serious human rights violations that have thus far been covered up rather than sanctioned.

In its annual worldwide report on human rights, Human Rights Watch praised Mexico's change in attitude with respect to human rights. It warned, however, that a great deal of progress must be made to address abuses by military officers, since the state lacks the capacity to subject military officers to the law.

This is obvious to all Mexicans. Four years after the Acteal massacre, its intellectual authors continue to enjoy impunity. Nor have the military officers accused of raping indigenous women been punished. These cases have called into question the National Human Rights Commission's actions. Fox continues to govern with the repressive apparatus of the old regime; he has not purged these structures or dismantled the paramilitary groups. Instead, he takes refuge in rhetoric.

### **Change has not come**

There has been a change in government in Mexico, but democratic change has not yet come. As long as impunity continues and there is no proven respect for human rights, and as long as the neoliberal economic policies that impoverish the majority are applied and the PRI's intricate networks of complicity are intact, the transition to democracy will remain a challenge on the horizon.

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### **The Monterrey "Consensus" in a Sea of Speeches**

*The "Monterrey Consensus" actually generated far more disagreement than consensus. There have also been profound disagreements within Mexico's political parties over how to stop corruption, guarantee human rights and build peace in Chiapas. Such differences of opinion have grown along with contradictions in a society thirsting for change.*

#### **Jorge Alonso**

President Vicente Fox's popularity continues to crumble. He began his term with a 70% approval rating, but this figure had fallen to 47% after 14 months in office. To improve his failing grades, Fox thought he might be able to polish up his image at the United Nations' International Conference on Financing for Development, scheduled to take place at the end of March in Mexico's third largest city, Monterrey. These hopes proved to be vain, however, since the event further deteriorated the standing of organizers and hosts alike.

**"There are millions of us, and the planet's not yours"**

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has been forced to admit that globalization has led to economic stagnation and that the world's poverty levels are unacceptable. In a survey of specialists conducted by the IDB, 61% felt that democracy is not working well because of the dismal distribution of wealth. Those polled concurred that there has been rampant corruption in the privatization of state companies. The World Bank also recognizes important mistakes in its fight against poverty. But there is a huge difference between words and deeds, and a great distance between the diagnosis and the cure.

The World Social Forum held in February in Porto Alegre, Brazil, included several protests against neoliberal globalization, but the largest march against neoliberalism to date took place during the meeting of European Union heads of state in mid-March in Barcelona. The latter brought together half a million people under the slogan, "There are millions of us and the planet isn't yours." This enormous demonstration displayed notable maturity by managing to keep violent groups at a distance. At the same time it was impossible for the heads of state at the meeting to claim that only an insignificant minority of people oppose globalization.

Monterrey was the next stop. There were actually three different shows in town that week. The first was the official event involving 51 heads of state and a million-dollar budget. The second was put on by civil society organizations that sought a dialogue with those responsible for neoliberal globalization. And the third was made up of grassroots organizations and individuals who, while not afraid of debating with those responsible, are more interested in proposing measures to subordinate market whims to the needs of humanity.

**Disagreements in Monterrey**

Monterrey was marked by excessive security to prevent the protests from obstructing the official event. The document supposedly presenting the summit's results was drafted ahead of time, and not even a comma could be changed. It was under these conditions that the "Monterrey Consensus" was signed, defending the importance of foreign investment, economic deregulation and the privatization of public property in developing countries.

On the issue of aid to poor countries, the document is full of good intentions but lacks concrete mechanisms. Even the FAO agreed that the Monterrey Consensus was mutilated at birth since it lacks any real mechanisms to address poverty and marginalization. The multi-

millionaire George Soros criticized the United States for using unilateral criteria to determine which countries should receive aid, but the poor countries themselves limited their demands on the industrialized ones. They did not insist on just prices for their raw materials, for example, but merely asked that emergency aid not be conditioned on structural adjustments, and not even that humane request was granted. To receive aid, they have to fulfill several conditions, including the classic adjustments and the new fight against corruption. Naturally, nothing was said about the corruption implicit in the very conditions of this aid.

#### The big bank approach to poor countries

The measures imposed on the planet's poor countries by the international financial organizations can be found in a World Bank document published in the London newspaper *The Observer* on October 10, 2001. The first step is to sign a classic agreement on economic restructuring and adjustment, one prepared previously and ready for signing. This restructuring includes privatizing basic services such as water, electricity and telecommunications, a measure often applauded by government officials who can look forward to juicy commissions in exchange for lowering the sale price for state companies. Whether these government officials were voted in by means of clean elections is not an issue here; all that matters is that they follow the steps. As a result, the countries' industries are devastated via a plan that encourages wholesale corruption.

Another step is liberalizing the capital market. Money comes in for speculation and flees at the first sign of trouble. A country's reserves can be drained in a matter of days, even hours. When this happens, the IMF goes into action, insisting that countries raise their interest rates to attract new capital from other speculators, despite the fact that high rates destroy national production and empty national coffers. The IMF also pressures governments to increase food, water and gas prices, knowing full well that these measures will provoke social unrest. The IMF then demands a firm hand and even higher prices in response to the unrest.

#### Like medieval bleeding

The predictable unrest leads to still more capital flight and bankrupt governments. This misfortune, however, is an excellent opportunity for transnational corporations, which can then buy up national assets at bargain prices. When a country falls into such misfortune, it is squeezed pitilessly. Nonetheless, international financial organizations always recommend saving the bankers, the only state intervention that the

market currently commanded by financial capital allows. While there are obviously many losers in such scenarios, the US Treasury, which holds 51% of the shares in the World Bank, makes sure it is never one of them.

The last step is what the IMF and World Bank call their "poverty reduction strategy," which means free trade according to World Trade Organization and World Bank rules. All of this is handled with an absolutist ideology. The recipes are like medieval bleedings: the sicker you get, the more you're bled. Although the international financial organizations have recognized their failure in the fight against poverty, they administer the same poison as medicine. A report prepared by a nongovernmental organization called Social Watch concluded that the Monterrey Summit had been a failure with respect to development financing.

### **The foreign debt no longer a priority?**

Despite the importance of the migration issue for Mexico, Fox did not raise it with the United States in a bilateral meeting. Worse yet, he declared that there were no longer rich and poor countries and that foreign debt was no longer a priority. The reality is that the foreign debt continues to be one of the main factors in Latin America's poverty. From 1992 to 1999, our countries were forced to pay US\$1.2 billion to service it. In 1998, the 41 most heavily indebted and poorest countries in the world transferred US\$1.68 billion more to the North than they received in aid that same year. The debt's weight has made independent development impossible in most countries of the South. All of this is widely recognized and efforts to address these injustices at the grassroots level continue. For example, the Mexican debtors' organization El Barzón recently organized a meeting to coordinate among Latin American debtors. But none of this appears in the Monterrey Consensus.

### **The Mexico-Cuba disagreement**

In his speech at the summit, Fidel Castro criticized the current world order as the worst system of plunder and exploitation that has ever existed. Charging those who rule the world with imposing the Consensus on poor countries, he also condemned the "aid" being discussed as conditioned, interventionist and, as a consequence, humiliating. He added that the powerful were only trying to agree on how to divide up the world and had no interest in creating a more just world.

The Mexico government caused a serious diplomatic incident through its treatment of its Cuban counterpart. Following his speech, Castro

suddenly decided to return to Cuba, amid Cuba's insistence that it could prove that the United States had exerted pressure on Mexico to prevent Castro from attending. Mexican opposition legislators demanded an explanation from the Fox government, declaring that it had conducted Mexican foreign policy in an undignified way by putting it at the service of US interests. The ruling National Action Party (PAN) representatives, implicitly acknowledging the accusation, replied that it is important to safeguard the country's relationship with the United States, leading representatives of the opposition Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) to retort that Mexicans do not want their country to become an associated state.

#### **Disagreements and denunciations**

Monterrey also produced disagreements among the nongovernmental organizations that put together a pre-summit forum with UN support. The organization was chaotic, and several NGOs led by El Barzón withdrew from the event. Many independent organizations also scorned the forum, criticizing its limited scope.

Meanwhile, the Social Pastoral of the Mexican Bishops' Conference drafted its own Monterrey Declaration, condemning the free market economy for being a blind machine that institutionalizes inequality and exclusion. The bishops criticized the fact that salaries and social spending are kept low in poor countries to maintain stable macroeconomic indicators and ensure returns on investments, and noted that the market economy is destroying the planet's natural resources. They also pointed out one of the incongruities in the demands of neoliberal capitalism, that the reduction of the state's role in the economy is only required in poor countries and not in developed ones. The bishops called for the subordination of financial policies to ethical principles.

#### **Dignity: the first act in an alternative economy**

The "Another World is Possible" assembly held several marches and forums during the Monterrey Summit. Although the turnout was not large, the movement again demonstrated its creative, playful and peaceful nature. The renowned intellectual Pablo González Casanova emphasized that dignity is the first act in an alternative economy. He also stressed that it would be preferable for rich countries to discuss how to stop robbing the wealth of poor countries instead of talking so much about how to divvy it up among them.

Rosario Ibarra, leader of a group called Eureka, which works on the issue of political disappearances, described the rulers attending the Monterrey

Summit as "cynical" for wanting to make people believe they are helping those that they are in fact plundering. Pronouncements were made against the globalization of capital to exploit and rob peoples, as well as against the invisible censorship in the UN-sponsored forum. Writer Barbara Jacobs said that people all over the world keep their principles a secret to continue receiving crumbs from the United States. The United Nations plan to fight poverty was sharply criticized as nothing more than a way to legitimize the interests of the powerful.

### **Another world is possible**

The declaration that came out of "Another world is possible" emphasized that organizations representing indigenous peoples, peasant farmers, human rights advocates, environmentalists, youth, women, children, labor and other grassroots sectors from many countries of the world had met in Monterrey to ensure that the voices of those excluded by neoliberal globalization were heard. It also warned that indigenous peoples are in greater danger than ever.

There was condemnation of the FTAA, the Puebla-Panama Plan and the blockade against Cuba; a range of proposals was made to eliminate the foreign debt and to tax speculative capital transactions; and demands were made for democratization of the UN.

The most important aspect of the meeting was that it continued the spirit of the World Social Forum, seeking convergences capable of generating viable alternatives to neoliberal barbarity, in order to create a just, human and livable world for all.

### **Inter-party divisions in Mexico**

On the home front, meanwhile, Mexico's three largest political parties—the PAN, PRD and Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)—were enmeshed in internal elections to choose their new national leadership in the first quarter of 2002. The events revealed serious battles and divisions within these parties, along with their distance from the majority of the population.

A survey published in the newspaper *Reforma* before those elections revealed that a large part of the population is not attracted to any of the parties, with some 30% saying they did not know which party to vote for. According to the survey, the PRI is supported by 28% of the voters, the PAN by 25% and the PRD by 16%. The newspaper *Milenio* published an analysis of the survey by María de las Heras, an election survey specialist, in which she combined the variables of trends identified before the elections related to people's party identification, intention to vote and

perception of the parties' electoral strength. Based on this, she drew up a scenario that gave the PRI 43% of the possible votes, the PAN 41% and the PRD 16%. Such evidence of the PRI's potential electoral recovery is not a good sign, given the party's incorrigible vices.

There were various other interpretations of the survey results. One focused on President Fox's declining popularity, which has influenced the PAN's shrinking share of the vote; another pointed out that the former state party can still use its hard-core vote; and yet another that divisions within the center-left Party of the Aztec Sun—the PRD—had blocked its progress.

#### **PAN: Tensions with Fox**

The PAN again employed its traditional method of election by means of selected delegates, who numbered only 279. Of the two tendencies that faced off, the one headed by former Guanajuato governor Medina Plascencia wanted to provide President Fox stronger support. The other sought reelection for National Party leader Luis Felipe Bravo Mena. This second tendency includes old-style PAN members whose numerous disagreements with Fox demonstrate that they still fail to understand how a party in government should act.

In the end Bravo was reelected, proving that the traditional PAN families continue to rule the party. Observers noted that the difficulties of having a President "without a party" would continue, since the PAN's relationship with Fox has not only been problematic but also inefficient. Moreover, certain local PAN governments have been involved in scandals, like the one of Atizapán in the state of Mexico, where the mayor has been accused of corruption, ties to drug trafficking and even responsibility in the murder of a PAN council member. But at least the PAN managed to hold its internal elections without accusations of improprieties or serious ruptures.

#### **PRI: the one with the most tricks wins**

In the elections for PRI leadership, one of the lists was headed up by former Tabasco governor Roberto Madrazo, an associate of former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari who benefited from the Banco Unión's fraudulent maneuvers and manipulated extremely fraudulent elections to hand-pick the two people who succeeded him in office. He faced off against legislative representative Beatriz Paredes, who headed a list of somewhat less discredited leaders.

Both teams included renowned pros at electoral fraud and used all

mechanisms imaginable, demonstrating once again the full extent of the illegal measures the PRI is accustomed to employing. Amid all the vehement accusations the two teams slung at each other in this internal battle, Paredes' team went so far as to charge that rather than mere fraud the other side was involved in "organized crime." Local PRI leaders, fearing that the divisions would degenerate into serious ruptures and lead to a loss of votes and resources, ultimately compelled the two sides to make some deals. This also revealed that, just as the Federal apparatus used to be put at the PRI's service in elections, the same thing still happens in the states it governs. The only difference is that there is no longer a single head but rather a kind of feudal power structure within the old state party.

In the end, they let the one who played the most tricks win. Thus, Roberto Madrazo became president of the PRI, although he has been widely discredited and poses a real threat to Mexico's fragile democracy. Soon after the elections, repudiated former President Salinas de Gortari calmly returned to Mexico.

In 1999, the PRI boasted of having pulled ten million Mexican voters to its internal elections. On this occasion, marked by widespread fraud, the official figures were less than a third of that number. The PRI announced it would launch "Operation Cicatrize" and while some visible party members resigned, there were no major splits. The party later managed to smooth the lingering resentments, although some commented that the fraud amounted to "the PRI's suicide." Events continue demonstrating that this is the party's real nature.

#### **PRD: a lack of transparency**

PRD leaders announced that there would be no repeat of the calamity of their last internal elections a few years ago, which seriously damaged the party's credibility, and assured that "the PRI's dirty dealings" would not be seen in their party. Several slates ran in the elections. One, backed by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, was headed up by Rosario Robles, the woman who replaced him as mayor of Mexico City. Another, led by Senator Jesús Ortega, was an alliance of several internal tendencies.

The elections were held amid charges that the statutes were not being respected. Robles won the PRD presidency with over 60% of the vote in the quick count and over 50% in the final count. Ortega questioned the quick count, and while he conceded defeat, he claimed that the final figures indicated the general secretary post should go to his slate. Robles in turn questioned these final figures.

There was great speculation in the PRD about the total number of people on its electoral role, with the figure of three to four million being tossed about. In the end, according to unreliable figures, the total was 872,275 voters. Due to irregularities, it was decided that the elections would be held again in eight states. Thus the PRD again failed to conduct its internal election cleanly and transparently.

### **Distanced from people**

After these three elections, there was some speculation over the possibility of PRI and PRD dissidents forming another party. But speculation aside, the parties are clearly doing little to win people's confidence. While the PDR and PRI have consistently demonstrated their propensity toward electoral chicanery, the PAN seems permanently dominated by a traditional group.

It is also clear that the party system is very weak. Experts have concluded that the Mexican Congress is 40 years behind the times and will only catch up when its representatives understand that their loyalty belongs to people, not a party.

### **A legal labyrinth that protects corruption**

The Office of Attorney General has three former PRI employees who provided evidence of illegal transfers from PEMEX, the partially state-owned oil company, and its union to the campaign of PRI presidential candidate Francisco Labastida. The three testified that the PRI kept alternate accounts.

The investigation into these diversions of some US\$175 million understandably made PRI leaders very nervous. They represent just one strand in the huge tangle of corruption in the party, just one example of how the PRI has used state resources to its advantage. Since the investigation could go very far indeed if it starts to unravel the mess, the party chose to defend those responsible.

Two visibly implicated senators have taken shelter behind their parliamentary immunity. The long-established PRI-affiliated oil workers' union even awarded one of them a medal. Independent dissident oil workers, meanwhile, formed an opposition coalition against the union leaders, demanding that the top leader be removed from office for his responsibility in the diversion of funds. These workers immediately began to suffer reprisals. Given the sums involved, the talk is that former President Zedillo himself may be implicated.

The Mexican Bishops' Conference lauded the government's decision to thoroughly investigate this diversion of funds from PEMEX to Labastida's campaign, at the same time calling on it to "safeguard institutions." While a crime of this nature could warrant stripping the PRI of its legal standing as a party, the public is skeptical that justice will be done. The laws, a legacy of the old regime, form a labyrinth that protects corruption.

### **Human rights: a few steps forward**

In February, President Fox pardoned two environmentalists who had been in prison in Michoacán since mid-2000. He also ordered a reduction of the sentence for General Gallardo, imprisoned for several years on trumped-up charges after proposing that an ombudsperson's office be established in the army. The order freed the general since he had already served more than the new sentence. Human rights organizations announced that they will continue to follow up on these cases until the innocence of the environmentalists and General Gallardo has been recognized. In both cases, the presidency imposed its authority over subordinate government offices but did so in a weak way, without questioning the procedures used to bring about an unjust prosecution. Justice was only half done in the release of these three people, since their innocence must still be recognized and the corrupt judicial processes rectified.

On a more positive note, the attorney general's office and the army have made important progress in the fight against drug trafficking. The most notable accomplishment was breaking up the band controlled by the Arellano Félix brothers, who have been wanted for years for crimes in both Mexico and the United States. It was a hard blow to the Tijuana cartel. The second in command of the Gulf cartel was also arrested.

### **Digna Ochoa: a pending case**

In a story that appeared to be planted, *Reforma* reported evidence of suicide in the case of human rights defender Digna Ochoa. A second newspaper then immediately wrote that another line of investigation was the possibility of personal motives behind her killing. In both cases, the goal was clearly to deflect the investigation away from the army. One of the military officers possibly implicated in the crime has still not been located.

Ochoa's relatives protested the report of possible suicide, a theory also criticized by members of the Senate's Human Rights Commission and rejected outright by the Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center. Amnesty International demanded that independent experts verify the

evidence and noted that the threats against Ochoa before her murder had not been investigated. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Rigoberta Menchú described the suggestion that Ochoa had committed suicide as contemptible and pointed out that it is not unusual in Latin America for authorities to try to pass off political crimes as suicides.

Researcher Luis Javier Garrido concluded that Fox's government has decided not to touch the army, to maintain the network of shared interests between the two. People who were with Ochoa in her final days were adamant that the suicide idea contradicted her character, spirit and religious convictions. Bárbara Zamora, the lawyer who worked with Ochoa and has taken up her cases, reported that she has received similar threats and made very clear that she has no intention of committing suicide.

Representatives of the International League for Human Rights and the World Organization against Torture in Geneva declared that human rights defenders in Mexico face a very difficult situation. They are generally repressed in a more subtle way than in other countries, giving a general appearance of openness, but in reality the hopes awakened by the new government have come to nothing as old practices continue. As long as deaths like Ochoa's are not cleared up, the deep-rooted practice of impunity will continue.

### **No signs in Chiapas**

The World Social Forum in Porto Alegre expressed solidarity with the Zapatista National Liberation Army and demanded that the Mexican government make the three signs the Zapatistas requested as a condition for returning to the negotiation table. The government has made no progress toward meeting their conditions in months.

With respect to freeing Zapatista prisoners in Chiapas, Tabasco and Querétaro, over two dozen are still in prison despite talks held by the legislative Peace and Harmony Commission (COCOPA). The prisoners have accused the government of racism. Furthermore, the land that had been occupied by the military posts withdrawn in 2001 has not yet been returned to the communities. Meanwhile, militarization, paramilitarization and aggression against Zapatistas are increasing in Chiapas.

The International Civil Commission for the Observation of Human Rights, made up of 104 observers from 14 countries, visited Chiapas at the end of February and verified that the constitutional reforms on indigenous issues approved by Congress in April 2001 have struck a hard blow to the

possibility of talks. The commission's presence in Mexico belied the Ministry of Foreign Relations' claim that the Chiapas issue no longer interests the rest of the world. The commission witnessed paramilitary activities and a vehicle in which a group of the observers was traveling was even attacked.

In its final report, the commission noted that poverty is growing in Chiapas and the communities believe that government anti-poverty programs are being carried out in a discriminatory way. The issue of people displaced by war has not been resolved, as there are insufficient guarantees to ensure a safe return to their communities. And while there is now less pressure from federal troops in some regions, military patrols continue in other areas, along with helicopter surveillance that sows fear in the indigenous communities. The commission also noted that checkpoints are still common in areas where the military has not withdrawn.

Global Exchange noted that 259 military operations and numerous acts of impunity occurred in Chiapas between April 2001 and March 2002. It also charged the government with attacking organizations and individuals dedicated to the defense of human rights.

#### **Peace for the Puebla-Panama Plan?**

France-Libertés Foundation president Danielle Mitterrand sent an open letter to President Fox in early March urging him to define his position on the conflict in Chiapas. Pointing out that the Zapatista indigenous people's silence meant that they no longer believed the President's declarations of peace, she addressed Fox again, appealing to "the humanity that exists in every human being." She reminded him that when they had met in the presidential palace a year before, Fox had pledged to make real changes in government, especially with respect to Chiapas, and to honor the San Andrés accords. Mitterrand asked Fox if he only aspired to peace to ensure the right conditions for the success of the Puebla-Panama Plan according to the designs of the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the big multinationals, or if peace would be based on dialogue and built with indigenous peoples' participation.

In this respect, authorities from the autonomous Zapatista municipality of Ricardo Flores Magón denounced attempts to dislodge and relocate 49 communities in the Lacandona forest. There are 50 army posts and nearly 30,000 soldiers within the disputed area. They also denounced business interests in the region. US Mexico scholar James Cockcroft has

warned that the Pueblo-Panama Plan may be the United State's final mortal blow to the indigenous people of Chiapas, since it is designed to allow transnational companies to take control of the region's valuable natural resources. He also believes that only resistance movements can defeat the plan.

Zapatista communities are still besieged by paramilitaries, who have threatened to kill Zapatista supporters. Indigenous women in the community of Morelia complained of aggression from a new paramilitary group made up of PRI members, while Mexico's Commission to Defend and Promote Human Rights has criticized the government of Chiapas for tolerating the actions of such groups.

### **The indigenous law: Another try**

The new Indigenous Law has not only dampened the spirits of indigenous peoples but also increased their discontent. In February, 168 legislators representing all of the opposition parties decided to reintroduce COCOPA's original bill, a clear sign that at least a hundred representatives now regret the position they took last year when they refused to recognize indigenous peoples' legal equality and identity.

The PRD called on the Senate to halt its consultations aimed at drafting the enabling legislation and to discuss this new effort to approve a law that respects the San Andrés Accords. It asked the Senate at least to wait until the Supreme Court has ruled on the constitutional appeals filed by indigenous communities over the last ten months.

Luis H. Alvarez, the peace commissioner in Chiapas, described the decision to reintroduce the COCOPA initiative as a "healthy" one. And Xóchitl Gálvez, head of the government's Office for Indigenous Affairs, rejoiced that the issue was being reopened, since it would provide another opportunity to settle Mexico's historical debt with this sector of its population. But PAN and many PRI representatives do not want to reopen the debate.

### **Indigenous people awaiting the Supreme Court decision**

Members of indigenous organizations described the new initiative as a positive development, but warned that the correlation of forces in Congress is not favorable to indigenous interests. They hope for more from the Supreme Court than from Congress. Even so, indigenous peoples have their doubts about the Supreme Court as well, given that it is made up of conservative lawyers nominated by Zedillo in 1994 who are very much a part of the system.

The Central Pacific branch of the National Indigenous Congress sent a formal request to the Supreme Court asking it to declare the Congress-approved reforms on indigenous issues unconstitutional. The court has received nearly 700 other constitutional appeals of various kinds on the issue, which is unprecedented in the country's judicial history and has increased the Supreme Court's workload some 900%.

If the members of the court abide by the law, they should declare the reforms unconstitutional because the legislature did not follow the proper steps to approve them, and because the reforms violate ILO Convention 169 on indigenous rights, which Mexico has ratified. Mexican unions filed a complaint with the ILO over the government's failure to respect Convention 169, which the ILO accepted on March 19.

The National Indigenous Congress has decided to step up its work in anticipation of the Court's verdict, especially if this verdict follows the letter of the law. Ten months after the lamentable reforms were approved, the spirit of the San Andrés Accords has yet to be honored; systematic aggression and militarization against the indigenous communities has increased; the living conditions of the indigenous peoples have not improved; and above all, the possibility of dialogue remains closed.

### **Many shadows and little light**

Taken as a whole, these disagreements all bear witness to the deep roots of a corrupt and perverted power, particularly in the apparatus designed to achieve globalization on neoliberal terms. But there are also signs of valuable grassroots tendencies that are eagerly and painstakingly striving to defend themselves from the terrible evils this policy has produced, and are determined to seek new kinds of policies and new ways of doing politics.

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### **Open Files in an Aborted Transition**

*Elitist policies persist. The country is more dependent on the United States. The transition to democracy has stalled and appears to have been aborted. Human rights violations continue. And, in Chiapas, peace is far away.*

**Jorge Alonso**

Many cases are still open in Mexico that have yet to be resolved on behalf of the majority of the population. Meanwhile, those in power appear more interested in partisan battles than in searching for ways to meet the country's needs.

### **Bush's servant**

President Vicente Fox's government has taken care to be submissive to the United States, appearing to all the world as its peon as its actions have demonstrated time and again. Although this is nothing new, attempts used to be made to mask it with demagogic. Since Fox doesn't dissimulate, he is openly accused of being pro-Yankee. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, head of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), lamented that "every day confirms anew the unconditional servility of the head of the Mexican government towards his counterpart in the United States and our government's absolute subordination to the interests of the political-financial leadership governing the United States." The US Secretary of Defense announced in April that Mexico's armed forces would come under the Pentagon in a "Northern Command" to defend North America. The announcement stirred such concern in Mexico that the government had to clarify that it would not be a case of "subordination" but of "cooperation for security."

The failed coup in Venezuela showed yet again that the United States will not tolerate independence and a refusal by Latin American nations to submit. The Mexican government's response to the events in Venezuela was ambivalent. On the one hand, it abided by Mexico's traditional foreign policy of non-intervention and influenced other governments on the continent not to recognize the self-proclaimed interim government. But on the other, Fox, embracing the arguments assumed by US officials to justify the coup, declared that Chávez had been brought down because of his "erratic economic policies." At the Monterrey Summit—which was organized by the United Nations, implying that all participating nations enjoy equal rights—Fox asked Fidel Castro for two things: not to attack Bush and to leave as soon as possible in order to avoid trouble with the United States. He then repeatedly declared to the media, legislators and the Mexican people that he had exerted no pressure on Cuba. When Castro, back in Havana, reported the conversation that had taken place between the two men, Fox was shown to be a liar. The incident made him look ridiculous, and more than a few people recalled that Nixon fell not because he

spied on his opponents but because he lied to the nation about it.

In Geneva, the United States pushed the UN Human Rights Commission to condemn Cuba on human rights issues. On this occasion, the Mexican government abandoned its non-interventionist foreign policy outright in aligning itself with the US. It tried to cover up the true source of the initiative against Cuba, claiming that it emanated from Latin America, but the media discovered the real author. In response to the strong criticisms of Fox's submissiveness to the United States, Bush came out in his defense, describing him as "a patriot."

### **The high cost of servility and lies**

Lies and servility have degraded politics. On the international level, people ruled by servile governments have not profited from this attitude and indeed, have paid dearly for it. This has been proven yet again in Mexico's case in two episodes related to migrants and water.

In the United States, self-proclaimed defender of human rights around the world, a court decision leaving migrant workers legally unprotected revealed the country's willingness to accept conditions very close to slavery in its own house. The Mexican government's response to the legalization of abuses against Mexican workers in the US was slow and tepid. The government secretary described the court's decision as ominous and asked the Inter-American Human Rights Commission to intervene. Mexican migrants in the US have been increasingly mistreated in recent months.

As to the water issue, Mexico signed a treaty with the United States in 1944 to divvy up the international waters of the Colorado and Bravo Rivers. Since then, Mexico has owed water to the United States only five times. In recent years, however, its debt has surpassed a billion cubic meters, amounting to 1.26 billion for the 1992-1997 period, which was paid off on May 27 of last year. The current debt will not be known until the new period ends in September, but it is thought to be around 1.93 billion cubic meters.

With an election campaign underway in Texas, the United States has been pressuring Mexico to begin paying this debt now. Fox and his secretary of agriculture replied that it would be paid soon. During recent years, however, the northern regions of Mexico

have been struck by one of the worst droughts on record. The governors of the northern states asked the federal government to explain its plans and demanded that it attend to the needs of Mexican farmers first. Some fear that we could be in the early stages of a water war between the two countries.

### **Bitter disputes between the executive and legislative branches**

The inconsistencies in Fox's statements and the approaching campaign for the legislative elections in mid-2003 have heightened tensions in the already-tense relationship between the executive and legislative branches. Foreign Relations Secretary Jorge Castañeda refused to appear before the Senate to explain the government's behavior at the Monterrey Summit that led to the conflict with Cuba. In reprisal, the Senate refused to grant the President permission to take a scheduled trip to the United States and Canada. Fox responded by accusing the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) of trying to prevent his government from carrying out the changes that the Mexican people had voted for. He explained that the purpose of the trip was to obtain new investments and sign several agreements related to developing small- and medium-scale business and expanding the temporary work program with Canada. When a group of jobless people asked him for work, Fox told them to take their complaint to the Senate, which had blocked a trip aimed at creating employment.

The President's National Action Party (PAN) accused the PRI of trying to impose foreign policy, a responsibility that constitutionally falls to the President. Castañeda then joined in the dispute by insisting that the legislature could not be both party and judge and suggested that it file a constitutional appeal with the courts if it thought the President's foreign policy violated the Constitution. In this dispute, surveys suggested greater support for the President (56.9%) than the Senate (30.4%). Later, Fox called for talks between the two branches, while the government secretary appealed for effective collaboration between them as essential to efficient democracy. He lamented that the current situation in the country's institutions did not favor good governance, and that the staggered electoral calendar left the parties constantly competing and blocked needed collaboration.

On many points, Fox's foreign policy does not enjoy congressional

consensus, as demonstrated by the events around the vote against Cuba in the UN Human Rights Commission. The opposition parties in the Senate, which comprise the majority, had recommended that Mexico abstain, but the government chose not to follow their recommendation. The Senate majority then warned that there would be conflicts between the two branches if Fox ignored the legislature, and accused him of doing the United States' "dirty work." A Secretariat of Government spokesperson retorted that the government could not accept a "gag law" from the legislature, since a democratic government could not be silent on the issue of human rights. The confrontation between the two branches continued along these lines, with opposition legislators calling for Foreign Minister Castañeda's resignation. Having dismissed him as a valid interlocutor, the Senate quit asking him to appear for having lied in the Fox-Castro incident.

After strong pressure, the government was forced to admit that Bush had asked Mexico to ensure that he would not have to see Castro at the Monterrey Summit. Opposition legislators charged that Fox had failed to respect the constitutional principles of self-determination, non-intervention and the legal equality of all states. The president of the National Human Rights Commission said that the Mexican government lacks the authority to go around insisting on human rights abroad when it has so many problems in this matter at home. He recalled that torture is still practiced in Mexico and prison conditions are miserable.

### **Electricity and oil: A controversial privatization**

At the end of April, the Supreme Court threw out the reforms that Fox had decreed in 2001 in the electricity sector to encourage private participation. Congress had filed a constitutional appeal arguing that the executive branch had usurped powers belonging to it, and the court agreed. Fox has been accused of trying to privatize the electricity industry through the back door.

Given this new crisis between the branches, Fox once again called for dialogue and the opposition senators met with him. They demanded that he respect Congress and reiterated their sharp disagreement with his foreign policy. The confrontation appeared to be letting up somewhat when the two branches issued a joint statement promising greater communication between them to promote a better relationship. Fox said he was turning the page

on his conflict with the legislature and praised its work on several recent pieces of legislation. Opposition representatives from the House also met with Fox, who reiterated his willingness to talk but refused to accept the demand for Castañeda's renunciation. Finally, Fox met with the legislative bench of his own party, whose relationship with the President has not always been easy, and promised to work with them for the 2003 elections.

Just when it seemed that the storm had died down, it was whipped up yet again. On his next trip to the United States authorized by the Senate, Fox declared that people opposed to the United States were attacking his foreign policy and that he was up against resistance from those who had benefited from the previous regime. Although this last point is true, it again sparked criticisms from PRI leaders. On his return, Fox tried to soften his tone. He met with the PRI's leader and invited the party to govern alongside him, emphasizing that there is more common ground than differences between the two parties. This statement, in turn, aroused discontent among PAN members.

### **Speeches conflicts at home**

**abroad,**

In mid-May, the dispute was inflamed yet again by a meeting in Brussels between Castañeda and former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Legislators of all parties demanded information about what had been discussed at this unexpected meeting. Though Castañeda said it had been a casual, informal get-together, no one was convinced. During his own trip to Europe, Fox once again spoke of opening up the energy sector, both oil and electricity, to private enterprise. He accused both the PRI and PRD of obstructing his government's plans, said he wanted an active and democratic PRI, and charged that Mexico's current Constitution responds to the interests of the former regime and has now been rendered obsolete by the country's democratic situation and the international agenda.

Fox's speeches abroad sparked still more conflicts at home. PRI representatives felt that he had first invited them to co-govern and then insulted them. And while the opposition called for consolidating public companies, the government insisted that Mexico would soon experience shortages if the electricity sector were not opened up. The World Bank advised opening up PEMEX, the national oil company, to private enterprise. On this issue, it is worth noting that a US senator recently described ENRON's

questionable maneuvers as clear evidence of the mistake committed in deregulating the energy sector in the United States. On his return, Fox called on Congress to reform the electricity sector and urged the parties to rise above their misunderstandings.

Business leaders launched a campaign against Congress, describing it as an obstacle to the needed reforms. Hard-liners in the PRI obliged the party's leader to make a speech in its Political Council confronting Fox, to which the President responded that differences may be freely expressed in a democratic country while warning that corruption and impunity could not be the price of good governance.

### **Endemic corruption in the judicial branch**

One issue that has been of great concern to the PRI and that they would prefer not to see run its course is the investigation into the diversion of funds from PEMEX into PRI coffers during the last election campaign. The Attorney General ordered the arrest of PEMEX's former director, also a former governor of Coahuila and a prominent PRI member close to Salinas. Several other officials have also been implicated, but the real brains behind the diversion of funds remain free.

The judicial branch is crucial in the fight against corruption and has acquired an unprecedented importance in the conflict between the executive and legislative branches. As a result, it must be clean and law-abiding, but unfortunately, this branch is precisely where the corruption is most endemic. A report by the special UN representative on the independence of judges and lawyers noted that a very high percentage of judges in Mexico—from 50-70%—are tarred by corruption. The report criticizes the bias of Mexican courts and concludes that there is virtually total impunity.

Mexico's party-ocracy has reached new heights. The upcoming election campaigns promise even more conflicts and little or no collaboration among the branches of state, while national interests remain relegated to second place.

### **Privileged bankers**

Bankers were the PRI regime's prodigal sons and continue to enjoy the same treatment from Fox's government. As PRD

representative López Obrador has demonstrated, they do not render accounts; no one audits them; they do not pay consumer or sales taxes; they receive more state resources than the public university or several of the nation's states and have been raking in public funds for the last several years thanks to the scandalous operations in the Fund to Protect Bank Savings (FOBAPROA). In the past six years, over US\$35 billion has gone into bailing out the banks, and foreign institutions have been the greatest beneficiaries. A full 87% of the shares in the Mexican banking system are now in foreign hands.

When a prosecutor charged with investigating corruption cases in Spain asked Mexico to look into the purchase by Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria (BBVA) of Mexican banks Probusa and Bancomer, it turned out that the Spanish bank had not invested the required capital. It also had not checked into the origin of the resources used in the purchase, which turned out to have included laundered funds from drug trafficking. Meanwhile, the Mexican magazine *Proceso* reported on the corruption of José Madariaga, close ally of both Salinas and former President Ernesto Zedillo, who was a BBVA vice president and a leading figure in these two sales. Several academic studies have shown that banks sold to foreigners tend to be concerned only with their own, often illicit interests.

### **Elitist visions and reforms**

Private enterprise has made it known, on numerous occasions and in various tones, that it does not trust the political parties. Businesspeople have been pressuring the federal government to reduce the price of fuel and electricity, open the energy sector to foreign investment, reform labor legislation in order to eliminate the labor rights that have been won and reduce the number of legislators. Another of their demands is to eliminate free, secular public education and intervene in evaluating education. Fox's team includes many officials who echo these positions. And, in fact, in the last budget cut, 76% came out of health and education programs.

In keeping with these interests, one of the candidates for the presidency of Mexico's leading business council has based his campaign on a proposal to dismantle Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM) and privatize the energy sector. He has also argued that indigenous problems are not priorities for

the country, and are mainly the result of alcoholism.

### **Labor reform: Betrayed promises**

While the very rich prosper from public resources and impunity, the very poor have to get by on increasingly scarce means. Among those hardest hit are peasant farmers. On April 10, the anniversary of Emiliano Zapata's assassination, peasant farmers all over the country marched to defend the land and oppose evictions and expropriations. On May 1, workers marched to repudiate the labor reforms being cooked up between business and government. The workers defended the eight-hour day and the right to strike, backed by the country's Catholic bishops, who issued a statement urging that the labor rights won by workers be respected.

The government is trying to impose on society a reform previously defined by the authorities that ignores everything Fox promised on this matter as a candidate: labor freedom, autonomy, democracy and pluralism. The budget included in the proposed reform encourages participation by foreign capital and neglects social interests. In one of the clearest examples of this betrayal, Fox met with the old PRI union leaders, those who had enriched themselves by letting the party control the workers' movement and are among the traditional obstacles to union democracy and freedom. Over 20 researchers specializing in labor issues called upon the Department of Labor to drop its secret, top-level talks and strive to negotiate consensus on labor reform.

### **Digna Ochoa: A pending case for Mexico and the world**

The nongovernmental human rights organizations are very concerned by increasing threats against them. Amnesty International charged that human rights activists are under attack, intimidated and slandered in Mexico and other Latin America countries. The UN Secretary General's special representative for the protection of human rights defenders reported that attacks against them have increased and said she hoped that the murder of human rights activist Digna Ochoa would not be covered up. She emphasized that the authorities are responsible for providing a valid explanation of Ochoa's assassination, since the government had not taken adequate measures to protect her despite sufficient warnings of the threats against her and the serious risk to her life.

After the last of the military officers cited by the Prosecutor's Office in the Federal District testified in the Ochoa case, the prosecutor announced that they had provided no relevant information. The OAS Inter-American Human Rights Commission said that the Prosecutor's Office had effectively carried out its role in the investigations into the crime. The Commission agreed to oversee and follow up on both the investigation and the protection measures for Ochoa's family, the lawyers involved in her work and the Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center. Nongovernmental organizations announced that they would only accept results backed by solid, conclusive evidence and demanded that such evidence be verified by independent analysts. They also demanded that the still unclarified threats against Ochoa be included in the investigation.

Six months after Ochoa's death, the Federal District Prosecutor's Office was following four lines of investigation. Two involved military officers, one had to do with her social and family environment and one posited suicide. This last hypothesis was leaked to the media.

Prominent journalist Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa wrote that the leaks were aimed at preventing the investigation from following a course that would damage the centers of power. Ochoa's brother said he had the support of Mexican, German and French experts in dismissing the suicide hypothesis and questioned who that suggestion sought to protect. The Prosecutor's Office announced that it was willing to let NGOs and human rights activists review the evidence in Ochoa's death and requested impartial experts approved by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission.

With the Senate's consent, Fox went to Europe to participate in the summit of European and Latin American nations in Madrid, and was the first Latin American President to address the European Parliament. When the case of Digna Ochoa also inevitably came up in a meeting with the Ministers' Committee of the Council of Europe, Fox promised that his government would provide all the information required by the Prosecutor's Office.

The human rights issue in general was also addressed in the meeting. Fox admitted that the government and army were accused of most of the repression and disappearances that took

place in the country in the two decades following 1968. He defended himself, however, by noting that his administration had established a special prosecutor to investigate these crimes. Recognizing that human rights activists are still being threatened, he added that the country was fully open to foreign nongovernmental organizations that could help build a culture of respect for human rights.

### **Impunity and the disappeared**

At the request of the mothers of the disappeared and in keeping with his own convictions, Mexico City's mayor filed a constitutional appeal against the Senate's interpretation of the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearances of Persons, which limits its application to events that occurred after it came into effect. The appeal asks that the Senate decree, which would make it impossible to prosecute those responsible for past disappearances and encourages impunity in the case of kidnappings carried out by armed forces members, be repealed. The Senate decree protects not only people responsible for the 1968 and 1971 massacres and the forced disappearances in the 1970s and 1980s, but also those who carried out the Aguas Blancas and Acteal massacres and those who killed Digna Ochoa.

The mothers of the disappeared have asked the government to remove the prosecutor it named to examine socially and politically motivated crimes in the past, charging that he has shown no interest in going after those ultimately responsible. The Eureka committee, which works on the issue of the disappeared, held a demonstration in front of the Supreme Court demanding that these crimes against humanity not go unpunished.

### **Indigenous in the court's hands**

The legislative and executive branches are not only enmeshed in their own conflicts, but are distanced from society's demands. One of the clearest examples can be found in their positions on the problems of indigenous peoples. The Mexican state has one last chance, however, as indigenous peoples have knocked on the doors of the judicial branch, which now bears responsibility for responding to them.

From May 6 through June 15, the Supreme Court held hearings on the 321 constitutional appeals filed against the Indigenous Law that the legislature approved last year. The National

Indigenous Congress asked the judges to issue a just verdict in accord with the law and expressed their confidence that the unconstitutional, illegitimate law would be overturned. They also called on civil society to join in this new phase of their struggle.

The municipalities' legal representatives have not attended the hearings, although this does not indicate disinterest. The municipalities involved are very poor and isolated, and many managed to take their demands to Mexico City for the first time only with the support of local politicians who used the situation to advance their own position, but once having achieved it, they abandoned the communities. This was especially true in Oaxaca.

Other communities have been able to organize themselves to carry on the fight and have been following the cases. They have also organized cultural events in front of the Supreme Court, fully aware that this strategy is just one more step in their centuries-long resistance struggle.

#### **Devastating report on Chiapas**

#### **European**

While Fox declared in Europe that Mexico's Indigenous Law was among the most progressive in the world, indigenous rights specialists continued to give the lie to this affirmation. The International Civil Commission for the Observation of Human Rights, made up of 104 people from 14 European countries, issued a report on their visit to Mexico that concluded that no progress has been made on human rights issues. They presented this report to the European Parliament when Fox was in Brussels on his official visit.

The report highlighted the government's failure to respond to the conflict in Chiapas and the deteriorating economic situation of Chiapas' communities. The observers warned that implementation of the Puebla Panama Plan (PPP) could worsen the situation. The report offered proof that high-level officials have encouraged the formation of paramilitary groups as part of a counterinsurgency scheme. The report revealed that, far from reining in the paramilitary groups, those in power have left their leaders free. It charges that they continue to fan conflicts and apply a policy of terror, assassinations and constant aggressions against Zapatista communities in the guise of land disputes, party or religious conflicts, personal enmities, family vengeance and accidents. The report also confirmed that the groups are

supported by the old PRI structures at the community and municipal levels and have operated with the complicity of the army and state security forces.

The report again demonstrated that peace has not come to Chiapas. All the superficial, cosmetic work boasted of by the foreign relations secretary crumbled under the evidence presented by the European observers. The Zapatista cause could not be swept under the rug, as Fox had hoped to do.

#### **The Puebla Panama Plan: Undermining peace in Chiapas**

Fox tried to convince the European politicians to support the PPP, but failed. Most analysts concluded that the Fox government is still applying PRI policies on indigenous issues, and many charge that he hopes to make the conflict in Chiapas wither away so that the PPP may prosper.

A Central American Peasant Forum held in Tapachula, Chiapas, concluded with an unequivocal rejection of the plan. This forum brought together 650 delegates from 52 indigenous peasant organizations in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama. They described the PPP as neoliberal, globalizing and authoritarian, and charged that it is being promoted by the United States through Fox and represents one more step in the line of anti-farm trade agreements and public policies that have ruined Central American agriculture, transforming these countries into net food importers. They also rejected the PPP as an anti-democratic project that hinders people's self-determination.

US expert on Latin America James Petras has described the PPP as yet another instrument for exploiting cheap labor. Far from helping integrate our region into the global market, he argues, it will lead to even greater subordination to US interests. Nor will it facilitate the emergence of new business sectors, since it will only extend the *maquila* in the South. In Europe, the PPP is accused of encouraging militarized globalization, and European activists have described the San Andrés Accords as an antidote to it.

#### **The EZLN's year of silence**

The end of April marked a year of Zapatista silence. In their place, we have heard the voices of the autonomous municipalities. Although there were changes in the local and federal

governments in Chiapas, local power remains in the same hands. Because paramilitary groups continue to act in impunity, peace remains far off, and the truth is that a low-intensity war is continuing in Chiapas. The Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center has documented 122 deaths caused by this paramilitarization since 1995, and reports that over 12,000 displaced people are still awaiting justice. Independent investigations have determined that the army maintains 232 posts and 32 checkpoints in Chiapas.

With the mediation of the legislature's Harmony and Peace Commission (COCOPA), three Zapatistas were freed from the Cerro Hueco prison in Chiapas at the end of May. The government propagandized the event, insisting that the EZLN return to the negotiating table. The imprisoned Zapatistas refused to be photographed with either the COCOPA members or the government's peace commissioner, stating that their freedom was not enough. The Zapatistas' lawyer argued that their liberation was no sign of good will from Fox, since the three had already completed their sentences as established by law.

### **Two bishops in Chiapas speak**

The bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, said there was no reason to be grateful for the freeing of the Zapatistas prisoners, since it was their just due. He also gave his analysis of the situation, arguing that racism and disdain towards indigenous peoples are ongoing problems in Mexico. The bishop said that although the EZLN has become a political force, the rebel group's effective renunciation of the use of arms has not been adequately appreciated. He emphasized that a reform of the state and the construction of a new society lie at the heart of the Zapatistas' proposals.

The bishop explained that the indigenous demands related to culture and rights were to have been the starting point as they were thought to be the easiest points. He also noted that while the Zapatistas have encouraged autonomy in their communities, other communities have chosen to take the government's charitable aid, which has led to great divisions among the indigenous people. In late May, the bishop of Tapachula, also in Chiapas, said that "a latent war" is underway in the region.

### **Globalization and its discontents**

The Zapatistas have been unwavering in their rejection of

neoliberalism, a position that has been growing increasingly strong all around the world. Writer Naomi Klein has argued that the Zapatista rebellion marked the start of the movement against corporate globalization. Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel laureate in economics, maintains in his new book *Globalization and its Discontents* that Latin America's economic reforms have been a failure, with the limited growth of the past decade benefiting society's richest sectors and virtually no attention being paid to either instability or inequality. He argues that the neoliberal model has failed to generate shared economic growth. With it, large sectors of society fell from low to zero productivity. Policies to eradicate poverty, he writes, have also failed. One fundamental problem is that the World Trade Organization and International Monetary Fund decisions, which have such a sharp effect on entire communities, are made exclusively by finance and trade ministers and central bank directors, thus reflecting only these interests within the government. The representatives of the various other sectors of a country's society have no say in the decisions. They are not the result of broad consensus, nor do they consider social and political consequences. Stiglitz maintains that the countries of the North would never accept the recipes that the IMF is imposing on the South.

### **Europe applauds the Zapatistas**

While the rulers get indebted to their own summits, the parallel grassroots demonstrations have grown increasingly strong. The European Union-Latin America and the Caribbean Summit in Madrid was nicknamed the "Summit of Disappointments." Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, the leader of Mexico's Eureka committee, was among those heading up a huge march in that city protesting today's corporate globalization. Other demands included the establishment of an international criminal court to judge the genocide and repression in Latin America starting in the 1970s and of adequate social and political conditions to ensure that human rights activists are not threatened or killed like Digna Ochoa in Mexico. The Zapatista cause was also present in the march, as Zapatistas marched alongside other leaders of Latin American indigenous and peasant movements. And when an EZLN banner was raised in the Plaza de España, the crowd burst out into applause, shouting "Zapata lives, the fight goes on!" In her speech, Ibarra said that although the Berlin Wall had fallen, those in power are now building new walls of hunger and misery. She recalled that José Martí had predicted that America would rise up with its indigenous peoples and that this is already

happening with the indigenous people of Chiapas. Thus, while the Zapatistas are heard and applauded in the heart of Europe, in Mexico a government made up of businesspeople is trying to ignore them, after centuries of keeping them under foot. This story is far from over, however.

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### **Atenco: Machetes Challenge Neoliberalism**

*The Atenco peasant farmer's rebelliousness and love of the land forced President Fox to change course, proving that people can challenge and even defeat money's power with the power and flash of machetes.*

#### **Jorge Alonso**

It has been clear for several years now that Mexico City's airport can no longer handle air traffic for the city, one of the world's most populous. And people have been drawing up projects to build a new terminal for years. Two of these appeared to be the most viable: one near Lake Texcoco, in the state of Mexico, and the other in Tizayuca, in the state of Hidalgo. The first would entirely replace the current airport, which would then be closed; the second would handle international flights, while national flights would continue to operate out of the current airport.

The debate over the site of the new airport soon became an exclusive battle between two powerful economic groups poised to benefit mightily, and the fight grew dirty and intense. What the inhabitants of the areas thought about the plans, however, did not appear to be on anyone's agenda.

#### **Expropriation and a ridiculous compensation offer**

In the second half of 2001, the balance tilted towards the Texcoco project. Mexico City's Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) government expressed its opposition to the plan, given that the airport posed various environmental and urban planning-related problems that would affect the city. The federal government insisted that the choice had been made on purely technical

grounds, although several academic specialists challenged this assertion.

To carry out the project, the government decided to expropriate the land belonging to several agrarian communities, or *ejidos*, where the new airport was to be built. Three municipalities of the state of Mexico were affected by President Fox's decree to expropriate decree. Some 70% of the affected land was in the municipality of San Salvador Atenco, 25% in Texcoco and 5% in Chimalhuacán. Atenco has a population of some 30,000 inhabitants, a high urban growth rate and a severe lack of services. The population's main source of income comes from agricultural production, mostly corn and beans. Yields are low, due to the region's deteriorated land and heavily saline water. The irrigated land, where alfalfa is grown, is in private hands. The decree affected several *ejidos* in these three municipalities. Those standing to lose the most land to the airport project were Atenco (whose lands would make up 20% of the project), Santa Isabel Ixtapa (23.2%) and Nexquipayac (16.5%). The square-meter price offered to compensate the affected landowners was more than offensive: 25 pesos, or around US\$2.50, for irrigated land and 7 pesos or \$0.70 for non-irrigated land.

#### **Legal**

#### **struggle:**

#### **Appeals and challenges**

Since the authorities had not taken into account the inhabitants of the area where the airport was to be built, discontent ran strong. The residents channeled it in two ways. First, they used the legal route, filing 11 appeals against the expropriation. Three municipalities—including Atenco and Texcoco—plus the Federal District also filed constitutional appeals with the Supreme Court for usurping their authority, since the Constitution establishes that municipalities have the right to authorize the use of their land and participate in regional development planning.

The media tried to minimize the protest, noting that the *ejidos* opposed to the project represented only 25% of those affected by the decree. But in fact, these *ejidos* held over half the land required for the new airport and without it, the project could not go forward. By the end of August 2001, 5 of the 11 appeals had been accepted.

It is important to note that several of the affected *ejidos* would virtually disappear if the airport were built. San Salvador Atenco

and five other *ejidos* would lose some 80% of their land, although some of the others stood to lose only around 20%. For those most affected, including Atenco, accepting the expropriation meant renouncing the life of their communities. But the stakes were high for the other side too, as the authorities' actions showed. Texcoco's mayor charged that both the federal government (with the National Action Party, or PAN, in power) and the state government (run by the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI) were harassing the town for having filed a constitutional appeal against the expropriations.

### **Taking the struggle to the streets**

In addition to the legal route, many inhabitants of the communities affected by the decree decided to build a protest movement, which gradually took the form of an organized front to defend the land. In response to the government's refusal to pay attention to them, the movement resorted to several acts of rebellion. In October 2001, dozens of *ejido* members blocked a major road leading to the municipal seat of Texcoco.

The next month, brandishing their machetes, they marched to the Zócalo, Mexico City's main square. Federal District police tried to stop them, but given the risk of a bloody confrontation, let them pass. At the end of the year, 3,000 *ejido* members from Atenco and Texcoco demonstrated in front of the state of Mexico's government offices. At the beginning of 2002, they marched to the state capital to demand that the PRI governor rescind the decree, stop the harassment and remove from office municipal officials they accused of having betrayed the people's cause.

### **The sparks of Atenco's machetes**

The response was to criminalize the movement. The state government got arrest warrants against Atenco's leaders, but these had no effect: the movement was growing beyond its borders. *Ejido* members from Atenco participated in the protest marches against neoliberal globalization at the Monterrey summit, and wherever social protests took place over the following months people from Atenco were there offering their support. Wherever they went, they brought their machetes, using their traditional tools of work as a symbol of their struggle.

In February 2002, they marched to Mexico City again. By that point, their efforts to build alliances had borne fruit and students and workers accompanied them. They intended to march to the

presidential residence to invite President Fox to a public debate on the expropriation of their land, but the police did not let them pass. They continued to set up roadblocks over the following months, especially after the date for bidding on the airport's master plan was announced. They demanded that not a single step be taken before the Supreme Court issued its decision, and insisted that they would not sell their land.

In June 2002, they confiscated four vehicles and detained eleven electricity company employees who were surveying their land. They also blocked work to appraise their land. And again they called on President Fox to take part in a public debate. On July 8, they marched to the Mexico City airport. Fearing that they would block the runways, the Federal Preventive Police refused to let them pass. In the media, businesspeople and politicians complained that the farmers were allowed to march with their threatening machetes, which they struck against the pavement to make sparks.

### **"Social rage"**

On July 11, Atenco's *ejido* members were on their way to participate in an event organized by the governor of the state of Mexico when the state police prevented them from going; a confrontation ensued that left several people wounded, including one from Atenco in serious condition. The police detained the movement's leaders. In response, the peasants destroyed several patrol cars and other vehicles and held several public officials hostage, demanding that their colleagues be freed. That night tensions escalated as the community members dug in. When they blocked a major road, they were besieged immediately by state police, the Federal Preventive Police and the Army.

The farmers declared that they were prepared for anything, even death, but would not sell their land. The magazine *Proceso* narrated the events under the title "Social Rage." The pro-business press unleashed their pens against the farmers, denouncing them as violent. General Gallardo, who had criticized corruption and human rights abuses in the army and was recently freed after many years in prison on trumped-up charges, denounced police provocation against the Atenco peasants by order of the government of the state of Mexico. He and several other observers concurred that the governor himself had ordered the repression against them and the detention of their leaders.

### **Demanding a hard hand against "hidden hands"**

All of the groups that had received the support of Atenco's people during the formation of their movement now mobilized in their defense. Workers, peasant farmers, poor urban inhabitants, students and teachers all participated. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas called on civil society to support them. Several organizations prepared a caravan to break through the armed forces siege to bring in food and medicine.

The television tried to present this alliance with the broader social movement as evidence of "hidden hands" manipulating the farmers, while the attorney general of the state of Mexico went so far as to claim that foreign subversives and guerrillas had been in Atenco. The ruling class again repeated the tired old saw it invariably drags out to disqualify any social protest, interpreting it as the result of foreign influence, as if the people had no reasons of their own. Protagonists are denigrated by supposing them incapable of thinking and acting on their own, that they must be manipulated by "hidden interests." The dominant classes called on the government to use a hard hand, arguing that the EZLN would have caused fewer headaches if the government had annihilated it in the early days of January 1994.

### **The people from Atenco seek talks with Fox**

Tensions increased along with danger that the conflict would escalate even further. The attorney general of the state of Mexico refused to free the detained farmers and pressed charges against them. The federal government expressed its willingness to seek a non-violent solution, but PRI authorities in the state of Mexico were determined not to give in. When the federal government declared that the problem was under the authority of the state of Mexico, the people from Atenco refused to deal with state authorities and called instead for direct talks with the President, since the whole conflict grew out of his expropriation decree. The state authorities later agreed to free the detained farmers provisionally on bail, but refused to drop charges against them.

The people of Atenco freed their hostages and suspended their roadblocks, but demanded that all charges against their leaders be dropped. They also proposed intermediation by three prominent figures: former bishop of Chiapas Samuel Ruiz, General Gallardo and social activist Rosario Ibarra, leader of the Eureka

group on political disappearances. The federal government rejected this proposal and offered to deal directly with those "really" affected, letting it be understood that it would not accept the participation of the movement's allies.

The PAN's general secretary blamed state of Mexico authorities for the violence. The mayor of the Federal District, the PRD's López Obrador, proposed a truce and the PRD itself expressed solidarity with the people of Atenco. The PRI cynically complained that negotiations were taking place "outside the law," although PRI leaders have historically been experts in the art of bending the law to smash any dissidence and benefit their own members and allies. The PRI complained that "delinquents" had been freed, neglecting the fact that criminals on the scale of Cabal Peniche and other big businesspeople who have defrauded the nation of millions of dollars, in complicity with the PRI, remain free.

**Mr. President, would you sell your ranch for 70 cents a meter?**

PAN members and several leading businesspeople also expressed their discontent, criticizing the government for letting itself be pressured on issues that had already been decided. They feared that the "bad example" would spread and undermine other projects.

The federal government had to recognize that it could not build an airport if it had to use arms to guard it from protesters. President Fox said that abiding by the rule of law did not mean closing the door to dialogue, that both were compatible objectives, and that solutions within the framework of the law could be found. In a CNN interview in which Fox chose not to talk about the Atenco case, he was asked if he would sell his ranch for \$0.70 a square meter.

Fox announced that other options for the new airport were being studied and promised he would not violate anyone's rights. The government secretary denied that the government was negotiating the rule of law, arguing that the best way to encourage compliance with the law was not through force but rather through reason and dialogue.

The federal government offered to reconsider the compensation price and provide land in other areas to people determined to continue working as farmers, declaring that in the spirit of tolerance it would examine all possible alternatives for reaching

an agreement. López Obrador praised Fox's capacity to rectify the government's mistakes. The PRD called on the government to find other terrain for the airport, while the PRI demanded that the investors be prioritized.

### **Conflict in Congress**

In Congress, the conflict divided the legislators. The PRD, Labor Party and Green Party demanded the government act in a manner congruent with the dialogue it had offered. The PAN came out in the President's defense, while the PRI defended the governor of the state of Mexico. Many believed that the solution lay in renegotiating the amount of compensation. The PAN maintained that the movement was infiltrated by outside provocateurs, echoing the secretary of communications and transport's charges that the resistance was manipulated and the conflict a political one designed to put the government to the test and create problems for it.

PAN Senator Diego Fernández de Cevallos lamented that the poor had to use the language of machetes, emphasizing that there was nothing wrong with the rich doing business, but that it was inexcusable that the poor have to use violence. While private enterprise harshly criticized the government for choosing to talk with the protesters rather than repress them, the pilots' union applauded Fox's decision to avoid another massacre like the 1968 massacre of Tlatelolco.

### **Prison for the leaders**

The charges against the movement's leaders continued their course in the state of Mexico, while there too, the movement was accused of being infiltrated by outsiders. The *ejido* members demanded that all the slanderous incriminations stop. A judge issued a warrant for several farmers from Atenco to face charges for having confronted the police. Others feared they would be next.

Atenco's residents, who were meeting constantly, demanded that the state attorney general drop the charges. The response was a new warrant to pick up farmers who had been freed on bail.

### **First victory: Dialogue, not repression**

Although the government of the state of Mexico had mounted the repression to crush the movement, it continued to grow stronger. The Pope's upcoming visit to Mexico made the federal

government fear that the conflict would escalate and have negative repercussions on the country's international image. This was no doubt one motive behind the government's decision to agree to talks in an effort to defuse the extreme tension. The people from Atenco, who had demonstrated that they were ready for everything, even death, took this as a victory: they had overcome the repression. Another important achievement in this stage was overcoming their own internal divisions.

Some 7,000 people led by the *ejido* farmers marched to the President's residence, and this time were received. Among their demands was that the expropriation decree be rescinded, that the federal government engage in direct talks to resolve the problem, that the arrested leaders be unconditionally freed, and that the police be withdrawn from the conflict area. Most important, above all these demands, the people of Atenco insisted that they would not sell at any price, and were not going to negotiate over money.

The movement proposed a public dialogue with the presence of the media, and a commission of 30 *ejido* members, 10 of whom would be seated at the table to speak. They announced that the People's Front to Defend the Land would also have 10 advisers, and proposed that the talks be held in the Emiliano Zapata auditorium of the Autonomous University of Chapingo at 5:00 on the afternoon of July 17.

### **The government aims to divide**

Once the extreme tension was defused, the political game continued. The government expressed its willingness to talk but in fact sought out only groups willing to sell in order to negotiate the price, while slighting or ignoring the groups that remained unwilling to sell at any price. The government secretary said that the government would talk openly, with no cards under the table, and wanted to know the feeling of the majority of the communities. Ten representatives of the 13 communities that would be affected by the expropriation agreed to talk on the government's terms. But the people of Atenco were not among them, since they remained determined not to sell.

Around this time, the government official in charge of the project to build the new airport stepped up the pressure, arguing that if the airport were not built in Texcoco it might not be built during Fox's term. Although everyone knew the work would mainly

benefit businesses tied to the powerful Atlacomulco political-economic group of the state of Mexico as well as foreign capital, the *ejido* members were offered a share in it.

The people from Atenco waited for the government's representatives at the place and time they had proposed, but no one showed up. The movement's leaders decided not to make too much of the government's absence, attributing it to the fact that this was a moment of reflection for the government. They also announced that if the federal government did not respond to them, they would turn to the legislative branch instead. Despite this positive spin, they were again stung by the government's disdain, more convinced than ever that the federal government was mistaken in not considering them. It was the fifth time they had called on the government to talk, to no avail.

### **Increasingly united**

The very same day and hour that the people of Atenco were left waiting, representatives of 10 *ejido* communities with whom the government had offered to talk met in the Department of Government. Those who participated said they agreed with the project to build the airport, but not with the compensation price offered, and that they supported Atenco's *ejido* farmers but not the violence.

The following day, the Department of Government invited the president of Atenco's *ejido* committee to talk on July 22. The government clearly thought it would be able to sidestep the land defense movement's representatives, but its calculations were off. Although the social movement and the *ejido* committee had taken different paths at the start, the repression had united them. Movement spokespeople charged that the *ejido* representatives who had participated in the earlier meeting with the Government Secretary had not held assemblies with their members to learn their views on the offers, and for this reason were not legitimate representatives. They stressed that the three communities whose lands were most affected had not participated in the meeting, and accused those who had met with the Department of Government of being traitors.

### **Increasingly determined not to sell**

The farmers of Atenco, Acuexcomac, Magdalena Panoaya, Nexquipayac and Tocuila—who owned 42.4% of the land to be expropriated—denounced the official strategy to isolate them

and focus on talks with the groups that wanted to sell their land. On July 19, leaders of the movement met with federal government officials in Texcoco and agreed to begin talks July 24.

Representatives of the People's Front to Defend the Land attended this preliminary meeting. Their leader declared that both sides were committed to finding an agreement. On July 21, a support committee made up of members of several social organizations went to Atenco. Farmers from San Miguel Tocuila removed six members of the *ejido* committee from their post, including its president, for meeting with the Department of Government without first consulting the community. They reiterated their support for the People's Front to Defend the Land. The inhabitants of Santa Isabel Ixtapa joined the Front, increasing the number of *ejidos* that refused to negotiate over the price of the land to six. Despite the government's efforts to divide them, the movement kept growing stronger. By this point, the government had increased its offer from \$0.70 a meter to \$5.

**Flowers and corridos  
for a hero from Atenco**

On July 24, the man from Atenco who had been badly beaten on July 11 died. The mainstream media and state of Mexico authorities tried to convince people that his death was due not to the blows but rather to a previous illness. They also charged that the man was not even an *ejido* member, and had been forced to join the march where he was beaten. *La Jornada* commented: "They wanted to take away his land, they took away his life, and now they want to take away his death." In fact, the man was married to an *ejido* member whose lands he sometimes worked, was a member of the movement and did not want to lose his house.

The beating clearly played a role in his death. One of the people detained along with him testified that after he was beaten, he felt very bad and asked the police to help him, but they paid no attention to him. When he became sicker, they took him to a hospital, but the hospital promptly returned him to his captors. He later returned to the hospital and died after several days in serious condition.

The first reports on the causes of the man's death pointed to medical negligence. The hospital stated that the man had died from respiratory problems that he could not overcome because

of his diabetes. The National Human Rights Commission, however, found that the beating had led to organ failures. The president of the Mexican League for the Defense of Human Rights attributed the man's death to complications resulting from the trauma, and noted that striking a person who has been detained—as the police did in this case—is defined as torture.

Prayers, hymns and anger marked the burial. People sang *corridos* from the Mexican revolution, changing the characters: the protagonist was the man from Atenco and the villain, Governor Montiel of the state of Mexico. The movement blamed the death of this "hero" on Montiel and President Fox. The President's office lamented the death, acknowledging that it would complicate negotiations.

The movement's lawyer officially charged the police of the state of Mexico with homicide. The National Human Rights Commission recommended that the government seek another site for the airport, since "they can't kill all those who don't want to sell." The death united the people from Atenco and neighboring communities even more.

#### **"We won't sell our Mother Earth"**

On July 22, the Department of Government informed the people of Atenco of its conditions for continuing talks. They would have to suspend their marches and leave their machetes and advisers behind. Also, the media would not be allowed to be present during the talks. The farmers responded that they would go to the place proposed by the Department of Government on the 24th, but would bring their machetes and their advisers. Their advisers were faculty from Mexico's National Autonomous University and the University of Chapingo, while their machetes were the symbol of their struggle. Nor did they agree to exclude the media. They complained that the government was playing it two ways by holding talks with other groups when it had agreed that the talks would be held with those who rejected the plan to build an airport on their land.

The people who participated in the talks on the 24th did not brandish their machetes, although some brought them along sheathed. The people from Atenco who remained outside the room did raise their machetes. In the meeting, the two sides talked but reached no agreements. The government representative warned the movement that the *ejido* assemblies

had the last word, while the movement's leaders demanded that they be recognized as the People's Front to Defend the Land. Another meeting was set.

### **"If no solution, a revolution"**

Inside, the representatives argued that they would not sell their mother earth, the basis of their existence and way of life. In response to accusations that they opposed progress, they replied that what they in fact opposed is progress on behalf of a small minority. Outside, demonstrators chanted, "if there's no solution, there'll be a revolution." The Latin America regional coordinator for the Habitat International Coalition, a United Nations consultative organization, declared that the government was violating several basic rights of the Atenco farmers, such as the right to housing, and described the government's attitude in the first session of talks as "arrogant," which would aggravate the conflict rather than resolve it.

### **Things of value without a price**

On July 26, the residents of Atenco and other *ejidos* waited in vain for government representatives to show up for the second round of talks at the University of Chapingo. They learned from the radio that the government would not participate. They had been stood up on six occasions now, while the authorities kept their schedule of meetings with representatives who were not recognized by their communities. PRD leader Rosario Robles called on the government to return to the talks, arguing that its policy of turning a deaf ear was responsible for the violence.

The *ejido* members of San Francisco Nexquipayac got their committee president to sign a letter promising not to participate in negotiations between the purported representatives of the 10 *ejidos* willing to sell and the Department of Government. The *ejidos* of San Felipe and Santa Cruz de Abajo held assemblies and agreed to join the People's Front to Defend the Land and fight the expropriation of their land. Once again, while the Department of Government tried to divide and weaken the movement, it continued to grow stronger. By the end of July, the number of *ejidos* opposed to the new airport had increased to eight.

On July 27, the deputy secretary of government informed the Atenco *ejido* committee president of the proposed increase in the compensation price and offered to build schools and health centers, relocate affected houses and provide jobs in the new

airport. But in their assembly, the *ejido* members ratified their refusal to sell their land. The leader of the Eureka group, Rosario Ibarra, criticized the government for failing to understand that some things have no price.

### **Massive support for the people of Atenco**

On Sunday, July 28, the first National Peasant Farmer Conference took place in Atenco. The People's Front to Defend the Land along with representatives of 93 peasant and social organizations from around the country decided to organize a national mobilization in mid-August to give Fox's government an ultimatum: that the decree expropriating land in the Atenco, Texcoco and Chimalhuacán municipalities be rescinded. One of Atenco's leaders explained that they were seeking to build a national consensus around this demand. In the assembly, people decided not to march to the Basilica of Guadalupe on July 30, during the Pope's visit, to avoid providing any pretext for repression. They would instead make their political-religious pilgrimage from Atenco to Texcoco. Signs of support for the movement from Atenco and the struggle of its people abounded all around the country.

On July 23, before the man struck by the police died, the polling company Consulta Mitofsky had done a telephone survey to measure public opinion on the movement. To the surprise of the powerful rightwing politicians, the movement enjoyed wide support. Although 80% agreed that there is need for a new airport and a third thought Texcoco was the best site, 77.5% felt that the people from Atenco were not obliged to leave their lands and houses in order for the airport to be built, showing widespread rejection of expropriation. A full 84.7% felt that the Atenco movement was legitimate and that the people in it were seeking to protect their patrimony, while only 7% felt that there were "third parties" behind them. Over two-thirds felt that the government should find another place to build the airport.

### **Letter to John Paul II**

In a last effort to overcome Atenco's resistance, the Department of Government sent the media a letter from the president of an *ejido* committee that supported the airport project and stated, in the name of other committees, its intention to negotiate the price.

When Pope John Paul II arrived in Mexico, the people of Atenco made a pilgrimage asking the Virgin of Guadalupe to intervene on their behalf with President Fox. In the diocese of Texcoco, they delivered a letter addressed to the Pope to explain to him the reasons for their struggle.

In the letter, which they titled "The land, God's gift to all," they denounced the government's false promises and attempts to rob them of their lands. They told the Pope that his visit took place at a time when people all over the world are facing changes that strike a blow to human dignity, and that under the cover of speeches about prosperity and progress governments are leading their people into even deeper poverty. They told him that it was precisely to denounce these injustices that the people of Atenco had raised their voices, but they were met by indifference and repression. They explained the whole story of the expropriation and insisted that the expropriation decree was both illegal and illegitimate, since they, the owners of the land, had never been informed or consulted. They also denounced the way the authorities treated them and their land as merchandise, ignoring the fact that they had a history, traditions and dignity. The people of Atenco asked the Pope to speak in favor of their just and worthy cause, because "our beliefs are as sacred as our land, and our land is our life."

**Fox cancels the project:  
A great victory**

The day the Pope left Mexico, President Fox announced that the project to build the airport in Texcoco had been cancelled. The official reasons were that the new compensation price had not been accepted and the negotiations were dragging out too long.

Negative reactions in other places continued along the lines of those expressed during the conflict. The bishop of Ecatepec, a friend of big business, complained that 300 machetes had proven to be more powerful than the President, and said that the airport should have been built in Texcoco even if 500 people had died. Leading figures in private enterprise agreed that giving in to the peasant movement was a sign of government weakness. Many congressional representatives also expressed their discontent.

Conservative commentators in the United States complained that Fox had given in to "violence." On the other hand, Cárdenas described the President's decision as "the triumph of reason,"

López Obrador praised Fox for keeping his word, and former general Gallardo said that everyone had won.

In Atenco, the decision was celebrated as what it was, a great victory, and the people held a ceremony to their patron saint in gratitude for it. They responded directly and bravely to the bishop, denouncing him for using the people's faith to his own ends and charging that his statements were those not of a man of the Church but of someone with his hands in the airport business.

### **The glimmer of a change**

On August 6, President Fox definitively rescinded the expropriation decree. Up to that point, the people from Atenco, who only had the President's announcement to go on, felt the threat of renewed conflict continuing to hang over them. As a way to celebrate this legal seal on their victory and respond to those who might have thought their struggle no longer had any basis, the people of Atenco announced that, like the Zapatistas, they would form an autonomous municipality; they had gone for several months without any outside authorities and functioned very well as a community. In response, some powerful groups described them as "lawless people." The President's decision to rescind the expropriation decree did not defuse the polarization created by the conflict. Just the opposite: those opposed to the farmers' interests were stung by their defeat while the people of Atenco along with those who supported their struggle saw that it is possible to win.

### **Many lessons to learn**

The movement revealed that Fox's government, like all that have imposed neoliberal policies on their people, lacks an agrarian policy and has no strategies to address the problems of rural areas and resolve their conflicts. It is interested only in achieving greater integration through commercial and financial globalization, and to accomplish this, prioritizes large infrastructure projects that benefit large capital. While the theft of peasant lands has always been an important part of capitalist accumulation, the current stage of neoliberalism has intensified this trend.

The government has been applying the infamous "Hood Robin" reverse tactic of robbing from the poor to give to the rich. The economic powers that invade lands belonging to peasant communities to evict the people and plunder their land are protected. People lose faith in the capacity of those in power to

resolve the needs of those from below, while the contradictions between the model imposed by the government and people's real situations intensify.

Those looking for "hidden hands" behind the conflict would find them easily enough if they followed the tracks of a state that swindles the poor and subsidizes the rich. This explains why peasant farmers who do not want to lose their land, which is all they have to pass on to their children, have become radicalized.

Those in power not only exclude the majority of the population but are incapable of even seeing them. In its *mea culpa*, the government admitted having erred by not negotiating with those affected at the very start. Its initial attitude was one of disdain, making clear that it would not listen to the people's demands or take a step back. This radicalized the movement and led it to use a violence that may not be legal but is legitimate. The brutal repression was the last straw.

The federal government's decision to rectify its position and agree to talk is to be praised. Even the people of Atenco also recognized that they had seen the glimmer of a change, though the new government had remained largely trapped within the course set by the former regime. It had committed other mistakes after the first one it acknowledged, trying to divide the movement through a fragmented series of talks sometimes more simulated than sincere.

What	the	Mexican
<b>"Heartland" had to say</b>		

Atenco was one more example of the movement of the marginalized against neoliberalism and its powers. The peasant farmers have defended their right not to sell their land. The powerful, as is their wont, first made plans to their detriment, without consulting them or even considering them, assuming they could take the lands of the poor in exchange for beads. Later, when the people rebelled, they thought that raising the price would resolve the conflict, ruled as they are by the law of profit. They were totally unprepared for the people of Atenco to respond by refusing to sell their ancestral heritage at any price. Then instead of trying to understand their indigenous-based culture, they immediately assumed that the whole thing must be the result of a plot, with outside hands manipulating people they disdained and believed incapable of thinking or acting freely. The

government and businesspeople accused the peasants of opposing progress and presented them as violent, intransigent enemies of development. They didn't listen to their arguments, or want to hear and understand them.

The peasant farmers said they were not interested in selling their land because their way of life, their identity and the life of their whole community were there; that they were not interested in the proposed jobs because they work the land to which they owe their lives and don't want to work for companies. They rejected only the "progress" that exterminates their culture and traditions.

The farmers were also unwilling to put a monetary value on their land because they were fully aware of the experience of people in the south of the Federal District, who after three decades have still not received all the money due them for the expropriation of their land to build the Military School. The farmers want a development that includes them not as servants or low-level workers but rather as people who have the right to decide over their work. The powerful made little attempt to understand them and many analysts argued that they don't understand the "Mexican Heartland" at all.

### **Atenco and the Zapatistas**

The decision to form an autonomous municipality was neither capricious nor accidental. Atenco has been yet another of the movements inspired by the Zapatista movement, both old and new. The figure of Emiliano Zapata and his defense of the people's land were revived in Atenco. The new Zapatista movement has also been a source of inspiration, as one of its leaders recognized, arguing that the struggle is won not with slogans but with reasons. The Zapatistas offered their support to the people of Atenco, and explained how large infrastructure projects like the proposed airport are part of the model promoted by the Puebla Panama Plan. The Zapatistas face the same basic issue as the people of Atenco, since in Chiapas they too are resisting privatization of their land.

Indeed, the similarities are numerous. Both groups have demonstrated that they are willing to die rather than give in. The first response of the authorities to both movements was to try to annihilate them. Both have been criminalized, both have organized themselves outside the political parties and both have brought their peasant struggle to the cities. Both responded in

defense of their dignity and have used symbols of struggle that give them identity, hoods in one case, machetes in the other. Both movements were offered negotiations that were merely simulacra, traps. Both have grown stronger through the solidarity of other excluded people and shown their determination to resist no matter how long it takes. Both movements include many young people and have encouraged all groups harmed by neoliberalism to join together.

### **Puebla Panama Plan: Flash points**

Another consequence of the Atenco movement is that it roused several politicians who warned that there are many flash points in the country, that the Puebla Panama Plan can spark off many Atencos and that some 5,000 latent agrarian conflicts could burst out at any time. With Atenco, people began to notice a number of tensions and economic and political pressures that could lead to violence. Anthropologist Rodolfo Stavenhagen, the UN special rapporteur on indigenous rights, declared that the abuses against Mexican peasant farmers persist and that the violence occurred because the authorities failed to pay attention to the ancient land problem or respect the rights of those who work and love their mother earth.

### **More Atencos will come**

Atenco's resistance has created a movement that has encouraged solidarity and established new networks of struggle. Atenco's peasant farmers have become an example for many others in the defense of their land and their indigenous agrarian traditions.

The struggle goes on. Although the expropriation decree no longer hangs over their heads, criminal charges remain pending against the movement's leaders. And the big investors, bitter over their defeat, are calling on the government of the state of Mexico, which also resents the multi-million dollar losses implied by cancellation of the airport project, to continue to press those charges in order to set an example. As always, winning a battle does not mean winning a definitive victory. For this reason, the expectation and the hope is that more battles will follow.

*"We don't want to stop being indigenous, we want to stop being poor." The Mexican government, however, has buffeted them with the Indigenous Law, now upheld by the judicial branch as well as the executive and legislative branches, which neither respects them nor supports their efforts to overcome poverty.*

### **Jorge Alonso**

When President Fox took office, his government appeared to be interested in resolving the conflict in Chiapas. Within months, it sent Congress a bill based on the proposal drafted by the legislature's Harmony and Peace Commission (COCOPA), which the Zapatistas accepted as a fair reflection of the San Andrés Accords. When Congress distorted the bill, eliminating essential sections, Mexico's indigenous peoples and the Zapatista Front for National Liberation (EZLN) rejected the reform. The EZLN has since kept silent, but many indigenous municipalities called on the Supreme Court to intervene, filing constitutional appeals against the mutilated indigenous law.

As the country awaited the Court decision, thinking that Zapatista influence had waned, one of the Zapatistas' lessons sent up shoots in the Valley of Mexico itself. The community of Atenco, after forcing the government to abandon its plan to turn their land into an airport, announced that it was establishing itself as an autonomous municipality. Autonomy is the form that Zapatista communities have used to consolidate their resistance. The goal is to build grassroots power with direct autonomy, egalitarian relations and community management of its own health, education and production projects. The Supreme Court has now spoken. Its September 6 verdict shot down expectations that had grown over the long months leading up to the decision, again revealing that the Mexican state is actively opposed to the country's indigenous peoples.

### **Military tension, uncertainty**

### **harassment,**

In June, the group led by Bishop Samuel Ruiz, which was once the National Mediation Commission for talks between the government and the Zapatistas, called a nationwide meeting to find new strategies for peace, democracy and full respect for human rights in Chiapas. Ruiz urged people to act to prevent violence. This Forum for Peace was held in early July, with over

3,000 participants representing 285 organizations from all over Mexico and abroad. Participants blamed the Mexican state's refusal to recognize indigenous rights and its continuing counterinsurgency campaign for the growing tensions in Chiapas. They argued that a productive dialogue could not take place until conditions for a just peace had been established. The autonomous Zapatista communities denounced the constant and growing harassment by paramilitary groups and the army that have created a climate of tension and uncertainty, and identified this as part of a phase brought on by the US counter-insurgency doctrine.

#### **Plan**

#### **Not a single step**

Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) leader Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas charged that people within the shadowy circles of public power were encouraging and supporting the paramilitary aggression against the communities as well as illegal land seizures in an attempt to divide people. The scholar Pablo González Casanova called on the Supreme Court to reject the reformed indigenous law as unconstitutional. He proposed using dialogue and negotiation to ensure fulfillment of the San Andrés Accords and demanded that not a single step be taken in the Puebla-Panama Plan until the indigenous communities' land rights were recognized. Bishop Ruiz said that civil society in Chiapas understands perfectly well that peace is not a gift but rather a conquest. He described President Fox as a weak leader and interpreted the Zapatistas' silence as the result of their disappointment in the government's actions.

#### **Against**

#### **and paramilitarization**

#### **Puebla-Panama:**

The forum was a symphony of different voices calling on the government to resolve the conflict. The government secretary in Chiapas recognized this and encouraged the federal government to change its position on the indigenous law. The forum concluded with a series of accords. It called on people to continue pressuring the government to give the three signs of good will demanded by the Zapatistas as a condition for returning to talks. It urged them to pressure the Supreme Court to issue a verdict favorable to the indigenous peoples. It demanded a comprehensive demilitarization of the communities that would deal with both militarization and paramilitarization by dismantling and punishing paramilitary groups, creating

conditions to allow displaced people to return to their homes, freeing prisoners of conscience and rebuilding the social fabric. It called for the establishment of dialogue mechanisms and avoidance of the logic of war. It urged people to fight government plans that divide and disorganize the communities and to support the autonomy of the Zapatista communities. It also called for the fostering of a new political culture based on respect for the diversity of Mexican cultures.

### **"We don't want to stop being indigenous"**

On August 9, the International Day of Indigenous Peoples, in an event attended by President Fox, Mexico's indigenous peoples demanded that the government and society assume the commitment of recognizing indigenous peoples and communities as subjects of public law. "We don't want to stop being indigenous, we want to stop being poor," one speaker emphasized. According to a study by the National Population Council, poverty has grown in a third of indigenous communities in recent years, and over half have seen no economic growth. Fox replied that his government was seeking to break with the past's paternalistic, authoritarian traditions, and offered a relationship based on dialogue.

### **Thousands of displaced**

In recent months, charges of stepped-up military pressure in Chiapas have increased. Many feel that the situation is similar to when the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) held all power in the executive branch and fear that war is in the air. Civil organizations have charged that the peace accords of late 2001 and early 2002 promoted by the executive branch were nothing but show, because injustice and impunity persist. There have been reports of aggression against the municipalities in resistance virtually every day. Among the reports was a charge that airplanes and helicopters had dropped flies over houses in Zapatista communities, leading to an outbreak of diseases. The Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center reports that the dirty war has forced some 12,000-14,000 people to flee their homes and charges that the military has an agreement to harass the communities.

### **San Juan Diego or San Andrés?**

The Catholic Church hierarchy has not shown much sensitivity to indigenous demands. In his visit to Mexico, the Pope emphasized

that "Mexico needs the indigenous people." While in Guatemala he asked for justice for the indigenous people of Guatemala and all of the Americas. Some interpreted these words as a call to the Mexican Church to take a stand on the side of indigenous peoples.

The Coalition of Autonomous Indigenous Organizations of Ocosingo described those promoting the canonization of Juan Diego as active opponents of the indigenous movement. In an open letter to the Mexican Bishops Conference and the Pope, they asked that priority be given to another campaign that would be much more important than this canonization: advocating for compliance with the San Andrés Accords. The Assembly of Indigenous Migrants of the Federal District also sent the Pope a message describing the abuse and repression they have suffered. In bidding the Pope farewell, President Fox told him that his visit had left a renewed commitment to work for indigenous peoples, the poor and the dispossessed, respecting their customs and traditions.

### **Focal points of instability**

National organizations have continued to support the Chiapas communities. In the first week of August, the Zapatistas sent several caravans filled with food and medicine to the conflict zone. International organizations have also continued to follow the evolution of the situation. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, the United Nations special representative for indigenous peoples, described prospects for peace in Chiapas as very difficult under present circumstances. Representatives of Amnesty International visited Chiapas in mid-2002, investigating the militarization and paramilitarization.

In August, the European Union's executive commission said that Mexico's Congress had failed to respond to indigenous demands and described the problems facing indigenous peoples and the lack of peace in Chiapas as two focal points of instability in Mexico.

### **Development programs that divide the communities**

The International Civil Commission for the Observation of Human Rights released the report of its visit to Mexico at the end of July. It concluded that the constitutional reforms approved in 2001 do not fulfill the demands of the indigenous peoples.

The commission also pointed out that development programs focused on poverty were often discriminatory, were not aimed at fostering the community's holistic growth and were used as forms of electoral proselytizing. Given the breakdown in talks and the failure to comply with the San Andrés Accords, these plans are a less obvious form of counterinsurgency, very effective in dividing the communities and further damaging an already battered and fragile social fabric. The commission also discussed Plan Puebla-Panama, which threatens to turn indigenous lands into the target of large economic interests. The commission called for establishing forms of support for production that are not used to create divisions or as a counterinsurgency tactic.

#### **The Court refuses to hear evidence**

Challenging the indigenous law before the Supreme Court proved to be a hard course. It was difficult to hold a dialogue with the justices because they rejected the expert witnesses and other evidence that the indigenous plaintiffs tried to present in support of their arguments.

The federal government took a somewhat mixed position on the appeals. The President's legal representative asked the Court to decide against the indigenous communities. He maintained that the law does not violate International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169, which he claimed refers just to legislative measures below the rank of constitutional reforms, requiring that the opinion of indigenous people be considered only in local constitutions and secondary legislation. The Attorney General's Office appeared to side with the President's Office, but did ask the Court to define the reach of international treaties when they conflict with constitutional provisions.

#### **The judicial branch's scope of authority**

On August 6, the Supreme Court considered the issue of whether or not it had the authority to hear the appeals filed by the indigenous communities. In early August, representatives of indigenous communities met and issued a statement that the executive branch had merely pretended to respond to indigenous peoples demands but had failed them; that the legislative branch had shown no respect for established procedures in legislating on indigenous matters and had not represented the will of the indigenous people; and that the judicial branch now had the

opportunity to redeem the Mexican state by doing justice to indigenous people, even though it had refused to accept the evidence they presented. The indigenous representatives demanded that the Supreme Court listen to indigenous people and fulfill its historic responsibility by issuing a positive verdict on the constitutional appeals they had presented. It called on the Court to recognize ILO Convention 169 as the supreme law of the land, and oblige the state to respect the San Andrés Accords. The statement was quite clear in warning that an unfavorable verdict would undermine the confidence that indigenous people had placed in the Court, and asked civil society to watch over the Court's actions.

The indigenous movement knew that a favorable decision by the Court would bolster their fight. They also knew, however, that an unfavorable verdict would not discourage but rather radicalize them.

### **Paramilitary heat up in August**

### **operations**

While the indigenous movement awaited the Court's decision, the situation in the Zapatista region became increasingly troubled. It is worth reviewing recent events. In the autonomous municipality Ricardo Flores Magón, paramilitary groups supported by the army tried to capture a community member and attacked seven EZLN support bases. Chiapas newspapers launched a campaign against the support bases, distorting what had happened.

Indigenous people in the Las Abejas group warned of the presence in neighboring communities of members of the armed group that had massacred their companions in Acteal in 1997. The federal government failed to act on 27 arrest warrants issued against members of this paramilitary group, who were now rearming. Several material and intellectual authors of the Acteal massacre remain free, and people fear a similar massacre could occur again.

A Zapatista was killed in early August. The authorities wrote it off as an accidental hunting death, but the EZLN demanded an investigation. Later, several PRI members led by a congressional representative attacked Zapatista bases that had set up a roadblock to prevent the export of precious wood and the entry

of alcohol and drugs into the communities. Observers described the attack as the largest paramilitary operation since the Acteal massacre. It is clear that the old paramilitary groups have been reactivated and new ones created.

#### **"Are they trying to kill us one by one?"**

On August 20, seven of the autonomous municipalities in rebellion (Olga Isabel, Che Guevara, 17 de Noviembre, Vicente Guerrero, 1 de Enero, Miguel Hidalgo and Lucio Cabañas) issued a statement denouncing three murders and accusing the paramilitary groups, businesspeople, ranchers, state security, police, municipal governments and the state and federal powers of triggering the violence. They insisted that impunity is unacceptable. Several days later another violent incident took place, with deaths and injuries. The Zapatistas denounced it as a paramilitary ambush, while the authorities attributed the violence to inter-family conflicts. The same day, in another autonomous municipality, a paramilitary group murdered a Zapatista. The EZLN argued that the paramilitary groups' actions under army protection reveal a concerted, well-planned campaign, and that the government is ultimately responsible for it. "Are they trying to kill us one by one?" one person wondered.

#### **Paramilitary community conflicts and drugs**

Local human rights organizations labeled the authorities' claims that the violence stems from inter-community conflicts as a cover-up and described them instead as part of a counterinsurgency campaign. They also reported large-scale army mobilizations, which military authorities dismissed as normal troop movements.

At the end of August, COCOPA announced that it would investigate the troop movements and the killing of Zapatistas. After a week-long visit to Chiapas, the UN's special representative for internally displaced people said that the problem of displaced people in Chiapas was multifaceted and had surpassed the state's capacity to handle it, but emphasized that this did not exempt the Mexican government of its responsibility for achieving peace. The special representative identified three main causes of displacement: the siege by paramilitary groups, community conflicts and violence related to drug trafficking.

At the end of the month, NGOs charged that former members of the army and public security forces were among the paramilitary groups that continue to act with impunity in Chiapas. The state government, however, insisted on viewing conflicts in the communities as the result of "everyday" problems, denying that they were political in nature, and attributed the deaths to accidents or conflicts over land. It emphatically denied the presence of counterinsurgency groups or any increased military presence in the state. The state attorney general of Chiapas claimed that criminal gangs were responsible for the deaths. In Congress, the PRD proposed an agreement to halt the growing violence against the Zapatistas in Chiapas, but the President's National Action Party (PAN) and the PRI rejected it.

#### **"The world is watching"**

Human rights organizations called on the governor of Chiapas to stop encouraging impunity by denying the existence of armed groups tied to the PRI. They interpreted the increasing violence as an effort to stop the Zapatista communities' autonomy process and a first step towards clearing away the obstacles to Plan Puebla-Panama. The Miguel Agustín Pro and Fray Bartolomé de las Casas human rights centers along with other civil society organizations made an urgent call to the people of Mexico and national and international civil society to mobilize to stop the confrontations, harassment and killings in indigenous communities, the continuing displacement of people and the renewed violent actions by paramilitary groups under the protection of the Mexican army.

"The world is watching," warned human rights activists from international organizations in Paris, Geneva, Barcelona, Madrid, the United States and Canada. Prominent figures from 18 countries, including José Saramago, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán and Giulio Girardi, called for continuing international support for the Zapatistas' cause. In response to President Fox's second report on the state of the nation, the FZLN demanded an end to the repression. In a speech at the Sustainable Development Summit in Johannesburg, Fox remarked on the need to respond to indigenous peoples.

#### **Voices of hope and alarm**

In mid-August, the Attorney General's Office arrested 25 members of the Peace and Justice paramilitary group responsible for several dozen killings. Among those arrested was one leader,

a former military officer, who had weapons used exclusively by the army. In defiance, the group named new leaders. The Attorney General's Office then detained the group's main financial supporter, a former mayor.

The PRI in Chiapas justified the existence of armed groups under its protection and called for freeing the people who had been detained. NGOs praised the government's action but said that other paramilitary groups remain untouched.

Zapatista support bases raised cries of alarm over possible new attacks at the end of August as security forces, taking advantage of the general confusion, threatened to capture Zapatistas, increasing tension and fear in the northern part of Chiapas. Bishop Ruiz commented on the relevance of the Supreme Court decision in this context, pointing out that a verdict in favor of the appeals presented by the indigenous municipalities would provide a basis for putting these problems to rest.

#### **Supreme Court decides against indigenous people**

These hopes proved to be in vain, however. On September 6, the Supreme Court threw out all the appeals filed by the indigenous groups. Eight justices even voted against hearing them, while three voted to hear them but concluded that the law was valid. With this decision, the Court demonstrated its incompetence to resolve the more than 300 appeals. It dismissed all of them together, whether they had been correctly presented or not.

The justices maintained that they had followed proper legal criteria and were not authorized to act in place of the legislative branch. They explained that they decided not to discuss the irregularities in the procedures used to pass the indigenous law so that they would not be accused of judicial activism or of trying to make the Court a supreme power above the other branches.

Although some lawyers felt the Court acted correctly, the indigenous people's lawyers condemned the verdict. The lawyer representing the Adelfo Regino Montes indigenous community noted that the Supreme Court justices had refused to listen to the indigenous plaintiffs, accepting only written testimony, and thus did not have the evidence on which to base a just verdict.

#### **A dangerous precedent**

The Court's interpretation of constitutional norms was an extremely conservative one, with serious implications. If neither the procedures used in legislating nor reforms made to the Constitution are subject to judicial control, legislators are free to reform the Constitution at will, committing all sorts of irregularities, and no one can intervene to set them straight. In other words, it makes no difference whether constitutional reforms are made correctly or not. This position ignores democratic principles such as the separation of powers and the system of checks and balances.

Another indigenous lawyer, Francisco López Bárcenas, argued that by refusing to hear the appeals and thus choosing the easy way out, the Supreme Court had not only failed the indigenous people but had also failed to assume its responsibility to ensure compliance with the law. He stressed that indigenous people were not asking for favors, they were urging that the constitutional order be restored. They knocked on the last door in search of constitutional recognition, after Congress turned its back on them by passing the law and the President did the same by signing it into law. López Bárcenas said that the verdict demonstrated the failure of institutions and politics and the state's incapacity to transform itself.

### **The essence of the appeals**

Other lawyers pointed out that the appeals had not asked the Court to judge the content of the indigenous law, much less modify it or point it in a different direction, but only to review the legality of the procedure used to reform the original bill. In particular, they argued that Mexico has signed an agreement—ILO Convention 169—which forms part of the Constitution itself via its Article 133. The convention establishes that indigenous people must be consulted on legislation that affects them, and the appeals showed that the required consultations had not taken place.

Another point questioned in the appeals had to do with the fact that several of the state legislatures that approved the reforms did not do so with the necessary two-thirds vote, an obvious violation of procedure.

### **In the annals of history**

In response to the Court's argument that Congress is not subject to judicial control, lawyers responded that the justices had made

an extremely narrow interpretation of constitutional norms. Because the congressional representatives participated in the constitutional reform as state authorities, their actions must therefore be subject to the law and the Constitution. For this reason, the Court does have the authority to review their actions.

Specialists in indigenous law complained that the verdict had not been a judicial but rather a political one. They said that the Supreme Court has made a decision that will go down in the annals of history as a blatant measure against indigenous peoples and in doing so, has set itself up as another obstacle blocking recognition of indigenous rights.

The appeals were a challenge for the Court. With a correct interpretation, the Court would have opened up new possibilities. In commenting on the Court's failure to do so, several people noted that the justices are no strangers to the influence of congressional leaders and often meet with them in their private offices.

#### **Another ingredient in the tension**

The federal government again took an ambivalent position in response to the Court's decision. The President's legal advisor, Juan de Dios Castro, said that the decision was cause for rejoicing because it showed that the institutions work. The Government Secretary stressed that the indigenous issue was a priority for the President and that Fox would continue to work to establish a new relationship with indigenous peoples. The Commissioner for Peace in Chiapas, however, said that the Court's action threw one more ingredient into the tense Chiapas situation. The head of the government office for indigenous affairs, Xóchitl Gálvez, said that the Court had fallen short in its analysis of the appeals and that the decision would make the peace process more difficult. In the first few weeks after the decision, the fear that armed movements would reactivate was clearly growing. It was not until September 23 that Fox, in a meeting with indigenous communities that criticized the government for not respecting the San Andrés Accords, promised to seek new political agreements to improve the indigenous law, although he warned that as long as the law stood it would have to be respected. He urged people to see it as "a step ahead."

**Five centuries of oppression...  
and still counting**

PAN and PRI legislators were visibly pleased by the verdict and announced that the time had come to draft the law's specific regulations. They said it is now up to state congresses to define the legal framework best adapted to the indigenous peoples who live in each state.

The PRD took a very different position. The party's president said that peace in the indigenous communities remains a pending task and predicted new outbreaks of violence. PRD legislators argued the need to "reform the reform" and announced that they would soon present a new bill that includes the main points of COCOPA's proposal. The coordinator of the PRD bench urged the Zapatistas to make another trip to the capital to reopen the door to dialogue that the Court had closed, while Mexico City's PRD mayor said that the Court had made a mistake in ratifying the law approved by Congress.

Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas recognized that in the course of Mexican history, the Supreme Court has seldom taken a stand on such a high-profile issue with such an impact on political life. He said that while the Court's decision left many pending questions, there was no doubt but that it would rekindle five centuries of oppression, exploitation, inequality and discrimination, once again offending ten million Mexicans and tearing open the social wound that prevents Mexicans from uniting in their diversity.

#### **A "racist and arrogant" verdict**

Several COCOPA members, fearing that the open wound would aggravate the situation in the conflict area, called on the commission to act rapidly. Even PRI members of the commission saw the need to resume talks to analyze the appeals filed against the law by the indigenous communities. Some proposed that new legislation be introduced, although the correlation of forces makes it unlikely that anything would come of such an effort.

Solidarity groups in Spain, Switzerland, Austria, Italy and Germany protested over the Court's decision, describing it as racist and arrogant. Human rights organizations in Europe and the United States demanded that the indigenous legislation be revised in line with the San Andrés Accords, and described the law as an obstacle to renewing the peace process and resolving the conflict in Chiapas.

Portuguese writer José Saramago and Argentine writer Ernesto

Sábato published an open letter in the daily newspaper *La Jornada* describing what the Court had done to indigenous peoples as another "blow of disdain." They said that the Mexican state sees indigenous peoples as the "internal enemy." The state, "which has shown so few signs of national self-respect in response to the degrading political and economic intervention from abroad, has used its judicial force against the weakest members of the Mexican nation." Danielle Mitterrand expressed sadness over a verdict that she called "a blow to indigenous hope." She pledged to go on accompanying the Zapatistas and defending their just cause.

In response to these and many other declarations by internationally prominent figures, PAN legislator Diego Fernández de Cevallos, one of the main promoters of the indigenous law, scoffed that "a Frenchwoman and two Portuguese men [sic] issued statements taking positions pre-established by Marcos." He arrogantly remarked that Congress could not be expected to draft a law "to please a bishop [referring to Samuel Ruiz] or a guerrilla."

### **A Church of varied opinions**

The Catholic hierarchy did not speak with one voice. Bishop Onésimo Cepeda, tied to economic and political power groups, defended the Court. The bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas first called on people to respect the Court's decision, but then said that the law could be improved. In the indigenous region of Istmo, Bishop Arturo Lona summed up the feelings of the priests who work nearest to indigenous people: "May God help us, they've given us the coup de grace." A spokesperson for the bishops said that indigenous peoples deserve recognition of their culture and autonomy and that Mexicans cannot go on living in a country divided by racism and discrimination. Samuel Ruiz reaffirmed his work with groups promoting peace. The priest in Ocosingo lamented the Court's verdict, which he described as a "serious and dangerous" decision that risked "leading the Zapatistas to desperation. Injustice has been reaffirmed, and the indigenous people continue to be excluded" he said, arguing that the Court had failed to grasp the indigenous issue, which goes far beyond the conflict in Chiapas.

As the days passed, it seemed that support for the Pope's statements in Mexico was gaining ground among the bishops. The Social Pastoral Commission proposed a national dialogue on the

legal situation of indigenous peoples and their economic and social conditions, without discriminating against anyone. And in the Congress of the Mayan Pastoral, four bishops called for the recognition of their autonomy.

### **Outpouring against the court ruling**

Many other Mexicans also questioned the Court's decision. Writer Elena Poniatowska described it as a "truly infamous act." Activist Rosario Ibarra de Piedra accused the Court of having "served the executive branch." Former rector of the Mexican National Autonomous University, Pablo González Casanova, lamented that the Court had not had the "sensitivity" to issue a verdict that would contribute to a solution, instead practicing "colonial blindness." Philosopher Sánchez Vázquez said that the immediate consequences of the decision would favor the agenda of Plan Puebla-Panama through "the redistribution of the national territory."

Writer Carlos Montemayor felt that the Court had chosen "not to confront the predominant racist ideology among the legislators or the blindness and indifference of the executive branch." Luis Villoro wrote that the Court's decision had demonstrated "the inability of the three branches to resolve a crucial national problem" and had unveiled "an excluding democracy" and a state "blind to differences and to any plurality other than that of political parties."

Other intellectuals felt that the Court had lost an opportunity to show that the branches of government are independent, and had revealed the backwardness of political society. A letter signed by artists, intellectuals and members of civic organizations denounced that just as during the 71 years of the PRI regime, the current Mexican government's institutions are not on the side of the Mexican people but rather serve their own interests as well as those of large transnational capital and the US government.

### **Humiliated, frustrated, betrayed**

The first response of the indigenous communities was that they had been humiliated, offended, hurt and deceived. They felt betrayed. The hopes they had placed in the courts had been frustrated. They trusted in the legal course of action but had been defrauded. Now they understood that the Court received their appeals only for the sake of show, but had no desire even to hear them, much less attempt to do them justice.

Another major concern was that just as legal channels had been

closed to them, it seemed that a peaceful approach was being closed off as well. Some groups went so far as to say that the verdict was the equivalent of an invitation to generalized violence, thus proving that the path chosen by the EZLN in 1994 was the right one. After having been legally and politically excluded, many indigenous peoples wondered what path was left them. They were unwilling to keep putting up with internal colonialism or the indignity to which they had been condemned. Nonetheless, though violent responses might have been predictable, the indigenous movement decided instead to take the path of resistance and nonviolence.

### **The next steps**

The indigenous people now have several ways to go. One immediate solution could be an appeal to international law. Many indigenous organizations announced that they would challenge the verdict through the Inter-American Human Rights Court, the United Nations and the ILO since the indigenous reform violates international treaties on indigenous rights. Another solution is to press for a legislative solution, to make Congress goes back and legislate in accord with the San Andrés Accords.

A third, quite plausible path is to Insist on compliance with ILO Convention 169. The Mexican state signed it so it should be the law of the land. Furthermore, it contains the principal demands of the San Andrés Accords. If President Fox demanded that the provisions of this convention be fulfilled, an important step would be taken towards the recognition of indigenous rights and peace.

### **"We're a people without a state"**

Writer and specialist in indigenous issues Miguel León Portilla summed up the current state of affairs. The indigenous people, he said, have struggled to survive for the past five centuries, dispossessed, marginalized, discriminated against, pariahs in their own land. The Zapatista uprising forced the Mexican state to talk with them. A key point of the San Andrés Accords was the recognition of indigenous peoples as subjects of public law who enjoy autonomy in their own respective territories and are entitled to benefit from their resources. They also have the right to representation in legislative bodies and to preserve their languages and cultural differences. Congress distorted the San Andrés Accords, however. Now, with the Court's verdict, the indigenous peoples had once again been legally discriminated against and left marginalized.

Many indigenous groups responded with mobilizations and protest. On September 9, members of the National Indigenous Congress, the National Association of Democratic Lawyers, the Mexican Jurists Union, the Civic Alliance and other civic and human rights organizations rallied outside the Supreme Court to express their rejection of the justices' decision. The next day, hundreds of indigenous sympathizers of the Zapatistas marched in San Cristóbal de las Casas, announcing that they had gotten the Court's message that neither dialogue nor negotiation are useful in addressing marginalization in Mexico. A Mixtec leader put it this way: "The indigenous people of Mexico are a people without a state."

#### **The Zapatistas' total silence and thundering repudiation**

The EZLN has not spoken on the Court's decision. It issued its last statement on the law in April 2001, and its last statement on any issue in October 2001, after the assassination of human rights defender Digna Ochoa. After that, silence, but it is a far cry from that in the saying, "silence is consent." It rather expresses a thundering repudiation of the lack of respect for signed agreements. To back up their silence, the Zapatistas have also reinforced 22 control points in their area of influence to block the government's efforts to defeat them by dividing the communities. Indigenous sympathizers of the EZLN said that at least 62 communities in the Zapatistas' area of influence were upset with the Court's verdict. Feeling that the resolution revealed the racist face of the state, they called on other municipalities in the conflict zone to declare their autonomy.

#### **For a nonviolent solution**

Indigenous groups in Morelos, Michoacán and Oaxaca prepared to block roads and take public buildings to protest the Court's decision. Indigenous people from Queretaro, describing the governor of their state as an obstacle to their progress, announced that they would join the demonstrations against the Court's decision. Members of the National Indigenous Congress declared that they would file appeals to block application of the indigenous law in their territories.

The indigenous peoples are not grouped together in a single movement. Some of the more radicalized ones could opt for routes that are not peaceful. Most of the indigenous groups,

however, have spoken in favor of nonviolence and continuing mobilizations to win recognition of their rights and their autonomy.

In a national meeting of indigenous peoples held in Guerrero in mid-September with delegates from the Federal District, Oaxaca, the state of Mexico, Sinaloa, Campeche, Yucatán, Sonora, Michoacán, Quintana Roo, Chihuahua, Morelos, Guerrero and Chiapas, people saw the need to bring the dispersed indigenous movement together within a project for a multicultural nation. One of the meeting's conclusions was the Declaration of Chilpancingo, which proposed unifying the Mexican indigenous movement. This resolution was sent to the National Indigenous Congress, which was holding a Traditional Medicine Forum.

### **Community norms and strength**

In the wake of the Court's decision against indigenous peoples, three things are clear. The state acted against the interests of indigenous peoples, the new legislation has not brought peace, and indigenous peoples will continue to fight for their collective rights and municipal autonomy.

One indigenous leader put it this way: "President Vicente Fox deceived the indigenous people, Congress mocked our initiative and the Supreme Court put an end to our last hope." The Court's decision opens another stage in the indigenous peoples' fight. They have seen that the three branches of the Mexican state will not allow them to rebuild their communities in the framework of the national legal order, so they will now promote autonomy in accord with their own norms. They have been pushed up against a wall but will not cave in. Instead, they will call up their communities' strength to confront the state and its repressive institutions.

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### **The Zapatistas Break their Silence**

*In an incident that helped break the Zapatistas' long silence, Subcomandante Marcos described Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón as a "fascist" while Garzón countered that Marcos was a "drifting*

*ship.” It can only be hoped that this serious mistake, which Marcos has tried to rectify, will not affect the cause he represents on the international level.*

### **Jorge Alonso**

Ever since the Mexican legislative branch passed an Indigenous Law that failed to honor the San Andrés accords, the Zapatista high command and its spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos have opted to remain silent. While the silence has been deafening, the powers that be have preferred to ignore it. Meantime, Zapatista support communities and various civil society organizations continued to talk about the indigenous cause.

#### **Successful in a hostile climate**

#### **autonomy**

In the middle of 2002 the conclusions of the National Peace Conference were announced. Over a thousand people from 285 organizations and 23 Mexican states attended the conference, which was held in San Cristóbal de las Casas. While experts discussed whether what was going on in Chiapas was a war of attrition, low intensity warfare or a counterinsurgency operation, the participants concluded that it was a neo-colonial war involving ethnocide. They also reported that military intrusion into the communities was continuing, that agrarian uncertainty was multiplying land conflicts in the communities and that the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) was still acting as an instrument of peace because it was making an enormous effort to prevent the violence from increasing. Among other elements of their analyses, the most important highlighted the ongoing affirmation of autonomy, which was now a concrete practice expressing the communities’ capacity to regulate their own coexistence. Many communities are already producing what they need and achieving food self-sufficiency without sacrificing commercial opportunities.

The conference evaluated how the Zapatistas were successfully promoting autonomous markets and combining traditional practices and contemporary tools. Faced with a single global market in the hands of a few, alternative markets not governed by greed or dispossession are a positive and viable reality. The conference participants reinforced their decision to continue defending the San Andrés accords, help rebuild the social and

community fabric in Chiapas, support autonomy and resistance and expand the new culture of respect for diversity and different cultures in Mexico. These and other pronouncements were summarized in the demand to reconstruct the indigenous peoples and their social and autonomous capacity as part of the civil society of a nation of multiple cultures.

At around the same time, the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center published a special report on people displaced by the war in Chiapas. By the year's end, there was consensus among human rights defense groups in Chiapas that the paramilitary groups exist with the complicity of federal and state authorities, their crimes are still committed with impunity and their hostility has not ceased.

In the case of the 1997 Acteal massacre, not even half of those responsible are in prison, certain inquiries have not been followed up and arrest warrants have not been acted upon. Bishop of San Cristóbal Felipe Arizmendi demanded that the truth about Acteal should be finally established, while the victims' relatives feel that justice has only been partly done. Members of the *Las Abejas* organization targeted by the massacre point to the impunity through which many of the material authors and all of the intellectual authors of such an atrocious massacre continue to enjoy their freedom.

During a reflection and planning workshop of the Indigenous National Congress, organizations from ten states positively evaluated the EZLN's policy of silence and opted to continue working to build different forms of autonomy in the communities. They said they would not talk to the government branches anymore because "We've already talked to them; we wanted to help them see reason and they didn't want to."

### **Traces of words**

While the Zapatistas maintained their silence toward the government, they did occasionally communicate with civil society. At the end of July 2002, Marcos sent architect Fernando Yáñez some verses he had written 18 years earlier, when the EZLN was beginning to form, for display in a local museum in Monterrey. The verses were accompanied by the desire that hope could be renewed. In a subsequent letter, Marcos hailed the appearance of the Zapatista magazine *Rebeldía*, stating that "as we are in silence, and silence isn't broken but rather cultivated,"

it would not refer to current affairs or comment on the Indigenous Law. In an enigmatic promise regarding such issues, the Zapatista spokesperson announced that “the words that will come will come,” then could not resist referring to the country’s political parties. Unsurprisingly, his description of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) as “a den of thieves without Ali Baba,” the National Action Party (PAN) as “an employment agency” and the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) as “an empty alternative” angered politicians from all three parties.

### **Marcos’ serious mistake**

At the end of 2002 a meeting place was opened in Madrid as the honorary version of the EZLN encampment headquarters in Mexico known as los Aguascalientes, since the center’s organizers consider the Zapatistas an ethical reference point in the struggle against neoliberalism. During the opening ceremony a letter from Marcos was read out that ranged from political allusions to poetic imagery, among them the prediction of “a geometric growth” of “globalphobes.” The letter’s most controversial reference was to the struggle of the Basque people. Among other strong accusations against prominent Spanish political figures, Judge Baltasar Garzón was dubbed “a grotesque clown at the service of the governing political party,” a “fascist” and a “state terrorist.” These broadsides loosed an avalanche of criticism in both Spain and Mexico. Marcos was accused of siding with Basque terrorism while the few words in his defense were limited to arguing that he was simply irreverent towards any form of power.

A number of commentators agreed that the Zapatista spokesperson had erred by meddling in an international dispute. They considered it a serious insult to accuse the judge of having a “fascist vocation” when he had shown himself a defender of international law and of justice. The Spanish writer Fernando Savater weighed into the debate, his indignation fed by what he interpreted as an alignment with Basque terrorists. “The slander that bothers me is not his, but that of the coryphaeia that urge him on and accompany him in legitimizing or trivializing the crimes committed in my land in the name of a so-called “just cause.”

Writers whose support for the Zapatista cause had stood out also criticized both the tone and content of Marcos’ message. Manuel Vázquez Montalbán lamented the error and pointed out that, like it or not, Judge Garzón had been responsible for many formidable actions against state terrorism and Marcos’ letter had trivialized

too many important and polemical issues. José Saramago stressed that all those who supported the indigenous cause in Latin America had been “bewildered” by his backing of ETA and his accusation that the Spanish judge had promoted state terrorism. Mexican columnist Luis Hernández tried to minimize the problem by bringing to light publications revealing the judge’s darker side, such as his failure to deal with the many cases of torture against leftwing Basque nationalists that Amnesty International had denounced to Garzón. But it was to no avail. Garzón had accumulated more bright spots than dark secrets in international public opinion.

### **Garzón’s angry response**

Judge Garzón angrily responded to what he called Marcos’ “sectarian letter.” The following are a few excerpts from his extensive reply:

“Where in your letter are a few words, just a few words, for the victims of terrorism? They are not to be found anywhere, because you (in your repressing fundamentalism, full of authoritarianism and arrogance) exude hatred toward those victims and toward all of us who neither act nor think like you.... Those whom you euphemistically term ‘Basque rebels’ are people submissively linked to the most unjust and demented strategy of violence that exists in Europe... With such attitudes, you will lose even those who follow the dream of the future you have offered them. The indigenous cause will be seriously threatened by the attitudes of extreme intolerance you have adopted.

“I confess, Mr. Marcos, that you represented something different to me: a kind of beam of coherence. Now I can see that I made a serious mistake. I had placed you in a category you did not deserve. You are nothing more than a drifting boat. At the beginning, at the head of your ‘army,’ you had the sympathy of many people (including mine) and you had the chance to bring the indigenous cause safely to port, but you took the wrong course and now we know why. You need not take off your mask to have unmasked yourself: you quite simply do not believe in the essential rights of man or in democracy, or even in the civil rights of your own people.

“I am not, as you claim, a ‘fascist’ or a ‘state terrorist.’ I have never taken up arms in my life (except to hunt partridges). I am essentially a pacifist. I try to apply the law and to honor it rigorously in a social democratic state with a rule of law, as

corresponds to me as a law professional, which is where I pledge my responsibility. I have worked 22 years in public service, 14 of them trying to fight drug trafficking, organized crime, corruption, terrorism, state crimes and crimes against humanity with the weapons offered by the law. I have made mistakes during this long battle, but unlike you I have shown my face, signed my name and assumed my errors. You, on the other hand, hide like a coward behind a kind of parapet that turns you into a strange, exotic being, a ghost behind a mask and a ridiculous pipe.

"I challenge you—whenever and wherever you want and without masks or disguises—to talk face to face about terrorism, rebelliousness, dignity, struggle, insurgency, politics, justice and all of those values that serve to build a country and a democracy and defend the rights of those who have the least. 'Today is still forever,' said Antonio Machado. I harbor the faint hope that you will recover the sense you seem to have lost and the democratic essence you perhaps once had."

Marcos had certainly slipped up, and he quickly set about repairing the damage. Five letters written by him in the name of the EZLN were circulated during December and he accepted Baltasar Garzón's challenge. He proposed that the debate take place in Lanzarote, on the Canary Islands, between April 3 and 10 and that Garzón should obtain the necessary guarantees and safe-conducts for Marcos and six "squires" to attend the intellectual duel. The latter term chosen for his bodyguards was one of several playful references to Don Quixote.

He also proposed a parallel, but not simultaneous, meeting of all the political, social and cultural actors involved in the Basque problem that wanted to attend. The theme would be "The Basque Problem: ways forward." He invited Garzón to come to the meeting to listen and help ensure the government's goodwill towards the event, and invited the Spanish government to send a high-level delegation to listen and speak. Marcos would also attend, but only as an observer because the only issue was the sovereignty of the Basque people. Marcos also called on ETA to commit itself to a military truce for 177 days, starting on December 24, and called on Basque civil society to mobilize in a campaign to "give words a chance." Marcos' proposals combined very concrete and witty elements. He promised to unmask himself if he lost the debate with Garzón, and called on his opponent to demand the recognition of indigenous rights and culture should Marcos come out on top.

The Spanish government declared that the letter was “eccentric” and “incoherent” and disqualified his proposals on the grounds that he was “an outsider.” Meanwhile, European Union migration authorities stated that Marcos could enter Europe if his papers were in order, using his real name and surname and without a mask.

**Marcos distances himself  
from ETA and apologizes**

In his letter to ETA, Marcos explained that his previous letter had been misinterpreted because it clearly referred to the Basque political struggle and not to the military one, but he acknowledged his ambiguity. To leave no doubt about his position, he stressed that the EZLN had not carried out and would not carry out any military action against civilians. He emphatically condemned such attacks and criticized ETA’s actions against civilians. Marcos specified that the EZLN considered the Basque people’s struggle for their sovereignty to be legitimate and just, but that such a noble and just cause did not justify the sacrifice of civilian lives. The letter ended with a strong condemnation of armed actions that harm civilian populations, be they loyal to ETA, the Spanish state, George W. Bush, the Israelis or the Palestinians.

With this Marcos separated himself from the accusation that his letter to Madrid’s Aguascalientes center showed him to be “an apologist for terrorism.” He repeatedly stressed that not only do the Zapatistas not practice terrorism, they actually condemn it, believing that something should be done to change the criminal logic imposed around the planet that terror can be fought with terror. It cannot be defeated that way, and is only a trap that forces people to choose between one form of terror and another. The Zapatistas propose finding a new path and hoped that Iberian dignity would show the world that it was possible and necessary to give words a chance, change the warlike logic and create a ray of hope for all peoples.

Marcos offered his sincere apologies to relatives of the victims of both ETA and the Spanish state—among whom he knew there were many Zapatista sympathizers—for any lack of respect his ambiguity may have added to their pain: “We wholeheartedly hope you understand us and one day will forgive us for the part we are responsible for.” He lamented that the Spanish government had manipulated the suffering of the victims of ETA

terrorism to distract attention from its criminal inefficiency in dealing with the ecologically catastrophic oil spill affecting the coasts of Galicia and the Galician people.

### **Speaking about Mexico again**

In another letter, Marcos called on the leftist political, social and cultural organizations from the Basque country to look for new ways of winning their sovereignty. He invited them to his proposed meeting, calling for the biggest possible concentration of forces to come together in a spirit of inclusion and tolerance to organize the forum. As the terror being encouraged by both sides blocked alternatives, Marcos asked them to talk and listen to each other. Subcomandante Marcos touched upon a Mexican issue in passing when he stated that the Basques did have an alternative political project, unlike the Mexican parliamentary Left.

In fact, the Zapatista spokesperson used this cluster of apologetic letters to break his silence on the Mexican situation. He emphasized that Mexico's three branches of government had violated international law by ignoring indigenous rights and culture and announced that the EZLN would file suit against former President Zedillo for his responsibility in the crimes against humanity committed during the Acteal massacre.

### **Marcos picks himself up off the mat**

In an interview, José Saramago described Marcos' proposal for the Basque country as positive, although it remained to be seen whether ETA would dare take it up. Making a place for dialogue as a way of seeking solutions would be "a much-desired demonstration that utopias are achievable," said Saramago, pointing out that Marcos' rectification showed that his thinking was as always based "on the pedagogy of words." Vázquez Montalbán declared that he would back any possibility of dialogue, but warned that no breakthrough would be possible if civil society did not participate. He expressed sympathy for the Zapatista leader's splendid proposal to call a meeting of the political and cultural forces involved in the Basque question, although he considered it unlikely that the Spanish government would accept. He described Marcos' rectification as "an intelligent, lucid and very ingenious solution," while the proposal itself seemed good because with so few possible solutions to the Basque question, he would accept any one, even if it were "surrealist." For Vázquez Montalbán, Marcos' second letter

sorted out the “blunder of the first one, which caused damage and unease.”

Mexican columnist Emanuel Carballo considered that the subcomandante had picked himself up off the mat and annulled the count. He praised the rectification, because the letter to Madrid had erred in its “disinformation, flippancy and rather injudicious position,” when the Zapatistas’ greatest victory had been to associate its name with peace. In the new letters, Marcos had once more favored dialogue.

#### **Terrorism: to the Left”**

#### **“Genetically**

#### **counter**

Answers were also forthcoming from Spanish and Basque political parties. Herri Batasuna, the separatist Basque party outlawed by Judge Garzón, accepted the proposal for dialogue to resolve the Basque conflict. Izquierda Unida supported the proposal as well and its general coordinator sent Marcos a letter thanking him for his concern about Spanish issues at a time “when you are seeing many of your own hopes frustrated and your silence has been disbelieved by those who should have been attentive to its clamor.” He stated that Izquierda Unida had condemned and would continue to condemn all cases of aggression against the indigenous communities and the mercantilism affecting the goods and lands belonging to humanity as a whole and in the hands of the peoples that had ancestrally inhabited those lands.” He thanked the Zapatistas for not showing the least indulgence towards ETA’s terrorism—Izquierda Unida activists described ETA as a “band of assassins”—and stressed that “terrorism is genetically counter to a transforming Left.” Several intellectuals held a cultural forum in Madrid to support the EZLN’s call for peace and express concern over the imposition of a warlike logic that was placing the citizenry and its freedom in danger. The EZLN’s recently opened political and social center in Madrid also welcomed the proposal to hold a debate on the Basque conflict. During the whole controversy, however, ETA failed to suspend its terrorist activities and no truce was called.

#### **ETA rejects Marcos’s “pantomime”**

In early January this year, ETA issued its response to Marcos, which was interpreted as an attempt to separate Marcos from indigenous Zapatistas. They explained that they were willing to receive “serious proposals” but described his letter as a “desperate maneuver to attract international attention,” stressing that ETA was unwilling to take part in any “pantomime.”

They complained that the proposal had been made public without so much as consulting them, which they considered a show of “disrespect.” Marcos was quick to reply and again clarified his position. He explained that the Zapatistas had launched their initiative without prior consultation because they do not make shady deals. They were not attempting to tell anybody what to do and had only called for words to be given a chance, but if ETA did not want to do so then so be it. In reply to ETA’s statement that EZLN children understand everything without words, Marcos replied that Zapatistas treat children like children and that the powers that be are the ones who use war to treat them like adults. That’s why Zapatistas talk to their children and teach them words, along with love and dignity.

He also offered ETA an important lesson related to “teaching to fight with words.” The Zapatistas make their children see that while “words don’t kill, words can be killed, along with human beings.” They take great care to teach their children “the existence of different ways of thinking, which they should respect.” They warn them that some people want their way of thinking to be the only way and persecute, jail and kill people whose way of thinking they view as different. In this respect they are taught to tell the truth, to talk and to listen, because “he who speaks and does not listen ends up believing that only what he says is of any value.”

#### **ETA “prefers tragedies”**

Marcos also referred to ETA’s statement that it did not want to take part in any kind of “pantomime,” which Marcos accepted, understanding this to mean that ETA prefers “tragedies.” He reminded them that the Zapatistas take no one seriously, even themselves, because “those who take themselves seriously end up thinking that their truth is for everyone and is eternal,” which is different from taking reality seriously. He explained that the proposed meeting had to be serious, which was why the Zapatistas had proposed it to the political and social forces from the Basque country, which would be responsible for organizing it.

Marcos stressed that the Zapatistas have neither the means nor the obligation to consult ETA before speaking, because they had won the right to use words and did not have to ask anyone’s permission to do so. Neither did he accept that they had shown any lack of respect to the Basque people, attributing ETA’s

reaction to the fact that “proposing to give them a chance to use words runs against the interests of those who from apparently opposite positions have made the death of words their business and alibi.” He denied being misinformed and called on ETA to inform the Basque people. In reaction to ETA’s statement that they represented the Basque people, Marcos responded that respect is not the same as fear. The Zapatistas do not allege to represent anybody but themselves: “We do not represent the whole Mexican people, or the Mexican Left or all of Mexico’s indigenous peoples.” They had renounced acting as a vanguard together with the idea of obliging anyone to accept their way of thinking through any method that did not involve the force of reasoning. Their weapons are not to impose ideas or ways of life, but rather to defend a way of thinking and a way of viewing the world and relating to it.

Finally, Marcos established that the EZLN did not need ETA’s support or solidarity, because its struggle has “a code of honor inherited from our ancestors that includes, among other things, respecting civilian lives, not resorting to crime to obtain resources and not responding to words by opening fire.” The EZLN referred to the end of the ETA communiqué, which proclaimed “long live free Chiapas,” pointing out that they do not want to split from Mexico; they want to be part of it, but without ceasing to be what they are. That’s why they always end their communications by proclaiming “Long live Mexico with its indigenous peoples.”

### **“ambiguities” Marcos’ harm the Zapatistas**

It was impossible for Marcos’ incursion into Spanish affairs not to produce waves back in Mexico. Members of the legislature’s Harmony and Peace Commission (COCOPA) said the EZLN would be better off making national declarations than international ones and demanded that the Zapatistas act according to their Spanish proposal, which would imply abandoning their silence in Mexico and giving words a chance here. The Government Secretariat stated that it would issue no safe-conduct or benefits to the EZLN leader that do not comply with the law.

Bishop emeritus Samuel Ruiz considered that in the end Marcos had left it clear that violence was not the correct way. The current bishop of San Cristóbal, Felipe Arizmendi, supported Marcos’ call to ETA and asked the subcomandante to practice what he preached and reinitiate negotiations in Mexico. He

accepted that the first letter's ambiguities had harmed the Zapatistas, but was glad they had quickly explained themselves and that the EZLN had shown laudable signs of having permanently rejected terrorism, which was an example for the whole world. The bishop expressed his support for the EZLN's just causes because they were the causes of the indigenous peoples and the poor.

### **The return to words in Mexico**

It was in this context that the EZLN started 2003 by conclusively breaking its silence over the Mexican situation. Government Peace Commissioner Luis H. Álvarez had previously claimed publicly that he had collected information in pro-Zapatista indigenous communities that the grass roots in several regions were beginning to differ with some of the EZLN comandantes. The commissioner blamed the Zapatista movement for the absence of dialogue and claimed that certain sectors of it were being questioned by their own communities, which were open to the idea of collaborating on the organization of infrastructure projects for roads, production and housing improvement. He considered that such projects could be implemented more quickly if there was dialogue with EZLN representatives.

While it had remained silent, the Zapatista movement was focusing on strengthening autonomy in its municipalities. On January 1, 2003, some 20,000 indigenous people from around 40 autonomous municipalities, covering their faces and carrying machetes, symbolically took the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas. They included comandantes of both sexes, demonstrating that the leaders were united and supported their spokesperson. The leaders known as Tacho, David, Omar, Míster, Brus Li (sic), Esther and Fidelia all spoke. Effectively breaking the silence, they talked about what they thought of the political situation and what they planned for the future.

The event was held to commemorate the ninth anniversary of the day the EZLN first broke onto the public scene. The speakers briefly reviewed the different political actors, answered various questions and rumors and demonstrated that Zapatismo is not dead. The leaders denounced what they termed the main parties' "confabulation" against the indigenous people and accused the PAN, PRI and PRD of having closed the doors to dialogue and wanting to confine the Zapatistas in a war against the paramilitary forces. Comandante Tacho explained that they

consider the PAN “a racist party that uses Indians as servants,” while the PRI resents the EZLN because its appearance implied that party’s defeat. He explained that the EZLN was disinterested in any short-term electoral agenda and called the parties “traitors,” comparing the governing PAN to the PRI. Finally, Tacho reaffirmed the rejection of the free trade agreement with the United States and Canada that the Zapatistas had expressed since their public debut on January 1, 1994, and accused President Fox of having policies similar to those of PRI predecessor Zedillo.

Comandante Esther told Fox that people were “disillusioned with his deceit.” The Zapatista movement claimed its right to link up with other struggles in Mexico and other parts of the world. They thus expressed their solidarity with the Italian and Argentine peoples, supported Venezuela’s right to self-determination and rejected US policy.

The comandantes also rejected rumors of a conflict among the Zapatista leadership—“we are not disunited or fighting”—and wondered why they would fight among themselves when they still had others to fight against. They warned the government peace commissioner, one of those responsible for the rumors, that they would not allow him to enter the Zapatista communities and would not recognize him as a mediator. They left it clear that they did not want charity handout programs and that the roots of the problem in Chiapas had to be dealt with. And to undermine any speculation that Marcos was in conflict with the indigenous people, they stressed that the Clandestine Committee supported his communiqués and actions. At the end of their appearance, they proclaimed “the globalization of rebelliousness and dignity.”

### **The government caught off guard**

When the EZLN suddenly reappeared on the scene, the executive branch did not know what to do. Peace Commissioner Álvarez replied that he was still open to dialogue and asked the EZLN to give peace another chance, but his words did not contain even a hint of self-criticism related to the Zapatistas’ reasons for not trusting the government.

Meanwhile some of the parliamentary representatives belonging to COCOPA, and one belligerent PRD legislator in particular, accused Marcos of having cornered the indigenous movement. They claimed that he was putting “a break” on the movement and lying to the indigenous people. This was because the

Zapatistas had inferred that PRD leader Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas had traded recognition of his son's victory in the Michoacan governor's race for the PRD senators' endorsement of the indigenous legislation that goes against the San Andrés accords. The Zapatistas had certainly exaggerated this interpretation, as electoral victory does not depend—as used to be the case—on high-level party negotiations, but was the result of the Michoacan voters' free choice.

The reappearance of the Zapatistas obliged COCOPA to call an urgent meeting. This parliamentary commission again invited the EZLN to set a time and date for a meeting aimed at reactivating dialogue, but did not open any doors to amending the legislation that had caused the distancing of the Zapatistas in the first place. The Zapatistas made it quite clear that they expect nothing from the state or even from parties such as the PRD, because its representatives soon forgot they had originally opposed passage of the Indigenous Law, and took part in the legal game of regulating it.

### **Hollow calls for dialogue**

The powers that be returned to the well-trodden path of empty and none-too credible calls for dialogue that so far have only led to betrayal of the San Andrés accords on indigenous culture and rights. The Zapatistas rejected the idea of such an official dialogue in which they could not trust, preferring to strengthen their autonomy and the search for dialogue and support within an alternative popular movement far from the scramble for electoral posts.

Meanwhile, a combative alliance of independent peasant organizations continues to grow throughout the country. It is opposed to implementation of the agrarian section of the free trade agreement and its demands include respect for the San Andrés accords.

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### **Zapatista Chiaroscuro: The Risk of Sectarianism**

*While anti-war protesters took to the streets in Mexico, Marcos explained why the Zapatistas wanted to go to Europe to work for peace, and why they decided not to go. Recent debates have again demonstrated both the Zapatistas' achievements and their*

*sectarianism and contradictions.*

### **Jorge Alonso**

The United States has forced a unilateral, illegal, unjust, genocidal invasion on the world, and countless innocent victims will pay the cost. In response, a growing global movement is demanding the end of such bloody, destructive aggression. On March 15 in Madrid, during one of the many huge marches organized by this new world movement for peace, Nobel Laureate José Saramago described public opinion against the war as a new world power. There have been numerous and continuous demonstrations for peace in every corner of Mexico. Fortunately, the Fox government, which had previously been so submissive to US interests, put up a dignified defense of national sovereignty in response to the Bush administration's pressures and threats to try to line up Mexico's vote in the Security Council behind its crazed thirst for war. Fox's position won him the support of political leaders and the vast majority of the Mexican people. The only ones to urge that we bow to the US government's demands were a handful of business leaders, who pointed to the economic damage that could ensue from US reprisals. Some of them went so far as to argue that "principles are for beginners." Finally, when it was clear that the nation was largely united around this issue—the first time such unity has been achieved on any issue since the government took office—the business association ended up granting lukewarm approval to Fox's position. Most Mexicans believe that the blood of the civilian population of any nation on the planet is not negotiable in the market of US promises and threats. The Mexican government rose to the challenge and faithfully represented the pacifist will of the Mexican people and the multilateralism that has traditionally characterized Mexican foreign policy.

### **Message from Marcos in Italy**

The Zapatista movement has been present in many ways in the immense worldwide peace movement. In one of the massive peace marches in Italy, the mother of the Italian activist killed in the anti-globalization march in Genoa two years ago read a message from Marcos: "Bush's war is a war over money designed to create fear." Marcos argued that Bush was acting like the "global police" and was only able to do so thanks to electoral fraud. He said that for the Zapatistas, the weak's only strength lies in their dignity, which motivates them to resist the powerful,

to rebel. “The question,” he said, “is not whether we can change the murderous course of the powerful but whether we can live with the shame of not having done all we could to prevent or stop this war.” Marcos called on people to voice a universal “no” to war, to fear, to resignation, to renouncing our humanity. It is the ‘no’ of humanity against neoliberalism.”

### **EZLN plans to go to Europe**

Around the same time, in the context of a series of statements addressed to people at home, Marcos tried to explain publicly why he was trying to organize a Zapatista visit to Europe.

Since late 2002, the EZLN has been exploring whether it could regain in the international realm some of the ground it had been losing in Mexico. The plan was to send a delegation to Europe to visit international organizations in an effort to obtain recognition of indigenous rights and culture, with support from those in Mexico and around the world who have sympathized with the indigenous cause. The idea was to organize a march similar to the one in Mexico in 2001, with one fundamental difference. While in that first march through Mexico the Zapatistas had limited themselves to the indigenous issue, in the international march they would link it to the struggles of other peoples around the world, especially those related to the recognition of differences, resistance and rebellions, and with opposition to the war already being prepared by the United States against Iraq.

The Zapatistas felt that the drive to war could best be countered in Europe, and that the force of the opposition could then spread to the rest of the world. In his messages, Marcos explained that it was not that the Zapatistas felt they had the capacity to spark such an international movement, but that they believed they could help set it in motion alongside other forces that were already in action in Europe. He saw a visit to Europe as an opportunity to participate more directly in building “a world with room for all worlds.” He clarified that they weren’t planning to go on their best behavior but rather to spread words of rebellion.

### **A damning revelation: True or false?**

The Zapatistas were looking into where and how to travel when the Zapatista General Command was contacted on November 2, 2002, on behalf of someone who had been very close to the circles of Mexican political and economic power from 1993 to 1996. Once they agreed with the conditions of discretion and

secrecy, the Zapatistas were given a message from this person, who claimed to have information that could be useful to the Zapatistas and concluded, “If you’re interested let me know. It has to do with Acteal.” Marcos explained that it was not the first time that government dissidents had sent them information, which sometimes turned out to be true and sometimes false.

In a series of messages, Marcos summed up what this person had revealed. In the months following February 1995, after Zedillo’s plot against the EZLN and the military offensive in Chiapas accompanying it had failed, and in the wake of the theatrical detention of Raúl Salinas de Gortari, Generals Cervantes Aguirre (Secretary of National Defense) and Renán Castillo (not only head of the military but also the *de facto* governor of Chiapas) insisted on the need to activate paramilitary groups to deal with the Zapatistas. Castillo had studied in the United States and Cervantes had very good relations with the US Defense Department. They put together a plan they called “Colombia” with State Department support, but Zedillo could not decide whether to carry it out.

That same year a member of the Spanish government visited Mexico. He was very close to President Zedillo and attended meetings that dealt with state affairs, in one of which Zedillo mentioned the Zapatistas and the problem of how to get rid of them, given that they had public opinion on their side.

The informant claimed that the Spaniard proposed destroying Zapatista legitimacy: since the Zapatistas fought *for* indigenous people, it was simply a matter of getting them to fight *against* indigenous people. He gave Zedillo the example of what had happened in Spain, where groups had been created to counter the Basque independence movement. The Spaniard said that “killing and kidnapping assassins is not a crime but rather a favor to society.” He explained how the groups created by the Spanish government not only killed and kidnapped but also carried out terrorist attacks and blamed them on the Basque separatist group ETA. He assured that no one asked any questions when terrorists were killed, and argued that serious decisions had to be made for reasons of State security.

Zedillo replied that the recipe wouldn’t work in Mexico because the Zapatistas weren’t terrorists. The Spaniard had the solution: “Let’s make them into terrorists.” They would have to create an

armed indigenous group, orchestrate a conflict with the Zapatistas, let them fight and kill each other, and then send in the army to establish peace. Voilá! The problem would be solved. Given his own experience, the Spaniard offered to provide advice, which naturally would not come free: the Mexican government would have to cooperate with the Spanish government by extraditing ETA members residing in Mexico. Zedillo objected that the Basques in question had never been proven to be ETA members, but the Spaniard said that he would take care of ensuring they were identified as such. He also offered the Spanish government's support in trade negotiations between Mexico and Europe. The Spaniard concluded by bragging: "If we Spanish are experts at anything, it's exterminating Indians!"

### **1997: The "Spanish plan" in Acteal**

Based on this information, Marcos inferred the rest of what happened as part of the "Spanish plan." Zedillo ordered the activation of paramilitary groups. The Spanish government provided advice and in return the Mexican government stepped up its extradition of purported ETA members. On December 22, 1997, a paramilitary group set out to meet the Zapatistas. The Zapatistas retreated to avoid a conflict between indigenous people and warned non-Zapatistas of the threat. The unarmed Las Abejas group remained in Acteal, trusting that their neutrality would keep them safe. But the plan was carried out against whoever was in Acteal: civilians, mostly women and children, were massacred while the police and military waited patiently to come in and impose peace in a "conflict among indigenous people." What took place was not a battle but a massacre, and the truth came out thanks to the media.

Word of the Acteal massacre traveled around the world. On March 10, 1998, Spanish President Felipe González was interviewed by the Mexican journalist Luis Hernández. González said that events like the Acteal massacre always create a huge commotion since we are living in a time of media globalization, but lamented that far more serious events in other places never surmount the communication barriers.

As Marcos now interprets that interview, "González presented it all as a problem of media exaggeration," and Marcos now wonders if he was not perhaps the Spaniard who spoke with Zedillo about paramilitary groups and extradition of the Basques, listing the times that Zedillo and Felipe González met as heads of

state. He even wondered whether the reason for Aznar's visit to Mexico in February 2003 was not to convince Fox to vote in favor of Bush's war in the UN, but rather to ensure that the Zapatistas wouldn't go to Spain.

### Why Spain and why the Basque issue?

After recounting this story, Marcos explained why the Zapatistas' proposed visit to Europe should begin in Spain and why it would have to address the Basque question. Indeed, justifying why the Zapatistas were obliged to address the Basque issue was one of the reasons for revealing the plot because it showed how the Spanish government itself had mixed the Basque issue up with the indigenous struggle. "The Zapatistas consider it our duty," Marcos explained, "to go to Spain to demonstrate to the King, to Felipe González, to José María Aznar and to Baltasar Garzón that they are lying when they say 'if the Spanish are experts at anything, it's exterminating Indians,' since we are still alive, resisting and rebelling." He said that while the Zapatistas would not provoke a massacre in Spain, they could provoke a debate. The initiative he launched a few months ago for a meeting on the Basque issue, called "give words a chance," grew out of this concern. "There was also," according to Marcos, "the problem that the Basque issue was a taboo among progressive forces. It could only be brought up to condemn ETA terrorism, while carefully ignoring two things: one, state terrorism, and two, that ETA is not the only force fighting for the sovereignty of Euskal Herria."

Marcos said that the Zapatistas didn't realize they'd get into so much trouble by addressing the Basque question, but considered it their duty to do so. He recalled that they had hinted at where they would take aim during the presentation of the new journal *Rebeldeía* on November 17, 2002, and that several days later they decided to lob "a provocation" at Felipe González, although it was Baltasar Garzón whose ego was wounded. The EZLN, he clarified, never proposed mediating in the Basque conflict, nor telling the Basques what they should or shouldn't do. He acknowledged that while the Zapatistas' proposals may have been clumsy or naïve, they were not dishonest: "there were no hidden accords or double-dealing." He also said that they were planning to reveal the information they had received on the plot cooked up by Zedillo and "the Spaniard" during their visit and when they presented criminal charges to international organizations.

Marcos once again defended himself from the criticisms that rained in from all sides when he took up the Basque question, accusing him of meddling in an issue he didn't understand. He countered that he had more knowledge of the issue than many imagined: he knew about the connection between Spanish and Mexican state terrorism.

### Defensive

### arguments

#### and offensive adjectives

Having made all these clarifications, Marcos announced that the Zapatistas wouldn't drop the issue, but had decided to cancel their visit to Spain. He reiterated that his initiative had been clean and honest, but that he had quickly been surrounded by the condemnation and misunderstanding "of those who claim to be progressive but when pressed by the media, refused to see the implications."

He had only a "feeling of reproach" for them and no more, because bitterness could not be sustained against those who "can be mean, but have been generous on other occasions." And he continued to vent his feelings: "Someone on the left even dared, in a mean, low-down way, to suggest that the EZLN's position on ETA was a condition set by the Spanish government to allow the Zapatista delegation to visit Spain." He appealed to history: the EZLN's position on terrorism dates back to its foundation.

He turned his arguments over and over: if the Zapatistas had decided not to participate in the meeting on the Basque issue, it was not because they were worried about "criticisms, reproaches and mean accusations," but rather because they could not ethically participate in a meeting that didn't have the support of all nationalist forces in the Basque country. In such a case, the meeting would run the risk of degenerating into a tribunal to judge those who were absent, instead of a forum to discuss and analyze the Basque country's options. Finally, he offered apologies to all the people of the Basque country who he had hurt or wounded and hoped they would someday forgive him.

With respect to the proposed debate with Baltasar Garzón that had emerged in the wake of his earlier critical remarks, Marcos explained that the Zapatistas had waited long enough and Garzón, who was the challenger in this debate, had chosen to remain silent. Marcos accused Garzón of citing laws for want of truth. And he once again turned to adjectives: "We previously accused Garzón of being a grotesque clown. This was not true.

He's only a chatterbox and a coward." Marcos concluded this series of statements by thanking the Basque organizations that had responded positively to the EZLN's initiative and hoping that the proposed meeting could still be held in the future.

### Criticism for all sides

Since the beginning of 2003, Marcos has once again been speaking out vigorously to people both in Mexico and abroad, asking them to understand his long silence and his renewed words.

On Mexican issues, Marcos commented on the Supreme Court verdict to uphold the legislators' "counter-reform" of the indigenous law, denying indigenous rights and undercutting their interests. This decision, he stated, had brought the three state branches together to definitively rule out dialogue and negotiation as a way to resolve the Zapatista uprising. He listed the number of indigenous people in each Mexican state, drawing on official statistics, and summarized the problems and struggles of the various indigenous peoples based on notes he had gathered during the Zapatistas' 2001 march.

His criticisms of the entire Mexican political class were caustic. The creation of "the new old PRI," he said, could not hide the fact that the old party refused to die. He recalled that PRI Senator Manuel Bartlett, one of the leading figures behind the counter-reform of the indigenous law, had used expropriated land to build a shopping center, golf club and exclusive residential development when he was governor of Puebla. Bartlett, he said, wanted to make himself out to be a patriot defending national sovereignty by opposing the privatization of the electricity industry, but people shouldn't be fooled, since he was holding out until the price was right, "preferably in dollars." He accused the PRI government of Veracruz of repression: under the PRI dictatorship, he said, the federal government used foreign policy to cover up a policy of domestic terror.

Marcos ran down the list of those already aspiring to be candidates in the 2006 presidential elections. He described the campaign of President Fox's wife as an attempt to turn 80 million Mexicans into "grateful beggars" and called Government Secretary Santiago Creel a "psychopath." He described the project of Fox and his National Action Party (PAN) as an effort to favor big business and "transform the nation and its history into

business."

According to Marcos, there are no ideological disputes in the PAN: all of the party's internal rival groups have the same economic, political, social and cultural project. The internal struggles are over minor differences in their political and economic interests. Marcos also accused the PAN governor of Morelos of expropriating the lands of small farmers to make way for *maquilas* and mentioned that he had already been accused of cooperating with organized crime.

But the Zapatista leader reserved his sharpest criticism for the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD). He said that what had once been a leftist party had become "a party without principles or a program." It abided by the logic of the political class and only aspired to slightly tip the balance, making it "a Left agreeable to the Right." In response to Zapatista criticisms, PRD leader Rosario Robles had already admitted that the vote cast by PRD senators on the indigenous bill had been a mistake and had called on the Zapatistas not to fight "among friends." But Marcos didn't listen; he continued the fight. He again accused Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas of being responsible for that vote, and the PRD of having chosen to be an "accomplice of the Right."

#### **A running battle with the PRD**

Marcos explained how the new indigenous law was a triumph for the political class over the indigenous peoples. He admitted that although the PRD's representatives in the House had voted against the law, they more recently voted to approve its specific regulations. According to Marcos, the PRD has been voting in favor of neoliberalism and against the Mexican people for the past three years. As an example, he mentioned how in December 2002 several PRD legislators had joined the PRI and the PAN to vote against the suspension of the agricultural section of NAFTA. This is currently one of the main concerns of Mexico's small farmers, who fear they will be put out of business by cheap (and US government-subsidized) grain imports from the North.

He accused the PRD government of Michoacán of having tried to break the indigenous movement by coopting it and pushing it towards the government's positions in an effort to dilute resistance. He charged the PRD mayor of the Federal District with trying to "control" the social movements, believing that "simulation was still effective," and concluded that the idea of the "city of hope"—the municipal government's slogan—was coming

to mean nothing more than its leader's presidential hopes.

In the Federal District, Marcos said, "people have lost the capacity to be shocked by corruption." He expressed his opposition to the "zero tolerance" plan imported from New York by the capital's PRD authorities, since it would limit individual rights and advance conservative thinking in an effort to build a wall excluding the poor from Mexico City. Finally, he charged that the municipal government favored businesspeople, and mentioned by way of example that the foundation for the city's historic center was headed up by Carlos Slim, the richest man in Mexico and Latin America.

Another wave of criticisms fell on the PRD's internal elections. Marcos asked how much had been spent on radio and television ads, and wondered why a leftist party was resorting to surveys to elect its candidates and promoting names and faces instead of principles and programs. The PRD had lost 67% of the municipalities it once won, he said, because the party governed like the PRI and the PAN. According to Marcos, it is clear that the PRD's language wasn't reaching young people, indigenous people or peasant farmers. For Marcos, the PRD contains "a new political class that is living off the budget" and he thus dismissed the argument that people should keep voting for it due to the lack of alternatives.

#### **"An intelligent rebelliousness" is emerging**

Marcos also referred in his messages to the mass media, which he sees as alternating "between easy scandals and lies." Nor did he forget the Catholic Church. He alluded to Bishop Onésimo Cepeda as an example of the country's many top church officials who can be found giving blessings on golf courses and in luxury restaurants, "at the sumptuous tables where everything abounds except dignity and shame." The bishop represents the Church that worships the gods of power and money and is indulgent "with crime turned into government and business," he said, while it condemns to eternal fire the rebelliousness of those who ask for justice and peace. Despite this, Marcos also recognizes the existence of another church that "talks about humility and honesty" and has chosen to stand beside the marginalized.

Marcos also addressed the overexploitation of workers. He explained how the logic of big capital does not prioritize food

production. Neoliberalism produces nauseatingly extreme wealth and unbridled corruption in the face of extreme poverty; it creates a bonanza for the rich by plundering the poor. In this context of increasing poverty, Marcos perceives a path of “intelligent rebellion.” He talked of a resistance that demands a great deal and doesn’t make a show. He spoke about the issue of self-management, which is progressing despite the obstacles erected by federal and state governments, and about the experience of good government in the face of official inefficiency. He sees many groups, especially among the young, in a “dispersed, fragmented rebellion.” And he recalled the triumph of the small farmers of Atenca following “a struggle that asked us to believe in what the people can do rather than in politicians.”

### **Marcos “doesn’t want friends”**

Marcos’ statements provoked all kinds of reactions. The PRI governors of Veracruz and Oaxaca said he was “misinformed.” PRD leader Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas wrote a letter to the Zapatista leadership at the beginning of February. He lamented that as a spokesperson for the leadership, Marcos was repeating the unfounded charge—which he had already set straight—that Cárdenas had directed the PRD senators to vote for the counter-reform of the indigenous law. Cárdenas expressed his concern that a social movement like the EZLN, with which one could agree or disagree but which had always acted truthfully, was stooping to lies. He called on the leadership to ask its spokesperson where he had obtained the information that supposedly proved that Cárdenas had told the PRD senators how to vote. He did not want to believe that some people were trying to turn this version into the truth by repeating it over and over again, even though they knew it was a lie. He reiterated his conviction and willingness to contribute whatever he could to achieve peace with justice and dignity in the conflict surrounding the Zapatista uprising.

Pablo Gómez, the PRD representative in the Electoral Institute who had proved the illegal diversion of funds from the oil workers’ union to the PRI’s presidential campaign, also intervened in the dispute. It seemed clear to him that Marcos “doesn’t want friends.” Gómez recalled that it was not the first time Marcos had attacked the PRD, and reiterated that the PRD senators’ vote had been a “mistake” that the party had already recognized on several occasions. He pointed out that the EZLN, too, had made a mistake, by signing one of the San Andrés accords that did not include indigenous autonomy via the

creation of a regional government entity with broad attributions. Gómez stressed that while the PRD recognized its error, Marcos refused to admit he had failed to defend the indigenous movement's most important political demand: regional autonomy. Gómez concluded that Marcos only accepted "subordinates" and was wont to "pontificate." Another PRD member who had participated in the San Andrés negotiations also intervened in the debate, clarifying that the accords were not only signed by the EZLN but by a larger group of representatives of the Mexican indigenous movement.

### **"Bitterness" in Marcos**

Marcos replied, provocative as always. He accepted the invitation from the governor of Veracruz to visit the state, but asked whether the real acting governor, Alejandro Montano, knew about the invitation. He wondered whether the governor hadn't already fled, in light of accusations that he was linked to drug trafficking. Marcos also said he hoped the authorities of Veracruz wouldn't use his visit to throw him into one of their prisons.

To Pablo Gómez he again insisted that the PRD wasn't a leftist party, and noted that not all political parties are registered. To Cárdenas he responded that the Zapatistas aren't liars and recalled that the PRD leader had chastised his son Lázaro when he was a senator by asking him, "Are you representing the EZLN or the PRD?" He was pained to think that Cárdenas, whom the Zapatistas viewed as committed to peace and justice with dignity for the indigenous people of Mexico and for all Mexicans, would have thought and said such a thing. And referring to the PRD government in Michoacán, he charged that it was made up of people who first betrayed their principles, then the truth, and then their friends—the Zapatistas—whom they accused of being liars.

Senator Ortega of the PRD lamented the tone of Marcos' messages and considered that they were dominated by "bitterness" rather than ideological confrontation or a political thesis. Ortega expressed his disagreement with the practice of trying to discredit opponents through insults, personal attacks and lies.

### **A move towards sectarian positions**

The journal *Rebeldía*, which first appeared in November 2002, includes articles by Zapatistas as well as activists and academics

from other parts of the world. Four issues have appeared in the first few months of 2003. Some observers of events in Mexico who have read what has been published in the journal feel that certain sectors of the Zapatista movement have been leaning towards sectarian positions on national issues. It seems as though they have forgotten the brilliant Zapatista line about fighting for a world in which there is room for many worlds, for all worlds. Perhaps this has been fed by the isolation and lack of progress following so many frustrated initiatives.

The Zapatistas called a National Democratic Convention in 1994, but this effort came to naught since sectarian groups prevailed, although this was not the Zapatistas' fault. The phenomenon was repeated in the Zapatista Front, however, hindering its growth. Of the long list of social movements named by Marcos in his summary of movements in the states visited by the Zapatistas, few were recognizable. And worst of all is the division within many communities in the Zapatista regions.

The Zapatista movement has had a hard time repositioning itself for this new phase of its struggle. The Zapatistas do not want to be subjected to the government's handout policies, but the resistance has been a very long and tiring one for some sectors. There is never a dearth of specific acts of resistance, but at times there are contradictions. In addition, these isolated acts of resistance do not achieve much in terms of community development, much less social transformation. And isolated acts of resistance have always occurred.

#### **The Zapatista movement's clear and luminous side...**

The Zapatista movement still speaks of a "new way of doing politics": the politics of resistance rather than government. It asks people to globalize dissidence. This remains valid. And despite the recent stumbles, it would be unfair not to recognize what the Zapatistas have helped generate in the world: the aspiration for another kind of globalization, one with a humane face, respectful of differences.

The Zapatista movement has been very successful internationally, ever since the Intercontinental Meeting for Humanity and against Neoliberalism held in Chiapas.

In Mexico, their cause has been taken up by the majority of those

affected by neoliberalism. And their rallying cry—not to aspire to power but rather to ensure that those who govern do so in accord with the will of the people—is innovative and profoundly democratic. Their struggle for indigenous culture and rights has been a consistent one.

#### **...and its murky, troubling side**

Nevertheless, we must recognize the obvious: capital has succeeded in exercising absolute power through a dense network of international institutions that impose their views and their rules, an arrogant and extreme power that is personified today in the US attack against Iraq. The movements against neoliberalism have also been making progress, demanding another world, rising up against this war and all wars. There is great potential in the indignation and rejection of injustice, the rebellion against power and the hope for a different world. But the enemy is very strong. There is a need for a network of political organizations, strong parties and social movements that can propose, from within this global movement of resistance, an alternative project beyond capitalism. And in this project there cannot, there must not be sectarianism.

In Mexico's case, the "partidocracy" is clearly a problem and certainly must be fought, but never with sectarianism, and always by looking for ways to win allies and increase convergences. The Zapatistas should not forget what they have contributed to 21st century internationalism: a new universalism based on recognition of differences and the struggle for a world that has room for many worlds, for all worlds. The Zapatista movement must now find ways to make sure that sectarianism doesn't exclude any "world," whether on Mexican soil or the new global soil.



## **The Birth of a New Alliance**

*The US punishment of Mexico for opposing the invasion of Iraq has given yet more impetus to a new national grassroots alliance that has formed to promote national unity against neoliberalism. This carefully forged alliance is stirring hope.*

### **Jorge Alonso**

The history of Mexico's grassroots movements has been characterized by a search for common ground, which has been hard to find and is often short-lived. Some people have become discouraged because alliances invariably slip away as divisions prevail. Others see hope in the persistent and consistent search for them, despite previous failures.

A new grassroots convergence was born at the end of 2002 to develop a strategic, systematic opposition to neoliberalism. In the course of its initial evolution, it increasingly recognized that there is no easy line to be drawn in defining the effects of neoliberal thinking. The story of its birth and its efforts to ensure success this time bears telling.

### **An good moment for trying again**

The immediate predecessor of this novel movement was the appearance in 2001 and 2002 of 14 separate new fronts to fight for human rights, against Plan Puebla Panama and against the sale of the state electricity and petroleum companies to private capital. Several of these struggles took innovative forms, reaching beyond a single sector of society.

Given this revival of pluralistic social movements, an initiative arose to unite them. People began to sketch out a mechanism to bring them together that everyone would be able to trust, free of vanguard notions and leadership cliques. They sought the collaboration of public figures known for their impartiality and clarity, enlisting the help of Samuel Ruiz, bishop emeritus of San Cristóbal de las Casas; professor Pablo González Casanova; Conchita de Nava, the wife of a leader of democratic civic fronts; and Miguel Angel Granados Chapa, a journalist who has helped

restore some trust in the electoral branch.

The people participating in those initial discussions mapped out Mexico's social movements, including the armed ones, since one point of agreement was to consider all forms of struggle legitimate. In so doing, they became aware of the enormous social capital that could be mobilized in the country. At the same time, they perceived the urgent need for information and for building consensus.

### **A common agenda and first principles**

The process was a very free and open one. A minimal organizational structure was created, with monthly meetings, and they opted for a collective, horizontal leadership. On the issue of national electoral politics, they made it clear that participants could do as they wished, as no single electoral position would be forced on anyone.

The nascent movement announced that it would encourage the participation of everyone in the country by organizing regional and state forums and meetings to generate discussion around the proposed grassroots civic unity, its agenda and forms of organization. Proposed as a collective coalition operating according to democratic principles, the movement would also have to operate in such a way as to facilitate the work of its member networks.

Seeking the most effective way to move ahead together, the early participants drew up a minimal common agenda and began to work their way through it, taking care not to get bogged down in all the immediate, urgent issues requiring response. They were determined to create a new kind of convergence and prevent the initiative from backsliding into the formation of yet another activist single-issue front, even if at a new level. To avoid getting mired in old, interminably controversial debates, they proposed to learn from previous efforts and, most important, to try to listen and discuss rather than assume judgmental positions. Thus, for example, starting from an attitude of respect for the Zapatista position, they discussed how that movement has its own rhythms and has chosen another strategy for the moment.

The group analyzed the effects of the neoliberal model applied by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other multilateral organizations all over Latin America in the past two

decades. They agreed that this model has led to greater impoverishment, the concentration of wealth in increasingly few hands, indiscriminate plundering of natural resources, privatization of the national patrimony and public services, the loss of basic social rights, a growing flood of migration and the subjection of national sovereignty to outside interests. Looking specifically at Mexico, they recognized that the model's application has exacerbated social inequality and is playing a major role in many of the issues that the social movements have been addressing in recent years.

In their discussions, they did not overlook the fact that indigenous people have been denied constitutional recognition of their rights. Nor did they ignore the proposed privatization of PEMEX, the state-owned petroleum company, which has polarized the country, with half of those surveyed opposing the privatization and the other half supporting it. Their analysis included the labor reform currently underway, which will limit workers' rights as it increases profits for private investors, and the new phase of NAFTA, which will further harm Mexico's rural areas. They also considered the intense global imperialist expansion of the United States in the economic, political, cultural and military realms, seeking to establish the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) as a framework for regulating economic and trade relations all over the continent, as well as imposing Plan Puebla Panama (PPP), Plan Colombia and the Andean Initiative.

### **The goal is to change the correlation of forces**

Based on this analysis, people concluded that all the various forms of resistance to these issues must come together to forge a new correlation of forces in Mexico to create the framework for a new, more just order. They thus realized that the point around which everyone could unite was the promotion of national unity against neoliberalism, not with a short-term, reactive, issue-by-issue approach but rather with a strategic focus and a systemic understanding aimed at defeating this model.

With all these points established, this initial organizing group, which called itself the Promoter of National Unity against Neoliberalism, drafted an initial declaration announcing its plan to promote broad, pluralistic, grassroots, civic unity in the fight against neoliberalism. Along with the declaration, they issued an invitation to social, civic and grassroots organizations, unions, networks, coalitions, fronts and movements from all around the

country to participate in preparing and holding a National Conference Against Neoliberalism and for the Defense of Sovereignty and National Independence in May 2003.

### **Key points of the common agenda**

They then began to draft a common program and national agenda, listing the basic points on this agenda during an open discussion. The first has to do with the fight for democracy, with new forms of representation and mechanisms for direct democracy to ensure social participation in decision making. Another important point is to continue demanding compliance with the San Andrés Accords, with the goal of establishing new, just institutional structures and practices that guarantee local communities the right to self-government and autonomy. This is a very important issue in the demilitarization of indigenous regions.

Since the movement includes many peasant farmers groups, another basic demand is related to achieving food sovereignty by supporting small-scale rural production. Some of the other proposed demands have to do with guarantees of the right to information and democratization of the media; the urgent need to build a new, ethical political culture; and the need to create egalitarian, equitable gender relations.

One of the key points is related to the defense of national sovereignty. The new movement proposes to push for a new world order based on justice, peace, dignity, democracy and sustainability, which presupposes putting a stop to military expansion and imperialist wars.

As in most movements opposed to neoliberalism, other central points include cancellation of the foreign and domestic debts and rejection of trade agreements such as the FTAA and the PPP. In the areas of economic, social and cultural rights, the movement rejects the labor reform currently underway, and obviously supports the full exercise of individual and collective rights with recognition of and respect for cultural, racial, sexual and generational diversity.

### **Planning for the conference**

The invitation for the May conference had been formulated round all the discussions that had taken place in the first few months of the year. It touched on both the national and global situation, expressing alarm over the US war against the people of

Iraq and Washington's decision to use force to consolidate its global hegemony and try to overcome the country's own protracted economic recession. The invitation also made clear that the conference was open to all the country's organizations, independent of their nature, size or political orientation. The only requirements were that they oppose neoliberalism and be willing to unite in a common front to defend national sovereignty and achieve a new political, economic and social order that would satisfy the needs of all Mexicans for food, health care, housing, education, jobs, land, recreation and justice.

The conference agenda would have two main points: first to analyze the national and global situation, and second to define the character of the new movement, draft a specific short-term program of struggle and determine its structure, name, slogans and emblems. All conference participants would have the right to present papers and participate in the thematic group discussions and plenary discussions. The commissions for analysis, coordination and organization agreed to draft documents for discussion.

### **For peace in Iraq...and in Mexico**

As the organizers prepared for the conference, they continued participating in other struggles. For example, they joined in one of the worldwide marches for peace on April 12.

A statement from *Subcomandante Marcos* was read at this march, in which he described the war against Iraq as an attempt to globalize fear and submission, but noted that it had also globalized indignation. He added that in a few short months, the United States government had achieved what it took Hitler's regime years to accomplish. Marcos again spoke out against all the political parties, this time for calling a march for peace in which they did not even dare name those who perpetrate war. He accused the political class of trying to capitalize on people's anti-war feelings, recalling that this same class had united against recognizing indigenous rights and culture, and that this had resulted in a continuation of the war against the indigenous people of Mexico. Members of the new movement against neoliberalism also took advantage of the occasion to underscore that Mexico itself couldn't be said to be living in peace.

### **A great and careful organizing effort**

A series of conference organizing meetings and workshops were

held to ensure that the initiative would bear fruit over the long term. A strategic plan like this, designed for the long term, obliges friends and enemies to define themselves, but to keep from getting bogged down, they identified the points on which the participating organizations do not agree and avoided making proposals related to them. These included anything with a whiff of partisan politics or elections. To strengthen unity, the promoters instead sought to maximize the points on which they did agree and worked scrupulously to ensure that the differences among the participating organizations would be respected, so that the declaration respecting their autonomy would not be a merely formal one. As another essential task was to correlate strategy with tactics through a careful effort to combine unity and diversity, they proposed discussions, negotiation and the building of consensus as indispensable mechanisms. Throughout the whole process, the desire to clear up any possible confusion among short, medium and long term requirements became almost an obsession.

The movement was also obliged to analyze the nature of its relationship to the state carefully, since it would inevitably confront the state powers. In addition, there was a striking concern to create a methodology that would ensure the movement's inclusive organization and ethical, democratic functioning. People agreed that the best way to create an environment of inclusion was to develop a culture of dialogue. They further recognized that consultations and discussion forums were essential mechanisms for elaborating global, national, regional and sectoral focuses for the proposed action plan.

While organizing the movement was a delicate task, there was much greater clarity around its purpose. It was agreed that it should be a forum for opposition to the dominant system to encourage the revival of social movements with the goal of building a new social hegemony based on a project of nation.

### **The national conference**

The conference took place in Mexico City at the beginning of May, with the participation of some 1,900 people from 18 institutions and over 100 social and civic organizations of all kinds and with the most diverse origins. They included unions, independent workers' movements, retired people, farmers' associations, indigenous groups, students, teachers, cultural and civic leaders, human rights activists, women, environmentalists

and politicians. Among them was the emerging movement of Atenco residents, who demonstrated such organizing capacity and combativeness in their struggle to save their land last year. Although the initial organizers were aware that the new forum would not represent all of Mexico's social movements, these organizations do cover a good part of them.

The meeting differed from previous similar initiatives in that it had been organized from below. Among its achievements was the environment of tolerance in which the discussions took place. Regarding the first agenda item, the analysis of the national and global situation, participants agreed that the change brought with the defeat of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in the 2000 elections had not brought the democratic transition Mexico needs, since the National Action Party (PAN) government has not dismantled the privileges of the groups in power.

The rapid pace of global events obliged them to add several points to the analysis made in the first declaration. For one thing, people felt that the US victory in the war against Iraq had emboldened the neoliberals, which would increase exploitation, keep salaries down and fuel social violence. They accused Fox of not daring to condemn Bush for the aggression against the people of Iraq, although his government had initially opposed the unilateral intervention. They also argued that Mexico had changed from its origins as a social state to a state for the wealthy with disempowering charity mechanisms for the poor. Despite the concern to steer clear of party politics, many participants insisted that neither the PRI nor the PAN are options today, and given the actions of the governments of Michoacán and Mexico City, most demonstrated little hope for the PRD as well, which they accused of bowing to capital and resorting to repression.

### **No more isolated struggles**

The second point on the agenda was the movement's own organization, program and plan of action. While the emphasis was on resistance during the preparatory stages, without ignoring the need to propose alternatives, the stress during the conference was on proposals, especially those related to migrant rights, the generation of new forms of grassroots production, exchange and trade, and a plan to fight for work and land. On the issue of migrants, people noted that income from remittances is now greater than income from tourism, and that 1,897 Mexicans

have died trying to cross the border in the past few years alone.

The action plan was polished during the meeting, in which there was wholehearted agreement over the goal of ensuring that grassroots struggles in Mexico would no longer be isolated. The participants pledged to publicize the agreements and build state, regional and sectoral structures. Although the entire organizational effort before the conference had relied on the Internet and people agreed to keep using it, they also decided to publish a bulletin and continue holding workshops to analyze the situation.

The new convergence's proposals were announced on May 20 in public events around Mexico City.

#### **A convergent indigenous meeting**

The National Encounter of Meso-American Response and Resistance to Neoliberal Globalization was held in mid-May, in a Mixe indigenous community in the state of Oaxaca, as a first expression of the new convergence. Those invited included indigenous organizations and peoples as well as other nongovernmental organizations and networks. Some 400 delegates from over 100 organizations participated in the event.

The participants again condemned the PPP, FTAA and NAFTA as forms of government despotism that favor the interests of large corporations. They described the mega-projects imposed on the region as a huge wave that is pillaging and destroying natural resources, violating the population's social rights and undermining national sovereignty. They also denounced the governments of both Mexico and Central America as "employees of transnational corporations" that do not respect the rights of indigenous peoples.

The meeting's slogan was "For a future without the PPP or FTAA." The agreements again included the issue of respect for women's rights and for indigenous practices and dress.

#### **Showing that another world is possible**

While they have provided heroic symbols, isolated attempts at resistance have not changed the correlation of forces in favor of grassroots causes. That evidence is what led to the search for this new convergence. It has set itself the task of designing strategies to highlight and empower people's specific proposals

and is attempting to create alternatives in order to begin showing that another world is possible.

All of this implies keeping a distance from the current governing political system, especially today's political parties. The goal is to encourage innovative forms of doing politics to counter the elitist forms and the leadership cliques that become oligarchies primarily concerned with their own reproduction.

The new convergence has become a place to learn about the country's diverse movements, a place for information and coordination, which was created through a careful and solid process. The challenge is enormous and will require tremendous innovative energy, but this energy exists. This utopia that is beginning to take shape on the horizon has produced great hope. It is showing us the way and helping us get there.

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### Voters Abstain as the Old Regime Regains Force

*With 52%, abstention was the big winner in the July 6 elections. It had already hit 42% in 1997, before the “democratic euphoria” created by the PRI’s loss in the 2000 presidential elections, but it rocketed past that in this year’s legislative elections even though six state and four local governments were also up for grabs, which normally ups turnout. Mexican voters were out to punish the government for mishandling the country’s new democratic opportunities.*

#### Jorge Alonso

A lack of proposals, the marketing of empty images and a myriad of conflicts defined the parties' legislative and gubernatorial election campaigns this year. The main result of these campaigns, and the most striking result of the elections, was massive abstention. Several factors explain why voters chose to stay away on election day.

#### The lingering shadow of past corruption

The illegal actions committed during the last presidential campaign were still in the news, discouraging voters. The Federal Election Institute (IFE) had leveled a US\$100 million fine against

the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) for pillaging PEMEX, the state oil company, to finance its campaign in 2000. The Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) charged that a large part of these ill-gotten funds went into buying votes. When the IFE recently ratified that sanction, the PRI spokesperson said that the actions had been the work of a team of corrupt, disloyal party officials who had already been replaced, though he named no names. This scandal, which has been dubbed “PEMEX-gate,” thus brought the party’s deep internal divisions out into the light. The successful efforts of several of PEMEX’s top managers to shield their responsibility in the affair behind the impunity of their congressional seats also discouraged voters. That impunity was confirmed after the elections, when the Attorney General’s Office exonerated all those involved of any criminal wrongdoing and merely opened an investigation into electoral violations.

The PRD also filed charges with the Attorney General’s Office, claiming that the PRI administrator of the railroad company had diverted some \$60 million from the employee pension fund, of which at least a million ended up in the presidential campaign. The National Education Workers Coalition also asked the IFE to investigate the diversion of funds from the teachers’ union to PRI campaigns. This time the PRI defended the actions taken, thus incriminating itself with an attitude plainly reminiscent of the old regime.

Yet another set of charges had even more influence on the spirit of the electorate, because it got a great deal of publicity, especially towards the end of the campaign. The accusations had to do with funds provided by “Amigos de Fox,” that is, a group of “friends” of President Vicente Fox. One accusation claimed a triangular channeling of funds from abroad that involved money laundering. The PRI and the PRD urged the Election Institute to clear this case up before election day. The Attorney General’s Office finally determined that some 15-20% of the money used in Fox’s campaign came from abroad, but clarified that its origins were licit, thus deeming the fault to be merely administrative, not an electoral violation punishable by that office.

These two cases aren’t equivalent, since PEMEX involved diverting public funds while the Amigos de Fox case involved private money, but the media made little distinction between them. The one irrefutable conclusion drawn by many voters was that the law had been broken

in both cases, and people were more disappointed in and therefore more apt to punish the one who had presented himself as “different,” as an “advocate for change.” Two weeks after the elections, the Election Institute determined that six serious electoral law violations had indeed been committed in the Amigos de Fox case: receiving money from abroad, accepting donations from financial firms, exceeding campaign spending limits, allowing private individuals to pay for media ads, failing to report over \$10 million in private financing to the IFE and falsifying information in reports of contributions from supporters of Fox’s National Action Party (PAN). The party was fined some \$50 million, half what was leveled against the PRI.

### **Bishops’ statements stir things up**

While the campaigns languished without any proposals that might inspire voters, several bishops issued statements that heated up the electoral panorama. A few commented on the quality of the candidates in general, insisting that they should be “well prepared” and not “opportunistic,” while one said it was a sin not to vote. Even more controversially, several bishops, including those from Querétaro, Acapulco, Tlaxcala and Cuernavaca, told Catholics not to vote for parties and candidates that support abortion and homosexual unions. One of the newly registered parties, México Posible, countered by recalling article 130 of the Constitution, which prohibits religious leaders from proselytizing in favor or against specific candidates or parties.

The government minister promised to look into the accusations and enforce the law and asked the bishops not to get involved in the campaigns, while the Attorney General’s Office warned that it would give them no special treatment. Some bishops called on the government minister to clarify that they were not violating the law because they were not mentioning any specific party or candidate. They insisted on continuing to defend life, and announced that if the authorities considered them guilty they would go to jail for defending the gospel.

The government clarified that it wasn’t a case of imprisoning anyone, but rather of applying administrative sanctions in accord with the law. The bishop presiding over the Bishops’ Conference announced that they would continue to call for a carefully considered vote, while the cardinal of Mexico complained that the government and certain sectors of society were trying to

muzzle the bishops. Catholic organizations published ads supporting him.

Another debate during the campaign revolved around former President Salinas de Gortari's return to Mexico after living abroad for the past several years to evade charges for criminal actions committed under his mandate and his influence on the elections. In an interview, Salinas described current PRI leader Roberto Madrazo as a "friend" and assured the foreign press that "the state's persecution has ended." It has been estimated that a third of the PRI's candidates are Salinas supporters.

### **Offensive expenditures**

The parties waged ambiguous image campaigns that had little to do with their platforms and spent a scandalous amount of public funds doing so: some \$500 million, the most in Mexican history. The expenditures were offensive, particularly with so many people suffering from poverty.

Eleven parties qualified to receive these public funds. The PRI got 29.4% of the total, the PAN 26.4%, the PRD 11.6%, the Green Party (PVEM) 7.5%, the Labor Party (PT) 5.8% and Convergencia 4.8%. The other five parties shared the remaining 13%.

### **The PRI's "dirty campaign" failed**

The leading parties continuously adapted their campaigns to the results of the latest surveys and the proposals of their strategists. The PRI first sought to consolidate its faithful following with a campaign that recalled the past, when the party had used its government position to provide jobs and services to its supporters. In addition to promising a return to this past, the party pledged that "the PRI is at your side" and emphasized its experience in government. Later, it decided to go after the undecided voters, attacking the governments run by both the PAN and Mexico City's PRD mayor, Andrés López Obrador, whom it criticized for failing to reduce the crime rate. PRI public relations specialist Carlos Alazraki argued that this kind of "negative publicity" should be used when the race is very tight and the second place contender can exploit weak spots in its competitors. Alazraki defended "dirty campaigning" by arguing that while "there are codes of conduct in the market, that's not the case in politics."

The truth is that the PRI's aggressive campaign against the López Obrador government only served to push voters away. The party did much better in the states its governs, where it once again

used public resources to buy votes. It also benefited from an alliance with the PVEM, called the “Alliance for All,” in 97 districts. The PRI and PVEM were the two parties that bought the most TV ads.

### **A plebiscite on Fox’s government**

The PAN tried to take advantage of the positive perception of President Fox shown in the polls by focusing its campaign on his achievements. “Take the brakes off change,” “Together we’ll change things” and “Choose well” were its slogans.

The PAN insisted that any lack of progress should be blamed on the opposition legislators for hindering change. But the warning signs were soon apparent: the PAN’s own polls showed that the election results would not be particularly good for the party, as the balance of power in the House of Representatives was likely to remain the same.

### **Weak points in the PRD and PVEM**

There were conflicts in the PRD, mainly revolving around some candidates accused of being pro-Salinas. It became clear that the party needs a full-scale renovation and the eradication of favoritism in its structures. Aware of the need to differentiate its practices from both the PRI’s centralized control and the PAN’s managerial discipline, the PRD tried to convince people that the PRI and the PAN were the same, as shown by their support for an increased sales tax and the useless and onerous multi-million dollar bank bailout. They argued that it was not only necessary to “take the brakes off change,” but also to change course; they did not, however, clearly propose a new one.

The Green Party (PVEM), led by an old friend of PRI leader Madrazo, presented itself as “the young party for the new Mexico.” But it never went beyond generalities in discussing its solutions to the problems of education, health and housing, and never explained where the resources needed to implement its proposals would come from.

### **Sick of dull, empty campaigns**

The Convergencia promised to forge agreements among all parties in the House of Representatives, while México Posible defended women’s right to abortion and opposed discrimination based on sexual orientation. The latter party got its main coverage thanks to its conflict with the bishops, but it proved to

be a two-edged sword as many voters shied away from the conflict.

Several polls showed that the vast majority of Mexicans are tired of expensive, dull, empty campaigns that begin long before election day and do not help educate voters. Such campaigns were not what people expect from the country's new democracy. Many parties but very few authentic, viable projects were competing in these elections.

### **The PRD won 41 more seats**

In the end, 36.9% of the vote went to the PRI, 32.8% to the PAN and 18.8% to the PRD. The PVEM held its position while both the Labor Party and Convergencia won enough votes to hang on to their legal standing, although the latter two pulled fewer votes combined than the total number of annulled votes. The result was a narrowed but still pluralistic panorama, as voters left six parties standing and got rid of five by giving them so few votes that their legal status was revoked.

The PAN won only 153 seats, which represents a loss of 52 in the House of Representatives, while the PRD made the biggest gain with 95 seats, 41 more than last time. The PRI won 224 seats, 16 more than before, and the PVEM held even.

### **One of the country's least representative legislatures ever**

In percentage terms, the three main parties stayed their ground, but in absolute numbers they lost a lot of votes, all the more troubling given the increased number of registered voters since the last elections. The parties are clearly reaching fewer voters. The PRI didn't have a significant presence in the capital; the PAN had no impact in a third of the country's states; and the PRD, which swept the capital, got insignificant percentages in a full two-thirds of the states.

The PRI took 45% of the seats in the House of Representatives with 15% of the registered voters, the PAN 31% with 12% of the registered voters, and the PRD 19% with 8% of the registered voters. The high abstention rate made this one of the least representative legislatures in the country's electoral history.

The first important election result is that no single party has an absolute majority in Congress. The second is that without the PRI, no combination of other parties can reform the Constitution, and they will have to reach agreements in order to legislate. The third

is that the PRI is in a particularly advantageous position.

Six gubernatorial elections were held at the same time as the federal elections. The PAN lost Nuevo León, which includes one of the country's most important industrial cities, held on to Querétaro, won San Luis Potosí and came in a close second in the other three states, where the PRI held on to the governor's office.

### **An alarming abstention rate**

The most alarming thing about the July 2003 elections was that so many citizens repudiated the parties by not turning out to vote, despite the scandalous expenditures. Over half of the registered voters chose to abstain, apparently to punish the parties for not fulfilling their promises. The rejection of the electoral process was especially strong in the area of the Zapatista conflict and the community of Atenco, where people went so far as to prevent election officials from setting up the polling stations. Despite pressures from the political parties, the Election Institute proved to be an impartial institution, ensuring the legality of the elections. Challenges were presented, but tribunals exist to resolve them.

President Fox addressed the nation late on election day. He interpreted the elections as a signal from the electorate that the political forces should hammer out agreements for the good of the country, and promised to try to understand the reasons for the silence and the decision of so many not to vote.

### **A major setback for PAN and the government**

Although they didn't admit it, the PAN and the government suffered a major setback. The PAN had chosen to turn the vote into

a plebiscite on the President, emphasizing his figure in its TV ads, while Fox personally waged a campaign highlighting his own achievements. But even the minority who turned out to vote gave the PAN an unimpressive share of the vote. It was only logical that the international and local press would interpret the electoral results as a defeat for Fox himself.

After the elections, there was pressure on the President to make changes in his team. When the PRI jumped in saying it "would govern from Congress," Fox replied that he would continue governing, since the balance of forces in the House of Representatives has not changed. He rejected the interpretation of the elections as a vote to punish his administration, pointing to

two polls conducted at his request showing there had been no drop in his popularity, which remained above 70%. These figures were also in line with the numbers published by the daily newspaper *Milenio*, which showed a two-point drop between a poll taken before the elections and another afterward. Fox agreed with those who are saying that the elections showed the political system had been stretched to its limit, since it had not been created with a plurality of parties in mind. The system had guaranteed social peace, stability and alternation in government, he said, but far-reaching changes are now required.

#### **The PAN self-critical and the PRI euphoric and united**

PAN leaders admitted having been surprised by the disappointing results, but did not interpret them as a debacle for the party. They saw the election as merely a warning call, pointing to a need for adjustments and rectification. They talked about how some poor candidate choices and divisions resulting from the party's internal elections had contributed to the defeat. The PAN's general secretary recognized that society had not expressed confidence in the party and that the government would have to make changes, going beyond images and spectacles and relying less on intuition and more on precise calculations to formulate sound policies. He also noted that some officials in charge of social policies in federal agencies—including the Social Security Institute and the National Credit Institute—had intervened in the elections in the PRI's favor, reportedly conditioning the delivery of federal funds on a vote for the PRI.

Although PRI leader Madrazo's first words were conciliatory, remarking that it was time to build, PRI members couldn't hide their euphoria over the election results. While winning the votes of less than a sixth of the registered voters and losing over 4 million of the votes they received three years ago, they still seemed to feel their campaign strategy had paid off and their progress in the House would make it possible for them to regain the presidency in 2006. The tactic of alienating other voters to increase the vote represented by their faithful supporters appeared to have worked well for them. Although the PRI has virtually disappeared in the capital, it maintains a strong presence in two-thirds of the states.

In responding to the election results, PRI activists fell into two main camps, the larger of which seemed inspired by a spirit of revenge and set on rebuilding the old models of exercising power.

They see themselves in the myth of the phoenix. A smaller number appeared convinced that this is not the most useful approach for their own future and urged the party to claim victory, but on new terms. The overriding tone, however, was not one of evaluation but rather of celebration.

The party's internal struggles soon surfaced in the debates over who would head up the PRI's congressional bench. As has typically happened whenever internal democracy is at issue, the struggle took place through the familiar anti-democratic maneuvering that is the party's trademark. This struggle has nothing to do with ideas or proposals, but rather a jockeying for positions with sights set on the upcoming presidential campaign. Despite its deep fissures, however, the PRI has admittedly maintained an internal unity that gives it strength.

#### **PRD wins the capital, falls short elsewhere**

The PRD nearly doubled the seats it holds in the House of representatives and significantly increased its share of the vote in two states. Furthermore, it made a good showing even when it lost, trailing the winner in 36 districts by a margin of less than three points. Another important achievement is that one of the party's norms—establishing that no more than 70% of its candidates could be of any one sex—became a national law, marking an important step forward in the struggle for women's political rights.

Thanks in part to this norm, renowned anthropologist and sociologist Marcela Lagarde will enter the House this September. Working from a gender perspective, she has helped translate theoretical postulates on women's political participation into practice and is well known among feminist groups in Latin America and Europe.

With 44.6% of the votes, the PRD clearly won in the Federal District, thanks to Mayor López Obrador's effective management and good image. It also consolidated victories in four states. It failed, however, to hit its proposed target of winning over 20% of the vote, and outside of the areas it governs, its share of the vote remains small; in some states not even 2%. Its chance of winning the presidency in 2006 thus seems very slim indeed.

#### **PRD: What went wrong and why**

The PRD's assessment of the elections and its own self-criticism

began the day after the elections. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas lamented the troubling loss of votes for the party, which fell by over 2 million between 1997 and 2003. He urged party activists to find ways to establish the party throughout the country, attract people who have drifted away and resume the ideological and programmatic debates that had been left aside. He proposed making alliances with social movements and restoring the party's character as a party-movement. Another PRD leader pointed to several other problems: the lack of alliances with social sectors, which meant that many good candidates were excluded, and the lack of much popular support for their "brigades of hope." As a result, the party only managed to win the votes of its faithful supporters—and barely that—and experienced severe setbacks in a number of regions.

Many PRD activists repeated their argument that if the party continues to assign quotas to the various tendencies within it, the resulting sectarianism and favoritism along with the internal battles will render it impossible to ever win the presidency. Another problem that has kept the party from emerging as a national option is that it has been caught up in internal battles in the areas it governs, as certain groups have tried to take over the regional leadership positions, excluding many who refused to submit to their command. This has revealed an urgent need for measures to ensure internal democracy.

### **Other parties**

The PVEM has managed to win more congressional seats through alliances than it could have done on its own. In 2000, in an alliance with the PAN, the Greens won 17 seats and this time won the same number in a partial alliance with the PRI. They would have won only 3.9% of the votes on their own, which indicates their real electoral pull. In very close campaigns, however, those few points can make the difference, and the party has shown itself to be a skilled negotiator, making the most of its small size. Thanks to its alliance it won over 1.5 million votes, or 6.5% this year.

México Posible did not get enough votes to maintain its legal status, but did win a seat in Mexico City's Municipal Council.

### **A good summary of the elections**

The PRD bench head in the outgoing House of Representatives summarized the elections by suggesting that Fox was seeing the

results of his own mistake. When he won the presidency in 2000, he had a choice: either seek the PRI's support and continue its economic project, or try to dismantle the old corporativist regime of government, business and powerful pro-PRI unions, punishing its most corrupt members. Fox chose to seek the PRI's favors and lent it his formidable political capital, receiving nothing in exchange. He even made it possible for former President Salinas to return in impunity. His option to leave the old PRI leadership and thus that entire political class intact was an indecisive move that gave the PRI time to recover. And, as was to be expected, it was time well spent. Fox could instead have sought the PRD's support to implement political reforms that would have democratized the whole political structure. But rather than punish those responsible for PEMEX-gate, to take one example, he merely used it as a means of exerting pressure. In opting not to transform the regime, he betrayed the desire for justice felt by those who had voted for him. The PAN hoped to blame the failures on the PRI and PRD by accusing them of refusing to cooperate, but the voters didn't buy it.

### **Disgruntlement with Congress, too**

The high abstention rate reflects not only on Fox, however. It is also a statement about Congress, since many people chose to stay away from the polls in these legislative elections because they are fed up with that institution as well.

The election showed that voters don't trust a single party to lead the country. While people may be disgruntled over the lack of progress in Congress, they did not clear the way for the PAN to enact its legislative proposals on issues such as increasing the sales taxes on food and medicines, or privatizing PEMEX and the electricity industry.

### **Signs of the old regime's return**

There were troubling signs during the campaigns that the old way of conducting politics has been regaining ground, and these signs are not just in the PRI's behavior. One was the smaller number of electoral observers who participated in these elections. Another was that all of the main parties appear to have caved in to the political tactic of fiddling with votes and voters. Observers from the Mexican Human Rights Commission witnessed the persistence of such practices as intimidating voters, buying votes, campaigning on election day, and even—in this case especially in

states governed by the PRI—stealing ballot boxes. It seems that the desire to win at all costs has led to a kind of pragmatism among more than a few groups that is the legacy of a deeply rooted anti-democratic political culture.

Nor did the media give the various parties equitable treatment. According to the Federal Election Institute's statistics, the PRI got the most time on radio and TV news (some 33.7% of the total) and the most positive media coverage between April 19 and June 30. Two television oligopolies took the lion's share of the vast public funds spent by the parties.

### **Crises within the parties**

Mexico's elections have clearly become more competitive, which allows for changes in power as well as rapid changes in the direction of the vote. But the recent elections revealed crises within the parties, none of which is able to attract the majority of the electorate. The distance between the parties and society is growing. In such a scenario, the party whose machinery can turn out the vote of its faithful supporters is the winner. And the old regime's recovery, which has a lot to do with the seeming apathy and abstention of a large share of the electorate, is hindering the country's democratization.

The fact that the PRI obtained a relative majority despite the PEMEX-gate scandals indicates that those who vote for it don't care about its corruption or infighting, but only about maintaining the benefits granted by the kind of government that rewards supporters. The PRD tried to present itself as an option, but failed to attract the disillusioned electorate.

### **Urgent, profound changes**

The country needs a thoroughgoing electoral reform that will put an end to the enormous campaign expenditures, the long campaigns and pre-campaigns, the unmonitored use of funds, and partisan corruption. The nation's colors are a national patrimony and should not be usurped by any party. The media is also in need of democratization. The task of guaranteeing a free vote, neither coerced nor bought, is still pending. We need free, clean elections, but we also need parties that manage their finances transparently and are an example of democracy in their internal affairs. We need a Congress that is concerned with more than the calculations of partidocracy, that really responds to society's demands. The democratization of the country is at stake

here, because without rapid, thorough changes on all of these matters, we risk going back to our authoritarian past.

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## Good-Government Committees: A New Stage for the Zapatistas

*In an intriguing initiative, the EZLN has organized nearly half the state of Chiapas into five “Caracoles” run by Good-Government Committees. These committees are guided by the words on a banner that runs across the main road into town: “Here the people rule and the government obeys.”*

### Jorge Alonso

Just when everyone thought the Zapatista movement had run out of steam, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) reemerged in July to announce several new initiatives that had been brewing for the past nine months. They prefaced their statements by admitting that no one is happy with them. When people expected them to talk, they kept quiet; when people wanted them to be quiet, they spoke out; when people looked to them to lead, they stood back; when people wanted them to fall in line, they set out on their own course. They angered even people who sympathize with their cause. But the first to make fun of their “very different way of being” are the Zapatistas themselves: they may not have won, but they haven’t died either. In reappearing, they explained that they hate martyrdom as much as giving up. And they haven’t given up or surrendered; they persist in living.

The moment the Zapatistas chose to speak out again was a singularly tense one. The PRI had grown bolder in the wake of its wins both nationally and locally in the recent elections and the paramilitary groups have become stronger and more aggressive. Indeed, communities in Chiapas describe the environment as similar to the one preceding the Acteal massacre.

### A series of statements from Marcos

Thirty municipalities in Chiapas that have been under EZLN control since 1994 and have proclaimed themselves “autonomous” asked Subcomandante Marcos to act temporarily as their spokesperson. In late July and early August, Marcos issued ten statements, a clarification and a recording to explain how these municipalities were now organized and how they would relate to national and international civil society.

Marcos reaffirmed their decision to cut off all contact with the Mexican government and the country’s political parties. He criticized the recent election campaign, noting that the people’s positions were most clearly expressed in the high abstention rate. He accused the political class—including all parties and the executive, legislative and judicial branches—of having crushed the hopes of millions of Mexicans and thousands of people from other countries who have demanded recognition of indigenous rights and culture in Mexico. He insisted that the Zapatistas would continue to resist as a form of struggle. The main point in all his messages was that the Zapatistas had decided to unilaterally apply the San Andrés Accords in the territories in Chiapas under their control.

### **Aguascalientes dismantled**

The first change Marcos announced on behalf of the Zapatista municipalities was the dismantling of the places known as “Aguascalientes.” One of his statements recalled their origins, which date back to the government of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

At the time Marcos offered this explanation, Salinas de Gortari had just reappeared on Mexico’s political stage, making this recap of his record even more relevant. After taking office thanks to outrageous electoral fraud, Salinas implemented a number of anti-populist reforms including one that effectively put an end to peasant farmers’ right to their land. The neoliberal model he imposed sent millions of Mexicans to their ruin. It was precisely in response to this policy, perceived as a war of extermination, of ethnocide, that the Zapatistas took up arms to attract the world’s attention in January 1994.

While they knew they didn’t have a chance militarily, they

weren't thinking of becoming martyrs but rather of finding a way to live. Civil society soon encouraged them to take another path: prepared to fire arms, they had to learn to fire words instead. To use the new words they acquired, they needed arenas where they could learn to listen and converse with the plurality of voices they called civil society to distinguish it from political society. They decided to establish a place for this purpose in the Chiapas municipality of Guadalupe Tepeyac. They called it Aguascalientes and turned it over to civil society on August 8, 1994.

The following year, President Zedillo destroyed Aguascalientes, establishing a military base in its place. The Zapatistas then built five more Aguascalientes in five other municipalities: Oventic, La Realidad, La Guarucha, Morelia and Roberto Barrios. Each was designed as a place for dialogue between the Zapatista communities and national and international civil society, where meetings could be held and initiatives developed. Similar places were also established in Mexico City and Madrid.

### **Neither pity nor charity**

In July of this year, the Zapatistas announced that the Aguascalientes had fulfilled their mission, but had also created problems that needed to be corrected. Since the Zapatistas gave out information piece by piece in their series of statements, some observers were initially disconcerted to hear about the end of the Aguascalientes, fearing that the Zapatistas were going to become even more isolated.

One problem in the relationship between the Zapatistas and civil society is that the latter has not always treated the Zapatistas with respect. It hasn't been a matter of insults but rather of attitudes: some people have felt sorry for them or given them charity, which they found offensive. They gave some of the worst specific examples: people have donated computers that don't work, expired medicines, extravagant clothes, single shoes.... Some NGOs and international organizations have drafted development projects that imposed both objectives and timeframes on the Chiapas communities without consulting them. Such practices seem hardly different from the paternalistic projects the government has offered them in exchange for

their surrender.

The Zapatistas said they have continued to resist the government's attempts to interfere, making their poverty a lesson in dignity, not something to provoke pity. They explained that they oppose paternalism and charity no matter where it comes from, and pointed to the autonomous municipalities as proof that they are capable of governing themselves. They decided to bring down the curtain on the Aguascalientes in order to signal an end to such relations. Problems aside, Marcos acknowledged that the Zapatistas have not been alone in their efforts to build indigenous autonomy and thanked civil society for its support.

#### **The autonomous municipalities' evolution to "*Caracoles*"**

In place of the Aguascalientes, the Zapatistas are establishing "Caracoles," the name they have given to the five territorial seats where Good-Government Committees have been set up in the autonomous municipalities. According to one of the Zapatista statements, the word means "conch shell," a Mayan symbol for "the opening to the heart." Demonstrating the Zapatistas' pedagogical approach towards the rest of civil society, the statements detailed why they created the autonomous municipalities, how they are governed and what the *Caracoles* consist of.

The Mexican state's refusal to fully recognize indigenous rights and turn the San Andrés Accords into legislative reality led to the decision to put the accords into practice in daily life through these new structures, following the path the Zapatistas have been taking to consolidate their autonomous municipalities.

The communities themselves have been democratically governing these municipalities since 1994. Officials who don't carry out their functions are removed from their posts. People don't receive salaries for serving in leadership positions; rather, this is considered collectively beneficial work and rotates among community members according to an old tradition. The Zapatistas have added some innovative elements, emphasizing the principle of "governing by obeying." People in the autonomous municipalities have prioritized

activities related to health and education, despite their extreme poverty. With support from civil society, they have built health clinics and organized health brigades to conduct hygiene and prevention campaigns. They have also built schools and trained and organized grassroots educators to carry out literacy campaigns. The autonomous councils approve the material taught in Zapatista schools.

The governing councils also address problems related to land, work, business, housing, food, transit, culture, information and the administration of justice in the communities. One of the big achievements in autonomous organization has to do with the dignity of women: progress has been made in changing the custom of “selling” women, who in the past could not freely choose their spouse. And although it is not yet entirely implemented, the councils have passed a progressive law on women’s rights. The Zapatistas are especially proud of the fact that girls—traditionally excluded from education—are now going to school.

The Zapatistas have translated these community-level practices to broader levels. The first higher level is that a group of communities come together to make up an autonomous municipality, where each community has a representative. Above it is the zonal level, which covers a set of groups and municipalities, and is the level at which the EZLN intervenes. In his statements, Marcos recognized that direct community democracy is contaminated to some extent by the military presence. While EZLN officials don’t intervene in elections or hold posts in the community or regional councils and any officials who want to assume such a post must first resign their posts in the EZLN, self-government at all levels is exercised under the shadow of the EZLN’s military structure.

For the past several years, these autonomous municipalities have maintained relations with Zapatista and non-Zapatista communities in Chiapas and with both national and international civil society.

### **Taking tally and identifying problems**

After working this way for several years, the Zapatistas

tallied up the achievements in these municipalities. In the process, they identified a serious problem: some municipalities, including the seats of the Aguascalientes, had more resources than others because of closer relationships with national and international civil society and/or easier accessibility by road. This greater benefit from outside support had resulted in differing development levels among both the autonomous municipalities and the individual communities and families. Steps had to be taken to counter these internal inequalities and imbalances as well as the tensions they produced.

While problems within the Zapatista communities were also identified for the autonomous authorities to resolve, the most serious conflicts and tensions were with non-Zapatista communities; for example complaints have been brought against authorities who have not respected the human rights of non-Zapatistas. This is another of the problems that the Zapatistas hope the new form of organization will be able to address.

#### **A Good-Government Committee**

in each *Caracol* The Zapatistas assigned several functions to the *Caracoles*. First, they are to serve as bridges for the communities, “like mouths that can carry our words to distant places and ears that can hear those far away.” They were given five names, chosen democratically. The *Caracol* in La Realidad was named “Mother of the *caracoles* in the sea of our dreams,” the one in Morelia “Whirlwind of our words,” the one in La Garucha “Resistance on the path to a new dawn,” the one in Roberto Barrios “The *Caracol* that speaks for everyone,” and the one in Oventic “Resistance and rebellion for humanity.”

Good-Government Committees were created in each *Caracol* as the highest level of administration in the autonomous municipalities. An office was built for each committee, so it would have a place to work. Their main responsibility is to “govern by obeying.” They are in charge of resolving the community’s problems and serving as bridges between the communities and the rest of the world. They have been put in charge of redressing the imbalances in the development of the autonomous municipalities and communities, and mediating conflicts that arise among

autonomous municipalities and between them and state municipalities. They are also responsible for receiving, investigating and finding ways to address any charges filed against the autonomous councils for human rights violations.

The Good-Government Committees have to oversee implementation of community tasks and projects in the autonomous municipalities, seek support for community projects, promote production projects, ensure compliance with Zapatista laws, receive and guide civil society representatives during visits to the rebel zones, establish peace camps and do research for the benefit of the communities. By common agreement with the EZLN's Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee's General Command (CCRI-CG), they must also promote and approve participation by members of the autonomous municipalities in activities outside the rebel communities. The Zapatistas established that the CCRI-CG will be set above these committees to oversee their operations and avoid corruption, intolerance, arbitrary actions, injustice and deviations from the principle of "governing by obeying."

Just as each *Caracol* has its own name, each of the five Good-Government Committees was baptized with a name selected by the autonomous council: "Toward hope," "Heart of the rainbow of hope," "Path towards the future," "The new seed that is going to produce" and "The center of the Zapatistas' heart before the world."

### **The good-government regulations**

The committees began their work with three sets of regulations. The first established that donations and support from civil society could not be destined for a particular individual, community or municipality. The Committee in each *Caracol* will evaluate the situation and decide where donations will go and which projects will be accepted. Each project will be charged a 10% "solidarity tax" to be distributed among the communities not receiving support. It was decided that neither leftovers nor alms nor imposed projects would be accepted.

The second set of regulations established that only individuals and collectives registered with the committees

will be recognized as Zapatista, to prevent other groups from passing themselves off as such. It was also determined that profits earned by marketing products produced by Zapatista companies or cooperatives will be turned over to the committee to support those who can't market their products or aren't receiving any support.

The third set of regulations covers everything related to identification of the Zapatistas to the outside, in an effort to prevent dishonest people from deceiving international and national civil society by purporting to be Zapatistas. They clarified that there are no Zapatista safe houses in Mexico City and thus no one is being trained in one. The committees were made responsible for issuing accreditations, and it was recommended that these be corroborated. The Zapatistas explained that although the Good-Government Committees would serve non-Zapatistas, they would not impose anything on them.

### **The PPP will split Mexico in three**

Along with this promising initiative, the Zapatistas announced that they will take down the EZLN's roadblocks, eliminate charges on roads through rebel territory and search only vehicles suspected of transporting wood, drugs or arms.

To accompany this thoroughgoing internal reorganization, the EZLN proposed five plans at the national and global level, prefacing these proposals by insisting that autonomy does not mean fragmenting the country, as many seem to fear, and that no separatist intentions are lurking behind it. All the Zapatistas are asking for is their right to govern themselves. They expressed pride in their Mexican identity, while demanding that their indigenous identity also be recognized and respected.

Aware of the country's current fragmentation, they charged that the real separatist project is in fact the Puebla Panama Plan (PPP), which will divide Mexico into three pieces. The PPP assigns a productive, commercial role to the north, turning it into a huge *maquila* and integrating it into the United States. It situates central Mexico as a commercial center to provide goods to consumers and reduces the southeast to a huge plantation, a hunting

ground for global capital, a source of natural resources to exploit. The Zapatistas remarked that Mexican capitalists may fear the country's social organizations but it's the foreign bankers who are snatching the country out from under them, crushing them under the weight of savage capitalism.

Convinced that the globalization of capital aims to destroy the nation state, the Zapatistas noted that seeds of rebellion and massive, strong resistance to the plans of the powerful can be found all over Mexico. They predict that the PPP will run into trouble as social conflicts intensify and insist that it will not be allowed in Zapatista territory.

#### **Five plans for five *Caracoles***

The Zapatistas then described plans involving each of their five *Caracoles*, which are in line with their basic vision of building a world with room for many worlds. The first, named the La Realidad-Tijuana (Reali-Ti) Plan, is to link all resistance efforts in Mexico in order to build the Mexican nation "from below." The second is the Morelia-North Pole Plan. The third, called the La Garucha-Tierra del Fuego Plan, is for the Caribbean and Central and South America. The fourth, the Oventic-Moscow Plan, covers Europe and Africa. And the fifth, the Roberto Barrios-New Delhi Plan, covers Asia and Oceania. The core of all of these plans is the same: to fight for humanity and against neoliberalism.

The plans were warmly received all around the world. In France, for example, thousands of people who were meeting to prepare what turned out to be the "derailing of the WTO" in Cancún saluted the birth of the Zapatistas' *Caracoles*.

#### **"Armies aren't supposed to govern"**

The inaugural celebration for the *Caracoles* was held on August 10 in the municipality of Oventic. Although the Zapatistas extended an open invitation, they clarified that they were not inviting the political class, nor would they meet with any of its members. Ten thousand people participated in the event, including Zapatistas, indigenous organizations from several states, peasant organizations, union members and activists from a number of foreign countries.

The Zapatista *comandantes* spoke at the event. *Subcomandante Marcos* was not present, apparently because of an intestinal disease. Although some observers felt that his absence stripped some of the glitter from the event, others said that it demonstrated who was really in charge of the process.

Marcos made his statement through a recording. He celebrated the birth of the committees, predicting that the example would spread throughout Mexico and the world. Having carried out the task that the autonomous municipalities had temporarily commanded to him—to act as their spokesperson in making the statements—he was returning “their ears, their voice and their eyes” to them. From that point on, their authorities and the Good Government Committees would address everything related to the autonomous municipalities.

Marcos clarified some very important points about organization in the Zapatista region. The EZLN would not be the voice of those who governed—even if they governed by obeying—because the Zapatista movement was the voice of those from below, of the governed. The EZLN has a mission to defend the municipalities and committees. He also noted that authorities in Zapatista territory—the autonomous municipalities and the committees—would not resort to the EZLN’s military forces in order to govern. They would have to govern through use of reason, not force. Marcos thus limited the role of armies: they should be used to defend, not govern. And this is precisely what the EZLN will do: defend the communities from the aggressions of a bad government, the paramilitary groups, and anyone else who might want to do them harm.

### **Positive reactions to the Caracoles**

The Mexican government took some time to figure out how to respond to the reappearance of the Zapatistas and the reaffirmation of their break with the government and the whole political class. The founding of the *Caracoles* obliged government officials to reexamine the new situation. At first, the Government Secretary indicated that the government would not accept them. He later

backtracked, declaring that it would respect the EZLN's actions as long as they are in line with the Constitution. In the end, it decided to accept the *Caracoles* officially, deeming them constitutional since they are forms of internal organization.

The federal government praised the Zapatistas for defining themselves as a civic rather than military movement. The coordinator of the suspended peace talks described the new forms of political organization as positive. The head of the recently formed National Commission for Indigenous Development, Xóchitl Gálvez, also recognized that the only way to resume the talks would be for Congress to approve a new constitutional reform, since the last one fell far short of satisfying the indigenous communities and the EZLN. In response to comments that the Zapatistas were trying to impose something on the government, she insisted that the committees were not a state within a state, and praised the communities for trying out autonomy.

#### **“A far-reaching initiative”**

The government commissioner for Chiapas responsible for reconciling communities in conflict described the Zapatista initiative as an effort by the communities to find new ways to solve their conflicts. The state’s governor said that the effort to improve the lives of the indigenous people in the jungles and highlands of Chiapas—where most of the autonomous municipalities are located—does not violate the law and that the EZLN’s new actions reflect a decision to replace war with politics.

Not all of Mexico’s political class echoed such positive positions, however. Local PRI and PAN legislators in Chiapas publicly repudiated the committees and many of those parties’ federal legislators agreed, arguing that they violate the law. Some PRI members even interpreted the committees as a response to a weakened government and the PRI’s resurgence in the area. The PAN spokesperson first urged his government not to tolerate illegal activities that could harm Mexico’s institutional structure and later, after the Government Secretary announced the official position that the committees do not violate the Constitution, accused Marcos of being “a postmodern cacique.”

Recently elected PRD representative Manuel Camacho, the government's first negotiator with the Zapatistas in 1994, said Marcos had repositioned himself with this far-reaching initiative. PRD leader Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas described the committees as an important step forward that provides mechanisms for working in the communities and municipalities in rebel territory.

The Mexican bishops also took positions, according to whether they are allied with the powerful or the popular movements. The secretary of the Indigenous Pastoral Commission of the Bishops' Conference feared that the committees would mean "segregation." The cardinal said he hoped the Zapatistas' reappearance would not be just another show, like the ones put on when Danielle Mitterand and a group of Italian activists came to Mexico. The Bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas praised the formation of the committees and said the Zapatistas have entered a new stage that society should try to understand. He valued the humility in the EZLN statements, which recognized that not everything is fair and right in their efforts to put their project for a new society into practice and admitted cases of human rights violations and ideological impositions on their side too.

### A model to consider

The National Indigenous Congress praised the Zapatistas for putting indigenous autonomy into practice. The National Plural Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy described autonomy as a grassroots response to the crisis in the political system, a new way of doing politics, a long-term project and a model. In northern Mexico, 244 traditional indigenous authorities and representatives of Mayan, Rarámuri and Odomi organizations established the Northern and Northwestern Indigenous Peoples Alliance. After the EZLN's reappearance, 75 indigenous organizations from around the country met in Chiapas. They defended the autonomy processes being tried out, arguing that autonomy is an alternative to the current crisis of credibility, legitimacy and representivity, and adopted the Zapatistas' Reali-Ti Plan. While Guerrero's 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Council began to study the model of the *Caracoles*, several indigenous towns in Veracruz announced their intention to create similar

committees. And in Michoacán, indigenous communities announced that they would form 18 autonomous municipalities.

Many peasant organizations saw the Good-Government Committees as extraordinary instruments for grassroots democracy. The labor organizations grouped together in the Union and Social Convergence, which include the electricians' union, telephone workers' union, social security employees' union and Autonomous University of Mexico's staff union, expressed their support for Zapatista autonomy.

### **Time for talks?**

In President Fox's traditional September 1 presidential report, he made a brief general reference to indigenous peoples, reaffirming the government's policy of offering paternalistic poverty-cushioning projects and saying nothing about the Zapatistas. Fox's government extends the EZLN formal invitations to talks, knowing full well that it will not negotiate until the government complies with previous agreements. The government believes the Zapatistas could talk but won't, since this position has brought them the greatest political dividends. Also, at a time when the government is working on many fronts and can point to very few achievements, it is afraid of opening a new front with the Zapatistas. But the Zapatistas are right in insisting that fundamental aspects of the San Andrés Accords were not included in the 2001 constitutional reforms and that there is no point in returning to the negotiating table until the government fulfils its part of the agreement and ensures full legal recognition of indigenous rights and culture.

### **Several legal concerns**

Analysts of this new stage for the Zapatista movement have raised several legal concerns, the first of which has to do with the legality of the Good-Government Committees. It appears that the committees are covered by article 2 of the Constitution, which recognizes that indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination and the autonomy to determine their internal forms of coexistence and social, economic, political, and cultural organization, and that they may apply their own normative systems in regulating

and resolving their internal conflicts. This legal basis resolved the problem less for the Zapatistas than for the government, which thus managed to stave off the conservative wing that was urging it to take repressive measures against the Zapatistas. Despite this constitutional legacy, however, it is clear that the autonomy announced by the Zapatistas goes beyond the legal framework. Another legal concern was raised by the announcement that the committees would levy taxes. This could be resolved by considering the taxes voluntary contributions. Yet another problem is that the committees appear to be set above the municipalities, as a fourth level, although the Constitution only recognizes three levels of government: national, state and municipal. Several commentators, however, argued that the committees are no threat to the established order but rather an opportunity to solve conflicts, and recalled that throughout history legislation has been changed by the force of events. There is no doubt that the committees represent both challenges and opportunities for constitutional reform.

Specialists in indigenous rights have also noted that International Labor Organization Convention 169 forms part of the supreme law of the land and provides the committees with their fullest justification. They further noted that the Vienna Convention determines that states cannot use internal legislation to justify their failure to comply with treaties they have signed.

### **Trade and local coexistence?**

Another concern has to do with the limits perceived in some of the new measures. Since the Zapatista communities are not and cannot be economically self-sufficient, they have to deal with the market. Imposing a “solidarity tax” on the cooperatives that market coffee and handicrafts could place them at a disadvantage with respect to their competition. The desire to avoid inequalities among the communities could lead to the imposition of bureaucratic centralization controlled by the military apparatus.

Then there is the issue of local coexistence. The local PRI in Chiapas is especially adverse to and aggressive towards the Zapatistas, with particularly sharp polarization in some

communities. The fact that each group has its own authorities has already led to friction, and the social fabric has been very slow to mend. Dialogue is essential, with negotiations inside the communities.

### **Zapatista achievements shine**

Despite the concerns, what is most striking are the Zapatistas' achievements. They have contributed a great deal to the world and the autonomous model they have proposed is one of their most important contributions. Mexico's indigenous peoples have been able to survive through their autonomy, even if it isn't recognized by law. Now, without basing their efforts on classic revolutionary texts, they have imaginatively synthesized indigenous traditions and innovative proposals. They don't want state power but rather to build grassroots power from below. They don't aim to be a vanguard, but their national and global influence has continued to increase in the ten years since they burst onto the public stage.

With this new step, the Zapatistas have reaffirmed the pacifist vocation that society imposed on them a decade ago. They have followed the path of prioritizing community needs and minimizing military tactics. They have not forsaken weapons, but have relegated them to second place, using them only for defense. They don't want to militarize their culture. Through these new measures, they are prioritizing reconciliation with opposition groups. And they continue to demand respect.

The Zapatistas have demonstrated great capacity for resistance and political inventiveness. Their *Caracoles* link local organization to global alternative projects, combining a defense of specific interests with universal interests. The two basic pillars of the Zapatista movement, to govern by obeying and to create a world with room for many worlds, remain goals for the popular movements of Mexico and the whole planet.

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### **Working for a Different World Amid Threats of Repression**

*While Vicente Fox's increasingly discredited pro-business*

*government provides fuel for social movements working for an alternative world, the Zapatistas continue to inspire these movements, which celebrated their anniversaries in Mexico amidst threats of repression.*

### **Jorge Alonso**

Halfway through his term in office, President Fox's approval ratings have plummeted. According to polls conducted by the country's leading papers, less than 60% of the population has a favorable opinion of his government, while the polling group GEA puts the number at under 50%. Fox's standing is even worse among opinion leaders, with barely 38% approval. Half of those polled feel that the country is "stagnating" and another 19% that it is going backwards.

### **Unemployment and the dirty war**

As for Fox's handling of the economy and employment, an overwhelming 70% give him poor marks. Although Fox admits that unemployment is high, and his government's own official figures show it to be the highest since the 1995 crisis, he boasted to a meeting of businesspeople at the start of this year that he would begin laying off some 50,000 state employees with more to follow. He counseled all the dismissed employees to open up small businesses instead.

The International Labor Organization described the country's poor performance in jobs and productivity in its 2003 report. Half a million jobs have been lost over the last three years. The scarcity of jobs is affecting even well educated people, which is a tragic waste of investments in education.

In the area of human rights, Fox's government has made mixed progress. The people responsible for the "dirty war" between 1968 and the late 1970s had confidently assumed that the statute of limitations had run out on their crimes. The Supreme Court, however, determined that there is no statute of limitations in cases where a person is illegally deprived of freedom through kidnapping if the victim does not reappear. It thus recognized forced disappearance as a crime against humanity, a decision applauded by the

human rights organizations. The Special Prosecutor's Office for Social and Political Movements calculated that some 1,500 people had been disappeared during the dirty war and announced that new charges would be filed against two former heads of the Federal Security Offices, who promptly fled the country. The Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), however, charged that both the prosecutor's office and Fox's government have been dragging their feet to protect former Presidents Luis Echeverría and José López Portillo, the ones truly responsible for the dirty war.

#### **In response to the dogma of the “globally subordinated”**

Although he was a charismatic candidate, Fox has shown a vacuum of leadership as President that some of the worst figures from Mexico's corrupt, authoritarian past have moved to fill. The public is generally disillusioned over his unfulfilled promises. At the same time, power struggles have intensified among the country's politicians, whose eyes are set on the next six years. A recent survey on political culture revealed the persistence of anti-democratic values such as intolerance. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the long-time state party regime, went into a kind of hiatus when it lost the 2000 elections, but virtually all the conditions still exist for it to reestablish itself. After his resignation, former Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda revealed that when Fox took office, he made a secret pact with the PRI, offering to pardon their past corruption in exchange for their support for his reforms. Fox held up his end of the deal, but the PRI didn't.

The PRD has denounced Fox's economic policies as identical to those of his predecessor, Ernesto Zedillo. The country has been at a standstill for three years, and industry is declining because the government neither promotes economic growth nor distributes income to mitigate the enormous inequalities. According to the PRD, Fox has simply maintained the status quo. It urged the President to use his powers to pull the country out of its continuing morass. Its analysis of the situation is that Mexico's national self-determination project has been replaced by one of global subordination, as its rulers have accepted the dogma that Mexico can only move ahead through foreign investment and technology. In response to this vision of the “global subordinates,” people have been

coming together around the conviction that self-determination is a necessary condition for development.

Catholic bishops from Mexico and the United States have described the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as an unjust system that has excluded Mexican peasant farmers and plunged them into extreme poverty. They believe that Mexico's rural economy will only recover when food sovereignty and a strong domestic market are fundamental components of national policy. Global Exchange calculates that some 8 million Mexicans have fallen from the middle classes into the ranks of the poor since NAFTA went into effect, and 10 million are now earning less than the minimum wage. Depending on the criteria used to measure poverty, between 53 and 68 million Mexicans are living in poverty, out of a population of 104.8 million.

### **In defense of the national patrimony**

Fox hoped to conclude 2003 by passing two major reforms: in energy and fiscal policy. He calculated that the parliamentary alliance between his National Action Party (PAN) and the PRI bench, led by Elba Esther Gordillo, would allow him to achieve this. One of his goals is to change articles 27 and 28 of the Constitution to allow private capital to play a role in generating electric energy and to privatize the oil industry through multiple service contracts. According to PRD leader Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, opening up strategic areas of the energy industry to private investment was one of the promises Fox made to the people whose political support and financial contributions made his election possible.

On October 1, with the feisty Mexican Electrical Workers Union in the lead, the country's main independent labor, peasant and university teachers' unions held a demonstration urging the President to respect the Constitution. They criticized his servility and warned him that grassroots opposition would stop him from giving away the national patrimony. The demonstrators called for unity to defend the country's energy sovereignty. At the beginning of November, they formed a civic front to block the President's offensive and draft and promote an energy

and oil policy that would be truly national in character.

### **Eight points in the “mega-march”**

In late November, eight demonstrations left several states to meet up in a “mega-march” in Mexico City. Demonstrations also took place in the capitols of nine states. In the nation’s capitol itself, labor and university unions and peasant organizations from all over the country joined together to reject the reforms proposed by the government and supported by private enterprise. What we are now seeing in Mexico is an authentic class struggle pitting two opposing national projects against each other.

The mega-march was also a demonstration against neoliberalism. Participants rallied around eight points:

1. The reassertion, consolidation, defense and full exercise of energy sovereignty. The Mexican Constitution establishes that the exploitation of fossil fuels and the provision of public electricity are activities reserved exclusively for the state. The demonstrators voiced strong opposition to allowing foreign corporations to administer and reap the benefits generated by electricity consumption, and to ceding the exploitation of fossil fuels to private companies through multiple service contracts. This, they say, would effectively hand sovereignty over to private corporations guided by private interests.
2. The building of financial sovereignty, by reestablishing the Economic Development Bank and establishing a new commercial banking system that can respond to the economy's needs. The demonstrators proposed a tax reform that would increase fiscal revenues, channel funds into investments in national development, and relieve the tax burden on the sectors most impoverished by neoliberal policies.
3. The recovery of food sovereignty by rebuilding the productive capacity of rural areas and improving the living conditions of rural workers.
4. A labor reform that upholds workers' social and political victories.
5. The defense of the cultural, scientific research and

professional training institutions that the federal government would like to do away with.

6. A review and audit of all privatizations of public entities carried out since 1982.

7. The reassertion of policies based on dignity and sovereignty.

8. Fulfillment of the San Andés Accords, the presentation of people “disappeared” for political reasons, and an investigation into the homicides of women in Ciudad Juárez as necessary conditions for a definitive, dignified peace, just and fraternal coexistence and a state respectful of life and rights.

All of these mobilizations—testifying to a labor, peasant and grassroots resurgence in defense of national sovereignty—were aimed not only at the executive branch but also at Congress. The demonstrators proposed establishing an economic and social council to plan actions and promised to assume the leadership the government is apparently unable to provide and to gather forces to draw up an alternative national project to replace the dominant one.

### **The PRI's authoritarian tradition**

At the beginning of the year, Fox sent his 2004 budget bill to Congress. The proposal allotted more money to paying off the public debt and the bank bailout than to health care and the fight against poverty. Interest payments on the huge bank bailout program established to handle the 1995 crisis would hit their highest point in nine years, while public investment spending remained stagnant. The most controversial part of the budget was the fiscal reform, which proposed applying a 10% sales tax to food and medicine. This broke the alliance between the PAN and the PRI, since many in the PRI were concerned that they would pay too high a price in the next elections if they supported this tax. The PRI's congressional bench split, with one group lining up behind bench leader Elba Esther Gordillo and Fox while the larger group rebelled to vote her out of her post.

If Fox has been no obstacle to the PRI's recovery, the party's own internal conflicts have certainly exacerbated its problems. Even without a single pole to bring everyone in the party together, people could have set aside their differences for tactical reasons, but the presidential race, which began so early, added fuel to the fire.

Two blocs were formed, one behind Gordillo, who is also the PRI's general secretary, and the other behind the party's president, Roberto Madrazo. Loyalties are very fleeting, however. The PRI governors also split, and no one has been able to put the pieces back together. The party is notorious for its feudal structure and has been weakened by it, despite its success in the last elections. Still trapped within its authoritarian traditions, the PRI has been unable to resolve its conflicts democratically.

### **The first victory against a neoliberal proposal**

The President's stubborn insistence on trying to impose a sales tax on food and medicine and privatize the energy sector, along with the split in the PRI's congressional bench, led to a climate of instability and uncertainty. The PRD criticized Fox's proposed fiscal reform as regressive and politically nonviable and proposed expanding the tax base rather than taxing food and medicine. The groups that had come together in the mega-march demonstrated in front of Congress, ready to resist, and called for a general strike should Fox's proposal pass. The alliance between the PAN bench in Congress and the PRI representatives who remained with Gordillo came up eight votes short, however.

The fiscal reform that would have cut taxes on the rich and threatened the economic survival of the poor didn't pass, thanks in part to the massive demonstrations.

For the first time, a neoliberal proposal that had been agreed upon at the top was successfully blocked. But it was just one battle, and was followed by the fight over the 2004 budget, which earmarked over a third of total spending to paying off the debt and interest on the bank bailout. The PRD bench in Congress, even supported by the huge demonstrations, failed to cut back the cost of the bailout or to place tariffs on imported corn and beans to

benefit national producers. They did, however, succeed in defeating the unjust proposal to tax food and medicine and in redirecting some funds to rural areas and state governments, and to investments in energy, infrastructure, health and education. They also established control over the President's publicity and prevented the dismantling of 16 public cultural and economic development institutions. None of this would have been possible without the pressure exerted by the grassroots movement.

The final results of this tense course of events: the PAN lost, the PRI was divided and the PRD mayor of Mexico City, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, is now leading in the polls as the preferred candidate for the next presidential elections.

#### **A hard hand in Chiapas**

Most of the legislators in the new House of Representatives appeared to have little interest in Chiapas either in 2003 or in the first few weeks of 2004. They did not even name representatives to the Harmony and Peace Commission (COCOPA), while one PAN senator went so far as to propose that the commission be dismantled. The PRD representatives charged that the PAN and PRI had chosen to make the road to peace and reconciliation even more difficult by neglecting COCOPA. They insisted that the commission would continue to play a key role in resolving the conflict in Chiapas, even though no talks have taken place among the parties for seven years now.

While the Zapatistas continue carrying out activities that have nothing to do with the state, the government has responded with a hard hand against the autonomous municipalities the EZLN has promoted. The government's commissioner for the talks, Luis Alvarez, participated in a campaign to discredit the EZLN and held meetings with some of its former members. The paramilitary groups remain armed and continue harassing Zapatista communities, while soldiers trained by the Pentagon operate in the area of conflict.

The military has attempted to cloak its counterinsurgency operations under the guise of environmental protection, actions to promote tourism and purported social

assistance. In response, opposition to both the military and the police has been increasing in Zapatista communities. To no avail they continue to denounce the illegal actions of paramilitary groups. Some of the nongovernmental organizations in the area speak of a “multifaceted war to wear people down” that, while not officially recognized, affects the indigenous communities every day.

### **Increased Zapatista presence in society**

The Zapatistas have increased their presence in Mexican civil society in recent months. Subcomandante Marcos sent a recorded message to the international meeting in defense of humanity held in the Siquieros Cultural Center, laying out the Zapatistas' views on globalization and neoliberalism. They see not only the globalization promoted by those with a lot of money, but also a globalization of resistance. The globalization of money does not respect countries or people, but consumes them and destroys the world. The fight against the globalization of power is a question of human survival. It is in this context that the many groups waging that battle around the world share experiences and provide each other mutual support. At the meeting, Bolivian coca leader Evo Morales explained how his country's poor and outcast rose up to overthrow their President in October 2003, recalling that the Zapatistas were the ones who said, “Enough to policies of hunger and misery.”

In November, the Zapatistas invited civil society to celebrate the 20th anniversary of their founding and the 10th anniversary of their armed uprising. The Zapatistas have kept the channels of communication with civil society open, and in celebrating their anniversaries, they took a look at their past, at the mistakes they've made and the lessons they've learned.

### **The Zapatistas' two anniversary celebrations**

On November 17, 2003 the Zapatistas celebrated their twentieth anniversary behind closed doors, in the company of the indigenous peoples in resistance. They announced that the “Caracoles”—recently established sites for exchanges between the Zapatista communities and the rest of the world—of Oventic, La Realidad, Roberto Barrios and Morelia would be closed to the press and to national

and international civil society from November 15 to 20. At the same time, they invited people to the anniversary events being organized by the magazine *Rebeldía* and several other organizations in Mexico and around the world. They announced that they would send messages to all these events but no representatives, so no member of the Zapatista leadership would be personally present at the events held beyond the mountains of southeastern Mexico.

In one of these messages, read during the presentation of a video about the Zapatista movement titled *The Fire and the Word*, Marcos criticized the Fox administration's disdain for culture and its dissemination among the people. The government's position, he said, is that if art and culture aren't profitable, they should be eliminated. He referred to a proposal in Fox's budget to tax reading and learning and put several state-run cultural institutions up for sale to increase revenues. Marcos felt this would "punish society and condemn the country to ignorance."

At the celebrations held by civil society, people spoke about how the Zapatistas had shaken up the structures of the Mexican political system and awakened many people's consciences, how their rebellion had won the right to speak and their movement spoke about new things in innovative ways. People commented on how the Zapatistas had reinvigorated Mexico's social movements at a time when they were worn out and weakened, upholding dignity even under repression, trying out multiple forms of resistance, always able to manage their weakness with great strength. It was the commemorating of a movement that has restored hopes for a better life and worked through peaceful means in the past ten years to build another world. If Mexico has become increasingly democratic in recent years, the Zapatistas deserve much of the credit. They have acted as a mirror reflecting the country's indigenous peoples, and for these past ten years, the indigenous movement has walked hand in hand alongside them.

Celebrations were held in 19 of the country's 32 states. Groups close to the Zapatistas, including human rights, environmental, university and other grassroots

organizations, also held commemorative events in seven of the largest Latin American nations, in nine European countries and in Turkey, Japan, Canada and the United States.

Organizations and individuals from 25 countries also participated in the Zapatista celebrations by signing a statement in which they said, among other things, that along with the Zapatistas they would continue to learn how not to mirror power.

The Zapatistas celebrated with cultural and political activities in the Caracoles that were open to the press and the public. At these celebrations, representatives of the Caracoles charged that their food supplies, health, education, production and marketing plans were being affected by counterinsurgency operations. They said they were convinced that only through rebellion and resistance would they be able to build their autonomy.

Throughout the celebrations, the Zapatistas and their sympathizers chose to emphasize culture: there were paintings, posters, music, movies, videos, conferences, round tables and the like. They blamed the government and the wealthy for prostituting culture and spoke about the value of the vast range of popular culture and the cultural aspects of daily life.

#### **Fox: “Chiapas is at peace”**

A study reputedly carried out by the government found that the EZLN is present in 580 communities in 35 Chiapas municipalities.

The Zapatistas’ recently established Good Government Committees have succeeded in overcoming differences with their neighbors through talks, without federal government intervention, and the Zapatistas continue to reject government programs and projects. When President Fox boasted that “Chiapas has changed and is at peace,” several commentators replied that the first was true, but because of the Zapatistas, while the second was an illusion. There is still no peace in Chiapas but rather continuing displacements, crimes committed in impunity and harassment by paramilitary groups. Although military patrols are no longer regularly scheduled and many control

posts have been eliminated, the total number of troops stationed in the Lacandona forest, the Chiapas highlands and along the northern fringes and the border has increased. And six years after 45 unarmed people were murdered while praying in a church in Acteal—including 19 women, 18 children and 8 men—no one has been held responsible for the massacre nor has the complicity of military and PRI officials in the crime even been investigated.

#### **A source of inspiration for long-term change**

Ten years ago, the day the Zapatistas launched their uprising, Mexico joined NAFTA. The promised economic boom never came, however, and inequality only increased. The Zapatista uprising forced Mexico's ruling classes to recognize the country's backwardness, and now the movement is a leader in the fight against inequality. The Zapatistas have also imprinted the demand for indigenous rights on the national consciousness. Although the insults and affronts continue and the Zapatista cause remains unresolved, the movement has remained active and grown stronger, always innovating. The Mexican state has refused to understand indigenous demands, but the continuing Zapatista struggle serves as a reminder of indigenous rights.

The Zapatistas know their struggle has not ended. They have shifted it to the arena of words, and especially to building a local and regional autonomy that is separate from the state. In their rebellion for dignity, they have promoted long-term changes that go well beyond the moment. They have shaped a new culture, a new way of doing politics, without seeking to take power independent of the increasingly discredited political parties. They have been a starting point for new social movements that have broken with the old political ways. Their movement has been a powerful source of inspiration for other movements around the world, an example that has encouraged the excluded of the world to organize autonomously.

#### **US agents in Mexico City's airport**

After announcing an “orange alert” on its own soil over Christmas and into January 2004, the United States next took charge of screening passengers in Mexico City’s

airport.

US agents came to supervise the screening, which went well beyond international norms. Travelers reported arrogance, insults, humiliations, arbitrary excesses and abuse of authority. The Mexican government's actions were not at all clear, as it tried to justify the measure by citing international agreements. It followed Washington's instructions with no thought to national dignity.

The reaction was quick and came from all sides. Mexico's cardinal said that Mexicans should be responsible for supervising Mexican territory. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas criticized Fox's government for bowing down to US demands, and recalled that the only valid alliances in international relations are ones of equality. Opposition legislators demanded the immediate withdrawal of the foreign agents. Several commentators argued that the United States was trying to generate and spread fear as an instrument of political domination and to drum up quick support for Bush's reelection. Former foreign minister Fernando Solana, for example, said that fear was being used as a political resource.

Fox responded by insisting that collaborating with the United States does not violate national sovereignty, and explained that the 2002 Intelligent Borders agreement empowers FBI agents to play a supervisory role in Mexican airports. Specialists in law and international relations at the National Autonomous University, however, argued that the direct intervention of US agents in the Mexico City airport is a flagrant violation of the rule of law and demanded that the Mexican government put a stop to the insults and abuses Mexicans were experiencing at their hands. The wave of complaints obliged the National Human Rights Commission to open an investigation. The commission verified that passengers had been treated poorly and proposed a charter on the rights of travelers.

### **Monterrey summit: Business as usual**

This controversy served as the preamble to the Special Summit of the Americas called by the Organization of American States on January 12-13, 2004, in the city of Monterrey. At the summit, the participating heads of state

discussed matters of good governance and terrorism. Security measures around the summit headquarters reached new extremes. Social organizations charged that the US government was trying to impose its agenda, putting its vision of security above the priorities of other nations. Brazil and Venezuela opposed including the FTAA in the declaration and insisted, along with Argentina, on emphasizing social issues at the summit.

Fox announced that he would try to get an agreement on migration at the summit—responding in part to pressure from both the public and the PRD—but in the end he accepted the plan presented by the United States. Mexico, Colombia and Chile appeared at the summit as trustworthy, docile US allies, while Brazil, Venezuela and Argentina dared to voice their disagreements with the superpower.

In preparation for the summit, forums were held by businesspeople, academics and social organizations. Hundreds of civil society organizations presented initiatives on economic growth with equity, social development and democratic governance. Some 150 of their representatives spoke with delegates to the summit, presenting specific proposals on each of the issues discussed and proposing that the OAS establish a permanent consultative commission representing civil society in the Americas.

In the vague final document, the United States succeeded in imposing most of its points of view—on the FTAA, for example. The summit achieved nothing new; it was merely one more venue to promote Bush's reelection. One achievement, however, was increased unity among Latin American countries in response to US agricultural and commercial protectionism. Bush got Fox to go along with his interventionist position—against Mexican foreign policy norms in the case of the referendum on Venezuela—and Fox came off as adulating and servile to US interests.

### **Two ways of making oneself heard**

As at other international meetings, civil society organizations chose to participate in two ways. Some tried to make their voices heard in the official discussions. Another, larger group held demonstrations around the

official site of the summit. The nongovernmental organizations that had participated in the earlier consultations charged that civil society's voices had been excluded from the meeting and that the governments were ignoring the commitments made in the 2001 Quebec summit to listen to civil society and involve the continent's social movements in defining public policies. The established procedures at Monterrey were anti-democratic, and unlike at other recent events of this kind, the NGOs were denied access to drafts and discussion documents, limiting their opportunities to present observations and alternatives.

Over 350 civil society organizations demanded that the US security operations in Mexican airports be discontinued and Bush's visit to Monterrey declared non grata. Some proposed establishing a people's court to judge Bush for his crimes against humanity and peace. Members of 41 peasant and indigenous organizations from 32 countries charged that free trade had battered Latin America, spoke out against NAFTA's agricultural chapter and expressed their concern over the hostile US attitude toward Cuba.

### **Tlalnepantla: Brutal repression**

Security forces blocked the first of their demonstrations in Monterrey, preventing it from reaching the site of the summit, and the large number of police around the site also kept other demonstrations at bay. "Alternative world" activists held parallel marches in the surrounding area and in front of the US embassy in Mexico City. The Mexican government, aware that international attention was focused on what was happening in Monterrey, took great pains to ensure both that the demonstrations would not make it through the protective cordons around the meeting where some 30 heads of state were gathered, and that there would be no repression. Fox boasted of successfully containing the demonstrations without violence.

The government's best attempts to ensure good publicity were undermined, however, by a separate event that unfolded in those same days in the municipality of Tlalnepantla, in the state of Morelos, linking anti-terrorist hysteria with government opposition to indigenous

autonomy through the brutal repression of an indigenous community of prickly-pear cactus producers. Following traditional customs, this largely indigenous municipality had always elected their own municipal leader. When the PRI was in power this had always been followed by their choice presenting his credentials to the ruling party, who then ran him as their candidate. When the new leader did not do so this time, the PRI ignored the municipality's will and ran its candidate, as did the other parties. Elias Osorio, the PRI candidate for mayor, was widely repudiated for previous acts of corruption, including electoral fraud. With many of the voters abstaining, Osorio was able to win the elections with a slim margin by buying a number of votes. In a plebiscite in October the townspeople elected their choice again by 1,357 votes to 1 for Osorio, but the results were not officially recognized. When Osorio was to take office on November 1, his opponents occupied the municipal offices and would not let him enter.

After fruitless attempts to negotiate with PAN state officials in Morelos, they decided to establish an autonomous municipality, but the federal government secretary declared that such governments would not be permitted, and in mid-January the state government ordered its security forces to violently dislodge the protesters. The result was one dead, several wounded and many more arrested. The state security forces chased people down in the hills and neighboring villages, trying to weed out everyone who had promoted municipal autonomy. Terror reigned, as police searching house by house without court warrants besieged the town. Families were afraid to go out, and food and medicine ran short. The police also beat back a solidarity caravan heading into the town.

The governor of Morelos initially attempted to justify the brutality by alleging that a terrorist training camp was located in the town, but police officials themselves quickly belied this.

### **As in the most repressive times**

Tlalnepantla's popular autonomous council and neighborhood commission issued a statement "from exile"

denouncing the repression and the atmosphere of persecution. They demanded an end to the repression, harassment and hunting down of their members, as well as respect for their autonomy. They asked for talks to resolve the problem.

Members of autonomous municipalities from other states spoke out in defense of the rights of indigenous people and demanded that the government stop the illegal police actions. Indigenous people from 13 neighboring communities came out in defense of those being pursued. The peoples of Milpa Alta, visibly offended, told the government that indigenous people were not terrorists but were simply exercising their right to choose their own way of life and govern themselves in their own manner. They demanded the immediate departure of security forces from the community of Tlalnepantla, the release of those detained, free passage for people in hiding out of fear of being captured, removal of the imposed municipal authorities and respect for indigenous autonomy. The Zapatista National Liberation Movement network organized an event to defend the right of Tlalnepantla to be an autonomous municipality. Other events took place in the state capital and Mexico City to protest the human rights violations.

The governor was finally forced to back off; he called a halt to the persecution and announced that arrests would be temporarily suspended. Nonetheless, some 20 people remained in jail, accused of insurrection and rioting, subject to procedures similar to those established in the most repressive times of the PRI. Popular pressure succeeded in containing the authorities' vengefulness, but the conflict had escalated and no immediate solution was in sight.

Governments such as Fox's, with a strictly pro-business mentality, are incapable of thinking in terms of social health and the construction of a citizenry. And the public's patience is being stretched thin by the clumsiness and frivolity of many of those in power. The economic and political situation of the country's poor will inevitably lead to conflicts, and repressive responses will only create a

spiral of violence.

### **A brief moment of dignity now forgotten**

In the final weeks of 2003 and first few weeks of 2004, there was an increased feeling of social insecurity and brewing social unrest. People no longer believe in the change promised by Fox's increasingly discredited government. It appears to be regretting its brief burst of national dignity in opposing the war against Iraq, and is increasingly servile towards a government that is using its war on terrorism to set itself up as the most powerful terrorist in the world.

Its economic policy favors the groups in power and is leading to high unemployment. People are coming together in opposition to neoliberal policies. Some have chosen to confront the government, to try to halt passage of its anti-national, impoverishing reforms. Others have decided to try to escape neoliberal globalization by turning instead to the local arena, prioritizing the exercise of autonomy. But they are constantly threatened by crazed repression under the guise of anti-terrorism. Still other citizens, those who can afford air travel, suffer from agreements that do not respect constitutional norms in a situation where sovereignty no longer matters.

### **There is resistance and solidarity, but it's not enough**

There are many examples of resistance and solidarity, but these two ingredients must be combined in a broad convergence to build the capacity to oppose, to begin changing the correlation of forces. The movements challenging the state have been forming an incipient convergent network, while the Zapatistas have evolved several forms of organization and are now focused on building autonomy, with a network of national and international sympathizers. Their example has reached far beyond their territory. They have demonstrated how resistance generates alternatives. But while resistance is extremely important, it's not enough. Because people have to confront strong, concentrated powers, there continues to be a need for broader organization. In this fight for hegemony, even if the goal isn't to take state power, it is nonetheless necessary to limit state power and build a new kind of power from below, in new forms.

Dispersed struggles will be crushed. We have to keep seeking out the features of a counter-power that can bring forth a new kind of power that encourages both autonomy and convergences. The vast spectrum of anti-neoliberal and “alternative world” movements has shown us the need to judge the reigning reality from an ethical vantage point to free ourselves from the subjection that global power would like to impose on us.

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## Repoliticizing the Election Institute: A Severe Setback for Mexican Democracy

*In 1996, after a long civic struggle, the Federal Election Institute became an autonomous, responsive, trustworthy institution. But now it has fallen under the control of the PRI and PAN, a victim of the corrupt partocracy that is swallowing up Mexico’s fragile democracy like a black hole.*

**Jorge Alonso**

Democracies in Latin America are extremely fragile, and Mexico’s democracy is not only fragile but also very sick. Political theorists have described corruption as the cancer in democracy. In late February and early March, Mexicans were able to witness the corruption of several of the leading political party leaders and government officials up close, thanks to videos broadcast on television.

Several months ago, it was discovered that the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) had illegally siphoned off a significant amount of money from PEMEX, the state oil company. The party was fined but the people responsible went scot-free. This was followed by the “Friends of Fox” scandal, involving illicit financing of Vicente Fox’s presidential campaign. Once again, the party was fined—in this case, the ruling National Action Party (PAN)—and again, those responsible for the illegal fundraising activities went free.

In February, a videotape caught the leader of Mexico’s Green Party (PVEM) brokering a permit for a tidy sum under the table, revealing his greater interest in greenbacks than in keeping the environment green. The result? The leader in question kept his post, as the Green Party joined the PRI and PAN in covering up for its corrupt members.

Then in March, the Federal District's finance chief, previously private secretary to Manuel López Obrador, the popular Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) mayor, was also caught on videotape in flagrant acts of corruption, together with another party leader. Unlike the previous cases, their party sanctioned the two officials, who are also facing criminal charges, although no convincing answer has been given to the question of whether the mayor knew about their actions. The federal government has tried to exploit the scandal for political gain, rather than develop a plan to counter and punish corruption.

### **Disgust and distrust**

The corruption has generated widespread disgust among the public and the impunity enjoyed by prominent political figures has added distrust to the mix. Polls have long confirmed that the immense majority of the country's citizens have little faith in politics, but the recent scandals, which left no party untouched, have finished off what little was left of politicians' credibility. María de las Heras, a professional pollster, published some alarming findings in mid-March. Those who say they have little or no confidence in the country's political parties make up the overwhelming majority: 93% for the Green Party, 91% for the PRI and the PRD, and 83% for the PAN. Congress fared even worse, as 96% said they had little or no confidence in their representatives with 95% feeling the same about their senators.

In an attempt to shift attention away from his responsibility in the illegal "Friends of Fox" financing scandal, President Fox took advantage of the video scandals to talk about ethics in politics. But 78% of those polled in the survey claimed little or no confidence in him either. And Mexico City's Mayor López Obrador, who enjoyed high approval ratings until the revelations about his former secretary, which broke right around the time of the poll, came in four points below Fox. To top it all off, the Federal Election Institute (IFE), one of the few organizations that had inspired public trust—and often cited as evidence of Mexico's budding democracy—has also fallen into disrepute, as 73% of those polled said they have no confidence in it.

### **Democratic involution**

After many long battles, Mexico's civic movement managed to wrest control of the Election Institute away from the government several years ago, to form a trustworthy autonomous entity that answered to the citizenry. While the need to closely monitor the actions of election officials was a major concern before 1996, the problem was essentially resolved through this reform. But just days before Congress elected IFE's General Council in October 2003, the Civic Alliance, one of many organizations that have worked hard to promote democracy in the country, issued a warning that IFE's independence was in danger. What prompted their worry? That same day, PRI legislators in the House of Representatives had demanded a larger quota of the nine Council posts than the

presidency and three additional seats. They wanted a majority, because many PRI officials are convinced they lost the 2000 elections by not controlling the Election Institute. In subsequent negotiations, they focused on getting the presidency and the majority of votes, something they achieved after convincing the PAN to join them in electing a slate made up of the two parties' members, sympathizers and allies.

The Election Institute's newly elected president immediately issued a statement denying his PRI membership. When his political record belied that statement, the concern over his lack of independence was coupled with a concern over his lack of honesty. Carlos Fuentes wrote that the IFE had been robbed of its impartiality, while other independent commentators described the situation as a political step backwards. The weekly magazine *Proceso* reminded people that an earlier PAN-PRI alliance had resulted in the looting of the national treasury through the FOBAPROA bank scandal, and lamented that the PAN was now giving the PRI control over elections. Civic organizations felt defeated, seeing how quickly the Election Institute's hard-won autonomy was lost. Many denounced what one described as a "democratic involution." In a seminar on Mexico's election prospects held in Madrid at the end of November 2003, a PRD leader criticized the serious turn of events.

#### **"Save Democracy, Recover IFE"**

In the November 24 session of IFE's General Council, the PRD representative challenged the election of the new council members. He argued that they didn't meet the legally established requirements given their commitment to their political parties and because they were legally and morally unsuited to act as impartial arbitrators in the commissions formed during the session. He said it was particularly troubling that the PRI and PAN had made this move after being respectively sanctioned for "PEMEXgate" and the "Friends of Fox" scandals. He suggested that the parties were afraid of submitting to the oversight of an impartial Election Institute. He concluded by calling on the newly elected members to resign.

The Civic Alliance headed up the organizing of a civic forum called "Save Democracy, Recover IFE" at the end of 2003, together with 25 organizations active in several states. In its first statement, it charged that the trustworthiness and responsiveness gained by the institute in 1994 and consolidated in 1996 had been lost in one blow, since the PRI had effectively gained absolute control. They also noted that the new council members would have no real opportunity to demonstrate their impartiality before the 2006 elections, and given the high stakes involved, it would be extremely risky to wait until then to see what happens. For that reason, they called on the council members to resign and called on citizens to mobilize to recover their election institute.

### **The UN's recommendations**

The election of a biased General Council in the Election Institute sparked so much controversy that even the United Nations took a stand. In its study on human rights in Mexico, it recommended that political parties should not designate election authorities and suggested an alternative: increasing public participation in designing the institutional framework to avoid obvious biases. It also recommended establishing legal mechanisms that would prevent political parties from designating council members and urged that the selection process favor civic representation, ensuring an equitable gender balance and coverage of all regions of the country. It proposed that one third of the council members should be elected and the other two thirds come from civil society and not hold any public electoral post. The procedure should include the registration of candidates and their public appearance before the House of Representatives.

During the preparatory meetings leading up to the Special Summit of the Americas held in Monterrey the third week of January, in which civic organizations participated, the Civic Alliance pointed out that Latin Americans still have a long way to go to ensure democracy and good governance and that many of the region's democratic institutions are fragile and deteriorating. They gave the case of Mexico's Election Institute as an example.

### **IFE failed its first test**

In February, IFE faced two decisions that would reveal whether it was independent of the PAN and PRI: designation of the institute's secretary and other leadership posts, and the review of Green Party statutes to determine whether they had fulfilled the orders of the court that had found its earlier statutes anti-democratic.

With respect to the designation of leadership posts, several civil society organizations met with council members to impress upon them the importance of naming independent, well-respected people to key posts. Since the legitimacy of the council members had been widely questioned, it seemed that they would agree to these demands. But when it came to selecting the new secretary, eight of the nine members voted for someone who had been in charge of Election Training and Civic Education for the institute before IFE's democratization. The only dissenting member—the PRD representative—denounced the lack of transparency in the process and said he had been pressured to vote for the man. He walked out of the session in protest, also charging that the selection process was clouded by secrecy and that, under the PRI's control, IFE was reverting to its old self. The PRD accused the new secretary of being involved in illegal PRI actions and predicted more questionable moves from the Election Institute.

### **Under international scrutiny**

By February 2004, the “Save Democracy, Recover IFE” network had doubled in

size. It issued another statement adding the flawed election of the new secretary to its concerns over the institute's impartiality.

It again alerted the public of the serious implications of the setbacks in one of the few trustworthy institutions in a position to guarantee Mexico's incipient democracy. It also reported on the first steps to reestablish and build networks of people to ensure citizen oversight of the Election Institute—a task they had not had to perform since 1997.

The network also announced that it was launching an international campaign to report this lamentable situation to the organizations that had accompanied Mexico through its difficult transition process up to 2000, and to place the Election Institute under international scrutiny, since the trust it had earned in the three federal elections since 1997 was lost. And the Civic Alliance planned a meeting with representatives of the European Union's diplomatic corps, since the Mexico-European Union Free Trade Agreement includes a democracy clause.

### **Civic conscience in politicians' hands**

The IFE's other crucial decision concerned its pronouncement on the Green Party's new statutes. But a lack of information and some cunning interpretations of the law again unfortunately confirmed its bias. Its determination to prove the statutes legally and constitutionally valid led Miguel Angel Granados Chapa, a respected journalist who had been one of the first council members in the reformed institute, to write: "IFE has covered up the true nature of the new statutes through tricks that should not be allowed in an institute of its constitutional stature." The Green Party, meanwhile, celebrated the decision as a great victory.

Some observers concluded that the Green Party had endorsed the PRI-PAN alliance on the make-up of the council members in exchange for later approval of its new statutes. Granados Chapa, for example, said the party bias was again clear, and charged that the decision had been cooked up ahead of time. Several commentators in the independent press described it as further evidence that the new council was determined to destroy the prestige the independent IFE had earned.

Critics lambasted the decision's lack of decorum and cynicism. Adolfo Aguilar Zinzer, who has represented Mexico in the UN Security Council and once served as a Green Party senator, wrote that the current IFE had a debt to the public, since the council members had put its independence in doubt by approving Green Party statutes that were even more anti-democratic than the court-challenged ones.

In a scenario dominated by corruption scandals related to the PRD's 2003

campaigns—which showed that all of the country’s parties made illegal use of resources in their campaigns—political analyst Sergio Zermeño asked himself, “How do we put a stop to the maddening political ads and the corruption machines known as TV stations? How can we do this if the IFE, formed to be the civic conscience, has fallen into the hands of the politicians?”

### **Scandals followed by indignation**

The civic organizations have been preparing to resume oversight of the Election Institute, as recommended by the United Nations. The “Save Democracy” group is developing a strategy to ensure constant scrutiny and plans to issue a quarterly report on its findings. In response to the generalized distrust and persistent demands, the institute has promised to investigate the parties. But its credibility has been shattered by shameless decisions made in the interests of the parties that named its authorities.

At the end of March, the Civic Movement for Democracy, part of the “Save Democracy” network, initiated a campaign titled “Democracy with Dignity.” It explained that the political scandals of recent years, months, weeks and days not only incite rightful indignation but also make it clear that democracy in Mexico is still a pending task. Mexicans lack political institutions that are up to the challenges facing the country . They noted that sustainable democracy requires both solid, legitimate and credible institutions, and effective government actions to encourage social inclusion, development, equity and respect for all human rights. Mexico has a long way to go to achieve this. According to the civic movement, a country with weak parties and governments and professional politicians who are more concerned about destroying their adversaries than building institutions and who put their own interests before those of the nation is incapable of effectively defending its sovereignty, which is especially threatened now by global authoritarianism. They insisted that true democracy has room for everyone—all kinds of civic, community and regional organizations and social movements—and has channels of communication to ensure that people can express themselves and are not used by political parties and elite groups for their own ends.

### **From presidentialism to partocracy**

Mexicans are deeply disillusioned with politics. The effective antidote against impunity and corruption in all its forms—venality, the abuse of public resources and the inept performing of public functions—is social control over the government and the institutions of public interest. Civic organizations have called for a grassroots campaign to demand ethics in politics, the building of efficient institutions and social well-being as the government’s fundamental objective. Such a campaign should involve everyone, drawing on our vast reserves of creativity to build a dignified and truly participatory

democracy.

The political parties have contaminated political life and are now corrupting the election institute, which had been a cause for pride in the progress of democracy in Mexico. We have gone from authoritarian presidentialism to a corrupt “partiocracy” that is destroying democracy. The political degradation is alarming. This partiocracy has been imposed through the current correlation of forces and is swallowing up and destroying everything that comes within its sphere of influence. The civic movement, unfortunately, has grown weaker while this has been happening, with some of its own most valuable members sucked up by the parties too. Although a slim but stubborn resistance has been raising its head, it is not yet enough. We have to build a new convergence from below that is strong enough to challenge the anti-democratic forces. One of the few positive results of this whole process is that the civic movement has grasped the seriousness of the situation and is starting to reorganize. Some cancers are curable. Mexican democracy is in very poor health, but there is a cure, which can only come from a powerful, broad, pluralistic, energetic civic movement.

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### **The Presidential Elections Are Already Tearing the Country Apart**

*Mexico's climate has been convulsed by its political class for months. Caught up in a premature, but all-out war over the presidential elections still two years away, the PAN and the PRI have been engaging in dirty tricks against PRD frontrunner López Obrador, Mexico City's mayor.*

#### **Jorge Alonso**

The thirteen weeks between the beginning of March and the end of May shook Mexico's political life to its very core, with the contradictions and conflicts intensifying by the day. A recount of events reveals the nature and practices of a government that came to power through a vote for democratic change and has recently opted instead for a dangerous return to authoritarianism, where it invokes the defense of a law it tramples, shows no respect for its opponents and cynically attacks the interests of the people.

#### **Cuba deports Ahumada**

Following a scandal caused by the release of videos implicating members of Mexico City's Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) government in acts of corruption, Carlos Ahumada, the businessperson involved in the entrapment, fled to Cuba. A month later, Cuban authorities arrested him on charges of fraud at INTERPOL's request. They reported while he was in jail, Ahumada had

admitted that the videos were released for political ends, which made many Mexican politicians, especially in the governing National Action Party (PAN), very nervous. After contacting several political figures in Mexico, Cuba decided not to wait for extradition proceedings and deported Ahumada to Mexico at the end of April.

The charges against Ahumada fell under the jurisdiction of Federal District authorities, but before turning him over to them, the Attorney General's Office held him for five hours to find out just what he had said in Cuba and instruct him on what he should say next. The goal was to cover up the federal government's role in instigating a plot against Mexico City's popular mayor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who has been leading in the polls for the next presidential elections.

If President Vicente Fox's government was caught off guard by Cuba's decision to deport Ahumada, it was angered by that country's next move. Cuba had itself been riled by Mexico's support for a resolution passed by the Human Rights Commission in Geneva to send a United Nations special rapporteur to visit the island, especially because its vote was announced not by Mexico, but by the United States. During Fidel Castro's speech in Cuba on May 1, International Workers' Day, he said "It hurts us deeply to see that all the prestige and influence Mexico had earned throughout Latin America and the world for its spotless international policy, born of a deep and true revolution, has turned to ashes."

#### No public support for **Mexico's break with Cuba**

Arguing that the Cubans were intervening in Mexico's internal political affairs, the Mexican government reacted strongly. On May 2, it announced that it would withdraw its ambassador from Cuba and gave the Cuban ambassador 48 hours to leave Mexico. It declared the Cuban Embassy's political affairs adviser persona non *grata* and insisted he, too, leave the country immediately. It also charged that the head of the Americas Department of the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee and the head of that department's Mexico Section had met with PRD members to negotiate the terms of Ahumada's deportation.

The Fox government has brought Cuban-Mexican relations to their lowest point ever, to the brink of a break, as did Peru because of another comment Castro made in his May 1 speech. And of course, the US government immediately praised the decision of both governments. In Mexico, private enterprise and the PAN supported the government's move, but wide sectors of society were indignant and lamented the conflict with Cuba, a country to which Mexicans feel especially close. Polls conducted by the leading newspapers found that 75% of the population wanted Mexico to maintain relations with Cuba and 47% felt that the Fox government had overreacted.

Several legislators commented that the near break was due as much to pressure from the United States as to the Ahumada case. As public repudiation increased, several civil society organizations remarked that Mexico is assuming a US-dictated policy that its citizens do not support. In the capital, the Promoter of National Unity Against Neoliberalism and 300 other organizations marched against Fox and in favor of relations with Cuba. Large demonstrations were held in several other cities as well.

Fox insisted he was only defending the country's sovereignty and soon took advantage of an opportunity to demonstrate that he was not just obeying US orders. When during this same period the US government announced that it was taking harsher measures against Cuba and called on other Latin American governments to follow Mexico's example, Fox announced that he would not support this plan aimed at further asphyxiating Cuba.

### **Resistance and complicity**

Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Reque refused to accept that the Cubans had intervened in Mexico's internal affairs and declared that relations had reached this regrettable point because of lies and arrogance. In a long press conference to the international media, he presented a video in which Ahumada said he had initially opposed televising the video showing the hand-over of money to PRD officials because they were his only bargaining chip, but "they"—presumably high PAN officials—had insisted on it. He also said that in exchange for releasing them, he had received neither legal protection nor economic assistance.

The Cuban foreign minister explained that Cuban leaders had met in Mexico with leading politicians in the PAN, the PRD and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and gave a partial list of names. He rejected the charge that they had carried out a clandestine or "conspiratorial" mission against Mexico, its authorities or its people, and commented that the Mexican government's unusual reaction confirmed the case's political implications. Finally, he said that if Mexican officials took the appropriate steps through diplomatic channels, they would receive a favorable response from Cuba.

Mexico's foreign relations secretary applauded the flexibility of Cuba's position, but the secretary of government rejected the idea that his government had started the conflict or was involved in a plot against Mexico City's government, and dismissed the video released in Cuba. For its part, the Attorney General's Office recommended that Ahumada file a complaint with the United Nations because Cuba allegedly obliged him to sign a blank confession (although the video shown by the Cubans amounted to a verbal declaration, with no papers involved). Ahumada's lawyer claimed that his client had been tortured in Cuba,

but the foreign relations secretary said Ahumada had not made this charge to the consul, nor had he complained of mistreatment.

Congressional legislators summoned both secretaries to Congress to report on what the Cubans had done in Mexico to warrant the diplomatic decisions made. The officials, however, refused to provide information on the reasons behind this near break with Cuba, pleading national security concerns. The slow pace of the attorney general's actions has led many to presume that Ahumada is being protected.

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## An unexpected crisis for Fox

What the government had wanted in Ahumada's case was a lengthy extradition process. Cuba's decision to deport him meant that he could be tried on all charges leveled against him, not only those cited in the government's extradition petition. This put President Fox in a complicated situation. Many people are now convinced he is not interested in fighting corruption, as he has repeatedly said, but rather in using corruption scandals to damage his political adversaries while covering up other scandals to protect associates and allies. López Obrador exhorted the government to admit it had cooked up a plot against the political project he represents. The PRD asked that all the videos be released, not only those chosen for partisan ends by the government to strike a blow at it. PAN members were also known to have received money from Ahumada, but these cases were not aired in the media. The PRD urged the government to take steps to diffuse the confrontational climate created by its decision to politicize an issue that should have been exclusively legal in nature. The PRI also called on Fox to reestablish dialogue with all parties. After returning from a trip to Europe, however, Fox defended the measures taken against Cuba, launched into a tirade against the López Obrador government in Mexico City for the corruption found there and lamented that while a businessperson had gone to jail, the PRD politicians involved were still free. Meanwhile, the press reported that the same businessperson defended by the President had hired the most dangerous criminals in the jail where he is imprisoned as his personal security guards.

In mid-May, the PAN issued a press release in which it called for putting a halt to the “judicialization of politics and politicization of justice,” while the PRD continued to demand that the PAN put a halt to its attacks against the local PRD government in Mexico City .

# López indestructible leadership

Obrador's

The Ahumada case did not achieve its goal of destroying the figure of López Obrador. A survey by one of the leading newspapers in the capital showed that

73% of Mexico City's residents approve of his performance as mayor and 58% believe that the federal government has been plotting against him. And he still led the polls as the preferred candidate for the 2006 presidential elections.

This led the PAN government to explore other routes. On May 17, the Attorney General's Office asked Congress to strip López Obrador of his immunity privileges, accusing him of contempt of court in a judicial decision related to some projects in the capital. The PRD saw this as a new attempt to force him out of the presidential race. López Obrador charged that they were resorting to dirty tricks to that end, but assured that he would continue to promote an alternative project whether or not he was a presidential candidate because he cannot support an economic policy that benefits only a few at the top while keeping the majority in poverty. He announced that he would not resign to face the Attorney General's charges but would consult the people at the end of the year to see if they wanted him to remain in office.

In a national poll done by GEA, 63% believe that the attorney general's actions are politically motivated and 57% feel that if López Obrador were removed from his post to face these charges, the 2006 elections would be illegitimate. Several analysts, including some who are not sympathizers of López Obrador, described the move as a low blow to democracy, a kind of coup through "legalistic" aggression. They felt that Fox, like most of his predecessors midway through their term in office, was losing his sense of judgment.

#### **Fox declared an "electoral criminal"**

On May 20, the federal judicial branch's Electoral Tribunal increased the fine against the PAN for the "Friends of Fox" case involving illegal contributions to the President's 2000 campaign. The Tribunal found that Fox's party—and in fact Fox himself—were aware of, participated in and benefited from the illegal, parallel campaign financing, thus damaging the democratic system by hiding the origins and destination of the money and violating the principle of electoral fairness. The Tribunal raised the fine from the equivalent of some US\$31 million to nearly US\$35 million because it was proven that both Fox and the PAN had actively and consciously participated in the parallel financing strategy to prevent election authorities from monitoring the resources. In so doing they violated several election laws: they broke campaign spending limits and made illegal use of money from abroad and from people who were not identified or not authorized to contribute or who had already reached their individual contribution limits. They had also concocted a money-laundering scheme to hide the parallel financing.

The President himself appeared to be the main one responsible for these irregularities, and the PRD insisted that the issue be pursued to its core. They demanded that Fox explain where the millions of dollars that had been illegally

obtained by “Friends of Fox” ended up, and asked that the case be reopened because the Tribunal had demonstrated that Fox was an “electoral criminal.”

### **Insults, enmity, cynicism**

With this, the climate grew even tenser. Fox was accused of ignoring the country’s problems while getting enmeshed in political conspiracies to defeat an adversary. While López Obrador presented legal documents in response to the attorney general’s charges against him, PAN as well as some PRI legislators seemed oblivious to the fact that using unjust methods to get him out of the race was threatening to undermine political stability. Reverting to the times of harassment and exclusion was discrediting the country’s institutions, thus endangering social peace. Even Former Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda, upon announcing himself as a “citizens’ candidate” for President, cynically and dangerously agreed that López Obrador should be prevented “by whatever means it takes” from being a presidential candidate.

The PRI called once again for a dialogue with the President, while the PRD said it would only agree to one that included both the charges against López Obrador and the “Friends of Fox” case. With all their actions determined by the presidential race, the parties do not seem truly interested in reaching agreements that are not related to the race, and it is proving to be very difficult to defuse the insults and enmity. They urge dialogue for rhetorical reasons, but their actions lean in other directions. An even greater problem is that neither the President nor any of the parties appear to have any interest in including society in the dialogue.

With the European-Latin American Summit approaching, the political panorama grew stranger by the day. Just a few days before it started, bombs were set off in banks in Morelos. The clandestine group that claimed responsibility explained that they were protests against the PAN’s policies.

### **Despite**

**everything,**

### **López Obrador is still in the lead**

López Obrador has maintained his substantial lead in the polls even after the new attacks, and the government appears even more obsessed with its desire to get rid of him. Despite assurances that the issue would not be raised at the summit, Fox railed against corruption and impunity in the Mexico City government before the foreign press corps just a few hours before the meeting got underway. He did not mention that the Electoral Tribunal had just determined that he personally knew about the illegal financing of his own campaign.

It is important to emphasize here that while Fox was directly implicated in the PAN’s illegal campaign financing, López Obrador was not personally involved in the corruption in the Federal District. In addition, the amounts involved in the

latter scandal are minimal compared to the illicit money that went into Fox's campaign.

After admitting that he was concerned about López Obrador's popularity, the head of the PRI met with Fox. That same day PAN and PRI representatives in Congress, ignoring the PRD's petition to dismiss the attorney general's request, opened proceedings to remove López Obrador from office without justifying their move on legal grounds. The defendant responded that he was accustomed to adversity and was in the people's hands. The president of the National Human Rights Commission warned that removing López Obrador from office would be a terrible mistake and create a grave social problem.

### **Summit in the midst of intrigue**

This was the convulsive national backdrop to the European Union-Latin American summit, which began in Guadalajara on May 28. Days before, Fox announced that it could be used to begin talks with Cuban authorities over the rift between the two countries, but when Cuba's foreign minister arrived in Guadalajara, he said that the diplomatic crisis between Mexico and Cuba might not be resolved there. He released a letter from Fidel Castro explaining why he had decided not to attend the summit personally, mentioning not only the pending issues with the Mexican government over its false, dishonest accusation against Cuba, but also a critique of the summit's organization. Nevertheless, the two countries' foreign ministers did meet and at least initiated arrangements for the return of their respective ambassadors. Commentators concurred that the Cubans were right on this issue.

The public also saw the contradictions between the government's initial hard-line stand against Cuba and its later offer of rapprochement. If Cuba's actions had been so serious, people felt, there was no reason to mitigate the initial response. And if the intent was to correct a mistake, this indicated that the reasons originally invoked were insufficient. People were bothered by the government's failure to clarify what had happened, and by the fact that they were being asked to trust in the "secret reasons" of a government that has lost credibility.

Once the summit was underway, the PRD distributed a paper among the participants in response to Fox's charges, denouncing his government's partisan, antidemocratic attitude. It also filed a complaint with the Organization of American States, charging that Fox's conduct violated the Inter-American Democratic Charter. It also clearly violates the democratic clause in the agreement signed between Mexico and the European Union, as the legal maneuvering aimed at deciding the presidential elections two years in advance is nothing short of attempted fraud. Fox was also denounced for serving, in another authoritarian twist, as coordinator of the presidential campaign of his wife, Marta Sahagún, rather than as President of all Mexicans. In fact, the federal

government unabashedly distributed a pamphlet on his wife's political positions at the summit. Meanwhile, the PRD demanded that the Public Ministry fulfill its duty to investigate Fox for the illegal financing of his 2000 campaign and his associates for their involvement in Ahumada's illegal activities. Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes criticized the spiral of intrigue and dirty tricks in Mexican politics based on a dispute over the presidential elections that only increased disillusionment and confusion. He commented that the lack of development, the insecurity and the fragile democracy could arouse a sense of nostalgia for an authoritarian past. Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, one of Mexico's main summit organizers, said that Mexico needs agreements not arguments. Others commented that Fox came to the summit with none of the democratic aura that surrounded him when he began his term in office.

### **Many shades of gray in this crisis**

Some of the European countries that participated in the summit expressed concern over the weakness of democracy in Latin America and the problems faced by Mexico's democracy in particular. In fact, many people both here and abroad had hoped that the Mexican government, which was elected in a democratic vote for change, would act in a reasonable, democratic way. Unfortunately, however, it appears to have lost its head. Determined to hold onto power at all costs, it has not been able to accept the appearance of a strong, popular candidate with an anti-neoliberal, pro-social justice project, and so has twisted the law and made partisan use of institutions to block his path. Fearing that López Obrador will win the elections, the government is trying to force him out of the running with legal maneuvers and abuse of state institutions and the law, just as in the times of the old PRI regime.

In reality, however, things are not all black and white. There is indeed corruption in the PRD and actions were not taken to address it. While the PAN government may have instigated the plot, it prospered because of internal disputes within the PRD around the upcoming presidential elections. This premature concern over the presidential race has encouraged enmity, convulsions, half-truths, manipulation of justice and authoritarianism. The alliance between the PRI and the PAN has not only stripped the electoral tribunal of its autonomous nature, but now threatens to create political convulsions that could endanger social peace. The authorities' alarming irresponsibility in the face of social inequality also encourages violent solutions.

*Nearly 400 women have been killed in 11 years, just because they're women. Who's doing such a thing? It's Mexico's number one human rights problem, the most tragic expression of the collapse of the rule of law.*

### **Jorge Alonso**

The modern state grew out of a sort of pact in which society, to ensure that its members could live together in peace, conferred upon the state the exclusive use of force, defined as "legitimate violence." That force was to be used primarily to safeguard individuals living under the state's protection. With neoliberal globalization, the state has been obliged to downsize and abandon a range of its obligations to civil rights, confining itself to the role of guardian of property. The forces of the legal market—and the illegal one—are rendering even the state's most basic functions redundant. The black markets in drugs, weapons, people and pornography have built a parallel power, corrupting a huge number of people and institutions that had been entrusted with the use of legitimate violence to safeguard people's lives. The result is that this violence has become illegitimate and has been used against society itself.

In Mexico, the demand that the state fulfill its responsibility to guarantee security has been mounting. At the end of June, Mexico City hosted the largest demonstration in recent history, in which thousands upon thousands of people demanded an end to the climate of public insecurity. At the start, the power of money, the electronic media and various ultra-right organizations tried to manipulate the march, but they were no match for the massive turnout of an economically and culturally pluralist society. This powerful demonstration of consciousness was led by relatives of the hundreds of women murdered in Ciudad Juárez, which gave the march enormous symbolism because their cases are the most important reflection of the nation's lack of safety. The "femicide" in Ciudad Juárez, state of Chihuahua, also known as the "passage to the north" because it is situated on the border with the United States, has shaken both national and international consciousness.

### **The city with the largest number of single mothers**

Ciudad Juárez is one of the most densely populated cities in Mexico. Over half of its inhabitants are immigrants and an enormous number of people take up temporary residence there, many of them living in miserable conditions, with the expectation of crossing into the United States to work. If the official data for 2001 in that city recorded an alarming number of marginalized people, the figure had doubled by 2003.

For the past 40 years, Ciudad Juárez has been a pole of attraction for the maquiladora work force. In the seventies and eighties, as male unemployment

was on the rise, the job offers in these assembly plants for re-export prioritized young women. The bosses argued that women work more and—even more importantly—cheaper. This contributed to the increase in female migration. Single women headed many of the households in Juárez, the city with the highest reported rate of children born to single women. Alcohol consumption increased among the men, as did violence against women. Although many male workers were incorporated into the work force, achieving almost full employment by the end of the 1990s, the US recession at the start of this decade hit hard, triggering a new wave of unemployment. Four out of every five formal jobs lost in Chihuahua were in Ciudad Juárez alone and the proportion between female and male employment again tipped strongly in favor of women. Young females who failed to get into the United States illegally found themselves stuck in Ciudad Juárez with no identification, money or any way to get in touch with their families. Many of them became easy prey for the prostitution networks.

### **The first eight victims of the brutal, repeated, unsolved crimes**

The unemployment, inhospitable environment and uprootedness created an ideal setting for the propagation of drug addition, alcoholism and violence. Ciudad Juárez has also been home base for one of the most powerful drug cartels, in which trafficking in drugs, weapons, stolen vehicles and even people, with the complicity of police and civil authorities at all levels, only added to the violence. Thus, it was there that a macabre phenomenon began to appear in 1993: the bodies of eight women were found with signs of rape, torture and strangulation. All were young women whose relatives had reported them missing, but the authorities had made little effort to search for them.

These murders were the first links in a long and thus far unending chain of painful mysteries. New bodies are still being found. Most of the victims are young, dark-skinned women, and a considerable number worked in the *maquilas* after migrating to the city in search of better living conditions. There they were exposed to the insecurity of late-night working hours with no public transport. Not all victims are maquila workers, however; they also include homemakers, students, domestic workers and prostitutes.

Many were kidnapped, held captive for days and subjected to harassment, sexual violence, torture and mutilations. Death came by strangulation or savage beatings. Their bodies were found among rubble, in deserted areas or alongside railroad tracks to make it appear that their bodies had been battered by a train.

Over the course of the past decade, society has been demanding explanations and solutions. Many argue that those responsible for these horrendous crimes can be found among the traffickers in drugs and people, sometimes naming

police chiefs, dealers in other dark businesses such as gambling houses, shady bars, houses of prostitution and the like, and figures linked to powerful old families of the past PRI regime. Members of youth gangs and even an aging Egyptian were accused, and in fact accepted their responsibility for some of the murders. There has also been talk that the strangulation was related to sophisticated sexual experiments, while others speculate about narco-satanic rites, "snuff" films, repression against union organizers and even trafficking in organs. Whatever the details, the reality is that these reiterated and unsolved brutal murders demonstrate that being poor and a woman is very dangerous in that city, making them preferred targets.

### **Evidence of complicity**

Some bodies were never claimed, but the relatives of many of the victims did indeed look for them. And in undertaking this task they came up against the sloth and ridicule of local authorities. The first problem is that forced disappearance is not a serious crime meriting full pursuit in Chihuahua. Thus, none of the missing persons reports were investigated in time.

Family members were given insulting responses: "She'll show up with her cholo [half-breed] and her *cholitos*." "She was looking for it." "This wouldn't have happened if she'd worn a longer skirt." One mother of a murdered girl complained bitterly that the killer did not come forward to testify because relatives in Public Security and the judiciary protected him. Those who demanded investigation of the drug dealers were threatened and all those who asked for justice were harassed. All of this has revealed the complicity of municipal, state and federal police. Relatives of the victims complain that they were being mistreated and ignored because they and the victims were not wealthy and thus had no access to justice. They lost whatever trust they might have had in the authorities.

### **The relatives organize: "No more Deaths!"**

The authorities and media tried to make society believe that the murdered women led a double life and thus were to blame for their own death. Their reputation and that of their families was called into question. The complicity, impunity, corruption, inefficiency and ineptitude of the authorities led mothers, sisters and even neighbors of the victims to organize and take up the task of investigating, interviewing witnesses and creating search brigades to look for bodies.

They began their fight together with teachers, lawyers and members of human rights organizations—most of them women as well. They created autonomous entities to make a count of the dead and demand justice. Several different groups appeared: "Women in Black," "Our Daughters Back Home," "Justice for Our Daughters" and "No More Deaths." They have insisted that just one case should have been enough to get the

authorities to conduct a serious and credible investigation, and that the authorities' failure to respond to multiple cases is inexcusable. These groups offered well-grounded lines of investigation, including names and even phone numbers. While the authorities only scoffed at their data, the injured parties futilely continued to demand respect for the rule of law.

In its search for a solution to this abominable problem, organized civil society detected numerous anomalies in the official investigations: serious errors in the dates of the denunciations and the finding of the cadavers, sexism and racism in writing up the denunciations, important flaws in the dossiers, delays in identifying, locating and even searching for the victims... The groups' efforts revealed the deterioration of the police corps.

The first reaction of local authorities was to minimize the events, alleging that everything was being exaggerated and the murders were nothing more than isolated events. Later, the government of the state of Chihuahua assured that all the perpetrators were already behind bars. When this was shown to be untrue by the fact that there was no solid clarification of any of the charges, the local government irresponsibly declared itself "overridden." Civil society kept up the pressure, leading the General Defense Attorney's Office (PGR), together with its state counterpart in Chihuahua, to form a mixed prosecutorial body, although it was soon revealed to be ineffective and a mere front. Governors of both the National Action Party (PAN) and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) at the state and municipal levels have been unable to provide a valid response, thus intensifying the impunity.

### **The conflict globalizes**

Given the negligent response of Mexico's various governmental authorities, relatives of the murdered women and human rights groups opted to go international. The foreign press has taken up this devastating issue much more frequently than its Mexican counterparts have. Some US media have charged that the Mexican authorities incorrectly identified many of the bodies and that their relatives had been harassed. One journalist rhetorically asked what the Mexican government was hiding or whom it was covering for.

Spain's Judge Baltasar Garzón expressed a desire to analyze these hundreds of cases, insisting that it was important to investigate whether they involved a systematic and premeditated form of eliminating people for gender reasons. While acknowledging that the task should belong to the Mexican authorities, he nonetheless considered that these murders had reached the point of a "crime against humanity." In mid-2003 Spain's congress unanimously approved a resolution asking the Mexican government to step up the investigations and provide answers to the families of the victims. It also proposed taking the case to the European Parliament.

In October 2003, US legislators toured Ciudad Juárez, interviewing relatives of some victims, who requested the presence of an international police contingent to put a stop to the wave of killings. Several US nongovernmental organizations complained that the Mexican authorities were not doing enough to prevent violence against women, investigate the killings or respond adequately to the victim's relatives. The situation only worsened as local authorities responded to these pressures by threatening the relatives.

#### **UN and OAS issue revealing reports**

The United Nations rapporteur on extra-judicial executions, who examined the case of the dead women of Juárez, concluded that the Mexican government had created a sense of insecurity among the women of Ciudad Juárez by failing to protect the lives of its citizens. She charged that the murders were sexist crimes favored by impunity, and urged the government to adopt measures to protect human rights defenders and put an end to the violence against women.

Organizations of the relatives took their demands for faster action to end the climate of terror and insecurity in Ciudad Juárez, the resolution of each case and the end of impunity to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in Washington. They also condemned the harassment of the families themselves. The report by IACHR's special rapporteur for women's human rights emphasized one investigative lead: the murders were rooted in and sometimes directly caused by domestic and family violence.

The executive director of the UN Women's Fund (UNIFEM) stated that coordination among government levels was needed to deal with the killing of women in Ciudad Juárez and that labor practices in the *maquilas* had to be changed. In 2003, the UN signed a technical collaboration agreement with the government of Mexico to solve these feminicides. In April 2004, Le Monde published a confidential UN report denouncing possible police collusion and nexuses with drug trafficking in the disappearances and murders. It called the government policies "late" and "ineffective," and urged the Mexican government to sign an assistance protocol with the US government to conduct joint investigations. A particularly relevant piece of information from this report was that convicted sex offenders from all over the United States are taken to El Paso, a city in Texas that borders on Ciudad Juárez, for their pre-release phase. The number of such people in any given year is high: 756 in 2001 and 600 in 2004.

In turn, the assessment of the human rights situation in Mexico prepared by the UN High Commissioner's office concluded that the crimes in Juárez were "an extreme case of the state's absence at various levels."

### **The world is watching and demanding justice**

Following an on-site investigation earlier this year, a delegation from the Canadian province of Quebec, made up of one woman legislator and several NGO representatives, demanded that the Mexican government speed up the investigation to find those responsible for the murders. They called it “unacceptable” that the deaths could have been so trivialized and that those truly responsible were neither publicly identified nor punished.

Also this year, the women’s commission of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, which represents 150 million workers in 152 countries, condemned the crimes that have been occurring in Ciudad Juárez for the past 11 years. The commission sent a letter to President Fox strongly criticizing the serious violence against women in Juárez, and underscoring the responsibility of the Chihuahua state administrators and federal officials in the impunity surrounding most of the crimes. It demanded an exhaustive and impartial investigation, lamenting that the cases had been minimized and the victims, poor working women, held to blame.

### **Amnesty International: It's gender violence**

One of the most active organizations in this chilling problem has been Amnesty International. In 2003, it issued the report “Intolerable Killings: Ten Years of Abductions and Murders of Women in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua,” which contained the results of its own investigation. It concluded that at least a third of the murdered women had suffered sexual aggression before dying. It also charged that the only response by the authorities for 10 years had been to treat the crimes as common violence in the private sphere, without recognizing the existence of a pattern of persistent violence against women deeply rooted in gender discrimination.

Referring to the deficiencies in the official investigations and the climate of impunity, it noted that the investigations had been tossed aside early on, when efficient follow-up would have saved lives. It stressed that it was shameful for the authorities that families had been forced to assume an investigative role because those to whom it rightfully belonged had behaved apathetically, indifferently and even with complicity.

### **The number one human rights problem**

One Mexican state institution that has been active on the case of the murdered women in Ciudad Juárez is the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH). In November 2003, it presented a 1,500-page report to the executive and legislative branches, pointing out the unwillingness of federal, state or municipal governments to stop the tragedy.

This commission documented serious irregularities and even criminality in the

investigations, with pathetic cases of carelessness. Many of the perpetrators had fled to the United States, and the downplaying of the seriousness of the problem had encouraged a climate of impunity. The CNDH also recommended requesting the cooperation of US authorities and suggested that a federal prosecutor do an in-depth investigation, since the crisis in procuring justice was becoming a “spreading cancer.” The killings in Juárez had become a national embarrassment and until the criminals were identified and brought to justice, no words would alleviate the pain of the victims’ relatives.

One senator asked the ombudsman if he didn’t consider the position of the Spanish legislators to be meddling, to which he responded that faced with a state that can’t fulfill its obligations, anyone would feel the right to “pull its ears.” The ombudsman also declared that he agreed with the Amnesty International report and complained that the authorities had not considered the recommendations made by the CNDH or only feigned acceptance of them. By mid-2004, the ombudsman was arguing that the murdered women of Ciudad Juárez had become Mexico’s number one human rights problem.

#### **Feminist heads House commission on feminicide**

An examination of the actions of government institutions, above all at the federal level, demonstrated inadequacy, limited technical capacities, serious errors and even attempts to cover up for those possibly implicated. In addition to harassing relatives and human rights defenders, officials reportedly tortured suspects to get confessions. Relatives of the victims refused to accept the convictions that had been made in these trials not only because the investigations, interrogations and the trials themselves were plagued with irregularities, coerced witnesses and a lack of convincing evidence, but also because the murders were continuing with the same cruel MO. The relatives felt the authorities only wanted to hush the clamor.

Repeatedly over these years, the civil organizations have accused police corps linked to the drug cartels, accomplices and political chiefs from both the PAN and the PRI. The discovery of a “narco grave” in January of this year revealed that a large number of judicial police officers in Chihuahua were involved and led to the disbanding of high commands.

The continuing work of the relatives’ groups and the international attention have made Mexico’s legislators increasingly aware of this tragedy. The 2002-2003 legislature created a special House commission to delve into and follow up on feminicide not only in Ciudad Juárez but all over the country. This commission is currently chaired by feminist legislator Marcela Lagarde and is working jointly with a similar body in the Senate.

#### **The federal government only acted in response to international pressure**

For many years, the federal government stayed out of the investigations, alleging that it was a state issue. When the situation reached critical proportions in 2003 and national and international pressure started bearing down heavily, the PGR

took on a few of the cases, confirming the similar characteristics of the victims and the MO of the killers.

The civic organizations suggested various paths of investigation: that it might have been a serial killer, or related to drug trafficking, or domestic violence, or even a US citizen who crossed the border, committed the crimes and returned to his country. The director of the National Women's Institute leaned toward the hypothesis that while some of the murders were the result of organized crime, the majority were victims of the country's general atmosphere of violence.

The Women's Institute of the state of Chihuahua, citing a journalistic audit, tried to minimize the problem by determining that only slightly more than a quarter of the murders were sexual crimes while the rest could be defined as personal crimes, robbery, drug trafficking and other causes. It had to admit that the investigations had been poorly coordinated, however, which called the judicial system's credibility into question.

The federal government announced a comprehensive public security plan for Ciudad Juárez and created an Inter-sectoral Sub-commission, open to collaboration with the US Federal Bureau of Investigation. The Federal Preventive Police also showed up in Ciudad Juárez. Meanwhile, the Secretary of Government declared that, while he did not agree with everything in the Amnesty International report, he would take up its recommendations. President Fox acknowledged that the problem was worrying and infuriating and admitted that much remained to be done to create a country free of human rights violations. At the end of 2003, the federal government presented a 40-point program and appointed María Guadalupe Morfín Otero, a prestigious human rights fighter, to head a new Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence Against Women in Ciudad Juárez. Following legislative pressure, the PGR also assigned a special prosecuting attorney to these crimes.

### **A commissioner with no power makes waves**

Morfín Otero's commission has no executive power; it is limited to coordination and liaison functions, including direct dialogue with the victims' families and with federal authorities. It is more like a Truth Commission than anything else. Among its civil advisers are prominent public figures such as writer Elena Ponatiowska.

In June of this year, Commissioner Morfín Otero presented her first report, which argued that it was not the city that was killing and attacking, but rather concrete individuals and groups whose names society is still waiting to learn. Ciudad Juárez has been harmed, she pointed out, because for over a decade it has borne the stigma of being the stage for cruel murders and disappearances of women.

Those directly responsible, their accomplices and those who turned a blind eye must assume this stigma, together with those who through fear or silent

discrimination contributed to the vacuum of information that has been fatal for hundreds of women. Due to impunity, crime has taken over the city. Many mothers doubt whether the bodies released to them really belong to their daughters, since proper identification examinations have not been conducted. The pain is ongoing and insuperable. Much of the evidence that could lead to the guilty parties has already been erased or irrecoverably damaged.

The commissioner also referred to the collapse of law, the role of the reigning economic model in the city's dire situation and the irresponsibility and corruption of the governors of both parties that ran Chihuahua during the previous decade. She pledged to promote a reform with the local congress that would protect the rights of women and children and improve the social, family and work environment for women. She specified that her work—to listen to those who have been ignored—has barely begun and that she wants to fill her institutional coordinating role so their voices will be heard. She added that she would reopen the cases that the government had already dispensed with.

As to be expected in an environment such as this, the commissioner, too, has had to suffer the hostility of the PRI government in Chihuahua. But at the same time, she is winning over the activists who finally recognize in her words the same language they have been using for years. The special prosecuting attorney assigned to investigate the cases also presented a report on its progress in mid-2004. She verified that procuring justice in Chihuahua is “a disaster” and reported on the first review of 50 files, which detected sloppily investigated or uninvestigated crimes. The attorney analyzed the probable responsibility of 81 members of the Chihuahua Defense Attorney’s Office, and noted that 51 of them were still in their posts.

### **Mounting mobilizationto identify the killers**

Mexican society has followed this tragedy closely, indignant at such insulting measures as those suggested by Chihuahua’s deputy defense attorney, who recommended that a kind of curfew be applied to the community. Or at the campaigns of some media, which suggested that women dress decently to avoid being raped and murdered. But just as the killers have not stopped their actions despite commissions, sub-commissions, forums, party speeches and special attorneys, the victims’ relatives and the civil society organizations have not stopped their mobilizations in which they shout from the depth of their souls, ‘Who kidnapped them and killed them? And who is protecting the killers?’ Marches have been held in Ciudad Juárez and in Mexico City with red carnations and photographs of the missing and murdered women. There have also been camp-ins in front of the Secretariat of Government, the PGR and the Vatican’s Apostolic Nunciature. The slogan heard most frequently is “No more deaths!” Denunciations of the continuing feminicide have also grown, not only in Juárez but also in Chihuahua’s capital and many

other cities, and people have noted that stealing a cow carries a stiffer sentence than sexual crimes in many states. The relatives of the women want justice, an end to impunity, punishment for negligent and corrupt government officials and government funds to pay for the funerals of the dead. The civil society organizations, arguing that these crimes are not only a national but a worldwide embarrassment, insist that international treaties be respected and that the three branches of the state fulfill their obligations by not letting these crimes run out the clock on the statute of limitations. Like Commissioner Morfín Otero, they also criticize the economic model based on the *maquilas*, which view their workers as easily replaceable trash.

### **The mothers will not be silenced**

Women legislators and both Mexican and Hollywood actresses, some of them stars, participated in a march in Ciudad Juárez in February 2004. Commissioner Morfín Otero defended the presence of such foreign activists as Jane Fonda against the charge that this violated national sovereignty. She argued that it is a fundamental right of peoples to receive and express solidarity with people whose human rights are being violated, and reminded critics that the victims' mothers and the civic organizations had been obliged to turn to the international sphere to get any results. A month later, CNDH announced the creation in Ciudad Juárez of Mexico's first tribunal of conscience on violations of women's human rights to charge officials who had not applied the law during a decade of impunity.

President Fox has declared several times this year that all possible causes for these crimes are being looked into: external social causes, procedural errors, negligence, complicity or any other action outside the law in the investigations. He has pledged that those responsible for illegal conduct in the investigations will be tried and punished and that those responsible for the crimes will be brought to justice. The civil organizations responded by demanding tangible results and stressed structural factors such as unemployment, violence and the limited capability of the political class, which have provoked public disillusionment with governors, legislators and political parties in general. They also requested public recognition of the dignity of the victims and survivors and compensation for their families. The mothers of the murdered women insist that they will not be silent until their daughters' killers have been found.

### **Bringing the issue to the public eye**

Several theater groups have put different versions of these painful events on stage and a Chicana filmmaker made a magnificent documentary titled Señorita extraviada ("Missing Woman"). In July 2004, a TV series titled Tan infinito como el desierto ("As Infinite as the Desert") dealt with five lines of investigation: drug trafficking, human sacrifices, perverse videos, psychopaths and copycats. It was broadcast at prime time on one of the channels with the most powerful signal.

The director of the magazine Metapolítica dedicated an entire special issue to discussing the horror of the deaths in Juárez.

All such dissemination of these outrageous crimes has sparked strong reactions against those who want the scandal swept under the rug. But that has not cowed those committing or defending such activities; in fact, Metapolítica's director received death threats following the publication of the special issue.

### **Data on the terror**

Human rights defenders have demanded that public resources be earmarked for seeking the missing women and that a DNA databank be created to identify the bodies. Meanwhile, existing statistics are shaky due to all the sloppy—or perhaps sometimes intentionally destructive—investigations combined with the fact that some bodies were not found for years. According to several independent investigations, the ages of the murder victims range between 11 and 28, with a quarter of them under 18. There is information on 370 women, but some are convinced that the figure could reach 400. There are indications of sexual violence in 137 of the cases.

There are also discrepancies and ambiguities in the data. For example, the commissioner's report in June mentioned 4,587 women reported missing in Ciudad Juárez since attention began to focus on the murders, with 133 of the cases still unresolved, while the figure the special prosecutor announced in July was 4,454 with all but 35 accounted for. The latter did, however, confirm that factors such as drug trafficking, prostitution, organized crime, traffic in undocumented people and domestic violence were involved in a number of the cases.

### **Utter scorn toward women's integrity**

Commissioner Morfín Otero emphatically insists that this is an issue of feminicide, by which she means murders motivated by gender, crimes triggered by hatred of women, and explains that they have been perpetrated by family members and acquaintances as much as by strangers. She underscores that the extreme cruelty employed shows utter scorn toward women's integrity. She also distinguishes two official discourses: one that accepts the magnitude of the problem and another that still wants to minimize its importance.

It has become difficult to govern Ciudad Juárez, since the police department abdicated its role in the fight against organized crime years ago. The city's inhabitants have lost their right to live a life free of violence. One of the most powerful drug cartels in the country has flourished in Ciudad Juárez for a couple of decades. The commissioner stresses that the ease with which the cartel operates depends on the complicity of the very public servants responsible for eradicating it, thus giving birth to an extralegal power that moved into federal and local entities and is inseparable from the violence against women.

The treatment of women has been one of the explanations behind the disappearances, but the commissioner also points to the lack of controls on questionable businesses and labor practices as additional factors. Many of the murdered women had no other options but to work in the maquiladoras or seedy bars. In addition, women who work in the houses of prostitution fear crimes within their walls, since members of the police protect these illegal businesses. The lack of any migration policy between Mexico and the United States has encouraged an additional arena of illegality that facilitates trafficking in arms, narcotics and people, above all children and women.

### **Collapse of the rule of law**

According to the commissioner, the Mexican state has failed in one of its fundamental obligations: to protect lives. It has also failed to comply with the four components of the law of justice: investigate and sanction those responsible; compensate for the damage; adopt measures that ensure that the phenomenon will not be repeated; and guarantee the right to know the truth. The conclusion is categorical: the rule of law has collapsed in Ciudad Juárez.

Despite the actions undertaken by Fox's government since late 2003, order has not been reestablished. It's not enough for the state to recognize the problem; it has to remedy it right down to its roots. The commissioner says that even if not all the criminals' names are yet known, those of the authorities who should have acted and did not do so with the necessary diligence are known. Her declarations have been courageous, denouncing the climate of harassment of families and defenders as a condemnable outrage against citizens' rights, and stressing the unjust culture prevailing in Mexico that particularly devalues women. Social and sexual discrimination are both evident at the root of the crimes. And we already know that disparagement and domination spark violence. While national and international solidarity have helped make this tragedy visible, Mexico is being held up as a truly paradigmatic case as the affronts against women continue.

### **Urgent tasks for an integral solution**

So far the results have been woefully insufficient. The commissioner argues that the problem has to be dealt with from a comprehensive, multidisciplinary perspective and the civil society organizations agree that Ciudad Juárez urgently needs exceptional public and programmatic treatment. In addition to presenting a detailed assessment for rehabilitating the social environment, the commissioner has proposed an ambitious but realizable plan of action, many of whose tasks cannot be put off: decided and extraordinary federal intervention; effective bilateral collaboration and respect for international law, in particular the conventions against violence and discrimination against women.

Another priority must be to review the economic model that has relied on hiring

a predominately low-paid female labor force in the *maquilas* and analyze possible solutions. The base of illegality prevailing in Ciudad Juárez must be dismantled. Other actions should be aimed at the public: providing training opportunities to women, educating people on prevention of domestic violence, offering support and advice to migrant women, educating and building awareness among public servants on human rights and a gender perspective. A special support program must be created in the areas of health, housing and education for the children of the murdered and disappeared women. Public policies must also be promoted to eradicate all media messages that feed or justify discrimination and violence against women. It is indispensable to create cultural spaces that foster social identity in young people, and the fight against addictions is a similar priority. The police need to be cleaned out, since they have turned into mafias due to the impunity they enjoy. Protection must be provided to those women who have denounced the involvement of a former state defense attorney official in a sexual exploitation network. And effective access to comprehensive justice has to be given to the victims, while also granting them the dignity they deserve.

In short, one set of actions has to do with full reparations for the damage, directly geared to the victims' family, based on an analysis of each file, while another package of solutions revolves around establishing public policies that are based on a gender perspective. The commissioner has proposed that the Mexican state make a special pact with women, guaranteeing them their rights, and all three branches of the state must fulfill their obligations in all these spheres.

### **Disentangle the complicities and modify the economic model**

One of the most arduous tasks is to clean out the knotted mass of complicities. Many of those entrusted with the mission of protecting people are some of the principal aggressors within the enemy band.

This evil has not been exorcised by electoral changes in government. Parties come and go in office yet the nexuses of authorities, police and organized crime remain intact. The only genuine solution will require prompt, efficient and intelligent disentangling of the knots in the police corps and the justice system with a very fine-toothed comb, right down to their roots. And it won't be enough to throw the bad elements out onto the street, since they will simply relocate into the criminal side of the equation, taking a lot of information and connections with them. There will have to be precise knowledge and enough controls to guarantee that the state can fulfill its principal obligation, that of security.

While the economic model has to be modified, this, too, is a big problem. In innumerable forums, President Fox has reiterated his conviction that the current model is right for Mexico. But neoliberalism devalues knowledge and work, intensifies inequalities and becomes an unstoppable producer of poverty. If this

model persists, the economic and social proposals put forward to halt the violence in Ciudad Juárez won't be a guide for action, but simply one more catalogue of good intentions. Juárez's killings have revealed the capacity for terror contained within the neoliberal model. The comprehensive plan is realizable, but it presupposes a thoroughgoing change in the social relations fed by

neoliberalism.

The problem is mammoth and dealing with it requires a widespread and convergent effort. The struggle against the patriarchal society's culture and practices is an enterprise that concerns not only women. It needs the decided participation of men as well. Equally indispensable is a national policy that includes men and women and goes to the roots of what has generated the feminicide.

Many theoreticians have argued that the women's movement in the 21st century will profoundly change the planet. Men and women have been given and must accept the challenge to transform the existing relations of power, stamping out violence against women in both the domestic sphere and the public arenas. The women of Ciudad Juárez, of all of Mexico, of the whole world, have no obligation to continue living in fear. They have a right to life.

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### The President and the EZLN Issue Their Reports

*The Zapatistas are again providing astonishing light in the midst of the political class' interminable in-fighting. They continue consolidating their alternative anti-system position, breaking all the rules of the grammar of resignation, offering lessons to Mexico and the world as they themselves continue to learn.*

Jorge Alonso

owards the end of the summer, two reports showed Mexicans two different ways to address the country's basic problems and two radically different projects for the nation. President Vicente Fox's annual State of the Union report revealed that the change in government brought about by his election in 2000 was merely formal, a change in groups at the service of the powerful but not a change that would respond to the needs and demands of the majority. In contrast, the Zapatista National Liberation Army's report on the first

anniversary of the Zapatista Good Government Committees showed us how to reach agreements, create shared well-being and design an alternative national project.

All-out political war  
Although things can always go from bad to worse, there is a general sense in the country that the political situation has already become unbearable. The discredited political parties have been waging all-out war over the still-distant presidential elections, aggravating the dirty wars within, among and outside their party structures. Presidential aspirations have exacerbated divisions and resentments within the parties, while the elections are being decided by money and the media—the powers that rule this country, aren't accountable to anyone and have no real counterweights. The vast majority of people are fed up with the inefficient, merely formal democracy that fails to respond to the lack of jobs and increasing poverty and inequality afflicting them.

The unnecessarily early start of the election campaign is polarizing the country. Everyone in the political world is talking about the need for dialogue and agreements, but no one is doing anything to bring them about. The executive and judicial branches are twisting the law to try to get Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Mexico City's Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) mayor and one of the strongest presidential contenders, removed from office and thus from the race. He has declared that he committed no crime, will not sit by and quietly accept an unjust condemnation, will not barter over principles and will put his fate in the hands of the people, who massively support him. He has urged that political differences be decided at the ballot box for the good of the country.

Most recently, the legislative branch has been brought into the campaign against López Obrador, in a rightwing alliance of convenience between the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the National Action Party (PAN) that is using its own legalistic maneuvers not only against him but also to strike a blow against workers' rights.

A weak President and a mediocre political class

The President must report to Congress once a year. When the PRI ran all branches of government, this was the President's day, and the other powers showed their submission to him. The presidency's authority has been considerably eroded since the change in government, but the political parties have not yet been able to reach the agreements necessary to reform the state so it can work effectively in a multi-party fashion.

The President's report, presented on September 1, revealed the serious national political crisis through both symbols and substance. In the days leading up to his presentation, large demonstrations were held all around the country, especially in Mexico City, demanding that López Obrador not be removed from office and protesting the government's economic policies and the attacks on workers' rights. The day of the report, the police set up an iron barrier preventing demonstrators from getting close to the Legislative Palace, to ensure that the President and congressional representatives would not be bothered on their way there.

This did not guarantee that President Fox could calmly read his report, however. The legislators repeatedly interrupted Fox's reading of a text that began by invoking democratic principles alien to his practice then manipulated various disconnected statistics to demonstrate purported achievements. Rather than informing, the report disinforming. Just one example: without mentioning the conflict in Chiapas, Fox announced a budget of nearly \$2 billion for indigenous peoples but said nothing about how the money would be spent. The President appeared tired and weak, distanced from the people, with a mediocre political class. With no power to formulate viable proposals, Fox only ventured to call for "a truce." That day it seemed that the political crisis could get no worse.

#### **Several levels to the fight**

Other voices reiterated the call for dialogue, but days and weeks have passed with no sign of the necessary actions. The political battles go on and people grow ever more weary of the confrontation.

There are several levels to the fight. The most visible is the one involving the many groups vying to win the presidential office in 2006. A deeper level is the fight over different visions and projects for the nation. In his unfortunate report and even more so in his 2005 budget, Fox demonstrated that he remains tied to neoliberal dogmas and recipes despite their global failures. He reaffirmed his loyalty to the powers of wealth that put him in the presidency, those he wants to repay through further privatizations. He stubbornly persists in trying to increase government revenues by squeezing the poor even harder while privileging the very rich. Nevertheless, disenchantment with his government is so widespread that even the rich on behalf of whom he governs have sharply criticized his presidency as inefficient and lacking in initiative.

#### **A different national project**

Meanwhile, grassroots demonstrations continue around the country, offering proposals for an alternative national project that would redirect development in an egalitarian way and decrease the enormous social inequalities. Such a

project would involve many urgent measures, addressing everything from such small but vital issues as renegotiating the unjust, deceitful bleeding of bank depositors' resources to a thorough reform of the political system as part of a larger reform aimed at creating a strong, democratic state that encourages the exercise of civic, political and, above all, social rights.

In such a new state, the aspirations of the country's indigenous peoples would have to be taken into account. A sharp contrast to the President's report and the political crisis afflicting all branches of government was offered by the Zapatistas in their report, which demonstrated how they have been dignifying politics by creating a new kind of politics and building the nation and a national project from another perspective, from the bottom up. Before looking at this report, it is worth summing up what the Zapatistas have done in the past year, the dangers they have faced and the progress they've made in developing their autonomy.

### **Challenging the grammar of resignation**

The Zapatista movement has been emblematic in the fight against neoliberalism. It has no interest in acquiring the kind of power that now exists, but rather in helping shape a new kind power from below. The Zapatistas are busy designing the framework for a new national project and trying out new forms of organization, namely the *Caracoles* they established in August 2003. As Pablo González Casanova sees it, the *Caracoles* bring together the experiences of the Paris Commune, the indigenous communities in their 500 years of struggle and the new social networks. Other analysts have noted that the Zapatista movement is the only one that has succeeded in consolidating an anti-systemic position, creating new spaces for political action that are breaking all the rules of the grammar of resignation. For this very reason, it continues to be harassed by power, in both regular and irregular ways.

The Zapatistas have been working to develop their *Caracoles* over the past year, and after the first six months they put together an initial report on their experiences. In addition to dealing with some difficult conflicts, they saw that they had been learning to operate under existing conditions, testing the feasibility of organizing a government in such a way that local and regional authorities obey the people. For a year now, they have used their efforts not only to implement such mundane but vital tasks as improving roads, but also to increase understanding and find mechanisms for peaceful coexistence among people with different points of view, and they have done so with authentic solidarity, generosity and dignity.

### **Caciques of all colors**

The obstacles Zapatistas have faced come not only from traditional PRI and

now PAN adversaries in the federal government, but also from local PRD representatives. In April, a peaceful march of 4,000 Zapatista supporters demanding that they not be denied their right to water was violently attacked by a group of people who had switched allegiances from the PRI to the PRD, resulting in several people wounded or displaced from their homes.

The attack was an effort by local powers to halt the advance of autonomy and the progress made by the Good Government Committees. In a report to national and international civil society, Oventic's Good Government Committee released the results of its investigations into the case, accusing the PRD of joining the war waged by "bad government" against the indigenous Zapatista people. They belied claims by the local PRD that the problem was social rather than political, noting that it was triggered "by people who see politics as a business and are ready to commit crimes to win."

The Committees, they said, do not operate to earn money or do business by violating human rights, but rather try to solve any problems that arise between Zapatistas and non-Zapatistas, and between autonomous and governmental municipalities through dialogue. In this specific case, they had sought a civil, peaceful solution to resolve differences of opinion over payment for government services. When this failed, the Zapatistas held a peaceful demonstration and were attacked.

The Good Government Committee said that the war being waged against them by bad governments has been intensifying, as local caciques, municipal leaders and paramilitary forces continue to attack the communities in resistance and their autonomous authorities.

During the attack, water tanks were destroyed in the Zapatista communities involved in the dispute, and several houses and stores were sacked. The Good Government Committee took steps to ensure the safe return of those displaced by the conflict. Two weeks after the attack, people returned under civil and state protection, accompanied by Zapatistas from other towns who had come to escort their brothers and sisters back to their communities. Camps of national and international volunteers were set up nearby to help people reinstall water and electricity services.

#### **Failures and achievements**

The international campaign against the repudiated 2001 constitutional reforms on indigenous issues has won victories and suffered defeats. Among the latter was the Inter-American Human Rights Commission's rejection of an indigenous petition against the reform. Among the victories, the Tripartite Committee of the International Labor Organization ruled that Mexico has violated Convention 169 on indigenous peoples, and recommended that the ILO

undertake comprehensive, long-term monitoring of the Mexican government's behavior with respect to compliance with this convention, and conduct a thoroughgoing study of the constitutional reforms' compatibility with the convention.

The Tripartite Committee also proposed that the ILO encourage the Mexican government to make additional, ongoing efforts to overcome the feeling of exclusion created among indigenous peoples by the constitutional reforms. Magdalena Gómez, an indigenous rights lawyer, said it would be appropriate for the ILO to set up on-site missions in autonomous communities so they could see the difference for themselves between receiving official reports that praise cosmetic achievements and directly observing precisely how the governments apply Convention 169.

Another important victory was the recommendation of the United Nation's special relateur for indigenous peoples that the Mexican state respect the *Caracoles* and Good Government Committees.

**Autonomy  
other indigenous peoples** inspires

In May, the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee-EZLN General Command, issued a statement they "never wanted to write." Amado Avendaño, a committed social activist who had supported the Zapatista cause from his political and journalistic trenches, had died in April. Subcomandante Marcos wrote an original, sad but hopeful obituary, showing once again that Zapatistas remember and appreciate solidarity.

In August, Oaxaca hosted the First National Autonomy Conference. In addition to indigenous people from that state, others came from Michoacán, Guerrero, Veracruz and Chiapas. The Zapatistas, still under siege from the government, could not attend, but the conference demonstrated that the Zapatista example has taken root and inspired actions in other indigenous communities. The participants shared experiences and plans to consolidate their autonomy. The conference provided a forum where indigenous peoples could once again denounce acts of official repression. Indigenous lawyer Francisco López Bárcenas recommended that a list be kept of the government's aggressive acts against indigenous peoples so they won't be interpreted as isolated events but rather as what they are: a preconceived plan to force submission, especially in regions where the rebellion has blossomed into an alternative life project that challenges authoritarian powers.

The participants in the meeting agreed that they are becoming increasingly skeptical of political parties and saw the decision made by several communities not to receive government charity as a positive step. They reaffirmed the value

of collaboration and of accountability by local governments in providing for the indispensable needs of those without. They insisted on the right to use their own languages and defended the cultivation of corn as their proven way to achieve food self-sufficiency. They addressed a variety of other topics as well, such as the relationship between autonomy and spirituality, the role of autonomy in the daily lives of women and young people, and a number of organizational issues.

The conference again demonstrated that indigenous peoples are working to defend their dignity and their right to decide for themselves how to live. And they are learning, identifying and correcting their mistakes along the way. This is how the inspiration of autonomy is having an impact.

**Zapatista** reports:

**Analysis, achievements, critiques**

At the beginning of August, Zapatistas, solidarity activists from Greece, guests from the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina and Ecuadorian indigenous people all came together to inaugurate a school in Chiapas. It was one of the first events celebrating the first anniversary of the Good Government Committees and the *Caracoles*. The Good Government Committees held other events that month to celebrate their anniversary, and then in September, each gave a detailed report on its first year of work—reports that are open and available to the communities and to anyone else who wants to examine them.

The communities have made progress in building autonomy and fulfilling the San Andrés Accords that the federal government refused to respect after having signed them. The *Caracoles* are proving that indigenous people are capable of governing themselves well, while the Good Government Committees have become important factors in achieving governability in indigenous regions. The reports noted that some Committees have suffered daily adversities because of the PRI and paramilitary aggression, which the federal government has amply rewarded. They also severely criticized the work of the ill-named Federal Dialogue and Reconciliation Commissioner in Chiapas, reporting that he has been doing ridiculous things with public funds, for example his failed attempt to recruit a force of peasant PAN supporters by handing out roofing materials and solar cells. The Zapatistas advised the government to redefine the Commissioner's work; instead of mandating him to seek dialogue with the Zapatistas, which he hasn't done in any case, it should officially assign him the job he has been doing: paying the bills of anti-Zapatistas.

**Learning to govern by obeying**

The reports discussed how the federal government tried to weaken them with

aid programs and counterinsurgency policies. But though the government kept up its assault, the Zapatistas governed in their territories. They have learned to walk on their own without government help, recovering traditions, culture and customs. In their celebrations and reports, the Zapatistas shared their joy and concerns with those who accompanied them on behalf of national and international civil society. Without trying to hide what they suffer from living in rebellion and resistance, bearing the blows of the country's bad governments, they listed their achievements proudly. After one year, the fruits of autonomy are visible in many ways: they have been building schools, installing electricity, making progress with alternative sanitation projects, successfully trying various forms of fair trade and demonstrating that rebellious people can conduct their own development independent of bad governments.

The Zapatistas said that while they know they still have a lot of hard work to do to meet the many remaining needs, they are happy with the progress they've made. The most important result is that they are learning to govern by obeying, to be accountable and to discover what is good and what isn't in the exercise of autonomous power.

Not without difficulty, the Good Government Committees are consolidating projects for the future. Determined to make the idea of peaceful co-existence a reality, they have been making progress because they know how to ask and listen, and while they don't have all the answers they are building by encouraging everyone to participate as they strive to bring about the free self-determination of indigenous peoples.

#### **Profound, ironic analysis of Mexico**

In late August, Subcomandante Marcos issued a series of statements titled "How to read a video," in which he reported on the achievements of the Good Government Committees and shared his lengthy interpretation of the country's current situation. He spoke of what the *Caracoles* had done by framing them in the context of an in-depth and ironic analysis of Mexico's political and economic situation.

Regarding the pending reforms in Congress, Marcos described the government's social policy as laughable, since government agencies have become mere charity institutions. The workers' conquests are being struck down through secret pacts accompanied by strident media campaigns. The national economy is a bad joke, nothing more than survival commerce for most people. The country's productive infrastructure is a mound of industrial waste. Transnational companies monopolize business, while foreign capital controls the banks, which live off financial speculation whose ups and downs respond to global rather than national variables. All of this translates into more precarious jobs, more under- and unemployment, higher prices and lower

salaries. Mexico imports what it could produce and produces for the global market rather than domestic consumption. Poverty is already penetrating the middle class and medium-sized businesses, while inequality is alarming and insulting. There are fewer and fewer rich Mexicans, but those remaining are richer than ever.

Marcos' penetrating, self-critical and inspiring report contrasted with President Fox's embarrassing and tragic inability even to understand the disastrous state of the country, much less point towards any solutions. Marcos began by making fun of the scandals sparked by the release of videos showing two PRD Federal District officials receiving stuffed money belts from accused embezzler Carlos Ahumada—whom Marcos described as a “corrupter of adults”—which they then slipped into plastic bags and briefcases. He criticized what they did, but put it in context: the difference between the left and right parties, he said, was that the right doesn't get filmed in such videos because it illegally moves far greater sums of money through cyberspace, a route that remains hidden to the public eye. Marcos recalled the PEMEX-gate scandal over the diversion of funds from the Mexican oil company, in which there was more than enough proof against the PRI but no video. He noted that there has been ample proof of the PRI's election frauds, but no one has ever been accused. “Corruption in government has legal protections,” he said. Going after the other rightwing party to be evenhanded, Marcos also recalled the PAN's diversion of public funds to support a group organized by President Fox's wife and a far-right organization called Pro Vida.

After noting that the beginning of the fight for the presidency had been moved up from 2006 to 2004 and was taking the country back to a period that should be past, Marcos pointed out another important change: “We've gone beyond the conviction that it's necessary to use the media to govern, and are now being governed by the media.” Politicians submit to the rules of the spectacles and agendas marked out by the media, and this tight relationship between politics and the media is deadly. Shipwrecked in the neoliberal sea, the Mexican nation is sinking, while some resist and build “small islands” for a future Mexico that will be the country and nation of all.

### Three big mistakes

After his quick historical survey and biting, ironic analysis of the country's current situation, Marcos described one of these islands of resistance in the autonomy of the Zapatista communities.

He recognized that the *Caracoles* had made three big mistakes. The first, very regrettable one has to do with the place given to women. The second is the relation between the Zapatistas' political-military structure and the

autonomous governments. And the third has to do with the lack of courtesy shown to people who travel from afar to meet with the *Caracoles*. All three, he said, should be corrected.

Marcos talked at length about the serious problem of women's scant participation in community government and especially in the Autonomous Councils and Good Government Committees. While women made up 30-40% of the members of the Zapatistas' zonal Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committees, they averaged of only 1% in the other two entities. Marcos lamented that women are still not considered in nominations for community and municipal representatives and said it is unacceptable for the work of governing to be men's prerogative. He noted that women play a fundamental role in resistance, yet respect for their rights often continues to be found only on paper. Women's participation in activities that involve leaving their communities continues being circumscribed. To create a new culture, everyone must recognize that women, too, have capabilities and aptitudes that are supposedly exclusive to men.

Another serious problem that emerged in the first year of the *Caracoles* is the relationship between the Zapatistas' political-military structure and the autonomous civilian governments. The original plan was that the EZLN would accompany and support the communities in building their autonomy, but this accompaniment has often taken the form of leadership, and orders have taken the place of advice. Marcos talked about how the military organization's hierarchical structure is not that of the indigenous communities, and how the fact that the EZLN is a clandestine political-military organization has affected work that should be democratic. In some Committees and *Caracoles*, EZLN comandantes have made decisions that weren't theirs to make, and this has caused problems for those organizations.

#### **Only eight pesos a day**

The communiqués also noted other points that had caused problems but are not exactly mistakes. For example, some have criticized the constant rotation of Good Government Committee members. Marcos explained that this was not a mistake, but a consciously planned and very wise move. The communities chose to make the work of government something that does not belong exclusively to one group, so there would be no professional politicians and everyone would learn, because the more people who know what government involves, the harder it is to deceive them or commit acts of corruption.

Marcos explained that when autonomous authorities take their turn on the Committees, the communities or EZLN support their personal needs for food and housing. The average per-diem expense of a Committee member, excluding transport from their community to the *Caracol*, is 8 pesos, or around

\$0.75. Marcos compared this to the salaries of top government officials and legislators—which range from \$10,000 to \$20,000 a month, paid for by taxpayers—and concluded that there is no reason for government to cost so much.

The communiq s provided a detailed report and analytical sum-up of the first year of government by the *Caracoles* and Good Government Committees, while the five Committees themselves offered an itemized report of the resources they received and how they have been used.

In total, they received nearly \$1 million, of which they have so far spent around \$850,000. Marcos thanked the communities of Mexico and the rest of the world that have supported the Zapatistas and embraced the cause of building a world where there's room for many worlds. He reported that individuals and organizations from 43 countries had contacted the Good Government Committees in the past year,, coming to Chiapas with productive projects, donations, scientific interest and even justified curiosity. He acknowledged that the Committees have sometimes taken an inexplicably long time to respond and that this lack of courtesy should be rectified.

Is Mexico disintegrating?

#### Fallacies unmasked

Marcos referred to several fallacies about the Zapatistas. One used by some intellectuals, judges and legislators to oppose the San Andr s accords, the COCOPA bill and implementation of those agreements by Zapatista communities through the creation of the *Caracoles* and Good Government Committees is that autonomy would lead to the disintegration of the Mexican state and creation of a state within a state.

The Supreme Court of Justice, which distributes impunity to the powerful, argued that autonomy would lead to the fracturing and Balkanization of the Mexican state. Marcos suggested that perhaps the Court meant to refer to the problems caused by drug trafficking and the officials and judges involved in it. In fact, the Zapatistas have proven that they want to be a part of Mexico, while those in power insist that they can only be part of Mexico if they stop being who they are. A year after the establishment of the *Caracoles* and the Committees, the country is indeed disintegrating, said Marcos, not because of indigenous autonomy, but because of political battles and neoliberal policies. Marcos summed up the national disaster: the federal government has renounced its basic functions and is reeling from the blows struck by those from above while acting without consensus or even consulting those from below.

Another fallacy has to do with purported evidence periodically produced to

argue that the Zapatistas are preparing a new military offensive. On the contrary, the Zapatistas have proven that they have opted for the political route. Their autonomy only amounts to putting into practice what was agreed upon by the government and the EZLN in the accords signed in San Andrés in February 1996.

Predictions were confidently put forward that the *Caracoles* would fail. Not only have they not failed, they have significantly improved the indigenous communities' living conditions without showing any signs of separatist tendencies. All this has undermined the basis for the fallacies used to justify the rejection of COCOPA's bill.

#### Including and respecting everyone

Marcos insisted that those who want to govern well must do so for everyone, not only their sympathizers or members of their own organization. And he showed how, in the Zapatista conception, the fight for inclusion is not a fight to exclude the other. If the mestizo's existence should not imply the disappearance of indigenous peoples, recognition of the indigenous as they are does not imply negation of those who are not like them. The Good Government Committees are proof that the Zapatistas do not seek to achieve the hegemony of their ideas or to shape the world in which we live according to their views alone.

Marcos reported in detail on how the Good Government Committees were created to attend to Zapatistas, non-Zapatistas and even anti-Zapatistas. They were established to mediate between the authorities and the citizens, and among the authorities at different levels and in different areas.

The Good Government Committees have open and respectful communication with many social organizations, a good number of official municipal governments with which the autonomous governments share territory, and even in some circumstances with the state government. They try to resolve problems through dialogue and exchange recommendations. Marcos emphasized that the Chiapas state government, knowing that the Zapatistas' critiques are aimed primarily at the federal rather than the local level, has chosen to try to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem, and has established a true communication channel with the Zapatista communities.

He listed numerous examples of how dialogue between the Zapatistas and the Chiapas government has led to solutions—cases of people kidnapped by organized opponents, the compensation agreement for those attacked in the water dispute, compensation of peasant farmers affected by the building of a road, a problem related to bicycle-taxis and several others. In each, they sought to avoid confrontations among indigenous people.

Marcos said “to respect is to acknowledge.” The Good Government Committees recognize the existence and jurisdiction of the state government and municipal officials, and in turn, most of those entities recognize the existence and jurisdiction of the Good Government Committees. The Committees also recognize the existence and legitimacy of other organizations. By respecting, they demand respect. This is the only way to reach agreements and fulfill them. An inclusive, negotiating Zapatista movement has nothing to do with the separatism and divisionism some have tried to attribute to it.

**When does Zapatista**

**justice go into action?**

Marcos emphasized that, although it took time, a year after the establishment of the Good Government Committees, non-Zapatista and even anti-Zapatista people and organizations know they can turn to these Committees with their problems because the Committees are bodies for dialogue and not sanctions, where their case will be evaluated and justice will be done. If someone seeks punishment, they go to a municipal or even an autonomous official, but if they want a solution through dialogue and agreement, they turn to a Good Government Committee.

This process is beginning to produce positive results in both the autonomous and official municipalities. When social problems arise among groups, communities or organizations, people are less likely to resort to the use of force or exchange of hostages. People are trying dialogue instead. If people previously believed that all aggressive acts were politically motivated, now they first investigate whether the motivations might have been sparked by something else. Often the problems turn out to be merely individual disputes.

The Committees have a communication channel with the state government through its Secretariat for Indigenous Peoples. When an act of aggression has been committed against Zapatistas and they have been unable to communicate with the aggressors to determine the cause of the conflict, the Committees ask the respective autonomous municipality to begin an investigation and send information to the state authorities as well. Until the situation has been cleared up, they do not issue denunciations or hold demonstrations. If the problem turns out to be a criminal rather than a political matter, they give the state government’s justice system a reasonable amount of time to do its job. Zapatista justice goes into action only if it fails to do so.

Marcos complained that the state government’s justice system has been slow and inefficient, even though it can act expeditiously when it comes to penalizing its political enemies.

The most important thing the Zapatistas have is their word, and they keep it, which is why they've gained so much moral authority. Because of the long and ongoing history of discrimination against indigenous peoples—in which even the name “indio” has been used as an insult—the Zapatistas have “waged a war against forgetting.” At the same time, however, Marcos presented a great deal of evidence to show that they want to reach agreements and live in good accord with those who are different.

### **The aims of good government**

In his statements, Marcos noted that the main aggressions suffered by the Zapatistas in the first year of the Good Government Committees have come from organizations and governments affiliated with the PRD. The difference is that now, when conflicts occur, the first thing they do is try to talk and learn the versions of those involved in an effort to solve the problems, and they have been able to resolve many conflicts this way. Marcos reported that conflicts among communities and organizations have been waning, that crime and impunity have decreased in the areas covered by the Committees and that the causes of crimes are being addressed. He insisted that a good government does not seek to grant impunity to those who sympathize with it or to penalize those with different ideas and proposals. And he argued that not only do the laws ruling the autonomous Zapatista municipalities not contradict the basic norms of justice in the state and federal legal systems, but they often complement them.

Marcos emphasized that the Zapatistas practice what they preach and invited people to visit to verify that. He boasted that the Zapatistas have not violated any individual rights in the exercise of their rights as indigenous peoples. He argued that collective rights—such as the right to use natural resources—do not conflict with individual rights, and in fact allow these rights to be extended to everyone, not only to a few. Among the benefits brought by the exercise of autonomy in Zapatista territories, he counted the decreasing number of individual human rights violations and improved living conditions.

The right to live freely, exercise freedom of religion and party affiliation, be presumed innocent until proven guilty, exercise reproductive freedom, demonstrate, dissent and be different are all respected. Instead of discussing these rights in legal terms, the Zapatistas have chosen to demonstrate through actions that recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples involves none of the dangers alleged by those in power.

### **On behalf of forests and emigrants**

Another achievement of the Good Government Committees has to do with forest conservation. Any inhabitant of a Zapatista area who cuts down a tree

must plant two in its place and take care of them. The Committees have also been

very careful to prohibit drug cultivation, trafficking and consumption. They have required vehicles passing through their territory to register so as to prevent trafficking in drugs, weapons, lumber and human beings. Marcos wrote at length about the problem of trafficking in undocumented people and the deceitful practices of the “coyotes,” presenting several examples of what the Zapatistas have done on behalf of Central American migrants who pass through their land, and against those who traffic in them.

He also reported on the actions of the *Caracoles* in the October 2003 municipal elections, starting with the fact that the Zapatistas don't believe that elections are a viable path for pursuing the interests of the people. Nevertheless, he also knows that some people still trust in the parties and believe in elections. The *Caracoles* worked to ensure that all ways of thinking were respected; they don't aim to make everyone a Zapatista by force. They let the state election board know that, just as they respect those who want to vote, the board should respect those who choose not to participate in elections.

### **Life has improved**

A wealth of figures, facts and evidence all lead to the conclusion that living conditions in the Zapatista communities are better than in the communities that have chosen to receive federal support. With well-earned pride, the Zapatistas never tire of inviting people who want to verify this to come and see for themselves. Marcos' statements provided information related to health, education, food, housing and land. He thanked civil society for the support that enables them to provide free medical care and medicine. The Committees have worked hard to conduct preventive medicine and hygiene campaigns and have ensured that a basic community health structure exists in each autonomous municipality.

In education, they have worked from the bottom up, building and equipping schools in all the communities. In each of the *Caracoles* they have established consumer and producer cooperatives and workshops, and have made progress in improving the land, housing and food situation.

### **Two reports, two countries**

President Fox's fourth State of the Union report tried to ignore the disintegration and serious national divisions promoted by an irresponsible political class in which the President plays a very active role. The divisions were made evident, however, through some highly symbolic facts, the most striking of which was that Fox had to read his report from behind the protection of an iron barrier separating him from the people. Fox fled self-criticism, made empty, groundless appeals and was incapable of offering proposals. He tried to

justify his neoliberal dogma under a questionable democratic guise.

From Chiapas, on the other hand, the Zapatistas evaluated both the situation in the country and their own experience of autonomy. They recognized mistakes and offered detailed information on their progress. Upholding their well-founded rejection of the federal government, they displayed openness to the state and municipal governments that have shown them respect, and in this way belied those who accuse them of fomenting separatism.

Coming out of a war, they have emphasized dialogue and democracy and shown that these are useful and viable ways to solve conflicts and attain peaceful coexistence. Facing marginalization, exclusion, poverty and above all, enormous inequality, they have made progress based on their own organizational efforts and the solidarity of civil society rather than through state policies. Instead of dividing, they integrate. They insist on maintaining their identity as peoples, demanding equality through respect for differences, along with their right to be recognized.

They have established and strengthened their own normative systems. They have made progress in designing and applying basic social policies. They understand autonomy as a specific way to exercise the right to self-determination within the national framework, and have spread the benefits of autonomy to other peoples from other states, who have also been developing it with success.

### **Mexico can escape this labyrinth**

Criticizing the formal state powers and their disruptive effect on national unity as well as the discredited but still pernicious neoliberal model, the Zapatistas have called for a re-founding of the nation with a new social pact, a profound and extensive reform of the state, an adequate Constitution, a renovated political class and a new way of doing politics. They have shown the need for a program of struggle built from below, based on a truly inclusive, consensual and democratic national agenda.

This requires abandoning the path imposed by the powers of money, the media and the politicians. The Zapatistas have proposed that if the forces from below succeed in promoting a new kind of politics and an alternative national project, Mexico can find its way out of the labyrinth, the trap that those who govern have imposed on it and in which the parties themselves are ensnared.

The Zapatistas' conviction is shared by broad sectors of society that are tired of what the traditional politicians, including Vicente Fox, have done to the country. With their new and honest practice, the Zapatistas are winning an

important cultural victory.

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## Disappointed with Electoral Democracy

*Only a strong, broad-based grassroots movement can reverse the country's political deterioration and people's disappointment with its current neoliberal model and electoral democracy. The first signs of such a movement are already emerging.*

Jorge Alonso

In July 2000, an electoral convergence finally succeeded in curtailing the monopoly of power held by Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) over the previous seven decades. Turnout was high, and people were ecstatic to think that authoritarianism and corruption had finally been eradicated.

### A lost opportunity

When the National Action Party (PAN) took office, people clamored for it to right a great number of wrongs. They expected sanctions against those responsible for the bank and business frauds that had been covered up through FOBAPROA and a lifting of the onerous debt the previous government had unjustly lain on taxpayers' backs to finance that huge bailout. They hoped the unions would finally break free of party control so free trade unionism could flourish. They hoped an inclusive economic model that could begin to close the gaping inequalities would replace the exclusive one that had impoverished and marginalized the majority of the Mexican people. They demanded respect for indigenous rights. And in the midst of this enthusiasm, a broad-based, pluralistic group set itself the task of building consensus around a much-needed and profound reform of the state. People hoped that the PRI's repudiated state party regime had ended forever.

For all these reasons, Vicente Fox's government began its term with a huge burst of democratic good will, but it quickly squandered it. Seeing the PRI disconcerted by the loss of presidential power, the new government could have worked to democratize the party system; instead, it encouraged the PRI, allowing it to recover. The PRI transferred its top-down, anti-democratic federal model to the state level, where its governors built fiefdoms of regional power, and the party kept a firm grip on the unions, blocking union democracy. The PAN did not reform the state. The parties concluded that furthering their own interests was more profitable than reaching agreements to respond to people's demands. As the traditional system based on a strong presidency grew weaker, the other branches assumed greater power—not in the healthy

balance required by democracy, but rather to benefit competing individual and party interests. With the entire state ignoring the San Andrés Accords, legislation was passed that betrayed the indigenous peoples. It gradually became clear as well that Fox's party had violated election laws and made many commitments to the de facto powers of money and the media in exchange for campaign support. The PAN used presidential power to promote anti-people and anti-national reforms. Despite Fox's initial rhetoric promising change, his economic policy followed his predecessor's.

**Obsessed with his rival,  
Fox restores the PRI**

In this climate, the PRI regained its strength under the leadership of its figures with the most anti-democratic pasts, not its potential reformers. Mistakenly hoping the PRI would side with him in making reforms being demanded by the World Bank, the IMF and big national and international capital, Fox put the country's few autonomous institutions, including the Federal Election Institute and the National Human Rights Commission, in the PRI's hands. Control over these two organizations is vital to the PRI's goal of regaining the presidency in 2006. The party's recovery is also favored by the disenchantment of the large segment of voters that has chosen to abstain from the next elections and the consolidation of the PRI's election machinery through an influx of unrecorded money and mechanisms that undermine the idea of a free vote.

In an early struggle over succession sparked by the President's office itself, the confrontation between the political parties has been growing increasingly rough. The Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), which could present itself as an alternative, is tied up in internal battles and its negligence on ethical issues made way for Fox's government to take advantage of video scandals showing PRD leaders receiving money from a corrupt businessman. Fox's obsession with protecting his own candidate while trying to undermine the success of the PRD's Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Mexico City's popular mayor and a prominent presidential candidate who is running strong in the polls, has led the President to manipulate the law and state institutions to disqualify him from the race. In short, Fox has slid out from under his post as President of all Mexicans to serve instead as manager of a dirty presidential campaign. Obstinate and obsessed by López Obrador's popularity, his desire to harm a political adversary has prevailed over the search for political paths to dialogue.

The result of all of this is that the PRI is pulling ahead of both the PAN and the PRD and laying claim to the inside lane. Fox might want to be remembered for turning the PRI out of the Presidential residence at Los Pinos, but he has since done everything possible to allow its return, with the events of the last few months of 2004 only reinforcing this trend. He will thus go down in history

instead as the man who restored the PRI. To top it all off, having been recognized as a business people's government, these same favored sons of his regime are now critical of Fox.

### **Optimism?**

Although Fox celebrated his fourth anniversary as President with a show of euphoria, assessments of his performance suggest that such optimism is far from warranted. According to the Global Corruption Barometer, a study by Transparency International presented in Paris in December 2004, Mexico ranks among the most corrupt countries in the world, as perceived by their own populations. The police and the political parties top the list of the country's most corrupt institutions, followed by the judicial system.

Fox promised 7% growth, but the economy was stagnant for his first three years. As consolation, Fox boasts that inflation is under control, but other indicators are also troubling: according to the OECD, academic achievement has fallen on Fox's watch. The promises of justice related to the dirty war that ran from 1968 through the 1970s have not been fulfilled. Rosario Ibarra, the prominent leader of Eureka, a group representing relatives of the victims of that dirty war, has charged that Fox negotiated with those responsible for the war to ensure that people at the top would not be implicated. Impunity continues to go unchallenged. Human Rights Watch declared that despite legislative and political efforts between 1991 and 2004 to fight torture in Mexico, the practice has not been eradicated but continues as a "symptom of a chronic problem." Paradigmatic cases of human rights violations include the women murdered in Ciudad Juárez and the young people tortured at the hands of Jalisco's PAN government.

### **Popularity falling**

The most striking characteristics of Fox's government are its inertia and lack of direction. People recognize that he has brought about greater freedom and access to information, but believe the state is hostage to big economic interests. One newspaper survey revealed that 7 out of 10 citizens have lost interest in politics. Among the military, some 44% feel that not much has changed since Fox took office.

According to a survey carried out by Consultura Mitofsky on the fourth anniversary of Fox's inauguration, the most strongly felt problem continues to be the economic crisis (24.9%), followed by unemployment (20%), crime (17.5%), poverty (12.2%) and corruption (9.9%). The President's approval rating has fallen: he began his term with 70% approval in February 2001, but it had dropped to 55.3% by November 2004. At the beginning of his term, 71.1% of Mexicans felt he was close to the people, but by the end of 2004 only 35.5% felt that way. At the beginning, 68.8% thought he had the leadership capacity

to run the country. By the end of 2004, only 20.7% did.

What remains of Fox's term in office will be marked by the parties' campaigns to select their next presidential candidates, by the campaign itself and by the invariably difficult "lame duck" period between the July 2006 elections and the inauguration of the new President the following December.

### **Who will be the next president?**

Consultura Mitofsky also did a nationwide survey to gauge the likely results of the presidential race. While 37.6% of those polled at the beginning of 2003 said they didn't identify with any political party, that figure had risen to 41.6% by the end of November 2004. The scandals and the all-out war among the parties have left people feeling increasingly fed up with politics. In response to the question of who people anticipated voting for in 2006, 30.2% said the PRI, 17.7% the PAN and 14.6% the PRD. Among those vying to be PRI's candidate, the leading aspirant is party president Roberto Madrazo. In the PAN, Government Secretary Santiago Creel currently holds the lead and in the PRD, it's Mexico City Mayor López Obrador. When asked not which party but rather which candidate they planned to vote for, the order of preference shifted, with only 26.4% listing PRI's Madrazo, 22.5% PAN's Creel, and 33.4% PRD's López Obrador. While López Obrador remains in the lead in virtually all surveys, his percentage in the Mitofsky poll is a 6.7-point drop after a year of bitter political fighting and a concerted, dirty campaign against him. In scenarios that do not include him, the winner is the PRI.

### **PRI: Preparing to return to power**

The political world is caught in the whirlpool of the premature presidential campaigns. Many of those in public office are using their posts to gain a political edge in the battle, while the other potential candidates in each party are demanding that these people give up their advantageous situations in the name of equity. In the PAN, when former Energy Secretary Felipe Calderón demanded that Creel fight for the nomination on equal footing, Fox replied that any members of his Cabinet who plan to run in the elections should leave their posts by mid-2005. In the PRD, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas is requiring that López Obrador resign as mayor.

In the PRI, the governors seeking nomination as well as the PRI's Senate chief are demanding that the president of their party resign that post to run. The PRI, which does not respect democratic norms in elections, is trying to reach agreement on minimal norms to ensure all its presidential hopefuls the same opportunities. They have agreed to avoid negative campaigning and to subject the sources and uses of resources to an audit. Another agreements is that Madrazo will step down from his post as party president in March 2005. PRI members know that their strength lies in unity and they are bending over

backward to avoid possible divisions once their candidate is nominated.

No current political moves are unrelated to the presidential race. The PRI has been adept at playing this game in Congress, where it forged an alliance with the PAN for a constitutional reform to transfer resources away from Mexico City's government, without considering the government's viewpoint or assessing its impact on the city's inhabitants. The two parties simply wanted to add a financial front to the media and legal attacks on López Obrador, even if taking significant resources away from the capital would be dangerously polarizing. They have gone beyond attacking the candidate to attack the city's inhabitants, but they don't care.

#### **Serious budget conflict**

When Fox sent his proposed 2005 budget to the House of Representatives, union leaders, peasant farmers and social organizations denounced the significant cuts in health and education and charged that it would amount to further problems for rural areas and more benefits for those who have always been privileged. The PRI then formed a bloc with the PRD to revise the budget.

It is only fair to acknowledge that this majority bloc has made positive changes in health and education, even while taking advantage of the opportunity to shift resources away from the government and into projects such as reservoirs and highways that could win them election points. The President responded with an angry media war against the opposition representatives. Replying in the same tone, they refused to make the changes the executive branch demanded. Fox then threatened to veto the bill, but could not, at which point he decided to publish the reformed budget as passed but appeal to the courts on constitutional grounds, giving the Supreme Court the last word.

In effect, the executive asked the judicial branch to decide who would be in charge of economic policy. The appeal meant that much of the education and culture budget as well as the budget for the roads and reservoirs would be held up. It also meant that Fox would be making the judicial branch both judge and party to the conflict, since it is among the institutions affected by Congress' budget cuts. Despite all this, Fox filed his appeal. The Supreme Court accepted it and ordered the freezing of 50 budget items totaling over US\$400 million, including a cultural center in Tijuana, a cultural forum in Monterrey, a library in Jalisco, 31 highway projects and 43 sports complexes.

On December 27, the House responded by presenting two of its own appeals to the Supreme Court. A mood of surly conflict now pervades relations among all branches of the state. Meanwhile, eight peasant farmer organizations announced demonstrations against the agriculture budget cuts. While remittances from migrants abroad are cushioning social unrest, the country's

economic policy and the lack of agreements that might benefit the majority are fueling social and political enmity.

#### **Media law reforms shelved**

Key new legislation reforming the law governing radio and television, which the legislative branch promised would be a democratic step forward, was shelved for 2005, even though one of the senators who sponsored the bill described the media in their present form as a threat to democracy and a serious danger to the 2006 presidential election. People have long been clamoring for reform of the television stations, among the most influential powers in the country. The Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center charged them with imposing the political agenda. But in response to the reform efforts, the owners of the two TV stations warned Fox that they would accept no cut in campaign spending—of which they receive the largest slice—and would consider any legislation as an attack on the freedom of expression.

The proposed legislation to govern radio and television, which various civic groups have been working on for the past two years, is designed to benefit society. One of its most important points establishes that, like land and water, the airwaves belong to all Mexicans. Thus radio and television activities should serve the public interest and contribute to the social benefit of all rather than just the economic benefit of a few. While the law doesn't affect the earnings of those granted licenses, it does guarantee citizens rights over and access to these media.

Another important point is to ensure more civic input and oversight through the National Radio and Television Council. To prevent the executive branch from granting or revoking licenses at its discretion, the bill proposes creating an autonomous authority over communication issues that will provide security to licensees as well as guaranteeing certainty, transparency and impartiality in the application of the law.

Basic aspects of the law include the right to respond—proposed as an inalienable civic right—and the prohibition of all kinds of censorship. The law establishes mechanisms to ensure transparency in issuing and revoking licenses, regulates commercial advertising, establishes special provisions for non-profit stations and defines the situation of state-owned media. It also includes provisions to stimulate Mexican cinema and productions that promote national identity and culture.

**Massive backing and self-interested resistance**

Writers, poets, musicians, politicians, academics, researchers, businesspeople, filmmakers, journalists, analysts, independent producers and union leaders

came out in support of the bill. In an ad published on December 12, they stressed the importance of encouraging greater competition by regulating the concentration of media ownership. While most frequencies are now in few hands, the law would prevent anyone from controlling more than 35% of the licenses in any given geographic region, which its backers note would put Mexico in line with minimum international democratic standards.

The day after that massive show of support for the bill, senators at the media's service prevented it from moving to the Senate floor for debate. In response, the bill's sponsors won a promise that the debate would take place in early 2005. Once again, it is clear that resistance to the law has to do in part with the 2006 presidential campaigns and the sizeable profits media owners can milk out of the scandals and dirty wars of unregulated political campaigning.

In case after case,  
**everything is politicized**

Everything that happens now is turned to someone's advantage in the all-out war of succession. One example was the televised lynching of two federal police officers at the Tláhuac delegation office in late 2004 by an angry crowd that mistook them for kidnappers. The event was politicized to become one more piece in the political battle. The President fired the head of security in the Federal District but not the federal-level security chief, because the latter was a friend and, perhaps even more importantly, because the former, Marcelo Ebrard, was a viable PRD candidate to succeed López Obrador as mayor. Putting the judicial system to political use yet again, the Attorney General's Office accused Ebrard of negligence and omission.

This is still more proof that although the President's powers have been trimmed back, he still has a great deal of room to maneuver. Fox has opted to use it to strike out at his opponents and benefit future candidates in his own party.

**The PRI still has impressive political capital**

In the conflicts between the PAN and the PRD, the winner is invariably the PRI, which still controls impressive political capital. It holds most gubernatorial offices, has a plurality in both the Senate and the House, controls most local legislatures, municipal governments and town councils, controls the major unions, exercises effective control over economic policy through the Bank of Mexico and Treasury Secretary—both headed by PRI members—and presides over and has the majority of votes in the Federal Election Institute. As if it this weren't enough, it enjoys the complicity of the major media. Moreover, the all-out war of succession that has put off many people who aren't directly involved in politics also benefits the PRI, since it has a solid bloc of voters and

the most efficient machinery for manipulating voters.

The fighting both within and among the parties with no regard for people's demands will only grow more intense in 2005. In several forums held on the issue of citizenship, participants have noted that people are disenchanted with the parties and fed up with political scandals. Unfortunately, such alienation, while utterly comprehensible, only reinforces the parties' behavior; as civic groups join in the disenchantment and inaction, it leaves the parties free to follow their own interests. Nothing is predetermined, however, and there is still a long way to go before the elections.

#### **Election reforms: A priority**

The civil society organization Alianza Cívica came to life again in 2004. Following the disheartening experience of seeing the Federal Election Institute fall under party control—particularly PRI control—after fighting so hard to prevent it, Alianza Cívica set itself the task of synthesizing the discussions of various groups from around the country to propose election reforms.

Among those proposed reforms is legislation that would regulate the internal procedures of political parties and establish mechanisms for their democratization, transparency and accountability. Another important proposal would require parties receiving too few votes to retain their legal status to return any public campaign financing they may have received.

Alianza Cívica proposed giving the Federal Election Institute more power to oversee parties, and making it solely responsible for contracting the media for political campaigns. Other proposals include reducing the campaign period and election calendar, and allowing independent candidates to run.

To avoid partisan bias in the Election Institute, Alianza Cívica proposes changing the mechanisms for electing the members of its General Council, which is currently done by the party's congressional representatives. Instead, Alianza Cívica proposes that the Supreme Court name a commission to take charge of issuing a public invitation and registering candidates, who would then make a public appearance. One of the requirements would be for the candidate not to have been an active party member for at least five years. Alianza Cívica also proposes that buying and coercing votes should be classified as crimes and considered reasons for nullifying an election, and that parties and candidates should be explicitly prohibited from giving gifts to the public during election campaigns.

#### **Why so little participation?**

Alianza Cívica has not focused only on electoral issues, but has also taken an interest in the larger set of issues related to civic participation. At the end of

2004, along with the Inter-American Network for Democracy, Partners of the Americas and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), it helped conduct the Mexican component of a study to establish a “civic participation index” in seven Latin American countries. The study found that 47.8% of those surveyed in Mexico believe people don’t participate because they don’t have time; 30.6% attribute it to a lack of interest or motivation, or to selfishness; 15.8% said it was due to lack of information; and 14.1% to a lack of trust. On the other hand, 42.5% felt that people who do participate do so for altruistic reasons.

Other organizations with medium- and long-range concerns that go beyond election issues also made their mark in 2004. In response to the immediate threat that Congress will approve Fox’s proposed labor bill, which would benefit businesses that are trying to make precarious employment without job security the norm and overturn the legal protections won by workers over the years, over 160 unions have united to oppose the legislation. Union and grassroots movements are also poised to step up actions against the electricity sector reform that Fox continues to promote. And the indigenous movement has continued to defend the autonomous municipalities it established.

An ambitious initiative to address enormous problems

A far-reaching grassroots initiative called the “National Dialogue for a National Project based on Freedom, Justice, and Democracy” began taking shape at the end of 2004. The aim of this ambitious initiative is nothing short of rescuing the nation and solving its huge problems by creating a strategic, comprehensive project. To do this, it must build a broad and powerful convergence, as inclusive as possible, among rural and urban workers; young people; migrants; small and medium industrial producers and other businesses; and the new social movements made up of environmentalists, human rights activists and people working for gender equity, respect for sexual diversity, the creation of “another world,” etc. What will bring all of these groups together is their determination to fight for an alternative to the neoliberal model.

If they are to make progress, these groups must identify the root causes of the social tensions of recent years and especially recent months. What are these tensions? It is increasingly hard to find a job. Small and medium businesses face sharp constraints related to credit, supply and the market, and many will go under. A large number of *maquilas* are packing their sewing machines and moving to other countries. Mexican emigration to the United States, which continues to grow at a dizzying pace, is becoming increasingly risky. The export of manufactured goods is clearly not a reliable source of economic growth. The internal market infrastructure is becoming de-linked and national businesses

are being bankrupted by transnational chains whose links often run from credit banks and wholesale supply centers down to distributors and retail stores.

**Official solution?**

#### **Even more privatization**

Without the least bit of scientific or technical evidence, the government maintains that the country needs “structural reforms” to resolve these pressing problems, by which it means selling off and otherwise denationalizing the country’s economic patrimony. PEMEX, the state oil company—which provides the country with more foreign exchange than any other enterprise—has been portrayed as inefficient to justify its privatization. It is being denationalized through multiple service contracts with US oil and gas companies. The government’s policy is effectively handing over the country’s energy supply and undermining national and social rights. There has also been an illegal increase of private investments in electricity generation.

The government has also been gradually privatizing the social security and pension system. The panorama in education is similarly distressing, as the government has cut resources for education at all levels and seems bent on asphyxiating technological and scientific research.

The neoliberal project is affecting the majority of Mexicans, from the poor to the middle class. Small and medium companies have already been affected, and now even big ones are threatened, as their owners are being pushed into retirement or forced to become subaltern units in the transnational mega-companies.

#### **Priorities in an alternative project**

None of this has taken place without resistance. Diverse groups of citizens, peasant farmers, workers, indigenous people, unions and various other social organizations, fronts and movements have emerged to challenge the neoliberal project.

These groups propose defending the Mexican people’s right to sovereignty and the full ownership, use and enjoyment of the country’s natural and energy resources, including oil, electricity, water, forests and land. They also propose defending the public, social sector of the economy, including food security and free education and health services. They propose defending the workers’ rights consecrated in the Constitution, including social security and individual and social guarantees, along with basic civil rights such as freedom of expression, the rights of indigenous peoples as recognized in the San Andrés Accords. And they support the de facto autonomy established by the Zapatistas in Chiapas. Other priorities include renegotiating the foreign debt to lift the enormous tax burden it imposes on the population,

and renegotiating, and where possible canceling, the government's debt to the banks, incurred to pay for the fraudulent bankruptcy of both businesses and banks.

These groups have decided to establish a “network of networks” to facilitate the sharing of information and analysis. They plan to organize educational programs based on the pedagogy of liberation, which encourages dialogue, mutual teaching-learning, and collective decision-making. They invoke the Zapatista spirit of “governing by obeying” and “learning to obey by governing.” One very important point they are adamant about is that their activities and initiatives not be used to help position anyone for the 2006 presidential elections.

### **Serious risks and possible scenarios**

There is a real risk that an authoritarian federal government will be restored in Mexico before we have succeeded in transforming the institutional structures that sustained the old regime.

Among the possible scenarios that cannot be ruled out are social unrest and even outbreaks of violence. Civic pressure is essential to ensure that the election campaigns remain within civilized channels. The parties don't respond to people's demands and challenges unless they are obliged to by the exertion of strong, organized pressure.

Two important currents of thought have appeared in the country, one focused on the need to recover the dignity and honesty of the electoral process, and another centered on a national project with perspectives and concerns that go far beyond merely party-related ones.

### **People have lost their enthusiasm for elections**

A kind of “post-democracy” is imposing itself, which is so full of privileges for a few that it is triggering strong public disenchantment with merely electoral and procedural democracy. While this is problematic in itself, the greater danger is that it opens the door to the potential emergence of anti-democratic forces. Recovering the enthusiasm of the vast majority of people to vote in elections appears to be an uphill battle, given how sorely they have been disappointed.

Assuming, then, that elections will not revive civic potential, the alternative solution is to build an educated, active citizenry that can challenge the powers running this country and propose a comprehensive, civic, political, and above all social democracy. To do this, we need to build a large grassroots movement with a well-defined program on civil, political, social and environmental rights. Only such a movement can reverse the country's political deterioration and

prevent a social catastrophe, and the first stirrings of one are already perceptible.

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## Marcela Lagarde: A Feminist Battles Feminicide

*A leading figure in Latin American feminism, Marcela Lagarde is now a member of Mexico's House of Representatives, where she presides over its special commission to follow up on investigations into the murder of women. Through her ideas and activism, she aims to leave a mark on public policies.*

Jorge Alonso

It is groups not individuals that carry out social struggles, and their success depends on the group's power. Nonetheless, figures arise who imprint certain characteristics on the struggle, so it is worth examining those leaders. I want to discuss the work of a feminist whose many merits include her determination to wage a battle against the murder of women in Mexico and the rest of Latin America. Her name is Marcela Lagarde, a woman already familiar to *envío*'s readers through her article, "We Women Want Power," which we published in March 2001.

Promoting equality  
from the legislature

Lagarde won her seat in Mexico's House of Representatives for the session that began in mid-2003 after agreeing to run as an independent candidate for the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD). As a feminist, she had sharply criticized the legislative branch as a misogynist, patriarchal institution where decisions are made in a top-down manner. She was well aware of the fact that women

who have obtained important positions in government or congress have typically done so by working within a party, and their leadership is conditioned by the tensions between the party's needs and those of their constituents.

Nonetheless, Lagarde felt that as a member of the House, she would be in a position to promote gender equity and a transformational vision inspired by a gender-based analysis. She decided to participate in the formulation of public policies, where she would have the opportunity to propose actions to ensure equal opportunities for women and demand that the government make a true commitment to women. More specifically, she set out to help clear up the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez and to promote transparency in the use of resources by the National Women's Institute.

First she joined the Equity and Gender Commission, where one of her first acts was to offer a motion that the National Action Party (PAN) authorities of the state of Baja California fulfill the recommendations of the National Human Rights Commission in the case of Paulina Ramírez, a girl who had been raped then forced by authorities to bear the child. In the House, she was elected to preside over the special commission that is following up on the investigations into murders of women and efforts to procure justice in these cases. Allies and opponents alike have widely praised her performance in this post.

### **Women's captivities**

In her youth, Lagarde was a member of the Communist Party. She was trained as an anthropologist and became active in feminist causes at a very young age. She taught for many years at the Mexican National Autonomous University, and has authored several books and over a hundred academic articles that have had important repercussions in feminist theory and practice. She coordinated the Cassandra workshops on feminist anthropology and has collaborated with feminist groups and networks of women's centers and institutes in Mexico, other parts of Latin America and Spain. She has served as an adviser to the United Nations on gender issues and also advises other international cooperation organizations as well as serving on the editorial board of Mexican and Spanish feminist journals.

Fifteen years ago, she published *Los cautiverios de las mujeres: madresposas, monjas, putas, presas y locas* (The Captivities of Women: Mother-Wives, Nuns, Whores, Prisoners, and Madwomen), a classic that has been reprinted several times to meet the huge demand. Lagarde constructed the category "captivity" to describe the cultural forms of women's oppression in patriarchal society. The various kinds of captivity produce suffering, conflicts, pain and contradictions. Some women, however, like Sisyphus in Albert Camus' reinterpretation of that story of endless suffering, find a false way out by imagining and even feeling that they are happy in their captivity.

Since women are diverse, they are subject to diverse kinds of captivity. Lagarde has reviewed the history of women from this perspective, emphasizing their relationship to power, and concludes that women are in an emergency situation and urgently need to take leadership all over the world. They need more power to ensure that their rights are recognized and respected. In this context, democracy consists among other things of establishing conditions to allow women to live as citizens.

#### **Feminism is not exclusive**

Lagarde has emphasized that the feminist paradigm is not exclusive, since it can be used to construct alternatives for men as well as for women. She maintains that history's solutions are not binary opposites and that eliminating the patriarchy does not imply creating a matriarchy, noting that anthropology has shown us the many ways in which women and men are the most sophisticated cultural creations, leading her to oppose racist, classist and sexist ethnocentrism.

Central to her thinking is the idea that social inequalities between men and women are not biologically determined, but rather socially constructed. There are men who have understood women's individual and collective experiences, and have committed themselves to help build a new, liberating and deeply democratic symbolic order.

#### **Sisterhood: A crucial concept**

Lagarde has looked at the issue of feminist acculturation from an anthropological analysis of the transmission of feminist conceptions, values, knowledge, practice and experiences under patriarchal hegemony. She notes that women are working from a delegitimatized and de-authorized minority position to build an alternative, reconstructive historical paradigm, but warns that processes are not linear and progressive and often involve steps back as well as forwards.

Another of her fundamental concerns is to emphasize the idea of "sorority" or "sisterhood" in response to the idea of "fraternity" or "brotherhood" that arose from the French Revolution. This notion refers to women's mutual recognition and unity in public action, a kind of meeting point among women, through which they can build an alternative together and support each other in order to transform each woman's life. Implicit within this concept is the modification of gender-based conditioning. When women achieve this sisterhood, this connection, they affirm their identity, but if they don't develop an awareness of gender, they can't develop a positive identity, which is the only way to overcome their lack of power and create spaces of solidarity.

### **Fear and empowerment**

Lagarde has looked deeply into women's fears: the fear of freedom, of making decisions, of being alone. She has shown how the fear of being alone in particular has been a huge obstacle to building autonomy. According to her theory, women will not gain autonomy without revolutionizing their way of thinking and the content of their thoughts. She proposes feminist keys to women's self-esteem, with gender awareness and identity at the top of the list.

Lagarde believes that each woman goes through a personal process in forming her feminist consciousness and identity and transmitting all this to society and its institutions. Among the keys to this identity is empowerment, essential to acquiring autonomy and power. Empowerment is an analytical category that proposes women's need for access to power—not established power, but the positive powers in women's lives. This empowerment makes it possible for women to deconstruct oppression and create alternatives, to develop resources, goods, skills, capacities and spaces in favor of their own lives. It is not a process that takes place outside of an individual, but rather one through which women internalize their own power. It is a way of being, living, thinking, acting and feeling.

For gender empowerment to take place individually, however, there must be collective, social gender empowerment. The goal is to ensure that individual, subjective appropriation accompanies this collective, social construction, which requires a set of capacities that allow women to deal with their specific situation, a kind of empowerment that allows them to escape the male-imposed captivity and create spaces for positive identification among themselves. To achieve this, they need greater awareness and practical knowledge. Lagarde has also called attention to the feminist keys for negotiation in love.

### **For women's leadership**

As an activist, Lagarde has worked to build a gender-based democracy where justice, respect and solidarity between men and women prevail. She has sought to make the equality proclaimed by law a reality. To achieve this, she encourages women to recast their gender identity in political terms. If we want to live in a social democracy, we must ensure that women's rights are recognized and respected, and women must legitimate their gender identity as something that justifies their participation in politics, then politicize this identity and promote leaders who assume women's causes. Women need to shape specific kinds of leadership. Lagarde has studied how such leadership originates, how it develops and how it overcomes obstacles. She has found that it's also necessary to heal generational relations, since adult women in a patriarchal society tend to exert authoritarian powers over younger women.

As an integral piece of her academic and activist work as a feminist, Lagarde decided to become a congressional representative for the Left. She's determined to show that laws aren't neutral and that discrimination against women lurks behind the application of the established legal framework. She has also denounced the discriminatory conditions in which women legislators work.

#### **Classifying the crime of femicide**

As president of the House special commission to follow up on investigations into the murder of women, Lagarde has demanded that those who have permitted the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez, whether through omission, negligence or collusion, should also be punished.

She hasn't limited herself to the crimes committed in that now highly publicized city, however, but has called for investigations into murders of women all over the country. She also demands that the orphans of the murdered women receive the care and attention they need.

As a legislator, one of her most important initiatives has been to promote passage of legislation to classify the crime of femicide, which she describes as a crime against the state that may occur in conditions of peace as well as war. She explains that the lack of a rule of law or fractures in it allow violence to proliferate and murders to go unpunished, favoring impunity.

Lagarde sets the kidnapping and disappearances of women and girls in a context of institutional collapse. She even speaks of genocide against women when the historical conditions foster social practices that allow continual attacks on their integrity, development, health, freedoms and lives by people they know as well as those they don't, by murderers acting alone or in groups, by occasional criminals as well as professionals. These crimes, whether serial or individual, share a common trait: their perpetrators treat women as objects to be used, abused and discarded.

#### **Hate crimes against women**

Lagarde defines femicide as hate crimes against women, misogynous crimes forged by the enormous social and state tolerance of gender violence.

These crimes are encouraged by impunity, by haphazard investigations and mishandled findings, by fraudulent or misogynist prosecutors who don't pay attention to the victims' charges and misogynist judges who see women's lives as secondary or are biased against the women, discrediting and blaming them. Silence, omission, negligence and the collusion of authorities responsible for preventing and eradicating these crimes all contribute in a criminal way to femicide.

Femicide happens when the state fails to ensure women's rights and create the necessary conditions to protect their safety in the community, at home, on the job, in transit, or at leisure. Femicide happens when the authorities do not efficiently carry out their work to prevent, avoid and sanction these crimes, which are fed by the ideological and social environment of machismo and misogyny.

#### Gender violence: A global priority

Lagarde argues that eradication of violence against women is now a high priority in women's political consciousness and on the democratic agenda of every country and the world as a whole. In her conception, gender violence—the violence women experience because they are women—includes sexist, misogynist, classist, agist, racist, ideological, religious, identity-based and political forms of violence.

This violence is nurtured in society and the state by patriarchal gender inequality, a lack of democracy and development, and because the lack of adequate public policies leaves institutions unable to respond. Gender violence aims to keep women at a disadvantage in the world, maintain inequalities and exclude women from access to goods, resources and opportunities. It devalues, denigrates and intimidates women, and reproduces patriarchal domination. Gender violence against women recreates a gender supremacy of men over women.

From a feminist perspective, Lagarde situates gender violence as a political problem not only for Mexico and the rest of Latin America, but for the world as a whole. She opposes misogynist concepts such as “crimes of passion” and calls for legally defining sexual violence such as rape, incest, harassment, conjugal and family violence, street violence, and all other forms of gender violence, whether work- or property-related, intellectual, symbolic, linguistic, economic, legal or political.

Lagarde has always acknowledged the women of many countries who have given life to feminist culture by denouncing gender oppression and creating a critical awareness of women's condition by highlighting gender discrimination, marginalization, exploitation and alienation. Rejecting beliefs about the inevitability of gender violence, she considers it an attack on women's human rights, one of the most serious social problems of our time, urgently in need of attention.

Women have made room for themselves

Looking back through history, Lagarde notes that women have been making room for themselves, creating opportunities and participating in the most diverse spheres of society, culture and politics. Based on her experience, she believes that women have breathed life into the task of building democracy, since by denouncing and fighting gender oppression they have helped create a critical consciousness.

Because of their work, condemning and fighting violence against women is now a priority in the political and democratic agenda of countries around the world. Research has made it possible to create a model in women's minds to differentiate among the various forms of violence, to eradicate misogynist concepts, and to legally define sexual violence.

#### **Legislative initiative against feminicide**

Lagarde notes that most countries have now included the murder, rape, forced disappearance and torture of women as criminal offenses in their penal codes. As a legislator, she insists that we cannot allow a violent death to be followed by a denial of justice.

She has proposed a bill to create a new article in Mexico's federal penal code on gender crimes in response to the spread of feminicide. She wants it classified as a continuous, ongoing crime, and argues that this classification will help eliminate the social silence and lack of concrete actions.

In her bill, "anyone who attacks the life, dignity or physical or mental integrity of a woman in a community or region where these crimes have been committed recurrently, regardless of the result of the action, will be punished with a sentence of 20-40 years, in addition to the sentence corresponding to the crime committed (homicide, forced disappearance, rape, kidnapping, mutilation, severe injury, human trafficking, torture, sexual abuse, forced prostitution, forced sterilization, or discrimination because of ethnic or racial origin, sexual preference or pregnancy)."

#### **Those nearest are often the ones responsible**

In a January 2005 interview, Lagarde emphasized that the murders of women will continue unless public policies are established to prevent violence. She charged that those governing the country are paying no attention to this grave problem and demanded that the federal government develop a comprehensive plan to prevent and respond to violence against women. She reiterated that this violence can be prevented and eradicated, but that doing so requires political will. She also noted that women suffer from domestic violence and especially conjugal violence in every part of the country. Partners, former

partners, husbands, lovers and boyfriends abuse women in the most terrible way, going as far as murder. Women are also hurt and murdered outside their homes. They are not secure anywhere. Without looking for violence, they are subjected to it; although nonviolent, they are murdered.

The problem is legal, economic, political and cultural. Women will live in precarious conditions as long as the inequality is so great between women and men. Women's inequality and exclusion is expressed in social deficiencies—health, education and jobs—and in unequal salaries and working conditions. As long as women are seen as being of less value in society, men will feel they have rights over them, including the right to abuse, insult, rape and even murder them.

#### **The solution: True peace**

Lagarde has not been content to wage this fight against feminicide in Mexico alone, but has sought to extend it throughout Latin America. At the end of 2004, both in a Socialist International meeting of women from the region and in the Guatemalan Congress, she proposed that if violence is the problem, the search for true peace is the solution. She charged that Latin American women are not included in the state through a democratic, egalitarian and equitable social pact.

The solution she has proposed for fighting feminicide is to build respect for women's human rights under social conditions of democracy, development and peace, pointing out that many organizations, global summits and conferences have recognized both a hidden and open war against women that must be stopped. She warns that the problem is enormous and very serious, and urges quick action. As an example, she mentions the proposal from Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi that the International Criminal Court address cases of gender violence against women.

#### **Women's rights to prevent violence**

In discussing the need to build peace for Latin American women, Lagarde has proposed that they wage a legislative battle to satisfy the demands of the women's movements in recent years: inclusion of women in the state's social and political pact in conditions of parity; reform of the state from the perspective of gender democracy; and transformation of the development model to ensure equity and well-being for women.

If the goal is to eradicate gender violence as the synthesis of all violence suffered by women, and if people are truly determined to eradicate feminicide in Latin America, justice and women's human rights must be prioritized in the political agenda of democracy. Lagarde has urged legislators to act responsibly in crafting bills and approving budgets to address the violence women suffer.

And she insists that in doing so, they should not follow the predatory neoliberal order, but one based on defending women's human right to life, personal integrity, development and its benefits, protection and security from the state, respectful treatment, full justice, a life without fear or violence, social peace, peace in daily life and democracy with equity—as a step towards full equality.

#### All institutions have a role

Lagarde has called on people to view the paradigmatic cases of feminicide as red flags signaling a relatively hidden but critical situation. She notes that the state fails not only where feminicide occurs, but also in many other ways. And she is convinced that a profound reform of the state institutions is required, because the current institutions—especially the justice and public safety systems—are no longer up to the task of dealing with new challenges.

Her proposed bill calls for guaranteeing timely, professional, reliable and efficient police intervention that is respectful of human rights; adequate investigation; due process; discovery of the truth; sanctions against those indirectly or directly responsible (including government officials) and fair reparation for damages.

Public safety must be ensured by professionals capable of preventing gender violence through educational reforms and citizen participation. All state institutions have a role to play in these objectives and should act in a coordinated, integrated way to put effective public policies into practice. Consultation with and participation of civil society and international organizations are essential.

#### Calling on women and men

Lagarde never tires of repeating that the fight for women's rights should be highly visible and remain on the political, legislative, and government agendas of all countries, and even more so those of international organizations. To achieve this, actions must be taken to encourage women's empowerment; otherwise, they will be unable to achieve development and democracy, which are essential to stop feminicide. She calls on women, as a gender, to act publicly and resoundingly to demand an end to violence, crime, impunity, the feminization of poverty and the negation of women's rights as citizens.

She believes that the struggle to eradicate feminicide and all forms of gender oppression coincides with the fight to extend human rights and opportunities for development to all women, do away with the fear women experience in their homes and public places, and achieve social peace, particularly for women. She is convinced that if we can do this, society will be radically transformed.

With her slogan, “For the life and liberty of women, an end to femicide,” and with the clarity and force of her arguments along with her tireless and determined activity, she has succeeded in expanding the contingent of women and men in Mexico and around the world who are fighting to end the shame of femicide.

A successful woman  
assaulted by the media

In yet another, very concrete example of the discrimination against women in Mexico, just as I was organizing the ideas that Marcela Lagarde had shared with me in writing so I could draft this article, the country witnessed a revealing and moving event.

A successful woman who had served as president of Mexico’s National Association of Manufacturers (CANACINTRA), where her leadership was widely recognized, agreed to run as the PRD candidate for governor of the state of Mexico, which virtually surrounds the Federal District. The PRI holds power there, and because of the large number of voters in the state, its election results are seen as a harbinger of the outcome of the presidential elections.

The media, controlled by groups adverse to the PRD, launched a dirty war against the candidate, and it soon came out that she had another name. Up until that time we had known her as Yeidckol Polevnsky Gurwitz, but journalists found records in which she appeared under the name Citlali Ibáñez. The media also “revealed” that she was the “illegitimate” granddaughter of the brother of former President Manuel Ávila Camacho, and whipped up a scandal with an avalanche of ignorant charges.

On March 2, Polevnsky was obliged to explain the situation and reveal her family history—one that highlights many aspects of the daily pain women experience and that Lagarde has analyzed. Polevnsky appeared at a press conference with her two children, her mother, her mother’s husband and her sisters. Her father, who had contributed to the accusations against her, was not there.

“There are thousands of cases like mine”

This was the story she told: “My parents divorced when my three sisters and I were young, between a year and six years old. The divorce was traumatic. One of the many differences between my parents was whether or not my mother belonged to the Ávila Camacho family. [Her mother was the illegitimate daughter of Maximino, the President’s brother.] When I was 12 I got pregnant. My pregnancy at that age was a traumatic event that marked my life and

affected my whole family."

"Because of my pregnancy, we had to leave the school we were attending and go from school to school until we found one willing to take us. Although I studied and behaved correctly, I was judged and condemned. Because of this, my mother decided to change my name to Yeidckol and also changed my last name. It was the act of a woman desperately trying to defend her daughters from the social stigma that followed us. She did it after trying everything she could to protect us."

"I've struggled to get ahead in life, and it hasn't been easy. I went from religious schools to secular schools, and starting at the age of 14, I had to work while I studied. Mexico has thousands of cases of family violence, violation of women's human rights, and the exclusion and stigmatization of women, their families and their children. We're condemned by summary judgments. Our families are destroyed and we carry this burden all our lives."

"My real name, my original name, Citlali, means 'star.' It's a beautiful name and I would have liked to keep it, but I couldn't. At the age of 12, 14 or 16, a girl can't overcome such adversity alone. At that time, society didn't understand a girl's suffering. Now, my name is Yeidckol. I want to live with this name because it's the symbol of someone who has overcome difficulties. Only those of us who have fallen know what it is to stand on our feet. I'm not ashamed of having suffered, and less so of having succeeded."

#### ***"I am feminism in the flesh"***

In response to questions from journalists, Polevnsky said: "I'm not going to talk about feminism. I'm feminism in the flesh. Who defends the thousands of women who suffer from domestic violence? Society has to become aware, so that those who experience so much suffering are not also stigmatized. Their stories are repeated day after day. Many, many women suffer such a tragedy then are left alone, the doors shut against them; they're insulted instead of being supported. In most cases, they're not guilty of anything."

"We have to raise awareness in society so that single mothers, girls who have to work when they are neither old enough nor educated enough to do so, families that are left out in the street with nothing, are not mocked or stigmatized, because that is very painful. I experienced it."

Polevnsky recalled that several days earlier, while visiting Nezahualcoyotl—one of the most densely populated and marginalized cities in the Federal District—a woman came up to her on the street. She asked for nothing, but simply told her: "I'm a woman of the street and I admire you very much." In recalling this

meeting, Polevnsky asked with tears in her eyes: “What opportunities has life given this woman? None. They took everything away from her and threw her out on the streets. They took all her opportunities away from her. Who’s defending her? Who even thinks about the harm this woman has endured? No one, because there’s no profit in it for either politicians or the media.”

The media refuses to pardon a woman who has been successful despite all odds but dares to stand for a leftist party, particularly in the crucial state of Mexico. They have tried to crush Polevnsky both politically and personally for being on the left, being successful—and being a woman. And she’s been able to defend herself. This is one example.

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### Andrés Manuel López Obrador: The Year Democracy Lived Dangerously

*President Fox’s obsession with knocking Mexico City Mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador, out of the upcoming presidential race went on for an entire year. Its near success threatened the very viability of Mexico’s democracy.*

Jorge Alonso

To tarnish the solid popularity consistently polled by Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) presidential aspirant Andrés Manuel López Obrador, currently Mayor of Mexico City, Mexico’s President Vicente Fox opted for an alliance between his National Action Party (PAN) and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which he unseated nearly five years ago in an historic upset. Various schemes were conceived and implemented over the past year from those pinnacles of economic and political power, in which the obvious endgame was to destroy his chances in next year’s presidential race. According to a leak to the press, Fox’s wife, Martha Sahagún, had commented that López Obrador would have to leave his post in early 2005. The media also found out about a meeting between President Fox and a wealthy business executive through which leading businesspeople sought to make clear to Fox that they did not want López Obrador to be a presidential candidate.

#### A calculated plan

The first scheme was the ultimately boring broadcast of videos in which some officials in López Obrador’s government appeared accepting money from a crooked businessman. When this didn’t have the desired result, the next play was to strip López Obrador of his parliamentary privileges for alleged contempt of judicial authority. The idea was that this would land him in a trial that would

ultimately disqualify him as a presidential candidate. In a press statement in early 2005, President Fox tried to convince the public that he would have no hand in the outcome, as it was a matter for the judicial branch, and was pained by the whole situation. Referring to a call he made to Supreme Court President Mariano Azuela in April 2004 to request a meeting to deal with the López Obrador issue, Fox called it the hardest decision he'd had to make that year.

#### A feeble pretext

What was the basis of the accusation of contempt? In November 2000, shortly before López Obrador took office, his predecessor had expropriated two segments of a piece of land called El Encino in order to extend an avenue to reach a hospital. Three days after the new governor was inaugurated, La Promotora Internacional Santa Fe filed a claim against the expropriation, arguing that it owned the terrain. At the outset, the federal judge assigned to the case did not grant the company's petition to suspend the roadwork, so it filed a complaint with a higher court. At that point, the judge in question granted the requested suspension so the capital's authorities would not block access to the land. Two months later, the company alleged that this provisional suspension had been violated. The judge ruled that the documents presented were insufficient, as they did not prove that the authorities were blocking or otherwise preventing access to the land.

The judicial process continued its course until the provisional suspension was ruled definitive in March 2001. Faced with that decision, the authorities were forced to cut a new stretch of road to provide vehicle access to the hospital, but in August of that year the company again accused the city government of violating the suspension. That same month, Secretary of Government José Agustín Ortiz Pinchetti presented a report showing that the judicial disposition had been honored, which was verified next day by the court clerk, who testified that access to the land had not been blocked.

Nonetheless, at the end of August a new judge declared that there were grounds for the charge. The secretary of government challenged that ruling, demonstrating that the municipal government authorities had issued no accord, order, resolution or official note, or executed or omitted any act involving defiance of the judicial suspension, stating that there was no reason to paralyze the opening of roads other than in the expropriated segments that served as access to El Encino. In early 2002, the seventh circuit court confirmed the judge's resolution and added an obligation that had not appeared at any earlier point: to respect the access not only of individuals but also of vehicles, and notified the Public Ministry of all this. The judge never went to the site to verify if the protection order had indeed been violated, but merely accepted

the supposed inspections conducted by court clerks as evidence.

#### A twisted intent

Finally, in October 2003, the Attorney General's Office subpoenaed for questioning several local government officials imputed by the company to have disobeyed the suspensions. All were asked the name of their immediate superior. While the obvious intent was to hold the head of city government responsible, none of the witnesses implicated López Obrador. Nonetheless, the Attorney General's Office decided to indict him, and only him.

The judicial proceeding was full of irregularities. The company first claimed 100,000 square meters but later presented a deed for only 86,000, while it appears in the Public Registry as possessing no more than 83,000. The PRD repeatedly charged that the owner of this land had in fact violated the law by appropriating national territory. The city government alleged that the stretch in question was not accredited as its property at all, but the judges paid no attention to this evidence. It became obvious that the company, evidently in alliance with President Fox, had gotten mixed up in the media-waged political struggle against López Obrador.

Given all the dicey issues in the case, the Attorney General's Office could have opted to throw the case out, as it had done in other similar cases. Although the President's Office repeatedly insisted that this was a strictly judicial affair, most people recognized it as a political issue and believed the executive branch was using the Attorney General's Office for partisan purposes.

#### Those who threw the first stone

The government engaged in a costly media campaign, paid for with taxpayer's money, to try to convince the population that it was a simple issue of respecting the law and that a minor crime—such as stealing a candy bar—undermines legality as much as a major one.

The principal instigators of these pseudo-legalistic maneuvers against López Obrador couldn't pass the candy-bar test of their own respect for the law. Both President Fox and his secretary of government had disobeyed it in the case of the "Friends of Fox" financing for their respective electoral campaigns in 2000. Other PAN members had blocked any sanctioning of the state petroleum company executives who illegally used company money for the PRI candidate's campaign that same year. And before Rafael Maceo de la Concha was appointed attorney general, he had been accused by numerous independent human rights organizations of failing to respect these rights and of having participated in the dirty war against PRI regime dissidents. Later, even PAN leaders had accused the Attorney General's Office of both defying the law and twisting it for its own purposes.

Then there was Deputy Attorney General Carlos Vega Memije, who painted López Obrador as a world-class crook for the El Encino case in his declarations; back when he was prosecuting attorney and secretary of government in the state of Guerrero, the PRD had accused him of illicit enrichment, influence peddling and repression. There was also PRI president Roberto Madrazo, another presidential hopeful, who had been accused of using ill-gotten money in his campaign for governor, and using it in excess to boot; he spent more than Clinton did on his presidential campaign. Madrazo saved himself from a well-founded accusation to strip him of his own privileges thanks only to the complicity of the PRI and the Green Party.

Continuing with the list, PRI legislator Manlio Fabio Beltrones, president of the House of Representatives, was accused in the United States of conniving with the drug cartels when he was governor of Sonora. And one of the loudest voices censuring López Obrador, PRI member Chuayffet, had been accused of being involved in the massacre of indigenous people in Acteal. For good measure, the PRI-PAN alliance had been responsible for one of the greatest holdups against the Mexican people: the approval of FOBAPROA, the institution created for the bank bailout operation that enriched fraudulent bankers and left the population indebted for generations to come. All of these fine upstanding people, including the Supreme Court president, who was also linked to the old political system, presented themselves as the champions of legality in an effort to bring about López Obrador's downfall.

#### **Many warning voices**

The concrete accusation against López Obrador was not having respected a suspension, for which the judge asked that he be stripped of his parliamentary immunity and the attorney general officially requested the House of Representatives to open a procedural trial to do just that. Juventino Castro y Castro, a prestigious retired Supreme Court justice, argued that the House was legally required to dismiss the suit because federal judges have no legal faculty to request that an official be stripped of parliamentary privileges for allegedly defying a suspension, nor is the Attorney General's Office empowered to ask the House to initiate such a trial.

Other jurists noted that the principle of proportionality was being ignored as there appeared to be a desire to throw the book at López Obrador on unproven charges of a supposedly minor infraction. The former rector of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, Pablo González Casanova, warned that closing the way to Mexico's Left by trying to criminalize one of the candidates would create a chaotic and self-destructive situation in the country. Many intellectuals and editorial writers stressed that the scheme against López Obrador was a form of electoral

fraud.

Other voices also began to be heard, accusing Fox's government and its allies of attempting an authoritarian coup to exclude the mayor that involved bending the legal framework. They demanded that citizens be allowed to decide whom they wanted for their President at the polling places and warned that Fox's obsession could create a situation of ungovernability. Among those participating in the growing debate over the months was Subcomandante Marcos, who argued that Mexico's destruction as a nation was not only economic and social, but also legal and political, and that to go as far as stripping López Obrador's privileges would be to regress a century by annulling the electoral route to power. Marcos accused Fox and the rest of the Mexican Right of using the judicial system as its own patrimony. Knowing that the sanction was unsustainable in strictly juridical terms, it was counting on twisting the law to hide its illegality.

In the midst of the political uproar, however, several polls confirmed that López Obrador kept his lead over other presidential aspirants in the polls, well ahead of both Madrazo and PAN Secretary of Government Santiago Creel, both of whom wanted him derailed by whatever means it took. The polls also showed that four out of every five citizens opposed removing López Obrador's privileges.

#### **López Obrador's defense**

On April 7, 2005, López Obrador called for a peaceful resistance movement before more than 100,000 sympathizers. His adversaries gambled that he would lose his cool and incite violent actions, but he did no such thing, instead warning emphatically that the violent ones were not in his movement. He told the crowd he had decided not to counter-sue for protection of his immunity or even request freedom on bail, but would continue his political fight from prison. He also labeled the trial to which he was being subjected a farce, since everyone realized it was a political rather than judicial issue.

After calling for a march of repudiation for Sunday, April 24, he appeared before the House of Representatives to defend himself. In that hearing, he charged that his trial was a falsity and that the dossier against him was riddled with falsehoods. He said he had violated no law and had signed no document or ordered in any other way that the protective suspension granted the presumed owner of El Encino be disrespected, and asked where the deceit and bad faith was if in fact the road had not been built.

He insisted he was being judged not for violating the law but for his way of thinking and acting, and for what he, together with other Mexicans, could represent for Mexico's future. He declared that those governing the country

were upset because his program of economic growth, job creation, construction of public works, health, education, housing and support to the most humble and forgotten people in Mexico City could be spread all over the country. They wanted to cut him off, deprive him of his political rights for the 2006 elections. Those who accuse me, he said, criticize whatever little is provided to benefit the majorities as populism, yet call the excessive amount given to the rapacious minorities promotion. They are the same ones, he added, who privatize the profits and socialize the losses, the same ones who have turned Mexico into an ocean of inequalities and fear that the population might opt for a genuine change.

PRD colleague Diana Bernal, currently a legislator but backed by 10 years of experience as a judge in administrative issues, made solid legal arguments against stripping him of his privileges. Although she demonstrated that the committee findings were unsustainable, even conjuring up Antigone to remind House members that injustices can be committed through legal decisions, her arguments carried no weight. The deal had already been cut between the PRI and the PAN; 360 members of these two parties voted to consummate it.

#### **Widespread international repudiation**

In the United States, *Credit Suisse First Boston*, one of the most important firms in the world financial community, stated that stripping López Obrador of his immunity was a clear attempt by interest groups to derail the candidacy of the most popular politician using questionable methods and ignoring the opposition of the majority of Mexicans. It was just one indication that Fox's government was running a high and futile risk, putting the legitimacy of the upcoming presidential race in question.

The world's most prestigious newspapers strongly condemned the decision. An analysis in *The Economist Intelligence Unit* recognized that the House vote was the result of machinations by the PAN and PRI and dittoed the warning that if López Obrador were sidelined from the electoral contest it would call the presidential elections into doubt. *The Wall Street Journal* went a step further, fearing that the decision had already compromised social peace in Mexico.

*The New York Times* saw the accusation against López Obrador as transparently political in a country where multi-million dollar misappropriations cases went unpunished. This newspaper stressed that it had never been shown that López Obrador had personally instructed anyone to disobey the judicial order. Moreover, making him and not his subordinates responsible went contrary to the legal principles under which they were trying to judge him, which stress personal responsibility. If gunning only for the top boss were applied equally to all, it was argued, the mayors of major cities would find themselves implicated in hundreds of criminal cases. With this

outrage, the 2006 presidential campaign was harking back to the old days when the PRI dictatorially rigged the elections in favor of its candidates.

*The Washington Post* also saw the decision as a democratic setback and warned that if López Obrador were eliminated from the ballot, Mexico would return to the era in which the country was governed by fraud and by force, with the next President discredited at home and abroad. *The Los Angeles Times* concurred, arguing that it was an absurd decision that stained the political system's credibility since in a country and culture accustomed to rampant corruption and presidential abuse of power, the charges against López Obrador were equivalent to disobeying a traffic regulation. In England, *The Financial Times* also warned of the possibility of a political and economic crisis, recalling the never-punished politicians of "PEMEXgate," who had channeled over US\$100 million of Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) money into the PRI's presidential campaign. *The Economist* echoed the argument that the punishment was disproportional to the alleged crime and that the entire process threatened political rights in Mexico.

In France, *Le Monde* underscored that the government's arguments against López Obrador had convinced nobody in a country where justice was used like a geometric variable and those responsible for scandals such as Friends of Fox or Pemexgate had enjoyed systematic impunity. In Italy, *Il Manifesto* accused Fox's wife of having orchestrated the whole operation from the shadows, while Spain's *El País* and *El Mundo* criticized it and Russia's *Pravda* called it a critical test for Mexico's transition to democracy.

Important television news reports from the BBC, CNN, ABC and NBC were also strongly critical of the Mexican government. Political scientists and analysts seemed shocked and agreed that Mexico was returning to the shadows, while Nobel Literature laureate José Saramago confessed that he had incorrectly thought himself "vaccinated against stupefaction" and could only interpret what was happening in Mexico as a "lack of decency." Salman Rushdie, Ryszard Kapuscinski, Laura Restrepo, Breyten Breytenbach and many other writers participating in the international festival "Voice of the World" signed a declaration expressing profound concern about the maneuver against López Obrador, condemning what they called an "assault on Mexicans" to prevent them from expressing their will and deciding their country's future political leader themselves. Numerous European jurists and academics pronounced the decision illegitimate and politically opportunistic, violating the supreme value of citizens' vote. Mexican students abroad, migrant organizations and solidarity groups demonstrated against the stripping of López Obrador's privileges in the United States, Europe and Latin America. Mexico's Foreign Relations Secretariat tried to silence this widespread repudiation with letters to the editor of the newspapers, but the cure was

worse than the disease. How could it be otherwise, since the perpetrators had no more convincing arguments at that stage than they had had before?

### The reactions in Mexico

López Obrador's enemies in government, the PAN, the PRI and the business elite, joyously celebrated the vote against him. A ghost civic group conjured up by the Secretariat of Government sponsored a costly television campaign that only worsened the political and social polarization.

Meanwhile, discontent continued to mount among those who saw the maneuver as an attack on democracy. The UNAM rector called it a political error. A former Federal Election Institute president echoed the concern that it would affect the legitimacy of next year's presidential elections. Independent workers' organizations accused Fox of having lost his way. Representatives of indigenous groups expressed concern. Academics, artists and op-ed writers cranked up their criticism of the aims of such an illegitimate move. The op-ed pieces in the majority of the print media could not have been more adverse to those who had schemed up the maneuver to manipulate the law in order to get what they feared would not be won at the ballot box. The watchdog organization Civic Alliance called it a mechanism aimed at ending the country's democratic progress in one blow, a perversion of the law that would lead to a mock democracy and an offense against the citizenry's intelligence.

Human rights organizations charged that the right to elect freely was being stomped on, and added that both Fox and the Attorney General's Office had refused to respect the principle of presumed innocence. The National Association of Democratic Lawyers declared that the ruling against López Obrador was tainted from the beginning. Prestigious criminal experts charged that the Attorney General's Office was using the law to eliminate adversaries. The maneuver's authors were also accused of having put a time bomb under democratic coexistence, triggering social confrontation and creating a climate that would lead to a lack of governability. And so it continued; the political intent in the accusations against López Obrador came under stronger criticism with every passing day.

The discontent continued to mount with such intensity that it even began to dent the armor of some senators from the governing party. One of them, Javier Corral, described the plot to drape a mantle of legality over the elimination of the leading presidential candidate as "one of the political class' most erroneous, absurd and unjust decisions." He condemned the television manipulation of the case and, as various commentators had already done, accused those who had taken advantage of the case's judicial complexities to argue in favor of stripping López Obrador's immunity of committing the great injustices of disproportion and selectivity. Corral's remarks were but one of many examples of the fact that the government's treatment of the citizens as

fools was making even those who were not sympathizers of López Obrador quite indignant.

#### **Widespread repudiation**

The PAN government's political and judicial incompetence also became more evident by the day. Two figures who had contributed to the democratic transition, President Fox and Government Secretary Santiago Creel, came to be seen as opponents of democracy and allies of the worst sectors in the PRI because of their blind ambition. People speculated that Fox's obstinacy was triggered by his fear that if López Obrador won the elections, he would open an investigation into Fox's closest circle of associates.

In its fixation to get López Obrador out of the race, the government exacerbated divisions among Mexicans. The crisis even affected the Catholic hierarchy. The Mexican Bishops' Conference declared early on that barring a candidate from the race would have serious repercussions on the 2006 elections. Later, the Social Pastoral Commission sharply criticized Congress's decision to strip López Obrador of his immunity. At that point, Creel pressured the Bishop's Conference president to make another statement emphasizing the importance of abiding by the law. Once achieved, Creel then declared that the last statement was the most important one, dismissing the position taken by the Social Pastoral Commission. As the atmosphere grew increasingly tense, Raúl Vera, the bishop of Saltillo, criticized the government for trying to discredit the Commission's position.

Those who had promoted the idea of casting a "useful vote" for Fox in the 2000 elections, arguing that it was better to finally get the PRI out than to waste one's vote on a third candidate (i.e. from López Obrador's own PRD) who didn't have a chance, were among the most upset. Many of them sent him letters contending that if justice were truly a priority for his government, those responsible for the PEMEXgate scandal, PAN's governor of Morelos and many others would be facing trial. One of Fox's former associates, Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, not only spoke personally with the President but published an open letter warning him that the country was facing a serious political breakdown that risked aborting the democratic transition, and that the President himself was mainly responsible. Referring to "a palace conspiracy," he reproached the President for his intolerant sectarianism and obsession with eliminating an adversary, and asked him not to lead the country over the brink. In the House of Representatives, a PAN representative even spat on a PRD colleague, which the press described as a shameful expression of hatred, warning that such a spark could ignite violence. In all of the events that Fox and his wife attended, people spoke out against what they were doing.

#### **Supported by huge crowds all around the country**

After the House of Representatives wrongly stripped López Obrador of his parliamentary immunity and removed him from his post, he went home, where he continued to speak out and take action. He challenged Fox to openly debate the matter and explain why he was so determined to get López Obrador out of the presidential race. He then began traveling around the country, urging peaceful resistance. This tour showed him that people's repudiation of the machinations against him was turning into a fight for freedom, democracy and justice.

In the capital of Tabasco, 70,000 people came out to support López Obrador. In Guadalajara, he told the demonstrators that the 160,000 pages in the dossier prepared against him contained no solid proof, relying only on conjectures and inferences to implicate him even though he had signed no papers and given no orders in the El Encino case. He once again called on people to act peacefully and expressed his willingness to talk on condition that he be guaranteed that his political rights would not be suspended. Writer Fernando del Paso also spoke at the event, insisting that "never had such a dirty affair been so clear" in the country's recent history. Like many others, he underscored that sad note that López Obrador was being persecuted for building a street to a hospital, while drug traffickers, murderers, thieves and bad rulers enjoy impunity.

In another huge demonstration in Tepic, López Obrador insisted that Fox's actions were not only a personal attack on him but also an attack on democracy, as they robbed the Mexican people of the right to freely choose their rulers. At an event in Acapulco, he urged people to reevaluate the actions being taken against him, concluding that the government was making itself look ridiculous. At all of these events, people chanted that he wasn't alone.

Fox and his ruling class allies expected the public protests to simply run out of steam. But the opposite happened; they grew stronger and more numerous over time. And despite extremely costly media campaigns, the government didn't manage to convince anyone.

### The legal battle

Since the Attorney General's Office had not proven that López Obrador had given signed instructions in the case, several social organizations called on the attorney general to withdraw the charges. The PRD, backed by a petition signed by 5,000 people, requested that Minister Mariano Azuela recuse himself from any Supreme Court decisions related to the case since he had shown he was not impartial.

The government continued to handle the case improperly. The PRI and PAN legislators committed a serious mistake by putting the motion to strip López Obrador of his immunity in the same resolution as the motion to immediately

remove him from his post, in open violation of the Constitution, which clearly states that accused officials will remain in their posts until tried and convicted. The Federal District's Legislative Assembly, which has a PRD majority, argued that the decision on whether to strip López Obrador of his parliamentary privileges should have been up to them, not the House of Representatives, since he is the Federal District's head of government and the Assembly serves as its congress. The Assembly voted to keep López Obrador in his post, and filed an appeal with the Supreme Court arguing that the House had overstepped its authority and violated the Constitution. In response, the House appealed the Assembly's decisions. The Court admitted both appeals, whereupon the Attorney General's Office and the House each filed separate appeals to challenge the Court's decision to admit the Assembly's appeal.

Five hundred faculty members at the Mexican National Autonomous University filed a petition in Congress charging that the 360 representatives who had voted to strip López Obrador of his immunity had violated the Constitution. They asked that these representatives' alternates be called instead when it came time to address the case because the others would be acting as both judge and party.

#### A ridiculous maneuver

On April 20, the Attorney General's Office submitted López Obrador's case to the courts for criminal prosecution. By this time, however, those responsible for the whole sham didn't want him arrested first, since a photo of him behind bars for a minor infraction would further discredit Fox's government, fuel public outrage and undoubtedly increase support for him.

To avoid this, the Attorney General's Office cooked up yet another ridiculous scheme. It asked not for López Obrador's arrest but simply for his appearance in court, since two PAN representatives had supposedly posted the \$200 in bail on his behalf. The government was trying to kill two birds with one stone: keep López Obrador out of jail, while barring him from the presidential race on the grounds that he was facing trial, but López Obrador foiled it by telling the judge he would accept no bail he had not arranged himself. The PRD announced that it would file charges against the Attorney General's Office for even presenting the file to these two PAN representatives, when neither the accused nor his lawyer had seen it. This bail episode further degraded the whole process as the public strongly repudiated the maneuver.

In the wake of these events, the judge assigned to the case ruled that the Attorney General's Office had acted incorrectly in letting someone out on bail who hadn't yet been arrested, and returned both the file and the bail money. Constitutional experts argued that López Obrador should remain in his post until the Supreme Court decided the appeals, and López Obrador announced

that he would return to work on April 25.

#### A historic, pluralistic, massive march

In its efforts to dismiss him, the President's Office constantly referred to López Obrador as "Mr. López." Instead of belittling him, however, this brought him closer to the people. When he called on his compatriots to join him in a silent protest march on Sunday, April 24, the turnout was enormous and impressive.

The march testified to a citizens' alliance against the attacks on López Obrador and in favor of democracy. It was without a doubt the largest and most pluralistic march in the country's history. A million people from all social classes turned out to show their repudiation of the government's maneuvers. People carried clever, creative homemade signs: "Three million voted for you, 360 representatives can't get rid of you," "Stop the Foxy use of power," "Fox, Martha makes your decisions, but you don't make mine!" "Stop the mean and dirty tricks," "AMLO [López Obrador's full initials] is not my saint, but I'm devoted to democracy," "We are all López."

Reiterating that he would continue peaceful actions, López Obrador called on his adversaries to set aside any ill will. He explained that he didn't hate anyone, wasn't interested in vengeance and he wouldn't prosecute anyone or invent crimes. Calling on people to build a new social contract with less inequality and more justice, he proposed forming a pact with all willing sectors, emphasizing that his project was not an exclusive one.

Commentators praised the mammoth, peaceful, heterogeneous march and the conciliatory tone of the man who called it. Again, they criticized Fox's government for leading the country into an unnecessary confrontation, all supposedly for an alleged crime worth no more than \$200 in bail.

#### Stubborn, crude blindness

Despite all this, the federal government persisted in its blindness: Fox said he knew nothing about the march because he'd spent that Sunday watching the new Pope on television. The next day, in a Monday morning press conference before a large number of Mexican and foreign journalists, López Obrador once again expressed his willingness to talk with Fox, the PAN and the PRI.

In the United States, *The New York Times* noted that the country's traditional power structures were not in control of the situation, despite their money and media control. The news of the march circled the globe. For people all over the world, the conclusion was simple: anyone who opposed or feared López Obrador should have their say at the polls.

And still, the President continued to respond in increasingly clumsy ways. "Mr.

López,” he said, had broken the law by going back to work. He responded to López Obrador’s conciliatory talk by calling him “a provocateur” and urged those who disagreed with the mayor’s actions to file criminal charges against him. It seemed that the conflict was bound to escalate even further. In an unusual statement from Cuba, Fidel Castro recommended that Fox retire before violence broke out in Mexico.

### **Why the about face?**

At this point, something happened in the President’s Office: the hardliners who had predominated up to that point stepped back, giving way to those in the executive branch who favored a political solution. Some analysts believe this was a result of their assessment of the political damage—demonstrated by a drop in the polls for both the President and his party—and the intense national and international criticism. Such a change in the internal correlation of forces perhaps made it possible for the government to change course, albeit a bit late.

It was also rumored that the change could have been due to pressure from the United States, concerned about the increasing grassroots discontent, which Fox, stubborn though he is, could no longer ignore. The government may have also been concerned that, while the massive grassroots demonstrations had taken a peaceful course thanks in part to López Obrador’s responsible guidance—which reassured the markets—a sense of accumulated insult could lead to greater tensions. That, ultimately, could trigger an unstoppable movement that would surely end up demanding Fox’s resignation, as occurred in Ecuador during those very same days. It is very likely that the change was due to a combination of all these factors.

### **The unexpected change in course**

Whatever the case, it was clear to everyone on Wednesday, April 27, that the President’s statements that day radically changed the situation. Fox announced that Rafael Macedo de la Concha was stepping down from his post as attorney general, along with Assistant Attorney General Carlos Vega Memije. He also announced that López Obrador’s case would be thoroughly reviewed, in an effort to ensure the greatest possible political harmony in the country while preserving the rule of law. He called on people to seek agreements instead of futile confrontation, dialogue instead of challenges, conciliation instead of division. He promised that the federal government would not prevent anyone from participating in the 2006 elections, and said he would send Congress a bill to protect the rights of citizens facing trial until a final, definitive verdict had been reached in their cases. He later stated that the decision to review López Obrador’s case cleared away any clouds that might be hanging over the 2006 elections, ensuring that they would be free and fair. Fox described the measures he had announced as a “state decision” aimed at dispelling fears and

providing guarantees to all Mexicans.

### The people's triumph

The President's Office accepted López Obrador's formal request as mayor for a meeting, noting that politics provides room to find legal solutions. López Obrador replied that he was willing to meet with the President whenever he wished, and celebrated the calmer, more relaxed environment that made it possible to build democracy. He attributed the change in the situation to the citizen's mobilization, as did many of the commentators, describing it as the triumph of the people.

The President's move left other participants in the operation, who hoped to gain political ground by knocking López Obrador out of the race, in a tough spot. The most visibly displeased was the PRI's president, Roberto Madrazo, who leveled his criticisms against Fox, accusing him of giving López Obrador preferential treatment, and demanded that the President stay out of the election. The President's office continued to call for prudence and moderation, and noted that before making his decision, the President consulted the PRI leadership, business leaders and the Catholic hierarchy.

### A new climate

In this new climate, the ruptures lying just beneath the surface in both the PRI and the PAN once again came to light. A PAN presidential candidate and several of the party's congressional representatives praised Macedo and criticized the actions of the secretary of government, insisting that he should resign as he was one of the instigators of the failed adventure. Nevertheless, the vast majority praised the President for resolving a conflict that threatened social peace.

The secretary of foreign relations told the diplomatic corps that López Obrador, while not responsible, had been a victim of the bureaucracy. Private enterprise, which had pushed the government to take action against him, now expressed its support for the President's u-turn, though it later showed itself divided on the attorney general's specific solution. In the May 1st parade, business and labor leaders both expressed satisfaction that the time had come to reach agreements.

López Obrador trusted that an impartial review of his case would find him innocent. He recognized that by rectifying his position, Fox had acted as a statesman, and asked people to trust the President's promise. López Obrador's lawyer recommended that the Attorney General's Office, instead of getting lost in a mountain of papers, send someone straight to the site to verify that no crime had been committed.

Finally, on May 4, 2005, the newly appointed attorney general ruled that, while evidence showed that López Obrador had allegedly committed an infraction,

he would not proceed with criminal charges because the sanction was not clear. The PRD's national leadership responded that although the ruling was contradictory, it definitively settled López Obrador's legal situation, and announced that he would resign from his post in July to participate in the party's primary elections.

The head of the PRD in the Federal District felt the situation had only been half rectified, since the decision left a crack open for legal challenges. Some legal experts saw a serious contradiction in the Attorney General's decision, since if a crime had been committed, there must be a corresponding sanction. If there were no sanction, they argued, there could be no crime, and the Attorney General should have decided that none had been committed. The Attorney General's Office squirmed out of the situation by attributing a nonexistent crime to López Obrador, when it should have simply exonerated him. Despite this, however, the decision contributed to the more positive climate in the country.

### Resistance

The people behind the actions against López Obrador ended up being nationally and internationally ridiculed. The PRI leaders and representatives responsible for pushing the decision through the House of Representatives continued to talk about legality and accused Fox of having proceeded in an immoral way. They argued that to clear López Obrador, a judge would have to absolve him or release him for lack of evidence, although they admitted that these actions wouldn't normally ensue since the Attorney General's Office had never filed criminal charges. Thus, the PRI—the party that has made immorality a form of government, manages to remain together thanks to a pact based on impunity, has used an authoritarian legality for its own benefit without bothering about legitimacy and has a long and continuing history of electoral fraud—continued to talk about the rule of law.

In the other corner, López Obrador accepted the decision, while still rejecting the notion that he was responsible for any infraction. He hoped that the Attorney General's Office would admit there had been no evidence for accusing him. Nevertheless, after acknowledging that all participants in the conflict, himself included, were on the verge of leading the country into political instability, he felt the situation had been resolved in a positive way. He agreed with Fox that it was time to turn the page, and proposed a national political pact. In doing so, he deactivated the peaceful resistance to make way instead for the organization of a civic movement around an alternative national project.

### Case closed?

It appears that the case is closed. In general, however, cases don't fully close,

but rather overlap and link up with other events, leading to new situations that depend on what came before. Because of this case, the fight for the presidency will become harder and angrier.

Those who tried to knock López Obrador out of the race with legal maneuvers will look for other ways. And the civic convergence for democracy will have to remain alert, to avoid encouraging the development of an authoritarian style of leadership around a single powerful figure, and to build their capacity to guarantee lasting forms of citizen participation and channels for their demands.

#### **Legality and the rule of law?**

The government based its argument in the conflict on the idea of legality, but the old regime's legal system, which has not been reformed, clearly encouraged the partisan use of the law and selective use of justice to eliminate political adversaries. There are serious problems in the judicial system that allowed manipulation, arbitrariness and a lack of moderation and simple good sense. Some argued that the law should be applied no matter what the economic, political and social consequences, making the law an end in itself and forgetting that it is only a means to guarantee justice.

Much was said about the rule of law, but authoritarian states are typically the most disposed to this line of argument and are invariably well-equipped with unjust laws to subdue their citizens. What we need to build instead is a democratic rule of law based on authentic justice that doesn't allow the state to impose disproportionate sanctions for minor issues, while those responsible for large crimes enjoy impunity.

#### **A bipartite state**

It was also clear that the PRI has not yet changed in any significant way. It still manipulates institutions to advance its own interests, without bothering about legitimacy or justice. The PAN let down its democratic mask to show that it suffers from the same authoritarian virus as the PRI. It resorted to the same arguments used by the old regime against political prisoners. It completely forgot the teachings of one of its founders, Efraín González Luna, who was politically persecuted and firmly opposed to the partisan use of power.

The 2000 elections appeared to put an end to the state-party era. But events soon belied this appearance: instead, there were signs that the country was heading towards a kind of two-party authoritarian regime, a bipartite state. Two of these signs were the formation of the Federal Election Institute, obviously divvied up between the PRI and the PAN, and the agreement between these same two parties to bump López Obrador out of the race.

It didn't matter to the PRI and PAN representatives that the vast majority of the country's citizens opposed the move. They were trying to revive the old tradition whereby the President hand-picked his successor—in this case as in others, by means of fraud. By refusing to listen to those who elected them, they called into question the current form of Mexico's representational democracy.

The government's actions constituted an attack against the citizenry and against a true, complete democracy. It was an attack against electoral democracy, as it tried to prevent a candidate from participating in the elections. It was also an attack against political citizenship, since it sought to violate the political rights of the candidate as well as the rest of the country's citizens. And above all, it was an attack against social democracy, as it tried to shut the door on a candidate who proposes an alternative to the neoliberal economic model.

### Promising trends

The main instigators of the operation were the powers that have traditionally run the country through their wealth and their control of the mainstream media. This episode revealed three promising possibilities, of which the first is that these powers, accustomed to using the state to their own benefit, can be reined in and some of their expressed purposes defeated by the massive action of organized citizens. It was possible to put a break on their abusive use of power.

The second promising sign is that the civic movement, which had disbanded and fallen into a kind of apathy after the 2000 elections, awoke and sounded the alarm that democracy was endangered with such strength that it forced the executive branch to change course. If this convergent democratic movement continues to grow, it will be able to promote truly democratic solutions. Only a strong civic movement will overcome the current discredited party-ocracy oblivious to anything but its own narrow interests and oblige the country to turn instead to solving the urgent needs of the majority. The third has to do with the ability of the democratic convergence to prevent social tragedy. In this operation, the bipartite state committed hubris, that combination of excess and arrogance that inevitably leads to tragedy. But when it seemed that the government was on the verge of tearing the country apart, determined citizen action prevented the tragedy.

### Winners and losers

In this course of events, there were clear losers: the powers that run the country, President Fox, his wife Martha Sahagún, Government Secretary Creel, former Attorney General Macedo, former Assistant Attorney General Vega, the president of the Supreme Court and the PRI and PAN leaders and representatives, with very few exceptions. Other losers include those who

hoped that getting López Obrador out of the race would enhance their own presidential aspirations; the PAN's Creel and the PRI's Madrazo both saw their poll ratings drop in the aftermath of this adventure. After speaking out against Fox's political solution, Madrazo lost five more points. Analysts predicted that both the PRI and the PAN would pay high political costs.

From the point of view of democracy, this was not a zero sum game; indeed, there were many winners. These included, of course, López Obrador and his party, since his participation in the elections is now guaranteed. López Obrador also became more widely known and accepted nationally, and his image and cause were favorably received at the international level. Fox, on the verge of going down in history as authoritarian and antidemocratic, also saved his image.

These two key figures in the conflict can learn lessons for the immediate future. Both Fox and López Obrador must have learned that people will not tolerate any kind of authoritarianism, don't like it when people try to trick them, refuse to see the law being twisted, demand transparency and insist on being taken into account.

Clearly, the big winner was a civic movement that finally got a sense of its own potential. The majority of citizens who came out to demand respect for their rights and repudiate futile conflicts won. The emergence of a convergent civic and social movement capable of straightening the course and sustaining hope was a huge victory.

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### The Zapatistas' New Face: Towards a Social Left

*"Politicians will finish our country off before we can agree on how to stop them," said Subcomandante Marcos as he detailed "The Other Campaign" that the Zapatistas are embarking on, and have invited others to join. "Let the heart beat where it should," he counseled: "on the left." This new stage of the Zapatista movement clearly hopes to bring the Left together.*

Jorge Alonso

The Mexican anti-neoliberalism movements that focused their efforts on trying to prevent privatization of the electricity and oil industries between 2002 and 2004 invited the Zapatista movement to join their struggle several times. The Zapatistas always replied that they were immersed in their task of developing autonomous municipalities and those municipalities' regional organizations, known as *Caracoles*. The other movements respected those organizational

plans and time frames and continued to insist that the government fulfill the San Andrés Accords. There was empathy, but no common efforts. There were, however, signs from the Zapatista movement that something more was to come. At the end of 2004 and the beginning of 2005, Subcomandante Marcos and novelist Paco Ignacio Taibo II jointly wrote a novel called *Muertos Incómodos*, with the subtitle *Falta lo que falta* ("Uncomfortable Dead: What's to Come is to Come"). It was first released in installments in the daily newspaper *La Jornada* and subsequently distributed in book form.

#### Signs of life during the wait for "what's to come"

The Zapatista movement's immersion in its own processes led the Fox government to assume it was no longer news. And as President Fox likes to interpret everything in terms of how it will play in the media, he declared in Chiapas on January 11, 2005, that the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) was virtually a thing of the past and Chiapas was modernizing. This declaration caused quite a stir in public opinion. Bishop Raúl Vera commented that anyone with such an incomplete and shortsighted vision of the Zapatista movement was better off keeping quiet. Bishop Samuel Ruiz said that only someone completely blinkered could deny the Zapatista movement's influence, because the Zapatistas were still around and their Good Government Committees were doing important work while nobody expected anything substantial from Fox's six-year term. Bishop Felipe Arizmendi called the President's statement unfortunate and inexact, aimed at provoking the rebel group. Civil society organizations also strongly criticized Fox's false appraisal.

For the time, one event that demonstrated the Zapatista movement's continuing national and international presence was the announcement in 2005 that the prestigious Italian football club Inter Milan had accepted an invitation to play an EZLN team for the *Pozol de Barro* trophy, something that made headlines in the world sports press. More serious news came at the end of May, when the EZLN's Indigenous Clandestine Revolutionary Committee-General Command released a communiqué reporting that they had successfully relocated several Zapatista settlements in the Montes Azules Biosphere into three villages, taking care to protect the environment, thereby depriving the government of the pretext to violently evict them. These people were moved and their new homes built and equipped with the financial support of national and international civil society organizations that had responded to the Zapatistas' call.

#### The Zapatistas split from the traditional Left

In January 2005, Subcomandante Marcos entered into direct conflict with officials in the Mexico City government, run by the leftist Democratic

Revolutionary Party (PRD) when, after having investigated the matter, he wrote to its Attorney General's Office pointing out irregularities in the inquiry into the death of human rights activist Digna Ochoa. He accused the office of inefficiency, acting in bad faith and refusing to receive evidence from Ochoa's family. And he offered information that contradicted the Office's hypothesis that Ochoa had not been murdered but rather committed suicide.

The next month, Marcos announced that there would be no more broadcasts from the Zapatista Intergalactic Television System, but added cryptically, "What's to come is still to come." He followed up his conflict with the institutional Left by proposing another Left. He argued that Mexico has been socially, economically, legally and politically destroyed. He claimed that the federal government's intention to impeach Mexico City Mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrado would set the country back a century, while assuring that this did not mean the Zapatistas politically supported López Obrador, who they saw as surrounded by the worst of the pro-Salinas PRI faction. Marcos defined him as "on the left of the right hand," part of a Left aligned with the PRD leadership but whose common denominator is a mixture of cynicism, amnesia and conformism.

In June Marcos released a piece he wrote titled "*La (imposible) ¿geometría? del poder en México*" ["The (impossible) Geometry? of Power in Mexico"]. He differentiated between right, center and left, then went on to describe how "they all pile up in the middle" during electoral periods. He said that the PAN, led by the ultra-right *El Yunque* organization, had launched a group of mediocre candidates, while the PRI was mixed up in kidnapping, drug, prostitution and human trafficking cartels. Turning to the PRD, Marcos criticized the way it fosters its own family businesses. He refused to forgive it for the part it played in the indigenous counter-reform and accused it of giving Mexico City's main square, the *Zócalo*, away to "show business monopolies," teaming up with the pro-Salinas PRI faction, manipulating Digna Ochoa's death and allying with the capital's drug rings. He strongly attacked López Obrador and predicted that his project would amount to "growing profits for the rich, with the dispossessed subjected to misery and the imposition of an order that controls their discontent."

Some responded to such harsh criticism by defending the political parties as the only instrument of electoral struggle. They particularly defended López Obrador's candidacy as providing an alternative for grassroots causes, and criticized Marcos for falling into the trap of simplistic Manicheism.

### **Reactivated paramilitaries**

The consequences of the counter-insurgency policy and paramilitary activities in Chiapas continued to be manifest through evictions, harassment and above

all impunity. In February 2005, after exhausting all avenues with the Mexican authorities, the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center and the Las Abejas organization took the Mexican state to the Inter-American Human Rights Commission for the murder of 45 Totzil people at Acteal on December 22, 1997. They charged that the main people responsible are still enjoying impunity, including former President Zedillo and former Government Secretary Emilio Chuayffet, who was heading the PRI bench in the House of Representatives by the time they filed suit.

The few signs of détente with Chiapas' state government had vanished by the end of 2004. Relations broke down between it and the Good Government Committees because it failed to honor the few commitments it had made. It did not compensate assaulted Zapatistas, for example, or guarantee justice in the few cases in which it had been asked to intervene.

At the beginning of May 2005, the Good Government Committee of La Realidad accused the Chiapas government of allowing counterinsurgency actions against the Zapatista grass roots on Fox's orders. It charged that the government was trying to aggravate the situation in the belief that the Zapatistas would turn to force. Over the course of this year, journalists reporting on the situation in Zapatista territory have testified that the counterinsurgency campaign remains an overwhelming presence, supported by militarization and federal spending. They also reported that the paramilitaries were active and still harassing Zapatista communities.

**Money given in solidarity  
is not money laundering**

At the end of May and beginning of June, the BBVA-Bancomer bank branch in San Cristóbal de las Casas urged two civic organizations to close accounts they used to receive international donations supporting the Zapatista cause, citing money-laundering concerns. Interpreted as yet another counterinsurgent maneuver to besiege the Zapatistas, the action resulted in an international outcry.

Nobel Literature laureate José Saramago, Catalonian musician Manu Chao, Danielle Mitterrand, Regis Debray and Bishop Ruiz were among the many renowned writers, journalists and other public figures who wrote the bank to protest that the accusations were false and an offense to the civil society organizations, individuals, universities, cultural associations, schools, parents' associations, municipal governments, government institutions and collectives that had made great efforts to help finance indigenous community development. José Saramago and his wife Pilar del Río wrote another letter to the bank's Spanish headquarters stressing that thousands of people, including the two of them, had given clean, hard-earned money that was being used in

solidarity to help the indigenous communities in Chiapas. BBVA-Bancomer was offending many honest people by pointing the finger of suspicion at them without justification. They demanded an apology and called on the bank to dig out the real dirty money hidden in other accounts. This incident also led to the creation of a movement in Spain inviting people to close their BBVA accounts because of what it had done to the Zapatistas.

#### Trying to link the EZLN to drug trafficking

The army itself struck another blow in the counterinsurgency campaign when the National Defense Secretariat announced that troops based in Chiapas destroyed 44 marihuana plantations in three municipalities under EZLN control in mid-June. The foreign relations secretary demanded that Subcomandante Marcos explain why drugs were being cultivated in Zapatista territories.

But public opinion reacted against this maneuver as well. Those familiar with Chiapas pointed out that the municipalities the army cited were not in fact in the Zapatista zone, while civil society organizations insisted that the EZLN is very strict about drink and drugs. The Chiapas government itself had to correct the army's statement, confirming that the municipalities in question were indeed not in the Los Altos region. Even a presidential spokesperson felt obliged to rectify the mistake. It was an obvious maneuver to link the Zapatistas to drug trafficking to justify an armed incursion against them. Several analysts stressed that the supposed geographical confusion was just the kind of media set-up that the old US counterninsurgency manuals used to suggest.

#### Red alert from the EZLN

Following this, witnesses in the region noticed unusual troop incursions. The army was operating throughout Zapatista territory, setting up temporary quarters or positions, building roads and carrying out patrol, simulation and training exercises.

In response, the EZLN announced on June 19, 2005 that it had decreed a general state of red alert throughout rebel territory. At the same time, the *Caracoles* and Good Government offices in the Zapatista communities of Oventik, La Realidad, La Garrucha, Morelia and Roberto Barrios were closed, along with the offices of the authorities in the autonomous rebel municipalities. This involved evacuating the Good Government Committee members and autonomous authorities for their protection. The EZLN explained that they would carry out their work clandestinely, moving from place to place, for an indefinite period, although the *Caracoles* would continue to provide basic community health services.

The EZLN also announced that all Zapatista personnel involved in social labors in their communities had been called up and that regular troops were confined to their barracks. Meanwhile, national and international civil society groups working on projects in the communities were asked to leave rebel territory.

The Zapatista red alert took both the government and society as a whole by surprise. The fear was that the EZLN would take up arms again. Some in the government believed that the communiqué might be false, as its style differed from previous ones. Some analysts suggested that the Zapatistas were internally divided and that “hard-liners” had issued the communiqué. Journalists going in search of the Good Government Committees confirmed that all the offices and locales had indeed been closed. The Zapatista *Caracoles* were almost deserted and the people still there seemed tense and nervous.

The EZLN later acknowledged that it had been restructuring its political and military command since 2002, a process now completed. As a result, the Zapatista movement was prepared to survive any enemy attack or other action that wiped out its current leadership or sought to crush the movement.

**Reactions,  
and “pastoral alert”** uncertainty

The Government Secretariat and the Chiapas state government separately announced that the situation was normal in the Los Altos zone and the jungle. Senator Fernández de Cevallos from the ruling PAN party termed the EZLN’s communiqué “quaint,” while the party’s leader commented that the Zapatistas were not even an issue for the PAN. President Fox, who was visiting Russia at the time, minimized the EZLN’s reappearance, although it did not escape notice that the army and state police were confined to barracks.

The moneyed elites then demonstrated their lack of analytical capacity and their frivolity by talking without any basis for their arguments. While the president of the confederation of state-owned companies claimed that the Zapatistas wanted a place in the presidential campaigns, which were already well underway, the president of the Confederation of National Chambers of Commerce pontificated that, as the Zapatistas no longer had any donations, Marcos was showing himself to be the “predator” he really was.

Carlos Montemayor, an expert in armed movements, warned of imminent violence and blamed the new situation on the stepped-up counterinsurgency. Those most knowledgeable agreed that the Zapatistas’ action was defensive in nature, aimed at resisting what they saw as a serious offensive from the other side.

Mexican writers and intellectuals published an open letter calling on the EZLN

to maintain its dignified struggle through unarmed channels. Bishops Raúl Vera and Felipe Arizmendi stressed that the lack of effective solutions to the prevailing problems of marginalization, poverty and racism in the country underlay the red alert. Vera proposed the need for some kind of reaction from politicians and businesspeople, while Arizmendi announced that the San Cristóbal diocese had also declared a “pastoral alert” due to the uncertainty in the communities. He suggested that people should listen carefully to the criticisms expressed by the different voices inviting all political, economic and social actors to thoroughly review Mexico’s economic and political system.

Building “something else”  
by consulting everyone

Several days later, the EZLN explained why it had declared its “red alert.” As a “precautionary defensive measure,” it had called its insurgent troops, commanders, regional and local leaders, and grassroots supporters to a consultation. The EZLN recognized the sacrifice, disposition and heroism of its grassroots supporters, leaders, militiamen and women, and insurgents during almost twelve years of war and resistance, describing the point they had reached and analyzing the current national situation. It proposed a new stage in the fight to its grassroots supporters, one that implied, among other things, risking everything they had achieved and possibly increasing the persecution and harassment against the Zapatista communities. The supporters and Zapatistas in general were free to decide whether to accompany the EZLN in this next step that was being discussed, which had to receive majority backing, but not consensus, to be implemented.

At the same time, Subcomandante Marcos issued a letter explaining that all aid received over the years from civil society had been used solely to improve the living conditions in the Zapatista indigenous communities and carry out peaceful initiatives seeking recognition of indigenous rights and culture. None of it had been used to buy arms or make any kind of military preparations.

Summing up the whole indigenous struggle, he stated that during these years he had increasingly seen and felt the injustice and the anger of peasants, workers, students, teachers, employees, gays and lesbians, young people, women, the elderly and children throughout the country. And now, the “we” that spurred them on wanted to grow bigger, to become more collective, more national.

#### Widespread consultations

Six months earlier, he had announced that “what’s to come is still to come,” and now it was time to decide if they were going to set out to find what was missing, to build “something else.” That was why they were immersed in an internal consultation, which they knew full well could lead to a very difficult

decision. He explained that the EZLN leadership was not directing the process, but rather seeking paths, steps, company. These paths were being presented to the people, and together they were analyzing what would happen if they set out on one or another of them. They were consulting everyone in an attempt to achieve consensus.

To avoid any confusion, Marcos stated quite clearly that this “something else” did not imply a Zapatista military offensive. They were not planning or discussing any such thing, and that the government should say whether it was preparing any military or paramilitary offensive.

Civil society organizations urged the political parties and the media not to ignore the Zapatistas, because at a time when national politics was entirely focused on the hollow campaigns of a large number of presidential hopefuls, the Zapatistas had put social issues back on the agenda.

The EZLN subsequently announced that tens of thousands of grassroots supporters—all of them Mexican indigenous adults—had been consulted at meetings and assemblies in over a thousand communities. These events had included a discussion of the Zapatista leadership’s reports, its analysis of the national situation and its proposal for a new step in the struggle. The advantages, disadvantages, dangers and risks of the different options were discussed and then a secret vote was held under the one person, one vote principle. The result was that 98% approved the proposed new step, authorizing the EZLN to undertake a new national and international political initiative.

President Fox, this time on a trip to Belize, interpreted the EZLN’s initiative as a decision to lay down its arms and said he was “at Mr. Marcos’ disposal” to reach agreements to integrate the Zapatistas into political life. The President was very happy with the EZLN’s decision and reportedly even considered the possibility of withdrawing the legal charges still pending against Marcos.

**“The time has come to take another risk”**

At the end of June, the Zapatistas released the Sixth Lacandona Jungle Declaration in three installments. The text “seeks to touch the heart of humble and simple, dignified and rebellious people.” It set out the Zapatistas’ current position, how they perceive the world, how they view Mexico, what they are thinking of doing and how they will do it. And it invited people to accompany them.

Following an extensive summary of their struggle, the Zapatistas described where they stand in the first five years of the 21st century, following the

creation and consolidation of the autonomous municipalities and Good Government Committees. "According to our analysis and to what we feel in our hearts, we have reached a point at which we can go no further and could possibly lose everything we have if we stay as we are and do nothing else to advance. In other words, the time has come to take another risk, to take a dangerous but worthwhile step. Because united with other social sectors with the same needs as us, it might just be possible to obtain what we need and deserve. A new step forward in the indigenous struggle is only possible if indigenous people join up with workers, peasants, students, teachers, employees... in other words, with workers from the city and the countryside."

The text explains how both the Zapatista communities and the EZLN have grown over the years. New generations have renovated the whole organization, giving it new strength. The EZLN has withstood 12 years of war; military, political, ideological and economic attacks; harassment and persecution. It has not been defeated, but nor have the demands for which it is fighting been entirely achieved. "No one can say that the Zapatista organization and struggle was in vain, because even if they finish us off altogether our struggle has meant something."

Moving on to the situation in Mexico, the Zapatistas maintained that with trhe country governed by neoliberals, the economy has not improved. They looked at both the causes and consequences of migration to the United States, examined the growth of drug trafficking and crime, criticized the abuse of the Constitution and explaineded how the state branches have come together to serve neoliberalism.

But despite it all, the declaration adds, a large number of Mexicans are still resisting, including peasants, urban workers, students, women, young people, gays, lesbians, transsexuals, priests and nuns, people who are lined up behind the struggles of the people rather than the rich: "Many people refuse to be used or to give in." The Zapatista "we" seeks to include all these current manifestations of rebelliousness in a more organized way.

#### **Messages to the world**

The Zapatistas sketched out what they want to do in both Mexico and the world. They are repeating to everyone in the world involved in resistance and struggle that they are not alone. Although small in number, the Zapatistas support them and are going to look at ways of helping them in their struggles. For example, they are going to send corn to Cuba, which has been resisting for many years now. They want the people of the United States to know that the Zapatistas differentiate between the bad US governments and those in the United States who are struggling and support the struggles of other peoples.

They mentioned many different peoples and movements. They told the Chilean Mapuches that they have leaned from their struggles and the Venezuelans that they are watching how they defend their sovereignty. They praised indigenous peoples in Ecuador and Bolivia for teaching the whole of Latin America how to put a stop to neoliberal globalization. They sent their love to the Argentine *piqueteros*. They expressed admiration for those in Uruguay who want to build a better country and their respect for the Brazilian landless. They told the Latin American youth of the great hope they offer and the representatives of the dignified and rebellious Social Europe that they are not alone, that their great movements against neoliberalism's wars bring joy to the Zapatistas, and that perhaps they will send crafts and coffee for them to market. And finally, they told those engaged in struggle in Africa, Asia and Oceania that they want to learn more about their ideas and practices. In short, they want "a world so big that it has room for all of the different resisting worlds."

No longer for or with  
indigenous peoples alone

In Mexico, the Zapatistas are proposing to build consensus with people and organizations of the Left. They believe that together they can draw up a plan to go to all parts of Mexico where there are "humble and simple people." They will not go to tell them what to do, give them orders or ask them to vote for a particular candidate, as these are all neoliberal acts. They hope that all the various struggles, which are now distanced from each other, will be able to come to an agreement.

To clear up any doubts, the EZLN confirmed its commitment not to engage in any offensives, including attacking government forces. Nor will it maintain any secret relations with political-military organizations in Mexico or any other country. Whatever the Zapatistas do will be done without arms, through a peaceful civic movement, but without neglecting or failing to support their communities.

They are going to continue fighting for Mexico's indigenous peoples in this new stage but will no longer fight just for them or only with them. Instead, they will fight with and for all of Mexico's exploited and dispossessed. And when they say "with everyone," this includes those who have had to emigrate to the United States to survive. They are going to use what they hear and learn to build a national program of struggle that is leftist in the sense of being anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberal. They are going to try to build or rebuild another way of doing politics. They will start up a struggle for a new Constitution and for new laws that consider the Mexican people's demands for housing, land, work, food, health, education, information, culture, independence, democracy,

justice, liberty and peace.

#### **How to “organize the indignation”**

Explaining how they intend to do all of this, the EZLN announced it was sending a delegation of leaders across Mexico for an indefinite period, stressing that they would go only where they were invited. The EZLN announced that it would establish a policy of alliances with non-electoral organizations and movements that define themselves as left wing under the following conditions: no deals would be made at the top level and imposed lower down, but rather agreements would be made to go together to listen and “organize the indignation”; no movements would be built only to be negotiated behind the backs of those responsible for creating them; they would always listen to the opinions of those participating; they would not seek kickbacks, positions, advantages or public posts in power; they would not be restricted to the electoral calendar; and they would not try to resolve Mexico’s problems from above, but rather build an alternative from below.

Other conditions relate to a reciprocal respect for each organization’s autonomy and independence, its particular forms of struggle, its way of organizing and its internal decision-making processes. The goals include the coordinated, joint defense of sovereignty and intransigent opposition to any attempts to privatize electricity, oil, water and natural resources. The Zapatistas are inviting leftwing political and social organizations—the Left that’s been left outside the election process—to organize a national campaign, visiting all corners of the country to listen to and organize around words people’s words. But they stressed that this would not be an election campaign.

#### **Indigenous time**

The EZLN issued nine documents in June. During that time, reporters who had covered events in Zapatista territory for some time continued to travel around the communities in search of new signs. They confirmed that the low intensity war was continuing at a slower pace perhaps, but had not stopped. Although public opinion seemed unaware of this, the communities bore witness to it every single day. The militarization continued in Chiapas and the paramilitaries were active. The army’s argument that its actions corresponded to normal practices and exercises was unconvincing, although it had dismantled four military camps in a Zapatista zone following the declaration of the red alert. While some communities were happy that the army had withdrawn from these places, others considered it suspicious that the withdrawals took place just as the paramilitaries were once again stepping up their aggression against Zapatista grassroots supporters. Was this apparent military withdrawal just part of a strategy to allow the paramilitaries more freedom of action?

The autonomous municipal offices and *Caracoles* remained closed. Although on

the surface the autonomous governments did not seem to be operating, they were evidently continuing to do so. Civil society groups that had been working in the autonomous communities remained on the alert and the communities themselves continued their resistance. When asked by journalists, the indigenous people seemed in no hurry to grab any attention. Indigenous time prevailed.

#### **Return to normality with changes**

On July 11, the EZLN announced that it was lifting the red alert it had announced 23 days earlier. Those who had become confused and nervous assuming that the Zapatistas had ditched the valuable experience of the *Caracoles* calmed down when they found out that they had resumed their daily activities. The offices of the councils governing the Zapatista autonomous rebel municipalities were also reopened. But there were some changes.

While Good Government Committee members, who had been named by the autonomous councils, would continue their functions, grassroots supporters would be placed in oversight committees whose task was to know who arrived, the problems faced by people requesting support or solutions, the projects proposed and the decisions being made by the Good Government Committee members. These oversight committees would be responsible for informing the Zapatista autonomous rebel municipalities and grassroots supporters to ensure that everyone knew about all decisions or actions and could assess them and express their opinions about them. Gradually civilian activities returned to normal throughout Zapatista territory and by mid-July, the offices of the Good Government Committees and autonomous municipalities reopened amid festive celebrations.

#### **“The Other Campaign”**

On July 13, the Zapatistas officially announced the “National Campaign with Another Kind of Politics, for a National Program of Leftist Struggle and a New Constitution.” For obvious reasons, the name was abbreviated to “The Other Campaign.”

The Zapatistas may have been frugal with their communications in the first five months of 2005, issuing just three communiqués from January to May, but they have more than made up for it since, with nine in June, another three in the first half of July and then two more just a week later. They announced that still more new documents were on the way that would give a detailed explanation of the new stage in their struggle.

The government just didn’t get it. President Fox praised the fact that they had laid down their weapons and calculated that Marcos would want talks over their reintegration into civilian and political life. The business sector insisted

that Zapatistas not be allowed to tour the country with their faces covered, arguing that if they had laid down their arms they should also take off their balaclavas. But the Zapatistas have not disarmed. Most of the EZLN will remain armed in their area of influence, not with any offensive in mind but rather in self-defense, to protect their communities from the dangers of paramilitary and military attacks.

The Zapatista National Liberation Army has not been dissolved. While Zapatistas will tour the country unarmed, they will be using all of their symbols and are still protected by the Pacification Law. It should not be forgotten that their balaclavas were firmly in place during the 1997 and 2001 national tours. Fox's anticipated dialogue with Marcos never happened, because the Zapatistas are looking for a meeting not with those at the top, but rather with grassroots people, a meeting between the poor and their allies, the different representations of the non-electoral Left.

A tower of Babel?  
Do they fill a void?

The political class continues to squander millions on worn-out, hollow campaigns to ensure the respective parties' presidential candidacies. The politicians' disappointing reactions to the Zapatista proposals have been criticized for their contempt and avoidance of any discussion of the questions raised.

A debate did take place in public opinion, however. Some complained that the Zapatistas had returned to their meta-territorial obsessions when the real resistance to neoliberalism had to be built locally, from the base, through natural resource management. Others argued that separate, unconnected forms of resistance can never take on the powerful forces of neoliberal globalization and praised the Zapatistas for maintaining their *Caracoles* and seeking to build broader alliances in Mexico and the world to forge new organizational models. There were also voices that warned of the risk of creating a new Babel, particularly regarding groups from an older Left that tends towards sectarianism.

Yet others pointed out that the Zapatistas have already failed in several attempts to launch initiatives aimed at broadening their struggle throughout the nation. They felt that before going ahead with the new initiative it was worth examining why the previous attempts had not worked.

Some suggested different courses. The Zapatista movement is not stepping into a void, they argued. For many years now, pluralistic coalitions have been forming to resist the impact of neoliberalism and sketch out alternatives. The combative Mexican Electricians' Union, the recently constituted Peasant,

Indigenous, Social and Grassroots Union Front—which successfully united a wide variety of grassroots movements—and the National Peace Promoter have been holding meetings and reaching agreements for some time, such as developing more active forms of civil resistance to stop a handful of people from deciding the future of the majority of Mexicans.

At the beginning of 2005, they proposed an alternative national program in the Querétaro Declaration. They had already covered a lot of ground and the Zapatista movement was always invited to join in. It should not be forgotten that time, tolerance, openness and respect for a great number of different struggles were all needed to arrive at that Declaration. In any case, the Querétaro Declaration, the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle and other similar initiatives appeared very compatible. They could all form the basis of joint efforts towards a free, just and democratic Mexico.

#### **What about the 2006 elections?**

Another issue that has raised many questions is how to achieve one of the proposals of the Zapatistas' Sixth Declaration: a new Constitution that defends grassroots sovereignty and rights. This necessarily touches on the makeup of the legislative branch and the general elections. There is general agreement with the EZLN's deep disparagement of the political class. There is no confidence that the political parties have the capacity even to look for, let alone find, solutions to the country's pressing problems. But while many sectors are convinced that it is essential to break the party-based system, there is also a strong sense of the need to discuss what to do with regard to the 2006 elections. They point out that if the grassroots forces have nothing to do with the process, then the PRI could end up winning the elections, which would represent a dangerous step back into authoritarianism.

In such a scenario, it is highly likely that the PRI and PAN legislators would revive their alliance, approving all the anti-grassroots reforms, such as privatizing the electricity and oil industries, education and health, and crushing the rights of workers and peasants. Wouldn't it be worth running independent candidates in the 2006 elections to try to wrest the monopoly away from the dominant classes and their parties? There are various options in this respect: boycott the elections altogether, run independent candidates, or establish alliances with the least neoliberal candidates.

Underpinning this new stage of the Zapatista movement is the desire to enter into in-depth discussions to reach firmly rooted agreements. The evident and growing deception with democracy is because it has been limited to electoral democracy and usurped by the moneyed powers, and because the alternation of power has offered no solutions to the needs of the majorities.

The Zapatistas don't support López Obrador

After explaining their plans in the Sixth Declaration, the Zapatistas announced that they had received a large number of critiques, arguments, doubts and advice. They asked those who referred to the danger of abandoning the indigenous issue to carefully re-read the parts of the Sixth Declaration that insist that while the struggle will expand, it will remain indigenous. They reassured others who urged them to remain in Chiapas doing what they've been doing by confirming that they will continue the Good Government Committees and are not competing "to be the most anti-neoliberal." They reminded people that the Zapatistas have their sights set on those below rather than on the institutions at the top.

They replied to those who defended Lopez Obrador's project as leftist by saying that he has defined himself as a centrist and insisted that they would not support the political center he represents. They specifically referred to some of those responsible for coordinating López Obrador's civic networks at a national level, pointing out that these people were pro-Salinas and had made aggressive declarations against the EZLN.

The PRD leadership avoided responding to Subcomandante Marcos' comments. But those in its civic tendency felt that he exaggerated some points, did not go far enough in others and was plain wrong in yet others. It was a mistake to confuse the PRD's grassroots supporters with the party bureaucracy because they were not an enemy of the Zapatistas. They also felt it was a mistake for the Zapatistas to want to exclude the grassroots supporters of registered political parties from the new movement. Some think that this clear definition on the part of the Zapatistas presages a future dispute over these very grassroots sectors. Finally, the European movements supporting the EZLN view the Sixth Declaration as a chance to land another blow against neoliberalism and European Zapatista networks have agreed to build democracy from below.

Slander them, lock them up, murder them...

Having announced that they will leave Chiapas to tour the country, the Zapatistas are anticipating different forms of pressure on them to abort this new stage. These include a "preventive" attack, intense media campaigns accusing them of links to drug trafficking and organized crime, as well as armed attacks and damage-control campaigns, including the buying off opinion makers. Another option would be to take them into custody either at the beginning of or some time during "The Other Campaign," which among other things would involve Congress voting to annul the Dialogue Law. And finally, they might even be murdered through the kind of classic forced disappearance

that invariably implies absolute impunity. Given the possibility of such scenarios, the EZLN made an important distinction: while the state of alert had been lifted among the Zapatista peoples, it remains in force among the insurgent troops. It reminded people that its military structure was prepared for the possible decapitation of its leadership.

### **Let society define politics**

It should be recalled that while the first roundtable in the 1996 talks achieved the yet-to-be implemented San Andrés Accords, the government aborted the second roundtable on democracy. And that one was to have been followed by others related to economic policy.

The EZLN is currently reworking these missing roundtables, this time not with the government but rather with a broad current identified as the new Left. The aim is to build a country that truly responds to the fundamental demands that gave rise to the Zapatista movement in the first place. But this time the discussion will not be limited to Chiapas; it will cover the whole Mexican territory.

The importance of this new phase of the Zapatista movement is its insistence that the people be taken into account. Respected intellectual Pablo González Casanova referred to the Zapatista's Sixth Declaration as a new, creative step taken by one of the most original movements of our times. He recalled that the Zapatistas have broken new ground regarding the importance of dignity, autonomy, pluralism, overcoming differences and coordinating indigenous peoples with the rest of the Mexican people and with the peoples of the world. They have linked the global to the local and redefined and reconnected national and social struggles of indigenous peoples, workers, communities and citizens. Their project implies that society define politics, and aims at a social Left. It is a cause for renewed hope.

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### **"The Other Campaign" of "Those at the Bottom"**

*The Zapatista movement has initiated its new stage. Who has responded to its call to develop "the other campaign," and what ideas and proposals have they brought with them? This initiative has produced a new heterodox and irreverent political dynamic in Mexico. But there are risks that it could end in a new orthodoxy.*

**Jorge Alonso**

In late June 2005, the Zapatistas issued the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon

Forest, in which they laid out where their movement has come, how they view the world, how they see Mexico, what they are thinking of doing and how they envision doing it. They invited all those “at the bottom” to participate with them individually or collectively in a different kind of national campaign from the ones run by those “on top,” which will be focusing on electoral issues until next year.

### Preparatory meetings

In August and September, the Zapatistas invited the most pluralist and diverse of the fragmented struggles against neoliberalism to their lands, and organized them into six sectoral meetings and one plenary. The sites for the different sessions were divided up among Zapatista towns, whose inhabitants prepared shelters, food and venues. The Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center provided maps to help the invitees get to their respective destinations. In each meeting the Zapatistas gave the welcoming and closing words and summed up what had been dealt with. No time limits were imposed on anyone who wanted to speak. In addition to presentations by those attending, position papers and other writings submitted by people who could not attend were read. The Zapatistas also organized a team that taped everything and made summaries, later sent to the participants for their comments. The idea was that, once corrected, they would be published on the on-line *Revista Rebeldia*. The meetings were cumulative, in that the progress made in one session was shared with those attending the next ones.

By promoting deliberative reflection, “the other campaign” has opened an ample experience of participatory democracy. It has insisted that decisions must be made by everybody and not just at the leadership level of each grouping. It invokes the power of dialogue, discussion, persuasion and informed deliberation. It wants the base to lead and to promote an integral citizenry to transform the state rather than merely reform it.

The EZLN rejected all three national parties

One constant in all these meetings was the emphasis on differentiating this new alternative from the essence and acts of the political class. The Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) commented that it opposed that entire class and clearly suggested that the “other campaign” should have nothing to do with the electoral campaign or supporting candidacies. It explained that the economic elite is currently imposing both the economic and political policies and that the role of the political class is simply to administer this imposition by the powers that be. Thus, it argued, politicians are mere managers of the destruction rather than reconstruction of social relations.

The EZLN considered that after wresting the presidency from the Institutional

Revolutionary Party (PRI), which had governed for nearly three quarters of a century, the National Action Party (PAN) had equaled in five years what the PRI had done in seventy. The PAN, it argued, will leave a country deep in economic crisis and with greater discontent than it inherited from the PRI. It added that the PRI is banking on the population's short memory. After having instigated the nightmare of frauds, massacres and corporatist control, it today represents organized crime's aspirations to consolidate its institutionalized power. The PRI can be defined as crime turned government as its plan is to return to presidential office to elevate corruption. For its part, the EZLN accused the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) of limiting itself to filing down neoliberalism's sharp edges. Such harsh and repeated criticisms of the PRD have led that leftist party to accuse the Zapatistas of playing the Right's game to prevent PRD candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador from winning the presidency, which would permit the PRI's return.

#### **Tough on the PRD**

The EZLN ironically asked: "When the PRI left the presidential office, what party has continued to have control of the majority of states, municipalities and the upper and lower houses of state parliaments?" It argued that it's not the same to hope for victory for the "least evil" option as to hope that a project of profound transformation could be victorious.

Looking back a decade, the EZLN recalled that when it burst onto the national scene in 1994, during an electoral period, it saw the strength of the PRD under Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. But the political class' rapid decomposition also contaminated the PRD, a party that had pledged to promote the rights of the EZLN and indigenous peoples but in the end only betrayed and mocked them. In its narrow-minded calculations, the PRD preferred to see the Zapatistas confined to their territory. As for López Obrador, the EZLN accuses him of having destroyed the grassroots movement in the capital while mayor of Mexico City and of surrounding himself with advisers from the corrupt PRI government of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

The EZLN slammed both the PRD leaders and the party's rank and file in all the meetings. And while it had clearly stated that it wanted nothing to do with the PRD, it complained that PRD militants were attending the meetings without disclosing their real identity, despite the fact that members of registered political parties were not invited to the meetings. It further accused them of exploiting the good faith of their hosts to use any opportunity to invalidate criticisms of their party.

#### **Sixteen-hour meetings**

Another constant throughout the meetings was the airing of criticism of the Zapatistas by many groups. The latter humbly examined the claims and where

they were right made a strong self-criticism with a clear promise to change in the future. The EZLN accepted that its own clumsiness had undermined relationships with many groups and expressed embarrassment for not having acted in solidarity with many struggles. Many also accused it of having paid more attention to international issues than to national ones.

Yet another characteristic of the meetings was that the Zapatistas took on the task of listening patiently to all who wanted to talk so they could learn what people were thinking, their problems, their experiences of struggle. The sessions lasted some 16 hours a day. It was a new experience for the Zapatistas to have direct contact with so many varied struggles and concerns from all over Mexico. The EZLN assured the participating organizations that it was not going to try to win away their members. The gathering was not about promoting the growth of an organization but rather encouraging the appearance of new social subjects, new groupings and new forms of organization. The EZLN wants to join its struggle to others, and if the Zapatistas were doing the inviting this time, in the next phase it will be just one more organization.

#### **With political organizations**

The first meeting wasn't very large. It was attended by representatives from leftist organizations that are not registered as electoral parties, of whom 26 made public statements. The Zapatistas acknowledged the grassroots work of these organizations. Some of the participants argued that a critical vote had to be given to López Obrador, while others suggested launching an independent candidate, but the majority favored working to create a different, non-electoral kind of movement organized around an anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal struggle that aspires to a different society. They opposed the construction of a new leftist party or fusions that would only end in more schisms.

In the desire to create a broad front against neoliberalism, some felt it was better to join what had already been built while others favored something new. Some argued for well-structured organization while others wanted to avoid anything rigid, preferring more horizontal spaces. Nonetheless, they all agreed on the need to achieve consensus with respect and equal treatment for all participants in this effort.

#### **With indigenous peoples**

The second meeting, with the indigenous organizations, was much larger: 300 delegates from some 50 groupings, 31 of which made public statements. It was recognized that the indigenous struggles are fundamental to the country's transformation. The Zapatistas promised to accompany indigenous peoples in defending their difference and characteristics. They explained that no one would respect indigenous peoples' place if the peoples themselves did not fight for respect; they also exhorted the groups to advance "the other campaign"

and create a collective of collectives.

It became clear that “the other campaign” is an effort that will take years. It was also evident that the Mexican indigenous movement is still strong and has a lot of appreciation for the Zapatista movement.

#### **With social movements**

The third meeting exceeded the Zapatistas’ expectations. They had planned for about five hundred participants and nearly three times that many came, from a hundred organizations, plus journalists and observers. Seventy-six of the organizations’ delegates made public presentations. There were organizations representing workers, peasants, cooperative members, fishers, merchants, day laborers, civic committees, grassroots urban residents, teachers, students, women, lesbians, artists, even people who wanted to continue studying but had been turned down. The meeting teemed with plurality in search of convergences.

Opposition to both subordination and command was expressed in this meeting. Each organization would contribute based on its own history, experience and form of organization and each would preserve what it already had or enrich it through contact with the others. Together, they would all define the whats and hows, the ends and the means. They re-clarified the principles: no agreements would be decided at the top to be imposed below, but rather agreements would be made to go and jointly listen to and organize the indignation; no movement would be established only to negotiate deals behind its members’ back; it would not be about seeking positions, advantages, public posts, but rather about reaching beyond electoral calendars...

Given that several organizations were quite concerned about the 2006 elections, the EZLN again made clear that it is not recommending any candidate, or even encouraging anyone to abstain; it fully respects the decision of each group. It did, however, stress its hope that while electoral campaigns start and end, the “other campaign” would continue.

As in the previous meetings, the Zapatistas exhorted the participants to report back to their other members on what had been debated and discuss it within their own organization. They insisted that “the other campaign” has nothing to do with elections, and added that when the Zapatistas tour the country they will dialogue and discuss projects, programs, characterizations, definitions and planning for the near and long term. They will not present themselves as a rival, but rather as a new partner in struggle.

#### **With NGOs and other collectives**

There were 650 delegates from 220 nongovernmental organizations and other collectives in the fourth meeting, and they represented a wide range of focuses, as could be seen from the 149 organizational statements. Both the government and business leaders had planted people among the 258 observers to find out what was being cooked up in Chiapas. Given such heterogeneity and a large number of young people, it was decided that participants could communicate either through traditional means or through songs, poetry, dances and plays. The session was extended accordingly.

One problem the Zapatistas detected was a kind of sector-based attention: artists only listened to other artists, feminists to other feminists, anarchic groups to other anarchists, and alternative media only to each other. They perceived little interest in histories that referred to different and even opposed realities, as if, despite the diversity intended in the invitation, each sector wanted to remain locked within its own place with its own mode of struggle. The Zapatistas reminded them that listening and respecting does not imply subordinating and obeying, much less remaining quiet. They invited everyone to listen to and respect each other to build one “grand and collective us,” radically transforming gender and generational relations. In all of their opening speeches, they came out strongly in favor of women’s rights.

#### **With families and individuals**

The fifth meeting, with communities, families and individuals, increased the diversity and complexity by including even those “who barely represent themselves.” One young man commented that it was the gathering of “our solitudes.” There were 300 participants, of whom 113 made public statements, plus some 200 observers. The meeting was attended by defenders of forests and opponents of dams that would flood out their towns. Autobiographic testimonies abounded. There was a proliferation of young people seeking their place, who had a certain suspicion of the Zapatista movement. It was a fragmentary, dispersed gathering that revealed how unhappy the marginalized are with the current state of affairs. Many proposals about what stages should be included in “the other campaign” had been previously gathered for this meeting.

#### **With all the rest**

The sixth and last meeting—“with all those who couldn’t come before”—included organizations representing indigenous peoples, teachers, students, and social, cultural and countercultural groupings, with a predominance of collective groups and networks with an express interest in convergence. There were 110 public presentations in what was easily the most political meeting. As in the others, there was a search for solutions, but presentations on the local and national situation predominated. The discussions from the other meetings were shared and everything was up for debate: definitions, slogans, times and

places for “the other campaign.” It was strongly felt that by coinciding with the parties’ electoral stumping, this campaign could underscore its difference from the simulation being carried out at the top, in which candidates promote themselves like merchandise, reflecting a profound scorn for people’s dignity and intelligence.

#### **Plenary: Everyone together**

All participants from the sectoral meetings were invited to return for the plenary session, scheduled for the weekend Mexican independence is celebrated. Given the festive nature of the moment, the invitees were warned that neither liquor nor drugs were permitted in Zapatista lands. As many who had attended the previous meetings could not come to the plenary session, they were able to follow up on the work by Internet. While no time limit or specific set of themes had been fixed during the previous meetings, it was requested that the interventions not exceed five minutes and that they focus on the point under discussion for economy of time and to make the session productive.

Many young people attended, but there were also old party militants. There were members of indigenous organizations, unionists who had never previously sought out the Zapatistas, members of renovated grassroots urban movements, intellectuals, teachers, students and members of new kinds of social movements: human and civil rights defenders, feminists, lesbians and gays, artists, pacifists and environmentalists. Some organizations and brigades identified themselves by name, while others preferred to remain anonymous. There were workshops and collectives of all kinds, anarchists and abstentionists, artisans, credit unions, subcontracted workers and displaced people. The novelty in all this was the participation of individuals as such.

While 30 leftist political organizations had committed themselves to “the other campaign” in early August, that number had reached 55 by mid-September. In that same lapse of time, the number of Mexican indigenous organizations and peoples involved had climbed from 32 to 103; of social organizations from 42 to 162; of NGOs, collectives and groups from 210 to 453; and of neighborhoods, communities, families and individuals who belonged to no organization from 690 to 1,624.

The plenary was attended by 2,069 people, including national and international observers. Of those, 196 attended as individuals, and the rest were delegates from 26 indigenous organizations, 91 social organizations, 36 political organizations and 129 NGOs and collective groupings. The EZLN viewed the attendance as bountiful, but recognized that it didn’t represent the majority.

#### **Seven points up for debate**

The discussion focused on seven proposed points. The first was to ratify, expand or modify the characteristics of “the other campaign” (civil and peaceful; anti-capitalist; leftist; with another way of engaging in politics; in favor of a national program of struggle and a new Constitution; familiar with the struggles and resistance occurring all over the country and in solidarity with them, supporting them and learning from them; respecting individuals, organizations, collectives and other groups in their forms of work, decision-making, demands, strategies and tactics; mutual respect; seeking to link struggles and organizations; and aware of and supporting the struggles for humanity and against neoliberalism all over the world).

The second point addressed who was invited and who not. The third had to do with the organizational structure of “the other campaign,” the fourth with the special place in it for differences, the fifth with its position toward other organizational efforts, the sixth with tasks and the last with whatever anybody thought was still missing.

All the Zapatista commanders attended the plenary, which conjured away the rumors of splits. The Zapatistas announced that Marcos would head up the first stage of the national tour next year, from January 1 to June 24. The Zapatistas would make this tour unarmed and entrust their security to the members of “the other campaign.” The tours would be financed by contributions and a detailed report would be made of it all. Paraphrasing a verse of “The International” and alluding to PRD presidential pre-candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador and Subcomandante Marcos, they sang “no more dictators, or supreme saviors, no Caesars, nor bourgeois, nor God nor Andrés nor Marcos. No one will be his own redemption!”

The second stage of the tour would be headed by another Zapatista delegation, which would travel through the whole country, and by specially created state and regional delegations. That tour would begin in September 2006 and finish in April 2007, at which point it would be relieved by another team.

The Zapatistas, who are literally putting their life into this project, see “the other campaign” as a way to try to shake up the country from below, to reveal all the despoiling, disparagement and exploitation. Public speeches will be secondary, with the main effort concentrated on contact at the grassroots level, place by place.

#### **What will “the other campaign” be?**

Sixty-three participants addressed the first point. Some proposed that various other elements be added to the definition of “the other campaign’s” characteristics. Some wanted to add “anti-hierarchical” and “anti-authoritarian” to the term “leftist,” while others said that what was meant by

"for humanity and against neoliberalism" needed to be spelled out more clearly. There were those who insisted on more detailed definitions: the international struggle as not only anti-capitalist but also anti-imperialist and in opposition to the war. It was said that the new movement should be social, political and national. Others wanted to see concrete proposals about the nation. Yet others thought it essential to add rejection of structural reforms, defense of sovereignty and a stress on trade union democracy. Some favored including that it was a cultural, counter-hegemonic and anti-capitalist struggle. A good number of participants considered it important to make clear that "the other campaign" was in itself an educational process, one of shared learning. There was a desire for resounding definitions, such as that it was the accumulation of centuries of resistance and rebellion by thousands of Mexicans who were saying "enough" to capitalism. There were also groups who felt that it should state its opposition to femicide.

The novel experience of bringing together so many groups and individuals provided many ideas. Some suggestions had more to do with programmatic points of struggle: boycott of capitalist products; defense of the rights to housing, education, health care, services and work; the struggle against the privatization of water and for a comprehensive and grassroots urban reform; an emphasis on culture, science, art and technology... Finally, it was agreed that the *Revista Rebeldía* would draft a text showing what the EZLN had initially proposed and what points had been added.

#### **Who can be part and who not**

On the second point, the initial formulation was that those invited were individuals, organizations and collective groups that were rebelling and struggling, were declared anti-capitalists and belonged to no institutional political parties. One of the new proposals was a clear statement that the political class was not invited. Others proposed excluding both political parties and any other organizations seeking power. Some preferred simply stressing that those with a candidate could not participate.

If party members strictly speaking were excluded, some wondered what to do with PRD sympathizers. The discussion also had to deal with the fact that while some groups want nothing to do with voting, others—without being either PRD members or sympathizers—favor voting for López Obrador. It was a point that would require further discussion.

Various participants got annoyed because one group appeared in the plenary with a photo of Stalin and thus proposed leaving out anyone who claimed to be Stalinist. As the discussion went on, the list of categories that at least some did not want to participate in "the other campaign" grew: bosses, spurious and corrupt union leaders (known in Mexico as *charros*), those with a history of

corruption and fraud, sexists, homophobes and anyone who had exercised any kind of violence against women. At the same time, a list was started of those who should be invited, which included the millions of professionals who belonged to the middle classes and had been victims of the system. Some groups argued in favor of making a special call to the Christian base communities. This point was resolved in the same way as the previous one: list the proposals and send them to everyone so they could be discussed and decided.

The dilemma in the discussion about organizational structure was between one with a very organic configuration to avoid an amorphous movement or something horizontal and reticular. It was stated that whatever structure was adopted needed to permit plurality and multiple initiatives. The discussion made it quite clear that “the other campaign” would not be reduced to the Zapatistas’ tours through the country. With respect to infrastructure for those tours, the creation of an economic fund was rejected in favor of the Zapatista travelers moving and living with what their host communities could provide for their subsistence and activities. This idea echoes the medieval movement of the mendicant friars.

#### **Intense debates, pending decisions**

The plenary opted to leave the fourth point, about differences, open for further discussion. The fifth point examined the relationship between “the other campaign” and other organizational efforts, particularly the Peasant, Indigenous, Social and Grassroots Front and the National Promoter of Unity against Neoliberalism and for Peace. The dilemma was whether to incorporate these structures or maintain their individuality and independence. The positions of the preparatory meetings had opened a range of possibilities: bring in these initiatives, given that they were somewhat asleep and coming into “the other campaign” would get them moving again; do not bring them in but examine which ones to ally with; or let them go their own way.

One serious problem examined was that PRD and PRI politicians were participating in the existing organizational initiatives, and in some cases *charro* leaders were even in top positions. The Zapatistas expressed their strong determination not to ally with these figures, and asked the organizations of “the other campaign” to respect their opinion. This point also ended up on the pending discussion list.

Finally came the issue of the tasks they would take up in the near future. First there was a call for solidarity with grassroots struggles in general. Then came the proposals: the creation of a class-based front, a national front for jobs, a network of small markets for organic products and one for fair trade among communities. There was an emphasis on the importance of supporting a

national gathering of young people, of forming a national roundtable of leftist groups, of solidarity with political prisoners, of defending human rights defenders. Some insisted on including those who have been forgotten and those who have nothing even to defend. Others proposed promoting massive electoral abstention. It was also decided that this point would continue being discussed by all those who had signed on to “the other campaign.”

To get an idea of how many are following these Zapatista-led discussions by Internet, the figure is available on the *Revista Rebeldía* web page. By the beginning of October 2005, the text of the Sixth Declaration had 1,715 hits, Marcos’ closing words at the first plenary 1,753, and the page presenting agreement with and opposition to “the other campaign” 12,433.

At the close of the plenary, Marcos declared that he was simply the EZLN spokesperson and would not agree to be the spokesperson for “the other campaign.” In any event, he commented, the first step would have to be to define if it even needed or wanted a spokesperson or preferred to let organizations or individuals speak for themselves. What had been fundamental was the practice they started with: consult everybody so no one was left out and take everyone’s opinion into account so that those who were the largest, knew more or talked more didn’t end up prevailing. Everyone should decide on and set the course, even if that means leaving urgent tasks pending a while longer.

As it was anticipated that the members of “the other campaign” would begin receiving threats and even experience repression, it was decided to respond by mobilizing all peaceful and civil means to defend anyone who came under attack.

The EZLN pledged to send a letter to all adherents listing the different options in each of the points addressed and requesting that they be discussed and the corresponding pronouncements sent back. It asked that this be done as soon as possible, but with the necessary patience to guarantee the participation of all. Only this way could it be guaranteed that “the other campaign” would find its course and take shape.

**Marcos'**  
**Affronts and intolerance**

**leadership:**

The Zapatista movement made important progress when it concentrated on constructing autonomous municipalities and regions, but by closing itself off, its relationships with old allies cooled off and in some cases were even broken. If the EZLN was now interested in unleashing a broad national movement, it had to stanch some still open wounds. It has in fact done that, in a process of self-criticism and dialogue, reestablishing those ties and rebuilding old bridges

with various social movements.

Nonetheless, it is impossible to ignore serious problems and evident contradictions in the dynamic of “the other campaign.” Some argue that despite everything said about Subcomandante Marcos having a subordinated role in the Zapatista leadership, about merely being a spokesperson because everything is consulted, his overwhelming presence and immediate responses make him appear as an indisputable leader who imposes points of view that are embraced without much internal discussion. Many also believe that he has contrived such personalism that many critical commentaries are taken as affronts.

It is very questionable, for example, to try to push forward “the other campaign” with major insults. The EZLN claims that it is defending a vision that reaches beyond the moment, but it is dealing with the electoral moment in a very opportunistic way. Thus the tour to be headed by Marcos coincides exactly with the campaign period. Making “the other campaign” coincide with the electoral year will unquestionably influence the elections. So, in the end, there is self-criticism of old insults but new ones are being committed without prior deliberation. In other words, the EZLN’s self-criticism is selective.

The Zapatista movement argues that it opposes the whole political class, but more often than not it has referred only to the PRD—to which it has directed many strong disqualifications. The disproportionate tone of its insults and taunts against the PRD and its presidential candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has been held up as an expression of great intolerance.

It must not be forgotten that Marcos previously adopted similar tones against individuals with positions very close to the Zapatistas, but who dared to differ on some points and to express their critiques. Rather than engage in discussion, Marcos responded with angry dismissals and summary disqualifications. While Zapatistas talk about creating a world with room for other worlds, they have demonstrated narrow and sectarian visions that hearken back to the tradition of the old Left. Their movement is trying to bring together part of the Left, that part outside the PRD, but by its hostile logic, it obliges those who want to follow it to make an unnecessarily hard-line choice.

The EZLN’s obsessive and disproportionate attack on the PRD is a bit contradictory: on the one hand Marcos accuses the party of being a conglomerate of infighting tribes, while at the same time attributing to it the actions of a homogenous top-down body. The most problematic aspect is that Marcos is going after a presidential pre-candidate who consistently gets the highest popularity ratings, and this obviously has political repercussions.

His relentless attacks raise many questions: is the aim to wrest votes away from the PRD so that the clearly rightwing options win, thus aggravating the contradictions? Marcos is leading a negative electoral campaign with no other option than abstention. Does he and his movement think it is better to abandon the electoral game and citizens' rights to those who currently dominate power? Marcos has also been accused of falling into the temptation of dirty media wars.

It is extremely important for the EZLN to define its non-negotiable positions and its positions of consensus clearly, in a way not related to the 2006 elections or limited to any other passing concern. If the PRI wins with Madrazo as its candidate, dignified by a hard-line vote in a sea of abstention, it would be the end of any pluralism in the state and an even greater threat would hover over the Zapatista movement. Accepting that a victorious López Obrador would hardly represent an ideal for a leftist movement, and would certainly not augur a radical transformation of the country, does not imply ignoring that his awareness of the needs of the poor and excluded and his struggle against inequality could bring advantages.

By setting López Obrador up as the main rival to beat, the Zapatista movement seems to have lost sight of the main enemy. The most recent Zapatista position divides the Left and many do not accept that the choice must be a leftist variant on Bush's threat: you're either with the Zapatistas or with López Obrador. The excessive criticism of the PRD has annoyed many who back the PRD but also support the Zapatista demands. A broad front, an anti-capitalist program and a new Constitution involve working for the creation of a political force that can make the demands of the majorities viable, and that cannot happen with divisions at the bottom.

**Why are the attacks on the PRD so harsh?**

There are conflicting interpretations of the Zapatistas' persistent critique of the PRD. It could be understood as a kind of desire to destroy the old, so that something new can be generated that goes beyond the decrepit party-ocracy that so harms the interests of the majorities. The critique of vacuous electoral processes, caught up in cynical and wasteful marketing is aimed at freeing people from these repetitive electoral cycles, identifying them with ephemeral, grotesque and coarse aspects of their outrageously costly TV campaign spots.

This marking of the PRD's boundaries can also be read as a new version of the Left at the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st. The dreams of that old Left, conceived as an illuminated group that takes power through armed means to make the transformations that the exploited masses long for, are no longer under discussion, having ended in the enormous failure of what

was called real socialism. What is being questioned now is the electoral path adopted by various Latin American leftist movements. As has happened in Brazil and Central America, particularly Nicaragua, those movements have been subjected to the logic of the powers that be, and in a context that has propitiated enormous corruption. Seeing this, the Zapatista movement may be proposing something different through its emphatic opposition to the electoral scenario. It would obviously be desirable to see a strengthened Left that does not accommodate itself, but really responds to its transforming role.

The Zapatista drawing of lines could also be interpreted as a confrontational posture to avoid confusion among the huge sectors afflicted by poverty and exclusion. The call for a “new campaign” has nothing to do with the Left’s historic attempts to forge fusions that could lead to the birth of a new party. The new convergent confluence is the complete opposite of the attempts of the registered so-called leftist parties, which are searching for a front made up of party elites and at the end of the day have little interest in elections other than to divvy up posts and privileges. In this take on the situation, the Zapatistas’ exhortations to the PRD grass roots to shake free of their elites and leave the party grow out of the imperious need to demonstrate that it’s not enough to renovate parties; something different must be constructed.

#### **The treasure of the PRD grass roots**

Whatever way one reads it, doubts remain. Some clear boundaries would have to be established to distinguish culpable from fallible. Wouldn’t it be an injustice to attribute the same blame to PRD members who attack Zapatista communities or to the regional and national leaders of that party—who obviously should respond, punish infractions by their members and mend fences with the offended—as to all other PRD members in the country? Isn’t the EZLN leadership falling into a simplistic, schematic and thus unjust generalization? Wouldn’t it be more appropriate to examine the issue with greater care rather than repeat condemnations as if they were incontrovertible?

Adolfo Gilly, a prestigious leftist who participated in the founding of the PRD, wrote a piece called “The triangle and the campaigns,” which was published in a national news daily. He argues that the triangle in which the present capitalist domination is mounted consists of despoiling, exploitation and disparagement. He criticized the assault of pro-Salinas politicians who have taken over the PRD. He came down particularly hard on many figures with a bad political reputation that have ended up being important PRD candidates and leaders. He labeled López Obrador’s proposal “welfare-style developmentalism to stabilize the neoliberal reforms already in place” and he totally opposed the conversion of PRD politicians into post seekers.

So far, Gilly's critique is in line with that of the Zapatistas. Nonetheless, he also says that anybody who proposes to organize something and goes out to towns, neighborhoods, communities and work places will come across many grassroots PRD workers whose greatest treasure is their experience of struggle, which nobody can take away from them. If "the other campaign" decides it can do without what these people have lived through and learned in their struggles, including their time in the PRD, it will lose out on a great deal. Gilly concludes that this is one of the greatest challenges facing not the electoral campaign, which will go on with its spots and its traps, but any attempt to organize and fight against that infernal triangle.

Other criticisms of the design of "the other campaign" argue that it's simply not feasible to listen passively to what many groups are talking about locally. They argue that what's needed is to build ties around determined objectives. The danger of leaving out those participating in registered electoral parties and making people feel uncomfortable about voting in 2006 is the exclusion of large combative grassroots sectors, which are necessary to face the enemies of grassroots interests. One major fear is that the bilious tone of Marcos' criticism is fostering the hegemony of the most sectarian groups, which would lead to the reproduction of more testimonial groupings, which will have no effect in changing the current correlation of forces.

It's still something  
new and promising

None of this, however, overshadows the positive aspects of "the other campaign," which brings with it a national and international political initiative to find a programmatic and political alternative to neoliberalism. It is a social movement that is endeavoring to create a new pedagogical political movement of organization and action. It is positive that the Zapatista movement is redefining itself as not only rebellious and anti-neoliberal, but also part of the anti-capitalist Left; that in response to a world where *having* predominates, it is trying to rescue a world of *being*.

We are observing an organic effort to leave behind the traditional form of parties and the old forms of mass fronts and coordinating bodies. Focusing on the crisis affecting all parties subjected to the logic of their elites, especially those known as leftist, "the other campaign" has repudiated all party-ocracy, manipulated by the powers of money, major media and organized crime. Instead, it is trying to create "something different." In response to the discrediting of electoral democracy, "the other campaign" has turned rescuing the potential of a more comprehensive democracy into a goal and a daily practice. For all that, we should not lose sight of the fact that by implication a comprehensive democracy encompasses civil, political, electoral and social democracy. It's not possible to erase electoral democracy from this vision, but

it certainly needs to be transformed, although this has yet to be stressed in “the other campaign.”

### Informed in a new kind of collective

citizenry

This long task transcends electoral dates. Given the political marketing that is deluging the citizenry with messages that it is supposed to receive as a passive spectator, “the other campaign” obliges those building it to listen to the people who are suffering from capitalism and resisting it through small daily struggles. It is an arena for the voice not of leaders, but of the organizations’ grass roots and of individuals being relegated because they can’t flash a membership credential. Innovative capacities can be seen in this initiative that are trying to ensure that what is built does not end up a prisoner of routine. The desire is to create a huge virtual assembly that debates, discusses and decides in a genuinely collective way, to guarantee a place and voice for all and keep the experts from dominating with their public speeches. A new kind of collective is therefore emerging that offers an equal and individual place within a collective of organizations or individuals. Another important innovation is that in this matrix the multiple is strengthened by both group and personal concerns. Thus, people who are not attracted by the traditional group molds can participate in a new type of broad collective that is not rule-bound.

The Zapatista movement’s accumulated moral authority was what made it possible to attract so many convergences. But it is still a challenge for these convergences to attain a level in which they have the capacity to break the vicious circles of dispersion and fragmentation. Releasing such trapped potential, when the institutions are so discredited, requires an inspirational and credible voice. If many of the contradictions pointed out are resolved, it should be possible to weave together hopeful and encouraging convergences that are dynamic and flexible, allowing the emergence of a movement that is more than a proposal, that could have the scope to remedy the currently lamentable state of affairs. Faced by an alienating maelstrom, the slower nature of indigenous time has been introducing a broad and unhurried temporality for the long haul. This proposed alternative must be patiently woven into strong and durable cloth.

### With the civil society “from below”

There is genuine concern to ensure that this new construction comes from below, that it belongs to and involves those at the bottom. There is a perception that the nation can be energized through the construction of a force nourished by ethical objectives and strengths.

If up to now the Zapatista movement loosely called on civil society, it has now clearly discerned the existence of a civil society from below as opposed to the

one from above. The mechanics proposed in “the other campaign” contrast with the National Agreement proposed and signed by Mexican multimillionaire Carlos Slim Helu, head of Televisa, on September 29 before a group including Mexico’s wealthiest business leaders, anti-democratic union leaders and the owners of the largest media, an audience that was presented as “civil society.” “The other campaign” is distancing itself from the Weberian concept of power as a zero sum—what one wins the other loses—and instead proposing the empowerment of those at the bottom in the configuration of a power that, rather than being disputed, is shared and therefore grows. Rejecting the conception of a democracy closed to the elites, it is aiming for a democracy that creates shared power.

“The other campaign” is no longer just a Zapatista idea, although it prides itself on having their inspiration and dynamism. An irreverent heterodoxy has been born. Let’s hope it does not lead to a new orthodoxy.

Number 294 | Jan 2006

### What are the Zapatistas Seeking With Their “Other Campaign”?

*During his tour through southeastern Mexico, Marcos constantly criticized López Obrador’s candidacy. He also turned down the invitation extended to the Zapatistas to attend the inauguration in Bolivia of Evo Morales, Latin America’s first-ever indigenous President. The next months will show the EZLN’s influence on Mexico’s own presidential elections.*

Jorge Alonso

In January 2006, Mexico’s presidential candidates officially kicked off their campaigns, after spending millions of dollars on their primaries and unofficial campaign activities. We don’t know who financed these activities or what promises the candidates may have made in return, and for this reason among many others, the parties continue to inspire little confidence among the Mexican people. The Zapatistas’ “Other Campaign” also began its tour of the country in January, the first stage of which was led by *Subcomandante Marcos*, who has taken on the name Delegate Zero.

#### Five presidential candidates

Five candidates are running for President in the July elections. Felipe Calderón, former head of the National Action Party (PAN), is now in second place in the polls. In third place, after a hard and divisive internal battle, is Institutional evolutionary Party (PRI) head Roberto Madrazo, running in a coalition—already discredited by corruption—with the Green Party. Two newly established parties are also running presidential candidates. The New Alliance, under the

strong leadership of Elba Esther Gordillo of the teachers' union, after she finally broke with Madrazo, chose a close ally as candidate. The Social Democratic and Peasant Alternative selected Patricia Mercado, a minority rights activist, as its candidate, following a schism between its two wings and some political and legal scuffling. The challenge facing these two latter parties is to pull a sufficient percentage of the vote to ratify their registration. Running first in the polls at the start of the campaign is Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the candidate of a leftist alliance made up of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), the Labor Party (PT) and the Convergence Party. Even though he hasn't appeared in the media in recent months, he has an eight-point lead over Calderón.

#### **On motorcycle, truck, horseback...**

The Zapatistas initiated their Other Campaign at the same time as the official one. Marcos is leading it off with a tour through southeast Mexico, made up of the states of Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Yucatan, Campeche and Tabasco. Some feared that enemies of the Zapatistas would take advantage of Marcos' travels outside Zapatista territory to attack him, so numerous contingents of indigenous people accompanied him through Chiapas to protect him during the first days of the tour. The Zapatista command also asked civil society groups involved in the Other Campaign to help ensure his safety, and each made sure to turn over the task to another group on his next stop. That "security" worked just fine.

Although the federal government and religious hierarchy praised the Zapatista tour, local police hassled people involved in the campaign in several states who were trying to publicize the meeting sites. Provocateurs also attended some of the events and in some towns poor families were given food handouts on the condition that they didn't participate in the meetings.

People also feared that there would be attacks on Zapatista communities during the tour, as in fact happened in one community at the hands of a group of PRD members allied with PRI paramilitaries. The Zapatistas were careful not to fall for any provocation aimed at undermining the campaign, while the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center warned that any act of aggression against the campaign would jeopardize the search for peaceful solutions.

In his first appearance, Marcos rode in on a motorcycle named "Sombraluz," together with the chicken named "Penguin" that made its debut in the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. Next he traveled by pickup truck, taking his turn at the wheel. On the outskirts of one town, people met him with a horse so he could ride in on horseback. In another, he showed up peddling a bicycle taxi. He slept in community centers and the humble houses of campaign

sympathizers.

There were three kinds of meetings. Some were just with participants in the initiative, so they could put forth their points of view. Then there were larger events, to which the press was invited. And there were massive events, which were very well attended and made a big impact.

**“Perhaps  
they’ll  
want  
to get involved”**

The meetings with those already involved in the Other Campaign and those joining it along the way are the main purpose of Marcos’ tour. Marcos is making contact with many new people in addition to meeting with those he’s known since 1994, when the Zapatistas, fed up with the “criminal Salinas,” finally said “enough!”

Acknowledging the important role played by the elders in Zapatista communities, Marcos shared their instructions to him: “You have to fight, but not alone. Look for others like us who want to organize. Share your thoughts with them and listen to their hearts. Invite them to join us in this struggle. And if they’re not convinced, let them see what we’re doing and perhaps they’ll want to get involved.” Marcos explained how the Zapatistas’ struggle had begun with six people and then grew, and although that struggle began among indigenous people, it had been able to reach beyond them into other sectors of society. He insisted that each person and each group, no matter how small and weak they may feel, could become part of the struggle and help it grow.

**Listening to each other,  
hearing about the problems**

Everyone spoke freely at these meetings, with the participants invited to take the floor. There was plenty of time for discussion, but not in the desire to convince, much less defeat, those who think differently. No one had anything to lose by speaking up. Marcos said the Other Campaign is like a large table set up to give an opportunity to speak to people who haven’t had a chance. He explained that it’s different from events in which a few outsiders climb up on a stand to speak to people whose history and struggles they know nothing about, and the people are expected to listen. He emphasized the importance of listening in order to see what’s happening in the country and together discover what we have in common, so we can build a national movement.

With this approach, memories and histories emerged that were unknown to most people at the meetings. People compiled a list of problems, grievances, laments and demands as they spoke of humiliation, exploitation, disdain, discrimination, injustice, unemployment, illegal migration to the United States, the eviction of artisans from archeological sites, the theft of land and water, contamination, the destruction of nature, time-consuming requests and

appeals with no response from the government, useless social programs, the rising costs of basic services, the lack of access to education, fraud in Fox's health care program and its failure to cover drugs or hospital care, the government's failure to help those affected by the recent hurricanes... The list went on and on.

#### **Becoming partners in the struggle**

People also spoke about persecution, repression and unjust imprisonment. Some came in the hope that Marcos would resolve problems no one else has addressed. Others presented proposals to deal with the problems. Marcos listened patiently, taking note of people's words and silences so he could write up reports. But he was also asked to speak.

Marcos shared some of the Zapatistas' experiences, and explained how their communities live better now than they did 12 years ago, and better than other communities that have put their trust in the political parties. Now they have schools and hospitals efficiently managed by the people themselves; they have taken the law into their own hands and apply it justly. With one story after another, he explained that he wasn't bringing solutions but rather another problem: the need to organize. People have to choose if they want to continue living in the same country or build another one together. He told them that southeastern Mexico had been a victim not only of the fury of nature but also of the hurricane of ambition, because the aid had gone to the rich. He called on people to mobilize against the region's economic, political and social devastation.

Marcos identified several fears. One has to do with the future of the movement promoted by the Other Campaign. He spoke of the fear that its leaders would become corrupt and people would be left alone, out in the cold. He presented himself not as a leader but as a *compañero*, a companion or partner. People don't need Marcos to build the Other Campaign; all he was doing was putting the sympathy the Zapatista movement has generated at the service of the cause, so those who otherwise wouldn't even have the chance to talk to each other could come together in the struggle. He explained that the words spoken at the meetings would be posted on the Zapatistas' web site, so they would reach people in other regions who would no doubt agree with their positions and proposals and also become partners in the struggle.

The meetings encouraged antagonistic organizations to connect, increasing the number of people involved in the Other Campaign. Marcos called on people to build a just country in which everyone is equal, and leave those who are shaming the country in the dust. He invited people to establish new laws and build a new country. He explained that the movement being formed, rooted in the history of the people, was something new, not a copy of what was being

done in other places around the continent. He asked the alternative media to help encourage ties by reporting on how the participating organizations had been born, the problems they'd faced, the defeats they'd suffered and victories they'd won. And he proposed that all the organizations establish a regional agreement for the southeast.

#### **The death of *comandanta* Ramona**

A few days after it had begun, Marcos suspended the tour when he learned that *comandanta* Ramona had died. She had been diagnosed with kidney disease ten years earlier, but had held death at bay for all of those years through the medical care she received thanks to the solidarity of civil society. Her body was buried in a private ceremony, attended only by members of her community.

Visibly moved, Marcos said he didn't even come up to the ankles of tiny Ramona, a symbol of the Zapatista struggle. He said Mexico had lost one of the fighters it sorely needs, and they had all lost "a piece of our hearts." The EZLN had to reschedule the rest of his tour around the country.

#### **Take off his mask?**

Once he left Chiapas, the Right began to insist that Marcos take off his mask, a demand echoed by the occasional voice of a provocateur at some events. Marcos replied that if he spoke without the Zapatista emblem, people wouldn't know who he was. Only when he wore the mask did people stop to see him, as had been the case since 1994. He reflected once again on the indigenous struggle, which requires people to hide themselves in order to make their demands visible. And he invited people to demand that the rich take off their masks.

At an event before a huge crowd in Yucatan, he announced that he'd take off his mask. People looked on, astounded and in many cases afraid—in popular mythology, fighters lose their masks when they're defeated—as he began to remove the balaclava. The relief was palpable when people saw that he was wearing a second one underneath the first. That day, Marcos challenged the government to unmask itself.

#### **For those without a party**

During the course of the tour, the Other Campaign was joined by people from all walks of life, including peasant farmers, fishermen and women, union and cooperative members, teachers, nurses, salaried workers, students, artists, environmentalists, people fighting against privatization and for the freedom of social and political prisoners, among many others.

The Other Campaign aspires to be a slow, long-lasting action, different from the

media-driven excess of election campaigns. The Zapatista tour isn't aimed at forming a political party. Marcos is emphatic about this: they're not looking for political posts, nor playing the game of any presidential candidate. They're creating a place for people without a party. Marcos constantly calls on people to respect this place, asking those who have opted to participate in the elections not to bring their search for votes into it.

#### Against all parties

Marcos describes all of the country's political parties as "overseers working for the rich," whose false leaders buy people's votes by taking advantage of their needs. He constantly recalls that the indigenous peoples were betrayed by all the parties and the three branches of the state in 2001, when the government backed off the promised legislation to guarantee their rights.

He criticizes all the parties, most specifically any time one of their activists speaks out at a meeting in defense of the election process. He blames the governing National Action Party (PAN) for trying to put Mexico in a neocolonial situation, to turn it into a hacienda. He criticizes the children of the President's wife for illicitly enriching themselves.

He criticizes her for making decisions alongside the President as though she held a public post when no one has elected her. He pointed out that although she purports to speak in favor of women, PAN members left the chamber when Zapatista *comandanta* Esther testified before Congress on indigenous peoples' demands, because "they couldn't see an indigenous women who wasn't their servant."

Marcos dismissed the charge that the PAN is paying him to criticize PRD candidate López Obrador to prevent him from winning. He continues to reject the idea that the PRD is a leftist option, because López Obrador himself has said it's not. He predicts that if López Obrador wins, those who vote for him will later regret it.

"Make sure your hearts are thinking"

Local PRI activists threatened Marcos in La Hormiga, an indigenous neighborhood on the outskirts of San Cristóbal de las Casas made up largely of people expelled from their original community for religious reasons, but residents of the neighborhood rallied to protect him. He said the PRI is the only party of which it can be said that it "has grown on the blood, humiliation and death of indigenous people." He maintained that the PRI is made up of "liars and murderers from the top on down." He described its presidential candidate, Roberto Madrazo, as a criminal unashamed of the thefts he's committed, and accused him of being involved with drug traffickers. He accused the Labor

Party's leaders of going where the money was, and recalled that they had walked hand in hand with a governor of Guerrero responsible for a massacre of peasant farmers. He also recalled that the leader of the Salinas Convergence Party had been charged with hiring people to evict Zapatistas from the lands they had recovered. He described the other parties as "shrimps that sell out to the highest bidder."

The Other Campaign is open to those who are not represented by the political parties, although the electoral sympathies of some campaign members don't prevent them from taking part in this effort. The campaign doesn't urge people to abstain or oblige them to vote or not to vote, but rather calls on them to do something else; not to be satisfied with elections. It promotes the use of reason in analyzing political options, encouraging people to "do what your hearts tell you to do, but make sure your hearts are thinking."

The message is clear: this democracy only allows you to elect the executioner, to select who will give the order to raise prices, evict people from their land or imprison social activists. The solution isn't to change one ruler for another; it won't come from above, but must be won through a force built by those at the bottom, a movement rich in ideas, proposals and struggles.

#### **Identifying the common enemy**

The Other Campaign began by analyzing the Pact of Chapultepec, signed by the powers of money and the big media that rule the country. This pact called on presidential candidates to commit themselves to neoliberal dogma, a pledge to which the PRI and PAN candidates both agreed. López Obrador said he would sign if aid to the poor were included.

Marcos argued that Mexico's problems can't be reduced to charity. He also noted that the pact discusses security as something requiring a firm hand, with more army, police and prisons to contain the people's rebellion, but not more jobs, houses, food or support for rural areas.

The Other Campaign has described the pact as a plan to plunder and destroy the country, around which the powerful class has united to turn the elections into a circus, and to choose who will fan the false hope of change.

The Zapatistas' analysis of the problems discussed during this first stage of the Other Campaign has led to the conclusion that the capitalist system itself lies at the root of the evils. Marcos asked people to reflect on this common enemy and called on "those at the bottom" not to fight among themselves but rather aim their fire at those responsible for the misery. To change the situation, he proposed that all forces unite and send out an "enough already!" even louder

than the one shouted by the Zapatistas on January 1, 1994. And the specific change he proposed was the creation of a huge national anti-capitalist leftist movement of struggle so those on the bottom can build a just and equitable country for all.

#### **“Make it all anew”**

Marcos said that everything remains to be done, and insisted that the Other Campaign not subordinate itself to what the Zapatistas do or don't do. No one is going to tell anyone what they should do. A network is being woven in which people need to learn to listen to each other, lose or control their fear, not be alone, raise themselves up in dignity, courage and rebellion, and organize in order to fight for their rights and win them and to promote a national program of struggle.

The goal is to transform Mexico into a new, just, free and democratic country. “We're going to sweep away everything, and make it all anew.”

#### **The EZLN is not going to Bolivia**

For all that, the EZLN has garnered its share of criticism, starting with a controversial decision it made at the beginning of the tour. It did not accept the invitation to the inauguration of Bolivia's new President, indigenous leader Evo Morales, even though it is the first time in Latin American history that an indigenous person has come to office with the support of a grassroots movement and on a government program that is not only anti-neoliberal but also anti-capitalist. Are the Zapatistas afraid of endorsing a movement that is changing the correlation of forces through electoral means? Is it an over-insistence on purity?

Marcos explained that the movement expressed through the Other Campaign isn't looking towards either Bolivia or Latin America; it is based on the Mexican people's concrete current situation, and that instead of following the leaders to Bolivia, he preferred to speak with people here. His reply was not convincing.

Will the PRD's defeat help  
“those at the bottom”?

Others reproached Marcos for his constant critique of López Obrador. Marcos dismisses the entire political class, but while he makes only tepid references to the PAN's Calderón, he comes down particularly hard on the PRD candidate. Furthermore, while claiming that he's not encouraging people to abstain, he regularly repudiates the electoral route.

Since the Other Campaign was deliberately scheduled to parallel the election campaign, the Zapatistas will most certainly influence the results by drawing some votes away from the PRD. But will those at the bottom be in a better

position to organize if it loses to either the PRI or the PAN?

#### How to judge this initiative?

The Other Campaign has also been criticized for making very general statements without proposing any solutions, and for simply gathering complaints during the various stops on the tour rather than help people work out solutions to urgent problems. The replies from its organizers are mostly defensive: the movement's still in its infancy, without a fully formed ideological position; it's not a question of finding quick solutions, but of creating something for the long term; this is an anti-systemic movement, with a well-defined enemy, that is trying to create a critical mass capable of bringing about real change.

It is true that, unlike other campaigns, this isn't an effort by leaders to convince people of the merits of an already-drafted program. Instead the aim is to encourage people to shape the movement themselves, through many broad-based discussions. The Other Campaign isn't about holding meetings that attract huge crowds, but about holding many meetings with many people, and encouraging them to participate in weaving a network of resistance and solidarity. It's about creating a new kind of politics, where dialogue is an ethical principle and responsibilities are shared.

What to think? This nascent movement can't be judged by traditional parameters, but only by what is done day by day. And we still have several months of campaign tours left to see what that turns out to be.

Number 298 | May 2006

#### The “Other Campaign” Is Forging a Path for New Ideas

*In July, Mexico will choose from two rightwing options—the PAN (more of today) and the PRI (more of yesterday)—and an electoral Left option led by the PRD’s López Obrador. Meanwhile, the “other” Left is seeking and debating its “other” theory in its “other” campaign.*

Jorge Alonso

The political moment in Mexico could not be more troubling. Security forces repress striking workers, leaving several dead and wounded. The avoidable deaths of dozens of miners have yet to be cleared up. Groups of drug traffickers are sowing terror with bloody turf fights in several major cities. Using public

resources, Vicente Fox's government has launched a costly campaign to support the National Action Party (PAN) presidential candidate and denigrate the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) candidate. Forgetting the principles of its founders, the PAN has waged a campaign full of lies and slander. When the prestigious writer Elena Poniatowska publicly called on it to play clean, the party leadership attacked her with excessive, misogynist verbal abuse, leading several prominent national and foreign writers to come to her defense. In its hostility to culture, the PAN has shown quasi-fascist attitudes. The advice of foreign experts in waging a dirty war is clear in its campaign. The party boasts that all of this is advancing its cause. Meanwhile, rather than fulfill its role as arbiter, the Election Institute is openly working against the leftist opposition and has been justifying the dirty war instead of acting in accord with the electoral law.

For their part, the big television stations are proving that they wield real power. They appear to have most of the country's legislators at their beck and call, as shown by the recently approved law governing radio and television, which renews the radio frequency licenses these monopolies hold for another 20 years free of charge and will eliminate many public service, university, community and indigenous radio stations. This operation was headed up by the Televisa group, which already owns 62% of Mexico's radio frequencies and is now poised to "legally" appropriate the new digital frequencies and cell phone and Internet businesses.

#### **Fear of "populism" and the hard facts**

Because of this strange climate, the PRD candidate, Andrés Manual López Obrador, chose to participate only in the last of the electoral debates. The first, in late April, was a dull affair as none of the participants ventured beyond what was already being said in their campaign ads. Some major news outlets have joined in the battle of the polls to make it appear that PAN candidate Felipe Calderón has taken the lead. In other surveys, López Obrador remains ahead. What is clear, however, is that the gap between the two has been closing. While the real foreign interference in this campaign has come from Washington, the PAN government is dragging Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez into the fray as part of its anti-Left scaremongering. It is claiming that, like Chávez, López Obrador is a populist. The PRD candidate has replied that neoliberals see anything that differs from their own position as populism. Distributing a little among those who have nothing is "populist" but lavishing benefits on a few is "promoting growth." López Obrador insists that he's not going to accept the neoliberal agenda they want to impose from abroad.

A look at the hard facts would clarify the situation. In 2005, Venezuela's economy grew by 9.3%, one of the highest rates in Latin America, even though the country ignored the International Monetary Fund's advice to save its oil

income rather than invest it in social spending. Chávez spent the money on infrastructure, education and health care, with very good results. In contrast, data from the IMF itself shows that Mexico's growth rate under the PAN government is below the Latin American average: Mexico will grow by only 3.5%, compared to regional growth of 4.3% and a global average of 4.9%. The IMF also noted that these poor results are because Fox's government took advantage of the high oil prices "only to balance the budget." Without the oil income, the deficit under Fox's government—including the expenses involved in the onerous bank and highway bailouts—would have been 9.8% of the GDP instead of 0.2%. But although these hard facts condemn the PAN government, a huge campaign organized by the real powers in this country is urging people not to change course.

### **The thinking of those from below**

In response to this cloudy panorama, another solution is taking shape. The Zapatistas' "Other Campaign" has been calling on people to shake off the deceptions of the electoral system and build an alternative from the bottom up, uniting people in their struggles against capitalism. The Other Campaign has already visited 19 of Mexico's 32 states. One important episode during its travels was a meeting to think about "another theory" to guide the action of the **Other Campaign.**

The Other Campaign tour had barely begun in January 2006 when some of its members realized that they should discuss strategic issues with intellectuals at some point. Most of the events in the Other Campaign have been local ones, but people felt that while this meeting should not be held in Mexico City, it should be national. It was finally decided to hold it on March 21 in the University of Guadalajara's Salvador Allende auditorium.

Among the participants were scholars from the Mexican National Autonomous University, the Nicolaíta University of Michoacán, the University of Guadalajara, the National School of Anthropology and History, the Wallerstein Center from San Cristóbal de las Casas, the Center for Research and Studies in Social Anthropology, independent researchers and the editors of the magazines *Chiapas*, *Contrahistória* and *Rebeldía*.

While the country's political parties are spending millions on dirty wars full of lies and slander, empty propaganda in the mass media and some impossible promises, everything said in the Other Campaign is being recorded and organized by the alternative media, which uses its modest resources to increase understanding and is keeping a record of all the proposals made at each place visited by the Zapatistas. As a result, anyone in Mexico or around the world can learn about and follow the struggles and the thinking of those at the bottom in this country. Like everything that has been said in the Other

Campaign, what was discussed in this session in Guadalajara can be heard at [www.kehuelga.org](http://www.kehuelga.org) (under “las voces de LOC” or “the voices of The Other Campaign”).

“Elite,” “mid-ranking” and  
“grassroots” intellectuals

The questions addressed at this first meeting with intellectuals included, “What is the basis for the thinking, actions and organizing efforts that should be carried out by the anti-capitalist Left involved in the Other Campaign in order to bring about a profound change in our country’s economic, social and cultural structures?”; “What elements can be drawn from the Other Campaign to build ‘another theory?’”; and “What role can intellectual workers play in the Other Campaign?” The participants contrasted the dominant situation in the country and the role of the Other Campaign for national transformation. Although they recognized that the topics proposed were enormous and complicated, they also saw that we’re in an emergency situation that requires innovation. We have to take a fresh new look at some old issues.

Before a full auditorium, *subcomandante Marcos* began the meeting with a classification of intellectuals. He started with “elites,” who pontificate on science and truth, add a veneer of humanism to the desire for profit and present capitalism as the final end of history. There are also “mid-ranking” intellectuals, who try to take refuge in the fragile ivory towers of “neutrality” and “objectivity,” but flirt with the system and try to win attention in the president’s court. They don’t want to remain in the middle, but rather move up. With their tools of analysis and debate, they put themselves at the service of political and economic power. Then there are others who, sooner or later, abandon their principles, back down and desperately search for a justification to save themselves in front of the mirror. These are the “prudent, mature and sensible” intellectuals who have laid down the arms of criticism and use the language of the Left to disguise their rightwing work. From the comfort of academia, they set themselves up as judges. They sell resignation, trying to get people to accept the illusion that we have to maintain the macroeconomic project.

In response to new realities, the Zapatistas pose the need for another kind of theoretical analysis, another debate of ideas. First, they’re asking what they call “grassroots” intellectuals to have the humility to recognize that they are facing something new. Second, they’re inviting them to join the Other Campaign, make it their own and learn about the situation of indigenous people, workers, peasant farmers, young people, women, children, the elderly, teachers, students, employees, lesbians, gays, sexual workers, small businesspeople, grassroots Christians, street workers and others. By doing so, Marcos said, these grassroots intellectuals will undoubtedly stun the world

with their theoretical debates and analyses.

Pablo

González

Casanova,

an authentic grassroots intellectual

Pablo González Casanova, one of Mexico's most renowned intellectuals, is among those accompanying the Other Campaign. As a very young man, he got both a master's degree in history, granted jointly by the National Autonomous University, the National School of Anthropology and the College of Mexico, and a doctorate in sociology from the University of Paris. He has been a profound and prolific researcher and the dedicated teacher of generations of scholars. He was one of the most dynamic and innovative rectors of the National Autonomous University and never shied away from facing up to vengeful authoritarian powers.

*Don Pablo*, as he's affectionately known, has been a tireless promoter of scientific learning in Mexico and around the world, leading rigorous, creative research on all continents. He has established important higher education organizations and has been an active member of international social science associations, presiding over several of them. He has been awarded many prizes, medals and honorary doctorates and his work appears in the bibliographies of studies and courses the world over. He has authored some 25 books that have left their mark on the development of science, including *Democracy in Mexico*, which has gone through 21 editions and been translated into English, French, Portuguese and Japanese.

But *don Pablo* is not one to rest on his laurels. His latest book, *Las nuevas ciencias y las humanidades*, published in 2004, has made important contributions to world thought. Since generosity is one of his virtues, he has contributed numerous chapters to collections edited by his colleagues and students. He has also taken the lead in compiling groundbreaking collections on such topics as the history of Latin America in the second half of the 20th century, the history of the Latin American workers' movement, the political history of Latin American peasant farmers, the state in Latin America, the perspective of the United States, Mexico's situation in light of its current crisis and immediate future, the working class in Mexican history, and many other valuable publications on Mexican democracy's problems, progress, challenges and options.

He has also written hundreds of articles in prestigious journals around the world, imaginatively addressing such topics as elections, political culture, rights, the new capitalist economy and economic and social alternatives. He has thought deeply about the role of the university and the social sciences in the contemporary world and since the 1980s has been especially concerned with what lessons for democracy can be learned from "those from below."

*Don Pablo's activity has been limitless, and he never repeats himself. He's always up to date on discussions, and invariably takes an original tack. Reading or listening to him always leaves one thinking.*

Despite his more than 80 years, *don Pablo's* research continues to open up new paths to knowledge. With an enthusiasm any adolescent would envy, he is committed to those from below, particularly the Zapatistas.

#### **World war IV is underway**

*Don Pablo's* speech at the meeting with intellectuals was dazzling. Titling it, "Why are we here?" he proposed that one would have to examine previous alternatives and what happened to them to understand what the Other Campaign has contributed. Social democracy played neocolonialism's game; revolutionary nationalism thought only in development terms and became mired in populism; state socialism became a stage of capitalism and neoliberalism made the rich richer and the poor poorer. Neoliberal globalization structured the world into two military-economic blocs that were leading it into a war that had already run through the Balkans to Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq, and now threatened Iran. What he called "World War IV" was being fought against the poor and the vital resources of nature. The situation couldn't be more alarming, given the rate of ecocide and the destruction of the biosphere.

He noted that things have changed. In the current phase of neocolonialism and imperialism, transnational mega-companies are taking the place of governments and privatizing nation-states. True elections have been replaced by a system of political parties. The Mexican Supreme Court rules in favor of owners and their public and private officials. And there's a policy of criminalizing and applying legal sanctions to any who dares get in the way of the plundering neoliberal program.

The class struggle remains influenced by the great division in global capitalism between central and peripheral, metropolitan and colonial regions, with places for the rich and powerful and places for the excluded and exploited poor. The proletariat of yesterday are the "poor" and "extremely poor" of today, and they're joined by those being impoverished by neoliberalism. In today's world, the poor and impoverished and their allies are history's new actors, calling for a new project of liberation, democracy and socialism.

**The three floors:**  
**State, economy and culture**

Other participants emphatically insisted that one can't be anti-capitalist without a socialist proposal, quoting Rosa Luxembourg, who opposed state

ownership of the means of production without workers' control, arguing instead for workers' self-government.

Members of the Wallerstein Center noted that it would take many meetings to fully discuss the questions posed by the Other Campaign. They called on people to dare think long and hard about how to bring about a critical reform of democracy, since politics has always been an affair of the elite. They suggested that anti-systemic movements have been mistaken in clinging to the idea of “three floors” and focusing on the state one, seeking to take power in order to change the other two: the economy and culture. The system invariably caught them by offering “the distraction of the exercise of power.”

They didn’t change those two floors or transform the state, but rather legitimized it. The Zapatistas and the Other Campaign have not made this mistake, since they chose the bottom floor, that of the “humble and simple people.” They don’t care about the state, as shown by the Good Government Committees in Chiapas, which have established a power that’s not that of the state, but rather about devolving power to those from below.

Neither worshipping nor  
weakening the state

Others argued that we have to examine the state more now than at any other time in history, since it has become a direct and docile instrument of the dominant class. Neoliberalism has weakened and reduced the states of dependent countries to exploit their peoples more easily. The neoliberal state has sacrificed the majority on the altar of the market.

In Mexico, this has led to a series of rapid and overlapping transitions. The country has gone from an authoritarian presidency to a petty “party-ocracy” that turned its back on people’s real needs and cares only about its own benefits. This party-ocracy does not really hold power, but rather plays the role of faithful servant to the “powers that be”—big money, big media and organized crime, especially drug trafficking. These powers, which weren’t elected by anyone and aren’t accountable to anyone, impose their own agendas.

Another transition was from pre-democracy to post-democracy, without ever enjoying democracy. The solution is for Mexico’s vast majorities to organize and build coalitions that challenge the “powers that be,” promoting a profound democratic reform of the state to turn it into an instrument that serves social needs and defends the weak against the powerful. This idea neither places the state in a supreme position, where it can crush its citizens, nor advocates a weak state that can’t help defend themselves from

the vast external and internal powers. It argues instead for a state that combines social equity and political democracy, defends diversity and protects the environment.

### **What power? what democracy?**

People also proposed a discussion about power. The power of the elite consists in a few imposing their will on the rest, an accumulating and predatory power in which what one wins, the others lose. Those at the bottom aspire to another kind of power, a shared power, which grows when it's shared.

Several participants focused on the role of democracy. It's becoming increasingly clear that representative democracy excludes people. The political class has been widely discredited, and the parties are increasingly failing to represent the new sectors of society. Electoral democracy is in crisis, as those elected don't take people into account or respect them. The political class doesn't listen to those at the bottom and has nothing to tell them. Some proposed examining the lessons of Athenian democracy, such as the rotation of posts by lottery, accountability, votes of censure and the control of the assembly. Democracy should lead to the control of power, and ethical factors should play a central role.

### **Not leading the way, but listening**

With respect to the role of intellectuals in the Other Campaign, people said that the movement could not establish itself as an alternative without its own intellectual base. It's important to keep things straight, however: the movement will generate its own intellectuals and set them to work. These intellectuals will include all of those who have been reflecting on their experiences and sharing and comparing them, making them intelligible, without the need for books or universities. The Other Campaign offers a magnificent opportunity to discover a new movement being formed, which intellectual workers can try to analyze and explain.

Intellectuals will be one more actor in the Other Campaign. They will study it, and will surely learn a great deal from the efforts and ideas of those at the bottom. They can't aspire to light the way, but rather follow behind dazzled by what is happened, attempting to understand and record this important historical moment. Nor can the intellectuals be reduced to eulogists. They will use their long critical training to encourage discussions that make it possible to identify elements of the "other theory."

### **Naming those responsible**

A huge percentage of the Mexican population is excluded from the benefits of development and from genuine political representation, and people are reaching their limit. A vast distance separates growing sectors of Mexican

society from the world of formal politics. As Pablo González Casanova has pointed out, projects supposedly designed to bring about progress have instead destroyed many people's lives. Precarious work, exploitation and plunder are the norm.

Those responsible have to be identified and named. Building an alternative to dominant politics, the Other Campaign includes a swath of the real nation whose existence is not reported in the official version of events. It records the insults and the damage done. While those at the top ask themselves what to do with the poor, those at the bottom are asking themselves what to do with the rich, those responsible for the country's disaster.

#### **From far away and far below**

Some called for class language to be recovered, but without losing sight of the fact that there are old and new elements we have to understand. Many struggles are in fact anti-capitalist, without ever labeling themselves as such. The Zapatistas and the Other Campaign are promoting another way of doing politics by asking, listening and encouraging people to reach agreements. They invite people to look back on past victories and defeats, study the Left's experiences in power, overcome the authoritarian characteristics of the old Left and build another kind of power from below.

We must remember that things always begin from very far away and very far below. We have to break the walls of exclusion without building others. At the meeting with intellectuals, participants accepted the challenge of beginning everything anew, in another form. The Zapatistas and the Other Campaign have created an anti-systemic initiative: they invite people to challenge the system and build the subjects of change, in the context of a polysemic subversion of the bourgeois order. There can only be another theory if there's another practice. There was consensus around the need to examine theory, history and the present situation to see how the world could be different. The Zapatistas and their Other Campaign are encouraging a new political theory and insist that for there to be a world with room for many worlds, we first have to transform society.

The plan was for Marcos to speak at the close of the event. but when it was almost over, some 30 sexual workers broke in, many with their faces covered, demanding their rights and denouncing abuses suffered at the hands of the PAN government, especially police harassment. Marcos invited them to take the stage and say what they had to say. This highly symbolic act ended the first meeting, at which he was very attentive to what people proposed and took many notes. There were 17 presentations, not counting those of Marcos and the moderator. Many others were unable to speak due to time, but the participating journals pledged to publish the proceedings, including both the

presentations made and the written statements that could not be shared.

### Many pending issues

Only a few issues were sketched out, even in general terms, so there's still a need to define things more precisely, clear up disagreements, carry out a thorough and wide-ranging discussion and reach conclusions that can be put into action. We have to further clarify everything related to the current phase of capitalism, the new class configuration, the constitution of power, the role of the state, comprehensive democracy and the forms of economic solidarity, autonomy, cultural diversity...

That afternoon, Marcos met with participants in the Other Campaign and reflected on the fact that some had argued at the morning's meeting that socialism is the only alternative to capitalism. He believes that the Other Campaign is demonstrating other anti-capitalist proposals that aren't socialist, including anarchist and libertarian ones, and even proposals to fight capitalism by means of the market. This is undoubtedly one of the main points to be addressed in future meetings with intellectual workers. Issue number 10 of *Bajo el Volcán*, the Autonomous University of Puebla's journal, has printed 19 essays in which intellectuals reflect on the Other Campaign, addressing issues related to the various forms of resistance and social movements. Many theoretical issues raised by the Other Campaign's tour are being discussed, and we must have the courage to delve much further into them. For example, why is the party system no longer viable? How can we weave together the various struggles and voices of those at the bottom? What kinds of alliances and agreements are needed to create a new kind of politics? How can we bring something new into being while taking advantage of what was good in the old? How can we prevent everything from being politicized? How can we create non-hierarchical organization and decision-making? How can we prevent totalitarian attitudes from taking hold, which instead of encouraging discussions that include disagreement, lead to rejection and attacks and the fear of raising certain questions? How can we free ourselves of slogans and secrets? How can we ward off efforts to impose a uniformity of thought that attempts to dictate what we can and cannot think? How can we guarantee plurality? These are but a few of the many pending questions.

Meetings like this one oblige us to think about such questions. Theory grows out of our attempts to understand experiences, and this kind of theory is intimately connected with praxis. Diverse positions are beginning to take shape. The first meeting with intellectuals was barely the beginning of a long road.

## **What are the Zapatistas Seeking With Their “Other Campaign”?**

*During his tour through southeastern Mexico, Marcos constantly criticized López Obrador’s candidacy. He also turned down the invitation extended to the Zapatistas to attend the inauguration in Bolivia of Evo Morales, Latin America’s first-ever indigenous President. The next months will show the EZLN’s influence on Mexico’s own presidential elections.*

**Jorge Alonso**

In January 2006, Mexico’s presidential candidates officially kicked off their campaigns, after spending millions of dollars on their primaries and unofficial campaign activities. We don’t know who financed these activities or what promises the candidates may have made in return, and for this reason among many others, the parties continue to inspire little confidence among the Mexican people. The Zapatistas’ “Other Campaign” also began its tour of the country in January, the first stage of which was led by *Subcomandante Marcos*, who has taken on the name Delegate Zero.

### **Five presidential candidates**

Five candidates are running for President in the July elections. Felipe Calderón, former head of the National Action Party (PAN), is now in second place in the polls. In third place, after a hard and divisive internal battle, is Institutional evolutionary Party (PRI) head Roberto Madrazo, running in a coalition—already discredited by corruption—with the Green Party. Two newly established parties are also running presidential candidates. The New Alliance, under the strong leadership of Elba Esther Gordillo of the teachers’ union, after she finally broke with Madrazo, chose a close ally as candidate. The Social Democratic and Peasant Alternative selected Patricia Mercado, a minority rights activist, as its candidate, following a schism between its two wings and some political and legal scuffling. The challenge facing these two latter parties is to pull a sufficient percentage of the vote to ratify their registration. Running first in the polls at the start of the campaign is Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the candidate of a leftist alliance made up of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), the Labor Party (PT) and the Convergence Party. Even though he hasn’t appeared in the media in recent months, he has an eight-point lead over Calderón.

### **On motorcycle, truck, horseback...**

The Zapatistas initiated their Other Campaign at the same time as the official one. Marcos is leading it off with a tour through southeast Mexico, made up of the states of Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Yucatan, Campeche and Tabasco. Some

feared that enemies of the Zapatistas would take advantage of Marcos' travels outside Zapatista territory to attack him, so numerous contingents of indigenous people accompanied him through Chiapas to protect him during the first days of the tour. The Zapatista command also asked civil society groups involved in the Other Campaign to help ensure his safety, and each made sure to turn over the task to another group on his next stop. That "security" worked just fine.

Although the federal government and religious hierarchy praised the Zapatista tour, local police hassled people involved in the campaign in several states who were trying to publicize the meeting sites. Provocateurs also attended some of the events and in some towns poor families were given food handouts on the condition that they didn't participate in the meetings.

People also feared that there would be attacks on Zapatista communities during the tour, as in fact happened in one community at the hands of a group of PRD members allied with PRI paramilitaries. The Zapatistas were careful not to fall for any provocation aimed at undermining the campaign, while the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center warned that any act of aggression against the campaign would jeopardize the search for peaceful solutions.

In his first appearance, Marcos rode in on a motorcycle named "Sombraluz," together with the chicken named "Penguin" that made its debut in the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. Next he traveled by pickup truck, taking his turn at the wheel. On the outskirts of one town, people met him with a horse so he could ride in on horseback. In another, he showed up peddling a bicycle taxi. He slept in community centers and the humble houses of campaign sympathizers.

There were three kinds of meetings. Some were just with participants in the initiative, so they could put forth their points of view. Then there were larger events, to which the press was invited. And there were massive events, which were very well attended and made a big impact.

"Perhaps they'll want to get involved"

The meetings with those already involved in the Other Campaign and those joining it along the way are the main purpose of Marcos' tour. Marcos is making contact with many new people in addition to meeting with those he's known since 1994, when the Zapatistas, fed up with the "criminal Salinas," finally said "enough!"

Acknowledging the important role played by the elders in Zapatista communities, Marcos shared their instructions to him: "You have to fight, but

not alone. Look for others like us who want to organize. Share your thoughts with them and listen to their hearts. Invite them to join us in this struggle. And if they're not convinced, let them see what we're doing and perhaps they'll want to get involved." Marcos explained how the Zapatistas' struggle had begun with six people and then grew, and although that struggle began among indigenous people, it had been able to reach beyond them into other sectors of society. He insisted that each person and each group, no matter how small and weak they may feel, could become part of the struggle and help it grow.

#### **Listening to each other, hearing about the problems**

Everyone spoke freely at these meetings, with the participants invited to take the floor. There was plenty of time for discussion, but not in the desire to convince, much less defeat, those who think differently. No one had anything to lose by speaking up. Marcos said the Other Campaign is like a large table set up to give an opportunity to speak to people who haven't had a chance. He explained that it's different from events in which a few outsiders climb up on a stand to speak to people whose history and struggles they know nothing about, and the people are expected to listen. He emphasized the importance of listening in order to see what's happening in the country and together discover what we have in common, so we can build a national movement.

With this approach, memories and histories emerged that were unknown to most people at the meetings. People compiled a list of problems, grievances, laments and demands as they spoke of humiliation, exploitation, disdain, discrimination, injustice, unemployment, illegal migration to the United States, the eviction of artisans from archeological sites, the theft of land and water, contamination, the destruction of nature, time-consuming requests and appeals with no response from the government, useless social programs, the rising costs of basic services, the lack of access to education, fraud in Fox's health care program and its failure to cover drugs or hospital care, the government's failure to help those affected by the recent hurricanes... The list went on and on.

#### **Becoming partners in the struggle**

People also spoke about persecution, repression and unjust imprisonment. Some came in the hope that Marcos would resolve problems no one else has addressed. Others presented proposals to deal with the problems. Marcos listened patiently, taking note of people's words and silences so he could write up reports. But he was also asked to speak.

Marcos shared some of the Zapatistas' experiences, and explained how their communities live better now than they did 12 years ago, and better than other communities that have put their trust in the political parties. Now they have

schools and hospitals efficiently managed by the people themselves; they have taken the law into their own hands and apply it justly. With one story after another, he explained that he wasn't bringing solutions but rather another problem: the need to organize. People have to choose if they want to continue living in the same country or build another one together. He told them that southeastern Mexico had been a victim not only of the fury of nature but also of the hurricane of ambition, because the aid had gone to the rich. He called on people to mobilize against the region's economic, political and social devastation.

Marcos identified several fears. One has to do with the future of the movement promoted by the Other Campaign. He spoke of the fear that its leaders would become corrupt and people would be left alone, out in the cold. He presented himself not as a leader but as a *compañero*, a companion or partner. People don't need Marcos to build the Other Campaign; all he was doing was putting the sympathy the Zapatista movement has generated at the service of the cause, so those who otherwise wouldn't even have the chance to talk to each other could come together in the struggle. He explained that the words spoken at the meetings would be posted on the Zapatistas' web site, so they would reach people in other regions who would no doubt agree with their positions and proposals and also become partners in the struggle.

The meetings encouraged antagonistic organizations to connect, increasing the number of people involved in the Other Campaign. Marcos called on people to build a just country in which everyone is equal, and leave those who are shaming the country in the dust. He invited people to establish new laws and build a new country. He explained that the movement being formed, rooted in the history of the people, was something new, not a copy of what was being done in other places around the continent. He asked the alternative media to help encourage ties by reporting on how the participating organizations had been born, the problems they'd faced, the defeats they'd suffered and victories they'd won. And he proposed that all the organizations establish a regional agreement for the southeast.

#### **The death of *comandanta* Ramona**

A few days after it had begun, Marcos suspended the tour when he learned that *comandanta* Ramona had died. She had been diagnosed with kidney disease ten years earlier, but had held death at bay for all of those years through the medical care she received thanks to the solidarity of civil society. Her body was buried in a private ceremony, attended only by members of her community.

Visibly moved, Marcos said he didn't even come up to the ankles of tiny Ramona, a symbol of the Zapatista struggle. He said Mexico had lost one of the

fighters it sorely needs, and they had all lost “a piece of our hearts.” The EZLN had to reschedule the rest of his tour around the country.

#### **Take off his mask?**

Once he left Chiapas, the Right began to insist that Marcos take off his mask, a demand echoed by the occasional voice of a provocateur at some events. Marcos replied that if he spoke without the Zapatista emblem, people wouldn’t know who he was. Only when he wore the mask did people stop to see him, as had been the case since 1994. He reflected once again on the indigenous struggle, which requires people to hide themselves in order to make their demands visible. And he invited people to demand that the rich take off their masks.

At an event before a huge crowd in Yucatan, he announced that he’d take off his mask. People looked on, astounded and in many cases afraid—in popular mythology, fighters lose their masks when they’re defeated—as he began to remove the balaclava. The relief was palpable when people saw that he was wearing a second one underneath the first. That day, Marcos challenged the government to unmask itself.

#### **For those without a party**

During the course of the tour, the Other Campaign was joined by people from all walks of life, including peasant farmers, fishermen and women, union and cooperative members, teachers, nurses, salaried workers, students, artists, environmentalists, people fighting against privatization and for the freedom of social and political prisoners, among many others.

The Other Campaign aspires to be a slow, long-lasting action, different from the media-driven excess of election campaigns. The Zapatista tour isn’t aimed at forming a political party. Marcos is emphatic about this: they’re not looking for political posts, nor playing the game of any presidential candidate. They’re creating a place for people without a party. Marcos constantly calls on people to respect this place, asking those who have opted to participate in the elections not to bring their search for votes into it.

#### **Against all parties**

Marcos describes all of the country’s political parties as “overseers working for the rich,” whose false leaders buy people’s votes by taking advantage of their needs. He constantly recalls that the indigenous peoples were betrayed by all the parties and the three branches of the state in 2001, when the government backed off the promised legislation to guarantee their rights.

He criticizes all the parties, most specifically any time one of their activists speaks out at a meeting in defense of the election process. He blames the

governing National Action Party (PAN) for trying to put Mexico in a neocolonial situation, to turn it into a hacienda. He criticizes the children of the President's wife for illicitly enriching themselves.

He criticizes her for making decisions alongside the President as though she held a public post when no one has elected her. He pointed out that although she purports to speak in favor of women, PAN members left the chamber when Zapatista *comandanta* Esther testified before Congress on indigenous peoples' demands, because "they couldn't see an indigenous women who wasn't their servant."

Marcos dismissed the charge that the PAN is paying him to criticize PRD candidate López Obrador to prevent him from winning. He continues to reject the idea that the PRD is a leftist option, because López Obrador himself has said it's not. He predicts that if López Obrador wins, those who vote for him will later regret it.

"Make sure your hearts are thinking"

Local PRI activists threatened Marcos in La Hormiga, an indigenous neighborhood on the outskirts of San Cristóbal de las Casas made up largely of people expelled from their original community for religious reasons, but residents of the neighborhood rallied to protect him. He said the PRI is the only party of which it can be said that it "has grown on the blood, humiliation and death of indigenous people." He maintained that the PRI is made up of "liars and murderers from the top on down." He described its presidential candidate, Roberto Madrazo, as a criminal unashamed of the thefts he's committed, and accused him of being involved with drug traffickers. He accused the Labor Party's leaders of going where the money was, and recalled that they had walked hand in hand with a governor of Guerrero responsible for a massacre of peasant farmers. He also recalled that the leader of the Salinas Convergence Party had been charged with hiring people to evict Zapatistas from the lands they had recovered. He described the other parties as "shrimps that sell out to the highest bidder."

The Other Campaign is open to those who are not represented by the political parties, although the electoral sympathies of some campaign members don't prevent them from taking part in this effort. The campaign doesn't urge people to abstain or oblige them to vote or not to vote, but rather calls on them to do something else; not to be satisfied with elections. It promotes the use of reason in analyzing political options, encouraging people to "do what your hearts tell you to do, but make sure your hearts are thinking."

The message is clear: this democracy only allows you to elect the executioner,

to select who will give the order to raise prices, evict people from their land or imprison social activists. The solution isn't to change one ruler for another; it won't come from above, but must be won through a force built by those at the bottom, a movement rich in ideas, proposals and struggles.

#### **Identifying the common enemy**

The Other Campaign began by analyzing the Pact of Chapultepec, signed by the powers of money and the big media that rule the country. This pact called on presidential candidates to commit themselves to neoliberal dogma, a pledge to which the PRI and PAN candidates both agreed. López Obrador said he would sign if aid to the poor were included.

Marcos argued that Mexico's problems can't be reduced to charity. He also noted that the pact discusses security as something requiring a firm hand, with more army, police and prisons to contain the people's rebellion, but not more jobs, houses, food or support for rural areas.

The Other Campaign has described the pact as a plan to plunder and destroy the country, around which the powerful class has united to turn the elections into a circus, and to choose who will fan the false hope of change.

The Zapatistas' analysis of the problems discussed during this first stage of the Other Campaign has led to the conclusion that the capitalist system itself lies at the root of the evils. Marcos asked people to reflect on this common enemy and called on "those at the bottom" not to fight among themselves but rather aim their fire at those responsible for the misery. To change the situation, he proposed that all forces unite and send out an "enough already!" even louder than the one shouted by the Zapatistas on January 1, 1994. And the specific change he proposed was the creation of a huge national anti-capitalist leftist movement of struggle so those on the bottom can build a just and equitable country for all.

#### **"Make it all anew"**

Marcos said that everything remains to be done, and insisted that the Other Campaign not subordinate itself to what the Zapatistas do or don't do. No one is going to tell anyone what they should do. A network is being woven in which people need to learn to listen to each other, lose or control their fear, not be alone, raise themselves up in dignity, courage and rebellion, and organize in order to fight for their rights and win them and to promote a national program of struggle.

The goal is to transform Mexico into a new, just, free and democratic country.

**“We’re going to sweep away everything, and make it all anew.”**

#### **The EZLN is not going to Bolivia**

For all that, the EZLN has garnered its share of criticism, starting with a controversial decision it made at the beginning of the tour. It did not accept the invitation to the inauguration of Bolivia’s new President, indigenous leader Evo Morales, even though it is the first time in Latin American history that an indigenous person has come to office with the support of a grassroots movement and on a government program that is not only anti-neoliberal but also anti-capitalist. Are the Zapatistas afraid of endorsing a movement that is changing the correlation of forces through electoral means? Is it an over-insistence on purity?

Marcos explained that the movement expressed through the Other Campaign isn’t looking towards either Bolivia or Latin America; it is based on the Mexican people’s concrete current situation, and that instead of following the leaders to Bolivia, he preferred to speak with people here. His reply was not convincing.

Will the PRD’s defeat help “those at the bottom”?

Others reproached Marcos for his constant critique of López Obrador. Marcos dismisses the entire political class, but while he makes only tepid references to the PAN’s Calderón, he comes down particularly hard on the PRD candidate. Furthermore, while claiming that he’s not encouraging people to abstain, he regularly repudiates the electoral route.

Since the Other Campaign was deliberately scheduled to parallel the election campaign, the Zapatistas will most certainly influence the results by drawing some votes away from the PRD. But will those at the bottom be in a better position to organize if it loses to either the PRI or the PAN?

#### **How to judge this initiative?**

The Other Campaign has also been criticized for making very general statements without proposing any solutions, and for simply gathering complaints during the various stops on the tour rather than help people work out solutions to urgent problems. The replies from its organizers are mostly defensive: the movement’s still in its infancy, without a fully formed ideological position; it’s not a question of finding quick solutions, but of creating something for the long term; this is an anti-systemic movement, with a well-defined enemy, that is trying to create a critical mass capable of bringing about real change.

It is true that, unlike other campaigns, this isn’t an effort by leaders to convince people of the merits of an already-drafted program. Instead the aim is to

encourage people to shape the movement themselves, through many broad-based discussions. The Other Campaign isn't about holding meetings that attract huge crowds, but about holding many meetings with many people, and encouraging them to participate in weaving a network of resistance and solidarity. It's about creating a new kind of politics, where dialogue is an ethical principle and responsibilities are shared.

What to think? This nascent movement can't be judged by traditional parameters, but only by what is done day by day. And we still have several months of campaign tours left to see what that turns out to be.

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### The “Other Campaign” Is Forging a Path for New Ideas

*In July, Mexico will chose from two rightwing options—the PAN (more of today) and the PRI (more of yesterday)—and an electoral Left option led by the PRD’s López Obrador. Meanwhile, the “other” Left is seeking and debating its “other” theory in its “other” campaign.*

Jorge Alonso

The political moment in Mexico could not be more troubling. Security forces repress striking workers, leaving several dead and wounded. The avoidable deaths of dozens of miners have yet to be cleared up. Groups of drug traffickers are sowing terror with bloody turf fights in several major cities. Using public resources, Vicente Fox’s government has launched a costly campaign to support the National Action Party (PAN) presidential candidate and denigrate the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) candidate. Forgetting the principles of its founders, the PAN has waged a campaign full of lies and slander. When the prestigious writer Elena Poniatowska publicly called on it to play clean, the party leadership attacked her with excessive, misogynist verbal abuse, leading several prominent national and foreign writers to come to her defense. In its hostility to culture, the PAN has shown quasi-fascist attitudes. The advice of foreign experts in waging a dirty war is clear in its campaign. The party boasts that all of this is advancing its cause. Meanwhile, rather than fulfill its role as arbiter, the Election Institute is openly working against the leftist opposition and has been justifying the dirty war instead of acting in accord with the law.

For their part, the big television stations are proving that they wield real power. They appear to have most of the country's legislators at their beck and call, as shown by the recently approved law governing radio and television, which renews the radio frequency licenses these monopolies hold for another 20 years free of charge and will eliminate many public service, university, community and indigenous radio stations. This operation was headed up by the Televisa group, which already owns 62% of Mexico's radio frequencies and is now poised to "legally" appropriate the new digital frequencies and cell phone and Internet businesses.

#### **Fear of "populism" and the hard facts**

Because of this strange climate, the PRD candidate, Andrés Manual López Obrador, chose to participate only in the last of the electoral debates. The first, in late April, was a dull affair as none of the participants ventured beyond what was already being said in their campaign ads. Some major news outlets have joined in the battle of the polls to make it appear that PAN candidate Felipe Calderón has taken the lead. In other surveys, López Obrador remains ahead. What is clear, however, is that the gap between the two has been closing. While the real foreign interference in this campaign has come from Washington, the PAN government is dragging Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez into the fray as part of its anti-Left scaremongering. It is claiming that, like Chávez, López Obrador is a populist. The PRD candidate has replied that neoliberals see anything that differs from their own position as populism. Distributing a little among those who have nothing is "populist" but lavishing benefits on a few is "promoting growth." López Obrador insists that he's not going to accept the neoliberal agenda they want to impose from abroad.

A look at the hard facts would clarify the situation. In 2005, Venezuela's economy grew by 9.3%, one of the highest rates in Latin America, even though the country ignored the International Monetary Fund's advice to save its oil income rather than invest it in social spending. Chávez spent the money on infrastructure, education and health care, with very good results. In contrast, data from the IMF itself shows that Mexico's growth rate under the PAN government is below the Latin American average: Mexico will grow by only 3.5%, compared to regional growth of 4.3% and a global average of 4.9%. The IMF also noted that these poor results are because Fox's government took advantage of the high oil prices "only to balance the budget." Without the oil income, the deficit under Fox's government—including the expenses involved in the onerous bank and highway bailouts—would have been 9.8% of the GDP instead of 0.2%. But although these hard facts condemn the PAN government, a huge campaign organized by the real powers in this country is urging people not to change course.

### **The thinking of those from below**

In response to this cloudy panorama, another solution is taking shape. The Zapatistas' "Other Campaign" has been calling on people to shake off the deceptions of the electoral system and build an alternative from the bottom up, uniting people in their struggles against capitalism. The Other Campaign has already visited 19 of Mexico's 32 states. One important episode during its travels was a meeting to think about "another theory" to guide the action of the Other Campaign.

The Other Campaign tour had barely begun in January 2006 when some of its members realized that they should discuss strategic issues with intellectuals at some point. Most of the events in the Other Campaign have been local ones, but people felt that while this meeting should not be held in Mexico City, it should be national. It was finally decided to hold it on March 21 in the University of Guadalajara's Salvador Allende auditorium.

Among the participants were scholars from the Mexican National Autonomous University, the Nicolaíta University of Michoacán, the University of Guadalajara, the National School of Anthropology and History, the Wallerstein Center from San Cristóbal de las Casas, the Center for Research and Studies in Social Anthropology, independent researchers and the editors of the magazines *Chiapas*, *Contrahistórica* and *Rebeldía*.

While the country's political parties are spending millions on dirty wars full of lies and slander, empty propaganda in the mass media and some impossible promises, everything said in the Other Campaign is being recorded and organized by the alternative media, which uses its modest resources to increase understanding and is keeping a record of all the proposals made at each place visited by the Zapatistas. As a result, anyone in Mexico or around the world can learn about and follow the struggles and the thinking of those at the bottom in this country. Like everything that has been said in the Other Campaign, what was discussed in this session in Guadalajara can be heard at [www.kehuelga.org](http://www.kehuelga.org) (under "las voces de LOC" or "the voices of The Other Campaign").

**"Elite," "mid-ranking" and "grassroots" intellectuals**

The questions addressed at this first meeting with intellectuals included, "What is the basis for the thinking, actions and organizing efforts that should be carried out by the anti-capitalist Left involved in the Other Campaign in order to bring about a profound change in our country's economic, social and cultural structures?"; "What elements can be drawn from the Other Campaign to build 'another theory'?"; and "What role can intellectual workers play in the Other Campaign?" The participants contrasted the dominant situation in the country

and the role of the Other Campaign for national transformation. Although they recognized that the topics proposed were enormous and complicated, they also saw that we're in an emergency situation that requires innovation. We have to take a fresh new look at some old issues.

Before a full auditorium, *subcomandante* Marcos began the meeting with a classification of intellectuals. He started with "elites," who pontificate on science and truth, add a veneer of humanism to the desire for profit and present capitalism as the final end of history. There are also "mid-ranking" intellectuals, who try to take refuge in the fragile ivory towers of "neutrality" and "objectivity," but flirt with the system and try to win attention in the president's court. They don't want to remain in the middle, but rather move up. With their tools of analysis and debate, they put themselves at the service of political and economic power. Then there are others who, sooner or later, abandon their principles, back down and desperately search for a justification to save themselves in front of the mirror. These are the "prudent, mature and sensible" intellectuals who have laid down the arms of criticism and use the language of the Left to disguise their rightwing work. From the comfort of academia, they set themselves up as judges. They sell resignation, trying to get people to accept the illusion that we have to maintain the macroeconomic project.

In response to new realities, the Zapatistas pose the need for another kind of theoretical analysis, another debate of ideas. First, they're asking what they call "grassroots" intellectuals to have the humility to recognize that they are facing something new. Second, they're inviting them to join the Other Campaign, make it their own and learn about the situation of indigenous people, workers, peasant farmers, young people, women, children, the elderly, teachers, students, employees, lesbians, gays, sexual workers, small businesspeople, grassroots Christians, street workers and others. By doing so, Marcos said, these grassroots intellectuals will undoubtedly stun the world with their theoretical debates and analyses.

Pablo González Casanova,  
an authentic grassroots intellectual

Pablo González Casanova, one of Mexico's most renowned intellectuals, is among those accompanying the Other Campaign. As a very young man, he got both a master's degree in history, granted jointly by the National Autonomous University, the National School of Anthropology and the College of Mexico, and a doctorate in sociology from the University of Paris. He has been a profound and prolific researcher and the dedicated teacher of generations of scholars. He was one of the most dynamic and innovative rectors of the National Autonomous University and never shied away from facing up to vengeful authoritarian powers.

*Don Pablo*, as he's affectionately known, has been a tireless promoter of scientific learning in Mexico and around the world, leading rigorous, creative research on all continents. He has established important higher education organizations and has been an active member of international social science associations, presiding over several of them. He has been awarded many prizes, medals and honorary doctorates and his work appears in the bibliographies of studies and courses the world over. He has authored some 25 books that have left their mark on the development of science, including *Democracy in Mexico*, which has gone through 21 editions and been translated into English, French, Portuguese and Japanese.

But *don Pablo* is not one to rest on his laurels. His latest book, *Las nuevas ciencias y las humanidades*, published in 2004, has made important contributions to world thought. Since generosity is one of his virtues, he has contributed numerous chapters to collections edited by his colleagues and students. He has also taken the lead in compiling groundbreaking collections on such topics as the history of Latin America in the second half of the 20th century, the history of the Latin American workers' movement, the political history of Latin American peasant farmers, the state in Latin America, the perspective of the United States, Mexico's situation in light of its current crisis and immediate future, the working class in Mexican history, and many other valuable publications on Mexican democracy's problems, progress, challenges and options.

He has also written hundreds of articles in prestigious journals around the world, imaginatively addressing such topics as elections, political culture, rights, the new capitalist economy and economic and social alternatives. He has thought deeply about the role of the university and the social sciences in the contemporary world and since the 1980s has been especially concerned with what lessons for democracy can be learned from "those from below."

*Don Pablo*'s activity has been limitless, and he never repeats himself. He's always up to date on discussions, and invariably takes an original tack. Reading or listening to him always leaves one thinking.

Despite his more than 80 years, *don Pablo*'s research continues to open up new paths to knowledge. With an enthusiasm any adolescent would envy, he is committed to those from below, particularly the Zapatistas.

#### **World war IV is underway**

*Don Pablo*'s speech at the meeting with intellectuals was dazzling. Titling it, "Why are we here?" he proposed that one would have to examine previous alternatives and what happened to them to understand what the Other

Campaign has contributed. Social democracy played neocolonialism's game; revolutionary nationalism thought only in development terms and became mired in populism; state socialism became a stage of capitalism and neoliberalism made the rich richer and the poor poorer. Neoliberal globalization structured the world into two military-economic blocs that were leading it into a war that had already run through the Balkans to Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq, and now threatened Iran. What he called "World War IV" was being fought against the poor and the vital resources of nature. The situation couldn't be more alarming, given the rate of ecocide and the destruction of the biosphere.

He noted that things have changed. In the current phase of neocolonialism and imperialism, transnational mega-companies are taking the place of governments and privatizing nation-states. True elections have been replaced by a system of political parties. The Mexican Supreme Court rules in favor of owners and their public and private officials. And there's a policy of criminalizing and applying legal sanctions to any who dares get in the way of the plundering neoliberal program.

The class struggle remains influenced by the great division in global capitalism between central and peripheral, metropolitan and colonial regions, with places for the rich and powerful and places for the excluded and exploited poor. The proletariat of yesterday are the "poor" and "extremely poor" of today, and they're joined by those being impoverished by neoliberalism. In today's world, the poor and impoverished and their allies are history's new actors, calling for a new project of liberation, democracy and socialism.

The three floors:  
**State, economy and culture**

Other participants emphatically insisted that one can't be anti-capitalist without a socialist proposal, quoting Rosa Luxemburg, who opposed state ownership of the means of production without workers' control, arguing instead for workers' self-government.

Members of the Wallerstein Center noted that it would take many meetings to fully discuss the questions posed by the Other Campaign. They called on people to dare think long and hard about how to bring about a critical reform of democracy, since politics has always been an affair of the elite. They suggested that anti-systemic movements have been mistaken in clinging to the idea of "three floors" and focusing on the state one, seeking to take power in order to change the other two: the economy and culture. The system invariably caught them by offering "the distraction of the exercise of power."

They didn't change those two floors or transform the state, but rather legitimized it. The Zapatistas and the Other Campaign have not made this mistake, since they chose the bottom floor, that of the "humble and simple people." They don't care about the state, as shown by the Good Government Committees in Chiapas, which have established a power that's not that of the state, but rather about devolving power to those from below.

Neither worshipping nor  
weakening the state

Others argued that we have to examine the state more now than at any other time in history, since it has become a direct and docile instrument of the dominant class. Neoliberalism has weakened and reduced the states of dependent countries to exploit their peoples more easily. The neoliberal state has sacrificed the majority on the altar of the market.

In Mexico, this has led to a series of rapid and overlapping transitions. The country has gone from an authoritarian presidency to a petty "party-ocracy" that turned its back on people's real needs and cares only about its own benefits. This party-ocracy does not really hold power, but rather plays the role of faithful servant to the "powers that be"—big money, big media and organized crime, especially drug trafficking. These powers, which weren't elected by anyone and aren't accountable to anyone, impose their own agendas.

Another transition was from pre-democracy to post-democracy, without ever enjoying democracy. The solution is for Mexico's vast majorities to organize and build coalitions that challenge the "powers that be," promoting a profound democratic reform of the state to turn it into an instrument that serves social needs and defends the weak against the powerful. This idea neither places the state in a supreme position, where it can crush its citizens, nor advocates a weak state that can't help help those at the bottom defend themselves from the vast external and internal powers. It argues instead for a state that combines social equity and political democracy, defends diversity and protects the environment.

### What power? what democracy?

People also proposed a discussion about power. The power of the elite consists in a few imposing their will on the rest, an accumulating and predatory power in which what one wins, the others lose. Those at the bottom aspire to another kind of power, a shared power, which grows when it's shared.

Several participants focused on the role of democracy. It's becoming increasingly clear that representative democracy excludes people. The political class has been widely discredited, and the parties are increasingly failing to

represent the new sectors of society. Electoral democracy is in crisis, as those elected don't take people into account or respect them. The political class doesn't listen to those at the bottom and has nothing to tell them. Some proposed examining the lessons of Athenian democracy, such as the rotation of posts by lottery, accountability, votes of censure and the control of the assembly. Democracy should lead to the control of power, and ethical factors should play a central role.

#### **Not leading the way, but listening**

With respect to the role of intellectuals in the Other Campaign, people said that the movement could not establish itself as an alternative without its own intellectual base. It's important to keep things straight, however: the movement will generate its own intellectuals and set them to work. These intellectuals will include all of those who have been reflecting on their experiences and sharing and comparing them, making them intelligible, without the need for books or universities. The Other Campaign offers a magnificent opportunity to discover a new movement being formed, which intellectual workers can try to analyze and explain.

Intellectuals will be one more actor in the Other Campaign. They will study it, and will surely learn a great deal from the efforts and ideas of those at the bottom. They can't aspire to light the way, but rather follow behind dazzled by what is happened, attempting to understand and record this important historical moment. Nor can the intellectuals be reduced to eulogists. They will use their long critical training to encourage discussions that make it possible to identify elements of the "other theory."

#### **Naming those responsible**

A huge percentage of the Mexican population is excluded from the benefits of development and from genuine political representation, and people are reaching their limit. A vast distance separates growing sectors of Mexican society from the world of formal politics. As Pablo González Casanova has pointed out, projects supposedly designed to bring about progress have instead destroyed many people's lives. Precarious work, exploitation and plunder are the norm.

Those responsible have to be identified and named. Building an alternative to dominant politics, the Other Campaign includes a swath of the real nation whose existence is not reported in the official version of events. It records the insults and the damage done. While those at the top ask themselves what to do with the poor, those at the bottom are asking themselves what to do with the rich, those responsible for the country's disaster.

#### **From far away and far below**

Some called for class language to be recovered, but without losing sight of the fact that there are old and new elements we have to understand. Many struggles are in fact anti-capitalist, without ever labeling themselves as such. The Zapatistas and the Other Campaign are promoting another way of doing politics by asking, listening and encouraging people to reach agreements. They invite people to look back on past victories and defeats, study the Left's experiences in power, overcome the authoritarian characteristics of the old Left and build another kind of power from below.

We must remember that things always begin from very far away and very far below. We have to break the walls of exclusion without building others. At the meeting with intellectuals, participants accepted the challenge of beginning everything anew, in another form. The Zapatistas and the Other Campaign have created an anti-systemic initiative: they invite people to challenge the system and build the subjects of change, in the context of a polysemic subversion of the bourgeois order. There can only be another theory if there's another practice. There was consensus around the need to examine theory, history and the present situation to see how the world could be different. The Zapatistas and their Other Campaign are encouraging a new political theory and insist that for there to be a world with room for many worlds, we first have to transform society.

The plan was for Marcos to speak at the close of the event, but when it was almost over, some 30 sexual workers broke in, many with their faces covered, demanding their rights and denouncing abuses suffered at the hands of the PAN government, especially police harassment. Marcos invited them to take the stage and say what they had to say. This highly symbolic act ended the first meeting, at which he was very attentive to what people proposed and took many notes. There were 17 presentations, not counting those of Marcos and the moderator. Many others were unable to speak due to time, but the participating journals pledged to publish the proceedings, including both the presentations made and the written statements that could not be shared.

### Many pending issues

Only a few issues were sketched out, even in general terms, so there's still a need to define things more precisely, clear up disagreements, carry out a thorough and wide-ranging discussion and reach conclusions that can be put into action. We have to further clarify everything related to the current phase of capitalism, the new class configuration, the constitution of power, the role of the state, comprehensive democracy and the forms of economic solidarity, autonomy, cultural diversity...

That afternoon, Marcos met with participants in the Other Campaign and reflected on the fact that some had argued at the morning's meeting that

socialism is the only alternative to capitalism. He believes that the Other Campaign is demonstrating other anti-capitalist proposals that aren't socialist, including anarchist and libertarian ones, and even proposals to fight capitalism by means of the market. This is undoubtedly one of the main points to be addressed in future meetings with intellectual workers. Issue number 10 of *Bajo el Volcán*, the Autonomous University of Puebla's journal, has printed 19 essays in which intellectuals reflect on the Other Campaign, addressing issues related to the various forms of resistance and social movements. Many theoretical issues raised by the Other Campaign's tour are being discussed, and we must have the courage to delve much further into them. For example, why is the party system no longer viable? How can we weave together the various struggles and voices of those at the bottom? What kinds of alliances and agreements are needed to create a new kind of politics? How can we bring something new into being while taking advantage of what was good in the old? How can we prevent everything from being politicized? How can we create non-hierarchical organization and decision-making? How can we prevent totalitarian attitudes from taking hold, which instead of encouraging discussions that include disagreement, lead to rejection and attacks and the fear of raising certain questions? How can we free ourselves of slogans and secrets? How can we ward off efforts to impose a uniformity of thought that attempts to dictate what we can and cannot think? How can we guarantee plurality? These are but a few of the many pending questions.

Meetings like this one oblige us to think about such questions. Theory grows out of our attempts to understand experiences, and this kind of theory is intimately connected with praxis. Diverse positions are beginning to take shape. The first meeting with intellectuals was barely the beginning of a long road.

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### Elections 2006: "This Isn't Democracy"

*Was the tiny gap between Calderón and López Obrador real or was it the product of manipulation and fraud? Whatever the truth, the powerful interest groups, enemies of democracy, imposed their will. The elections were unfair and managed by a biased electoral commission.*

Jorge Alonso

The elections held in Mexico on July 2 laid bare a democratic disaster. With the elections six years ago, people thought the country had entered a new democratic era, but it was wishful thinking. During his campaign then, Vicente Fox, presidential candidate of the National Action Party (PAN), saw that he

couldn't possibly win at the polls because of the tricks of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which had run the state for three-quarters of a century. So he made secret deals with representatives of the financial moguls. Tied into illegal financing later discovered by the electoral commission, he won those elections, booting the PRI out of presidential office in what was dubbed "the changeover."

What happened was interpreted as a true democratic triumph, and there were great hopes for further change in that direction. But since it was more the result of an appetite for power than a commitment to democracy, the government soon made deals with the PRI's old corporative power circles, betraying its commitment to union reform. It seemed easier to govern with the old regime's still intact authoritarian and undemocratic structure.

Fox orchestrated everything from his presidential office

Once he was President, Fox became convinced that the end justified whatever means. From his offices, he did everything necessary to ingratiate himself with the electronic media, another of the powerful interest groups. He maneuvered to get them concessions and approved a law regulating radio and TV that benefited the media moguls. He relegated the media's social role, treating them like a business and leaving community and indigenous radios defenseless.

As President, Fox also prepared the way for the 2006 elections. First of all, in an undemocratic move, he tried to prevent the Federal District's head of government, Andres Manuel López Obrador, from standing as a presidential candidate for a leftist coalition, using a blatantly political maneuver—an attempt at impeachment. When that went nowhere, he made a deal with the powerful factions to ensure that they wouldn't let López Obrador win. He used his presidential power and the resources that went with it to cut this deal, making wild increases in spending on advertising to support his own party's candidate, and to attack López Obrador. The latter's coalition, made up of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), the Workers' Party (PT) and the Convergence, adopted the name "For the Good of All," and campaigned under the slogan "First the poor." Certainly Fox couldn't allow him to get away with that kind of sentiment!

Union leader fulfills three key tasks

The President and his party also made an alliance with the lifetime leader of the teachers' union, Elba Esther Gordillo, who fulfilled three important tasks for the PAN. In late 2003 she used the PRI's General Secretariat to actively push for the reestablishment of the General Council of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE). She nominated five of the nine members of this electoral leadership body

and left the PAN to appoint four, excluding the PRD from decisions about its composition. This was not only a blatantly partisan maneuver, but also an attack on achieving consensus among the electoral players.

Gordillo's second task was to encourage disunity within the PRI. She founded a new party that succeeded in registering for the elections and was promoted by activists among her union's leadership. From there she encouraged the PRI state governors not to support their or even her candidate, but instead go for the PAN.

This woman's third and related task was to move votes from her new teachers' union party to the PAN's presidential candidate. Her party has not distinguished itself by anything other than undemocratic practices and electoral maneuvers.

#### **Advisers, a dirty campaign and social problems**

The PRI, which had made an important electoral recovery in the midterm federal elections in 2003, suffered a catastrophic defeat in 2006, ending up in third place in both the presidential and legislative elections. Its deep internal divisions and imposed candidates were the causes of its undoing.

In spite of all the support he got from Fox's illegal and ruthless campaign, Felipe Calderón, the PAN's presidential candidate failed to dominate the campaign at the start. The PAN hired Spanish advisers and opted for fascist tactics of lies and calumny against the candidate leading the polls, the PRD's López Obrador. The centerpiece of this dirty campaign was to accuse him of being a populist who would bring people only misfortune. TV and radio advertisements encouraged a fear of change and tried to whip up hatred towards the leftist candidate. These ads relentlessly repeated that López Obrador was "a danger" to Mexico. In addition, the woman who had been heading the Social Development Secretariat was brought in to manage the PAN campaign, giving the PAN an advantage with all the information and connections she had through the social programs.

#### **López Obrador on the defensive**

Was the tiny gap between Calderón and López Obrador real or was it the product of manipulation and fraud? Whatever the truth, the powerful interest groups, enemies of democracy, imposed their will.

The leftist candidate was confident that the dirty tactics would result in a backlash from the electorate and that what was keeping him ahead in the polls was a campaign that reached people directly at the grass roots, not via the media. Nevertheless, he began to feel the impact of the dirty war as he moved

down in the ratings, which forced him to respond and resort to speaking through the media. In the meantime, his party made a hopeless request to the IFE to act as a fair arbiter, put an end to the dirty tactics and control Fox's illegal proselytism.

During his campaign, López Obrador outlined his proposals—fight corruption, cut government spending, put an end to fiscal privileges and raise productivity, insisting always that “for the good of all” it was necessary first to attend to the poor—but at the same time he was put permanently on the defensive. He consistently criticized the fact that the PAN candidate’s campaign was supported by public funds and subsidized by big business.

In the middle of April, the new head of the Social Development Secretariat was forced to acknowledge the results of studies carried out by academics, which showed that 10% of the 44 million beneficiaries of state-financed social projects were vulnerable to electoral manipulation. The study pointed to the fact that up to 4 million people might change their vote because of promises that they would be registered as beneficiaries of these programs. Even the United Nations Development Program warned that a range of federal social development programs were susceptible to political or electoral manipulation.

**In the name of freedom of expression**

Also in mid-April, the IFE was shown to be divided about the intense electoral war. While some people thought it was their obligation to prevent dirty advertising, the majority said they would not intervene. Messages of fear and hate proliferated, not only on TV channels, but also through emails and messages on cell phones. Those who obtained most economic benefits from this war were the media oligarchies that received the flood of money spent on ads.

The IFE’s rationale for not clamping down on the dirty tactics was respect for freedom of expression. Nevertheless, one academic responded that the constitutional article defending freedom of expression also establishes limits for it.

A former member of the Electoral Council made the point that this body was not currently fulfilling its regulatory function, but was instead infringing legislation and abdicating its true purpose, which was to guarantee society elections that would not only make sure the elected posts in the branches of state were filled through free voting in a fair contest, but also contribute to concordance. Another media specialist reminded people that the law obliges parties to abstain from any expression involving calumny, infamy, injury, diatribe, defamation or denigration of citizens, public institutions or other

parties and their candidates. By not putting a halt to the dirty tactics, the IFE showed serious bias and prejudiced the quality of the electoral process.

The PRD was forced to appeal to the Electoral Tribunal and towards the end of May it ruled that it was offensive and untrue to assert—as the PAN ads were doing—that López Obrador was “a danger to Mexico.” The PRD applauded the measure, but lamented its lateness. Nevertheless, the PAN’s foreign advisers found ways to continue the dirty war. Going against the ethical principles of its founders, the PAN boasted that these tactics were reaping very good political dividends.

### Clean hands?

Two debates were held among the candidates. López Obrador didn’t attend the first one and his rivals took advantage of his absence to say that he was afraid and being disrespectful to the citizenry. In the second one, when the PAN’s Calderón attacked López Obrador, he responded by challenging the PAN campaign’s slogan “Clean Hands” with information found on the Internet that Calderón’s son-in-law hadn’t paid taxes on his company’s profits. Although the PAN claimed that Calderón hadn’t given him any contracts, the son-in-law acknowledged on TV that his company had indeed received contracts worth several million pesos from Calderón when he was head of the Energy Secretariat.

The PRD’s revelations led to the exposure of a wide network of favor-trading and gave substance to the accusations that Calderón had also influenced the registration of beneficiaries for the social programs and voter lists. The PRD also denounced the diversion of funds to Calderón’s campaign from a rural housing program. With a typical PAN touch, even funds to support the elderly had been siphoned off.

López Obrador is  
“a danger for Mexico”?

In the middle of June news came out that big business was coercing employees to vote for the PAN by threatening them with dismissal. Several clergy were also proselytizing in favor of the PAN. In the campaign’s last days, the Coordinating Council of Businesses joined the PAN’s dirty war even though the law only allows political parties to engage in electoral propaganda. The business umbrella retorted that six electoral counselors had given their agreement.

The PAN insisted in its advertisements that if López Obrador were to become President, he would send the country into debt and provoke economic bankruptcy. López Obrador explained that his measures to favor those who had least—involving mechanisms to increase their income and charge them less for

gas and electricity—did not imply debt because he would make cuts in the high costs of state bureaucracy and reduce fiscal privileges for those who had most. Although Calderón had accused López Obrador of being a populist during the campaign, by the last lap the PAN candidate was also promising to cut gas and electricity prices to benefit the poorest. López Obrador merely applauded Calderon's support for policies he had previously dismissed as populist.

A peaceful day and a very tense night

After so much tension, the day of the elections passed peacefully even though 18,702 trainees had to be used as electoral officials, 3.5% of whom had received no training at all. In the Federal District, many people aged over 60—who presumably were in favor of López Obrador because of his senior citizen programs—charged that they had been eliminated from the electoral rolls and couldn't vote.

On election night, the conflict returned with greater force. The TV channels announced that, because the contest was so close, the exit polls, which are made “on the spot” as people are coming out of the booths, could not be shown. At almost midnight, the IFE president reported that the quick-count database wasn't showing a clear leaning and thus he couldn't say who was in the lead. Seconds later, President Fox gave a Message to the Nation in which he urged people to trust the Federal Electoral Institute.

Both Calderón and López Obrador declared themselves winners. The UN Development Program invited famous personalities to form what it called a “peace room,” which asked both parties and voters to wait for the Electoral Tribunal's official vote count and declaration. It also called for a national democratic dialogue.

### Inconsistencies and suspicions

The Preliminary Electoral Results Program (PREP) kicked off with an advantage for Calderón which he never lost for even a moment. The PRD charged that this was inexplicable in such a tight contest, and indicated that the results were being manipulated. The final margin produced by the program was more than a percentage point in favor of the PAN candidate. López Obrador denounced that the data didn't add up, given that the program was missing 3 million votes. At that point, the IFE acknowledged its inconsistencies.

The PRD also challenged the IFE for not saying that the data released corresponded to only 90% of the voting tables rather than 98.5%, as appeared on the official page. When the program's file of inconsistencies was reviewed, it turned out that López Obrador had more votes than Calderón in the final packet of votes to be counted, which ultimately reduced the PAN's advantage

to 0.6%. The IFE's mismanagement of the program produced growing suspicions.

The candidate of the party formed by the Elba Esther Gordillo called for Calderón's triumph to be admitted as "irreversible" and the PRI candidate accepted his defeat, implicitly backing Calderón. It was an historic collapse for the PRI, which did not even win states where there was a PRI governor.

#### **Cyber fraud? Theft by ants?**

On the Monday and Tuesday following the election, the PAN, supported by big business, pressed for the IFE to declare Calderón the winner based on the PREP, but doubts arose from academic groups about the possibility of cyber fraud. The PRD denounced what it called "theft by ants." While the votes for President were greater than for senators in states where Calderón won, the reverse was true in several states where López Obrador won, which couldn't be explained.

In previous elections, the PAN had always presented the voting table count sheets, but in the first days after the elections, it pointed to the PREP and exit polls to argue that it had won. Up until Wednesday morning, when the recount started in the districts, Calderón announced that he had 100% of the count sheets, and that they showed a total of 14,870,170 votes.

Many international heads of state, unaware that the process hadn't ended and that the Electoral Tribunal would have the last word, began to congratulate Calderón. When the Foreign Relations Ministry failed to clarify the situation, the PRD had to intervene.

Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatista movement declared that, although "the Other Campaign" wasn't participating in the elections, it was evident that sophisticated fraud was happening at the top and in the name of the campaign rejected the presidential election's fraudulent result. Other analysts summed up what had happened as unfair elections managed by a biased electoral commission.

#### **A vote-by-vote recount**

Appealing on behalf of the country's future peace, the PRD demanded a vote-by-vote recount from the outset, but even though there was an official recount, the PAN and the IFE refused to allow all voting packets to be opened, asserting that the law determined the cases in which this could happen. Only 2% of the ballot boxes were reviewed, and even in those there were indications of illegally annulled votes for López Obrador.

The IFE was in a hurry. The recount lasted one day less than in 2000, and its

results showed that Calderón had obtained 15,000,284 votes, giving him a 0.5% lead over López Obrador. This was 130,114 more votes than Calderón himself had claimed to have, allegedly based on the polling table count sheets. With that the PRD charged the existence of a major electoral fraud and declared that the IFE president's announcement of the winner when this was the responsibility of the Electoral Tribunal proved that López Obrador had won the elections and not Calderón.

The PRD again demanded that the Tribunal open all the voting packets and do a vote-by-vote recount, which the PAN again opposed. Even though Mexican law gave the PRD right to challenge the election results, the demand was presented in the electronic media as an act of destabilization.

#### Anomalies, irregularities, pressures

While the European Union's electoral observer delegation declared the election clean, the organization Global Exchange considered that the IFE had shown bias in favor of the governing party, denounced the persistence of past practices such as the purchase and coercion of votes and explained that, although some anomalies appeared minor, they were in fact important given such a close result.

Civic Alliance, an organization experienced in electoral observation since 1994, demanded that the irregularities reported by several national and international observers before, during and after the elections be investigated. It said it could prove cases of vote buying and coercion by municipal agents, proselytism and inappropriate influence by religious ministers and big business in support of Calderón, and a lack of transparency by the IFE in dealing with the results. It also charged that the free and secret vote had been violated in nearly 11% of the voting centers under observation, since people had been exerting pressure in these places.

*The New York Times* considered that the problems of the Mexican election merited a complete recount and *The Financial Times* agreed that it would help Mexico overcome the crisis. It suggested that national reconciliation would be difficult if a substantial number of poor people didn't believe the new President to be legitimate and advised Mexico's elites not to underestimate the dangers the electoral crisis represented. Calderón reportedly tried to influence *The Washington Post*'s editor to say that he had won the election.

#### PRD: Two challenges and a demand

A week after the elections, López Obrador's supporters filled the Zócalo, Mexico City's main square for what it announced would be peaceful demonstrations against the electoral fraud. They criticized the PAN as a good apprentice of the PRI's fraudulent methods. It was clear that great shadows

hung over the elections and that Mexico was experiencing a backpedaling in electoral democracy.

With the material that the PRD and the Coalition for the Good of All presented to the Electoral Tribunal, they made a specific challenge, a generic challenge and a demand for a vote-by-vote recount to dissipate all doubts. They argued that the electoral process had not fulfilled the constitutional criteria of fairness, objectivity, impartiality, transparency and legality and had denied Mexicans a free vote. Many factors had influenced this twisting of civic will: the PRD blamed President Fox, the PAN, its candidate, big business and the IFE officials. It pointed to the dirty propaganda in thousands of ads, written messages, phone calls and Internet messages that presented López Obrador as a danger for Mexico, comparing him gratuitously with Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez.

The IFE had failed to intervene either in time or in the correct way to restrain this propaganda and when it finally did so it was only after the Electoral Tribunal had ordered it to. President Fox had organized a media campaign dedicated to mislead and coerce the Mexican electorate. In addition, he propagandistically linked the government's social programs to a vote for the PAN. Both his federal administration and several state secretariats had pressured, coerced and exercised undue influence on voters.

#### **Complaints of multiple abuses**

The PRD highlighted the use of funds from the rural housing program, the Opportunities program and other schemes managed by the Social Development Secretariat in favor of the PAN. It also denounced the illegal participation of churches to proselytize for the PAN candidate and against López Obrador and documented many cases of companies that had intervened directly on Calderón's behalf.

The PAN had also exceeded campaign funding ceilings. The amount spent directly by the party, plus that spent by big business on its behalf, was 895.4 million pesos (approximately US\$83 million), 37% over the authorized limit of 651.4 million pesos. The PRD also protested the illegal participation of foreigners in support of Calderón's campaign. The former Spanish President, Jose Maria Aznar, had publicly harangued people to vote for Calderón on February 21 in Mexico City, and Spanish publicist Antonio Sola had advised the PAN on its dirty war. The PRD also demanded that the very early stages of the campaign be scrutinized, when Calderón was still Fox's energy secretary.

An important part of the PRD's challenge concerned the partisan bias shown by the Federal Electoral Institute. There were also complaints about the dismissive attitude of the Specialized Attorney on Electoral Crimes. Yet another aspect of

the challenge dealt with illegal use of the electoral rolls by Calderón through his son-in-law's company.

Other abuses concerned the PAN's use of call centers and push polls whereby people automatically received messages supporting Calderón and opposing López Obrador. And in various voting centers, people served as officials whose names did not appear in the publication listing the officials for those locations and it was impossible to verify whether they belonged there or not.

**Votes annulled,  
eliminated, subtracted...**

In view of the large number of annulled votes, there was suspicion that valid votes had been illegally damaged. It was claimed that votes belonging to the New Alliance Party had been counted as PAN votes in centers where no representatives of the Coalition for the Good of All were present. In its demand, the PRD addressed the manipulation of the PREP, but the key issue was the great number of arithmetical mistakes in the voting count sheets. In many cases, there were more votes than voters.

The Coalition for the Good of All claimed that more than 1,600,000 votes could not be substantiated with the voter count sheets. Only 42,762 of these sheets had correctly tallied data, while the other 72,197 showed errors, with 898,862 votes added illegally and 722,326 eliminated artificially. In addition, in a great number of polling places where the Coalition had no representatives, there were completely illogical percentages of votes for Calderón.

Finally, without having requested permission from the Electoral Tribunal and with no party representatives present, IFE officials had illegally opened 3,000 voting packets after the official date for checking the electoral results. The Coalition blamed Elba Esther Gordillo, her New Alliance Party and the PAN for orchestrating the electoral fraud. All this strengthened the demand for a total recount.

The Tribunal received 364 complaints of malpractice, most of which came from the Coalition. Although the PAN proclaimed that the elections had been clean and transparent, it also challenged results in a large number of voting centers.

#### **The end of electoral democracy**

Fox continued stoking the fire by declaring that Mexico was moving forward "in spite of the renegades," which was the term he and the media used for the many young people in the demonstrations protesting the fraud. Researchers from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) came out in favor of a total recount, since science shows it's best to re-measure when there isn't complete certainty. They warned that, to remove all doubts, this should be

done without using the Federal Electoral Institute's computer system, which was held in question, and recommended that the universities and NGOs participate in the recount.

Porfirio Muñoz Ledo wrote that it was impossible to talk of electoral democracy owing to the accumulation of illegal actions and the combination of plots and complicities and accused Fox of establishing a takeover policy. He asserted that the PAN campaign had been inspired by fascist ideologues and that people were beginning to talk of an ideological and political class struggle that goes beyond a simple change of government. The situation, he affirmed, resembled the enthronement of behind-the-scenes powerful factions.

Pablo González Casanova wrote an article entitled "This is not democracy" in which he affirmed that the 2006 elections were not like previous state elections, but are a new type of emerging transnational state-world election whose supporters and subordinates include states and political regimes from the metropolis and the periphery. He warned that those who are fighting for true democracy should prevent this violation of the popular vote. Former electoral counselor Jaime Cárdenas said much the same thing, defining it not as a state election but one where the de facto power groups had subjected the formal powers of the state and imposed a candidate in tune with their interests rather than the legitimate winner of a free vote. Faced with the crisis, the dirty war broke out again, promoted by big business and the media to try to force López Obrador to throw in the towel and stop calling mass demonstrations. López Obrador replied that he would continue to fight electoral fraud and that all decisions would be taken in consultation with the people.

#### An "electoral revolt"

On Sunday, July 16, López Obrador gathered more than one and a half million people opposed to the fraud in the Zócalo and called for peaceful resistance, telling them that Mexico did not deserve a spurious President. Groups of his followers stood guard at the front of 300 district headquarters to ensure against any illegal removal of documents or manipulation of voting packets. Days before, symbolic acts repudiating the fraud were held in different locations: the stock exchange, banks, shopping malls, businesses....

Without having been officially appointed, Felipe Calderón was now behaving like the President-elect and holding meetings with different organizations. He got support not only from the business heads, but also from the leadership of the undemocratic unions. Former Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda praised Fox for having actively intervened on Calderón's behalf and urged him not to be pushed off balance by the demonstrations.

The IFE appealed to the Tribunal to defend the PAN's triumph and spent a great deal of money trying to present itself as a civic organization. It also tried to shrug off the mistakes it had made in training officials, arguing that if the election itself was in doubt, that also called into question the citizens who had acted as electoral officials. Nonetheless, some junior IFE members admitted that people had many doubts and that confidence had to be regenerated with a vote recount. A priest who had participated in the 1986 protests against fraud in Chihuahua declared that twenty years later there was now a new "electoral insurgence." While the cardinal of Guadalajara supported Calderón, the bishop of Saltillo, Raul Vera, backed a vote-by-vote recount.

López Obrador sent a letter to Calderón proposing that he support such a total recount in order to eliminate any suspicion of fraud, which, as was to be expected, Calderón rejected. The PRD declared that this demonstrated he was an authoritarian politician only interested in responding to the interests he represented. López Obrador said that he would stop calling demonstrations if a total recount was accepted, but that if the Electoral Tribunal decided against his demand, he would accept its resolution under protest because the election had not been either clean or free.

#### **The Electoral Tribunal had two options**

On Sunday July 30, a new mega-march against electoral fraud brought together more people than the previous two Sundays and they decided to take the further step of initiating a civic vigil to demand the total recount. Forty-seven permanent camps were set up from the Zócalo of Mexico City to the capital beltway, one for each federal entity and each delegation of the Federal District. López Obrador stayed in these camps as well.

The Electoral Tribunal had two basic options. It could stick to the legal and formal route and throw out the challenge, leading to a long political confrontation, or it could go to the heart of the problem as a legitimate guarantor, correct the voting sheet mistakes and declare the genuinely triumphant candidate based on the results.

While there were those who argued that a complete recount wouldn't be legal, some important jurists argued that the Electoral Tribunal has the power to conduct one in order to remove all doubts. Nor, given the number of irregularities, including those prior to voting day, was the possibility of declaring the election itself null and void ruled out. In such a situation, the new Congress would have to appoint an interim President and call new elections within 18 months.

An important collateral issue is that six of the seven electoral judges finish their term in office at the end of October 2006. There will also be vacant positions in

the Supreme Court of Justice, appointments that depend on President Fox and on the new Senate, in which no party has a majority. Some fear that the judges may be bought. The PRD has denounced the pressure that the Government Secretariat and de facto powers are putting on it, while there are also voices calling for trust in the Electoral Tribunal. With ten years' accumulated experience, the Tribunal could have produced a declaration that would have objectively clarified the election, leaving no doubt. Many of its members have demonstrated independence.

### **The fight will be a long one**

On Saturday August 5 the Tribunal chose to limit itself to a narrow interpretation and review only 9% of the ballot boxes. López Obrador rejected what he called "one tenth democracy," accusing the judges of failing to see the bigger picture and of sticking to the PAN's criteria. The decision was partial and incomplete, but pleased the PAN's euphoric supporters. The opening of this meager number of ballot boxes means people will never know for sure who actually won and is thus a decision that doesn't resolve the conflict. The reaction of the PRD supporters was to form a human chain and repeat their demanding for a vote-by-vote and ballot box-by-ballot box recount. The Information Assembly

of the Coalition for the Good of All moved from the Zócalo to the Electoral Tribunal headquarters. The Coalition charged that the judges, pressured by outside forces, were trying to legitimize electoral fraud. The fight for democracy will continue and promises to be a long one.

### **If it had happened...**

The fact that the PAN and its candidate opposed a total recount increases the suspicions about what might be revealed by opening the packets. If the Tribunal had accepted a recount and one had been done, and even if Calderón had ended up with more votes, it wouldn't mean that the election had been democratic. A good number of votes were neither free nor informed, but rather coerced by the dirty war of verbal and symbolic abuse. Perversely, this war involved accusations of violence against those who were suffering violence. If the elections had been declared null and void and there had been new elections with no substantial changes, the polarization would only deepen, since the current Federal Electoral Institute has already demonstrated its bias. There would surely have been a return to dirty tactics with much more furor, giving the anti-democratic alliances a great advantage the second time around.

### **What draws most attention**

Another fact these elections have exposed is that the PAN will continue looking for support from the most corrupt and undemocratic corporatist union structures. In previous elections, the powerful financial and media moguls at least had to answer to the state. Now, a fraudulent election has been

engineered by these behind-the-scenes powers—including not only financial capital and the mass media oligarchy, but also a large part of the Catholic hierarchy and organized crime—and they have subjugated the political parties and the state.

The parties not only lost their demarcation lines—all of them exchanged candidates—but they ended up looking insignificant compared to the cliques running the dirty campaign with a huge amount of financing of unknown origins.

What draws attention is that the de facto domestic power groups, united to international financial capital and the Bush government, were simply unable to stomach the possibility that the Coalition for the Good of All candidate might actually win the elections in a free vote. Andrés Manuel López Obrador didn't represent an alternative to neoliberal politics; all he did was offer less bad conditions to impoverished people. It's revealing to see how these power groups not only opposed addressing Mexico's serious social problems, but also attacked the most basic premise of electoral democracy: the right to a free and informed vote.

The good thing about this tense situation

The elections have left Mexico a fragmented country. In the north, a majority voted for a continuation of the PAN's policies, although a sizeable minority called for a change in the economic model. In the impoverished south, most of the population clamored for change. This indicates the urgent need for a national dialogue on democracy.

The good thing about all of this tension has been the awakening of a dormant civic movement for democracy that could push for important changes not only related to electoral democracy, i.e. respect for the free vote, truly autonomous and unbiased electoral commissions, shorter campaigns, transparency about the origin and use of funds, and real restrictions on the purchase of media space. It could go even further in pushing for comprehensive democracy, which means participation and deliberation in order to achieve essential social democracy.

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### An Unyielding Movement Challenges the Fraud

*Mexico's electoral fraud turned those from below into active, unyielding rebels. The powers that orchestrated the fraud have demanded that they submit, but to no avail. The whole institutional scaffolding of the transition to democracy*

*has collapsed. Calderón will govern a divided, outraged and rebellious country.*

### Jorge Alonso

Ignacio Ramonet, the editor-in-chief of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, concluded that massive fraud had undeniably occurred in Mexico. His assessment was echoed by the French sociologist Loic Wacquant, who said Mexicans were protesting in the streets because the elections were marred by serious problems.

#### The evidence

Numerous witnesses have charged that most of the state campaign managers for the incumbent National Action Party (PAN) work in the government's Social Development Office and got out the vote by illegally using the beneficiary lists from its programs. Others have accused the election institute of improperly moving the location of some polling places and posting pro-government officials at a number of them. President Vicente Fox spent nearly \$200,000 of public money to support his candidate and trash his opponents in the campaign, a practice mimicked by many PAN state governors as well. The entire country witnessed how the PAN, in clear violation of the Constitution, engaged in a fierce and dirty media war, egged on by its foreign advisers. The turncoats in the teachers' union worked for the PAN, while some businesspeople have been accused of buying and coercing votes.

#### Imaginatively and unresignedly

After all this, the powers that be tried, with the help of blatant media manipulation, to get Andrés Manual López Obrador and his followers to bow their heads and submissively accept the scandalous vote fraud. After triggering the conflict, they insisted that he keep quiet about it. As though defrauding the popular will were not enough, they complained because people refused to resign themselves to it. Their response to the crisis has been to step up their costly media campaign against those mobilizing against the results being imposed on them.

Despite the pressures, many different groups waged imaginative grassroots protests using novel forms of expression on the steps of businesses, banks and the largest television company, accusing their owners of helping to perpetrate out the fraud.

The demonstrators constantly reiterated the motives behind their peaceful, civic resistance: they were defending their votes and the country's democracy by trying to prevent those who didn't win the elections from being imposed on them. López Obrador, the Coalition for the Good of All's presidential candidate, faced off against the powerful and privileged elite who rule the country and look on any alternative national project as unacceptable, even if neither

manipulation nor the dirty war nor money were enough to put PAN candidate Felipe Calderón in office without fraud. People in the resistance movement have insisted on their obligation to defend democracy not only by demanding clean elections, but also by refusing to accept poverty, lack of employment, emigration, miserable wages, limited opportunities for young people to attend university, the approval of sales tax on food and medicine, and the privatization of social security and the electricity and oil industries.

#### Civic resistance: “Vote by vote”

The first step in this historic mobilization was to demand a recount. The official figures—widely seen as crooked—gave such a slight margin of victory to Calderón that if the votes were recounted, they would likely show that López Obrador had won.

The PAN and the Business Coordinating Council, the country’s leading business association, were opposed. López Obrador sent Calderón a letter asking him to agree to a recount because he had nothing to fear if he was sure of his victory. Calderón refused to accept this solution, as did the Electoral Tribunal, even though it would have reassured everyone. The Tribunal instead ordered that the votes be recounted in roughly half of the districts and in only 9% of their polling places. López Obrador replied that he could not accept “the decimation of democracy.” He also insisted that the movement would not limit itself to demanding a vote-by-vote recount in the wake of the fraud, but would press for a transformation of the institutions.

The Coalition for the Good of All, led by the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), charged that there were various kinds of anomalies in 72,000 of the ballot packets. Even the partial recount revealed an overall excess of 545,079 ballots in some packets and a 148,150 shortfall in others. The journal *Proceso* reported that such inconsistent tallies had been the rule rather than the exception, and that the PAN candidate tended to have fewer votes than attributed to him while López Obrador had more. Alianza Cívica noted that these irregularities were the product not of errors but of alterations. The bishop of Saltillo, Raúl Vera—who has long stood up for people’s rights—declared that the results of the partial recount justified the civic resistance.

#### The tribunal’s ruling: A “coup d’état”

After the hardly transparent partial recount, the Electoral Tribunal decided to annul a similar number of votes for both candidates, thus maintaining the 0.5% margin in Calderón’s favor. López Obrador described this ruling as a “coup d’état” and accused the tribunal of complicity in validating the fraud and supporting the criminals who were stealing the presidential elections. He declared that the institution had made a political rather than juridical decision, because it served the economic and political interests of a group of privileged

people who had taken over the state apparatus. That same charge was made by the people in their huge demonstrations. As if in proof of the allegations, the tribunal refused to clean up the elections.

On its editorial page, *The New York Times* urged López Obrador to accept the tribunal's decision, but granted that Calderón had been wrong to reject a full recount. *The Financial Times* argued that a recount would have been the best way to resolve such a serious conflict. The Washington-based Center for Economic and Policy Research did a sampling of the recounted polling places and found that the election results were "inexplicably biased." The writer Carlos Montemayor commented that the Electoral Tribunal had opted for an arithmetic adjustment, without wanting to admit that the numerical errors were evidence of fraud.

### **Electoral tribunal: Impunity and absurdity**

Finally, on September 5, the Tribunal declared Calderón President-elect. It recognized that both Fox and the Business Coordinating Council had illegally intervened, but argued that it was impossible to determine the extent to which their actions had influenced the final results. The course the Tribunal took and the arguments it offered were more appropriate for resolving conflicts between individuals—as though this were a case of civil or commercial law—than for such a crucial issue involving the public interest and governed by electoral law. The Tribunal did not explain why it chose this course. Its treatment of polling places with too many or too few ballots was inconsistent, since in August it decreed such votes invalid and when they were decisive annulled the results of that polling place, then changed its criteria on September 5. How is it that the Tribunal saw something as a serious irregularity in August but not in September? Actions like this only increased people's doubts about the election process, encouraged impunity and made the tribunal look ridiculous.

### **A strongly challenged resolution**

After being declared president-elect, Calderón made a call for unity but López Obrador rejected it, saying that it was hard to accept the idea there would be no consequences for the dirty war Calderón had led, and accusing the Electoral Tribunal magistrates of validating the fraud. Eliasur Artega, a legal scholar from the Autonomous Metropolitan University, argued that the Tribunal had ignored the legal basis of the charges filed. Constitutional scholar Raúl Carrancá y Rivas agreed that the decision was unjust, while colleague Clemente Valdés called the tribunal's arguments poor and even contradictory. Experts on media impact charged the Electoral Tribunal with ignoring the media's irregular and uncontrolled participation in the presidential race, while former Tribunal member Jaime Cárdenas said its decision was rife with legal absurdities. The

magistrates reviewed each point separately but failed to evaluate the whole, and thus had not assessed how the full set of irregularities had impacted the process. The Tribunal had also failed to examine the various stages in the process with the proper legal criteria, had not followed proper procedures and had issued a mere rebuke to the President and the Business Coordinating Council when it should have sanctioned them.

Other commentators argued that, with an average two-vote difference between the candidates per polling place and so many irregularities, the proper course should have been to annul the elections. Human rights organizations complained that the tribunal had not assessed the irregularities in depth, while farm workers' organizations proclaimed that Calderón would be a legal but not legitimate President. *The New York Times* acknowledged that a significant part of the Mexican population believe fraud took place.

When the PAN talked about winning the decision, the PRD responded that this wasn't the same as winning the elections. And although the PAN's allies, the Mexican Bishops' Conference and private enterprise applauded the ruling, the Tribunal's actions aggravated the political crisis. Calderón had to arrive by helicopter to receive his certificate of election since people kept up their demonstration in front of the Tribunal's offices. The magistrates' decision not to consider mathematical mistakes in the record as evidence of fraud only fueled people's distrust of the tribunal.

#### **López Obrador speaks to a million, Calderón to only 30,000**

While the Left argued that the Tribunal's attitude was clearly biased and charged it with validating the coup against the democratic electoral system, the people kept up their civic rebellion. They flat refused to accept the wrapping of consummated illegal acts in legal arguments.

Former ambassador, congressional leader and PRD founder Porfirio Muñoz Ledo announced that he had reliable information from the highest level in the judicial branch that the Tribunal's magistrates had met in the home of the Supreme Court president before reaching their decision, where they were reportedly treated to pressure from President Fox. Even after the president of the Supreme Court maintained that there was no proof that this meeting had taken place, Muñoz Ledo held his ground. He added that Fox had warned the magistrates that a failure to validate Calderón's election would trigger capital flight and other negative consequences that would lead to economic collapse. This could explain why the magistrates recognized election violations but applied no legal sanctions.

While López Obrador protested before crowds of over a million, Calderón celebrated his certification before thirty thousand. He counterproductively

punctuated his calls for dialogue with insults against those who had voted for his opponent. President Fox also kept up his inflammatory statements, inciting ill-will, while López Obrador called on his followers to resist such provocations.

#### Fox couldn't read his report or launch Independence Day events

Mexico's Presidents always make their annual report to the House of Representatives on September 1. For the many years of PRI rule, this was a day for the President to shine, and more recently an occasion to take jabs at the opposition. This year, anticipating that the event would be marked by huge demonstrations, the President, with the complicity of legislators in his party, ordered the army to surround the House of Representatives with tanks and a steel muralla, thus illegally placing a part of Mexico City under siege.

The PRD demanded that the legislative building be opened back up and announced it would attend the report as an aggrieved party. The predicted massive demonstration took place in the Zócalo, Mexico City's famed central square. To avoid the possibility of bloody repression, people did not march to the House of Representatives, but PRD congress people took over the podium and prevented Fox from delivering his report. In a later televised message, Fox said the PRD had wronged Mexicans, to which the PRD responded that Fox was the wrongdoer. The media sharply criticized the PRD for not allowing the President to give his report. In reality, the PRD had simply put an end to an outdated rite of the *ancien régime*.

López Obrador's followers had taken over the Zócalo and were still camped out there by September 15, the date of Mexico's independence celebrations, when the President traditionally steps out onto the National Palace balcony overlooking the square to give the "cry of independence," thus launching the evening's festivities. López Obrador announced that he would be with the demonstrators in the square on that date. Fox, daring him, insisted that he would come out to give the cry. Many feared that the army would be used to repress the demonstration. In the end, Fox had to cede the square and announced that he would not participate in the celebrations in Mexico City.

After more than a month and a half of huge demonstrations in which not a single window had been broken, López Obrador called for an end to this form of protest and for the organization of a National Democratic Convention to take place in the Zócalo following the traditional Independence Day military parade.

López  
"Legitimate President"

Obrador:

On that day, over a million delegates from all over the country attended the National Democratic Convention. This new organization that has arisen in response to the electoral fraud has several aims. One component of the

struggle relates to an effective fight against the country's enormous poverty and inequality, because people are no longer willing to accept the control of the country's wealth by a small minority while the vast majority of Mexicans cannot satisfy even their most indispensable needs. Another has to do with defense of the national patrimony, to prevent the continued privatization of public wealth. Another central demand is the public's right to information. The convention participants also agreed to the need to fight corruption and impunity. Rejecting the model of a state that buys allegiance and a government that is no more than a committee at the service of a minority, they called for a drastic transformation of all state institutions.

In short, the convention became a forum for organizing continued peaceful, civic resistance. People understand that the path will be a long one. They proposed starting to put an end to the simulated republic by organizing a democratic dialogue for freedom, justice and democracy among the country's various social, political, and cultural groups, and encouraging a discussion of the political crisis caused by the anti-democratic imposition. All this implies a revolution in people's way of thinking.

When the assembly was asked whether it would prefer to appoint a coordinator of peaceful, civic resistance or name a "legitimate President," the majority of hands went up for the second option, understanding that it would be López Obrador. Opposition to the idea of recognizing Calderón as President was virtually unanimously.

#### A show of hands?

There were also debates among the opponents of fraud at the convention. For example, philosopher Luis Villoro, argued that opposition from below is a long-term strategy, and criticized the method of reaching agreements by a show of hands in an assembly. Adolfo Gilly, a tried-and-true leftwing activist, argued that it was inconsistent to propose a government in rebellion while the PRD legislators accepted their congressional seats. Longtime PRD leader Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, accepting the Tribunal's decision without criticizing the election fraud, said that naming López Obrador as the legitimate President was a step backward in the path to democracy. He questioned the movement's actions, apparently forgetting that repudiated rulers have been brought down by mass demonstrations. He also criticized López Obrador for having surrounded himself with onetime allies of former PRI President Salinas de Gortari, and said that an alternative project needs to be debated and approved over time, not simply rubber stamped in a public square.

The writer Elena Poniatowska said that fraud had indeed taken place and that people couldn't just stand by with their arms folded. They were incited by the dirty war paid for by the country's owners and felt that they were defending

their dignity in response to an unjust election.

### Between support and distrust

The parties that made up the Coalition for the Good of All decided to form a broad progressive front and register with the Electoral Tribunal as a coalition of leftist legislators. Magdalena Gómez, a lawyer, defended the convention's legality, stating that the decision to name López Obrador as legitimate President was based in article 39 of the Constitution, which recognizes the people's right to change their form of government.

López Obrador's functions as legitimate President are also within the law because he's leading the opposition to the usurpation and the decisions the spurious government will seek to take. and heading a peaceful movement to found what was described at the convention as a "new republic." In response to the objection that the PRD legislators had taken their seats, several people noted that the legislature is an independent branch that does not form part of the illegitimate government.

People also raised other issues. For example, writer Guillermo Almeyra felt that a fundamental problem with the convention was that many of its members were there simply as followers of López Obrador. If the movement depends solely on the decisions and directions of him and his team, the capacity to attract millions of Mexicans who want social change but distrust López Obrador's top-down leadership would be lost.

Another point had to do with sectarianism. Some argued that extensive nationwide discussions would be required to draft proposed solutions to the country's serious problems, with thousands of forums to provide a channel for participation from below. Many called for the new movement to break out of the top-down leadership style.

In recent weeks, some have also noted that the people in this movement have been pushing the leader to increasingly radical positions. Although the government predicted that the protests would last no more than a couple of weeks, the new movement has proven its vitality as it takes shape as an anti-oligarchic coalition for institutional transformation. With the new government, we can soon expect to hear the demands of outsiders who encouraged the fraud and have been advocating for the privatization of the country's considerable energy resources. One of the immediate steps to be taken by participants in the convention will be the defense of energy sovereignty.

### Those from below: Active rebels

What the last PRI President was finally no longer able to do, the President of the so-called change in government did do: Fox imposed his successor through

**fraud. But he's giving Calderón a divided, injured country immersed in massive protests. Despite the calls for dialogue, the hate-filled campaign has left deep wounds on political culture. The convention participants are convinced that the real powers of money, the media and the Catholic Church stole the elections from them. They say that Calderón will be simply a puppet of these powers, and urge López Obrador not to give in or compromise.**

**Those from below have become active rebels, in that neither Fox nor Calderón can participate in public events without incident. People have come to see the powers-that-be as their enemies and are ready to rein them in. These powers are insisting that they submit to the old institutions, but to no avail. The institutions have shown that they are untrustworthy and only serve those at the top.**

In prior fights for democracy, solutions were found in the supposedly autonomous institutions. But the fraud of 2006 has shown that these institutions are biased and subject to the ruling powers. The whole institutional scaffolding of the transition to democracy has collapsed. The problem is that the country has taken such a big step backward that the promise that these institutions will once again function properly is no longer enough. Those from below want to rebuild another kind of democracy with other kinds of institutions.

#### **A vital, ambitious movement**

The movement that arose to challenge the fraudulent elections is gaining strength. Now it aims to create another country, from below. It has been criticized for its oppositional stance, but it's not merely a struggle of repudiation. It is rather one that can explore problems and propose solutions. As the movement seemed to come close to what was being proposed earlier this year by the Zapatistas' Other Campaign, Subcomandante Marcos once again chose to distance himself from it, insisting that the Other Campaign would not take the same course or share the same destiny as the protests led by López Obrador. And to those who thought that the two movements could come together, Marcos made it clear that he views the new mobilization with critical skepticism.

But currents from below tend to find their own channels and not necessarily keep to those marked out by their leaders. We mustn't forget that such movements always contain the seed of an entropy that tends to wear them down, but history has also shown that grassroots movements arising from great wrongs can contain embers that light later movements for freedom.



## Oaxaca: Unwavering Grassroots Resistance

*For the past several months, the people of Oaxaca have marched in the streets against the repressive forces sent first by the PAN's outgoing government, then by its fraudulent new government. The movement in Oaxaca is emblematic of a new kind of resistance that has arisen from the grass roots and overcome its fear. The recent events there have further discredited the neoliberal economic model imposed in Mexico.*

### Jorge Alonso

Recent political events in Mexico recall Hannah Arendt's classic text, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. And although one of the leading founders of the National Action Party (PAN), Efraín González Luna, was a harsh critic of Nazi and Franco style fascism, many of its other founders were fascist sympathizers or admirers, a tendency that can still be found among more than a few party members.

### Parastate and parallel state fascism

Hannah Arendt warned that totalitarian solutions emerged when people saw no hope of alleviating economic, political and social misery through means worthy of human beings. Meanwhile, Portuguese scholar Boaventura de Sousa Santos warned of the danger of social fascism, a new kind of fascism that has no need to eliminate other parties, as did the original form. Instead it aims to segregate the excluded, to establish a parallel state fascism through the selective application of the law and a parastate fascism in which powerful social actors usurp the state's attributions with its complicity. Then there is the fascism of insecurity, which involves the manipulation of insecurity and fear.

There are clear signs of all of these forms in the conflict in Oaxaca. The powers that be and the spurious PAN government are trying to shore up their support there by using the powerful communications media to convince broad sectors of the population to turn against the grassroots movement in that state, which is waging a passionate fight against the abuse of power.

### Power and despotism

Oaxaca is one of Mexico's poorest states, and has long suffered from marked social, political and economic inequalities. It has Mexico's largest indigenous population, with 16 ethnic groups spread out over 7 regions, has been run by economic and political strongmen and is plagued by all kinds of abuses.

Economic and social crisis  
and a political mafia

Any real understanding of the dramatic situation in Oaxaca must take into account the Mexican government's plans to privilege the transnational investments that monopolize wealth. Plan Puebla-Panama, for example,

includes several huge projects in Oaxaca: the trans-isthmus train, which will serve as a new “dry canal” between the Pacific and the Gulf of Mexico; the La Venta wind-powered electricity project; the Pinotepa Nacional-Huatulco tourist corridor; and the privatization of mineral resources in the Sierra Sur mountain range. Public opposition to all of these projects has been growing, adding to the more long-standing opposition to the La Parota hydroelectric project.

In addition, the free trade agreement with the United States has disrupted the domestic market, aggravating the crisis in traditional agriculture, especially maize. It has also intensified agrarian conflicts, while the natural and cultural wealth of Oaxaca’s communities is being destroyed by severe soil erosion and the loss of water sources. Because of the lack of local opportunities, Oaxaca sends more workers to Mexico City and the United States than any other region of the country. All this makes the already serious problems of poverty, unemployment and migration even worse.

In addition to the economic crisis and rising social rebellion, the corrupt authoritarianism of successive Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) governments has triggered a serious political crisis. They have fostered violence and ungovernability, denied justice to indigenous communities and other extremely poor sectors of society and exploited public resources with no accountability, favoring only their allies. A voracious oligarchy dominates Oaxaca.

#### **A single voice: Down with Ruiz**

Things only got worse when Ulises Ruiz, an ally of outgoing governor Roberto Madrazo, then-leader of the PRI, was imposed as governor in the fraudulent 2004 elections. His despotic exercise of power soon earned him the enmity of much of the population. The human rights situation in the state grew even worse, and Ruiz was frequently accused by both national and international human rights organizations of orchestrating the jailing and death of his opponents.

The new governor attacked dissenters and harassed anyone in the media who questioned his plans. At first, his victims turned to the courts and public ministries, denouncing thefts and murders, but to no avail.

In May 2006, Oaxaca’s teachers called for better wages, and when their demands met with no response they set up camp in the center of the state capital. In mid-June the local government tried to crush them with a violent eviction in which one person was killed. This led to the birth of a broad-based movement united around a demand for Ruiz’s resignation. Although Oaxacans know they have many problems to solve, they see removing Ulises Ruiz from

his post as an indispensable condition to begin to remedy their ills.

**Birth of a broad-based opposition movement**

Oaxacans have a rich community life. Many communities and student, peasant, and neighborhood organizations came together to form a coalition known as the Grassroots Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) to challenge all abusive leaders, but especially Governor Ruiz, whom they describe as criminal.

APPO organized its own communications channels with the public. From June to November 2006, students controlling the university radio station placed it at the service of the movement.

Then on August 1, hundreds of women marched with pots and pans, demanding time on the state government's television station. When no one met with them, they decided to take over the state radio and television stations, transforming the television station's parking lot into a vast kitchen. They didn't occupy the offices to avoid later being charged with theft.

Soon afterwards, they formed the Oaxaca Women's Coalition. Pooling their strengths and overcoming their fears, they again marched together, this time to Mexico City, where they took over a radio station called The Law, which they renamed The Law of the People.

**Under the wing of a united PRI and PAN**

One solution to this steady, organized public repudiation of Governor Ruiz would have been for the legislature to dissolve the government and call new state elections. But since an immediate result of the movement against Ruiz was that Andrés Manuel López Obrador's Coalition for the Good of All won a large share of the vote in July's presidential elections, the PRI sought an alliance with the PAN to protect Ruiz.

It must be remembered that the glue that now binds the PRI is impunity. Its members protect each other backs, defending themselves like a mafia. Abandoning its own principles, the PAN also defends the PRI's most discredited members in exchange for that party's support in Congress.

This explains why an APPO petition presented at the end of July 2006 calling on the legislature to dissolve the government of Oaxaca made no headway in the Senate. A judge later determined that the Senate erred in failing to respond to the petition, thus violating the constitutional guarantee of the right to petition. APPO then took another legal route, calling on Mexico's House of Representatives to file suit against the governor, but again to no avail as he has

found shelter under the protective wing of a united PRI and PAN.

#### The murder of Brad Will

In August and September, APPO organized several marches and hunger strikes, setting up barricades over much of the city of Oaxaca. The federal government initially believed the protests would peter out on their own, but as they continued, the local government's response grew increasingly violent.

In mid-October a demonstrator was killed by state police, an event documented by US reporter Brad Will, who was covering the conflict for an independent media outlet. On October 27, police and PRI members attacked several barricades and this time it was Will who was killed.

APPO blamed the governor and the federal government for refusing to recognize that the conflict in Oaxaca was more than just a localized labor dispute. The Senate also bore a share of the responsibility for ratifying Oaxaca's government out of partisan interests. APPO again demanded that the governor step down and rejected the use of force as a solution, while human rights organizations denounced a growing wave of repression.

#### A state of siege to crush the resistance

The federal government responded to the killing of the US citizen by declaring that it would agree to the teachers' wage demands but would not discuss Ruiz's resignation. To support its decision, it sent the federal police to Oaxaca, which carried out searches and detentions.

The movement announced that it would confront this military occupation with passive resistance. The Mixtec communities declared that they had no weapons, just the need for the federal government to listen to their demands and put a stop to the repression. At the end of October, the Mexican League for the Defense of Human Rights and over a hundred civil and social organizations issued an urgent statement in response to the "de facto state of siege" that was persecuting a peaceful resistance movement.

The federal police retook the city center. Although the federal government publicized it as a "clean operation," it was in fact a violent act of repression, supported by military helicopters and planes. The first results of the federal police's participation were two dead and dozens wounded and detained. One person died after being hit in the stomach by a gas canister.

Citizens groups from around the world protested the savage repression. Amnesty International demanded that the government respect the demonstrators' human rights, while other human rights organizations denounced the arbitrary detentions and reported that they had information on

forced

disappearances.

Those behind the election fraud in July's presidential elections—big business, the powerful communications media, the top Catholic Church hierarchy—and its beneficiary Felipe Calderón all pressured outgoing President Vicente Fox to crush the uprising.

#### Rocks and fireworks against guns

The occupation of Oaxaca by federal troops only exacerbated the crisis. The federal government again miscalculated: it thought that with the federal police in Oaxaca, the movement would come to an end, but people overcame their fear and the struggle continued. Falling back to the Santo Domingo Plaza, the people bunkered down in the university. APPO now demanded the withdrawal of the “occupation army” and the freeing of political prisoners in addition to the governor’s resignation. Unlike the position expressed by the Mexican Bishops’ Conference, priests from the archdiocese of Oaxaca also called for an end to the repression.

There were striking images of young people, women, the elderly and children facing off in the streets against the federal police, who launched gas and fired their guns while the people threw rocks and set off firework rockets. With each passing day, more people were wounded, detained, tortured or disappeared.

In October, the movement—made up of teachers in Section 22 and APPO—suffered a setback when the teachers’ leaders caved in to the government, although most of the rank and file stood firm. Despite this division and the ongoing repression, APPO organized a march against the occupation army on October 31 in which 10,000 people participated.

#### A “response to neoliberalism”

In November, the federal police destroyed the barricades and took back the state television station, by then held for two months. By the time they reached the last barricade at the university, the movement had gathered over 20,000 people, who faced off against 4,000 officers. They defended their bastion with sticks, stones, Molotov cocktails and firecrackers. The police reported 10 officers wounded, while APPO said 200 civilians had been injured.

The Bishop of Saltillo—who has always stood at the side of the oppressed—condemned the use of force, noting that the events in Oaxaca demonstrated how Calderón’s new government would act upon taking office in December. Independent journalists and artists distributed a statement expressing their alarm at the government’s actions: instead of taking steps against the violent paramilitary groups linked to local government, it was attacking the people of Oaxaca. Meanwhile, the National Indigenous Congress repudiated the violence

and repression against APPO and the Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center denounced at least 84 arbitrary detentions and 59 disappearances.

The movement set up new barricades and on November 5 held another big march to show that it hadn't been defeated. Around this time, it was disclosed that Ruiz's government had not clearly accounted for some \$9 billion received from the federal government. Pablo González Casanova described the movement as a "response to neoliberalism" and urged its members to beware of infiltrators. On November 9, an indigenous caravan left Chiapas for Oaxaca to express its solidarity.

In an effort to counter the massive grassroots mobilization against it, the Ruiz government organized demonstrations of PRI members and public employees, but they were always smaller than the movement's demonstrations. The government also promoted violence against APPO members through an unidentified radio transmitter to counter information broadcast by the movement, particularly on the university radio station.

#### No peace with Ruiz

APPO organized a congress that issued a statement against neoliberalism, explaining that the profound crisis in Oaxaca was caused by an authoritarian, corrupt, illegitimate power that denied justice to indigenous peoples and the poor. It also explained that the new form of grassroots struggle that has arisen to reject this power aims to rebuild the social fabric, which necessarily implies punishing those responsible for the killings, tortures and disappearances in the state.

In mid-November, there was another huge march with several thousand participants. In response, the local government used the media in another attempt to blame the movement for the death of the US reporter. There was so much evidence against groups linked to the government, however, that this ploy failed. The governor stepped up his persecution of movement members and some leaders sought political asylum from the church to avoid detention, which the local hierarchy rejected. Not even all this dampened the protests.

The day before the anniversary of the Mexican revolution, an assembly of the Zapotec, Mixe and Chinanteco people of the Sierra Juárez issued the Declaration of Guelatao. It said there would be neither governability nor peace in Oaxaca as long as Ruiz remained in his post and demanded profound transformations to redress the marginalization and neglect.

It also condemned violence and repression as means of addressing these problems and once again demanded the withdrawal of the federal police, the release of political prisoners, presentation of the disappeared, the cancellation

of arrest warrants, respect for university autonomy and an end to all forms of aggression against the movement. A day later, with the tacit approval of the police, paramilitary groups set fire to a camp set up by movement members, and the federal police and APPO groups squared off for nearly four hours.

### Sowing terror in the march

On November 25, APPO returned to the streets with its seventh huge march. The local government also took another step: it infiltrated plainclothes police into the march, who committed acts of vandalism and set fire to public buildings, conveniently destroying the files that would have verified the local government's misuse of funds. The government accused APPO members of starting the fires, but APPO demonstrated that those responsible were linked to the governor. Some commentators drew a parallel with the burning of the Reichstag in Germany, a ploy Hitler used to blame the communists and justify their repression. That day, dozens of people were wounded and over two hundred detained, three-fourths of whom were sent to prisons in other states so their family members could not visit them. In the following days, the police continued to sow terror as they searched for movement leaders.

On November 28, participants in a State Forum of Indigenous Peoples declared that the conflict had led to a profound human rights crisis. They accused the government of using old instruments to respond to a new kind of social organization that is demanding its rights as the country's economic and political model is unraveling. They also charged it with sowing terror to prevent a political solution. That same day, APPO turned the university radio station over to the rector to keep the police from entering the university, and left the last barricade that had been set up at its doors.

International support for the people of Oaxaca

As the days went by, human rights organizations began to report physical and psychological torture of detainees, many of whom had not even participated in the events and were being held on trumped-up charges. The police searched houses without court orders and many of the detained, both women and men, were subjected to sexual abuse. More people disappeared and there were reports of secret burials. The government responded by harassing and persecuting human rights activists. Shots were fired into a church where members of the movement had taken refuge and the office of a social organization was set on fire and a priest was attacked; yet people linked to local government who had been accused of killing Brad Will were set free.

People from 35 countries expressed their repudiation of the Mexican government and support for the grassroots movement in Oaxaca. At the beginning of December, the movement again overcame its fear and organized

demonstrations demanding the governor's removal, release of the prisoners and presentation of the disappeared.

**"Oaxaca has changed,  
we're no longer afraid"**

Felipe Calderón took office on December 1, 2006. His new attorney general was the man in charge of the federal police during the Atenco case, in which people had been harshly repressed and arbitrarily detained, and arrested women had been raped. As head of the Government Ministry, Calderón named a former Jalisco governor, a man the Spanish newspaper *El País* described as a "hawk," who had ordered the repression of the "other world" movement in Guadalajara in May 2004. The new minister had already been involved in the Oaxaca case for several days, having told Governor Ruiz not to resign and promising him the government's full support.

On December 4, the government invited several of the movement's spokespeople to a meeting, only to arrest them and send them to maximum security prisons as if they were dangerous criminals. But the government miscalculated once again. Because the movement grew out of the grass roots, rather than being organized from the top, the arrest of some of its leaders did not snuff it out, but instead fanned the flames. Hundreds of other community leaders met to confirm that the peaceful struggle would continue. As one indigenous leader said, "Those who thought the citizens' movement could be put down through the exaggerated and illegal use of the public forces and institutionalized violence got it wrong again, as a very broad sector of Oaxacan society has shaken off its fear and is clear that PRI shock groups were behind the provocation. The government's maxim has been 'divide, attack and conquer,' but Oaxaca has changed and they can't make it go back to what it was."

**The balance of terror**

The families of those detained stressed that their only crime had been to participate in a peaceful civil movement to publicize the abuses that the people of Oaxaca have suffered for too long. Rosario Ibarra, founder of the Eureka Committee of families of the disappeared, declared that the repudiated practices of the dirty war of the 1960s and 1970s were being used again in Oaxaca.

Along with members of the movement, the federal police also arrested some of the state police infiltrated into the movement by Governor Ruiz. To prevent this information from getting out, Calderón sent many of those who had been detained and illegally imprisoned in the state of Nayarit back to jails in Oaxaca, while a third party paid the bonds to free the infiltrators. The government also attempted to bribe or pressure those arrested and their relatives by offering

them freedom in return for signing papers blaming the PRD for the violent events.

Meanwhile, the arrival of the International Human Rights Commission in Oaxaca encouraged independent human rights organizations to continue their fight against impunity. The federation warned that the same kind of repression applied against the “other world” movement was being used in Oaxaca, and that the torture, repression, beatings, sexual abuse, arbitrary detentions, fabrication of crimes and other abuses violated the human rights treaties signed by Mexico. Dominican priest Miguel Concha noted that the new government’s rhetoric about a rule of law law was belied by what was happening in Oaxaca.

#### **Seven months into the conflict**

The movement still refused to give in and on December 10, International Human Rights Day, it took to the streets again, demanding the freeing of political prisoners. The voices of the women were particularly strong. Some said that what they had been through made it feel like they were living under Pinochet.

The third week in December, the National Human Rights Commission released some preliminary information, reporting 349 detained, 370 wounded and 20 killed. It had received 1,211 charges of human rights violations including undue use of force, illegal searches, arbitrary detentions, people being held incommunicado and forced disappearances. It had also received information on the use of weapons against APPO members by subjects identified as local police officers dressed in civilian clothes. Its information was based on over 2,700 testimonies.

The director of the Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center responded that the National Human Rights Commission should not limit itself to verifying the facts, but should also issue recommendations. The Mexican League for the Defense of Human Rights, which also claimed that over 30 people were disappeared, noted that the commission failed to mention either the degrading and inhumane treatment and torture, or the serious responsibility of both the state and federal governments in the events. The commission responded that it was drafting a final report that would be released soon.

Given the intensity of the situation, APPO decided to halt its actions for the Christmas and New Year’s celebrations, to give the anger over all the injustices time to cool down.

#### **Striking testimonies of repression**

In January the struggle heated up again with repeated demands for the fall of

the tyrant, withdrawal of the federal police, the freeing of political prisoners and the region's economic, political and social transformation. The Trique communities announced the creation of the autonomous municipality of San Juan Copala, explaining that they wanted a just government that was neither repressive nor corrupt. A human rights activist denounced government threats to imprison her for publicizing the documentation of serious and systematic human rights violations, while an APPO activist who had worked as an announcer on the university radio station had to go into hiding after receiving death threats. Another radio announcer charged that the government had put a \$10,000 price on her head.

On January 6, APPO held an event to distribute toys to children, which the government tried to prevent. Denouncing the criminalization of the social movement, APPO demonstrated that those imprisoned were social activists, not murderers, drug traffickers or kidnappers.

Over 100 of the 141 people in the prison in Nayarit had been freed on bail, but remained subject to legal proceedings under false accusations and dozens remained in jail. When the federal government reneged on a promise it made during its last round of negotiations with APPO in December to free all remaining prisoners, relatives of those imprisoned, killed or disappeared organized protests and demonstrations. Many people stepped forward to testify about abuses and injustices in a National Forum for the Defense of Human Rights in Oaxaca, held in the House of Representatives. Again, the women's testimonies were very powerful.

On January 13, the police violently attacked a demonstration of relatives of political prisoners, using obviously fabricated evidence to imprison eight people. They were later released on bail by an organization created to address the problem of the prisoners of Oaxaca. The arbitrary exercise of power kept the political atmosphere tense.

#### **International response mounts**

Brazil's Landless Movement sent a letter of support to APPO, promising to denounce the cruel and murderous repression of Ruiz's government, the federal government and the PRI and PAN. In mid-January, the Latin American leftist political parties in El Salvador for the 13th meeting of the Sao Paulo Forum called on the Mexican government to stop repressing APPO and demanded punishment for those guilty of "crimes against humanity" in Mexico.

In New York, Human Rights Watch denounced that torture, excessive use of force by the authorities and official impunity are among the main human rights problems in Mexico. The International Human Rights Commission released part of the report it will present to the European Union, stating that the movement

in Oaxaca is peaceful, not subversive and has legitimate demands; that the conflict will never be resolved if its causes are not justly addressed; and that APPO has been a civil, peaceful movement and thus cannot be blamed for the violence, except in a few isolated, individual cases.

It reported that the federal and Oaxaca authorities, in contrast, have committed serious violations of the individual rights of APPO members and sympathizers, including their freedom of movement, demonstration, expression and use of public space. They have made illegal, arbitrary arrests and are guilty of inhumane and degrading treatment and extrajudicial executions. They have also violated the presumption of innocence and the right to defense. Those detained have not been given due process and the death of APPO members resulted from "direct aggression and not confrontations." The commission concluded that Oaxaca's citizens were in an extremely vulnerable situation, subject to serious human rights violations and the suspension of constitutional guarantees.

#### **Dictatorship on the horizon**

The "Grupo Sur," made up of prestigious journalists and academics, issued a statement calling on the government to put a halt to these dictatorial tendencies. They noted that the rightwing forces that supported Calderón's presidency have demonstrated authoritarian tendencies that if not kept in check by social resistance, would soon lead to an openly totalitarian regime. The imposed government was behaving as though it had obtained a landslide victory and the illegitimacy of the violence it was unleashing could lead the country to dictatorship.

As evidence of this authoritarian tendency, the statement mentions the criminalization of social protest; the misuse of laws and institutions to threaten social leaders and the rest of the population; the deployment of armed forces in the country's streets; the dishonest and partisan control of the media, which eliminates dissident voices and persecutes reporters who dare to air any criticism; the inclusion in the Cabinet of human rights violators; judicial branch collusion with the country's real powers; and the budgetary attack on education, science, culture, and social development.

#### **A broad based, fearless movement**

After his first six weeks in office, Felipe Calderón declared himself very happy with the situation in Mexico. But how does the majority of the population feel? In addition to the severe repression in Oaxaca, most people's economic situation has been deteriorating because of sharp hikes in the price of basic goods like tortillas, milk, meat and eggs. Does the imposed government not understand that it cannot play with people's hunger?

The powers that be are pushing a new kind of fascism in Mexico. Since the PAN government won through electoral fraud, it has apparently decided to bolster itself through repressive force. The television duopoly reinforces this social fascism.

But there are also new features to the resistance against this model. Previously, repression would defeat social movements by cutting down their leaders, obliging what remained of the movements to focus all of their efforts on getting their leaders out of jail. The use of force spread fear, and it took people a long time to return to the streets. A movement like APPO has shown that repression isn't capable of stopping movements that feed off people's own energies and demands rather than leaders.

Instead of being sidetracked by efforts to free its prisoners, this movement has added that struggle to its original demands. It is part of a new class of movements, characterized by globalized resistance, constant and renewed international support, and above all, the presence of local and international human rights organizations.

#### **For human dignity**

The persistent resistance of the grassroots movement in Oaxaca recalls novels like *Land, Land*, by Slovak writer Sándor Márai. Identifying the reasons behind the kind of institutional cruelty that humiliates people, he said that torture cannot annihilate defensive movements. And if terror attempts to oblige people to accept human atrocity, something incredible happens once they understand that those in power are not only pillaging material goods but also trampling human rights: they overcome their fear of tanks and weapons, because they understand they cannot allow the annihilation of their human condition.

Mexico's new regime is marked by inhumanity and cruelty, characteristics it has learned from the former authoritarian regime of its alliance partner, the PRI. Reneging on its founding doctrine, since it has seen that it cannot exercise power without degrading what is human, the PAN is trampling on human dignity and hypocritically invoking the law to defend the use of terror. But in Oaxaca this new fascism has come face to face with a movement that has overcome fear in its struggle for justice.





Mexico

### On the Decriminalization of Abortion

*On April 23, after a tense and intense debate in all spheres of society, two-thirds vote of the Federal District's legislature voted to decriminalize first-quarter abortions in Mexico's capital, thus giving women there the right to decide whether to end their pregnancy. One woman with years of experience defending women's rights shared her thoughts with envío following this historic decision.*

**María Guadalupe Morfín Otero**

I'm a Mexican woman who's not an activist in any political party. I have an education that's largely humanistic: an undergraduate degree in law, a master's degree in literature, a diploma in human rights and a year of theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. I've held two public offices in my country, as president of the state Human Rights Commission in Jalisco and as the Federal District's commissioner to prevent and eradicate violence against women in Ciudad Juárez. Although raised a Catholic, I have remained open to diverse beliefs in carrying out my public functions, including a lack of religious beliefs. It is based on this personal experience that I offer these reflections on the recent decriminalization of abortion in the Federal District.

#### A necessary separation

I was born in the Jalisco region, which was the site of a religious war as recently as 1926-1929, when the Cristero War was sparked by anticlerical provisions in the Constitution. The war was particularly cruel in Jalisco and other neighboring states. It cost us a lot in this country to understand that the separation of church and state is necessary and healthy in the interest of establishing a secular society that allows a diverse population of believers and non-believers to come to essential agreements around issues of general interest without sacrificing basic freedoms. They are two spheres, two areas of action that should coexist in a spirit of mutual respect. This by no means implies disregarding the great responsibilities of those who exercise authority in each sphere. A good ruler can be a believer and be coherent with his or her faith, but must not use public office as a pulpit. These are two different things. A good

bishop may not share the viewpoint behind a law, and nothing prevents him from expressing solidarity with the vulnerable people affected by it. He can continue to talk with those in power, bearing witness in accord with a faith that counts compassion among its essential principles, especially towards the poor and the fallen, and encouraging the cultivation of values that can bring about a reign of peace and justice within reach of all. The role of law is not to prohibit sins or impose virtues. It expresses accords that are valid for everyone in a republic of equals and thus contains the minimum consensus needed for social coexistence.

#### **What should the state do?**

Mario Gutiérrez from the newspaper *Mural* in Guadalajara interviewed me on April 23, before abortion was decriminalized in Mexico's capital. I want to share with *envío* some of the ideas I expressed in that interview, along with some other thoughts I've had since.

In response to the reporter's question on how the state should intervene on the abortion issue given the country's current situation, I replied that the state should ensure that there is absolutely no coercion against any women to force her to end her pregnancy. It should ensure that women who choose to give birth but aren't living in adequate conditions receive government support in employment, health care and education, and have a support infrastructure, including a place to live, daycare for their children and options for adoption.

The state should also ensure that the rights of women who choose to make use of the possible new law decriminalizing abortion are respected, while safeguarding their privacy. It should ensure widespread public education on sexual and reproductive rights and responsibilities, especially among adolescents and young people of both sexes in middle and high schools, both public and private. This would allow them to make decisions based on objective information with the support of advisers trained in the issue, know their options for avoiding unwanted pregnancy—which run from abstinence and other natural methods to the use of condoms and other birth control devices—and have access to the options most suitable for them.

To achieve all this, the topic of abortion has to come out of the sordid space to which some people have tried to confine it. A debate would be welcomed that helps move the dialogue forward so that those in favor of decriminalization and those against it can find each other and find ways to promote life, since neither of the two parties is “in favor” of abortion.

#### **A step forward for rights?**

In response to the question of whether the decriminalization of abortion should be seen as a step forward on the path to women's rights, I replied that it

can help us recognize the extent of the problem, but doesn't solve it in and of itself. It will help to record and count the ways in which abortions are taking place and their physical and psychological consequences. It will provide a starting point for designing preventive public policies in all areas of society. It will provide information for designing educational campaigns. This information will also be useful to the various churches and religious groups that do not have a single position on the topic and want to address it from their various pastoral perspectives in the most appropriate forums.

Dealing with this issue implies thinking seriously about creating another kind of state. It assumes a change in education, in the formation of people's consciences. It also implies building a society in solidarity with the most vulnerable and a culture that will eradicate all forms of violence against women, especially those resulting in unwanted pregnancies or miscarriages because of physical abuse, as well as the violence implicit in thinking of women only as spouses, as mere receptacles for procreation, without their full consent.

Women take up the defense of life every day, when they defend the environment against speculators who deplete sources of water and food for themselves and their families. They defend life when they stay in their home towns while their partners emigrate north. They defend life when they march for peace or try to find peaceful means to resolve the conflicts between their children and violent neighbors in urban neighborhoods governed not by the rule of law but by the criminal trafficking of drugs, influence and arms.

No woman has an abortion because she wants to. When a woman decides to end a pregnancy, whether or not abortion is decriminalized, she does it with greater or lesser ease depending on whether or not she has resources. Those without resources have to do it clandestinely, dramatically alone, endangering their lives. This tragic option then cuts off other options, because it makes it hard for them to gain access to networks of public and private institutions that offer a range of support and could even help them avoid abortion.

### We know what hurts us

In response to the question of whether people in my state avoid addressing the issue due to fear of losing votes—Jalisco is known as a conservative state—I replied that we can't generalize. Silence can mean different things. Some people may avoid speaking about it to project an image that wins votes at the polls, but these votes aren't so sure, since a politician who talks from his or her own conscience also builds confidence among voters. People form their own opinions, based in part on their experience with real, dramatic cases related to this and other issues. Women make up 53% of the Mexican population. We know what hurts us, and abortion hurts us very much. Some of us don't believe that the solution lies in the criminal realm. Machismo and discrimination also

hurt us. If anyone is pro-life in this country, it's the army of women who feed their families every day with the money they have available, however little that may be. And for the vast majority, it is very little, painfully inadequate.

I also think there are public officials whose personal convictions lead them to believe that the topic should be avoided at all costs and they aren't open to public discussion. Surely they're not closed to dialogue among their closest associates, but we have to encourage them to participate in a public dialogue, in a pluralistic spirit. If they hold public posts, they should act not as tribunals of conscience, but as public servants in a constitutionally secular state, where people must legislate and govern based on a legal consensus achieved among people who think in different ways.

#### **How to generate a healthy debate**

In response to the question of how to generate debate and analysis in Jalisco, I gave a response that is valid in any country in Latin America: the help of professionals in the media is indispensable. Abortion is not an issue to be sensationalized, however much some people might want to treat it that way. It's a topic that requires sensitivity, a capacity to listen to the people most affected—which are mainly though not exclusively women—and a minimum level of rationality in the debate. You can't talk with people who start off by shouting "assassins" without realizing that we're also pro-life. Women's institutes, gender studies programs and university centers should play a decisive role in helping define the magnitude of the issues, their various angles, their complexity.

Hearing more of the stories that happen just around the corner can make us more aware. It would also help to compile, write up and publicize cases—protecting the sources to protect people's identities—in order to know more about how different women have resolved their problems, whether or not they turned to abortion. We could thus learn about the thinking process they went through, what helped them through the dilemma and the various positions of the women they know and their spiritual advisers.

#### **Avoiding debate?**

The reporter asked who gains by avoiding debate, and who find it convenient to do so? I replied that the winners are, first and foremost, those who profit from clandestinity. They also include people who are pleased with themselves for having avoided the topic and stand by doing nothing in response to the many other scenarios where life demands justice—to feed the hungry; to better share the blankets, the classroom seats and the hallways of power; to protect our forests and aquifers; to ensure enough food for the table, with protein for the body and sustenance for the soul; to protect the women and

children who are victims of sexual exploitation networks. They include those who have always tried to ignore or hide the violence women suffer.

In response to the question of who should propose and promote this debate, I mentioned legislators, political parties, experts on the issue in public and private institutions, and civic organization members. Most important would be the participation of health workers who struggle to save the lives of women who have had botched abortions. Therapists who support people in grieving also have much to contribute.

I think it's always better to get sensitive topics out of the realm of the sordid than to keep them hidden away. What's difficult about the political moment we're in, not only in Jalisco but in Mexico as a whole, is that there are already many fissures in the country that are barely beginning to heal. This topic requires people to listen to each other carefully, which hasn't been the case, so they can reach minimal accords, get beyond a criminal agenda and create an infrastructure to support women with unwanted pregnancies.

#### **The threat of excommunication**

*envío* asked me two other questions. The first was, how do you assess the debate and the controversy that preceded the decriminalization of abortion?

The political moment, fraught with post-electoral tension, was not the most propitious, although it was important to address the issue with little delay because of its serious public health consequences. Besides this, there's virtually no willingness to dialogue between those in favor and those opposed. Both sides ended up sharpening their swords instead of building bridges to create a shared agenda around effective prevention actions to avoid unwanted pregnancies. Nonetheless, this fortunately seems to be beginning to happen now, after the vote.

It seems to me that the churches have a role to play in their respective forums—their homilies, confessionals, assemblies, pastoral action and editorial work—to create awareness, provide guidance and help people develop a sense of responsibility. But in this case they stooped to an offensive belligerence, or at least that was the case among a sector of the Catholic Church. The Office of the Archbishop of Guadalajara, which is the capital of Jalisco, went so far as to publish an editorial that used offensive language about people on the Left—in Mexico there are three parties that could be called leftist—and has been sharply criticized by a number of commentators, including a widely respected one who served for years as the head of the federal election office in Jalisco. In other regions, including the Federal District, some Church leaders raised the threat of excommunication, without noting that provisions in the Code of Canon Law bar use of this sanction against people involved in an abortion

because of their vulnerability.

I say “a sector of the Catholic Church” because there were also editorials signed by priests in various print media arguing that what is most needed in these cases is compassion for women facing this drama. They noted the uselessness of a law prohibiting abortions that, although unenforced, still feeds a dangerous clandestine practice. They also argued that effective preventive actions are more useful than criminal sanctions.

#### **Is society ready?**

*envío*'s second question was, who won and who lost? Knowing the prevailing machismo, women's fears and the pressure of the Church hierarchy, who do you think will be able to benefit from decriminalization? How do you believe doctors and other health workers will respond? Is society prepared for decriminalization?

The post-legislative period won't be easy. It already isn't. Machismo requires efforts from society and the government not only to counter it but also to make it socially unattractive. On another score, there's a difference between the health institutions run by the Federal District government and the federal institutions that serve the same Federal District's population on the issue of whether or not they're obliged to provide abortions. Federal and local health services coexist. A doctor may object on grounds of conscience so long as he or she is not the only doctor in the place who can treat a woman in need of urgent attention, because in this case the doctor's objection would deprive the woman of her right to make use of the new provision in the law.

Since the law is valid only for the Federal District, it's very unlikely that this will happen at this point, since there are always several doctors in its public hospitals. But what will happen if abortion is decriminalized in regions with isolated towns, where only one doctor is available? Will this objection be used to discriminate against the poorest women? This is precisely what decriminalization proposes to prevent: it aims to prevent the death of women who, given the prohibition against abortion in safe conditions, had no other choice but to use unhygienic or unsafe methods that endanger their lives.

One of the good things that has come out of this very painful process to decriminalize abortion in the nation's capital is that all health centers and hospitals in the Federal District will now have counseling services for women who want them. It is through such services that support networks can operate, so that a clandestine abortion is no longer the only option. These services also help women who choose to terminate their pregnancy cope with their grief.

I don't know if society is prepared to deal openly with something we're already

dealing with clandestinely. What we should prepare ourselves to do is avoid unwanted pregnancies. And this requires living in a just society, developing people's awareness, guaranteeing women a safe life, weaving networks of solidarity. This is a topic that touches us at our very roots and that I hope will be taken up not through criminal sanctions, but rather by educating ourselves and others.

### Truly "pro-life"?

It is now time to take the steps as a society, beyond our polarizing positions, to see if we are truly coherent in defending life, wherever it is threatened: in prisons, in the organized crime networks permeating our societies, in the subhuman work in the *maquilas* or the field, in the bloody migration North that leads to crosses in the desert, in violence against women at home and in public places, in violence against children who live in the streets, in young people addicted to drugs, in sex workers exposed to sexual violence, in the treatment of the elderly. We must show that we are "pro-life," that we defend life, in all of these places.

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### A Government Trapped in Its Dirty War

*Felipe Calderón's government is illegitimate, so it's covering its nakedness in military garb. The army's in the streets "to stop drug dealing," but the real objective is to prevent and/or repress the common and increasingly intense social protests. The list of social activists jailed has reached historic levels. There's no more doubt: this is a repressive government in an increasingly unjust and violent country.*

Jorge Alonso

Mexico's economic, political, social and cultural situation is marked by serious injustices. In very broad strokes: half the population enjoys over 80% of the available income and the other half barely survives on 17.8%. But these halves are not homogenous.

### Carlos Slim: The world's richest man

*Felipe Calderón's government is illegitimate, so it's covering its nakedness in military garb. The army's in the streets "to stop drug dealing," but the real objective is to prevent and/or repress the common and increasingly intense social protests.*

The list of social activists jailed has reached historic levels. There's no more

doubt: this is a repressive government in an increasingly unjust and violent country.

The inequitable division of wealth is worse now than three decades ago. While 18 million people live in extreme poverty, 10 families enjoy nearly 10% of the national GDP; their fortunes are equivalent to 40% of public spending. One person, Carlos Slim, made a dizzying ascent up the ladder of global wealth and reached the very top. Thanks to the privatization of what was once the state telephone company, with an enormous captive and mercilessly abused market, this one person has amassed a scandalous fortune. Mexico is home to the man who may now be the richest in the world. As economist José Blanco describes it, Slim has dedicated himself to buying failed companies in his and other countries, and “fixing” them, although none of the innovations he has employed are of his own creation; he’s a paradigmatic capital accumulator, not an entrepreneur. It is shameful for one person to be so excessively wealthy when millions have barely enough to eat.

### A lacerating inequality

The man sitting in the President's office promised in his campaign to be the jobs President, but so far only half a million jobs have been created when there should have been three times that many. In addition, most of the new jobs are poorly paid. One study revealed that 6 out of every 10 workers are super-exploited, lack social security and live in extreme poverty with wages that don't cover minimal subsistence needs. Each year some 600,000 Mexicans have to leave to seek work they cannot find in the country where they were born. The National Human Rights Commission has had to recognize that economic and social rights are not respected in Mexico. The lacerating inequality has become a serious threat to democratic coexistence.

### Army abuses

A year after the elections, writer Sergio Pitol, winner of the Cervantes Prize in Literature, declared that President Calderón knows he's governing illegitimately. Researcher Laura Carlsen of the Washington-based International Relations Center, scholar Víctor Flores Olea, and researcher John Saxe Fernández have all warned that Calderón is trying to assume a leadership he was unable to win at the polls by turning to the armed forces for support. Nonetheless, their anti-drug operations, amply covered in the media, are proving insufficient and ineffective in cutting crime. They merely reveal the government's weakness and the strength of organized crime, with its powerful financial structure, surplus weapons, and web of complicities in the economic and political system.

In indiscriminately taking to the streets, the army has also clashed with the population. Charges of abuses are increasing. For example, in June 2007, a

woman and four children were killed at an army checkpoint in Sinaloa in circumstances that were never clarified. Some witnesses said that the vehicle they were travelling in was fired on before reaching the checkpoint. The governing National Action Party (PAN) tried to minimize the event by saying that the war against crime involves some “collateral damage.” Several days later, a 13-year-old was killed by the army in Guerrero in an aggression the secretary of defense tried to justify. A national human rights organization has confirmed that several military officers raped several young women in Michoacán in May. And the military officers accused of raping 14 women in Coahuila have still not been punished three years after the charge was filed.

#### **The death of Ernestina**

The most scandalous event was the death of Ernestina Ascencio, an elderly indigenous woman in Veracruz, in February 2007. The Veracruz state government first reported that she had been found dead after being attacked and raped by military officers. But President Calderón immediately countered that she had died from gastritis, at which point the local authorities recanted their first statements; the National Human Rights Commission also parroted the government line. After successive contradictory “official stories,” the indigenous authorities announced they would turn to international bodies to seek justice. Jurist Magdalena Gómez said it was public knowledge that the investigations by the Veracruz attorney general’s office indicated that the woman had been raped by members of the army, based on the testimony of family members who heard her last words. Medical reports and other evidence also supported these findings. The official position, caving in to the President’s line, violated fundamental rights related to law and justice and the obvious manipulation of the case.

It was later learned that the President had declared death by gastritis with no evidence whatsoever. Andrés Manuel López Obrador described the case as an offense against the entire nation. Jurist Clemente Valdés said that in no case did the army’s fight against drug trafficking justify attacks and violations of the fundamental rights of any of the country’s inhabitants. Putting the army in the streets to do police work has not contributed to the government’s reputation, but rather led to an increasing number of human rights violations and revealed its enormous incompetence.

#### **In alliance with “a mafia”**

Another alliance that is discrediting the government is Calderón’s relationship with the anti-democratic leadership of the teachers’ union under Elba Esther Gordillo. In its June 4 issue, the journal *Proceso* denounced that over the past two decades, this woman has handled some \$10 billion in members’ dues and public resources without keeping any precise records on their management. In exchange for her help in manipulating the elections, Calderón has given

Gordillo control over the Secretariat of Education and several positions in his enlarged cabinet. Basking in her relationship with the President, Gordillo has proclaimed herself “president for life” of the teachers’ union, which she is running as her own personal fiefdom.

Education specialists lament the open hand-over of educational policies to what they describe as a “mafia.” For their part, union dissidents have sharply criticized Calderón’s decision to cede education to “a corrupt killer and a dictator” and announced that they would fight back. They have mounted massive demonstrations to repudiate changes in the law related to state workers’ pensions and demand reforms in the national education policy.

#### **Is the court independent?**

In July, the Supreme Court agreed that the main points of what is known as the “Televisa Law”—a set of reforms to the country’s broadcasting law that would grant even greater power and influence to the two biggest broadcasters—are unconstitutional. This awakened hopes that the Supreme Court would defend the Constitution beyond supra-legal accords reached with other branches. The Court also discussed the case of Oaxaca, but simply took note of what was happening without touching those in the federal and state governments who are responsible.

Over 2,000 people demanded that the Court intervene in defense of the constitutional rights of journalist Lydia Cacho, who bravely denounced an influential network of pederasts in her 2005 book, *Los demonios del Edén* (“The Devils of Eden”). Cacho’s defenders argue that what is at stake in this case is whether common citizens can count on the state to protect them from criminals operating in alliance with public officials. The investigating commission demonstrated that the governor of Puebla, Mario Marín, and the heads of that state’s judicial branch had seriously violated the journalist’s rights, but any hope that the judicial branch could be trusted to serve the public interest soon crumbled.

The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) leadership threw its full weight behind its governors in Puebla and Oaxaca, and it became clear that it and the PAN were supporting each other. In early July, the press published a photo in which Calderón and Marín stood together, smiling broadly. Faced with this alliance, the Court shied away from condemning Puebla’s governor.

Six months after the Court established a commission to investigate human rights violations against the population of Atenco when police occupied the municipality last year, it was announced that no date had been set for the Court to issue a report on the case. It was also leaked to the press that the Court had consulted the President’s office before deciding the Televisa case,

further evidence of its lack of autonomy.

#### Poorly executed public works

Shortly after that, a hill above a highway in the state of Puebla crumbled and buried a bus and all its occupants. The editorial in the newspaper *El Universal* noted that this wasn't a mere accident of nature, but rather the result of a tangled web of official irresponsibility, negligence and corruption in public works and even cynicism on the part of the state's governor. The highway had been built without doing geological or mechanical studies or considering the area's geographic characteristics. It was also revealed that the governor had directly assigned 116 works, without open bidding. Only days later, Calderón and the governor inaugurated another stretch of highway, in yet one more sign of the close alliance between Calderón and the PRI governors.

#### Oaxaca continues to burn

In mid-June, an editorial in *El Universal* noted that Oaxaca was smoldering. "The killing of opposition figures by paramilitary forces on state orders, according to ample evidence" made it morally impossible for Governor Ulises Ruiz to remain in his post. The Grassroots Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) organized a people's court on human rights violations in the region. At the trial, evidence was provided on illegal detentions that are effectively kidnappings, the use of psychological and physical torture against those detained, the persecution of family members and political opponents, and the use of state terror in an attempt to subjugate the population.

The people's court found Ulises Ruiz guilty of crimes against humanity and delivered the documentation proving his crimes to the Mexican House of Representatives. APPO urged the government institutions to take this last chance to demonstrate that they're capable of taking efficient, timely action to prevent violence. But soon afterward, there was a resurgence of the violence.

#### Repression in the Guelaguetza

Following an earthquake in 1931, Oaxaca's government came up with the idea for a celebration it called the *Guelaguetza*, in which indigenous people from 16 different language groups present their traditional dances and songs. "*Guelaguetza*" means "to participate cooperatively" and is understood to mean that while the indigenous groups offer their creative gift for free, reciprocity is implied. The Oaxacan bourgeoisie very soon took over the festival, however, especially the economic benefits it brings. When APPO emerged last year, it proposed recovering the festival and announced that it would hold a popular *Guelaguetza* on July 16 with free admission.

Since an enormous crowd of people came to the plaza, many headed off to the Cerro de Fortín, site of the official, commercial *Guelaguetza*, to be held a week

later. It was guarded by the police, who began a confrontation that lasted hours. Some 50 people were wounded and an equal number detained. One member of a human rights committee was arrested and struck so hard he nearly died, even though he put up no resistance. This was not an isolated case; movement members and even passers by were victims of the police brutality. APPO accused President Calderón and Governor Ruiz of responsibility for the violence. The government set bail for each of those detained at \$200,000.

A week later, while the governor was celebrating the official *Guelaguetza* with government bureaucrats and PRI activists attending, APPO and the teachers organized a massive demonstration to denounce the illegal detentions. The Zapatistas expressed their support for the grassroots movement in Oaxaca and the Grassroots Assembly of the People of Guerrero called a demonstration to demand that the disappeared in Oaxaca be presented. Dissident teachers managed to reach the offices of the Secretary of Government to demand talks with Calderón's government, but were refused. Analyst Carlos Montemayor charged that, instead of holding talks and responding to people's demands, the federal and state authorities had opted for a strategy of selective repression.

#### **The satrap of Oaxaca**

Several social and political organizations issued a joint declaration charging that Oaxaca was again experiencing government violence. They said the state was being run by an abuser of power and that impunity was stronger than ever. They insisted that the roots of the conflict were extreme poverty, marginalization, lack of opportunities for a decent life, miserable salaries when there is work, forced migration and anti-democratic leaders. They said they were prepared to fight this "asphyxiating situation" and demanded that violence be replaced with true dialogue.

Several organizations have charged that the government in Oaxaca is acting as it did during the "dirty war" of the 1970s. A statement to the national and international public by the Center for Economic and Political Research on Community Action condemned the path of violence the three levels of government in Mexico—federal, state and municipal—have chosen in response to the legitimate demands for justice and democracy of the Oaxacan people and the country as a whole. It noted that the grassroots movement in Oaxaca is the result of a democratic, pluralistic process, and that its struggle expresses people's strong opposition to the abuses they've suffered, as well as to the imposition of a neoliberal, ultra-right development model that increases inequalities, social and economic exploitation, exclusion and oppression.

The Center blamed Ruiz, Calderón and his secretary of government for the brutal repression and demanded the immediate and unconditional release of the detained, the immediate withdrawal of all repressive and paramilitary

forces, the end of the media campaign against the social movements and criminalizing of social activists, and the removal of Ruiz as governor of Oaxaca.

#### Oaxaca sparks international concern

The International Civil Commission of Observation of Human Rights, the Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center and the Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture released a statement expressing their alarm over the events in Oaxaca. They emphasized that for a year the federal and state authorities had failed to stop or prosecute the murders, tortures, arbitrary searches and detentions and a whole series of other violations of individual and collective human rights.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States also expressed its deep concern over the events in Oaxaca after receiving reports about detained people whose whereabouts are unknown. It reminded the Mexican state that it is duty bound to respect human rights. Amnesty International announced that it would visit Mexico in the first week of August to look into the situation in Oaxaca. Scholar José Antonio Crespo recalled that the illegitimacy of Calderón's government lies at the heart of the problem and noted that there are clear signs that the PRI has agreed to pact with Calderón in exchange for impunity for its governors and thugs.

#### Investigating the fraud

A year after the presidential elections, a third of the population still views the electoral process as "very bad," and nearly half could not say there was no fraud. While election officials describe these elections as "felicitous" and Calderón announced that his project would continue beyond the end of his term, a strong civic movement has proposed establishing a Truth Commission to investigate the 2006 fraud. A large part of society has not forgiven the powers that be for this assault on the nation.

The PRI's presidential candidate published a book in which he complains of his betrayal by Elba Esther Gordillo and describes the presidential elections as fraudulent. López Obrador, the PRD candidate, also published a book explaining how a mafia made up of former President Fox, big business and the media stole the presidency. He describes the fraud as a state operation in which the election institute played a fundamental role, and polling places were taken over by electoral criminals.

One important indication of fraud was the unusually high turnout in some 9,000 polling places, so high that it surpassed the elemental rules of probability. Furthermore, nearly half the votes at these same polling places, were cast for the PAN candidate and only a quarter for the PRD candidate—a difference of over 15 points, compared to the national average of just half a

point. Several election experts have surmised that most of these votes were false.

A movement that  
resists and advances

A huge event held a year after the 2006 elections again filled Mexico City's Zócalo. The celebrated writer Elena Poniatowska described Fox's interference in those elections as a betrayal of democracy. She urged the people gathered to use "the critical exercise of memory woven with the unbreakable strands of history" to oppose the forgetfulness urged on the public by those responsible for the fraud.

In his speech, López Obrador emphasized that the powers that be have been unable to destroy the movement that emerged in opposition to the election fraud. He called the government officials' scandalous incomes and benefits unacceptable and the idea of a country with poor people and a rich government intolerable. He spoke in favor of changing the course of economic policy and demanded the resignation and punishment of governors Ruiz and Marín, as well as punishment of those responsible for human rights violations.

López Obrador also expressed his pleasure at finding in a tour of the country that millions of people are ready to take up a peaceful fight for real change. Despite the information blockade put up by the mainstream media, this movement is not only resisting but advancing. Faced with a rotten political society, the transformation the country so desperately needs has to come from the bottom up.

Calderón refuses to  
debate López Obrador

The journalist Carmen Aristegui asked López Obrador whether he would be willing to debate Calderón, and the opposition leader replied that he would indeed. He said he would ask Calderón for a full explanation of the waste in public spending and government contracts, of why he had given the Secretariat of Education and the funds from teachers and other state workers to Elba Esther Gordillo, why the army is being managed as it currently is, and why Calderón had refused to agree to a vote recount.

Calderón did not agree to the debate. One of his spokespeople replied that the presidential office only speaks with other government institutions. The PRD asked why, if this was the case, he has kept up a congenial public dialogue with Elba Esther Gordillo. Calderón responded with a verbal attack on the Federal District's PRD government. The daily *La Jornada* noted that Calderón's undeniable aversion to the district's authorities contrasts with his obsequious attitudes towards discredited and indefensible governors like Ruiz and Marín.

In an interview with *Proceso*, historian Lorenzo Meyer said that the Right is afraid of democracy, and this could lead it to any means, including violence.

#### A murky case that remains in the shadows

A scandal that further discredited the federal authorities was the case of Zheni Ye Gon, a figure who passed himself off as a prosperous, respectable Chinese businessman. He was granted Mexican citizenship in 2002 after an unusually rapid process and was given his documents by Fox himself in a public event in early 2003. In March 2007, some \$205 million in cash was discovered in his luxurious residence. It was learned that he had been involved in importing raw materials for illegal drug producers as well as for the pharmaceutical industry. But to bring in large quantities of strictly controlled substances, he must have had the consent of the Secretariat of Health, which grants the necessary permissions, as well as the customs office. Zheni Ye Gon was arrested in late June in the United States, but the government clarified that he was arrested on charges filed by the US Drug Enforcement Agency and not because of what had been discovered in Mexico.

There were also accusations that he had supported the campaigns of PAN and PRI candidates. After the 2000 presidential campaign it was proven that both parties had illegally handled campaign funds, and it appears that Calderón's government was concerned about possible evidence of illegal management of his campaign funds as well.

It wasn't clear where the money seized from Zheni Ye Gon ended up: the government reported that it had been deposited in the Bank of America and then returned to Central Bank vaults, but without giving a convincing explanation for this move. The official newspaper simply reported that since the money had been abandoned, it had become the property of the Mexican state. Economist Mario di Costanzo called attention to the fact that the movement of the funds looked like money laundering to erase the tracks of how an individual came to have so much cash in hand. The confiscated money should have been left untouched as evidence for a trial in this case so laced with contradictions. López Obrador demanded that federal authorities do an in-depth investigation rather than engage in a media campaign to mitigate the impact of the scandal.

#### An explosive sabotage

Several serious fires at facilities of PEMEX, the state oil company, also sparked political tensions. According to official reports on June 22, a bolt of lightning struck a tank in a refinery in the state of Nuevo León. On July 5 there were explosions in oil ducts in the state of Guanajuato, and a few hours later, another duct exploded in the state of Querétaro. Although the accidents

happened in unpopulated regions, thousands of inhabitants had to be evacuated.

The first official report of the events were that illegal extraction had lowered the pressure in the pipes and this had led to the fires. Later, however, the People's Revolutionary Army (EPR) claimed responsibility for planting eight explosive devices in the pipes as surgical strikes. The EPR announced that it was conducting a national campaign "against the interests of the oligarchy and the illegitimate government," indicating that these actions would not stop until the governments of Calderón and Ruiz presented two of its members who had been detained and disappeared at the end of May in Oaxaca.

The government had to admit that the PEMEX facilities had been attacked. Political analyst Octavio Rodríguez Araujo said that some will seek ways to act against institutions that don't work or are used to repress social movements, and emphasized that the guerilla groups emerged from the governments' unwillingness to respond to the people's growing demands. Journalist Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa recalled that the authorities had failed to respond to a public demand in early June to present the two people later named in the EPR statement. Both the federal and Oaxaca governments denied holding them, and the army mobilized its elite troops.

Carlos Montemayor, an expert in Mexico's guerilla forces, explained that such groups invariably arise because of social issues and cannot be dealt with through military measures alone. The government hasn't learned that there are consequences to defending despots like Ruiz. The EPR's statement revealed a resurgence of some of the dirty war's main features, such as forced disappearances. As the height of cynicism, a plan appeared in the PAN's ranks to accuse López Obrador and the PRD of responsibility for the attacks, when his movement has demonstrated for over a year that it has chosen a peaceful route despite the many attacks against it.

#### **Was it the guerrillas?**

Some continued to insist that the attacks were likely carried out by drug traffickers to distract the army. Surveys showed that some 60% didn't believe the EPR was responsible and over 40% felt the explosions were a smoke screen to distract attention from other problems. In a later statement the EPR insisted that the disappeared were in the hands of the federal police and military forces and named a general responsible for their torture. They said it was not a question of smoke screens or pitiful speeches about poverty and social struggle, but of a political reality.

Instead of resolving matters, however, this statement aroused greater suspicions. Some thought it might have been planted by the government to

create confusion, because it seemed to imply that the movement in Oaxaca was led by the EPR and suggested a “settling of accounts” that could lead to greater repression.

Víctor Flores Olea said the explosions, which had affected production in many of Mexico’s industrial facilities for several days, had the ring of a provocation to promote the privatization of PEMEX. Commentator Luis Hernández, however, continued to argue that the explosions had to be recognized as the work of the EPR and that the political class should understand that they are an actor on the national political stage.

In any case, it’s important to remember that the guerilla groups in Mexico have been infiltrated. Meanwhile, an EPR splinter group that calls itself the People’s Armed Revolutionary Forces issued a statement in late June criticizing Plan Puebla Panamá for not proposing development alternatives for the poor or productive projects or the creation of socially beneficial companies, but only large investments of oligarchic capital.

#### A lack of justice

Neither the Fox nor Calderón governments have been concerned about human rights. Fox had promised that justice would finally be done in the long-pending cases of student repression in 1968 and the dirty war waged by the Mexican state against dissidents. But the commission established to this end was disbanded with no results. On learning that one of the main people accused in this war, former President Luis Echeverría, had been granted amnesty, Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, a persistent fighter for the presentation of those disappeared in the dirty war, stated that this revealed the complicity of the PAN and the PRI. For its part, the Committee of 68 announced that it would ask the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to investigate this denial of justice. Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa wrote that in no country do politicians who exercise power enjoy such social and judicial impunity as in Mexico.

Cases of human rights violations have been reported day after day as this was going on. In Mérida several young people were arrested for opposing neoliberal globalization. In San Luis Potosí people were persecuted for opposing ecological depredation by a mining company. In Toluca an adviser of Mazahua women was jailed for teaching them to defend themselves. In Oaxaca yet more social activists were jailed. In Atenco those who defended people’s right to the land received maximum sentences, something that not even the largest drug traffickers get.

The list of social activists jailed under the PAN governments has reached historic levels. When Calderón visited Europe, he was met with protests over the Atenco and Oaxaca cases. In his meeting with Calderón, the Italian prime

minister expressed his concern over human rights in Mexico. Carlos Montemayor has noted that Calderón's government is trapped in the logic of the dirty war; instead of dialogue it has chosen to torture, kill and disappear social activists.

#### Raúl Vera: A persecuted bishop

Mexico is a country of impunity. Although the International Labor Organization called on the Mexican government to investigate the tragic explosion in the Pasta de Conchos mine, those responsible still haven't been punished nearly a year and a half later. And federal entities have sought to harass, persecute, and intimidate Bishop Raúl Vera for standing alongside the miners' families and the women raped by military officers in this state.

Bishop Vera has stated that both he and the miners' families believe the company is hiding the bodies of the workers buried by the explosion because they don't want it known that the "accident" was caused by lack of maintenance. He has noted that both the company and the federal government have lied to the miners and their families, and is asking for impartial mediation to determine the real causes of the tragedy.

He has also called on the government to return the military forces deployed throughout the country to their barracks and to deal with organized crime networks by intervening in the financial institutions where they have been allowed to make illicit investments. The bishop has expressed his concern about the recent turn of events in Mexico, where the army is given *carte blanche* to act, as though we were living in a dictatorship.

#### A repressive military regime

Bishop Vera has not given in to those who have tried to silence him, but has instead charged that from the Pasta de Conchos Mine case under Fox's administration through the most recent events in Oaxaca, what has prevailed is repression exercised by a small group that sees all who fight for a small measure of justice as criminals. He has accused the current government of having formed "a repressive regime."

Participants in the Zapatistas' Other Campaign have held public events in which they have demanded that the federal authorities stop the policy of harassment and terrorism against social organizations and free all political prisoners. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has asked for evidence to begin a suit against the Mexican state for human rights violations. Amnesty International has described the Calderón government's human rights record as disappointing and called for in-depth investigations of the Atenco and Oaxaca cases. Porfirio Muñoz Ledo has suggested that a special prosecutor be named to investigate Fox and insisted that the current impunity must cease.

A group of intellectuals who have gathered together as the “Grupo Sur” issued a statement arguing that Calderón’s government lacks legitimacy and has decided to cover its nakedness in military garb. They said the army is supposedly in the streets to fight drug trafficking, but that the real objective is to inhibit, repress and criminalize social protest, adding that the country is witnessing the institutionalization of lies. The group called on people to work from the trenches to develop more effective and bold resistance, to move beyond responding to the daily aggression and take a more proactive stance.

### The temptation of violent responses

The institutionalized violence in Mexico foments the oppression and exploitation of the majority, who live in terrible poverty. The proclaimed transition to democracy has not happened, merely a change within the regime. Corruption has been consolidated, while the corporativism invented by the PRI has been refined and perfected by the PAN. There is no democracy in Mexico. The small spaces for negotiation have been closed and the police and military repression against social protest has increased. In this climate, some have been tempted to respond in kind, with violence, but this only aggravates the situation. The official powers and the powers that be, all enemies of the people’s causes, hold the most sophisticated weapons and the most resources.

Violent responses won’t bring about justice. The only viable path to true change is found in two large movements: the Other Campaign and the one that arose in response to the electoral fraud. Both have chosen to patiently organize the discontent of those from below. We have to oppose the multiple and destructive violence of the official and unofficial powers with the construction of an active non-violence.

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### Partiocracy vs. the Media: An Important Battle

*Mexico’s powerful media, dominated by Televisa and Televisión Azteca, behaved like gangsters in their attempt to block an election reform that would limit their sizable profits from election campaigns. The partiocracy won this time. The relationship between media, money and political parties has started to change, but a larger challenge still remains: altering the relationship between parties and citizenry.*

Jorge Alonso

Asked what Aristotle would think of most governments in today’s world, Argentine social scientist Atilio Borón replied that he would certainly not

describe them as democracies, but rather as oligarchies or plutocracies. Mexico has gone through several transitions, but democracy remains a distant dream. Complex, pluralistic civic movements have made intermittent appearances, demanding respect for civil, political, social and cultural rights, even winning some victories little by little, but they are most often soon overturned. This is where we now stand: a battle has been won against the media that serves the political parties somewhat more than society, but the war is far from over.

### How we got to this point

The civic movements have invariably come up against the political parties and the media. For many years, one of their main goals was to end the 70-year authoritarian rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). While it was in power, the media put itself at the party's service and prevented the opposition's access to the airwaves. The Federal Election Institute (IFE) was a mere extension of the PRI. An alliance between the civic movements and opposition parties finally freed the country from the domination of this state party by breaking its hold first on the federal legislature, then in 2000 on the President's office. That struggle was preceded by an earlier victory that ensured the IFE's autonomy, forcing the executive branch to cede control of the organization of elections.

As the executive's power declined, however, the political parties consolidated their own power and a kind of "partiocracy" took root. After a brief period in which the IFE was run by citizens' councils, it quickly fell under the control of the parties, each with its own quota of seats on the institute's General Council. Political control over the institute reached an extreme during the 2006 presidential election, when the President's office set up a special phone line to stay in constant contact with the council. By this point, the number of parties controlling the institute was down to two: the governing National Action Party (PAN) and its new ally, the PRI.

For their part, the media had formed their own kind of "-ocracy," their own power structure, which basically followed the partiocracy's line. This arrangement meant that money and the media were the only two factors needed to win elections. The parties and their candidates had to negotiate expensive air time in humiliating conditions. In other words, they not only needed the substantial public funds they got for their campaigns, but also had to woo those with money, whether legal or illegal, to obtain more. The elected officials then governed and legislated in line with the interests of both those donors and the media.

Against

and for democracy

"Televisa's

law"

Before the 2006 elections and knowing the power they wield over the

campaigns, the media had obliged the legislators to fast-track a bill known as “Televisa’s Law” because it was drafted in the offices of the television duopoly. Fast-tracking it implied not passing it first through the appropriate committee. A handful of legislators appealed to the judicial branch, arguing that the law was unconstitutional because it accepted a monopoly. The Supreme Court agreed and the legislators had to draft a new law governing radio and television.

It was the moment to counter the media monopolies and oligopolies with rules that would allow fair competition and equitable access. Since the airwaves are a limited public good, the legislative branch is responsible for regulating them. Ensuring pluralistic, equitable access to radio and television—that is, democratizing the airwaves—was an urgent task.

That first step in the election reform initiated a radical change in how politics is done. Some politicians who had already started their upcoming political race allied with business and the media to try to sway the state legislators, but there was broad consensus among the majority of politicians that the time had come to free themselves of these yokes.

Two election reforms:  
**From above and from below**

Mexico cannot allow itself another election as controversial as the 2006 presidential election. Given the obvious, urgent need for election reform, some of the civic movements reactivated during the 2006 elections organized around discussion of this reform. In early August of this year, the recently formed *Comité Ciudadano* or “Citizens’ Committee” distributed a working paper with its proposed reforms.

The Citizens’ Committee is a network of election specialists and civic groups in the capital and several states. Among other points, they proposed that election officials be selected by means of a public, transparent procedure in which civil society organizations, civic groups, academic institutions and the public in general could nominate candidates. They also proposed drastically reducing political party funding and putting an end to paid ads, replacing them by debates.

Only weeks later, at the end of August, a congressional committee issued its own proposal for constitutional reforms to the electoral law. After analyzing it, the Citizens’ Committee held a press conference in which it recognized that the legislators’ proposals made several important steps forward: regulating campaigning before the start of the official campaign, reducing the length of campaigns, eliminating banking secrecy for political parties to allow for effective oversight of their resources, and prohibiting federal, state or

municipal governments from running ads with names, images or symbols that would promote any individual public servant. The proposal would also grant IFE the power to sanction political parties and groups and both national and international individuals and organizations that violate election laws.

Nonetheless, the Citizens' Committee also noted that the proposal implied some significant steps backwards. The committee members expressed concern over the secretive nature of the discussions in Congress and among the three leading parties that had negotiated the agreement, along with the fact that they had failed to include key proposals made by several sectors of civil society. They noted that the proposal would make no significant campaign spending cuts and included no provisions for citizen input into electing the IFE's General Council members, magistrates or the special prosecutor for election crimes. They also criticized the fact that the proposed legislation would do nothing to address the inordinately high salaries of council members.

On September 5, an election reform bill was introduced in the Senate. It would prohibit political parties from buying paid television and radio spots or programs. Campaign publicity could only be aired during official, state-sponsored time slots and the Election Institute would be the only entity authorized to administer these periods. The reform would also prohibit citizens and businesses from paying for or broadcasting messages in favor of or against parties and candidates. IFE's Financial Commission calculated that the parties had spent some \$250 million on radio and television ads in 2006—not including some 281,000 ads the parties did not report or the enormous media expenditures in the period preceding the official campaign.

#### Council members: in or out?

The thought of losing so much money—equivalent to 70% of the parties' sizable spending—roused the major television companies. They fought back, accusing the parties of trying to destroy IFE's autonomy by removing the current council members from their posts, a point on which the parties had not yet reached an agreement.

For several months, public discussion had revolved around arguments for and against such a move. IFE's president used the media to defend his position, arguing that removing him would be tantamount to recognizing that the presidential elections had been fraudulent. The Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) argued that IFE's president would have to go and in fact that all council members should be replaced, while the PRI agreed regarding the president but felt that some should remain in their posts. The PAN disagreed totally, significantly raising the political price of replacing council members. The PRI claimed that the PAN's position showed the council members were at its service.

Writer Denise Dresser summed up the reasons why the council members should be replaced. She noted that IFE cannot play its role as elections arbiter if it does not enjoy the confidence of the parties whose actions it regulates and that confidence in IFE's authorities had been undermined by events like the controversial formation of the institute's General Council in 2003 and the errors and omissions committed by council members before and after the presidential elections, which had had a decisive, negative impact.

Former IFE council member Jaime Cárdenas wrote that IFE was facing a serious credibility crisis. He considered the PRI's complaint that the institute is under the control of one political force to be well grounded. The solution, he suggested, was to reform the Constitution and the relevant laws, designing more competent and accountable institutions. The editorial page of the daily newspaper *El Universal* argued that IFE's council members should be part of the solution not of the problem, and should place the institute's well-being above any personal interests. It maintained that the loss of credibility and confidence affecting the institute was a powerful reason to replace all current council members.

#### **Reaction of the television duopoly**

Understanding that the election reform would cut into their profits, the powers of big media and big business used the discussion on replacing the council members as a pretext to try to block the reform itself. Acting just like gangsters, the television companies and some radio stations tried to intimidate the legislators, threatening to use the media to destroy their political images. The Senate condemned these attacks.

The daily newspaper *La Jornada* charged that the powers behind commercial television and radio were waging a disinformation campaign to harass, pressure, threaten and blackmail the legislators and poison public opinion. It further charged that the National Chamber of Radio and Television (CIRT), led by the powerful television duopoly of Televisa and Televisión Azteca, was falsely presenting itself as a spokesperson for "the Mexican people" in arguing against the replacement of IFE's council members despite the fact that their biased actions had seriously discredited the Election Institute. Commentator René Delgado wrote that those who argue that keeping the council members in their posts is a way to defend the institute were in fact playing into the hands of the television companies that were trying to block the much needed reform.

#### **Resisting the media pressure**

In the midst of this intense public debate, the Citizens' Committee issued another statement on September 10. Once again, it asked Congress to significantly change the way council members are elected to give the IFE a civic

rather than partisan character. It noted how the illegitimate formation of the council responsible for organizing the 2006 elections had numerous regrettable consequences, and that without a true reform, a risk remained that this would happen again. It also demanded that proper procedures be used to replace the current council members rather than secret negotiations involving questionable compromises and deals.

The committee expressed strong support for the proposed constitutional reform, which would establish a new kind of relationship between political forces and the media. It denounced the media's attempt to pressure the legislature and use the debate around replacement of the council members to defend their economic interests. It argued that freeing the political parties from the power of the media would be an important reform, but one that would only make sense if an austere democratic process congruent with Mexico's situation were also created. Complaining that the goal of austerity was not evident in the proposed constitutional reform, the Committee once again summed up its proposal to make the cost of Mexico's political life less onerous, and recalled that its own proposed election reform included many issues not addressed by the legislators.

#### **Freedom of speech at risk?**

The debate continued, along with pressure from the television companies and CIRT. On September 10, a new bill was introduced in the Senate with some modifications to the one submitted five days earlier. The new bill clarified that the proposed changes would create a new model of communication between political parties and society based on the exclusive use of public airtime on radio and television for political campaigning. Government propaganda of all kinds would have to be suspended during campaigns. IFE would have the power to sanction those who unduly use their economic power or media influence to try to steer elections toward or against particular parties or candidates.

The Senate responded to accusations that the bill would restrict freedom of speech by explaining that its purpose was to prevent the parties from denigrating institutions or slandering individuals. The limitations were being placed on governments and parties, not on the right of citizens to express their criticisms and points of view. The bill would not restrict freedom of speech, simply the ability of those with money to buy ads to attack participants in political campaigns. Those who opposed these changes were the same people who were accustomed to choosing and removing candidates and financing campaigns behind the scenes.

Finally, on September 11, the negotiators agreed on a gradual replacement of IFE's council members. When it appeared that all pending issues were resolved,

however, CIRT pressured the senators on the committee into participating in a nationally televised meeting with a group of television and radio station owners, managers and program directors. They insisted that the issue was freedom of speech.

### Freedom of speech or just big business?

Although freedom of speech was the pretext for maintaining the status quo, it became clear by the end of the meeting—in which the media representatives arrogantly attacked the legislators—that what was really bothering them was the ban on paid political ads. The senators reiterated that the proposed law would not affect freedom of speech but would affect the freedom to commercialize a public good that belongs to the nation.

Commenting on this meeting, former council member Mauricio Merino said that the media was up in arms about the sudden loss of the business they had cultivated. They didn't want to lose the hundreds of millions of dollars they get from the parties during each campaign, or the political power they wield in negotiating the fees and schedules allotted each party, in which webs of friendships, political sympathies and money invariably play a part.

These hidden negotiations between parties and the media were precisely what made it so hard to oversee campaign spending in the 2006 elections. Analysts continue to question the validity of the accounts presented to IFE and to ask where the nearly \$100 million “lost” along the way came to rest. Behind these figures is not only a lucrative business, but also a political arrangement that suits the media and that would be eliminated by the proposed reform.

Delving deeper into these practices, legal scholar John Ackerman recalled that the television stations increased their prices during election campaigns and charged different fees depending on their support for the candidates. They offer more and better time slots to those who share their points of view, and charge inordinately high rates to opponents. He recalled that in January 2006, at the start of the campaign, CIRT signed an agreement in which it promised to deliver detailed information on paid political ads, including copies of the bills sent to each party. It only supplied general information, however, with no specific details on prices, time slots, and buyers. IFE reported that it didn't know who had paid for some 281,000 campaign ads, since the media had not fulfilled its promise to provide the institute with a quarterly report of all their contracts.

Another huge problem in the fight against the proposed reform was that the media had formed a close alliance with the current members of IFE's General Council. In the wake of this alliance, could these council members have the

independence and moral weight to oblige CIRT to reveal who was behind these ads?

#### **Despite attacks, the reform is approved**

In response to widespread public concern that illegal, illegitimate monetary interests shouldn't influence the actions of political parties or the course of the election campaigns, the corresponding committees approved the bill despite the pressure. The clear message was that neither the media's money nor its power should be determining factors in the campaigns or the country's political life.

The reform's main provisions would prohibit parties from buying ads in the media. Instead, they could use only those periods allotted to the state by the media to conduct their campaigns. No public or private individuals acting either on their own or for others could buy ads on radio or television aimed at influencing voter preferences either for or against political parties or candidates to elected office. The bill also established a constitutional ban on negative campaigning, i.e. using denigrating expressions in political ads. Another step forward would be the establishment of a right to reply.

The bill then moved to debate in the full Senate. In one last attempt to derail it, CIRT, in alliance with leading business associations including the Chamber of Commerce, again went on national television, this time challenging the senators to hold a referendum on the bill supervised by IFE. The powers that be once again presented themselves as the voice of civil society and tried to disguise this new attempt to block the reform as a struggle to defend freedom of speech. They clearly trusted their capacity to manipulate public opinion through the media.

The senators explained that the Constitution contains no provisions for holding a referendum. Moving to discussion of the bill itself, they replied to the radio and television companies that, despite their public and private threats, lies and attacks, the relationship between parties and the media was being radically changed so that neither money nor paid ads would decide campaigns and candidates. During the debate they also recognized that a great deal of public money, legal private money and money under the table had played a part in previous campaigns.

#### **Final step for the reform: The state legislatures**

Once approved by the Senate, the bill then went to the House of Representatives. CIRT now demanded that House members hold a televised meeting with it, as the senators had done, but they remained firm and refused this attempt to delay the vote on the reform.

As a proposed constitutional reform, the bill required approval not only of both houses of Congress, but also half plus one of the state legislatures. The media announced that with support from the business community they would take their battle to the states to stop the reforms, now approved in the House as well as the Senate. The federal legislators also began contacting their state counterparts to explain the benefits of the reform.

The Citizens' Committee also set out to support the reform at the state level, arguing that it doesn't violate freedom of speech. While applauding the progress made in changing the media-money-political parties relationship, it reiterated its demand to reduce overall campaign spending and subject political parties to the country's transparency law.

The committee not only denounced the radio and television companies' aggressive, defamatory campaigns against Congress, but also called for further reforms on elections and the media to promote greater democracy. It reiterated the need for a new model of communication and a new kind of relationship between the country's institutional powers and the public that would involve further reforms in the area of radio and television.

#### **Why so upset?**

Mexican society once again entered the fray. Businesspeople, the media, its employees and some academics and other intellectuals attacked the reform, again on the grounds of freedom of speech. Civic groups argued once more that no one should be fooled; that freedom of speech was one thing, but the fact that a second of television time cost a huge amount of money and only those with a lot could buy paid campaign ads was something else altogether. The reform merely sought to limit the abuse of the powerful.

Journalist Carmen Aristegui commented that she was concerned by the belligerent attitude she perceived in many of her colleagues. She didn't share the idea that the reform risked her freedom or that of any other citizen to express his or her opinions simply by setting limits on the money used to influence campaigns. Civil society organizations and indigenous groups described the power of the television duopoly as unacceptable. They also criticized the attempt of the powers that be to claim to represent civil society and noted the irony that media owners invoked the very freedom of speech and democracy they so often trod on. Freedom of speech in Mexico shouldn't depend on purchase of air time.

Academics specializing in research on the media noted that CIRT's members tend to think of themselves as the owners of the airwaves, which in fact belong to the nation. They revealed the weaknesses in the media's arguments,

showing that underlying their anger was the realization that they were going to lose a lot of money as well as the control they've traditionally exerted over politicians.

Former IFE council member Jaime Cárdenas called attention to the fact that the media were not only making boodles from each election, but were also weaving networks of complicity and influence peddling with the parties and candidates that allow them to maintain their own privileges to the detriment of society. Legal scholar John Ackerman pointed to another source of their anger: CIRT was worried that IFE would now have the power to effectively regulate the media, since in addition to withdrawing advertising that violates the law, the elimination of secrecy in banking would allow the institute to sanction individuals and institutions. Another issue that was not addressed out loud but was also clearly bothering the media was the constitutional recognition of the right to reply. This would interfere with their bullying custom of destroying public figures who are not servile to them.

#### **Important, but insufficient**

The reform, important but still insufficient, was approved. It represents obvious progress, especially in making political campaigns less dependent on the power of money and the media, but the process revealed the flaws of partocracy. Public consultations were rather cosmetic with important issues left out as the interests and behind-the-scenes negotiations of the largest parties prevailed. The parties continue to be wary of transparency. Political ads will be regulated on radio and television, but not on other media such as the Internet and cell phones. The parties will still receive considerable funds from both the federal government and from each of the states, which they could use to extend the practice of buying votes.

#### **A bigger challenge ahead**

This has been an important skirmish between the partocracy and the media, in which the former succeeded in shaking off the very heavy yoke placed on it by the latter and began to resolve in its favor a contradiction in the workings of the oligarchy. But many of civil society's proposals were left out.

The social movements that have renewed their struggle for an authentic democracy now face a deeper contradiction, since they have to confront both the entrenched power of the parties and the ideologizing powers of the media and a business class that use a false mantle of democracy to mask their economic interests. True democracy is possible, but it will require a long, persistent struggle by active social movements.



## **Warning the World that Zapatismo Is in Danger**

***The Zapatistas have flashed a red alert to Mexico and the world. The problem is not just the growing military aggression, but rather that important sectors of Mexican society are ignoring the danger. Mexico will not be the only loser if Zapatismo is destroyed. Latin America and all of humanity will lose as well.***

**Jorge Alonso**

Signs that the Mexican government is gearing up for war have led the Zapatistas to launch a red alert to the world. Increased activity is reported in the 56 permanent military bases in Chiapas, which are receiving modern weaponry, equipment and special forces. Activity by rightwing paramilitary groups operating in Chiapas is also on the rise. Those aligned with the PRI, the army and state officials from the Agrarian Reform Office have mounted a series of attacks recently on Zapatista villages on lands liberated during the 1994 uprising. The attacks are of such intensity that the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) recently postponed its ambitious plans for participation in the Other Campaign.

Several years ago, after the government reneged on the San Andrés Accords, which among other things had recognized the indigenous peoples' right to large areas of land that had been taken and collectivized by the Zapatistas, the Zapatistas devised a peaceful de facto solution: they simply exercised their right to the land in question by creating autonomous municipalities. The government's violent response through paramilitary activity against many Zapatista towns, particularly since last September, has been documented and made public, but the Zapatistas' call for support has largely been met with disinterested silence, especially in Mexico, where the Zapatistas refused to back Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) presidential candidate López Obrador against Calderón of the National Action Party (PAN).

The PAN federal government, the PRD state government in Chiapas and local Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and PRD municipal governments and political bosses are calculating that the time is ripe for smashing the Zapatistas. The key is in wresting away the lands on which their Caracoles and autonomous municipalities have been built. Plans sponsored by international institutions, in which the US government's hand is hard to hide, are designed to dislodge Zapatista communities by turning resources over to transnationals in the guise of defending the environment.

**The alert was issued  
in a symbolic setting**

The Zapatistas reiterated the alert in December 2007 at an international

colloquium organized by the University of the Earth, the EZLN and the magazine *ContraHistorias* to discuss the planet's future and the situation of what are becoming known as the anti-system movements. The event was held at the university itself, which could not be a more symbolic locale. This non-formal learning center for indigenous communities fully living their autonomy receives nothing from the Mexican government; it even produces its own energy and controls its own water supply. Students from the communities gain hands-on experience cultivating organic products and there are also electricity, blacksmithing, mechanics and handcrafts workshops. They decide what they want to learn and how long they can stay.

Among the numerous speakers at the colloquium, the EZLN's Subcomandante Marcos made a seven-part presentation on behalf of the Zapatistas, the final one of which was titled "The Calendar and Geography of War." He began by referring to capitalism's warlike nature, its use of war as a profit-making venture. But rather than spend time on that point, he recommended *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, a recent book by journalist and "other world" activist Naomi Klein, who also spoke at the colloquium.

He then warned that the Zapatista communities were being attacked to a degree that had not occurred for some time, adding that this is the first time the aggressions are openly coming from a "supposedly" leftist government—a dig at the PRD government in the state of Chiapas. In fact, newspapers reported that same day that Chiapas' Governor Juan Sabines had just appointed Constantino Kanter, the representative of Chiapas' big farmers and an ally of López Obrador, a post in his government. Marcos noted that this would give Kanter the opportunity to provide even more resources to paramilitary groups, offering as evidence for such collusion Sabines' accusation that the Zapatistas had caused López Obrador's electoral loss and that his "institutional Left" party would never forgive them. He charged Kanter with having coined the phrase, "In Chiapas a chicken's worth more than an Indian."

Marcos listed many incidents squelched or ignored by the media that had occurred in his last trip to Vicam, Sonora, for the gathering of Indian Peoples of America. He acknowledged that the EZLN was itself an army, albeit a very different one, but said that the Zapatistas were continuing their peaceful Other Campaign while preparing to resist the army, police and/or paramilitaries. He also announced that this was the last time, at least for a good while, that he would be appearing at colloquiums, roundtables, conferences, interviews and other activities of this sort. He added that this was hardly the first time the government had determined to wipe out the Zapatistas, but was, worryingly, the first time the national and international social response was insignificant and in some cases non-existent. Marcos concluded by warning that the stench of fear and war could be smelled in the Zapatista lands.

In the nineties, any danger to the Zapatistas triggered huge civil society demonstrations, which in Mexico City always included a sizable PRD contingent. Today, however, the prevailing feeling in that party is one of revenge because the Zapatistas didn't line up behind López Obrador.

Blaming them for the PRD's electoral defeat is way off base, however, because it ignores the fraud employed by the winning National Action Party (PAN) with help from the powers behind the throne: Mexico's big money and influential media. Even if the Zapatistas hadn't chosen to boycott the elections and criticize López Amador as just another cog in the system, it would not have altered such immense fraud. At the end of 2007, a prestigious polling firm found that if the presidential elections had been held at that moment, 69% of the population would have viewed them as either not very clean, not clean at all or frankly fraudulent.

#### **Andrés Aubry: Zapatista Doctorate**

At the colloquium, Andrés Aubry was named *Primus doctor liberationis conatus causa*, which freely translated could be interpreted as a doctorate for his commitment to the effort and substance of liberation. This new doctorate was outlined in a paper signed by the EZLN's Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee and by indigenous authorities of the Oventic Caracol and autonomous municipalities.

Historians Jerome Baschet and Jorge Santiago, both of whom spoke at the colloquium, briefly summarized Aubry's life, above all in Chiapas. He had come to Mexico after the massive uprisings of May 1968 and following an anthropologists' meeting in Barbados that had condemned missionary ethnocentrism, come out in favor of indigenous liberation, and argued for a liberationist anthropology. Aubry, who had an authentic spirit of liberation and was committed to the people, became a respectful apprentice in their struggles and wisdom. He accompanied the Zapatistas deeply and fraternally and because of that loyalty could look beyond appearances and live the secret of never being disillusioned. In September 2007, at the age of 80, he planned to drive to the meeting of indigenous peoples in Vicam. His doctor gave him permission to make the long trip, but he died in a highway traffic accident on his return to San Cristóbal de las Casas, just days before his planned journey.

The EZLN's Comandante David, his voice breaking at one moment, declared that Aubry had been a constant, untiring friend and comrade. The Zapatistas would always remember him and his wife, who died some years earlier, with respect, honor and admiration. Diverse Zapatista groups, speaking in their native Totzil, Tzeltal, Chol, Tojolobal and Zoque tongues, explained that they had awarded this original doctoral honor to Aubry because he had genuinely

accepted the lessons of the struggles and wisdom of the different peoples and cultures of Chiapas, Mexico and the world. He had learned from them, conceiving intellectual effort not as a privilege, a form of personal self-affirmation or a source of power over others, but as a collective experience that is necessary to resist, to nourish the good life and to change the world.

#### A time of tough questions and weak answers

An ongoing seminar in the University of the Earth bears the name of social scientist Immanuel Wallerstein, a theoretician of the “Another world is possible” school, who also delivered the colloquium’s opening speech—mainly an overview of today’s anti-system strategies. He argued that before the 1968 world movement such strategies had centered on taking state power to transform the world, while today alliances are being sought among anti-system movements, in the style of the Zapatistas’ “Other Campaign.” He urged that the World Social Forum be kept alive as the only multi-varied international response to capital’s global power.

*Contrahistorias* director Carlos Aguirre Rojas lauded the Zapatista movement as one of the most advanced anti-system movements in the world, adding that these leftist movements no longer lean toward a central actor and do not have hierarchical structures. Rather, they are creating organizations from the ground up, generating a greatly varied resistance to capitalism.

Both during the sessions and in the corridors the discussion was lively among presenters and the many and varied groups of concerned young people from all over the world. There was general agreement that the existing frameworks don’t adequately explain what’s happening in the world or how to halt it. There was also basic agreement on the need to break with Euro-centric and metropolitan visions and to learn from the anti-capitalist movements, and most of the speakers acknowledged different aspects of the Zapatistas’ experiments with alternative political structures and social relations as inspiring and thought-provoking. Nonetheless, the prevailing atmosphere among these movements is still one of searching how to create an inclusive “other possible world” that is forged from below, and this search for new, useful theories and concepts for transforming from the grass roots was also a constant in the presentations, with questions generally in greater supply than answers. In other words, everyone agreed that something is dreadfully wrong with today’s world and shared a broad brushstroke vision of what a better world should look like, but ideas on how to get from here to there seldom exceeded principles of behavior, although several speakers are working with young anti-system movements of a whole new kind. Conspicuously absent, however, were any viable economic alternatives that reach beyond isolated pockets of

resistance.

We can't let ourselves be immobilized by perplexity

Although he couldn't attend, one can intuit from his latest writings what Portuguese researcher Boaventura de Sousa Santos would have said from his South perspective. Like the other presenters, he sees neoliberalism as the most anti-social form of capitalist globalization, and has denounced the exclusion, oppression and destruction of the means of subsistence and sustainability of huge populations

in the world. In this sense he has also criticized the conversion of Chinese communism into an extremely savage form of capitalism that he calls market Stalinism. But he is optimistic because the new information and communication technologies have enabled these situations to spark resistance actions that have led to the creation of alliances and struggles through local and global ties in distant parts of the planet. As a result, an alternative globalization is being built from the ground up.

Boaventura argues that understanding these new movements requires a new social theory and new analytic concepts because the Western modernity paradigm sheds little light on today's world. He holds that we are witnessing the final crisis of the hegemony of that paradigm, and that in this era of transition tough questions and weak answers are inevitable. The questions are probing the future of the possibilities before us, each with its own roots and underpinnings, while the inevitably weak answers cannot assuage the perplexity generated by this uncharted territory and the frustration of wanting to change what is so seriously wrong without any models or precedents for how to do so.

He warns against pretending that this discrepancy between the force of the questions and the weakness of the answers is absurd or can somehow be eliminated. Instead we must recognize it as a symptom of the underlying complexity, of a new open field of contradictions in which the different possibilities compete, but in which there is also room for innovation. We must accept the invitation to mobilize, assume the risk of testing out new answers rather than allowing ourselves to be immobilized by the perplexity.

In this setting, practice resorts to a kind of theoretical bricolage according to the needs of the moment. Radical democracy is conceived as the transformation of unequal power relations into relations of shared authority in all fields of social life, a struggle for equality and recognition of difference that privileges rebellion over conformity, and an effort to stop activists turning into functionaries. Rather than an obstacle to unity, diversity becomes a condition for it, although

fragmentation and atomization are the hidden face of diversity and multiplicity. Theoretical disputes must take place in a context of concrete collective actions, because resistance doesn't occur in the abstract. Transformative collective actions begin in response to conflicts established by the oppressors, and their success depends on their ability to change the terrain and the terms of the conflict in the course of the struggle.

### A new post-capitalist utopia

The Belgian priest François Houtart, founder and member of the World Social Forum's international council and distinguished representative of the "other world" movement, presented his vision of 21st-century socialism, at the same time acknowledging that discussing socialism at all is controversial. Most of those who have been defined as "anti-system" believe the idea of both capitalism and socialism must be abandoned because they are two sides of the same coin. Others repudiate the term socialism because of its baggage—Stalinism, for example.

Houtart argued that actions without prior reflection lead to revolts with no future and that social processes are not decreed, but result from concrete actors. He said that capitalism's destructive approach to nature and human labor has never been as intense or rapid as in the neoliberal period. The experience of social movements and convergences are delineating the focal points of a post-capitalism or new socialism. These include sustainable natural resource use, privileging use value over exchange value and establishing a representative and participatory democracy generalized in all social and economic relations rather than just political ones. This involves another philosophy of power and the construction of true multiculturality.

Hope is the conviction  
that struggling makes sense

Gustavo Esteva, a promoter of Iván Illich's work and an activist and ideologue of grassroots movements such as that of the Oaxacan peoples, posited that the era of the world capitalist economy is over and US imperialism is reaching its end, given that, while it can still capture hearts and minds, it no longer has cultural hegemony. With neoliberalism now an empty shell, its end is generating chaos and producing new reactionary waves and religious fundamentalisms. He explained that some want to return to the now impossible welfare state modalities while others want to bring back socialism, which is equally non-viable because of the economicistic perspective of both its philosophy and practice. Noting that the new social movements are having difficulties becoming anti-systemic because they were born in the old era, he exhorted his listeners to renounce socialism.

Esteva analyzed the Grassroots Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca and

Zapatismo as a source of inspiration for such anti-system movements. He proposed channeling the general discontent from this perspective, transforming protests and denunciations into viable initiatives, and resistance into liberation by linking up pockets of resistance, building autonomous ways of organizing social life beyond the logic of capital. While it seems impossible to propose the convergence of all organizations attempting to situate themselves on the left, he counseled against accepting division and turning friends into the main enemy. Quoting British writer John Berger, he said that naming the intolerable in an increasingly desperate world is in itself hope, which he defined as the conviction that struggling makes sense, no matter what happens, rather than that things will happen as one thinks they will .

### **Redefining the concept of power**

For my part, I analyzed the social movements that are constructing a profound critique of neoliberalism and capitalism, and posited that there is a diversity of powers, the best known being that which is used by groups or individuals to get others to do what they want. This type of power can be backed by force or by subtle forms of acceptance based on the asymmetric construction of consensus, but it is always oppressive, a zero-sum game in which what is gained by one is lost by the others.

Another kind of power is one that does not hoard but shares, multiplies. An example of this is the power of common decision-making. The Zapatistas' "lead by obeying" concept is a very different kind of power from that to which capitalism is accustomed.

A basic rule that has come out of the study of social movements is the need to learn from what people do. We mustn't fall into a Manichean way of thinking, because the dominant ideology can easily be interjected and assumed in our social expressions given that we have all lived and absorbed capitalist alienation, but we do need to distinguish the remnants of oppressive power in incipient forms of alternative power.

I looked at how the movements are demonstrating that one important instrument against concentrated and ubiquitous powers of domination is the convergences among the emerging movements. I wasn't talking about convergences between movements and parties, both because the political class has fallen into an irreversible deterioration and because the party form corresponds to now outmoded structures of the industrial model. It is thus imperative to seek new ways to engage in politics, as the Zapatistas are doing. Convergences are part of a process in which it is no longer possible to postulate a privileged actor of change; it now has to be a kaleidoscopic panoply of agents, in our case a pluralist set of subjects that are working toward identifying, proposing and finding agreement on a common goal of transformation.

This essentially new mass is surmounting dispersion, fragmentation and merely spontaneous expressions by experimenting with new and innovative organic forms, thus forging a diverse and pluralistic conglomerate. Many social movements have been demonstrating how such convergences are needed to access other possible worlds in which justice, freedom, equality and respect for life reign.

### The Landless Movement and the Peasant Way

Brazilian lawyer Ricardo Gebrim, a member of that country's Landless Movement (MST), described a grassroots consultation process in Brazil similar to the Other Campaign promoted by the Zapatistas, stressing that Zapatismo has been a pedagogical example for many movements. He explained that many processes, such as the one in Bolivia, are not so much electoral events as insurrectional acts resulting from resistance struggles of many years. He explained that, while the MST had supported Lula, it was now building alternatives of broad-based unity and emerging strategic thinking, given that the current democracy is still nothing other than a set of mechanisms of capitalist domination.

Food expert Peter Rosset, a member of the world organization *Vía Campesina*, stressed that capital's re-territorializing processes are in effect a genocidal war against indigenous peoples, peasants and fishing people. He described the destracturing and privatizing of the countryside and its control by transnational corporations that espouse a false environmentalism to justify dispossessing indigenous peoples of their lands, water and other resources. He reported on the alliances being built among traditional peasant movements and the newer anti-system ones and said that sharing experiences and debates has the potential of turning pro-system movements into anti-system ones. He also reported how the Zapatista example had spread to faraway lands, with Zapatista-style *Caracoles* being created in Thailand, for example.

### Subversive words and eyes that speak

Architect and energy specialist Jean Robert spoke on anti-systemic action in times of crisis, like the one affecting the capitalist system right now, but added his voice to those who do not believe it is on its last legs. It is surviving through inertia and as it becomes illegitimate is basing its power on violence. He then posed a fundamental question: how can we prevent the system's feedback mechanisms from devouring the pockets of resistance? He challenged the audience to examine whether the system of domination doesn't learn from resistance movements and whether this learning doesn't actually reinforce it.

Another aspect he dealt with was language. Western languages, he explained,

make us speak of “capitalism” in a way that makes it seem like the only possibility. Daily language feeds a vision and a way of thinking that reinforces the system, while those who do not speak Western languages can have subversive words. He urged us to “de-capitalize” our minds.

John Berger himself counseled looking beyond words altogether, since what we perceive is more important than the name we give it. He related his visit to the Oventic Government Junta and listed four things that caught his attention: 1) they have an authority stripped of authoritarian features; 2) rather than making them less human, the balaclavas the Zapatistas wear actually make them more visible, since the expression revealed in the eyes is hardest to control, and in those eyes he saw sincerity; 3) resistance can produce fatigue and that fatigue needs to be consoled; and 4) by telling their local history and their place in the world, the Zapatistas represent the antithesis of all politicians of both Right and Left, and that opposition is in their bodies, minds and souls.

### **Systematic lies and blinding fears**

Pablo González Casanova confessed that something happens to him with the Zapatistas that never happened to him in the world’s great universities: he worries about whether or not it’ll pass the test. He spoke about coherent, scientific lies—such as those used and justified by the World Bank under the principle of authority—which he wasn’t sure whether to call deceit or self-deceit. He called salaries a systematic lie, as paying for “free” labor, paying what that merchandise is worth in the free market, hides the exploitation. He valued “prohibited” knowledge, much of which is very important if those from below are to advance, explaining that prohibitions exist precisely to stop people thinking differently.

González Casanova also referred to psychological violence and violence by intimidation, which lead to ambiguities, and explained how fear is an epistemological problem because it stops people from gaining knowledge. He alluded to the differences between what people say and what they do, such as self-proclaimed socialists who support neoliberal policies. He also provided current data to prove that those proclaiming imperialism’s death have gotten way ahead of themselves; the only thing that has died is socialism, asphyxiated by the bureaucrats.

### **Disaster capitalism**

Journalist Naomi Klein, whose book on the current rise of what she calls “disaster capitalism” was lauded by Subcomandante Marcos, repaid the compliment by recognizing that the world anti-system movement had been born in Chiapas. She also spoke of the movements in the North that oppose the dominion of the huge corporations, but acknowledged that after September 11 some resistance movements in the North had been weakened and even

splintered. In that regard, she explained that the mechanism of disaster capitalism is to use the state of shock or exception to impose its neoliberal measures. With public policies abandoned, disasters are exploited to privatize, weakening the state and strengthening the corporations.

Shock resistance is a powerful force that is confronting this, with some peoples using their historical memory to resist. What happened in Argentina in 2001 and in Madrid in 2004 were examples of resistance to shock. Because today life itself is under threat, she made a call to combat the capitalist narratives with anti-capitalist ones.

#### **Women's equality as part of the Zapatistas' definition**

Feminist Sylvia Marcos called for an assessment of women's contributions to the anti-system movements by their refusal to subordinate themselves to the kind of subjugation women suffer under capitalism and by generating new conceptions and new practices. She critiqued patriarchal contradictions, such as thinking that anything relating to women has only to do with them and not with everyone. After defending the need for alliances with other movements and for embracing other problems as part of a viable common agenda, she expressed appreciation that a guerrilla movement such as the Zapatista one had taken on women's equality as part of its own definition.

In fact, on January 1, 2008, the 14th anniversary of its uprising, the EZLN took pride in the fact that the celebrations took place under the sign of transforming the role of women in the communities in struggle. Furthermore, the Third Gathering of Zapatista Peoples with the Peoples of the World, held in the *Caracol La Garrucha* in late December 2007, was an international meeting exclusively for women. Over 2,000 people from 30 countries participated in the three-day event. Women delegates from *Vía Campesina* in Asia, Europe and the Americas joined others from Brazil's Landless Movement and from many other collectives around the world. Comandante Dalia, who spoke for the Zapatistas, said that women will never forgive what capitalism has done to them and affirmed that the Zapatistas were organized to defend their lands.

Zapatista Women led workshops on the history of their movement, women's role in the rebellion and the future of women's participation, while men were assigned housekeeping tasks. The Revolutionary Women's Law, promulgated in Zapatista communities in 1992, underpinned the gathering, which celebrated women's rapidly changing roles in Zapatista communities.

By the evening of January 31, the official 14th anniversary celebration of the Zapatista uprising, more than 5,000 people crowded La Garrucha, enjoying

speeches, songs and dancing. The meeting ended with the warning that Zapatismo is being attacked in a hidden war with paramilitary forces made up of peasants co-opted and trained by the federal army who are trying to dispossess the *Caracoles* and autonomous municipalities of their land base. In fact there were precarious security conditions in Zapatista communities, especially in the North and Selva regions, at the time of the international gathering.

### Neither Center Nor Periphery

Subcomandante Marcos' seven talks under the general title of "Neither Center Nor Periphery," offered a sharp and lucid counterpoint to the other presentations.

"Geography and the Calendar of Theory." In this first topic, Marcos announced that he was presenting the basis of a theory so different that it is actually practice. He went on to explain that when the conceptual stone touches the surface of theory, it produces a series of concentric waves that affect different scientific and technical activities. This continues until a new conceptual stone drops and a new series of waves changes theoretical production again. The density of the theoretical production determines whether these ripples reach the shore of reality.

He criticized the aseptic zeal imposed on the social sciences, which leads to the idea that if reality doesn't conform to the theory, tough for reality. Such theory is used to hide reality and ensure impunity. He said that Calderón, the man who currently passes himself off as President in Mexico thanks to an electoral fraud, hid his responsibility and that of those who preceded him for the catastrophes that battered Tabasco and Chiapas in late 2007 by blaming them on the moon. He also bitingly criticized supposedly progressive intellectuals who argue that social relations can be transformed without struggle and without touching the privileges enjoyed by the powerful.

Marcos then presented seven theses on the anti-system struggle. First: the capitalist system cannot be understood and explained without the concept of war. Second: the forms capitalists use to increase their earnings are to increase productivity, produce new merchandise and open new markets. Third: they achieve the latter by conquering or re-conquering territories and social spaces in which they previously had no interest, such as ancestral knowledge and natural resources. Fourth: he refuted the thesis that capitalism will collapse by itself. Fifth: he defended the idea that the capitalist system will only be destroyed if one or many movements confront and defeat capital's central nucleus: private ownership of the means of production. Sixth: a society's real transformations are those directed against the system as a whole. And seventh: the great transformations

do not start at the top but with small movements and with the organized consciousness of groups and collectives that mutually know and recognize each other below and on the left and construct another kind of politics.

**“The Calendar and Geography of Difference.”** In his second intervention, Marcos described how theories that emerge in the metropolis are exported to the periphery, where they suffer the blockages of those geographies. He cited the example of trying to impose a metropolitan feminism on the communities without consulting them or understanding what’s already being done. He contrasted this with what women from the Zapatista movement and The Other Campaign are doing in one of the weightiest, most complex and ongoing anti-system struggles for equality and difference. These struggles would rock not only the whole patriarchal system, but also those who are barely beginning to grasp the strength and power of that difference.

**“The Calendar and Geography of Destruction.”** Here Marcos criticized people who suggest we stop worrying about those who exploit, dispossess, repress and deprecate in order to debate and agree on what comes after this nightmare. He said that arrogance is usually a bad counselor on practical and theoretical issues, and spoke of the destruction of nature—deforestation, contamination, ecological imbalance—and the misnamed “natural” catastrophes, which hide the bloody hand of capital accompanying these adversities. He analyzed the catastrophe in Tabasco and Chiapas that affected a million people, recalling that the “self-declared” President Calderón had painted a picture of a nearly divine tragedy that had nothing to do with the development model that led to the closing off of old water routes. The inundations were a crime given the opening of the Peñitas dam, monopolized by individual interests for electricity production. In contrast with the politicians’ actions, Marcos highlighted the population’s solidarity, above all by the poor for the poor. On this point he told how the Zapatistas got help to stranded communities, which of course was not reported in the major media.

He also talked about Cuba and its history, which is one long braid of pain and dignity, and about the extraordinary challenge of building its own destiny as a nation, its own socialism. He stressed that its rebellion had come at the cost of an economic blockade and a massive demonizing campaign by the United States.

**“The calendar and geography of the land.”** Marcos described the uses and abuses by the big farmers in Chiapas before the Zapatista uprising. He recalled that in 1994 the Zapatistas fought against the federal army and central government of the time, which included various figures who now back López Obrador. The Zapatistas will keep talking about their persecutors, executioners

and killers, adding that if they had supported the PRD's supposed alternative to the Right, it would have been a betrayal of those who had died.

He referred to the revolutionary women's law and the revolutionary agrarian law. Because of the latter, ranchers had been expelled from their huge holdings, which were then divvied up among the indigenous. The passing of the land into the hands of the Zapatistas was accompanied by processes that can now be seen in their territories: advances in government, health, education, housing, food, trade, culture, communication, women's participation, etc. The Zapatistas have recovered the capacity to decide their own destiny, which among other things implies the right to make their own mistakes.

"The calendar and geography of fear." In this segment, Marcos said that freedom must be built collectively, and not on the fear of others who, although different, are our equals. A movement's ethics are more important than the number of people it has, its media impact, the forcefulness of its actions or the clarity and radicalness of its program. He pointed to the lack of ethics at the top, which is the ethics of fear. The capitalist system can be defined as the empire of fear. There are many fears: fear of gender, which not only implies women's fear of men and vice versa, but women's fear of women and men's fear of men. There's also fear of different generations, fear of others, fear of race...

He stated that the Zapatistas have no hierarchy of spheres and don't claim that the struggle for the land has priority over the gender struggle, or that the latter is more important than recognizing and respecting differences. The Zapatistas want a broad movement with clear objectives: a radical transformation that involves the destruction of the capitalist system. They ask that their rights be recognized, to be allowed to be what they are and how they are. They aren't interested in positions or posts or awards or honors. They simply want to be able to get up each morning without fear of being on the day's agenda: fear of being indigenous, a woman, a worker, homosexual, young, old, a child... and that's not possible in the capitalist system.

"The calendar and geography of memory." In this intervention, Marcos underscored that the Zapatista uprising had been against being ignored and forgotten. He distinguished the way Zapatistas look from the way they are looked at, detailing the respectful look that anthropologist Andrés Aubry always had for them. He warned that those who look at them are incapable of taking in all that the Zapatista movement has been, is, means and represents. The way they are seen by social scientists, analysts and artists is a window through which others look at them. We need to be aware that this window only shows a small part of the Zapatistas' great house, leaving aspects such as the communities' heroic daily resistance unseen.

Cuba: A revolution that knows how to danceAnother position shared by the immense majority, Zapatistas at the head, was recognition of Cuba's heroic role in the liberating process.

Cuban speaker Gilberto Valdés, who collaborates with Havana's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Center, talked about his country's culture of resistance, which has forged a very participatory people. He analyzed the current debate on the island, in which the people are seeking solutions to problems of all shapes and sizes. At the end of 2007, over two million specific proposals for responding to the daily problems and bureaucratization had been gathered. He proudly claimed that the Cuban revolution has continued to exist because it "knows how to dance and sing," referring to an anecdote by Marcos of a young woman who had told him she didn't want to be invited to his revolution if it didn't know how to dance. Valdés noted that one huge challenge in the new Latin American panorama, with its anti-imperialist, emancipationist and libertarian logic and its search for a response to the perverse mercantilist logic, is to figure out a model of alternative well-being.

#### Awareness of danger

At one point, a presenter respectfully inquired why a hard-line, sell-out and illegitimate rightist presidency such as Calderón's hadn't been prevented from taking office, referring to the Zapatistas' decision not to back the PRD candidate. It was explained that former PRI members who were the Zapatistas' main persecutors and the instigators and organizers of paramilitary groups in Chiapas were now with the PRD in Chiapas' state government, where they were continuing to attack the Zapatista peoples. This was presented as proof of Marcos' argument that the Zapatistas cannot make alliances with their executioners.

The participants were deeply disturbed when they realized the grave danger the Zapatista communities are facing today. Colloquium organizers and participants signed a declaration stressing that the Zapatistas had honored their word to put aside their weapons despite the formation of paramilitary groups, the massacre in Acteal and all the other terrible things the army had done in Chiapas. They had created the *Caracoles* and their peaceful activity was exemplary, yet in recent months paramilitary groups had been harassing them to get them off the land. The declaration demanded that the state and federal governments cease the aggression, since peoples should not be forced into using violence to defend against the violence they are suffering.

#### The Acteal massacre is a symbol

The gathering culminated on the tenth anniversary of the Acteal massacre,

when the government and its intellectuals attempted to twist history to elude what had happened: a state crime. Jesuit Ricardo Robles wrote at the time: "Although governments, and behind them the de facto powers, are attempting to cover their crimes with silence, obscurity and oblivion, the dead continue their work; they care for their struggles so they don't die with them. And their protests, proposals, utopias and slogans remain alive in truth. However much they are denied, the flames of Acteal remain alive. Acteal's horror goes beyond today's dirty war; it has become a symbol of all the horrors."

Zapatismo is the whole world's patrimony

After the colloquium, several participants used different media to call on people to mobilize to defend Zapatismo. Wallerstein stressed that the Zapatistas had set up de facto autonomous indigenous municipalities that are functioning well despite being under siege and constantly threatened by the Mexican army. He admitted that world support for the Zapatistas is suffering from some degree of fatigue and that the colloquium sought to resuscitate alliances.

Naomi Klein also echoed the Zapatistas' red alert, given the evident signs of war on the horizon. She warned the world and Mexico in particular that new massacres such as the one in Acteal must be avoided. John Berger also demanded immediate support for the Zapatistas from Mexican civil society, arguing that everyone will suffer the consequences if this threatened project disappears.

There's still time to stop the aggression

The political parties, now hugely discredited for having acted against people's needs, have lost the support of a large proportion of the population. The Zapatistas are legitimately seeking other paths and other ways of engaging in politics and that search has to be defended. Leaving the Zapatistas to their fate would be enormously shortsighted and an act of terrible complicity. There's still time to raise voices from the media that claim to be democratic to halt a massacre of the Zapatista option.

If the political polarization in Mexico is tolerating this crime, there is still the international option. It is urgent that individuals and groups around the world be made aware of what is happening and act in time to halt the aggression against the Zapatistas. Zapatismo is the patrimony of those at the bottom everywhere in the world. It belongs to us all.



## A Thousand and One Demonstrations: For Life, Petroleum and Rights...

*In 2007, over 12 million people demonstrated against government policies in Mexico's capital. Already in 2008, millions more have come to express their various demands in the Zócalo. A thousand and one demonstrations against privatizing petroleum, human rights violations, the free trade agreement, the high cost of living, corruption, impunity and lack of justice,... Mexico is in ferment.*

### Jorge Alonso

Mexico is polarized, with overlapping conflicts in every aspect of national life. In late 2007, The New York Times noted that a sizeable proportion of the Mexican population believed something crooked had happened at the ballot box during the last presidential elections. In March 2008, when the judicial branch turned down a request from citizens demanding the right to learn the truth about the 2006 elections by getting access to the ballots, it was a clear sign that the government had something to hide about what really happened.

### Increasing impunity

The government's proclaimed war on organized crime hasn't prospered and violence has become daily news. A World Bank assessment of political stability and violence places Mexico at appalling levels.

In an attempt to strengthen his government, the controversial President of the Republic has changed his team but the results have been counterproductive. An illustrative case was the Secretary of the Interior, Juan Camilo Mouriño, who was accused of disrespecting the law by holding positions reserved for Mexicans by birth even though he was born in Spain. Subterfuge and inconsistencies over documents proving his origins aside, he had used a Spanish passport in 1996. Experts in Constitutional Law point out that he never presented a letter formally renouncing his Spanish citizenship.

López Obrador has said that Mouriño's appointment to the Department of the Interior was linked to efforts to speed up the passing of Mexican petroleum into private hands. And he documented the charge that Mouriño had engaged in a conflict of interest when, as a shadow official under Calderón, he benefited his family with contracts from PEMEX, Mexico's state oil company. It would become a huge corruption scandal. Several days after the charge was made, Mouriño defended himself by alleging that while he had indeed signed the contracts exhibited, they were legal.

Despite demonstrating that he had acted "within the law," a study showed that

85% of those polled felt his action to have been unethical. But, counter to its founders' principles, the governing National Action Party (PAN) covered it up and took the attitude that an attack on any one of them constituted an attack on them all. The PAN government shares impunity with the previously long-governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The hackneyed rule of law is manipulated to protect powerful people who commit crimes and deepen corruption.

If 2007 was marked by impunity, the situation has only worsened in the first quarter of 2008. Powerful people who commit crimes are rewarded—as in the case of the PRI governors of Oaxaca and Puebla—while many innocent people are kept in jail under fabricated charges. There are intermittent charges of torture, a widespread and deeply rooted practice. Social struggle is criminalized. Rape has become a state policy against dissidents. The number of political prisoners and disappeared is growing. And independent human rights organizations demonstrate that the government is hemming them in.

Human Rights Watch strongly criticized the conduct of the official human rights agency: it abandons cases in progress, tolerates abusive practices and promotes impunity by maintaining that the army itself should investigate atrocities it commits. Researcher Sergio Aguayo says that while human rights are being massively violated, Mexicans must put up with a bureaucratized ombudsman, a complicit Senate and a President who busily protects the powerful and ignores the victims.

Human

rights:

A terrible image

In February, observing the lack of progress in investigations into the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez, the more than 500 disappearances related to the dirty war and the criminalization of social protest, the head of the United Nations Human Rights Commission declared impunity to be Mexico's biggest challenge. She also advised that if the army is carrying out police functions it should have civil oversight. She received data proving that the military had violated human rights in the fight against organized crime—raping women, committing murders, detaining people arbitrarily, robbing and looting. A network made up of 59 human rights organizations in 20 federated entities assembled dozens of cases and launched a campaign against the repression. The International Civic Commission for Human Rights Observation, a civil society group formed in 1997 to monitor human rights in Mexico, affirmed following its sixth visit to Mexico that the state's image as one that respects human rights is unsustainable. Impunity emboldens abusive elements in society and the government's authoritarian temper remains unchanged.

In an effort to counter all the negativity, the Calderón government has

increased spending on publicity and at the same time is increasingly censoring the media. Independent media are finding spaces closed to them. Calderón refused to tolerate journalist Carmen Aristegui—known throughout Latin America via CNN—giving a voice to his opponents. Through the collusion of government authoritarianism with the de facto power of money and the electronic media, Aristegui's important news program was shut down. There was an attempt to present it as a contract issue, but it was obvious that it was censorship. Thousands of radio listeners sent electronic messages protesting the disappearance of the successful morning program Aristegui had been directing on W Radio for five years.

#### Mexicans killed in the attack on the FARC

One case that shows how Calderón considers himself a servant of the Bush government's interests more than the President of all Mexicans was the March 1 attack by the Colombian army on a FARC position in Ecuadorian territory, in which four Mexican citizens visiting the camp were killed and a fifth was wounded. The Mexican government should have demanded an investigation into the deaths and asked for compensation. The facts show they were not combatants. The Right used the situation to attack the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), where some of those massacred were students. From a legal perspective, Mexican authorities had no reason to concern themselves with why their citizens had made the trip, and still less with the reasons for their conduct overseas; if they had committed any crime, Ecuador would have had jurisdiction. The Mexican government should only have demanded satisfaction for the killing of its nationals. But Calderón didn't say or do anything. The parents of the Mexicans killed denounced their government's complicit silence, calling it "state cowardice in the face of a state crime" and announced that they would file a claim with international organizations against Colombia.

Analyst Granados Chapa condemned the Mexican government's hostile, shabby, clumsy and illegal attitude: first setting out to determine whether or not the Mexican citizens in question actually deserved government protection—as if such protection were conditional. Rather than protest to Bogota, it expressed concern over the relationship between Mexicans and a terrorist organization such as the FARC.

A month after the attack, the Attorney General's Office declared that there were no indications the FARC was recruiting Mexicans and the Senate asked the federal government to condemn the massacre. But it remained silent. The Latin American Rural Sociology Association denounced the unpunished killing of students who went to Ecuador out of genuine academic interest; they were not in a country that was party to the conflict and international negotiations

were underway at the time over a humanitarian exchange of prisoners between the FARC and the Colombian government, making an armed incident in the area impossible to foresee. The Association criticized some media outlets' treatment of the incident, which demonized social science academics in an attempt to justify such a terrible crime. It also expressed concern over the media campaign against internationally prestigious Mexican institutions of higher education.

#### **The case of Lydia Cacho**

The executive branch doesn't have a monopoly on corruption or the sponsorship of impunity; the whole state, including the legislative and judicial branches, is involved. After demonstrating the complicity of high level officials with pedophile rings, journalist Lydia Cacho—who documented their power and impunity in her books as well as in her own life—faced a Supreme Court resolution that left her and the citizens of Mexico without recourse and protected the powerful people she had exposed. Impunity was legitimated. Retired minister Juventino Castro admitted that the Court's prestige was undermined by the decision against Cacho.

Alicia Pérez Duarte—since February 2006 head of the special prosecutor's office for crimes related to violence against women—resigned in December out of embarrassment over the behavior of the Court ministers. She could no longer continue to work within a justice system so out of line with her principles. She revealed that the attorney general had ordered her to drop the accusations against judicial police who had directly violated Lydia Cacho's rights and condemned the attorney general and the Supreme Court for giving protection to pedophiles. She also spoke out about the government's desire to cover up the actions of Puebla's PRI governor, who ordered that psychological torture be used against the journalist.

It was public knowledge that the PAN government agreed to protect the governor in exchange for his party's support for the energy reform project. Protestors gathered in front of the Supreme Court building shouting that the ministers were "corrupt!" and "child molesters!" and fouled the entrance gates as a sign that the behavior of most of the Court's ministers "stinks."

#### **"I won't leave Mexico"**

In response to Cacho's vulnerable position, French diplomats and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, a well-known Spanish politician, all recommended that she leave Mexico to protect herself from revenge by the criminal mafia she uncovered. But she responded that she would not give up. She said she'd received hundreds of messages of support from the families of victims of kidnappings and killings and survivors of the criminal organization. She declared that she would not leave the country, give her freedom up to the

political-business-criminal mafia or grant them the power to make her flee.

The journalist recalled that half a million people a year flee Mexico due to poverty, violence and corruption. She said she would not add herself to this enormous outflow because millions of people in Mexico dream of a different kind of country. The corrupt are only a few and those who want real change are the majority.

#### **Opposition to the “Gestapo law”**

Lydia Cacho has continued her struggle as a journalist and citizen. She denounced the legislature’s attempt to approve what she called a “Gestapo Law.” Over the protest of citizens, the political class was planning to pass a law that would allow entry into houses without a warrant—giving the system’s most corrupt sectors even more weapons against citizens.

The United States was pressuring Mexico to become a police state and this bill provided the tools, further incriminating social protest. Many organizations marched in protest against it. The debate was joined by journalists who denounced the army’s entry into their homes and indigenous people from Guerrero who complained of abuses by soldiers. The president of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Sergio García Ramírez, called the planned reform a step backward, a worrying and deplorable attack on rights. After a lot of debate, which made it clear that the reform would place Mexico far behind in terms of respecting basic rights, the legislators removed a part of the law that would allow the repressive forces to enter homes without a warrant, but left in other parts that will have negative impacts on human rights: for instance, under the law, the Public Ministry, in accord with a judge, can suspend anyone’s civic guarantees by accusing them of organized crime.

#### **Huge inequalities**

Mexico remains a country marked by huge inequalities. Every year, a handful of businesspeople, protected by the political powers that be, increase their capital so stupendously that they appear on lists of the world’s wealthiest. Mexico’s political class is among the best paid in the world: one way of getting rich in Mexico is to attain high government office. The Supreme Court ministers are the most voracious, with approved annual salaries of close to four million pesos (over US\$382,000), which is why they rub shoulders with the rich, watching out for their cronies’ interests, and remain aloof from the misery of the majority of citizens.

Some 50 million Mexicans are locked into poverty. Calderón promised to be the “employment President,” but official figures show that unemployment in 2007 reached the highest level since 2004. Those who have a hard time getting and keeping employment are trapped by what the Mexican Labor Front calls a

policy of labor instability. Economists say the Mexican economy has entered into a steeper decline than anticipated and that the domestic consequences of the US recession are only somewhat mitigated by high petroleum prices.

### Against NAFTA

This situation has been triggering constant mobilization. The first few months of 2008 saw the emergence of a strong, broad-based movement of peasant organizations against NAFTA. UNAM studies reveal that the basket of basic goods is already out of reach for over 90% of Mexican peasants. The movement's strategies include marches all over the country, tractor caravans to the capital, the takeover of international bridges and highway tollbooths and legal appeals against the free trade agreement's agriculture chapter.

Movement members have condemned the agricultural and trade policies in place since 1982 as a war against peasant and indigenous agriculture; they say that 14 years into NAFTA, while agro-food exports have increased, imports have surged to the benefit of only 2% of the nation's productive units. They also argue that emigration and food dependency have increased, that agriculture policies have been an ecological disaster and that Mexican peasants are in no position to compete with the world's most highly subsidized and technologically advanced agricultural sector.

### No corn, no country!

These issues have formed the basis for the "No corn, no country!" movement, which is demanding renegotiation of NAFTA's agriculture provisions and the rescue of Mexican agriculture. Toward the end of January, the movement filled Mexico City's Zócalo, supported by union and grassroots organizations. The Justice Department weighed in on the side of the powerful, rejecting most of the demands for appeals against NAFTA. While the peasants were showing that the Mexican countryside is in ruins, the PAN government showed its inability or unwillingness to dialogue with them. There was so little interest in finding a solution that government interlocutors didn't even meet with the peasant groups even though the movement took almost half a million signatures to the Senate demanding renegotiation of NAFTA. Despite government maneuvers aimed at dividing the movement, the various peasant organizations forged a political pact that supported the food sovereignty movement, joined the movement for energy sovereignty and made demands on behalf of workers' rights and democratic freedoms.

They said they would carry on with their struggle against neoliberal policies and in defense of social ownership of the nation's land and water in their traditional collective *ejidos* and communities. They spoke out in favor of strengthening the domestic market, rejected initiatives to promote a state of emergency and militarization and defended freedom of association and

expression and access to information. They also demanded recognition of a multifunctional agro-food sector characterized by ecologically sustainable development.

### A country in ferment

Popular ferment has erupted in thousands of ways in response to a collective memory of offenses that stretches way back in history. Several strikes have been held, one by Cananea's miners. The PAN government responded the same way the government of Porfirio Díaz did before the Mexican revolution: with repression. It sent the forces of public order to try to recover the installations from the workers and return them to the owners. The workers defended themselves, and some fifty people were wounded. The union used legal means to battle the government-supported company. A hundred thousand miners across the country went on strike protesting the violation of the right to strike. A national movement demanded that police forces leave the Cananea mine, but only three quarters of them were withdrawn.

The government endorses the unions manipulated by owners and demonizes the democratic ones. Meanwhile, dissident teachers sick of the antidemocratic leadership of teachers' union chief Elba Esther Gordillo, a government ally, have mobilized to demand that she be investigated and removed from office.

Workers have also been struggling against the State Workers' Social Security and Services Institute (ISSSTE) law, which would have them lose half their retirement funds to the mercy of private companies. They've launched thousands of appeals, but the Supreme Court has been excessively slow in responding. The privatization of retirement funds has become big business for the financial institutions that administer them and a great loss to the workers. It's the usual neoliberal prescription: privatize profits and socialize losses.

In Oaxaca, local and federal governments continue to violate human rights with impunity. A police chief who had been a key figure in the repression of the grassroots movement was shot down and there was an attempt to attribute it to the People's Revolutionary Army (EPR). The guerrilla group disclaimed responsibility for the killing and suggested that the police chief had become a liability to those in power and that responsibility for his death should be sought in the state government of Ulises Ruiz. Social campaigners continue to be tortured, killed and disappeared, causing many to wonder where the Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) is. Writer Gustavo Esteva replies that it can be found "among the people, at ground level," and that in addition to fear, frustration and anger, increasingly intense preparations—both action and reflection—for what's to come are taking place in Oaxaca. For now, what's visible are teachers' mobilizations and hunger

strikes.

#### No more peaceful means

Indigenous people facing trumped up charges in Chiapas have also initiated a much-publicized hunger strike. And the Huichol people of Santa Catarina, in Jalisco, are opposing the construction of a highway through their territory. They say the government is only trying to control them, not to understand them. They claim that militarization and highway construction are destroying communities.

Their stand was backed by the National Indigenous Congress, which held a session in the spot the Huichol were occupying to prevent the machinery from getting through. The Congress expressed its opposition to the privatization of energy companies, which it sees as the patrimony of the people of Mexico. It also opposed the planting and sale of transgenic corn and the use of corn for agro-fuel.

In late March, dozens of indigenous people in the Guerrero mountains condemned what is known as Plan Mérida as a measure intended not to combat drug trafficking, but to combat armed movements and social organizations struggling against poverty, and announced they were joining the Insurgent People's Revolutionary Army (ERPI). They warned that they wouldn't wait until 2010 to start a revolution—that they'd already started it. They said governments had always been deaf to indigenous people, and they no longer see any chance of progress through peaceful means.

#### Privatize PEMEX?

One of the strongest and most broad-based movements has been the struggle against the privatization of petroleum. Seventy years ago, President Cárdenas expropriated Mexico's oil resources to the enthusiastic support of the vast majority of Mexicans. It belongs to the nation. With the rise in the oil prices in recent years, transnational companies and private enterprises are hungrier than ever to get their hands on this great wealth. Oil earnings in 2007 reached nearly 432.8 billion pesos and the Mexican government is under pressure from the multilateral financial institutions to privatize the industry.

Rather than being treated as the shared wealth of all Mexicans, oil has been a treasure chest for federal and state governments that distribute its profits lavishly in high salaries for officials and squander it on the media campaigns politicians use to secure their careers. The antidemocratic and bureaucratic oil union has also its teeth sunk into oil profits. And petroleum earnings compensate for the government's failure to collect taxes from the very wealthy. The national oil company still exists, but it's vulnerable; its lack of

maintenance and appropriate growth offer the pretext for privatization.

#### National resistance

In early 2008, mobilization was organized to halt maneuvers by the PAN government—supported by the PRI, since the governing party has protected major PRI politicians—to either change the Constitution to allow de facto privatization or overturn its prohibition on privatization by altering secondary legislation—the latter an unconstitutional tactic they've already used on labor. The reform isn't openly called privatization—they refer to it as "opening the doors to private capital investment in crude oil extraction."

Since mid-January, López Obrador has been challenging Calderón to engage in a debate over PAN's plan to privatize oil, and demanding accountability regarding the oil profits petroleum. The parties that make up the Broad Progressive Front announced that they were preparing a national civil resistance plan to prevent any energy sector reform leading to open or veiled privatization. They won't wait for the blow to come, but will try to prevent it. The Lucio Cabañas Revolutionary Movement gave notice of its opposition to privatization on the grounds that it would constitute an attack against the people. Carlos Montemayor wrote that converting public income into private profit was not a way to democratize oil but rather capitulation by the state and a new way to rob the nation.

#### A crime against the nation

The South Group—made up of outstanding academics such as Héctor Díaz Polanco, John Saxe-Fernández, Gabriel Vargas Lozano, Guillermo Almeyra and many others—published a communiqué showing that PEMEX is Mexico's most profitable company and that oil income represents about 50% of the federal budget. Privatizing this company would be unpatriotic. They warned that anyone who wants to privatize PEMEX is conspiring against the nation.

The Group analyzed how the inefficient and biased management by many Mexican governments has led the country's economy into a serious crisis. A large domestic debt from investment projects recorded as spending, along with the US economic crisis, is having a strong impact in reduced purchases of Mexican exports and reduced jobs for Mexican migrants, leading to lower remittances, the country's second biggest source of foreign currency.

They made it clear that in response to this situation, the PAN and its allies in the PRI are trying to demonstrate the urgency of privatizing PEMEX, alleging that it's in crisis. The South Group showed that it isn't PEMEX that's in crisis, but the socioeconomic model. They unveiled the government's lie that its intention isn't to privatize PEMEX, but only to reform it, clean it up and democratize it. What's really being proposed behind these empty words is the

privatization of a strategic enterprise. The Group called on Mexicans across the country to mobilize against private participation in PEMEX. Its destiny should not be decided in backroom negotiations amongst a few, but in widespread discussion and by taking defense of the national interest to the streets.

Standard & Poor's revealed that Calderón planned to turn oil over to private capital in 2008, against the current of what's happening in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador. And in an interview given in Mexico, the director of the association of engineers from PETROBRAS, Brazil's oil company, stressed that Brazil is today looking to recover control of its oil in response to pressure from the United States to privatize Latin America's hydrocarbons sector. According to López Obrador, Mouriño, the contested Secretary of the Interior, was the main advocate of privatizing PEMEX. February saw many protest activities in many states against opening up PEMEX to the private sector.

#### **"A deep water treasure"**

One fact to keep in mind is that PEMEX is in debt because it pays more in taxes than it makes in profits. Advocates of continued state ownership for PEMEX have revealed that the para-state company has granted US\$70 billion in investment contracts to private domestic and foreign companies over the last ten years. These contracts were made possible by issuing medium- and long-term debt to the companies through a scheme of deferred-expenditure investment projects (PIDIREGAS), which will be paid off out of revenues expected from the projects themselves. This indebtedness means that PEMEX will have to pay out 150 billion pesos in the next 25 years for the credit received—all within a scheme lacking transparency. It was also revealed that the Federal Electricity Commission, PEMEX and the Energy Secretariat signed a 15-year contract last year to supply liquid natural gas to the Spanish transnational Repsol, committing a US\$16 billion budget.

In other words, this is evidence that steps compromising the national interest have already been taken. The alternative would have been to strengthen the company rather than bleed it, allowing its earnings to be reinvested in its modernization. What had to stop was the practice of misspending petroleum earnings to benefit PAN politicians and the new state bosses.

As part of its privatization offensive, the government used substantial sums from PEMEX to fund a manipulative media campaign. It paid 218 million pesos for television ads and paid news directors and television programs that supported the proposed "alliance" between PEMEX and private capital. According to the ads, "there's a treasure deep in the waters of the Gulf of Mexico" that PEMEX lacks the technology to extract, so it needs help from those with know-how. But partnering with foreign companies to extract oil and share half the earnings with them—as non petroleum-producing countries such

as Cuba do—would see Mexico ceding US\$500 billion.

When Mexico's oil was expropriated 70 years ago, it was said that Mexicans wouldn't know how to extract it. But we did know how, and later we created specialized research centers. Now we're hearing the same old song again. One point that wasn't brought to public attention was that when oil prices were low, extracting it from greater depths cost more than could be earned by selling it. But the situation has changed drastically with the high prices of crude. Only 102 of the 952 oil wells in the Chicontepec zone are operating; 850 have been abandoned and could be revived.

### Playing with fire

Academics, scientists and responsible politicians closed ranks in defense of nationalized oil. Former Secretary of the Interior David Ibarra noted that PEMEX is being deliberately broken up, and business opportunities are being transferred mainly to the foreign private sector. The objective of PEMEX is no longer to promote growth; it has become a short-run mechanism for balancing the public budget and foreign accounts. José Antonio Almazán sounded the alarm: faced with the impossibility of constitutionally reforming Article 27, the PAN-PRI alliance was seeking a counter-reform through regulatory laws. He recalled that this ruse had already been used by Salinas de Gortari to meet NAFTA requirements in the electricity sector and now they were trying to hand over the country's oil wealth to meet their pledge to the Alliance for Security and Prosperity of North America (ASPAN).

Calderón sent the PRI a document setting out the need to open up PEMEX, but not indicating the amount of resources transnational companies would obtain. Calderón visited Oaxaca's contested PRI governor Ulises Ruiz—who Calderón knew would stick to his position despite public condemnation thanks to support from his party and the complicity of the PAN, which had given him protection. During the visit, Ruiz gave his backing to the federal executive's plan to reform PEMEX and criticized "the populists" who opposed it. But in their efforts to "open up" PEMEX, advocates of privatization forgot that national exclusivity in energy has been a fundamental issue in the Mexican people's long struggle to defend their sovereignty. The privatizers were playing with fire.

### Brigades in defense of Mexico's petroleum

In a ceremony led by López Obrador commemorating the expropriation of the oil industry, thousands packed the Zócalo in Mexico City to demonstrate that they would defend it. A week later, the crowds returned to the Zócalo to show that they were ready to prevent any form of privatization of PEMEX. During this event, Rosario Ibarra read a letter from the young Mexican woman who was

wounded by Colombian troops in the FARC camp in Ecuador. She explained that she and her companions had been there in response to an invitation from the armed group to learn about its peace proposals. The people observed a moment of silence for the four massacred Mexicans.

López Obrador insisted that the internal problems his Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) is experiencing wouldn't hamper the defense of oil and announced the formation of brigades: 1 of intellectuals, 10 of 10,000 women and 36 of men. He maintained that defending oil meant keeping the door closed to foreign companies and refusing to stand by and allow the Constitution to be violated with impunity through risk contracts that would permit a legal amendment. He dissembled the government's arguments and said that behind the lies about lack of money and technology to modernize PEMEX could be found the Calderón-Mouriño group and their secret agreements with foreign companies.

The agreement that emerged from this mobilization was to go beyond symbolic protest and organize an active defense of Mexican oil. While the highest levels of the PRD were showing their true colors in a ruthless struggle for control of the party apparatus, the rank and file of López Obrador's movement made their devotion and commitment to the national interest felt.

#### **Millions of mobilized Mexicans**

During 2007 over 12 million people demonstrated in the Republic's capital—and many more across the rest of the country. So far in 2008 several million have already shown up in Mexico City's Zócalo to protest neoliberal policies. All of Mexico is simmering. In one huge event, Pablo González Casanova stated that neoliberalism was committed to swallowing the nation whole.

Many contradictions are evident at various levels and around various disputes today. Some are secondary, expressed mainly at the leadership level, but there are also contradictions of principle, relating to conflicts between opposing visions for the country, pointing to a deep polarization. There are very heterogeneous and pluralist grassroots movements that manage to agree on some points. Their members are workers, peasants, teachers, students, indigenous people and groups of many different kinds. The repertoire of struggle is as diverse and pluralist as the movements. Some have opted for armed struggle, others for direct civil action. Some highlight peaceful resistance and call on their supporters to avoid provocation by the powers that be. All these movements are confronting globalized and local economic interests, and in the process corrupt and cynical politicians who negotiate among themselves to maintain their impunity.

The political class, using terms from political theory to try to justify their

misdeeds, is corrupting concepts like democracy, justice, truth and law. This multi-striped political class has shown little sensitivity to people's suffering. Party leaders, caught up in intra- and inter-party battles for political power and its privileges and economic benefits reveal the depth of the crisis of professional politics. The PRD's dirty internal elections once more proved EZLN *Subcomandante Marcos* right in his critique of the anti-democracy and corruption of the party's leadership.

#### **Below and on top**

The crisis of politics at the top is not surmountable. Huge numbers of those at the bottom are rejecting the oppression, exploitation and contempt faced by the majority. Some grassroots mobilizations are already very visible. And they arise to support other forms of mobilization hidden in every corner of the country. The media are incapable of perceiving this and the grassroots groups don't yet want to be too visible. A silent but determined resistance to all kinds of power is being constructed in day-to-day life, and another politics is being rehearsed, profoundly different from the tainted politics of those at the top. From below, another country may emerge.

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#### **The Struggle for a New Media Law: Who Owns the Airwaves?**

*Televisa and Televisión Azteca control Mexico's entire television audience. The long, arduous struggle to break this "duo-poly" and defend citizens from the media's unfettered rule hit a major stumbling block in April, but there will be another decisive moment in September.*

**Jorge Alonso**

Pablo González Casanova has said that the government is defending its agenda through the "expropriation of reason, rights and words." He charges that the art of deception has reached extraordinary proportions, making "Tartuffe seem like an amateur" at tricking and influencing people with lies. This Mexican intellectual's opinions have been proven more than accurate in an episode that has deepened Mexico's polarization even more.

The Broad Popular Front (made up of the opposition Democratic Revolutionary Party, Workers' Party and grouping of parties known as the Convergencia) took over Congress in an attempt to block approval of President Calderón's decision—made in the shadows by the highest leadership levels and never opened to public debate—to privatize the oil industry. After 15 days the government was forced to agree to a period of public discussion on its oil proposals.

### **“Monstrous campaign”**

The takeover of Congress infuriated the governing National Action Party (PAN) and the powers that be in the worlds of big money and major media, and the dirty war reappeared. This time, using methods learned from fascism, the ultra-Right tried to discredit former presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, one of the most tenacious defenders of Mexican petroleum, by taking out paid TV ads comparing him to Hitler, Mussolini and Pinochet. The Mexican state institution in charge of elections, waited several days before applying the law and ordering this privately-paid political message off the air.

Bishop Raúl Vera declared that if the Secretariat of the Interior didn't put a stop to and investigate “the media's lynching campaign” it would be viewed as complicit. The president of the Federal District's Human Rights Commission warned that the messages spread hate and intolerance. The National Center for Social Communication—an organization that has worked on the side of the voiceless for decades—said the campaign was unethical, increasing polarization rather than encouraging dialogue. Many academics commented on the harm these messages did to democracy and the right to information, going beyond freedom of the press. Writer Carlos Monsiváis called it a “monstrous hate campaign, product of defamatory arrogance trying to pass itself off as freedom of expression.”

This behavior by the wealthy, particularly by the owners of the two Mexican television stations with national coverage, put the urgent need for a new media law back on the public agenda.

### **The long struggle for information**

Many groups have been involved in a long struggle to make the public's right to information a reality. Although the Mexican student movement of 1968 faced violent repression and jail, it set off a wave of grassroots mobilization in the years that followed, to which the political class saw the need to respond through political reforms that included recognition of this right. But while spaces were opened to new parties in the political sphere, the owners of big media outlets ensured that the right to information would remain a dead letter. Later, with the advent of neoliberal policies, the main public media were privatized—in a corrupt manner. Thus Televisión Azteca was born, in imitation of Televisa.

With the change of government in 2000 that ended the 70-year rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), civic groups that had been struggling to promote the right to information thought a propitious moment had arrived—especially since the new government convened a working group on media reform during the first months of its administration.

Two parallel processes ensued: a civil society working group and an official one in which the civic organizations had representation. Progress was thus made on discussing the issue and some agreements were reached. But after 14 months, the ambition of President Fox's wife put an end to the effort. In the belief that pleasing the media would ensure her own presidential candidacy, Martha Sahagún convinced her husband to give up most of the state's airtime, which shrank from 12.5% to just 1.5%. Time previously allocated for socially-oriented public communication thus became a little gift to the private media owners for their own commercial purposes.

Intellectuals, journalists and other communicators left the official working group in protest over the government's abusive and unilateral action. But civic groups took advantage of the work that had been done to present their proposed legislation to a group of sympathetic senators. This bill to democratize broadcasting, open up Televisa and Televisión Azteca's duopoly to new voices and strengthen public and social broadcasting made its way through the Senate, but the television stations had their own people in the legislature and bought others, preventing the legislation from reaching general discussion in the Senate.

#### **The abusive “Televisa Law”**

Meanwhile, Televisa's legal team was quietly putting together another legislative proposal. Just days before the presidential campaign began, it was pushed through the House of Representatives in a seven-minute transaction with no discussion. It was a moment when all parties wanted to ingratiate themselves with the media, in hopes of good treatment during the campaign. This bill, which became known as the Televisa Law, was the opposite of the one that had been put together in the Senate. It gave television broadcasters privileged treatment and violated citizens' right to be informed.

Once the bill was approved in the lower chamber, it needed Senate approval. The senators who had been working on the democratic media law opposed it, but they were a minority. The new law contained many unconstitutional elements, however, so over a third of the senators—from several parties—proposed filing a complaint with the Supreme Court that it was unconstitutional. These senators weren't alone; they were backed by a wide range of civic groups that were demanding the Court's intervention to throw out the abusive Televisa Law.

One of these groups was the Mexican Association for the Right to Information (AMEDI), which argues that all citizens should be able to exercise this right, although in practice it is conditioned by the market and the power of the media owners. AMEDI insists on the need to update the legal framework to reflect the fundamental harmony between freedom of expression and the right to

information.

#### **The necessary agenda**

AMEDI is supported by a variety of civic organizations with shared experiences and goals. Its position is that freedom of information means any person's real and effective right to investigate, receive, produce and disseminate information of any kind by any means. This, it explains, requires a full guarantee of the right to information, understood as any person's faculty to solicit and receive accurate, timely, diverse and sufficient information on any matter of public interest.

AMEDI's proclaimed mission is to promote the recognition of information as a good and a public right; guarantee respect for journalists' free exercise of their profession; guarantee access to information on public administration; guarantee the right of reply to all media as a civil defense mechanism; promote an explicit and public definition of media codes of ethics linking the exercise of free expression to social responsibility parameters; demand transparency in the government's exercise of its social communication function to benefit society at large; promote the rights and duties of the state, users, communicators, owners, and licensees of the media; demand transparent and equitable use of state time in radio and television (legal, fiscal and electoral); demand access for all citizens to information of public interest of any kind, in both public and private entities; promote the salvaging and preservation of the historical memory as part of the right to information; and promote the formation of plural organizations, with social participation, to oversee the norms related to the media.

AMEDI has declared that, as it is a social right, the right to information must be promoted and monitored by society itself.

#### **An historic decision**

The Supreme Court first rejected the executive branch's petition to ignore the charge of unconstitutionality made by a multi-party group of senators completing their terms in 2006. Examining the case a year later, however, the Court resolved that the Televisa Law reduced state decision-making capacity regarding the broadcast spectrum (the information transmitting waves used for television, radio and cellular phones). The Televisa Law also gave Televisa and Televisión Azteca privileged status with respect to automatic license renewal. The Court ruled that this was unconstitutional, since the state has the right to review the use of the broadcast spectrum, which is public property.

Groups defending the right to information saw the Supreme Court decision, which threw out most of the Televisa Law, as an historic event that obliged the legislative branch to reform telecommunications and broadcasting. An all-party

working group was formed in the Senate to draft the reform.

That group conducted various public consultations from October 2007 to January 2008, in which the Chamber of the Radio and Television Industry—representing the owners of the big media outlets and the Secretariats of the Interior and of Communications—gave the government point of view. The National System of Higher Education Institutions, the National Telecommunications Association, the International Association of Broadcasters and the representative of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico were heard, as was AMEDI and a number of other civil society groups.

#### **Profit, privilege and power**

During its presentation to the Senate working group, AMEDI emphasized that it was struggling for a reform that would reflect Mexicans' democratic aspirations. It asserted that the reform would be meaningless unless it contributed to building an authentic information society. It charged that the big media outlets had been captured by a handful of licensees and that the privilege of radio and TV broadcasting had been subordinated to the whim and convenience of political power. It showed that the content of many stations was being defined by profit rather than social responsibility and that an inability to deal with controversy and diversity had led the most influential media corporations to oppose militantly any opening that would encourage competition, especially open-access television.

The concentration of communications resources in a few hands had reinforced the power conferred by the privilege of access to a radio or television concession. That capacity for influence had made the main licensees into powers that were sometimes parallel to the state, and they had tried to set themselves above the legal institutional framework.

#### **Public and community**

AMEDI pointed out that in their desire for control, the communications consortia had managed to push through a reform that expanded the privileges they already had. It also denounced their attempts to subordinate important elements of the political class to their designs. The Supreme Court's intervention had stopped them, and it was time to proceed with genuine reform.

AMEDI noted that recent technological progress had made new information resources available, but their development in Mexico was limited and unequal. There had been no public policies broad enough to provide the majority of Mexicans with open, constant and quality access to these resources. The digital divide had added to other factors of social exclusion. AMEDI called for socially

inclusive legislation, with rules to ensure equity and participation. The new legislation had to be based on citizens' rights and define the public service function of radio and television. The broadcast spectrum must remain national property, taking advantage of information technology as much as possible. And finally, there should be an autonomous regulatory agency.

AMEDI came out in favor of genuinely public media. In the case of indigenous communities and peoples, it proposed granting rights according to constitutional principles under a transparent and simplified system. It emphasized that community media are the closest to citizens, responding to specific needs in the immediate environment and based on self-management in formation, operation and maintenance, characteristics the Mexican state ought to recognize.

#### No to monopoly

Since the Chamber of the Radio and Television Industry was recommending that the legislature ignore the Supreme Court justices' decision on the unconstitutionality of the Televisa Law, AMEDI argued that the Senate was obliged to respond to the Supreme Court decision.

The new legislation should regulate the administration of the airwaves, which are the property of the nation, and deal with the issue of content. Pluralism and prevention of media monopoly were important. There should be more channels in the hands of a variety of actors with diverse perspectives. If citizens had a number of information options, they wouldn't be able to distinguish between broadcasters that intentionally distort and manipulate events—as Televisa and Televisión Azteca habitually do—and those that behave professionally. AMEDI charged that according to the current regulations, commercial advertising was not supposed to occupy more than 18% of television's total broadcasting schedule and 40% for radio, but that, especially in television, broadcasters were not adhering to those percentages. The new legislation should have effective enforcement mechanisms. AMEDI made concrete proposals for sanctions: fines and loss of concessions.

#### A national coalition is born

Many elements for new legislation emerged during the discussions, but the powers that be exerted strong pressure to impede any new legislation. In February of this year, about fifty civic organizations decided to form the National Front for a New Media Law. When this coalition was formed, AMEDI called on the Senate to keep its word and deliver the new media legislation by the end of February. It claimed that legislators with ties to broadcasters were trying to delay the debate.

Meanwhile, broadcasters ridiculed the electoral reforms and ran paid political

propaganda disguised as soap operas, special programs or interviews. The coalition stressed the obligation to comply with the Supreme Court ruling, not only to rectify the existing laws but also to provide new legislation that incorporated the 23 recommendations made in the discussion and the ruling itself. It stressed that the real threat to liberty of expression was in the media's concentration in few hands.

#### **Televisa: A unique case**

Televisa is unique in the world for its control of so many frequencies. It owns four network television stations in the national capital and has the band space for four other national channels; it owns 56% of the country's commercial stations, 100% of its satellite television, 35% of fiber optics television and 38% of cable. Two companies, Televisa and Televisión Azteca, virtually control the entire national audience. There are 461 commercial TV channels in Mexico, 94% of which belong to these two corporations. Two thirds of advertising spending benefits Televisa and the rest goes to Televisión Azteca. The major electronic media have become enormous unelected powers that set themselves above constitutional powers, commercializing and denigrating politics and setting the public agenda with no accountability to anyone.

Given the behavior of these two companies, which refused to comply with the new electoral law, it was obvious that they weren't prepared to cede on any point, and that sanctions for failure to comply would be ineffective. The members of the new coalition agreed on a number of actions, including bombarding the legislators with emails and letters, and calling and visiting them. They also decided to prepare a questionnaire for legislators, asking their position on a new media law. There were even plans to collect signatures from the public.

Salvaging democracy means democratizing the media via legislation that guarantees the public interest and makes organized citizens a counterweight to the de facto powers. There can be no democracy unless citizens can fully exercise their right to be well informed. And that cannot happen if the current invisible censorship and distortion of facts by television continues.

#### **April: the time is now**

Those involved in the civic struggle called on legislators to make use of the historic opportunity to promote a new media law, underlining the urgency of legislating soon, before the session ended in April, since waiting until the September session would bring things too close to the federal election campaign for 2009, making it even harder to reach agreements. According to AMEDI, if the legislation didn't follow the solid proposals already put forward by civic organizations, citizens would continue to suffer the despotism of powerful media and the political class now fearful and obsequious towards

them.

It was time: either things would continue to be dictated by the big media corporations, which would get even stronger, or there would be progress toward democracy. The legislators had to decide if they were going to help recover democracy or carry the shame of having been accomplices and slaves of the opprobrious dictatorship. But while the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) was working on getting the new broadcasting law passed during the April session of congress, the PRI member heading the Radio, Television and Cinema Commission decided there was no time.

In early April, the National Front for a New Media Law met, in the belief that April would be decisive. It designed a strategy in which each of its members “adopted” a senator to lobby on everything related to the media law. In mid-April, it decided to commit the legislators publicly, inviting them to forums and events where they would have to state their positions. AMEDI, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Senate Radio and Television Commission organized an international forum on media reform.

It was an extremely important moment for Mexico; modern, democratic plural reform that would encourage diversity and make the most of technological innovation was in the offing. During the forum, the situation of the public media in various countries was compared. There were discussions of broadcast media pluralism, market concentration, competition and community media.

#### **It wasn't to be...**

Just at that moment the opposition staged a takeover of Congress to halt immediate approval of the oil privatization reforms. The oil issue took precedence, despite AMEDI's calls not to let the media hubbub over energy reform drown out the issue of the new media law. AMEDI found itself facing a challenge as the media question got caught up in the controversy over PEMEX, the new focus of all major national debate.

April drew to a close without the passage of any media legislation. AMEDI charged that the Senate had failed to fulfill its promise. Meanwhile, together with the National Front for a New Media Law, it worked out a new strategy to continue pushing for the legislation.

More lobbying was done, reiterating the senators' obligation to pass a new law. Flyers warned that the television company owners, not satisfied with the power and wealth they'd already acquired, were continuing to pressure Congress for more, and had managed to delay the new legislation again until September. They demanded that the guarantee of the right to communication

not be postponed indefinitely.

### We own the air

They also explained why the new law is required. Almost 100% of commercial channels are in the hands of the two companies. Commercial broadcasting forgets that all Mexicans own the “air,” broadcasting space that—like the forests, ocean and petroleum—is part of the national territory. While Mexican airspace is used only for business purposes, the most Mexicans have nowhere to express themselves and can’t hear each other. Parents worry about the inappropriate content broadcasted during children’s programming hours (violence, consumerism, discrimination, pornography). Advertising—much of it false—is increasing at the expense of programming. Mexicans have the right to form opinions and influence the type of information and entertainment they want and need. What Mexico thus needs is a national and local public radio and television system that respects audiences and offers them pluralism in education and information, and a space for genuine citizen communication.

### The true face

The government’s true face on the media legislation issue was demonstrated in another incident. As a member of the International Documentation Mission on attacks against journalists and the communications media, the vice president of the World Association of Community Radios (AMARC)—a Mexican woman who among other things defends indigenous people’s right to install, operate and manage their own media—visited the Public Prosecutor’s Office. When she touched on the issue of the killing of two indigenous communicators, the deputy prosecutor tried to discredit them by saying that the murdered women weren’t accredited journalists, but mere housewives. When the AMARC vice president took issue with the deputy prosecutor’s insulting statement—which came just as the women were being recognized elsewhere through the posthumous award of the National Prize for Journalism—he argued that the station where they worked was unauthorized and accused his interviewer of being an “enemy of the state.”

### Difficult times

It’s a grim situation. The powers that be have tried to prevent passage of legislation that favors citizens’ rights and the government is under the control of these powers. Only firm pressure from citizens can push legislators to approve the new legislation proposed by civic groups.

In a meeting in Paris in mid-2007, Jacques Juillard called for resistance against the “plutocratization” of society. He offered the electronic communications media as an example: a formidable concentration of power that has nothing to do with journalism. He said it isn’t the power of money that needs to be fought, but money’s exercise of power in arenas where it doesn’t belong: in science,

art, education, religion, sports and information. "Our spirit isn't merchandise," he concluded.

In an interview granted by semiologist Fernando Buen Abad in May 2008, he argued that we're suffering from the commercial mafia's kidnapping of the tools for producing communication. We need to expropriate them, because they're used to censor and kill the rebel spirit through an alienating aggression that benefits capitalism. These are the media troops of the oligarchies, armed with calumny, lies and corruption. Their intention is not to inform, but to win more promoters in their ideological war. A form of media terrorism is deforming our minds, so we have to take the territory where meaning is constructed.

The legislative debate has been carried over into a very difficult period for achieving agreements: the budget issue may use up all the legislators' energy. But all is not lost, because some legislators from all parties have been made aware of the issue and citizens' groups continue to work actively to raise awareness both among legislators and in society. Mexico needs a new media law like the one these groups propose.

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### All Powers Against Zapatista Autonomy

*The scale of the recent military mobilization against the Zapatista autonomous communities in Chiapas hasn't been seen for years. Army, police and paramilitaries are surrounding and intimidating the communities, provoking them and fabricating incidents between indigenous people and peasants. These aren't isolated events; the increased armed pressure is alarming, as is the lack of concern from the powers responsible for stopping them. This summary of what happened during the first seven months of the year is a way of sounding the alarm bell and calling for ever-vigilant solidarity.*

Jorge Alonso

Mexico's oppressing powers want to stop Zapatista autonomy from surviving and propagating. The illegitimate presidential power of the National Action Party (PAN), the power of the army, the powers of the government-promoted paramilitary groups, the power of the Democratic Revolution Party-run Chiapas state government, the local powers of both the PRD and the Institutional Revolution Party (PRI) and the media powers have all joined forces in an offensive to wipe out the Zapatista autonomous communities. They calculate

that this is the prior strategic step necessary to crushing the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) and its liberating project.

#### The current assault

In *envío* we have been noting the many attacks against the Zapatistas, with the anti-Zapatista offensive turning more aggressive so far in 2008. The following is not an exhaustive list, but rather a few examples of the current assault.

Since the beginning of the year, Zapatista grassroots leaders in several communities have received death threats and many communities have suffered threatening incursions from paramilitary groups that have stolen their animals and other belongings. In January, the new municipal mayors in took office in Chiapas state, with many of them announcing they would evict the autonomous communities from their territories. In Zinacantán the problem caused by a Zapatista community being dispossessed of a water spring persists. The Zapatista communities announced that they would defend their lands, even if it meant being jailed or killed.

In February, a brigade from the Federal Electricity Commission cut off the electricity to various Zapatista grassroots families at the instigation of paramilitaries. Municipal police attacked autonomous communities, and it was charged that a Zapatista had been intentionally run over and killed. Paramilitary groups that carry out highway assaults tried in vain to blame their misdeeds on the Zapatistas. That same month, grassroots Zapatistas held a man for several hours who claimed to be a reporter but was actually an agent of the federal government's Investigation and National Security Center, whose espionage work is supported by the state police. The "Heart of the rainbow of hope" Good Government Board denounced that women who had gone to bathe had been attacked by state police and the community had had to defend them. Many autonomous communities have reported helicopters constantly buzzing overhead and have been subjected to constant police and army patrols. It was also again charged that social programs are being used as part of the counterinsurgency plans.

Receiving only conflicts and pain from the government

In March, the civil organization Las Abejas accused both the federal official responsible for the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples and the Secretariat for Social Development of having entered the Acteal ceremonial center without its authorization. "They want to deceive us and buy our consciences to keep us quiet and say we have relations with and trust the government," it said. This organization pointed out that both the federal and state governments were waging a media campaign to deceive and confuse public opinion. That same month, the Zapatista Caracol number 5 felt

obliged to issue a communiqué drawing civil society's attention to the various problems the Zapatistas are suffering as a result of attacks on their autonomous progress. "The bad government wants to continue ignoring us and stripping us of our right to live and enjoy what mother earth gives us," it stated, also expressing its opposition to the high electricity costs and taxes levied on the land, "which should belong to those who work it."

The Zapatista communities are being pressured in many different ways to abandon their resistance. The "bad government" filled the paramilitaries with hatred so they would try to snatch away the Zapatista's right to the land. Recalling that the Zapatista struggle has brought advances for everyone, both indigenous and non-indigenous, the Caracol members recognized that the Zapatista struggle is receiving only "conflicts and pain" from the government.

In April, several Caracoles commemorated the memory of Emiliano Zapata through community events, while pressure by cattle ranchers looking to take the Zapatistas' lands away from them increased that same month and the federal government decided to put an end to the Coordination for Dialogue and Negotiation in Chiapas, arguing that it was unnecessary. The three levels of government (federal, state and municipal) have proposed penetrating Zapatista territory under the pretext of ecotourism projects. One Zapatista community complained about negligence and racism in a regional hospital that resulted in the death of a 72-year-old woman. It was also charged that the Government Secretariat had tried, unsuccessfully, to use indigenous grassroots Zapatistas to locate EZLN leaders.

#### **Threats and provocation**

At the end of April, some 500 armed men entered a Zapatista community, kicking down doors and flattening dwellings. They kidnapped several Zapatistas, who were later released following actions by human rights organizations. That same community also suffered at the hands of the police. Although the threats of dispossessing people of their land multiplied, Zapatista responses to defend them increased. The attacked communities described degrading treatment and deliberately-started fires.

In May, several Good Government Boards announced it was time to defend what belonged to them and that they had already begun to do it. They assured that the autonomy process was continuing in the autonomous municipalities despite the counterinsurgent aggression. The "Altos de Chiapas" Good Government Board exposed maneuvers to take away part of the territory in one of its towns, in a case that revealed how the federal authorities' application of agrarian programs created conflicts among the communities.

Toward the end of May there were charges of other police/military incursions

into Zapatista communities, with helicopters buzzing over and incursions by several vehicles from different corporations carrying people bearing large-caliber weapons who raided houses without a judicial order. Las Abejas accused the prosecutor of the Acteal case of threatening its leaders. In other communities, groups linked to the PRI attacked Zapatistas over a dispute about water and electricity. Officially the incident was referred to as a confrontation, but the “Heart of the rainbow of hope” Good Government Board rejected the claim that the Zapatistas had responded to the aggression. They said the Zapatistas had tried to negotiate, but that the PRI sympathizers were intransigent and provoked them.

#### Danger of a confrontation

At the end of May the Zapatistas informed civil society of military incursions in at least three regions of Chiapas. The aggression was intensifying. The Federal Environmental Protection Ombudsperson’s Office evicted peasants in Montes Azules, with federal police support. Meanwhile, the “La Garrucha” Caracol condemned a military operation in its territory. The military claimed it was looking for marihuana crops despite the fact the Zapatista authorities have demonstrated that drugs are neither grown nor used in their territories.

At the beginning of June, the Oventic Good Government Board predicted regrettable events if the aggression continued and complained about increased harassment from PRD sympathizers. But the harassment strategy and the military incursions against Zapatista communities did not stop. In El Carrizal women kept the army from passing, shouting that they wanted liberty, justice and democracy, not soldiers. The soldiers, however, threatened to return in a few weeks. The Zapatista authorities said they were particularly concerned because the provocation was quantitatively and qualitatively greater than before and the danger of confrontation was increasing. The Zapatistas decided to organize better surveillance and resistance in response to the threat of the military returning to their towns. Meanwhile, army patrols continued on a daily basis on the outskirts of the Zapatista communities.

#### The case of Huitepec Hill

Another serious conflict took place in the municipality of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Last year, the Zapatistas declared an area of 102 hectares on the Huitepec Hill a community ecological reserve. This year, the new PRI mayor threatened to evict the Zapatistas from that zone. In May, the “Central heart of the Zapatistas in front of the world” Good Government Board issued a communiqué to disseminate the news that “supposedly unknown” people had poisoned a well supplying a suburb of the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas. The board recalled that the Zapatista grass roots had been protecting the Huitepec ecological zone, but that the “bad government” had increased its harassment and without consulting them had decreed the supposed expropriation of the

same land they had declared an ecological reserve in order to create a protected natural area. In April some inhabitants of a settlement had complained that the water from the hill's wells was not being fairly distributed, in that they were not receiving enough water because they were poor even though they had been living there for a long time, while rich people who had arrived more recently were receiving an abundant supply. The Good Government Board told the complainants that the water was inside the Zapatista reserve and they would make sure it was also distributed to the poor.

### **The fight for water**

While doing an inspection, the Zapatistas had found a dozen people around the springs, whose leader aggressively refused to ask the Good Government Board for permission to use the springs. The board's representatives replied that this was no way to work things out and that they had to go before the board before doing any work on the reserve, explaining that it wasn't a question of taking water from them, but rather distributing it to the poor as well. When the head of the group insisted that they didn't care what the board said, the board's representatives realized it was impossible to reach an agreement with them. They called on the poor people living around Huitepec not to let themselves be deceived and repeated that the Zapatistas were fighting for the lives of the poor and of all good and honest people, and suggested they go to the Good Government Board to find a way to distribute the water that sprang from mother earth fairly. Regarding the possibility of poisoning, the Good Government Board announced it would study what substances had been introduced into the water, which was apparently contaminated with herbicides. PRI supporters from San Cristóbal de las Casas wanted to blame the Zapatistas, but couldn't prove that false accusation. It all added up to just one more provocation.

### **Ecological concerns?**

In mid-June a group from a neighboring PRI municipality tried to enter the Zapatista reserve on the pretext of wanting to plant trees, but with the real intention of taking control of the zone. As the Zapatistas keep up a constant rotating mobilization, the PRI sympathizers couldn't enter the protected area despite verbal confrontations and threats. It has been demonstrated in the press that the mayor's ecological concerns are pure deception, as he's more concerned about fostering exclusive land developments, many of which have threatened the city's aquifers. The Zapatistas, in contrast, have protected the zone with environmentalist ends.

In July the rumor spread that the municipal government would try to evict the Zapatistas from the area with federal support. The mayor was accused of "buying support" to remove the Zapatistas, who declared themselves ready to

resist their ejection from lands belonging to their ancestors.

#### **Hundreds of political prisoners**

Yet another process shook Chiapas during the first months of 2008. Several dozen prisoners in the state's prisons declared they would go on hunger strike until their rights were restored, as they had been deprived of their liberty without due process and had been subjected to torture and cruel and inhuman treatment to elicit self-incriminating declarations. Many demonstrations supported the hunger strikers in both Mexico and Europe.

Some of the prisoners were released at the end of March, while the others continued their struggle. The Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Committee (CDHFBC) proposed that the provisions included in international treaties signed by the Mexican government be considered domestic rights. The case highlighted the crisis in the Mexican penitentiary system and again spotlighted the case of two Zapatistas unjustly jailed in Tabasco for a crime they didn't commit. These two men, whom the government tried to use to pressure the Zapatistas, also joined the hunger strike. The "Roberto Barrios" Good Government Board then charged that the two had been transferred from Tabasco to a prison in Chiapas and the CDHFBC demanded their release. At the end of May, human rights defenders denounced the cruel treatment received by the two men, who were qualified as political prisoners.

The two Zapatistas were released at the beginning of June, having unjustly served 12 years in prison. The newspaper *La Jornada* recalled that the governor of Chiapas had recognized at the beginning of his administration that hundreds of indigenous people—many linked to the Zapatista movement—were in prison for political reasons, sentenced in judicial processes plagued with irregularities. He had promised to review hundreds of cases identified as examples of repression, but had done so only partially, and very slowly. In July, the CDHFBC, as one of the defenders of political prisoners, suffered persecution, aggression and death threats from paramilitary elements.

#### **Support for the "indigenous autonomous laboratory"**

The Zapatistas are not alone. Mobilizations have been organized to support them in various European cities. In Athens, an international Zapatista meeting declared its opposition to the Mexican government's assault on the Zapatista communities and demanded that the San Andrés Accords be honored and political prisoners released. Anarchist groups issued a communiqué declaring that the Zapatistas' struggle "against the oppressive and exploiting state of affairs, both in Mexico and the rest of the world, is an example of an indigenous autonomous laboratory where true democracy is exercised by everyone for everyone." They considered the Zapatista's fight an expression of

the global social war at many levels against all forms of exploitation and domination and against the decomposition of everything human.

On its sixth visit to Mexico, the International Civil Commission of Human Rights Observation (CCIODH) analyzed the threats against the Zapatista communities. It sustained that there was governmental responsibility for the Acteal massacre, despite which no justice had been done after so many years, allowing the impunity to continue. It confirmed that Zapatista peasants had been attacked and tortured and on presenting the report of its sixth visit warned of the “extremely critical” human rights situation in Mexico. It also expressed its profound concern over the police and military incursions into Zapatista communities. Meanwhile, other human rights organizations demonstrated that the military mobilization in Chiapas was of a magnitude not seen in years.

The military siege  
is beginning to squeeze

The Chiapas Center for Political Analysis and Social and Economic Research (CAPISE) specified that the greater militarization and attacks on the Zapatista grass roots is the government’s response to the Zapatista’s decision to organize the Other Campaign across Mexico to build alternatives to the prevailing situation. It confirmed that the offensive against the Zapatista towns had increased and *Subcomandante Marcos* had gone back into hiding, with the army increasing its presence in the Zapatista territories under the pretext of fighting drugs. Finally, with the exception of *La Jornada*, the government had achieved media silence on the militarization and constant attacks on Zapatista communities.

Since President Felipe Calderón took office, 79 military camps have been established in Chiapas, 56 of which are in indigenous territory, 90% of them containing special troops supported by paramilitary elements. The paramilitaries consist of indigenous people, with the idea of facing them off against the Zapatistas to make it appear that the problems are caused by inter-community conflicts. The government has launched military operations against civilian Zapatista authorities and is closing its pincers with the construction of new highways to further squeeze the Zapatista zone by a military siege. The government strategy also includes the “smoke screen” of environmental protection. Meanwhile, civil organizations supporting the Zapatista communities have worn themselves down with campaigns to free political prisoners, only some of whom have been freed. According to CAPISE, the deployment of military forces has been alarmingly redefined against the Zapatistas. The tactical and military deployment responds to a logic of regular and irregular war, and is penetrating into free zones in which “a supposed enemy” is moving. The army is violating the free zones,

closing off the space for free movement that should exist in times of truce and peace, blocking the space for civil and peaceful struggle proposed by the Zapatista towns and proving itself intransigent against peoples building a comprehensive project around indigenous self-determination.

We are thus seeing the true face of an imposed government that represses and dispossesses with scandalous impunity. The new offensive focuses very specifically on the EZLN, the Zapatista civil authorities, their grassroots support and the Other Campaign.

#### **The smell of war**

*La Jornada* journalist Luis Hernández Navarro has written about the new government provocation against the Zapatista movement. Although the government has tried since 1994 to discredit the Zapatistas by linking them to drug trafficking, it has failed because the Zapatistas prohibit the planting, trafficking and using of drugs. They don't even allow alcohol to be drunk or sold in their territories.

The new, crude attempt by the country's governors to link the Zapatista movement to organized crime seeks to exploit the wave of national resentment against drug trafficking, trying to erode the currents of favorable opinion toward the Zapatistas and then deal them a definitive blow. The Zapatistas have told the government that dishonest people, terrorists and drug traffickers are not in the Zapatista zones, "but are mixed up with the bad government."

Hernández Navarro reported that the army mounted one of its most dangerous provocations in a site that had just been visited by *Subcomandante Marcos*. From La Otra Jovel, Eugenia Gutiérrez sent out an article she titled "The Subcomandante's sense of smell." Half a year after Marcos said he could smell war, the aggression against the Zapatistas and the whiff of war have greatly increased, as all the above sources and others have documented and videotaped. But even though they are expecting a real military offensive, the communities go on with their daily life.

#### **A year of abuse**

In May 2008, the CDHFBC published its annual analysis of human rights in Chiapas, covering the period from March 2007 to March 2008. It records forced evictions such as in Montes Azules, where aggression against communities that had been settled there for various decades was documented. It tells not only of evictions, but also of murders, displacement, material damages, the disappearance of whole village populations and the social fragmentation of the organizations that possessed the land. All of these actions were perpetrated by government officials. It documents the criminalization of social protest and notes that the institutional machinery provokes nonconformity, protest and

resistance, then modifies the penal legislation and harasses social fighters, violating the most basic human rights. The government equates social fighters with criminals and opposes those who defend human rights.

The struggle of the political prisoners to demonstrate their innocence has revealed the inefficacy and politicization of the justice system. However, the fact that several did achieve freedom with support from civic mobilizations shows that acting in solidarity can counter the criminalization of social protest. The CDHFBC drew up a long list that shows how human rights violators are recycled into new political power posts and how those responsible for the genocidal policy in Chiapas continue to be concealed.

#### **They are not isolated acts**

There's a new offensive against the population to guarantee the right conditions for the economic powers to accumulate greater wealth. Amid human rights violations the new political class has betrayed the democratic will in order to favor a few at the cost of the majority.

Following its report, the CDHFBC registered a record number of military and police incursions into communities in Chiapas, responding to a counterinsurgency logic in which a mixture of military, police and local actors operate in tactical deployments against territories with a civilian population organized around just social demands. The testimonies mention raids and physical and verbal aggression. The now numerous documented operations show the intensification of the counterinsurgency plan with the discrediting of organizations and communities in order to win support for the government from the civilian population, establishing a climate of psychological harassment through territorial deployment and reconnaissance, which also allow observation of the population's capacity to respond to such operations. The military incursions are assisted by federal, state and local actors and aren't isolated acts. They respond to the logic of an offensive against indigenous populations in resistance.

In June, retired Supreme Court Justice Juventino Castro y Castro said he could see a revival of the crime of "social dissolution." Meanwhile, a public manifesto from social fighters and personalities pointed out that the government and the Right are trying to criminalize solidarity, conscience, critical thinking and social research to proscribe and destroy the long tradition of brotherhood that has characterized the Mexican people.

#### **Solidarity of the MST**

Gustavo Esteva, an academic committed to grassroots struggles, drew attention to the fact that the situation had reached its limit: faced with the aggression towards its communities, the Zapatistas were being left no other

option than armed defense. Indigenous law specialist Magdalena Gómez considered that the recent operations by the army and various police forces in the territory occupied by the Zapatista Good Government Boards demonstrate the decision to break down the arena for indigenous government that has been constructed. She insisted that civil society has to question why there are no arenas for dialogue at any level. Congress' Concord and Pacification Commission is little more than a moldy old relic, so there's no reason for civil society to wait with its arms crossed while the Zapatista communities are brutally attacked.

At the beginning of July, the Rural Landless Workers Movement of Brazil expressed its indignation at and total rejection of the military incursions into the Zapatista communities. This social movement fears that the Mexican state will declare open war and try to legitimize it, while its real objective is to destroy the Zapatista National Liberation Army. Movement spokespeople warned that if the government continued attacking the Zapatista communities, their important movement would use all means available to generate mobilizations in solidarity with the Zapatistas and in repudiation of the Mexican state's military and repressive policy. The Brazilian Landless demanded that the Mexican government withdraw its armed forces detached to the conflict zone in Chiapas.

Meanwhile, over 200 groups from different parts of the world demanded that the Mexican government cease its aggression against the Zapatistas and lamented the Mexican media's conspiratorial silence. A group of democratic lawyers in Mexico delivered a letter to the embassies of France, Italy, Denmark and Germany calling on those respective European Union member governments to recommend that the Mexican government respect the law and stop using the army to attack and harass the Zapatista communities. They pointed out that such harassment violates the Law for Dialogue, Conciliation and Dignified Peace in Chiapas approved by Congress years ago, as well as the different international human rights instruments.

### The new way of doing politics

Gilberto López y Rivas, who has many years of experience studying autonomy, has reflected on the proposal for a new democracy through autonomy. He's convinced that the Zapatistas have transcended and intensified self-government based on "commanding by obeying"; rotating positions of authority; revoking mandates; planning programmed participation in which women and young people participate, not just male adults; equitably and sustainably reorganizing the economy; adopting an anti-capitalist political identity; and seeking alliances. The Zapatistas have introduced a qualitative change into autonomies, taking control of their territory by extending the power from below, implying a rupture with the old ways of doing politics.

The Zapatistas view politics as something so serious it can't be placed in the hands of professional politicians, so have created another collective way of doing politics. They promote a multiethnic network of different communities, regions and peoples and concern themselves with reaching beyond inter-community conflicts over boundaries and resources, providing united responses to the pounding they receive from states and capitalist organizations. They are creating an autonomous subject that guarantees internal cohesion through consensus-building and a truly participatory, authentic democracy, attempting to overcome ethnic and political divisions and fighting corruption and the state's attempts at cooption. This new subject propels the mobilization of peoples and communities in defense of their rights and demands.

López y Rivas stresses that this kind of autonomy is a long way from the stereotypes of autarchy that some have tried to saddle the Zapatistas with. Autonomous processes produce substantial changes, reject the modernizing acculturation and traditionalist withdrawal and genuinely defend the common good, solidarity and respect for nature, reaching beyond the limits of ethnicity. That is the autonomy that the powerful, with the Mexican state at the head, would like to completely destroy by attacking the Zapatistas.

The Zapatistas constantly seek the peaceful way

Philosopher Luis Villoro has insisted that the Zapatistas are seeking a democracy that has no room for violence or repression. And they have effectively been consolidating a project to build a world in which we all fit. With a cry of "Enough is enough!" they broke onto the scene through military action in 1994, but soon accepted the call from broad sectors of national and international civil society to make space for an exchange of words instead of letting their weapons do the talking. They set out on the road of dialogue, achieved the signing of the San Andrés Accords in 1996, but were betrayed by the government. They tried out all of the institutional paths until 2001, when the whole of the Mexican state—with the agreement of the executive, legislative and judicial branches and all the main political parties—betrayed them via the deceitful Indigenous Law, which turned its back on the essential points of the San Andrés Accords.

Since then, they have opted to build their own spaces of autonomy. With the exception of the first few weeks of January 1994, the path they have taken has been wholly peaceful. Their decision has been radical by building a new social conscience that respects dignity, ensures participation for everyone, achieves in-depth democracy and seeks justice.

The Zapatistas have been heroic in adopting the peaceful way, but we all know that there is such a thing as legitimate defense. The oppressing powers have been attacking them and pushing them into a corner until their only way out is legitimate defense. The situation is very critical, but we can still stop that vital plant that is the Zapatista movement from being uprooted from the earth.

#### Time is running out

The objective of this whole summary has been to increase awareness among those interested in human rights and concerned with preventing the violation of human dignity so they can find ways to stop the serious aggression being unjustly suffered by the exemplary Zapatista communities.

If they were to be massacred, the historical reversal would be very severe and would open the way for a cruel repression of attempts to provide a better life for the majority of people. The predatory project of the oppressive powers has to be stopped by raising our voices, exposing them to the whole world, and imagining and implementing actions that guarantee the peaceful expression of Zapatista autonomy. And we have to hurry, because time is running out.

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#### Mezcala: A Mirror and a Heart

*As the bicentennial of Mexico's independence approaches, Mezcala's volcanic lake, island and lands are once again proving irresistible to federal, state and municipal governments. But the consciousness of Mezcala's Coca people is more deeply rooted in its ancestral past, a history of resistance and pride in its indigenous identity. It is defending its beautiful lands, resisting, protesting and creating autonomy.*

Jorge Alonso

The struggles of a great variety of peoples for their autonomy demonstrate a long-term desire that constantly transforms both the group and the reality in which they live. This is the case of Mezcala's indigenous community, which lives alongside Mexico's largest lake, Lake Chapala, in the state of Jalisco. The community maintains a centuries' old resistance strategy in defense of its lands and its rights, constantly adapting to changing circumstances without bowing down to them.

One threat to the communal lands has to do with the attempt of the Poncitlán municipal authorities to impose an Urban Development Plan on Mezcala by means of which those in government want to award themselves the right to decide on the use and enjoyment of this land without consulting the people or

asking the community's assembly for permission.

Another pitfall that the Coca people of Mezcala have discovered is that having lost their language and traditional dress, the Jaliscan authorities are unwilling to recognize them as an indigenous people. They perceive this as another attack and insist that they don't need that legal recognition to continue being what they in fact are.

#### **Founded by the Aztecs**

Mezcala's inhabitants are proudly aware of their origins. A sign at the entrance to the town announces that Mezcala was founded by a group of Aztecs who stayed behind on their journey to the valley of Mexico. They are proud of the pre-Columbian pottery found on their lands, a cave, their cave paintings and petroglyphs and some huge stones on the hill that evoke their religious beliefs about rain. They are especially proud of the island the town faces.

The town is protected by a huge mountain on the lake's shore and its inhabitants have known how to take advantage of its barely accessible topography to preserve their traditions. Nonetheless, they've been adept at hybridization, incorporating new elements into their culture without letting them take over. It is said that their festivals date back to before the Spanish conquest but they've clothed them with the Catholic saints' days and added on the national independence holidays.

In the early 1990s President Salinas' modification of Article 27 legalized the sale of land belonging to ejidatarios (members of Mexico's communal farming system known as ejidos) or held communally. Hence pressure grew on Mezcala's communal landholders to sell their land, highly desirable for tourist projects due to the beauty of the place, but they have been steadfastly opposed to privatization and have not accepted the Procede and Procecom programs, the first an official program legalizing *ejida* I rights and titling individual lots and the second a version of the same program for communal land. With the arrival of the rightwing National Action Party (PAN) to Jalisco's state government, moves to privatize the countryside gained momentum. Moreover, with the complicity of one of the community members, a person close to the first PAN governor occupied part of the communal mountain forest, blessed with a view of the lake, towards the end of his administration. Since then the community members have begun mobilizing local society and waging a legal struggle against this man, who is protected by powerful politicians.

#### **It's a sacred place**

In 2002 the community suffered another incursion by the government and business people who want its land. Rather than build a highway following the

old road alongside the lake, their plan crossed the communal hill to open up the land for subdivisions and tourism, obviously hoping to attract foreign investment.

With such pressure increasing, the community's resistance has also increased. The community members looked for allies in their fight to preserve their land and traditions and found them in the National Indigenous Council. They have particularly strengthened their ties with the Wixaritari (Huichols), who regard Lake Chapala as a sacred place, which they visit from far away to make offerings to it in exchange for water and life.

The Mezcala community enthusiastically joined the Zapatistas' Other Campaign, and when Subcomandante Marcos visited Jalisco in May 2006 the community took part in massive Other Campaign events. They introduced themselves as the Coca indigenous community, a historic people, owners of their own territory. They said their identity was established in ancient documents, but also that they knew their identity through their parents, grandparents and all those who had fought for land and freedom in the area. With pride in their indigenous origins, the community maintained that Mezcala was a nation that had always been in the Other Campaign. On that occasion they stated that, as members of the Other Campaign, they put no hope in Mexico's presidential races every six years. They weren't looking for a President or a political party but rather a solution to their problems, and their experience had convinced them that they would achieve this from the bottom up, rediscovering their indigenous roots, defending their land and rebuilding their communal vision and behavior.

#### Relying on the support of other peoples

In November 2006 the Mezcala community organized a National Forum in Defense of Mother Earth and the Autonomy of Indigenous Nations, an event where they consolidated relationships with other indigenous peoples around the defense of water, maize, land, traditional medicine and self-government. The Mezcalan community members said that if two centuries ago 400 indigenous people had successfully opposed 8,000 men of the Spanish Royal Army, today thousands of indigenous people would rout those who wanted to strip them of their land and customs.

In March 2007, in the meeting of the National Indigenous Congress in the Central Pacific region, the Mezcala community took part under the name of the Coca people. At the end of this meeting the participating peoples issued the Tuxpan Declaration, which highlighted the constant attacks and harassment that indigenous peoples experience from political parties and churches that work on the side of big money to weaken and divide their assemblies,

authorities and cultures. Included among the accusations of all the participating groups was the Coca people's charge that their communal forest was being turned into a motocross race track with backing from municipal authorities and motorcycle clubs in the state of Jalisco. The clubs had set themselves up on the community's land against the community members' wishes, using their land as if it were a private amusement park and causing huge environmental damage.

In the Tuxpan Declaration the signers announced they would continue to strengthen their de facto autonomy in order to continue existing. The declaration was signed by indigenous peoples from the states of Morelos, Durango, México, Colima, Guerrero and Jalisco.

A controversial celebration On November 25 last year, the Mezcala community again invoked history and their dead to state publicly that they were not selling their land but defending it. They objected that every November 25 their town was taken over by municipal and governmental officials who arrived to celebrate the battle waged on the island during the war of independence. They complained that those people were forgetting that today's townspeople are the legitimate descendants of that resistance, and insisted that their ancestors' struggle hasn't ended. It's not only the communal hill of Mezcala that's in danger but also the historic island where their ancestors fought for four years in the war of independence and weren't defeated, despite the superior military technology of the royal armies. Jalisco's PAN government wants to see the island as government property and, using the pretext of preparing for the official bicentennial independence celebrations in 2010, the state and municipal governments began public works on the island, without consulting the community.

The idea put forward by the government representatives was to invite Mexico's President to the island for one of the bicentennial celebratory acts. The members of the community have invited Oaxaca's indigenous peoples to attend the 2008 commemorative forum of the island's resistance. On their own account and with their own means they've been organizing their own celebration of the bicentennial, separate from state authorities at every level.

#### We're owners, not bits of folklore

Although the community has existed since before the arrival of the Spanish, those on high, immersed in their bicentenary independence celebration programs, are trying to avoid recognizing the indigenous community. The community members protest that they want to impose an external form of government when they already have their own system. Those on high want to sideline the community's traditional government so they can implement changes in land use.

In December 2007 the community had to raise its voice against the work beginning to be done on the island without its consent. They opposed the plan to convert the place into a special tourist center for foreigners where native people would just be objects of folklore and curiosities in the landscape. They objected to the use of heavy machinery without the needed authorization or environmental feasibility studies and especially the failure to consult with the community. Emphasizing their ownership of lands, mountains, water and monuments, the indigenous people accused the municipal, state and federal authorities of violating international treaties protecting the right of indigenous cultures to their own cosmovision.

An impartial expert sided with the members of the community, confirming that the works being built on the island were inappropriate, plagued with oversights, omissions and negligence, such as the demolition of part of the fort's defense structure and the absence of criteria in separating rubble from remains and of a comprehensive architectural and archeological plan.

#### **We won't sell our heart**

The community members have said that the island is the heart of their community and the authorities are trying to turn it into a product for the tourist business. In November 2007 the community members issued a proclamation: "Our ancestors' blood pulses and lives on Mezcala Island; here the memory of our people takes refuge and here we affirm our identity as an ancient nation. Every November 25 our history walks through the town, the lake, the island, accompanied by our dead ancestors who arise and whisper in our ears about how we should care for our lands, our inheritance... We will not sell the land; rather we shall defend it as the closest remembrance that joins us to them."

#### **Mezcala is a mirror**

At the beginning of 2008 the Mezcala indigenous community members' General Assembly, their traditional authority, invited indigenous peoples and civil society to a forum to discuss, analyze and denounce the actors and promoters of the land invasion to steal lands that have belonged to them since time immemorial. The meeting was held next to where a businessman from Guadalajara had built a luxury home on community land. By denouncing the theft of their lands they showed that what's happening in Mezcala is a mirror reflecting very indigenous nation in the country.

There was a lot of support for the Mezcala community from representatives of peoples in the National Indigenous Congress and from people in Jalisco involved in the Other Campaign. On explaining their problems to representatives of other indigenous peoples, the Mezcala community members

said they found themselves facing “a new war of conquest” and were very aware of what their grandparents had taught them. They were using that wisdom to design their resistance, their struggle and their own plans for coexistence with that territory.

#### **“We have suffered the same”**

At the end of the event the participants released the following declaration: “Here in the Mezcala community in Jalisco, the P’urhepecha, Wixárika and Nahua indigenous peoples of the states of Jalisco and Michoacan, during the commemoration of the Vice-regal Land Treaty, manifest our complete rejection of the shameless federal, state and municipal governments, who in league with business people and caciques, aim to strip our Coca brothers from Mezcala of their resources, historical heritage and land. We know from our own experience that hidden behind supposed objectives such as “progress,” “environmental and archaeological conservation” or “development,” one finds the desires of the powerful to exploit for their own benefit the resources of our peoples and communities, still protected because of our century’s old resistance.

“We recognize that throughout history our Mezcala brothers have been one of the strongest nations to have led the indigenous struggle for dignity and help preserve the integrity and identity of our country with their blood. Because of this it is doubly outrageous that Jalisco has not even awarded them the status of Indigenous People, or at least recognized them as the legitimate owners of their lands and territory, including the waters of Lake Chapala and Mezcala island, which they have defended for generations.

“We, the communities present at this event, have also suffered the attacks that capitalist and now globalized interests engage in against our Nations and against the resources that traditionally form part of our cultures, from genetic material to our forests, water, minerals and land, in their attempt to sell it all, wanting to extend the damage already caused by this market logic to the whole world in opposition to our sacred vision of care of and responsibility towards our Mother Earth.”

#### **The right to our autonomy**

The National Indigenous Congress member nations that joined in solidarity with the Mezcala community members also came out against the Mexican state’s neoliberal policies and against militarization and paramilitarization, since on the pretext of fighting organized crime, soldiers and police invade indigenous territories and protect those stealing from their peoples.

They raised their voices against the illegal means of appropriation being used by wealthy nationals and foreigners to plunder the nations’ resources. They

opposed so-called environmental projects which, forcing ecotourism projects and scientific research on them, help wrest away control of their territories, resources and knowledge from indigenous peoples by introducing bio-prospecting measures that end up awarding to huge transnationals patents and intellectual property rights over resources belonging to these peoples and the whole of humanity.

### **They are the Coca people's lands**

As another way of defending their autonomy, the Mezcala community members prepared a communal statute in 2008 in which they insist they are an ancient nation that has been there since time immemorial. They refer to their primordial title, which shows them to be the rightful owners of the water, lands, forests, hills and island. They stress that no law, person or government can dispossess them since they are the absolute owners with permanent legitimate rights. The statute is based on principles that protect the indigenous community's lands, territory, island and natural resources; govern their communal, agrarian, social and economic organization; and lay the foundations for running their own institutions, which taken together form part of the community's traditional government.

In the terms of the ILO's Convention No. 169 on indigenous peoples in independent countries, these people indeed belong to the Coca nation. The issue doesn't lie exclusively with their dress or language. They are descendants of populations that lived in the country during the time of the Conquest and maintain their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions. They apply their uses and customs or their customary law but observe the fundamental rights defined by national and international law and respect the general spirit of those laws. They participate in the administration, conservation and use of the resources on their lands and preserve the characteristics of the transmission of rights to the community's own lands.

**Woodlands,  
hills, plants, animals...**

**streams,**

Their organizational structure is communal, with a general assembly of community members as the highest decision-making body in the community. From antiquity to the present day they have used the land and water collectively to benefit the whole community. According to their laws, the interests of the whole community prevail over individual interests; they favor the community's development based on the development of all its members, they maintain social unity and identity as a community by protecting and promoting their institutions with particular emphasis on their main festivals, historical and archeological monuments, customs and history. They defend as their own the community goods recognized and confirmed by the presidential resolution published in August 1971 as well as the lands they've historically

possessed and that were legally recognized by the Spanish colonial government in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

The lands belonging to the Mezcala community members enjoy special protection that makes them inalienable, enduring and immune to embargo. The community not only owns the land and Mezcala Island, but also all the natural resources found therein.

Referring to article 13 of ILO Convention 196, the community's territory consists of the entire habitat of the area it occupies or uses, and this includes land, forests, water, streams, springs, sacred places, hills, valleys, plains, hillocks, gullies, plants, fungi, animals, corn patches, settlements, maguey patches, stones and other communally used resources. For this reason it establishes that any subdividing of the communal wooded areas will be null and void.

#### **Defending the environment**

There is great awareness of the need to conserve the area's ecology. The Convention states that all activities carried out by the community for the exploitation, use and conservation of its natural resources must make every effort to achieve sustainable management; ecological balance; protection and preservation of the environment, ecosystems and biodiversity; and ensure full autonomy to the communal nucleus in managing these resources. Any exploitation of the community's natural resources should take into account the type of protection they should have, valid ecological criteria, possible environmental impact, instruments and policies of ecological planning and the natural vocation of the resource to be exploited.

Given the special relationship that the community has always maintained with its communal lands, the plants, fungi and animals found there enjoy special protection; they are considered crucial to satisfying the community's needs. The common lands cannot be granted to an individual communal member and will be subject to the care and administration of the common goods commissariat and the oversight committee to guarantee their common interest and protect them from use by anybody outside the community. The privatization, rent or sale of springs, dams or riverbanks is banned and nobody can use them for their personal use, only for community use.

#### **"Our nation comes from way back"**

The people in the community are proud of their indigenous identity, defense of the land, self-government and preservation of their historical memory. Most of the young people are on the side of the elders and the community stresses that to feel they are indigenous it is enough for them to know they are and defend this identity.

In May 2008 the Mezcala community contacted the UN Commissioners for Indigenous People's Rights to tell them they shared the poor conditions of other indigenous nations in Mexico, because of the Mexican state's neglect and abuse. They also said the Mexican state did not recognize their community as Coca people, claiming the Coca nation is extinct because neither its language nor its dress have survived.

#### **They won't cut our roots**

The Mezcala community refutes these arguments as follows: "Our nation, our elders laugh at the government's words because we don't need their approval to tell our children and the general population that our nation comes from way back and that what we have, our lands, our islands, our forests, our traditional authorities, our dances, festivals and customs represent our ancestors' heritage."

The Mezcala community also told the UN about the heart of their community, the powerful symbol of their history of resistance and the perilous situation in which it finds itself. They introduced another important issue about the island: the governmental plan to eliminate the island's origin and ignore the worship of Ytzollanlzentzi that has taken place there since time immemorial. While the government wanted to restore the stones, the community "saw their ancestors' memories, words and blood." The Mezcala community members complained that the authorities mock their nation's history but warned that while the government was cutting the community's leaves, branches and even part of the trunk, it forgot that the roots are what give it strength and life.

#### **Memory's interviews with those absent**

**workshops**

**and**

This September the community members continued their struggle in defense of their communal land against invaders or strawmen. Knowing the importance of keeping their community's historical memory alive, they ran workshops to reinforce this memory among all their members, from the elderly to the children. They are determined that the Mezcala community should talk and write books. They are also imaking an inventory of the flora, fauna and natural resources and making a video to publicize community life. And as half of the old community members have died, they have promoted a new process to renew the community members, receiving dozens of youngsters into their ranks.

In the community they have kept up a careful communication with the "absent children," immigrants in the United States. Population growth and the lake's pollution have increased emigration, especially to the north. The migrants send money back, which is used to build houses in the community, and remain

united by the main religious festival, that of the Virgin of the Assumption. The “absent children’s organization” is well connected to the communal structure.

Following the Zapatista tenet of “walking and questioning,” they have incorporated the whole population in the dynamic of defending their autonomy and started a consultation in September between the resident population in Mezcala and the absent children to analyze all the problems they are currently experiencing.

#### **“Our dead surround us and whisper”**

The Mezcala community members look at the example of what happened to other ejidatarios in neighboring towns along the lakeshore, particularly Chapala and Ajijic. As a result of the pressures of capitalist tourism, which holds out the carrot of job creation, these neighboring communities sold their lands one by one and are now underpaid servants to strangers and foreigners in what were once their own lands. The Mezcalans do not want to make the same mistake. Most of them want to keep their community free, although a few are dazzled by the money on offer.

But the community organization continues strong and acts as a brake on community disintegration. The community members have repeatedly denounced the intentions of authorities and individuals. They remind others that their dead watch with distress the trickery by both government authorities and academics, who promise a progress that excludes the place’s inhabitants, its true owners. The Coca elders say that the warriors who died two hundred years ago surround us and whisper in the ears of the living: “Remember you are our children; cry out that our story isn’t over.”

#### **With them and like them**

Mezcala is experienced in local resistance to outside invasions by those from above and by neoliberal globalization. This resistance has been historically successful, putting a halt to government pretensions to act without its permission. The Mezcala community is aware it has the support of many centuries behind it. On the shore of Mexico’s most important lake, its members continue their anti-capitalist search and their long struggle for autonomy.

There are other groups of indigenous peoples, peasants, neighborhood residents, young people and women just like Mezcala’s community members in many corners of Mexico whose daily lives resemble theirs. Like them, they are looking to free themselves from the molds imposed on them by the state and capitalism.



## Zapatistas Organize the First Global Festival of Dignified Rage

*The Zapatistas called a festival so that all dignified rages in the world could come together, meet, talk and listen to each other. The idea was to discover the plurality of rages and accept the differences involved in experiencing them. The festival's conclusion was to "make a deal to fight together for the whole and for what corresponds to each and every one."*

Jorge Alonso

Last September, the Zapatistas announced that they were making preparations to hold the First Global Festival of Dignified Rage. Given the intention of those above to impose their calendar of death and their geography of destruction, and faced with the sermon of defeat, capitulation and resignation, those below—the exploited, dispossessed and marginalized, those expelled from the countryside or even their country—would express themselves in their own languages of rage and dignity.

### There is rage across the world

Three years after the Sixth Declaration from the Laonda Jungle, the Zapatistas were encountering so much rage and dignity that it confirmed their options for them. They were convinced that if the approaching catastrophe could be avoided and humanity had another chance, it would only be because there was resistance from below and on the left and because the profile of another world was being sketched out there. They noted that the tedium brought on by political classes' cynicism and incompetence had been turning into rage. Often, when that rage flowed down the same old paths, it ran up against disillusion. For "those above" in the North, war was still a favored tool of international diplomacy. The planet, sick and tired of such avarice, was now paying us back in kind with its destruction. In Mexico, the Zapatistas were seeing peasants imprisoned with scandalous sentences for defending the earth; in Italy, those opposing the installation of military bases were being persecuted; in Greece those above viewed the youth as a vice that had to be eradicated; and in Mexico young people were being criminalized and killed. There is rage in the world.

The Zapatistas explained that this rage was neither bravura or malice, but rather grew out of wounded dignity. It was also creative, as it pointed towards the transformation of the situation. The Zapatistas saw many differences among all those different dignified rages, but all were caused by a common aggressor: the capitalist system, which is above all the destroyer of dignities. To create an arena for these rages to come together, the Zapatistia National Liberation Army (EZLN) invited those who were rebelling in Mexico and in the world to a festival to commemorate the 25th anniversary of its birth, the 15th

anniversary of the start of the war against oblivion, the 5th anniversary of the functioning of the Good Government Boards and the 3rd anniversary of The Other Campaign.

#### **First and second stages**

The first stage of the festival took place in Mexico City on December 26-29, 2008. A total of 270 speakers from 57 collectives in 25 countries gave presentations at 39 locations, while another 1,155 people from 228 organizations from 27 states of the Mexican Republic presented their political and cultural proposals in 109 places. Around 2,500 people turned up every day, in addition to about a hundred artistic groups that shared their music, theater, dance, stories, poems, paintings, films, videos and photography related to the struggles in Mexico and the world. During the mornings, workers, peasants, indigenous groups, urban dwellers, political collectives from across the broad leftist spectrum and academics discussed the four wheels of capitalism (exploitation, dispossession, repression and disdain), and then in the afternoons turned their attention to the “other paths” (another city, other social movements, another history and another form of politics). This stage concluded with a statement condemning the Israeli army’s massacre of the Palestine people in Gaza.

For the second stage, the event moved to the Oventic Caracol in Chiapas, to celebrate with the Zapatistas the 15th anniversary of the EZLN’s public debut. Convoys from Mexico and other countries were met by Comandante Domingo and Comandanta Florencia. The central message was given by Comandantes David and Javier, who warned that the indigenous peoples that had proposed fighting for a better and more human world were being persecuted and battered by bad governors and their powerful allies. The government was financing and training paramilitary groups to provoke, threaten and divide them and handing out alms to weaken and destroy the Zapatistas’ social base by buying the conscience of Zapatista grassroots support. While some had fallen into those traps, the Zapatistas proclaimed that they had not risen up to beg for alms, but rather to achieve true democracy, liberty and justice for all. They announced that they would continue resisting the blows from the bad government with dignity and rebelliousness. They were continuing to fight against neoliberalism and to build a fairer, more human world. And they called on all good and honest people to join their resistances, struggles and dignified rage together in the hope that another world was possible.

#### **Culmination in san cristóbal**

The third stage of the festival was held on January 2-5, 2009, in the University of the Land in San Cristóbal de las Casas. It was organized into nine roundtables that discussed the issues of “the other world” and “another form of politics.” Some 3,500 people turned up to hear presentations from militants of different

groups, academics and Zapatistas.

The previous year Marcos had been the only Zapatista speaker, but this time Zapatista participants included Insurgent Lieutenant Colonel Moisés; Comandantes Tacho, Guillermo, Zebedeo and David; Comandantas Susana, Miriam, Hortensia and Florencia; Insurgent Captain Elena; and compañera Everilda. Two girls with their faces hidden behind balaclavas—Lupita and Toñita—told stories to the audience, gave out presents from the Zapatista speakers and removed any hint of solemnity from an event that was profound, but had a different style. When not performing, the girls could be seen next to Subcomandante Marcos playing with the smoke from his pipe.

Marcos did, however, preside over one unprogrammed and five programmed interventions. Lieutenant Colonel Moisés acted as the liaison with the other stages of the festival and Comandante David brought the event to a close, while Moisés and Comandanta Hortensia were responsible for two of the Zapatista's central presentations. All roundtables were coordinated by women and men of the EZLN, with the exception of one, which was presided over by an international militant.

Many rages in the nine roundtables

Eight of the nine roundtables dealt with the following subjects: "a dignified and enraged youth"; "a dignified and enraged endeavor"; "the other communication and the other culture"; "a dignified and enraged color of the earth"; "a dignified organized rage"; "a dignified female rage"; "another dignified rage"; and "another world and another politics." The ninth closed with a synthesis of Zapatismo and its aims. In addition to Mexicans, people from Italy, Switzerland, Spain, the Basque Country, France, India, the United States, Guatemala, Chile, Argentina, Nicaragua and Bolivia made presentations at the different roundtables, while those voicing their opinions from the audience included union members, representatives from peasant organizations, indigenous people, urban residents, women, migrants and sex workers and militants from a wide range of movements, who presented themselves and explained what they did. They told of their experiences and significance, talked of rage over the massacre of Palestinians in Gaza, the rage of the Greek youth, and rage against the repression of militants throughout the world.

They also talked about the tenderness of solidarity. Members of a French collective in solidarity with Zapatismo saluted the Zapatista rebellion and thanked it for a resistance that had inspired them to push ahead. A group from the Greek magazine *Alana*, also in solidarity with the Zapatistas, explained that while it did not represent the rebellion of the Greek youth, it was part of that

rage that expressed the illegitimacy of the system foisted on the people.

#### Analyzing the crisis of capitalism

The festival analyzed capitalism and the crisis it is going through, highlighting the importance of building alternatives and examining the positions of worker and leftist organizations. One worker from Spain's General Confederation of Workers asked how one taught and learned to be anti-capitalist, as everyone was infected with the virus of capitalism and needs a profound re-education. The festival helped many exploited people see themselves in the mirror of others. Those above want to classify the rage of those below as blind, but the only blind rage is the one that insults those below when they cannot insult those above. Various groups pointed out that the Festival of Dignified Rage was being held at a moment of social, cultural and environmental crisis as well as an economic one. As these crises cannot be resolved within capitalism, they called for the situation to be analyzed using free thinking devoid of dogmas. Members of a group of unemployed people from Argentina shared their decision to fight without intermediation by the traditional political forces. Their movement is seeking new paths of autonomy to make the change. Many participants agreed that the intolerance of the powerful means they have to seek new forms of human relations, considering that diversity doesn't mean division.

#### Defending Mother Earth and indigenous and peasant lands

It was stressed that the struggle is not only for a just society but also to save life on our planet. A Peruvian peasant stressed the common roots linking the continent's indigenous peoples, including collectivism and love of nature and Mother Earth. A member of the Mapuche indigenous people—Mapuche means “people of the earth”—explained that her people don't see the earth as simply earth and spoke of how they were trying to recover their territory, part of which is in the hands of big transnational companies, while the Chilean state is repressing the Mapuches and wants to see them reduced to their traditional costumes. Peasants grouped in the Vía Campesina organization accused six transnational corporations of dominating the world food chain, particularly the grain chain, and talked about both the indigenous and peasant struggle against privatization of the land and water and the defense of biodiversity, including native seeds. In a festival marked by a high attendance of young people, calls were made for alliances with the youth and urban movements to achieve food sovereignty.

Many sustained that the time is right for sowing struggles and hopes. Indigenous Mexicans from the National Indigenous Council insisted on taking history into account and not forgetting the Conquest and the genocide it produced. They saw Mexico's situation today as similar to that of a hundred years ago, which produced the Mexican revolution, with the difference that the

land dispossession processes were now more accelerated and violent. They recalled that the North American Free Trade Agreement had ruined the countryside, generated massive migration to the United States and altered the legal framework to turn peasant lands into merchandise. The indigenous people told of their long struggles and the enormous injustices that produced dignified rage among them. They felt the solution to be the construction of autonomy in action.

#### **Women were a recurring theme**

Women and their rights were a recurring theme during the festival. Brutality, repression and sexual exploitation and discrimination were condemned and people talked about “another sexuality” that was anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal and about respect for sexual diversity. A call was made to build gender equity from below. In her official presentation, Comandanta Hortensia talked about women’s participation and organization in the Zapatista territories, explaining how women had been incorporated into the economic, social and military spheres. That participation had been hard for both men and women, as it implied changing their customs and “everything in their heads.” But there are now women on the Indigenous Clandestine Revolutionary Committee and women with regional and local responsibility. Women are also training as autonomous education and health promoters, midwives, bonesetters, photographers, camerawomen, radio operators and announcers, etc. and are learning how to recover medicinal plants. The comandanta explained that it had been hard for men to accept this, as they had to watch the women leave their houses to perform a large number of jobs they never did before, and without asking the men’s permission.

Marcos recognized that the Zapatistas still have a long way to go in overcoming machismo, although they are fighting against it. He ironically told the following anecdote: “A few days ago we were gathered together talking about the fact that Sandinista Comandanta Mónica Baltodano was going to come. One of our Comandantas came out with that phrase Sandinista women always said: ‘You can’t make a revolution without women’s participation,’ and I jokingly said I was going to introduce the phrase, ‘You can make a revolution in spite of women.’ The Comandanta looked me up and down and said, “We’re fighting a war of liberation and if we’re taking our time it’s the fault of the lousy men!””

#### **Mónica Baltodano on Nicaragua**

Two cases demonstrated the failure of groups representing those from below to comply with their original missions once they manage to become the government of their countries.

First, Mónica Baltodano summarized the history of the struggle in Nicaragua, where the people defeated the dictator but the Sandinista leadership made

mistakes that, on top of the pounding from imperialism, had led to a number of setbacks. One mistake was corruption. Others were linked to limitations, such as the failure of the Sandinista movement to build either internal or participatory democracy. No autonomous grassroots movement was built and Sandinismo was incapable of designing a strategy for genuine resistance outside of government, from below. The emphasis was on defending its institutional spaces and power was not seen as an instrument of the revolutionary people, but rather as control. The struggle became diluted and the neoliberal project took its toll on the grassroots movement, while large sectors of society were depoliticized. The next step came with the transition and pacts, including agreements between Daniel Ortega and Arnoldo Alemán to share out power, thus constructing a *caudillo*-based system.

The Sandinista government is currently using leftist rhetoric but applying neoliberal policies. There are small movements that want to restore Sandinismo, but any criticism is clamped down on from above using Stalinist methods. Nonetheless, there are still Sandinistas who refuse to give up the dream of a socialist society, against capitalism and imperialism.

#### Oscar Olivera on Bolivia

The second example was Oscar Olivera's description of Bolivia. He recalled the struggle of the Bolivian people against the privatization of water. When certain indigenous individuals got into government following other struggles, they did not transform it but were themselves transformed by power. No new institutionalization has been achieved. Spokespeople from the social movements have been co-opted by the state apparatus and the social movements have lost their capacity to build an agenda that's autonomous of the government. The way of doing politics hasn't changed, and there has been disappointment. Nonetheless, arenas for deliberation are being rebuilt from below. People don't want to be deceived and they want to recover their autonomy against capital, racism and neoliberalism. There are currently many people proposing to fight for independence without *caudillos* and bosses.

Various points of consensus among many rages

The theoretician of changing the world without taking power, John Holloway, pointed out that rage alone is not enough because it doesn't lay the foundations for another world. At the same time, he argued that insubordination was shaking the system and that anti-capitalist rage is a dignified one because it breaks the condition of victim and aims at a different world. Something else lies behind the shouting and the barricades: the building of other social relations, the creation of another way of doing things and another way of loving.

The director of the magazine *Rebeldía*, Sergio Rodríguez Lascano, highlighted the fact that in the current crisis the rage of those below is a main conditioning element in the struggle, and should be the basis for thinking about what to do. He made a call to avoid restoring the state and the political system. The points of consensus included the need to act outside the state institutions, accept that there are contradictions in the anti-capitalist movement that have to be resolved and seek a self-managing society. There was also a common conviction that the world won't change through elections.

Writer Marcos Roitman sent the festival a document in which he proposed that having dignity, accumulated rage, awareness and a future project annoys and oppresses those with money. It shakes them to know that there are people who don't sell out, who fight exploitation, who organize and work democratically from below without allowing room for resignation and conformism.

Autonomous movements  
all across the continent

Mexican researcher Carlos Aguirre was convinced that the festival would not have been possible a few years ago, as such diverse movements from so many parts of the world couldn't have been brought together. He recalled Wallerstein's thesis on the terminal crisis of capitalism, when states stop fulfilling their social obligations and economies collapse, a stage in which skepticism toward the political class grows and academia loses its critical spirit.

Uruguayan analyst Raúl Zibechi celebrated the exchange of knowledge and mutual learning fostered by the festival. He praised the Zapatistas for having no links with the state, thus demonstrating that not everything has to involve agreements with the government and subsidies. Zibechi referred to the resistance movements in Latin America and stressed the importance of small, but very important local movements because they have the chance to create horizontal coordination without hierarchical structures. In his travels across the continent, Zibechi had noted the existence and survival in rural and urban territories of community-based rather than social-political autonomous movements.

The rural-urban distinction was not a good way of understanding them, nor should they be viewed from their structures. We should learn to assess them according to their internal vitality. Those below are building their own environment based on collective work and collective decisions, and have new forms of education and health initiatives in which women play a determining role. The Zapatista formula of "commanding obeying" has been heard in many of these collectives, which are true micropowers. Zibechi recognized that some of these movements opt to maintain relations with the state, and that debate

has not yet been closed on this issue.

### **Another justice and other ways of thinking**

Mexican academic Paulina Fernández shared her research on the organization of justice among indigenous peoples, using justice as another way of governing. She gave a detailed description of and analyzed a community justice system in which understanding is sought among the parties involved in all cases save homicide and rape. There are no lawyers and punishments are related to reeducation. Equal treatment is not given to people in unequal conditions and an attempt is made to try to recover people for the community. This “other form of justice” grows out of creative rebellions.

Philosopher Luis Villoro drew attention to the fact that good intentions are not enough to cure the ills of capitalism and pointed out that the Indo-American cultures have another way of thinking and their communitarism promotes reciprocity and not inequality. When the community is in command it announces that another vision of the world is possible.

Pablo González Casanova recalled the 50 years of the Cuban revolution, which had helped him maintain his principles and continue fighting. He referred to imperialism's military, business and media network, which includes associated, co-opted and corrupted people across the world. He explained that there used to be a state party in Mexico and that what now exists is a state with state parties that want everything to be negotiable. He stressed that Zapatismo is not just a movement respectful of peoples' traditions, but also something very novel because it contains another language, another form of politics and another hope.

### **The Zapatistas' other democracy: how it works in practice**

Speaking for the Zapatistas, Lieutenant Colonel Moisés saluted the different rages in the festival that were being suffered in various countries, in many cities, in factories, barrios, housing subdivisions, schools, towns and common and communal lands. He reminded them that they were participating to get to know about each other and tell each other how they fought and organized with different forms of rage against neoliberal capitalism. He exhorted them to have dignified rage, because unless it is dignified those expressing it would give up, capitulate and sell out. With dignified rage everyone would make the changes they needed.

At another point in his official presentation, he explained how the Zapatistas experience democracy in their daily lives and in what they have built in the last five years. This other democracy involves the linking up of a great variety of

collectives. In the first level—the one “below”—are the villages, which are hundreds of collectives. Then comes the level of the autonomous municipalities in each region, and after that the regional Caracoles and their linkage. He gave the impression of a kind of spiral that is continually ascending and descending. The commissioners, agents and autonomous municipalities form a collective for listening to each other to see what has to be done and how to do it. Visits are made to the villages to consult them and see whether the people on the ground think the same as the authorities. He explained that when a compañero in solidarity makes a proposal a consultation is held and this takes time, but it is better to take one's time than not really listen to what the people want.

The authorities of the five Zapatista Caracoles have a lot of work. The method is to consult the people and the job of the men and women working as authorities is to look, listen and discuss. They are learning that they can't dictate or direct. A general assembly brings together all the authorities from the different levels and the proposals they come up with aren't decided there, but rather taken back to the communities so they can hear about them and then decide.

This way the authorities don't supplant anything and it's the people who decide. If a certain authority doesn't comply, that person is removed. There's also a watchdog committee that reports what's happening to its villages and municipal assemblies. The Good Government Boards also are accountable to the general assembly. It's not the authorities who run things, but rather the village representatives.

#### **The EZLN is a bridge**

Marcos explained that the Zapatista movement brings together various indigenous peoples—Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Tojolobales, Choles, Zoques and Mames—as well as mestizos. The indigenous peoples have communities that form zones and each zone has an organized collective leadership that isn't military. Each zone also has “its way” of responding to and resolving its own problems and the EZLN is like a bridge for liaising among these zones. It represents all the zones as a whole with respect to the outside world. When the comandantes and comandantas, including Marcos, talked, they did not do so as individuals.

In his presentations, Marcos commented on and incorporated some of the proposals being presented. He highlighted the participation of Adolfo Gilly, who addressed the issue of intermittent insurrections, and Luis Villoro, who had been criticized by the Zapatistas a few years earlier for the position he took on a conflict in the UNAM, acknowledging that both maintained a position from below and on the left that's close to the Zapatista movement. He particularly praised Pablo González Casanova, stating that he had never ceased to amaze

the Zapatistas with his simplicity and modesty in his dealings with them, so much so that “he didn’t seem like an intellectual.” He had been with the Zapatistas in good times, bad times and the worst times and Marcos stressed that Zapatismo views him as a wise man, closer to the indigenous peoples’ sages than the arrogant specialists of academia. The subcomandante talked of how they agreed on many things and differed amicably on others. They share the idea that there should be no single thinking and that criticism and discussion do not imply having gone over to the other side.

### **The violence of those above**

At various points in the meeting, Marcos denounced what the Israeli army is doing in Gaza. His official presentations also referred to different forms of violence. He criticized Mexico’s Calderón government and pointed out that organized crime is running the state. Marcos emphatically stated that Zapatismo does not support the kind of pacifism that counsels people to turn the other cheek, or, contrarily, the violence inspired by “let’s you and him fight.” He stated that the powers that be use violence as a resource for domination, just as they do with art, culture, knowledge, information, the justice system, education, institutional politics and the economy. Those below also have many forms of struggle, and that repertoire includes a violent response to the violence from above, although it’s neither the only nor the best option.

He recalled with irony that the Zapatistas have been “accused” of not succumbing to the seduction of power, not having given up, not having capitulated. They have been dubbed “ultra” for saying it is the capitalist system that’s causing the main ills afflicting humanity, while the same views are now being heard even in Wall Street. The Zapatistas have been bitterly criticizing neoliberal globalization for many years and now those above are also seeing that globalization is in crisis and announcing that we all have to pay the costs, as “capitalism becomes very democratic during crises.”

### **What is wisdom?**

The subcomandante criticized the electoral fraud in Mexico’s 2006 elections and argued that presidential elections, in addition to being very expensive and forcing everyone to listen to the stupid things candidates say, are useless, as the person who will be President is decided on elsewhere. He explained how the uses and customs of the Mexican political class are in a real crisis, but did not limit himself to criticizing the current National Action Party government or previous Institutional Revolutionary Party ones. The episodes suffered at the beginning of this century, which got progressively worse in their communities, convinced the Zapatistas to make a clear break from those supporting Manuel López Obrador, [the Democratic Revolutionary Party’s 2006 presidential candidate], because they had suffered persecution, discrimination and

aggression at their hands.

Marcos added that, since the beginning of their uprising, the Zapatistas have valued the sympathy and support they receive from four sectors of the population: indigenous peoples; women; young people; and homosexuals, lesbians, transgenders, transsexuals and sex workers. They understood that it's because they all are "others"—excluded, persecuted, discriminated against and feared.

We're neither hegemonic  
nor the bearers of truth

Marcos told how the Zapatista autonomous municipalities had made more progress in health, education, housing and food than the official municipalities governed by professional politicians and denounced "specialists" who represent a form of private ownership of knowledge. Those who know something tend to hoard it, he said, complicating it to make it seem like something extraordinary, of restricted access, and refusing to share it. Following that logic it is erroneously assumed that mestizo culture is superior to indigenous culture by its breadth and depth of wisdom and knowledge.

He clarified that while wisdom doesn't consist of specialized thinking, of knowing a great deal about a small part of reality, it also doesn't consist of knowing a little bit about everything. Wisdom, he explained, is knowing how to read what will follow and interpret what came before in order to understand what's happening now. The Zapatistas know that there are many truths, not just one, and are aware that they could make mistakes.

The Zapatistas confessed that at one point the EZLN was tempted by hegemony and homogenization to impose their ways and identities, presenting Zapatism as the only truth. But the different peoples stopped them and taught them that it wasn't the right path, that they mustn't replace one dominion with another. Now that such temptation has been overcome, the Zapatistas are proposing the plurality of rage and of the different ways of experiencing it.

They went to the festival to express their rage and take responsibility for it. All shared their rages in an atmosphere of analysis and festivity. The Zapatistas said they aren't worried about how that rage is going to be channeled, with what or at what pace, rhythm and velocity. They trust people, who don't need someone to direct them. What they're concerned about is that the world that might emerge from that rage could appear like the world we're currently suffering. They are concerned that even in a world born of so much struggle women could still be seen with all the variations of scorn that have been imposed by the patriarchal society; people with different sexual preferences could continue to be seen as weird or sick; there could still be a desire to

domesticate the youth; and indigenous people could still be looked down on and humiliated.

#### **“Make a deal to fight together”**

Not everyone in the festival belonged to a group, whether Zapatistas, communist, socialist, anarchist, libertarian, punk, *skato* or Goths. The Zapatistas are not proposing to organize and direct the whole of Mexico, much less the world. They’re just saying what they are, want and think. And they are trying to act recognizing their limits, possibilities and proportionality. Each group has its own space, history, struggle, dream and relative weight.

What they’re talking about is the need to “make a deal to fight together for the whole and for what corresponds to each and every one”; to make a deal among the different proportionalities so that the world they bring about is made up of the dreams of each and every one of the dispossessed. The Zapatistas made a call not to turn the strength of those in the festival into a weakness. Being so many and so different will allow us to survive the catastrophe of capitalism’s crisis and build something new and different.

#### **Walking other paths**

Comandante David spoke the final words, saying that those who had gathered had seen that another form of politics, another path, another everything was possible, without capitalism. At the end of the festival, there was a feeling that the resistance, rebellion and dignified rage would grow stronger and stronger.

The government, the academia set up to serve those above and the indigenous groups that have yielded to the state’s handout policies have all proclaimed that Zapatismo is weakened because it isn’t seen on the stages erected by the political class. What has happened is that Zapatismo is walking down other paths, ones that are also being trodden by many alternative groups in Latin America and the world. Holding this festival demonstrated just where and with whom the strength of Zapatismo lies.

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#### **A State Less and Less Willing to Tolerate Social Protest**

*Indigenous, youth and neighborhood groups met in Jalisco in February and March to discuss the Mexican state’s mounting repression of social movements. Its obvious aim is to instill fear and resignation, inhibit the protests and teach a lesson to any who dare participate.*

Jorge Alonso

Repression has been on the rise in every corner of Mexico, particularly due to the criminalization of social protest and the surge in violence and insecurity. The national press confirmed that crime has shot up since the start of President Calderon's six-year term and the UN indicated that 37% of Mexicans feel fear even in their homes.

#### **Violence with a war logic**

In late February the US government was forced to admit that the Mexican state's war on drug trafficking was taking a high toll on society due to the long list of civilian casualties. The US report stated that high levels of impunity were leading many victims not to report crimes and as a result, corruption was rife at all government levels in Mexico. It also singled out the indigenous population as being the most vulnerable to arbitrary detentions, torture and intimidation. Yet right as this report was released, the US House of Representatives endorsed a bill that included hundreds of millions of dollars for the Mérida Initiative, which would further Mexico's militarization and its inefficient fight against drug trafficking.

The Miguel Augustín Pro Human Rights Center has charged that the state's public security plans are being conceived with a war logic in which loss of civilian lives is viewed simply as collateral damage. It has also documented the obstacles that military influence in civilian life implies for a country's democratization. In March 2009 writer Carlos Fazio argued that the United States had Mexico in a "Columbianization" phase, a "larval intervention by stages." Mexico, he said, had been put in a position of limited sovereignty under the euphemism of military cooperation while the self-styled fight against drug trafficking had created a national-level policy against social struggle.

Early this year Amnesty International announced it was investigating the human rights situation in various Mexican states, looking in particular into threats and aggression suffered by human rights defenders and activists. In Guerrero, after having been threatened "for defending Indians," two members of a human rights organization were kidnapped during an official event and subsequently tortured and killed. Many national and international human rights defense organizations and networks condemned the lack of state effectiveness in safeguarding the physical integrity and lives of human rights defenders in Mexico, demanding that these extrajudicial executions be investigated and prosecuted.

There are strong calls for independent investigations to uncover the truth, given signs that authorities are involved. Various political prisoners from Oaxaca also sent a letter to the second Ordinary Congress of the Oaxacan People's Popular Assembly in February to publicize the repressive situation

experienced by various Oaxacan communities. They asked the congress not to forget that they were prisoners for having fought at their people's side.

### **Reviewing history**

The groups that met in Jalisco to examine the situation reviewe Mexico's history of repression, going back to World War II. At that time the United States pressured Mexico to pass legislation condemning people who worked on behalf of the Axis powers (Germany-Italy-Japan). That was the birth of the law on social dissolution, although it was never applied during the war. The authorities first used this law during the fifties to imprison opposition leaders when their social and political movements refused to accept either the lack of union democracy or the price increases for food and services.

Student movement leaders were condemned for this same offense in 1968. A year after the student massacre, an independent legislator managed to get the offense repealed. But the authoritarian Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which ran the country for 70 years, found new ways to incriminate social activists, especially during the "dirty war" of the seventies, which to this day remains unpunished. During that period the repressive state apparatus practiced torture, forced disappearances and extrajudicial execution.

Also reviewed were political disappearances, which involved a constellation of human rights violations such as torture and the existence of clandestine jails. In the seventies the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners, Disappeared, Persecuted and Exiles was born. Its slogan was "They were taken alive, we want them back alive." Later on activists from different leftwing factions formed the National Front against Repression, which took up the demand that the state return alive those it had "disappeared," reveal the truth about the dirty war and punish those responsible.

### **Following the path of repression**

The state continued to repress movements of indigenous peoples, peasants, workers, students, residents of poor neighborhoods, women, ecologists, people fighting for electoral democracy, etc. in the eighties. To study the situation since the nineties, the groups used the research done by political prisoners Gloria Arenas and Eugenia Gutiérrez called "The Path of Repression," which examines political persecution between 1990 and 2008. Its rigorous compilation and analysis of piles of information reveals the Mexican state's repressive machinery. The first part of the study focuses on the imprisonment of activists, sympathizers and militants of social movements and detects regions and groups where persecution has been unremitting. Following the path of popular movements the authors also discovered the path of repression.

The authors see the state's aim as reducing grassroots movements to a

resigned state so they only dare express their disagreement halfheartedly and in fact prefer inaction to repression. They describe it as part of an extensive plan for ongoing and constant extermination to halt the advance of any show of rejection of human rights abuses (social, economic, political, cultural and environmental). The instruments of political persecution include imprisonment, disappearance, murder, persecution with or without an arrest warrant, job dismissal, vilification, exile, harassment, threats, aggression, disqualification, torture, sexual violence, massacres, massive repressive coups with huge detentions and, finally, militarization. They rightly argue that state violence is occasionally directed at a single person, as was the case with journalist Lydia Cacho, who denounced child sexual abuse networks protected by governors, but it produces social repercussions and that gives it a collective character. The purpose of repression is not just to inhibit protests but even more importantly to teach a lesson to those who dare engage in them.

The inventory compiled by social activists Arenas and Gutiérrez takes as its starting point the repression of the movement against the fraudulent elections in 1988 and subsequent years. There is a constant muted repression, but there are also moments when it becomes strident and such cases reveal the modus operandi of those in power. For example, in mid-1995 a group of Guerrero peasants were headed to the city to protest the disappearance of some of their leaders, when the governor of Guerrero, who belonged to the PRI, ordered a road block in a place called Aguas Blancas. The police fired on the farmers with no motive at all, killing 17 and wounding 24. The police tried to plant weapons on them to make it look like there'd been a confrontation but a reporter gave the lie to the official version with graphic evidence. So great was the ensuing scandal that the governor had to resign.

Another example: at the end of 1997 a group of paramilitaries in Chiapas, protected by the army and the police, massacred 21 women, 9 men, 9 girls and 6 boys who were praying in a chapel. Those at the top who were responsible have never been brought to justice. The following year several peasants who provided support to the Zapatistas were killed and their executioners haven't been punished either. The repression of the inhabitants of San Salvador Atenco and of the Oaxacan grassroots movements in 2006 is exemplary for its cruelty and the lack of punishment for the guilty.

A hundred political prisoners per month

These are the most scandalous examples of the repression, but there were 26 massive repressive blows between 1990 and June 2008. A search of the records reveals that there has been a monthly increase of more than 100 political prisoners since 1997, and that figure shot up to several hundred in May 2004, August 2005 and May and November 2006. The number of social activists in

prison totals several thousand. Those persecuted aren't accused of political offences but of phony common crimes. The state's revenge against social leaders takes the form of protracted imprisonments, as in the case of the leader from Atenco, who was sentenced to a consecutive prison sentence of 112 years. Several of those detained have been sent to prisons far from their homes to prevent their families from supporting them.

Some people have been imprisoned not for participating in some movement but for being related to those who have. There are also cases of people detained for political motives who have not been brought before the judicial authorities. The study details tortures, beatings, kidnappings, rape, evictions, torching of fields and houses, destruction of community radios... Many social activists have had to go into hiding, unable to visit or have contact with their families. One outstanding element of the repression is the business opportunities that accrue to the repressors, since as well as imposing exorbitant fines on those who suffer repression, the captors usually steal their possessions.

The repression is always marked by injustice, impunity and complicity by the repressors. The study's authors show that repression is a violent state reaction to outbreaks organized by disgruntled social movements that affect the economic interests of some powerful minority. Persecution seeks to instill fear, doubt, blame, weariness and desperation in social movements to slow up their advance. In short, it's generalized governmental terrorism to block dissent.

#### Zapatista ideas and plans to deal with the repression

The groups meeting in Jalisco to reflect on this history recalled that in mid-2007 the Sixth Commission of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) proposed setting up a national forum against repression because the groups in its Other Campaign were being besieged, persecuted and repressed. They decided they needed to think about repression in order to know how to deal with it. Those taking part in the Other Campaign realized that repression involved disinformation, adverse propaganda about social activists, threats, harassment, persecution, kidnappings, deportations, forced exile, imprisonment, disappearances and assassinations of social activists.

While displaying many similarities to previous repression, the repression today also has many differences. Previously it was a weapon by the state party against the people. Now it's used by all parties, even those that claim to be leftist. The weaker the government, the more easily it resorts to repression. Repression is a daily occurrence for indigenous peoples, thousands of whom have had to flee their homelands to avoid being killed. Human rights defenders continue to be harassed and many have lost their life. More recently, protests

against the effects of the capitalist system, more numerous due to the crisis, are being persecuted.

It's necessary to fight repression and impunity. The Zapatistas suggested anticipating repression in order to know how to recover from its blows. Seeing how starting from zero would be a serious problem, it was decided that each group would work on its own, accumulating and synthesizing everyone's experience and not waiting to be hit before reacting.

At the same time, though, all agreed on the urgency of putting up organized resistance regionally and nationally, given that fragmentation and disconnectedness lent itself to the success of the low intensity warfare strategy. If for each victim of the repression not only one replacement but two appeared to occupy their place, if two autonomous groupings came into being every time one was struck, it would show the futility of repression.

In 2008, the Other Campaign pushed the idea of a forum for freedom and organization and against repression. Given that the state was using new forms of repression, it had to think of other methods of struggle so the repression wouldn't leave social activists just looking for the disappeared and freeing their prisoners. Organizing autonomously was shown to be very effective against repression. In this way Zapatismo has been organizing the search for mechanisms against repression and state terrorism so as not to get trapped in immobility.

#### A policy of public insecurity

In September 2008, on its 20th anniversary, the Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center published a document titled "Human rights under siege: Public security and justice in Mexico." It argued that the state uses the public security debate to safeguard its power and avoid dealing with the population's real security needs. It has resorted to iron fisted policies and showy operations behind which it customarily hides its inaction in responding to the structural roots of crime and insecurity. The iron fist hasn't lessened criminal violence, however. The statistical average of deaths attributable to organized crime doubled between 2005 and 2008, without including civilians killed by state actors violating human rights in their operations against crime. On the judicial side, repressive legislative reforms have been proposed but disdain for human rights has meant decreased rather than increased public security.

This document severely criticized the militarization of public security under Calderón's government given its serious violations of fundamental rights. It also analyzed the Mérida Initiative as reinforcing a dysfunctional public security policy. Many civic organizations have warned that this initiative will extend the Mexican government's failed politics. The Human Rights Center argued that the

**lack of deterrents in Mexico's penal justice system didn't grow out of a lack of severe punishments but rather high indices of impunity.** It recalled, among other things, the repression on May 28, 2004, during the Third Latin America, Caribbean and European Union Summit in Guadalajara, involving dozens of illegal detentions and torture. It also recalled that there were 50 or so women among the victims of human right's violations in San Salvador Atenco in 2006, many of them tortured in addition to being sexually abused and even raped by the police.

### **Two scandalous cases**

In March 2009 a reporter revived the case of three Ñahñú-speaking women, sentenced two years ago to more than 20 years in prison for allegedly kidnapping six armed agents, after the prison director admitted to him that the accusation was not only unfounded but not even credible, as who could believe that some unarmed indigenous women could have kidnapped six armed police. The journalist reconstructed the events: when villagers surrounded several police agents who had arrived to destroy and steal, they got scared and sent for reinforcements. Once their chiefs arrived, they agreed to repair the damage and left one policeman as a guarantee. They did indeed return and paid for the damage, so everything seemed to be sorted. But the police wanted revenge and sometime later filed a kidnapping charge against the three women who had taken part in the popular resistance. They couldn't accept people, particularly women, defending themselves against their abuse. This case is only one example of thousands of innocent people who have been imprisoned merely for daring to stand up for their rights.

The National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) confirmed that a joint operation was conducted in May 2007 between the federal army and Oaxaca State police in which two guerrillas of the People's Revolutionary Army (EPR) were detained and immediately disappeared. The CNDH made a recommendation about the disappearance of the two men in 2008, which was rejected in March of this year by Oaxaca's PRI governor, Ulises Ruiz. Writer Miguel Angel Granados Chapa charged that by rejecting it the governor was incriminating himself as the head of the team that had captured the two EPR members, because had he not done so he would have been in the awkward situation of investigating the behavior of police agents acting on his orders.

### **The Supreme Court rules on the Atenco case**

Because the Atenco case has been especially scandalous, the country's Supreme Court got involved. This February, after a long time, Justice José de Jesús Gudiño presented a finding for examination by the court plenary. It confirmed that there had been a serious violation of individual guarantees and constitutional rights to life, physical integrity, sexual liberty, non-discrimination

on the basis of gender, inviolability of the home, personal liberty, due process, decent treatment of detainees and the right to justice.

The document maintained that public force had been used excessively, disproportionately, inefficiently and indolently; that the Mexican state had used the police force in an irresponsible and arbitrary fashion. The authorities' intervention had negative results, given that it instilled mistrust in the state and fear, fertile ground for insecurity, injustice and impunity.

Despite the weight of this ruling, the Court disassociated itself from the recommendation of the National Human Rights Commission with reference to the violation of the guarantee of minors and to the young man who had died of a gunshot wound. The Court declared it had no proof that the shot had come from a police weapon. In the case of the women, it admitted that the aggression they charged could constitute acts of torture forbidden by national and international law and that the police had violated the sexual freedom of the women sent to prison.

The judgment questioned the attitude displayed by both the federal attorney general and the one in Mexico State for not conducting the necessary tests on the evidence or collecting the statements required in investigating accusations of sexual abuse. But most of the justices did not want to find out who was responsible and with their resolution sought to hand impunity to high-level officials.

#### **An unusual sentence: All but one**

During the discussion, Justice Genaro Góngora argued that there was enough proof to consider that the young man had been killed by a police weapon, but the others cleared the police of responsibility.

Justice Góngora directly blamed the state by pointing out that what had happened had been an act of vengeance in which superior commanders had intervened with crowd control techniques used in the dirty wars in South Africa, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Guatemala, Vietnam and Mexico in the seventies. He argued that its tactical nature meant it couldn't have been an improvised operation since it required forward planning that could only have been the result of coordination among different administrative and political groups. For Góngora, they were dealing with an operation that couldn't have been carried out without the orders of high-level political authorities, and he severely condemned the excessive brutality of this act of repression.

His colleagues disagreed. And though the majority accepted that serious violations had been committed through the excessive use of public force, 10 of the 11 justices exonerated the governor of Mexico State. The man in question,

who was secretary of Federal Public Security when the attack on the Atenco people took place, also happened to be the PRI's front-runner for the 2012 presidential candidacy and the current attorney general of the republic. Seven justices said the violations had only been committed by some police and intermediate commanders. The Court resolved that the investigations should be widened in order to issue guidelines and considerations and concluded that legislation should be passed to regulate the use of public force.

**Macro-impunity  
of macro-repression**

on

top

On receiving this result, members of the Atenco movement shouted at the justices that they were corrupt and were murdering justice. The president of the Senate Human Rights Commission, social activist Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, declared that the highest tribunal in the country had fallen into disrepute with its decision. The president of the Fray Francisco de Vitoria Human Rights Center considered it disgraceful that the Court had shied away from exercising its power by naming those at the highest level responsible for planning and ordering the Atenco operation. From Barcelona the International Civil Commission of Human Rights Observation commented that the ruling once again buttressed the impunity with which the Mexican state responds to serious violations of fundamental human rights.

The Supreme Court's conclusions in the Atenco case confirmed negation of justice as the standard state response. To the violent repression suffered by Atenco's peasants must now be added judicial repression, as their legitimate aspirations of obtaining justice have been violated. Lawyer Magdalena Gómez wrote that political reckonings had led to "failed justice." It was an aberration that a social activist who had neither robbed nor killed anyone was sentenced to over 100 years in prison for defending his land, a sentence not dished out to even the biggest criminals or drug traffickers.

In the 2009 carnival celebrations, the Atenco peasants' movement included in its traditional ritual the demand for its prisoners to be freed. One commentator said that if there had been macro-repression in Atenco in 2006, macro-impunity was striding the land in 2009.

**These are times of civil rage**

The Court handed down its ruling on the Atenco case in a context qualified by one retired justice as "civil rage" against the sitting justices' pro-oligarchy and anti-grassroots judicial rulings. This is further aggravated by the scandalous size of their salaries, with benefits hitting half a million pesos a month, next to a population submerged in crisis-deepened poverty. The newspaper El Universal wondered what kind of confidence citizens can have in a judicial branch that lives in privileged conditions that offend social sensitivity and a sense of justice.

Also in March, members of the national and international campaign “Freedom and Justice for Atenco,” including Bishop Raúl Vera and Dominican priest Miguel Concha, went to the prison where social activist Ignacio del Valle and 14 other political prisoners were being held. They were forbidden to talk to the detainees on the grounds that they were under maximum security. The visitors argued that they were political prisoners and that the legal system had been used against them illegitimately because they’re not criminals but members of a land defense movement. One legislator who was taking part stated that the prison authorities were accomplices in holding innocent prisoners. The group called for the struggle against the governors to continue to keep them from manipulating the law according to their whims.

#### **The symbolic case of Lydia Cachos**

The Supreme Court’s behavior in the Atenco case followed the same path as in Lydia Cacho’s case, where most of the justices blatantly and cynically protected the governor of Puebla. The only thing achieved in the Cacho case was that in March of this year the National Human Rights Commission detected probatory elements determining that the journalist had been subjected to physical and psychological torture and that her rights to legality, juridical security and protection of her health, integrity and personal security had been violated. It thus issued a recommendation to the governments of Puebla and Quintana Roo that they investigate whoever had directly taken part in the journalist’s detention and make amends for the damage. But Puebla’s governor, shown by a telephone communication to have been the person who gave the order for these outrages, has not been brought to justice.

On International Women’s Day several civil organizations, including the Eureka group and “Children for identity and justice against oblivion and silence,” demonstrated in front of the Supreme Court building demanding that more than half a thousand political disappeared be presented alive. The resounding slogan again that day was the historical “They were taken alive, we want them back alive.” In particular, the demonstrators demanded that the women who were disappeared during the dirty war be presented and insisted that justice be done for the women assaulted in the Atenco operation. As part of the celebrations that day the Zapatistas held an international forum dedicated to a woman whose sons had been disappeared for political reasons. A Mazahua indigenous woman, persecuted and imprisoned in the Atenco operation, took part, sharing with those present the messages of solidarity and love she received during her imprisonment. Zapatista Captain Elena asked when bad governments would stop harassing them, stating that when women organize and protest they are persecuted, insulted and even murdered.

It's                   necessary                   to                   learn                   to

**“read” the repression**

The existence of so much repression has not prevented grassroots resistance. The Oaxacan People’s Popular Assembly held its second congress precisely to rescue and continue the process interrupted by the repression. They made alternative government proposals through assemblies and suggested a new way of doing politics, of governing themselves from below, rescuing the experience prior to the repression.

The grassroots and indigenous groups that have been reflecting on repression stress that it’s a unilateral action by the state to contain those who question it. Repression instills fear and imposes violence in order to maintain power over those who struggle and resist. The state’s justice and its laws are part of a system based on repressive domination.

These groups have emphasized that acts of repression oblige movements to concentrate on legal mechanisms to free their prisoners and while that is certainly important, they need to ensure that such efforts don’t consume all their energy. They examined various scenarios set up to imprison social activists: police infiltration into the movements, and both paid and spontaneous provocateurs.

Just as the state learns from the movements in order to try to control them, the movements must also learn from government repression to try and avoid it and know how to confront it, given the general response is improvised and not very effective voluntarism. To resist the notion that repression is inevitable, it needs to be understood that avoiding it is feasible, given that there’s nothing determined or absolute in the political game. It’s necessary to learn from one’s own mistakes and read the signs of repression. Those ordering the repression want to convince us that the only way to avoid it is by not fighting. This way of seeing and dealing with repression should be turned around. It’s not necessary to wait to be taken prisoner and beaten, ways to neutralize it before it happens need to be examined.

Repression isn’t uniform, it has many guises, and being assimilated is one of them. There’s also a structural repression that manifests itself in day-to-day life. Families are also repressed in order to deactivate social movements. Solidarity action is an element that always hinders repression.

**Operate  
and stay autonomous**

**underground**

Many reflections were shared in Jalisco. There’s a growing conviction that entering power’s space and time puts the grassroots social movements in a very fragile position. They need to leave this setting and use their own space and time to build on. Visibility exposes; it’s more advisable to fight

underground. There are many forms of self-defense in neighborhoods and the community that aren't visible to those in power. Another key is information; one has to be well informed. A repressive environment can be effectively confronted based on solidarity and the construction of autonomies. From a long-term perspective the struggle against repression has to be aimed at constructing and spreading autonomous self-management processes that bit by bit cast doubt on the capacity of the state and the capitalist system to reproduce themselves.

Conclusion: we shouldn't confront repression with the logic of those in high places, but rather with the logic of the mission of those below.

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### The Legion of Christ: A Rotten Fruit

*The legend of Marcial Maciel, now deceased, is tarnished by his scandalous life as a depraved pederast, lover of money and accessory to the rich. But his Legion of Christ, founded with Pope John Paul II's blessing, is still with us. An investigation of this religious business organization, ordered by Pope Benedict XVI, is now underway. Will this rotten fruit be separated from the rest or will it go on contaminating the Church?*

Jorge Alonso

During the whole of the Catholic Church's bi-millennial history, organizations have emerged whose intention is to live more profoundly and spread the message of the Gospel more effectively. The foundations for religious life have generally aimed at bearing critical witness to the "world" (the system) that rejoices in riches, vain honor, pride and other vices.

### An array of religious orders

The most ancient of these groupings were the monastic orders such as the Benedictines, founded in the 6th century by Saint Benedict. In the 12th century Saint Bruno founded the Carthusians, whose monks dedicated themselves to prayer and did manual labor to survive. The Carmelites began with Saint Berthold of Mount Carmel in the same century. Over time some of these orders went through changes, as with the Barefoot Carmelites set up in the 16th century by Saint Theresa and Saint John of the Cross.

The mendicant orders appeared in the 13th century. Their members no longer called themselves monks but friars. Saint Dominic founded the Dominicans as an order of preachers and Saint Francis of Assisi founded the Franciscans based on a life of poverty as a response to the excesses of the clergy of his time. There

were several subdivisions among the Franciscans: the Tertiary order, Capuchins and Poor Clares. In that same century, the Augustine order reformed itself as a mendicant religious order.

In the 16th century Saint Ignatius Loyola introduced an important approach to the order he founded: they would no longer meet daily to pray but instead would be “introspective in action.” Its founding nucleus was a handful of University of Paris graduates with doctoral degrees who devoted themselves to establishing colleges and spreading the Gospel outside Europe’s borders. Later on Saint John of God founded a charitable order.

In the 16th century the formality of religious orders was changed to religious congregations. Saint Phillip Neri started a secular congregation of lay people. At the end of the century Saint Joseph of Calasancius founded the Pious Schools to educate poor and abandoned boys. In the next century Saint John Baptiste de la Salle formed the Christian Brothers. In the 19th century Saint Marceline Champagnat established the Marist Brotherhood and Saint John Bosco established the Salesians. Also in that century dozens of women’s religious congregations emerged, dedicated to education and health services. With their charisma, each of the founders put their own seal on their religious organization to offer answers to important religious and social problems.

**Born                      in                      1941,                      now**  
**“Millionaires of Christ”**  
The “religious congregation” style has been very prolific and has taken different forms. Among the most recent is one whose founder is quite the opposite of the long tradition of good examples, given that he modeled an institution in accord with a system of exploitation and domination totally remote from the faith                      of                      the                      Gospel.

In January 1941 a young Mexican seminarian, Marcial Maciel Degollado, founded the religious congregation known as the Legion of Christ. The name itself is attention-getting. If one looks in the gospels for the word “legion” in the singular, one finds it in both Mark and Luke, referring to the diabolical name a possessed man revealed to Jesus; “My name is Legion.” According to this organization’s official web page, its first members went to Spain in 1946 then to Rome in 1950 where they established their headquarters. At that time they proudly proclaimed that they already had seminaries full of adolescents in Mexico and Spain. Later they opened novitiates in Ireland and the United States. Subsequently the legionaries took over colleges and created a movement they called Regnum Christi. In 2004 John Paul II entrusted the Notre Dame of Jerusalem Papal Institute to the legionaries. Today this congregation has 125 religious houses, 200 educational centers and another 600 centers for lay education and missions. The legionaries boast of having more than 800

priests, 5,000 seminarians and 85,000 lay members of Regnum Christi in 40 countries. They have gotten economic support from the owners of huge fortunes and political backing from conservative parties and groups. The annual budget for its network of institutions has hit US\$650 million. The Legionaries of Christ are popularly known as the “millionaires of Christ” due to their characteristic zeal for proximity to money. It’s a fitting name given that they unite three powers: the economic, the political and that of the top Catholic hierarchy.

#### **Its “model” is a sexual abuser**

The history of this organization holds many shadows going back to its very origins. When legionaries went to the Jesuit University in Comillas, Spain, in 1946, they were expelled due to accusations of pederasty. Nonetheless, the organization prospered because it knew how to use religion as a source of power and money. Its leaders have very skillfully made connections with important politicians, both civil and religious, as well as wealthy Catholics, reaping copious resources with which to buy loyalty.

In 1994, Pope John Paul II commended its founder, Marcial Maciel, as an effective guide and role model for young people. But only three years later eight former Legionaries, seven of them Mexicans and one Spaniard, dared to denounce publicly before the Holy See the atrocities they had suffered at Maciel’s hands; they accused him of having sexually abused them on many occasions when they were teenagers.

Declaring themselves Christian men, they appealed directly to the Pope: “In full right and now even more in legitimate defense we decided to reveal the terrible and painful truth of a dark evil, hidden almost since the founding of the institution, of the immoral secret behavior of the founder and general superior of the Legion of Christ for over four decades.”

#### **A widespread evil**

They would discover that their cases were not isolated or unique, but rather a widespread evil. They admitted having felt defenseless at the time because they were young and had been made to believe they owed devoted, blind obedience to the founder. They told the pope they had been psychologically unable to overcome the painful self-imposed prudence and discretion for many years after leaving the institution, but the papal declaration that Maciel was an example to youth had made them decide to break the silence. They didn’t want the pope being deceived. They confessed that due to misplaced loyalty to the institution when they were young, they had hidden the truth from the Vatican’s investigators who interrogated them about Maciel’s behavior in 1956.

They regretted that the response of the institution and its allies had been to

accuse them of conspiring against the Church. They complained that the archbishop of Mexico City had publicly slandered them. Knowing that the evils they were denouncing implicated many more victims, they wondered why the official cover-up and silence had been so hermetic. They were convinced that accepting these facts wouldn't be so onerous for the Church given that it had recognized other great errors. The shame, they argued, would lie in failing to reveal the truth. They appealed to the Holy Scriptures and Patron Saints, declaring that the Church has always accepted not only that it is an institution for sinners but also a sinning institution. They asked the pope for an investigation.

The first response of the Catholic hierarchy and important Mexican businessmen was to try to keep the accusation from getting out. Subsequently they made their power felt by denigrating the accusers and harassing reporters who had dared publish such a harrowing story. From that moment on Mexican journalist Carmen Aristegui has been one of those who has refused to be intimidated or pressured and has opened her various radio and television programs to the voices of the victims and those analyzing Maciel's personality.

#### **Religious “with business criteria”**

Once the group of victims found the courage to speak out, others began to do so too, revealing that the truth was even grimmer. A victims' association was organized by former Legion and *Regnum Christi* members, all of whom denounced the sexual abuse they had suffered and other characteristics of the public figure. One of them recalled that on a trip with Maciel somebody asked him what he would have been had he not been ordained a priest and he answered “a businessman,” noting that this was the key to understanding the legionaries: a religious congregation “with business criteria.” Do business criteria mean not compensating the damage they do to people and families, using people like objects while they last and discarding them without caring about justice and charity?

Another line of accusation has been directed towards the legionaries' leaders for setting themselves up as representatives of “God's will” who should be revered and allowed to enjoy every privilege. They use the people attracted, seeking their financial contributions without the least interest in social justice. Those who know them from within and have become disenchanted with their behavior emphasize that they are expert at looking after their image, carefully covering up their injustices and disorder.

#### **Control, secrecy, bribes...**

Other witnesses allege that various strategies and policies more characteristic of sects or cults are used in the congregation. The legionaries have a powerful recruitment program for teenagers and children, considering that all have

vocation until their superiors decide otherwise.

Those who join are subjected to total control. Inside there is a complete lack of dialogue, discussion, disagreement or difference of opinion with the institution and they must accept everything their superiors tell them without question. Another feature similar to that of a sect is secrecy. They are forbidden to communicate with people on the outside and must account for all conversations or dealings they have with anyone who doesn't belong to the group. The silence and control were ramparts behind which its founder dug in.

One of the emerging accusations is that pederasty is only the tip of the iceberg. There are also accusations of manipulation within the organization and even of money laundering. The investigations so far reveal about a hundred accusations by seminarians who say they were victims of sexual abuse perpetrated by Maciel. It has been proven that the legionaries are expert at silencing their accusers with bribes or by legal means with the help of powerful networks.

#### A life of luxury among magnates

Colombian writer Fernando Vallejo's biographical sketch of Maciel suggests that the Church's bishops must have been envious because Maciel "knew how to live." He emphasizes the priest's great ability to conceal and dissimulate his real self, given that he deceived various popes from the 1950s onwards. Maciel invited Pope John Paul II to visit Mexico three times. Rather than provide an example of the poverty he demanded of his disciples, Maciel appeared to live in a paradise: he wore black like all legionaries but his were designer clothes. He owned a Mercedes Benz, a BMW and a Porsche and justified them by citing back problems. He only flew first class. On one of his visits to Medellín he demanded a helicopter to fly him, citing security as the reason. On his trips he would spend \$10,000-15,000 dollars on extravagant luxuries. As he had a direct line to the pope, Mexican Presidents had high regard for him and asked him to secure papal audiences and blessings for them.

He was friendly with magnates such as Carlos Slim and the Azcárraga family. From the time of the dictator Francisco Franco on, he entered by the great door in Spain through friends such as Alicia Koplowit. In more recent times the Botella sisters ensured him the backing of José María Aznar's government. In Italy he could count on President Julio Andreotti's support. To protect his interests with the far Right in Chile, he interceded for Augusto Pinochet's freedom when the latter was detained in England. Vallejo's biographical sketch, corroborated by other sources, allows one to see Maciel living amongst tycoons just like one of them. Big businessmen felt in good company with him, since he justified their way of life and hardly spoke like a prophet.

### Drug addict and pederast

Maciel and the legionaries have been the subjects of copious academic and journalistic research and evaluations. Several books have been published, among the most outstanding being Pepe Rodríguez's *Pederastia en la Iglesia Católica* (Pederasty in the Catholic Church], José Martínez de Velasco's *Los legionarios de Cristo. El nuevo ejército del Papa* [The legionaries of Christ: The Pope's new army], Carlos Fazio's *En el nombre del Padre* [In the name of the Father] and *Los documentos secretos de los legionarios de Cristo* [The secret documents of the legionaries of Christ].

Another book, titled *El Legionario* (Grijalbo), was written by Alejandro Espinosa, himself a former legionary and relative of Maciel. It portrays Maciel as a drug addict and pederast who used his religious power to protect his vices and transgressions. Espinosa recounts that in 1955 Maciel was banished from Rome accused of pederasty; but the process was suspended, the incriminating documents mysteriously disappeared and Maciel reestablished himself in Rome. In the second half of the 1990s the accusation against him of drug addiction and pederasty reappeared, and the information came out in the *Hartford Courant* newspaper. Although the legionaries hired an expensive law firm and tried to buy the paper off, they couldn't deny the accusations.

A consecrated man with a network of accomplices

In 2006 the Mexican academic and psychoanalyst Fernando González came out with his own book, titled *Marcial Maciel. Los legionarios de Cristo: testimonios y documentos inéditos* (Marcial Maciel. The legionaries of Christ: Evidence and unpublished documents). It contains documents showing that pederast nuclei were embedded in the organization Maciel founded.

According to González, "When the evidence is seen from outside, Maciel's seduction tactics are somewhere between pathetic and grotesque. Nevertheless, on trying to understand the institutional spiritual surroundings of those implicated in what went on in the legionaries' congregation, especially Maciel's personality, one can observe that extremely contradictory elements become inextricably crystallized in the seductions. Elements such as the priest consecrated and sustained in a discourse of purity and resolve, and the sexually perverse individual who skillfully interweaves the discourse of chastity with that of his exceptionality ends up dissolving the borders between what at first exalts and what perturbs and undermines it with a vow of silence about the asymmetrically shared deed." This specialist in social analysis shows that Maciel's case is a paradigm for how, in a bond of complicity, the Catholic hierarchy kept information about the sexual and addictive activities of the legionaries' founder from coming to light at the time.

He shows that the different actors implicated, among them important businessmen, didn't previously agree to cover up for Maciel. Because the institutional and social network in which Maciel moved was a system that could neutralize the possibility of accusations by those involved, the legionaries called the convincing evidence presented in 1997 implausible. The figure of Maciel was idolized and irresistible. Analyzing those who dared file charges, the researcher said: "Agreeing to testify to an act of seduction and the way in which those implicated did it means exposing oneself publicly to an *inermidad* (sic – illegible typo) that can only be understood as the impossibility of bearing for any longer a silence and complicity with a seducer who has ceased representing the exceptional being, and a readiness to face the past to try to understand how one could have taken part in the violent relationship of seduction."

#### **Protected by John Paul II**

Surveillance, seduction, ensnaring and silencing were combined in the legionaries' organization. The accusers' statements are heartrending, recounting how a power appealing to spirituality and papal license committed terrible crimes against defenseless people.

González's book presents not only testimony but also three unpublished files that the author used to reveal a web of complicity stretching from the top of the ecclesiastical institution to its base and backed by political elites. In Rome he consulted the files of the Sacred Congregations for the Religious as well as those of Father Luis Ferreira Correa, the Legion's vicar general from 1956 to 1957, and Flora Barragán de Garza, the group's first great benefactor, whom Maciel tried to divest of her possessions. Based on a huge quantity of uncovered, classified and thoroughly analyzed information, the author arrives at this conclusion: "It is certain John Paul II protected the pederast founder [of the legionaries] and did so consciously."

Making him a saint,  
despite everything

Given so much evidence, Benedict XVI, upon arriving at the papacy, ordered Maciel to leave Rome, return "to a life dedicated to prayer and penance" in Mexico and give up any form of public ministry, thus saving the priest from an ecclesiastical trial and especially from civil trials. The institutions of the top Catholic hierarchy and Mexican politics managed to protect Maciel while continuing to ignore the victims.

The legionaries still trusted that people would turn against the victims instead of condemning Maciel. They were especially confident that time and short memories would dissipate the accusations against their founder. They were even certain that the power they obtained in the Vatican could raise their

founder to the altars. These leaders had assimilated the path and the logic Maciel had taught them: make the abominable look like virtue. They wanted to start by canonizing Maciel's mother, as in the case of Monica, the mother of Saint Augustine.

For the cause of beatification to prosper, it needs connections in the Vatican and lots of money. As they had both, they managed to get the lady on the first rung of the process: she was now "servant of God." They also aspired to get Maciel's great uncle, Bishop Rafael Guízar y Valencia, canonized. Certain that canonization of John Paul II, Maciel's great protector, would also be quick in coming, they expected it to culminate in an official declaration of the saintliness of the legionaries' founder. They didn't fear the usual practice of assigning a devil's advocate to investigate his life, since they'd already seen it put aside in the canonization of Opus Dei founder José María Escrivá. Nonetheless, they were wrong on all counts and it now remains to see if the Maciel scandal, which has become widely known, doesn't become an insuperable obstacle to Karol Woltyla's own beatification process.

#### A nest of sexual abusers

Maciel died in 2008 at the age of 85, but not even his death managed to silence the controversy about him. Despite the evidence, those shaped by the cult to his personality demanded he be left in peace and labeled the proven accusations slander and attacks on the Church. They appealed to the saying, "By their fruits ye shall know them," seeing as "fruits" the whole web Maciel had woven among the powerful to ennable himself. They offered the institution itself as another proof of his "fruits," hiding the fact that it was rotten to the core. His victims also knew that by his fruits Maciel would be known and were demanding justice for this very reason; they called for an examination of his criminal actions.

Bernardo Barranco, the specialist in ecclesiastical matters, explored Maciel's legacy and concluded that his canonization was out of the question given that he had ended his days stigmatized by sexual abuse of children and impunity. The victims continued to demand that the truth be known. If the legionaries wanted the accusations to end with Maciel's death, the facts recounted by the victims showed that the whole institution was a nest of abusers.

Maciel's pederasty and drug addiction had not occurred in isolation, but was organized and accompanied by a group of like-minded men who protected and abetted him. Another thing to take into account was this: the Vatican's elimination in late 2007 of the private vow forbidding the organization's members to criticize their superiors had dismantled one of the fundamental cornerstones on which the legionaries' impunity rested.

### Rome's confidential adviser

Bernardo Barranco recalled how, during John Paul II's long papacy, Maciel reached the summit for his organization by becoming the pope's totally trusted adviser on everything to do with vocations, clergy and the fight against liberation theology. Maciel had already secured a position of privilege and prerogative among the ecclesiastical, economic and political elites in Mexico and now the legionaries' inner circle had acquired great power and collected a lot of money for their organization through his connections to the fortunes of high-up public figures in Rome. And while the legionaries appeared very strict in matters of personal and familial morality, they were incredibly lax and permissive when it came to businesses management and environmental damage.

Ambiguity and dual discourse has been an essential characteristic of the legionaries. Historian Francisco Martín Moreno laments how the Church hid accusations of sexual abuse by the legionaries' founders and José Martínez de Velasco, a Spanish researcher and author of two books on the legionaries, appears convinced that the Church was complicit in Maciel's acts. Nonetheless, some Christians simply hope he will face divine justice for the secrets he took with him to the tomb.

### With the Vatican's complicity

Thanks to his rigorous investigations, Fernando González has become a specialist on the subject. In his opinion Maciel's death won't put an end to the scandal. What is needed is to get inside his organization to see just how far it was complicit in and abetted the crimes of pederasty, drug use, absolution for accomplices and others, although in 2001 then-Cardinal Ratzinger established a 10-year statute of limitations for the latter crime.

Maciel died without ever facing a trial or compensating his victims. If religious organizations carry the imprint of their founder and the legionaries carry the imprint of a pederast, González notes that the internal pederasty networks continued to function after Maciel and gave concrete examples of cases. He considered viable an accusation in Geneva against both the Vatican's Roman hierarchy and the Legion for complicity with and abetting a pederast. He also argued that the Vatican's archives would make it possible to prove the enormous complicity of the Secretary of State, the Sacred Congregation of Faith and the Sacred Congregation of Religious, all of which failed to act on the trustworthy information they had.

A double life of affairs and pregnancies

Information about Maciel's hardly saintly life has continued to appear this year. First was the news that he'd had a daughter with a lover. In response, the

legionaries' leaders didn't resort to their usual excuse that the accusation was a conspiracy against the Church. They claimed they were surprised, saddened and disconcerted by their founder's double life, but while this information made no one proud, they continued to insist he had done a lot of good as head of the organization and thanked him for the values he had handed down to them.

Then in a radio interview with journalist Carmen Aristegui, a former legionary revealed that at age 68 Maciel had gotten a 15-year-old girl pregnant, a serious crime of child abuse punishable by civil law. Other people said Maciel had maintained sexual relationships with various women. A Spanish ex-legionary recalled that Maciel was known to have intimate relationships only with well-off women.

Even Alejandro Espinosa, Maciel's nephew, alleged suffering sexual abuse by his uncle, and stated that he too had witnessed Maciel's affairs, remembering how he boasted of his conquests. He named a good number of women whom Maciel had exploited economically and with whom he'd had sexual relationships.

**Who leaked it and why is it accepted now?**

Some believed all these recent revelations came from Rome itself, when they realized they couldn't block out the sun with a finger and wanted to avert a bigger disaster. This is supposedly why the legionaries accepted some of it. When new information became available, Fernando González was interviewed. He also believes that the legionaries' acceptance of the existence of Maciel's daughter shouldn't be seen as a desire to start unveiling the truth about his character but rather as a ploy to deter future revelations and bury the gravest criminal behavior of the Legion's founder: that having to do with pederasty. Moreover, up to that point the sexual sphere was the only focus; a fundamental subject—the legionaries' economic management—continued to be concealed.

Another interpretation of the leaks had to do with Rome's attempt to uncouple the organization from its founder, to clean up and restructure a religious congregation perceived as valuable. Nonetheless, this strategy didn't seem to be faring very well.

There had also been talk of intense internal struggles within the Legion and perhaps even a highly complicated conflict over Maciel's will. In the media it was observed that Maciel had not only seduced and conned various rich women, but also had destroyed the lives of many children who had been sexually abused and regret was expressed that he'd gone to his grave

unpunished for all he had done. Faced with proof of the pederasty accusations, the Church would have to cleanse itself and one way to do so was to stop protecting the accused and instead ensure that they face justice in the civil courts.

### A crumbling legend

The legionaries' leaders complained about how the case would affect them, but didn't beg forgiveness from Maciel's victims or show any intention of making reparation to those he wronged. They went along with trying to distance the institute from its founder, but their language was ambiguous since even while accepting the facts they continued to verbally protect the man who, despite "some defects," had brought them many values for which they were indebted to him. In their arguments they got at least one thing right: the institution couldn't be understood without Maciel.

According to Fernando González, a major change had occurred as the legionaries had steadfastly denied their founder's acts of pederasty and addiction to morphine and now were admitting that he led a double life. Nevertheless González insisted that talking about a "double life" wasn't enough: they should be talking about many lives since he was a drug addict, a pederast, had sexual relations with women and even had a daughter. To cap their disingenuousness, they still wanted his saintliness to be accepted despite this behavior. It was important too that the defense the organization had originally constructed to defend its founder—alleging a conspiracy against them and the Church—had crumbled.

### A Vatican inspection with what results?

In March of this year the Vatican ordered a team of clerics to conduct an inspection of the Legion. They said they aimed for truth and transparency. Once this news became public, Maciel's successor said members of his institution were troubled and asked for forgiveness from anyone who felt harmed by Maciel's actions.

It seemed a step forward since they used the word "forgiveness" for the first time, but closer examination of their words suggests they were only seeking forgiveness from those loyal to the organization because the legend had fallen. They said nothing to those wronged by their founder, much less clear a path to repair the serious damage Maciel had caused so many defenseless victims.

Leaving to one side the legionaries' comments, which ineffectually tried to minimize the inspection's expected results, it was taken as a sign of the case's seriousness that notification of the Vatican's visit was made by the Secretary of State and not the Congregation for the Sacred Life Institutes and Apostolic Life

Societies. Another point to emphasize was that now it wasn't just about the deceased founder, but also about his institution. There was speculation about what might result from this visit: institutional changes, expulsion of some members and even the religious institution's dissolution. Given that the powerful networks of economic interests supporting the legionaries would be activated, the latter was seen as unlikely unless the Vatican set its sights specifically on the networks of international economic complicity and ensured that a truly evangelical vision would prevail.

One former Mexican legionary felt that the investigation started by Pope Benedict XVI meant something expected of him for a long time was finally being done. He trusted that the pope's determination wouldn't waver because Maciel and the congregation's other leaders had committed "high treason against Christ and the Church." Spanish journalist Martínez de Velasco also considered the announcement important and long overdue, and advised that the current superiors, all of them close to Maciel, should be thoroughly investigated because he had not acted alone and those who had abetted him should go to prison for their complicity. An ex-legionary from Chile expressed hope that the investigation would bring about the congregation's renewal.

#### In the "universal devil" category

Xavier Velasco, a man of letters, published an article in April titled "A bedroom absolution." It began with the account of an incident that happened 12 years ago when the legionaries' followers were still convinced they would one day pray to Saint Marcial Maciel. The legionaries had contacted Velasco because they wanted him to announce their institution's main advantage: while others taught, they formed leaders. Velasco confessed that he was tempted to ask them if instead of forming they didn't mean "shoe-horning".

Velasco explained the reasons that had led him to write the article. The first was that "the tarnished cleric from Michoacan, as well as being a child rapist, pedophile, drug addict and father, was one of John Paul II's confessors." The second had to do with "a scandalous fault common to many hypocrites, with and without cassocks: forgiving the accomplice. How could the unwary/innocent believer not be encouraged to sin alongside the libertine in a cassock, if he who was going to absolve him absolves the pope? Who would dare to contradict his teachings having once believed in his goodness and seeing him now as a saint? Is there a pious soul in the head of him to whom the Pope confesses his own sins, an extreme hedonist disguised as a shepherd of souls? How to deny, based on the disciple's silent genuflexed faith, that the graceful accomplice would necessarily leave the place of the incidents even purer than when he entered, after receiving such a huge indulgence? "

The writer went on to reflect that the aggressor connived with his victim for a

handful of blessings. He ended by underscoring that the memory of the man who would have been a resplendent new Mexican saint was now likely “to ascend to the category of universal devil.”

### Pending responsibilities for the Catholic Church

In the context of the latest revelations about Maciel, a sizable group of people of recognized honor joined with prestigious civil organizations to publish a pamphlet that opened with the question: “When will the Vatican finally stop covering up the crimes of sexual abuse committed by Marcial Maciel?” Given the latest revelations, the objective of those who signed the pamphlet was to get the legionaries and ecclesiastical authorities to publicly distance themselves from what they had previously been complicit in covering up. The signers requested from the legionaries and the ecclesiastical hierarchy a series of things they should have done for some time but that had become imperative in light of what had happened.

First, they asked for an official public declaration to establish responsibility for the canonical and civil crimes committed by Maciel and to ask for pardon for the extensive damage caused to the sexual abuse victims. They also called on the pope to demand a review of the process conducted against Maciel, in which the honor and reputation of all those called to give evidence under an oath of excommunication would be vindicated for having done so in good faith and telling the truth.

Out of respect for the victims and all Catholics, the ecclesiastical elite were obliged not only to clarify the crimes of pederasty but also to pay compensation for the damage done. The Catholic hierarchy was expected to bring about profound institutional change to avoid more innocent boys and girls falling victim to sexual abuse in the future by priests sheltered, protected and concealed by that same Church.

### The only conspiracy

Civic groups concerned with respect for children’s rights and an important sector of civil society that defends transparency view the evidence as overwhelming, well-founded and decisive. Maciel, the legionaries’ leaders and the top Catholic hierarchy now find themselves in an inextricable bind. Many religious and civil laws have been violated. Both the damage done to the victims of the alleged pederasty practices and that provoked by its concealment and multiple complicities is immense. The top Catholic hierarchy cannot escape the obligation to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation, make the results known with total transparency, ask forgiveness for the resulting blame and compensate the victims for the damage done. The latter must not continue to bear the burden of their aggressors’ injustice and

impunity at all levels.

Also to be resolved is what all this implies for the legionaries' organization, not only because its founder was surrounded by a nucleus that favored and protected his perverse practices, but also because the response of the congregation's leadership revealed the highly questionable and dangerous way it thinks and acts. Rather than investigate the accusations when they surfaced, the leadership enlisted their own and their allies' organizational machinery—making them accomplices—and employed substantial economic resources to further dishonor the victims and those in the media who listened to them. They thus further victimized those who had suffered Maciel's abuses and created new victims, those whose professional work was significantly harmed. In order to protect itself, this leadership invented and publicized a non-existent conspiracy supposedly aimed at damaging the Church. In the end the only plot to damage the Church was the pederasty and the institution's concealment of it.

#### **What carries more weight?**

Once the legionaries could no longer evade the facts about their founder's sinful and criminal life, they fell back on a style of argument that showed them up even more: they appealed to the metaphor of scales. They tried to minimize Maciel's serious crimes by arguing that they were outweighed by all the good he and his organization had done in the world. Those who think like this have a warped vision and damage people over whom they wield influence.

If someone undertakes praiseworthy labor, does it not matter if he wrongs others? Can one violate people's elemental rights if one compensates for it with other actions? An organization with this behavioral logic is essentially immoral. To try and minimize behavior that attacks people's human rights and dignity displays a crooked thinking linked exclusively to activism. Such thinking has led many of those loyal to the legionaries to ask about the good Maciel did, as if it might excuse him from responsibility for having trampled on and denigrated many people's dignity.

#### **Indoctrinated in Macielism**

A first clue to answer what the legionaries have called Maciel's "double life" can be found in the gospels when Jesus warns: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves." Ironically, these are the very ones who shall be known by their fruits.

Another clue has to do with the complexity of human beings. No one is monochromatic. Good people have flaws and bad people can show goodness. It's enough to examine the behavior of bloodthirsty and corrupt mafia bosses who are excellent fathers and do charitable works building schools, hospitals

and temples in different communities. But no one can be exempted from answering for their actions against others.

In order to save their founder, the legionaries distanced themselves completely from the most basic of lay ethics, not to mention the imperative of Christian love.

An example of the people over whom the legionaries have influence is the case of Mexican President Fox's first lady for the six years of his administration. This politician boasted that Maciel was her spiritual guide but demonstrated a behavior far from what could be considered moral. Marta Sahagun de Fox dressed ostentatiously with public money even though most of the population lives in poverty. She was accused of favoring the illicit enrichment of her circle, and in her unrestrained ambition encouraged the serious reversal of democracy Mexico suffers today. Was she distorted by association with Maciel's thinking, or was it a case of "birds of a feather"?

#### **Money, sex and power**

It's impossible to take Maciel out of the legionaries because we can't forget that the legionaries and their followers have been indoctrinated with Macielism. We also mustn't minimize the intrinsic relationship between Maciel's personality and the addiction to money, power and perversion.

The teachings of Mexican psychoanalyst Raúl Páramo can be applied to this case. In his book *Psicoanálisis y lo social* (Psychoanalysis and Society) he warns that addiction will be less detectable as such in an environment where it is widespread. One such addiction—to money—is intrinsically insatiable as "it becomes an end in itself, over and above any other value." Páramo emphasizes that money encourages the idea of its convertibility into many things, including power or fame. It is perceived as something that allows everything. The author stresses that he uses the word "allows" in both its meanings: at the material level to be able to do something and the moral level, wherein money grants permission to do anything. In this way, money overrules morality. In becoming a substitute for all values, it acquires "its maximum potential as seducer and oppressor: everything is within its reach" and it feeds fantasies of omnipotence. On arriving at the conviction that money can do everything, it follows that "one can trample others' rights underfoot."

Addiction to money degrades and corrupts because it leads to trading what cannot be traded: love, truth and loyalty. Keeping this in mind, it would be appropriate for the just-initiated Vatican investigation to examine whether Maciel's organization is not a rotten fruit that should be separated from the rest so it doesn't spoil everything.



## Fear in the Time of the Virus

*Although the new human influenza virus, a.k.a. swine flu, didn't originate in Mexico, the deaths there were what first alerted the world to it. The Mexican government's inappropriate reaction to the epidemic provides interesting lessons, the main one being how political power can use fear of diseases as a method of social control.*

Jorge Alonso

In 2009, the world became aware of a new and worrying strain of influenza first dubbed “swine flu” then changed to human influenza A (H1N1). It was first said to have originated in Mexico, but was later found to have had roots elsewhere years earlier.

### Various cases in previous years

The H1N1 swine flu virus was identified in a pregnant woman in the late eighties, although 24 people may have died of the same virus in China in the summer of 2005. A new kind of swine flu called H2N3 was detected among pigs in Missouri at the end of 2007 and in September 2008 it was revealed that a girl had been infected with type A swine flu in 2005. In November 2008, a case of type A (H1N1) swine flu was reported in a human being, then in early March of this year respiratory problems and general malaise among a Mexican population living near the pig farms of an important transnational company made the news. The next day it was confirmed that a boy had been infected in San Diego, California, and by the end of the month a girl in the same state suddenly had a fever of over 103 degrees Fahrenheit.

By April 11 the World Health Organization (WHO) began alerting Mexico to unusual cases of pneumonia in Veracruz, but the authorities rejected the idea of any epidemic. Finally, on April 22, Mexico sent the first 51 samples to Canada, where the propagation of a new strain of this flu was confirmed. It had genetic ingredients of swine, bird and human flu and was easily transmitted from human to human.

These different cases had not really sounded the alarm until it was confirmed that there were cases on a massive scale in Mexico. Authorities said they were very worried because they did not know how deadly the illness was or whether any medicine would prove effective against it. Since the name “swine flu” was seriously hurting pork sales even though contagion did not come directly from pigs or their meat, pig producers protested so strongly that it was changed to

human influenza A (H1N1).

Specialists calmed down as soon as it was verified that the virus was curable if treated in time with Tamiflu antiviral medicine (oseltamivir), but the Mexican government preferred to employ the politics of fear.

#### **Mexico behind masks**

By the end of April there were cases in half of Mexico, particularly the capital city and San Luis Potosí. The authorities decreed an epidemiological emergency, suspended classes throughout the country, prohibited mass activities and restricted certain economic activities. Citizens were insisting on transparent and complete, information, the government's response fell way short of that.

As the outbreak intensified, health authorities publicized the symptoms—a sudden high fever, headache, aching muscles, sore throat, runny nose and acute general malaise. Informing people that the illness was spread by saliva when people cough or sneeze and by touching contaminated surfaces or materials, they disseminated urgent preventive measures such as avoiding contact with sick people, not sharing food and drink, using a face mask, moving away from other people and covering one's nose with one's forearm when sneezing. The authorities also suggested cleaning surfaces, handles and handrails, avoiding greeting people by shaking hands and especially kissing, and constantly washing one's hands. And finally, while people were advised to avoid crowds, anti-bacterial hand gel was made available in busy places.

The alert was sounded on the global level and many Mexicans travelling in various parts of the world suffered discrimination and humiliation. Being Mexican was taken as the equivalent of carrying the disease. When the flu was found to be spreading in the United States as well as Mexico, the WHO decreed a level 5 alert, meaning the disease had spread to at least two countries in the same region.

#### **Media terror and growing doubts**

It became increasingly evident that an illness of this nature could not be confined locally and would soon become a global problem. Despite the Mexican media's continued stress that the announced measures were timely and pertinent, by May certain civic organizations were having their doubts. While the measures might avoid propagation of the virus, the government had been far from efficient in handling information it had been receiving.

It was impossible to hide cases in several areas of the country where the population didn't receive immediate care. Since early 2009 the inhabitants of one town in Veracruz had been complaining to the media about an epidemic of

a respiratory disease they attributed to the unsanitary conditions of industrial pig farms. Other negative factors included the cuts in health sector resources dictated by neoliberal policies and the fact Mexico had no laboratory capable of detecting the illness immediately, leaving the country dependent on foreign laboratories.

A kind of media terror was being spread rather than information. It was a good thing for the Felipe Calderón government that the May Day workers' parade had to be suspended, as it would surely have brought strong criticism of the Mexican Right's neoliberal economic measures.

### **Who were the winners?**

The lack of honest and timely information and the media manipulation gave rise to various hypotheses. Was this a disease created in the laboratories of the empire to the north that had gotten out of control? While this couldn't be proved and the WHO declared that the illness had mutated naturally, it and other hypotheses were based on the fact that important, profit-driven capitalist businesses control the production of vaccines and medicines for pandemic emergencies. It didn't go unnoticed, for example, that Donald Rumsfeld—the Bush government's defense secretary—was a major stockholder in the pharmaceutical company that holds the patent for the medicine used to treat H1N1 and was therefore among the companies that stood to make a fortune out of the spread of this virus.

### **Other forgotten “pandemics”**

With the prioritization of the morbidity and mortality figures for this epidemic, other health problems were totally pushed aside. Mexico and the world in general seemed to simply accept, without demanding any effective remedies, that a newborn dies from lack of medical care every second, that a child dies of hunger and malnutrition every three seconds, that a child dies from contaminated water every eight seconds, that a child dies of AIDS every minute, that a child dies to lack of medical care every five minutes, that 11 million children die before reaching puberty every year, that 530,000 pregnant women die of malnutrition every year, etc., etc., etc. Dengue, malaria and other transmittable diseases have been relegated as “illnesses of the poor” because tackling them doesn't offer a gold mine to those in the health business.

### **The disease marches on**

By the first week of May, the United States had the largest number of reported cases of the new influenza, followed by Mexico and Canada. The first scientific article on it appeared on May 11 in *Science*. The journal forecast that this flu epidemic could become as severe as one in 1957, which caused the deaths of 2 million people around the world, but not as serious as the one in 1918, to

which 100 million deaths are attributed.

When President Calderón proclaimed himself a kind of savior of humanity for the measures his government had taken in response to the epidemic, Fidel Castro justified Cuba's temporary suspension of flights to Mexico by accusing the Calderón government of having concealed the first data so as not to endanger President Obama's visit to Mexico. Referring to the *Science* article, Castro pointed out that Mexico already had several thousand cases when it first announced the epidemic and that the infection had emerged at the beginning of the year.

By mid-May, the epidemic had already reached Europe and the WHO warned that the virus could undergo a new mutation and become more aggressive. At that point, the official number of people infected in over 30 countries had topped 5,000. In only a few more days it had risen to over 8,000 and was also showing up in South America, New Zealand, Japan and Israel.

In Mexico, 2.5% of those infected had died. While seasonal flu cases usually affect the two extreme age groups—children and the elderly—this new flu was particularly infecting young women. With panic growing, health speculators started offering fake treatments and selling Tamiflu on the black market.

#### **Why are there more deaths here?**

Grassroots groups stressed that fear was the worst enemy of health promotion and that the answer lay in community organization and self-care. The People's Revolutionary Army (EPR) released a communiqué denouncing the Calderón government for lying about the epidemic's magnitude and cost. It pointed out that by creating media panic, the government and the communication monopolies had sparked a psychosis among the middle and upper classes, while there was incredulity and collective sarcasm among the working classes that had to face the consequences of an inefficient and corrupt health system every day. "The face mask is just another consumer product, exclusive to those with money. Poor people have to choose between eating a kilo of tortillas or buying a face mask," they said.

Many people were asking why there were more deaths in Mexico than in other parts of the world, to which the medical world responded that aggravating factors helped turn a curable illness into a deadly one. Along the same lines, the EPR noted that people are defenseless against this kind of disease because of the chronic malnutrition caused by poverty and starvation, and that no hygiene measures are enough for people living in poverty. The EPR also accused Calderón of causing more deaths with his army and police force than the epidemic, and viewed his desire to present himself as the savior of the world as ridiculous. It lamented that most of the deaths were among the poor and

stressed that the epidemic had provided a good pretext for containing the protests against an anti-grassroots government.

#### **Everything under control?**

While health specialists viewed Mexican society's behavior as exemplary, they were less flattering toward the government, which had made important decisions that endangered the whole population based on imprecise data. There had also been delays of over a week in providing the information and it had been managed in a perverse way. The government wanted to give the impression that the epidemic had relented in order to reactivate the economy, but the figures didn't back this up and the number of deaths was actually rising.

On May 19, the UN Secretary General called on the world to remain vigilant against the virus as it still was not known how far it would reach, how fast it would spread, how serious it would be and how many people would die. By this point around 10,000 people had been infected in 40 countries. The WHO announced that it feared the new virus would interact with other viruses, stating that an influenza pandemic was evolving before its eyes, making the creation of a specific vaccine harder than initially hoped. On May 22, *Science* published a new article on the influenza, detailing the original forms of animal-to-human and human-to-human infection.

During the last week of May, just as the government was trying to convince people that the situation was under control, there were over a thousand new cases in Mexico. Some recognized that the information wasn't reliable, as estimates about the epidemic's evolution weren't consistent. Public health experts detected that the real number of suspected and confirmed cases and deaths was being concealed. In fact, the government was worried about releasing the real figures around that time so as not to frighten off investment and tourism.

#### **A late and poor response**

Although the United States led the way in the number of people infected, the proportion of infected people—not to mention deaths—among the total population was higher in Mexico. But by then, the interests of businesspeople and merchants weighed more heavily than the health of Mexicans. Health specialist Asa Cristina Laurell wrote that not only had the actions been taken late, but initially paralyzing the country hadn't helped control the influenza. She argued that an intense search for cases and contacts should have been undertaken, while epidemiological fences should have been applied to isolate and treat the sick, as was being done in other parts of the world. She added that there were also serious recording problems.

While the WHO believed that Mexico had a solid epidemiological emergency

system, the reality was quite different. Not only did Mexico not save the world, it actually confused it. During the WHO's World Assembly it became clear that countries' recording problems represent a serious weakness in the world emergency network against the pandemic. But even though Mexico's official under-registration contradicted him, President Calderón continued proclaiming that the country had already surmounted the health contingency. It must be stressed that the government instructed health sector doctors to give out no figures on their own initiative, but while the government controlled the figures, it couldn't mask the rise in the number of people infected.

#### **Level 6 pandemic: Global alert**

The virus spread throughout the world. By the beginning of June there were over 19,000 cases in 66 countries. A few days later the figures had climbed to over 25,000 in 73 countries. Because the virus appears to live better in cold and dry environments than hot and humid ones, the South American winter increased the number of people infected in Southern Cone countries. The WHO warned that the arrival of autumn in the northern hemisphere could reinforce the epidemic. In Mexico new cases kept on emerging and the number of deaths kept on rising, passing the hundred mark.

Mexico announced it would be hosting a summit of health ministers from 40 countries in July to discuss the new flu, swapping experiences on its management in order to give the WHO more information for analyzing how the health crisis was being handled. The WHO's director general warned that Mexico could experience a second wave of cases. Following an emergency meeting with specialists, she decided to decree the highest level of alert—level 6—as the new virus was so easily transmitted from person to person and country to country. The first pandemic of the 21st century had been established, offering a bleak panorama for countries with deteriorated health systems and limited resources.

The WHO advised preparing for a long battle against the unstoppable new virus, establishing that the emergency would be long-term and stressing that people between the ages of 30 and 50, pregnant women and people with chronic illnesses (asthma, diabetes and obesity) were at greatest risk. It also announced that its members had to remain alert throughout 2009 and 2010, and possibly for several more years. Although the virus seemed to be showing up in a quite stable form up to that point, it could become more lethal, particularly if it combined with the H5N1 avian flu virus circulating widely among farmyard fowl.

#### **A vaccine? For whom?**

Another risk was that the new virus could mix with the more common seasonal flu, which had developed resistance to the antiviral drug Tamiflu. Nonetheless,

the WHO advised countries not to close their borders or impose trade restrictions. The phase 6 classification meant the illness had propagated globally, but did not reflect the virus' virulence or the number of deaths it had caused. Up until that moment, the pandemic was only moderately severe in developed countries.

The main fear was what might happen in poor countries. The WHO announced it would donate another 5 million doses of Tamiflu and recommended that laboratories complete production of the vaccine against seasonal flu, which infects millions every year and causes the deaths of up to half a million people. The WHO praised the fact that the main pharmaceutical companies were already developing a specific vaccine against influenza A (H1N1), but recognized that it would be a few months before it could be put into circulation. The Novartis laboratory declared that over 30 governments had already requested the new vaccine. The United States had already placed an initial million dollar order and other developed countries were ensuring the acquisition of most of the vaccines that would be produced.

### **The virus is here to stay**

Mexico's health secretary recognized that the appearance of the new virus had taken the authorities unawares but tried to calm people by saying that more and more was already being learned about it. He accepted the likelihood of a new wave of cases during the winter period, and announced that 20 million doses of the seasonal flu vaccine and another 20 million vaccines against the new virus were being acquired. He also said that construction of a new level-three bio-security laboratory would soon be concluded in the capital city and that all state labs would have the capacity to test for the new influenza virus. He accepted that important lessons had been learned in areas such as coordination and perfecting the collection and sending of information, and announced that the epidemiological surveillance platform had been readjusted. He also surmised that Mexico had passed from the epidemic to the endemic phase.

Despite the official optimism, the new influenza virus experienced a new surge in mid-June in four of the country's states. By early July, the official number of people infected in Mexico was very close to 11,000, with 121 deaths. In absolute numbers, the United States still headed the field with around 34,000 cases, but Mexico was still in second place. Worldwide, there were over 98,000 confirmed cases in 137 countries, with 440 deaths. It was a major cause for concern that Mexico accounted for a quarter of the deaths globally.

Although the Health Secretariat stopped releasing its reports on the epidemic at the end of June, cases kept appearing, and in some states there was a jump in new cases in mid-summer. There were 200 new infections in Yucatán in just

a few days in July, placing that state second only to Mexico City. Between June and July the number of cases increased by 80% in the state of Jalisco, forcing local health authorities to accept that the epidemic had come to stay. It's still not possible to draw up an influenza map using official figures, as they aren't reliable enough.

#### The WHO warns against both panic and complacency

The health authorities from 40 countries who met at Mexico's Cancún resort on July 1-3 for a summit on influenza A (H1N1) heard the WHO announce that a stronger outbreak was expected and that the virus would inevitably continue to evolve and could not be contained. It stressed that no one knew how the virus would behave. The WHO also changed its initial estimate of the date on which the new vaccine would be available, although it still hoped to have it ready before winter hit the northern hemisphere. It announced its commitment to distribute 250 million doses in developing countries.

The WHO recommended careful monitoring of what happened during South America's winter and that researchers should prepare for surprises from a virus that was both threatening and changeable as a result of the capacity of flu strains to mix. Since the world was still at the start of the pandemic and did not know how it would evolve, the WHO recommended neither generating panic in society nor fostering complacency. It requested analyses of patients with uncommon symptoms so it could detect possible mutations of the virus. Less than a week after the summit, the WHO reported that some patients were showing signs of resistance to Tamiflu—the medicine most used to treat the new influenza—although fortunately they responded favorably to zanamivir, the other antiviral used against it.

US, Mexican and Canadian health authorities agreed that a second, stronger and more widespread wave of the new virus would hit starting in the autumn and continue through winter. The Mexican health secretary announced that Mexico had 2,400,000 doses of antivirals to respond to the winter increase and that the country was guaranteeing medical care, but warned that some situations might get out of control. Meanwhile, Mexican officials complained of discrimination against Mexicans in various countries.

#### US\$4 billion in economic losses

A Pan American Health Organization committee evaluated the influenza's economic impact in Mexico, which health authorities calculated to be at least US\$4 billion, equal to 0.4% of the GDP. A research study by the Mexican House of Representatives' Center for Public Finance Studies revealed that 30,000 tons of pork had gone unsold due to the influenza, even though the authorities had promoted pork consumption, insisting the virus couldn't be transmitted that

way.

### The virus on top of the crisis

The economic impact of the virus came on top of the world economic crisis, which was already seriously affecting Mexico. Income from tourism fell 14.8% between January and May of this year, while in May alone, with Mexico in the headlines due to the virus scare, international tourism dropped by 49% compared with the same month in 2008.

In April the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had forecast that Mexico's economy would shrink by 3.7% this year, but in July it revised this figure to 7.2%. This was publicly announced the day after the government said "recovery" was underway. The IMF declared that while the world in general was starting to pick up, the decline in Mexico's productive apparatus was intensifying and the country was being increasingly affected by the crisis. Calderón had promised to be "the employment President," but events were making him the President of unemployment. Official figures already admit that thousands of jobs have been lost, outstripping the number of people laid off during the 1995 crisis.

President Calderón has used the rhetoric of placing Mexicans' health over and above the economy, but when the government perceived that the political control measures employed to respond to the epidemic had overstepped the mark and were affecting the economy, it dropped that tactic to encourage tourism. Members of the governing National Action Party (PAN) wanted to exploit the July 5 legislative elections to provide backing for Calderón's measures, but the PAN suffered a crushing electoral defeat. Calderón's government is staggering from failure to failure, and the millions of poor are paying the price.

### A bankrupt health system

There has never been an official explanation for why Mexico has had the greatest number of deaths from the virus. But at a minimum the epidemic has revealed how neoliberal policies have dismantled the health system.

Groups attempting to create another way of doing politics from below point out that Mexico is 64th in the WHO health ranking, that its public health budget is much lower than that of other member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, to which Mexico also belongs, and that this measly budget isn't enough to cover the population's needs. A full 40 million Mexican workers are underemployed in precarious jobs with miserable wages and sidelined from the social security systems. Transnational laboratories hog 90% of the national medicine market and thus control the health of millions of human beings. These monopolies impose their businesses

as if they were public health policies and speculate with the prices of medicines.

The deteriorated health services and miserable conditions affecting the population left vulnerable by the neoliberal economic system offer the influenza better conditions to spread among the poorest and those living far from the health centers. Authorities stressed that the antiviral medicines are effective if applied within 48 hours of the symptoms appearing, but many people in impoverished conditions can only reach health care facilities several days later.

#### **Was Cofre de Perote the locus?**

The influenza helped create an important social movement among over 30 communities neighboring the pig farms on the border between the states of Puebla and Veracruz.

In 1994, with support from the state governments, a transnational company pushing Carroll's pig farms set up shop in the valleys of the extinct Cofre de Perote volcano. Local inhabitants were told the farms would provide a lot of jobs, but work turned out to be scarce and the farms caused major ecological damage. When the communities started defending their lands, water and air, the government responded with repression. The above-mentioned outbreak of pneumonia among roughly a thousand people in March 2009 together with data from *Science* suggesting that a mutation of swine flu could have occurred in this area encouraged the inhabitants to reactivate their movement in defense of ecology and life.

They stressed that the contamination that might have provided the right conditions for the virus was still present and the situation could become even more dangerous. In addition, they demanded the closure of the pig farms due to their high environmental cost and called for independent national and international organizations to conduct medical and environmental research on the influenza cases in the area and the damage done to land and aquifers by the oxidation lakes installed by the companies. They also called for an examination of the pig carcasses in the farms' warehouses to check their cause of death and detect whether they had been affected by viruses. The movement's demands included a total clean-up of the area and an investigation of the actions of the relevant authorities in order to attribute responsibilities.

The movement demonstrated that those affected would not be fobbed off with the idea that this was some kind of "divine punishment," but rather that identifiable people linked to economic capital and/or in state institutions were

directly responsible.

#### **“No” to fear, “yes” to organization**

The epidemic exposed the inconsistencies of the Mexican government, which applied media terrorism in an attempt to politically control the social unrest. The government later backed off in response to pressure from big businesspeople when it saw the economic impact this tactic was having. The bioterrorism worked at first and could prove useful again should the epidemic take a turn for the worse or if the political conditions deteriorate.

The government applied a kind of state of exception, suspending or restricting basic rights and disseminating only limited information, another tactic it could use again. Grassroots collectives, however, have proposed alternatives to the strategy of fear-fueled conjecture and demobilization that confined most people to their homes and workplaces. In other countries, the epidemic is being effectively managed without resorting to such methods. An adequate response can be provided if people are responsibly organized and informed. These collectives propose increasing the surveillance, timely detection and control of the disease based on grassroots potential. Commissions need to be created in barrios and towns, while community epidemiological diagnoses have to be conducted in response to the disinformation and state manipulation.

We have to say “no” to fear and “yes” to mobilization, organization, trust and life. And the best medicine of all would be an active epidemiology built up from below.

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#### **Acteal Twelve Years On**

*Twelve years ago the massacre at Acteal, Chiapas, alerted the world that the Mexican government had unleashed a counterinsurgency war against the indigenous Zapatista communities. The system is now trying to cover up the crime with a judicial ruling that only reveals the reigning impunity. The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience included Acteal among the 17 historic sites of gross injustice that remind the world of a history we cannot forget.*

**Jorge Alonso**

After a term and a half of National Action Party (PAN) governments, Mexico is a nation in ruins. According to the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy, only 18% of Mexicans earn a living wage. The rest are

living in some form of poverty. A study by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean shows Mexico is a leader in poverty and inequality.

International organizations consider Mexico to have been severely affected by the global financial crisis, mainly due to the ineptitude of those governing. In this respect, Latinobarometer's report for 2009 revealed that only 28% of Mexicans were satisfied with the country's democracy.

#### An internal war with guaranteed impunity

The Calderón government has declared an internal war, which analysts have dubbed "a failed war" because comparing the reasons for conducting it to the official data only reveals the unsustainable nature of all of the government's arguments. The worrying thing is that the federal government's 2009-2012 National Security Program emphasizes the use of force against grassroots rebel groups.

The last six months of 2009 showed an increase in this counterinsurgency war in the southeast of the country, while the Supreme Court's participation in the counterinsurgency strategy encouraged the paramilitary groups. Rejecting the evidence of survivors of the 1997 Acteal massacre arguing formal points, the Court freed 29 of those accused of perpetrating the massacre and ordered the retrial of 22 others. As a result, it ensured complete impunity for that crime against humanity. Freeing the accused members of paramilitary groups was another step in covering up a state crime.

#### The brutal Acteal massacre

The target of the massacre was a group called Las Abejas, formed in 1992 to confront the government repression against indigenous communities in Chiapas. A peaceful organization that did not agree with the armed approach, they nonetheless recognized that the Zapatista demands following the Zapatista uprising in 1994 were similar to their own.

Members of the Las Abejas organization participated with many other Mexicans in demanding an end to the government's war in Chiapas. There was an increase in paramilitary groups in 1997 and they demanded that Las Abejas collaborate in the attack on the Zapatistas. But Las Abejas had never taken up arms against the government and was certainly not going to do so against indigenous brothers and sisters. In a context in which the paramilitaries had the full support of the army, local police and the government, members of Las Abejas fell victim to the paramilitary groups, which first began to steal their crops and burn their homes and finally forced them off their lands. On December 22, 1997, they were attacked by government-backed paramilitary

members in Acteal while praying and fasting against these abuses.

A total of 45 people and 4 unborn babies were massacred, including 19 women, 14 girls, 8 men, and 4 boys. Later on the same day of the massacre, Las Abejas group members detained the assassins when they passed in front of the relatives of the slain in a municipal government truck. Around 80 perpetrators were taken prisoner.

When the Supreme Court ordered many of those same people to be freed twelve years later, the Las Abejas group dubbed it the Supreme Court of Injustice.

#### **Evidence and accomplices**

Although most of the official media wanted to make this legal atrocity look like a step towards justice, all it really ensured was impunity. Las Abejas insisted that the alleged lack of evidence was false, citing the survivors who saw those responsible for the assassinations and who have testified on many occasions. The Court alleged that its ruling was correcting the work of the Attorney General's Office, when in reality it was completing its work in order to free the government's accomplices.

The survivors of the massacre and their families have now been put in danger, as those freed from jail have threatened revenge many times. In this respect, the Commission of Indigenous Affairs of the Mexican Congress' House of Representatives warned that freeing indigenous people accused of the slaughter at Acteal could rekindle the violence.

The Las Abejas group named the intellectual authors of the crime, including former President Zedillo and top local military and civilian authorities, undermining efforts to portray this as either an inter-community or an inter-religious conflict. When the release of the prisoners was announced, it was revealed that one of those working on their defense has been an advisor to Zedillo. In 2006, a promise had been made to review the case of these prisoners in exchange for presidential votes for Calderón.

#### **It was a state crime**

On learning about the sad ending to this story, the Network Against Repression and for Solidarity reminded people that the Supreme Court had become a "guarantee of impunity" for those responsible for the repression in Oaxaca and Atenco, not touching those who make "horror into a business and a state policy." Many independent columnists again pointed out that the Acteal massacre was a State crime and that, in addition to an attempt to rewrite the history of the massacre, freeing the perpetrators, was "the continuation of the war by other means." Adolfo Gilly proposed establishing a kind of Russell

Tribunal for Acteal and many human rights organizations demanded the reopening of reliable investigations into this terrible case.

The representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico expressed his disappointment and anthropologist Aída Hernández, who wrote a powerful book on the testimonies of the women of Acteal, said she felt impotent and incensed by the Supreme Court action, which sent a message to those who did the dirty work that they would be defended in the same way by the government.

#### **Evidence from the United States**

Official US documents, declassified in 2009, refuted the official version and showed that from mid-1994 the US Defense Intelligence Agency had information that the Mexican army was giving direct support to the paramilitary groups in Chiapas and that the paramilitary groups were under government military supervision when the Acteal massacre occurred. The army had presidential authorization to organize military teams responsible for promoting armed groups in Chiapas, which were provided with training and protection. The documents showed a counterinsurgency strategy that had been carefully planned by the government.

Academics from the United States, Latin America and Europe also expressed their indignation at the Supreme Court ruling and their support for the massacre survivors. Marcos Roitman stated that the infamy was growing “exponentially” and condemned the rigged rulings, while indigenous people and different grassroots groups marched in condemnation of the freeing of the Acteal assassins. All of these critical voices have highlighted that this action has only increased the disrepute of the political and legal institutions.

#### **The Church speaks out**

The Conference of Mexican Bishops stated their disagreement and pointed out that the intellectual authors of the crime would not be able to live in peace even though they were not incarcerated. Meanwhile, the bishops of the diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas said that the unjust Court decision would only increase insecurity in the communities of the Acteal area. Bishop of Saltillo, Raul Vera, who spent several years in Chiapas, gave the harshest assessment: the justices that had voted in favor of the accused should be brought to political trial for defending the paramilitary, silencing the truth of what happened and covering up the trail leading to the real instigators of the massacre. He warned of “a new Acteal,” fearing things were heading in that direction.

Ricardo Robles, a Jesuit of the Tarahumara Mission, suggested that by issuing carte blanche impunity and freeing the present and past authorities from the

weight of justice, the Supreme Court had welded the next link in the chain of twelve years of injustice. This had been done to open up spaces for the free trade of “what the Indians are and have” by terrorizing, threatening and humiliating them.

#### **Acteal was the result of State policy**

The Las Abejas group could only view the Supreme Court as a court of “the rich and criminals,” denouncing the justices for taking orders from the intellectual authors of the Acteal massacre. In the region where the crime was committed, the sentence was met with indignation, anguish and pain. They didn’t let the governor of Chiapas into the community when he went, hoping to silence them with gifts, including a statue of the Virgin. Then the government tried to implicate them in alleged armed groups that were supposedly going to invade the area on the bicentennial anniversary of Mexican Independence and the centennial anniversary of the Mexican Revolution.

In the presentation of the book *Acteal, crimen de Estado* [Acteal: State Crime] at the Guadalajara International Book Fair in November, journalist Herman Bellinghausen accused Zedillo of planning the massacres of Acteal, El Charco and Aguas Blancas and also the murders of many indigenous people as a result of state policy. He recalled that although he had been writing before the Acteal massacre about all the signs pointing to such a terrible outcome, the genocide had not been stopped.

And it’s still not stopping. Counter-insurgency actions and inciting paramilitary groups against Zapatista sympathizers increased in the second half of 2009, in a scenario reminiscent of events before the Acteal massacre. A synthetic review of the events reveals how the release of those accused of the Acteal massacre was just one incident in a sequence of events that adds up to an aggressive anti-grassroots counterinsurgency policy.

#### **Ongoing counterinsurgency actions**

In August 2009, several cooperatives in Chiapas demanded a halt to the repression against them for defending their territory and freedom for people who had been imprisoned for fighting for social justice. They also demanded justice for the murderer of one of their comrades. They stressed that the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) government of Chiapas, closely allied to President Calderon, preferred war to dialogue.

In September the Zapatista Board of Good Government of La Garrucha spoke out against the violence unleashed against the autonomous municipality of San Manuel. Paramilitary groups had decided to take a piece of land being worked by Zapatista support groups causing serious damage to the livestock and wounding, capturing and torturing people.

Throughout 2009 the autonomous Zapatista authorities disseminated reports detailing their grievances, while denying having negotiated the commercialization of their land. In a climate of aggression and attempted evictions in different communities, the paramilitary groups' incursions increased.

#### Years of impunity for the paramilitary groups

In 1997, paramilitarization was already proliferating in the ranks of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). In 2009 members of the PRI, PAN and PRD parties were attacking Zapatista communities. The Board of Good Government of La Realidad made it clear that they would continue to defend their land and would not allow the threats, intimidation and humiliation to continue. The paramilitaries wanted to take away their water as well as their land. And no longer content to constantly attack indigenous Zapatistas, the paramilitary groups upped the ante in September by ambushing and attacking a lawyer from the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center. Without any proof, peasants who sympathized with the Zapatistas were arrested. The International Civil Observation Commission issued an alert on the worsening situation of violent and armed paramilitary actions and warned that the authorities and media in Chiapas were keeping up a campaign against human rights workers. Other groups noted the absolute impunity paramilitary group members enjoyed since they were formed by both the federal and state governments, which protected them to use them in the counterinsurgency war.

While paramilitaries were breaking the law without anyone bothering them, indigenous people and the peasants who sympathized with the Zapatistas were arrested without evidence. Human rights defense groups hit the nail on the head: the persecution and harassment of local peasant communities in resistance was due to neoliberal projects that wanted to take control of the communities' natural resources.

The government kept troublingly silent in response to accusations of paramilitary attacks, continuing the tried and tested recipe of Acteal: let time pass so the paramilitary attacks against the communities become routine.

One important element of this counter-insurgency war is that the attackers and the local media present distorted versions of the facts, making it look like the victims are the victimizers.

#### Silence, threats, attacks...

The escalation of violent events endangered the physical well being of human rights defenders. The Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center made a

call for national and international denunciations against this piece in the counterinsurgency strategy: neutralizing civil human rights organizations so the paramilitary could act with impunity, enjoying police and military complicity. However, the federal and state governments have taken no action to investigate or disarm the paramilitary groups in response to these denunciations.

Besides the dismantling of the paramilitary groups, the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center has demanded a stop to the censorship and instrumentalization of the media; arrest of both the perpetrators and the brains behind the attacks against the cooperative farmers of San Sebastián Bachajón and Jotolá, who are followers of the “Other Campaign”; and a halt to the actions by state officials that polarize and stigmatize human rights groups.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, made up of the World Organization Against Torture and the International Federation of Human Rights, travelled through Oaxaca and Chiapas, documenting how disappearances and murders weren't being punished while rights defenders were subjected to deadly attacks, threats, forced disappearances and smear campaigns, all aimed at preventing them from doing their work.

Academic groups and grassroots collectives in California issued a communiqué in response to information they received from the Zapatista Good Government Boards. Having been informed of various attacks and threats of eviction against communities supporting the Zapatistas, they named President Calderón and the governor of the state of Chiapas as responsible.

#### **Warnings of terror on January 1**

In spite of all these denunciations, at the beginning of October 2009 the paramilitary actions were increasing. In San Cristóbal de las Casas, for example, an attempt was made to burn down a women's training center. By the middle of the month, independent observers and journalists shared the hypothesis that the government was preparing the stage for what later happened: the freeing of the paramilitary members accused in the Acteal case.

The campaign against grassroots organizations and Zapatista communities was official. There were irregular arrests and attempts to discredit clergy working with the communities, and “leaks” were arranged to point to catechists as the promoters of violent actions.

Government operators wanted to impose on reporters the idea that the grassroots organizations were preparing armed attacks. But as a number of journalists did not accept these versions, the government spread them as paid information in the daily papers. This misinformation warned that on January 1,

priests would instigate violent acts throughout the country, with buildings taken over, roads blocked and banks and stores looted.

The governor of Chiapas went even further than the official version by declaring he would remove Chiapas from this nationally orchestrated military offensive.

#### **Denunciations increase in November**

Parallel to the official media offensive came denunciations by collective farmers who sympathize with the Zapatistas, stating that the paramilitaries were preparing to throw them off their land. In November, the Network against Repression made an urgent appeal concerning the incursion of paramilitaries who threatened to burn down the houses of indigenous people close to the Zapatistas. In mid-November, the Roberto Barrios Good Government Board reported paramilitary attacks in the northern area of Chiapas, the La Garrucha Good Government Board denounced an attempt by several people supported by “the bad government” to take possession of the peasants’ market in Ocosingo, and Caracol V protested the constant threats suffered by students of a Zapatista autonomous school.

In the second half of November priests in the Diocese of San Cristóbal strongly protested state persecution against them. Pastoral care workers stated that the Church and the people of Chiapas were being persecuted in response to their opposition to mining concessions for foreign companies in which the government had given permission to explore over a million hectares of Chiapas’ subsoil.

The government blamed the Church for the fact that Acteal’s residents refused to receive the governor, but it was actually a community decision. People considered it a mockery that government officials wanted to enter their community given that the government was an accomplice to the massacre by freeing and protecting the accused and that the original judicial decision held the government responsible for the crime.

#### **A government “professional at lying”**

In mid-November the Chiapas Coast Regional Autonomous Council demanded an end to the harassment, repression and threats against people involved in the Other Campaign in that state. The army continued its raids and patrols and Zapatista grassroots supporters in the Zinacantán municipality received death threats from the PRD municipal authorities. Using the pretext that they had not done community work they had never even been informed about, the authorities locked up some of these supporters for 16 hours without food.

Oventic’s Good Government Board announced that PRI members from San

Cristóbal had attacked the Zapatista grassroots base and kidnapped one supporter—threatening to kill him—when members of the Zapatista grassroots had gone to clean the spring that supplies their water. The PRI members even went to the media to spread the lie that the Zapatistas were provoking the confrontation. In all of their statements, the Good Government Boards have been very careful to present a detailed account of the events and their context.

Another episode in the counterinsurgency plan was a point of agreement approved by the Chiapas Congress in which the governor was asked to deal with an alleged petition of the Zapatista Good Government Boards requesting legal recognition, although all boards promptly denied having made any such petition. They announced that they had never asked for recognition from “bad governments” and were already recognized by their people, who had elected them, and by many other people both nationally and internationally.

The lies spread by the bad government, its elected officials and their accomplices are part of a counterinsurgency plan to confuse public opinion and batter the people’s resistance in their struggle to build autonomy. The Boards declared that they had a power called dignity, which was their best tool for showing the world they would never give up their struggle. They accused the government of being “professional at lying.”

The municipal, state and federal governments ruled by neoliberalism feel empowered by the money of neoliberal foreign investors. But they have run up against the dignity of the Zapatistas. The Good Government Boards recalled that all the political parties had betrayed the San Andrés Accords, warning that the bad governments would not achieve their goals as the Zapatistas wouldn’t sell out or give in.

#### **Building another justice**

On International Human Rights Defenders Day, the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center declared that during 2009 the work of human rights defenders had been criminalized in Chiapas by the authorities. With the pretext of a social explosion that would allegedly break out in 2010, the army continued to conduct illegal body searches in many communities with the help of police officers and agents from the state and federal public ministries, putting the population at risk. The grassroots movements demonstrated the existence of a plan of selective and systematic repression against leaders and groups opposing the privatization policies of the State and big business.

On December 21st, the twelfth anniversary of the Acteal crime, the community of Las Abejas held the “Supreme Impunity” Forum of Conscience and Hope to Build Another Justice. It was an arena to generate ideas and analysis around the issue of impunity provoked by the National Supreme Court’s resolutions

and by the Mexican judicial system. It was stressed during the forum that building true justice by and for the people implies working to recover historic memory, not hiding the truth and respecting the people's own normative systems. One point that stood out was the charge of military and paramilitary violence against women.

A national design  
**implemented in Chiapas**

Journalist Luis Hernández has summarized this counterinsurgency tactic as "inscribed in the arena of the war of networks," with the aim of changing what a population knows or thinks. Hernández compiled a long list of provocations, including arrests, the murder of social opponents, promoting a campaign of rumors of a new armed uprising, attempting to malign Zapatismo by publicizing a false request of support from the Zapatista Good Government Boards to the local Congress, freeing paramilitaries responsible for the mass killing at Acteal, increased military presence and activity, and a media campaign to cover up the facts. These daily counterinsurgency actions in the communities are combined with an informational counterinsurgency campaign.

While all of this is happening locally in Chiapas, it has been designed in the federal government. Those at the top cannot tolerate the fact that those at the bottom are not submissively accepting their plans. The people who have proved incapable of resolving the urgent national economic and social problems are determined to exacerbate the situation in Chiapas with an irresponsible and dangerous offensive against grassroots autonomous expressions.

**So we don't degrade ourselves**

The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience included Acteal among the 17 historic world sites that remind humanity of the most serious injustices to humanity. Declaring Acteal a "Site of Conscience" reaffirms a history that some want to deny. Some crimes must not be left in impunity and what happened at Acteal is one of them. As Nobel literature laureate José Saramago has written, "Beneath honor there are interests, clearly identifiable crimes perpetrated by concrete people and groups that cannot be ignored. We have to understand the importance of not degrading ourselves so as not to be always despicable.

Those affected by the unjust Supreme Court ruling are holding the Mexican state responsible and have taken their case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. As long as the intellectual and material authors of this brutal crime remain unpunished, Acteal will continue to be a constant call against impunity.



## Pederast Marcel Maciel and His Partners in Crime

*It won't be possible to save the Legion from its greatest Legionary, pederast Marcel Maciel, a sex abuser for sixty years disguised as a priest. The networks of collusion that allowed this monster to hide his perversions implicate former Pope John Paul II and the current Pope Benedict XVI. The scandal has shaken Mexico and the wound in the Church won't easily heal over.*

Jorge Alonso

The Mexican Marcial Maciel was born in the Michoacan town of Cotija, in 1920. Twenty-one years later he founded the Legion of Christ. Its members call themselves and are known as "Legionaries." Maciel's theological and historical education was too meager to allow him to understand that Christ made disciples, while legions were an instrument of domination belonging to the Roman Empire.

### Years of violations

Maciel was ordained a priest in 1944. Two years later he traveled to Spain with a first group of young people. In 1950 he set up a study center of the Legion in Rome and in 1959 a lay movement he called Regnum Christi. During that time he published a document he called "The Psalter of my days," which the Legionaries considered their spiritual guide. It was actually brazen plagiarism: 80% was a copy of a book by Spanish Catholic politician Luis Lucia, who died in Valencia in 1943.

By the late fifties Maciel was already subjected to a canonical process for accusations of pederasty. Despite the evidence, the Roman Curia chose to take no action. In 1965 Rome officially recognized the congregation of Legionaries. Maciel had a knack for ingratiating himself with important people in the Vatican bureaucracy and the religious elites of the business classes in the countries to which his organization spread. From the end of the seventies right up to the early nineties he was an active promoter of John Paul II's trips to Mexico.

At the end of the nineties the Vatican received documentation on another suit against Maciel for pederasty, this time from several former Legionaries. Ratzinger, who was the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the time, chose to shelve it so John Paul II wouldn't have to quarrel with Maciel. Not until 2006, once he was Pope Benedict XVI, did Ratzinger decide to punish the Legion's founder, but tried to do it with a low profile. He ordered Maciel to leave Rome, renounce all priestly public ministries and lead the life of

a recluse. In early 2008, Maciel died without ever facing justice for his serious crimes.

They protect, silence,  
transfer, scatter...

In 2006 Mexican academic Fernando González published Marcial Maciel. Los legionarios de Cristo: testimonios y documentos inéditos (The Legion of Christ: unpublished testaments and documents) (Tusquets, 2006), a meticulous investigation into the pederasty of the Legion's founder and the network of accomplices to it both in that organization and the Catholic ecclesiastical elite. Later, he gave another turn of the screw with revelations and analyses of these criminal practices in the book: La Iglesia del Silencio. De mártires y pederastas (The Church of Silence. Of martyrs and pederasts) (Tusquets, 2009). In the second part of this book González offers new data and new sources about the sexual abuse of Pope John Paul II's protégée. Emphasizing how difficult it is to investigate the sexual activity of the clergy, he documents accusations that have been made all over the world in recent years by those who have suffered sexual abuse, silence and subterfuge from priests.

The most discordant aspect of these cases is that the abusers betray the trust placed in them and make defenseless victims out of those delivered into their care. Those who have been raped become entrapped as partners in crime and the pederasts protect themselves from accusations by invoking a supposed "moral martyrdom". The author examines the Catholic Church's diverse institutional strategies to deal with the perverted sexuality of these religious officials, protecting the institution over and above the human rights of those affected, revealing it as institutional behavior and structural hypocrisy. They silence, control, relocate and scatter. Trying to avoid scandal, they undermine the accusers and hearten the protected abuser into continuing his abuses in the many places to which they transfer him.

John Paul II:

An institutional accomplice

González's book details the case of Marcial Maciel, drug addict and pederast. Every time he was accused, his organization and a variety of bishops rallied to his defense, alleging the Church was being attacked. The organization Maciel set up was based on business logic with many links to powerful economic and religious interests.

The author examines how the victims, through shame and a feeling of guilt, usually keep quiet about the abuse. In order to cover himself, Maciel invented a special vow that obliged members of his congregation to maintain silence on the subject of his perversions and dirty business, in which they would swear not to criticize their superior. He was accountable to no one. He lived a double

life in an organization that shielded him. The Legion became a cult to the personality of its founder.

In the first wave of accusations in the fifties, most of the accusers ended up lying before an incipient and soon aborted Vatican investigation. The accusers were maligned and the abuser transformed into a martyr. John Paul II was his institutional accomplice. When Ratzinger was a cardinal, he too protected Maciel. In 1998 he blocked the case and in 2001 modified the Canonical Code of Law to give Maciel a way out: the crime of absolving an accomplice would have a 10-year statute of limitations. This gave the abuser an escape route and left the victims with no possibility of proving their accusations in court. The book shows that Maciel went unpunished thanks to this collusion.

#### Faced with a landslide of evidence

González shows that when the mounting evidence of Maciel's excesses and crimes could no longer be hidden, ecclesiastical logic dictated that the Legion's founder be removed from the scene, thus saving the organization. After Maciel's death the Vatican preferred to condemn him publicly for having women and children without mentioning his pederast habits and his addiction to drugs. Instead of recognizing its founder's crimes and the complicity of many of the organization's members, the Legionaries took refuge in a watered-down acknowledgment that Maciel was human and as such had "failings".

González's book shows that the group of accusers, who demanded justice for years, made thinkable what had hitherto remained in the realm of the improbable. In spite of the religious authorities' tendency to neutralize protest, the accusations began to find their own way. It was proved that relations existed between money, power and sex in the religious world. The network of complicity woven by the Catholic hierarchy was also revealed. It became clear that John Paul II protected the pederast Maciel in both practical and moral terms. Negotiations between Vatican authorities and the Legion's leaders got them to accept that Maciel had fathered children, but both in Rome and in the congregation of Legionaries, highly stultified arguments were advanced to try and save the figure of Maciel, rhetorically asking how a pederast, if that's what he really was, could possibly have managed to set up such an important educational enterprise, as if being a pederast prevented one from being a good businessman...

The far-reaching network of complicity woven by Maciel was weakened in the end by a landslide of evidence. Accusations by former Legionaries brought down the vow of silence, the wall raised by the founder, his congregation and the Catholic hierarchy. But one question remains to be answered: how could Maciel have seduced so many? Fernando González admits there is still much to investigate, but there's no doubt that an institutional wound has been opened

in the Catholic Church that won't heal.

#### **Sex and money went hand in hand**

The Legion numbers 125 religious houses, 900 priests, 3,000 seminarians, 70,000 lay volunteers, 150 schools and 9 universities in 22 countries. In Rome it had one of the main pontifical universities. Its assets are estimated to be worth 20.5 billion Euros.

Among the Legionaries there's a "charisma" of pretence, lies and pederasty bequeathed by the founder that isn't dispelled just by taking his portraits off the walls. González provides important information on a network of pederasts in one of the Legion's schools, showing how durable inter-generational chains are being forged.

The author emphasizes that Maciel conducted his racket with savoir faire and his disciples have gambled on not being discovered. González points to a crucial vein: that of money. The organization's current authorities say they don't know how their founder managed the money for his double life, but they want us to accept that they, of course, do it honestly. If a truly serious ecclesiastical investigation were opened into the Legionaries, it would have to analyze the provenance and use of the organization's money.

The second part of González's book has three annexes. The first shows how Maciel's supposed pardon of his critics was very limited and how he used a great deal of money to sue his accusers, some of whom were obliged to reach a "deal" for lack of economic resources.

The second annex talks about secrets that explain Maciel's pederast behavior, given that he himself was abused as a child by the muleteers with whom he traveled. His father thought that going on journeys with muleteers would help make him a man.

In the third annex one finds the reflections of a former legionary about a charge he brought before the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith based on an accusation against Maciel by a group of ex-legionaries. There it is proved that the Holy See acted discretionally in favor of the accused. According to testimonies from the forties, fifties and sixties, Maciel was repeatedly guilty of the crime of absolving an accomplice; thus the canonical modification introduced by Ratzinger avoided due process. As well as protecting the criminal, the victims' rights were infringed.

#### **Who was Maciel really?**

At the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009 the Vatican changed tack on Maciel's case. The Vatican secretary visited Mexico in December 2008 and in February

2009 went to Madrid where one of Maciel's daughters lived. On March 10, 2009, the Vatican ordered an apostolic visit to the Legionaries. In May the names of inspectors responsible for investigating the Legion were announced.

While the Vatican commission was examining the Legionaries, the international press published a heap of revelations about the Maciel case. It documented his drug addiction, and accusations were leaked that he'd had contacts with drug traffickers. Traces of his fat bank accounts in different parts of the world were presented. Several false identities he used officially were detected. Versions of the period before his death were divulged: his resistance to going to Mass after receiving a life of prayer as his penance, and his rage against the religion he professed because Rome had expelled him. It was also learned that one of his concubines and a daughter of his had arrived to attend to him on his death bed, a situation known by the Legion's authorities, one of whom threatened to reveal to the media who Maciel really was.

The appearance on Carmen Aristegui's radio show of two young men who said they were Maciel's sons and had been sexually abused by him was widely disseminated after the story was confirmed publicly by their mother, another of his concubines. It also came out that the Legion's leaders had known about their founder's licentious life for some time. They seemed to have less resistance to admitting Maciel's heterosexual activities than to accepting publicly the overwhelming proof of his homosexual pederasty.

A monster sheltered  
by Pope John Paul II

Given this avalanche of proof, the names used in the media to refer to Maciel became increasingly harsh: faker, fraudster, impostor, hypocrite, vice-ridden, drug addict, con artist, libertine, sexual obsessive, compulsive pederast, child sex abuser, delinquent, pervert, criminal, devil in priest's clothing... Many wrote about his long and prolific history of pederasty, drug addiction, polygamy, deceit, illicit wealth, religious and political influence trafficking, false identities and mythomania. It became increasingly obvious that the monster Maciel had flourished in the shade of his defenders.

Maciel's main protector was John Paul II, whose collusion was complete. In 1991 the Pope designated Maciel a member of the Ordinary Assembly Bishops' Synod for priests' education; in 1992 a member of the IV General Conference of the Latin American Bishopric; in 1993 a member of the Bishops' Synod on the Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and the World; in 1994 a permanent consultant for the Congregation for the Clergy; in 1997 a member of the Special Assembly for America of the Bishops' Synod. And after he was already aware of the accusations against Maciel, he publicly praised him as a

**promoter of pastoral work and commended him as an example to youth.**

**Many**

**Mexican**

**bishops**

**and heads of big business**

Various analysts have wondered why this happened and have had to agree that the basic reason is rooted in the money Maciel gave to the Vatican. Writer Rubén Aguilar indicated in the magazine Milenio that the investigation into pederasty didn't prosper due to the close relationship between Maciel and Pope John Paul II based on money Maciel obtained for the pope to finance his war on communism. A network of bishops, with whom Maciel had contact thanks to the positions John Paul II gave him, were also accessories and accomplices. When at the end of the 20th century the accusations of pederasty were made public, several bishops vigorously defended Maciel and harshly denigrated his accusers.

Mexican big business has also been an accomplice. They proudly presumed that Maciel would hold Mass at their anniversary celebrations and would marry and baptize family members. Thanks to this proximity they didn't hesitate to use their economic power to protect Maciel and attack those who called for justice for atrocities he committed. Most of the families belonging to the Mexican high bourgeoisie had some relative connected with Maciel's Legion. For them, defending Maciel and the Legion became a family mission, a role not far removed from mafioso codes.

#### **Ratzinger the surgeon**

The Vatican's inspectors finished their work in mid-March of this year, but there are no great expectations of what might come out of this examination. It's feared that everything has already been cooked up and there'll be a lot of pretence to make it look like the Catholic hierarchy is responding to the crisis. Rome has made clear that it will take some time to release the results of the Vatican inspection. There is no reason to expect transparency, since the hierarchy isn't used to being accountable to either its faithful or society.

As there's no way to defend Maciel, the most probable outcome is that his memory will be condemned and some changes will be made in the Legion's leadership so that the 'reestablished' organization can carry on, with some cosmetic adjustments. There are many networks of money and power and many accomplices in the ecclesiastical and business structure with interests in the Legion's continuation. One factor that could carry a lot of weight in the Vatican's decision is the amount of resources the Roman See continues to receive from this institution.

Fernando González, accustomed to doing penetrating analyses, has underscored the Vatican's perversity in sending a commission of investigators

to examine the Legionaries as if this commission were only a judge and not a link in the chain of collusion between three Vatican authorities that have intervened in the Maciel affair: the Secretary of State, the Sacred Congregation of the Religious and the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. González refers to the current pope as “surgeon” Ratzinger who invented the figure of the “solipsistic pederast,” a sort of oxymoron or reconciler of opposites. It will fall to this surgeon to decide just how far to cut the Legion’s body without touching the complicit Vatican authorities, which would inevitably lead to himself and John Paul II.

### Vatican clues

The Vatican’s behavior in other recent pederasty cases gives some clues as to how it might proceed in this one. In late March of this year it was revealed that the Vatican hadn’t punished a US priest accused of having abused 200 deaf children, arguing he was sick and old. Faced with the scandal of scores of pederasty cases among the Irish clergy and emphasizing that the Roman declaratory was not limited to that country alone, the Vatican asked the victims of pederasty for forgiveness and admitted that inappropriate procedures had been used. It also asked for an investigation, but announced no punishment for the child raping priests.

González has pointed out that Benedict XVI addressed the Irish bishops as if he hadn’t headed the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for over 20 years, as if he had been above and beyond the whole conflict.

### The clamor of the survivors

There have been demonstrations by sexual abuse victims both in St. Peter’s Square and in front of the Vatican Embassy in Washington, demanding that the files of pedophile clergy be opened and that they be defrocked. The Vatican replied to this demand and to an editorial in The New York Times, regretting what it called an attempt to attack the Pope and his close advisers. The paper responded with the information that when Ratzinger was bishop of Munich he had authorized therapy for a pedophile priest and approved his transfer to another parish.

Victims’ associations went public with their disappointment at the papal role in the Irish cases. They were hoping for more forceful signs and gestures, not just in Ireland but in other countries affected by this serious crime. Rome was saving the top-ranking hierarchy, complicit in such an abominable practice, from the courts. The general demand is for those who have victimized innocent children and those who have been their accomplices to appear before both ecclesiastical courts and civil ones, particularly the latter. The victims must also be compensated. Many of them not only suffered sexual abuse but also persecution, denigration and slander at the hands of the religious hierarchy and

their unconditional allies in the world of money. Victims of pederasty have proved they suffer extremely serious and long-lasting psychological damage.

#### The Legionaries speak

Trying to save their necks after the apostolic visit, the Legion's director general, vicar general, four general counselors and ten territorial directors of different world regions issued a press release on March 25, in which they followed the Vatican script: cut the tie with Maciel. They admitted Maciel had fathered a daughter in the context of a long and stable relationship with a woman and that two men had also appeared claiming they were his sons, the fruit of a relationship with another woman. They asked forgiveness of people who had accused Maciel in the past to whom they had given no credit and offered them spiritual and pastoral help. They said that if there had been any guilty collaboration they would act in accordance with the principles of justice and Christian charity. They offered to tell the truth about their history, provide security to minors in their institutions and seek reconciliation and a coming together with those who had suffered.

The document also refers to "other serious behavior" of its founder but doesn't specify what this is. It says the Legionaries could no longer regard Maciel as a model of Christian and priestly life. They make out to be stunned by Maciel's abominable behavior and stress they previously believed the accusations to be false, despite the information that the leaders were fully aware of many of Maciel's crimes and covered up for him.

They continue to call Maciel their founder and thank God for the good he did. They also express their gratitude to the pope for having offered an apostolic visit, thank the five inspectors for their fatherly concern and call on the Legion and its followers to intensify their prayers.

This document offers an excellent exercise for those dedicated to analyzing discourse. By alluding, it eludes. It never explicitly mentions Maciel's pederasty, everything remains between the lines. They ask for forgiveness and say they are convinced of the meaning and beauty of forgiveness, but appear to be referring to the forgiveness they bestow on their founder. They offer no concrete acts to repair the damage but rather pastoral attention and prayers. But neither they nor the Church will resolve the serious problem of pederasty with prayers. Subsequently, the Legion's director general wanted to exonerate his organization's existence, assuring that God knew how to write straight (them) on twisted lines (Maciel). He announced that his organization would begin anew.

#### A tainted congregation

Maciel's victims replied that the Legion's document of forgiveness was

insufficient and superficial. They pointed out that it made no reference to compensation for damages. Roberto Blancarte, a specialist in religions, agreed that the press statement, which was intended to preempt whatever conclusion the Vatican might reach, was insufficient. José Barba, one of Maciel's main accusers, considered the apology of the Legion's management reflected its usual rhetoric and lacked repentance and justice. He insisted that the Legion didn't truly take the victims into account and didn't even call them by their names. He argued that the Vatican's apostolic inspection wasn't enough and that a high-level international group was needed to conduct a parallel investigation in order to be accountable to society later on.

He asserted that the Legion couldn't disassociate itself from the actions of its founder and begin a new era without that model, and that the Legion resolved the affair facilely by saying Maciel was the tainted one and the rest of the congregation had nothing to do with it. Barba insisted that the entire organization needed to be scrutinized in depth, as opposed to the hasty way the Legionaries were attempting to ignore their founder's influence. In response to the Legion director general's remark that the Legionaries were "orphans," Barba agreed that they were indeed, but were spiritually orphaned.

#### **Accomplices and accessories to crime**

Journalist Carlos Puig referred to León Krauze's analysis, which demonstrated that it's impossible to understand the Legion or its Regnum Christi work without Maciel. Puig argues that one must distinguish three important aspects: Maciel's atrocities, the cover-up operation on which the Legion and the Catholic hierarchy embarked years ago and the machinations of the Mexican elite to crush both the victims who denounced Maciel's abuse and the reporters who revealed the monster he was.

The Legion couldn't salvage its greatest legionary. The words they used in their press statement, attempting to disassociate themselves from Maciel, only sounded pathetic when they asserted that what their founder and moral guide had done was reprehensible. Sexual abuse, lies and cover-ups are rather more than reprehensible; they are criminal. In its statement the Legion made no reference to the civil laws under which their founder deserved incarceration. The Legion's management acknowledged Maciel hadn't been a good Christian, but didn't admit he was a sexual criminal and a pederast. To top it all off, they asked that their founder be forgiven and offered the victims nothing more than to carry on praying for them.

Just like Maciel had done, the Legion's leaders used faith as a weapon to justify criminal actions. Puig emphasized that the Legion's statement left out anything to do with the long-standing operation of those close to the founder to protect

and cover up for him. It was crucial to ask how many of those who signed the statement had kept quiet for years, how many helped hide their founder's crimes, how many worked together in silencing his victims. Puig questioned them: when would the Legion start to denounce Maciel's accomplices, because what they had done was cover up not a "sin" but a crime.

#### **Dehumanized automatons**

The Legion's leaders, Fernando González warns us, issued their plea for forgiveness early, a mechanism that generally serves to leapfrog justice and avoid deeper probing into the facts. One can call this "the forgiveness short circuit."

González stresses that the protection and complicity that allowed Maciel to continue his criminal career for more than 50 years included not only the Legion's elite but also middle-ranking and even minor congregational authorities that have been his partners in crime right up to the present day. Maciel injected the establishment he founded with his own institutional code. Not everything has come to light; an exhaustive investigation is needed into funds and their misuse.

Another element noted by analyst León Krauze is related to Maciel's other victims. From information gained from a family dedicated to the Legion, Krauze relates how this family's sons were raised on Maciel's teachings and bears witness to the terrifying transformation suffered by those who dedicate themselves to the Legion's position. A sort of brainwashing and dehumanization goes on that changes them into automatons. To them, Maciel is not only the founder but the very dogma. The Legion owes a debt not only to the victims of Maciel's sexual abuse, but also to the thousands who participated in a movement created, guided and inspired by a "cruel and hypocritical monster."

Is it enough just to reestablish the Legion?

Vaticanologists and specialists in the study of religions have hazarded a guess that, given the deluge that has battered the Legion, this congregation is facing the Vatican's choice between abolishing it, which is unlikely, or look for a way out that will permit it to continue functioning by means of "reestablishing" itself. The latter appears to be what it will go for, cutting out the tumor represented by Maciel from the congregation he founded. Nevertheless, no few analysts consider this solution unviable, arguing that it's impossible just to turn the page because Maciel represents the entire book for the Legionaries. The cancer in the Legion has metastasized. Maciel isn't an expendable part of this institution but rather its backbone and marrow, the origin of an entire way of being and doing.

One can't forget the deeply rooted and boundless cult to Maciel instilled in the Legionaries and its followers over many years. Many still have little household altars to Maciel and close their eyes to the plethora of evidence. Another scandalous issue that can't be avoided is the existence of pederast networks among the Legionaries and their followers who, aware of the double, triple and even quadruple lives Maciel led, promoted his canonization by the Vatican, even while he was still alive. Writer Sanjuana Martínez recalled that Mexico's archbishop had declared that Maciel would always be the Legionaries' founder, despite the punishment handed down to him by Rome.

The Legion's response to the crisis and its actions when faced with the examination to which it was subjected suggests that Maciel left behind a habitus they are unable to forsake. Thus, far from feeling real remorse when confronted with the accusation by Maciel's sons that he had abused them sexually, they tried to make themselves look like the offended party of an extortion threat rather than accepting that the victims were only asking for economic compensation for the serious damage suffered. Another indication that they had learned to imitate Maciel well came in the context of the Vatican's punishment of their founder. At the time, they denied it was a punishment, referring to it just as a "spiritual retreat." Subsequently, faced with the announcement that the Vatican would subject them to an examination, they wanted to present it as assistance given them by Rome.

**The perverse Legionary psycho-pathology**

One former legionary and Maciel victim has pointed out that legionary psychology—one would have to say psycho-pathology—isn't going to change given that these people have spent six decades working with Maciel's convictions and learning his way of doing things: his skillful use of deceit. The Legion's leaders prepared for the questioning by Vatican inspectors by sending the members possible questions they might be asked so they would know what replies to give. The investigators were thus met with learned answers, while the Legion's management announced that everyone had answered "freely."

Sheldon S. Wolin, an experienced specialist in democracy, has demonstrated that liars want the untruth to be accepted as reality and that lying is an expression of power's resolve.

**Reactions of Mexico's civil authorities**

Writer Roberta Garza states that the Church has always known how to convert its crimes into sins so as to expiate them in obscurity. She thus called for an

analysis of how pederasty, cover-ups and money laundering had become the Legion's real "charisma," and stuck her neck out by saying that the Church would not see real justice done. Another Mexican columnist wrote that the overdue apologies weren't enough, damage had been done and the moral authority of the Catholic priesthood was being severely questioned. Various Mexican analysts expressed astonishment that such a sustained and wide-reaching violation of human rights hadn't been subjected to an investigation by the Mexican civil authorities. Maciel had died, but his organization continued to enjoy enormous power and complete impunity. The current demand is for the Mexican civil authorities to ensure that justice is done rather than collude.

In Mexico all three major parliamentary benches in the House of Representatives asked the Church hierarchy to compensate the people damaged by the criminal activity of the Legion's founder. Juventino Castro, a former Supreme Court justice, thinks the Legion should assume responsibility for its founder's excesses and believes there are enough contributing factors to abolish the organization. Legislator Leticia Quezada demanded that Mexico's attorney general investigate the Legion given the probability that it sheltered a network of pederasts. Nevertheless some senators refused to comment on the case with the argument that their children studied in the Legion's schools.

#### **Jail for the accomplices**

The Catholic hierarchy's attempt to shield itself by alleging that no more pederasts can be found in the ranks of the clergy than in other professions is extremely clumsy. A pederast is highly condemnable wherever he appears and if it is in the Church, the assumed bearer of a saintly mission, he's even more abominable. It is a major miscalculation for the hierarchy to respond to pederasty cases with comparisons that come nowhere near the root of the problem. If it offers highly unconvincing solutions to get out of its fix, it will only dig itself deeper into a crisis of enormous proportions.

Esteban Garaiz, who has shown himself to be a responsible and trustworthy public figure in Mexico, has reasoned in one of his articles that pederasty is a social evil and not just a sin based on firsthand testimonies of Maciel's pederasty and direct proof of the Legion's complicity. And being a crime, he argues, the criminals should be subjected to civil law and punished in accordance with the serious damage inflicted. Furthermore, the Catholic hierarchy has the moral and civic obligation to ask for forgiveness and rehabilitate and compensate the victims, identifying them and acknowledging that they weren't liars but brave men who have been demanding their rights. He further emphasized that Mexican business leaders who gave their unconditional support to a social criminal such as Maciel are obliged publicly and in writing to ask forgiveness of the pederasty victims they slandered and harassed. Finally he makes it clear that Maciel's accomplices should go to

prison too.

#### **Maciel's sons were also his victims**

González looks in depth at the dramatic case of Maciel's two sons who ended up admitting they had demanded \$26 million in compensation and accepting they had effectively offered their silence for money. Their tragedy is that they ended up with nothing and on the same level as their father for having even suggested the exchange, when the crucial element was their story of the lie they lived and the abuse to which Maciel subjected them. One major difference should be pointed out, however: at least they admitted what they had done, while their father never acknowledged his true personality, the one the whole world now knows.

In their souls and their bodies they both distill the two most significant aspects of Maciel's sexuality. It was pitiful how the institutional network, with its sustained silences, ended up provoking the media testimony in which Maciel's sons were compelled to malign their own father in public. Speaking up is in itself very difficult for any survivor of sexual abuse; now the coercion to continue talking will become a new source of shame for them if they don't do it.

#### **The moment of truth**

Fernando González reflects that, unlike other similar cases, the longevity of the case of Maciel and his Legion has allowed it to pass from the improbability to which it was long consigned by the Vatican, Episcopal bodies, the Legion, their related elites and the parents of families at their schools. It therefore turned into probability and now into acceptance of the evidence. The first Vatican version and that of the entire Legion has fallen to pieces before the eyes of a large part of Mexican society. Whatever the Vatican leaves of the Legion will remain a closed, authoritarian institution, now without Maciel's public figure, but with his seal and fundamental nature forever.

The Maciel affair has become a crucial element with which to analyze the organization that gave rise to it. It has involved the exposure of a hubris that has unleashed a tragedy in the Catholic hierarchy. Independent of any decision the Vatican might take regarding the Legion, neither the Catholic elites nor the Legion itself will be spared history's condemnation. If there are really Legionaries who don't want collusion on their conscience, they will have to push for its dissolution, since the case isn't about one of its members but the founder himself. Finally, this serious crisis is about those at the top and very clearly brings to light their corruption, hypocrisy and double standards.

*The media highlight organized crime's spiraling illegal activities every day. But they pay little attention to the spiral of state violence in crimes against grassroots movements and protests, which are equally cloaked in impunity.*

Jorge Alonso

Mexico is in a deplorable state. The country is unraveling. Nobel Prize winner in economics Joseph Stiglitz calls the current situation an economic disaster. Government data from the first quarter of 2010 show that 23 million Mexicans are going hungry and 43.4 million have no access to health care, while according to World Bank data, half of the new poor caused by the economic crisis in Latin America are Mexican.

A report by the US Congressional Research Service concluded that the war on organized crime and drug trafficking unleashed by President Felipe Calderón, who took office in December 2006, has failed. In the words of Mexican politician Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, who in his long career has been a member of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), later founded what would become the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) and now coordinates the Progressive Broad Front, that war has been a cover for the deaths of over 23,000 victims of avoidable violence.

Four serious events explain a great deal

Now the Mexican government has opened up a new battlefield against workers and grassroots movements. It seems that the highly challenged Calderón wants to celebrate the bicentenary of Mexican independence by reversing the country's social conquests, particularly the labor ones. Raúl Vera, one of the few Mexican bishops still on the side of the poor, has opposed attempts to reverse labor legislation. Demanding an end to efforts to legalize injustice, he argues that it is immoral to make laws that violate the dignity of workers for the sake of economic and commercial competitiveness in which the human side of things means nothing. Human Rights Watch has repeatedly called on the government to respect human rights, while Amnesty International has revealed the reign of impunity and growing abuse of civilians by the army and police. It has also noted increasingly violent attacks against communities and social activists, pointing out that murder, disappearances and rape have not only increased but are being carried out in more serious forms, often simply because the victims demand their rights.

Four events are paradigmatic for understanding the style of the serious government attacks against basic grassroots rights: the siege against an independent union, the violent taking of the Cananea mine, the eviction of the

Pasta de Conchos mine pithead, and the bloody repression by paramilitaries of peaceful convoys of vehicles supporting the autonomy of an indigenous community.

**Against “light and force”  
and against their union**

In October 2009, police and military forces stormed the installations of the 130-year-old Luz y Fuerza del Centro (LFC) electricity distribution company. The President issued a decree dissolving the once-Canadian and now decentralized public company and its union arguing that it had serious financial problems because government transfers to it had become unsustainable.

What he failed to mention was the reason for the losses lay in decisions taken by the government itself. They limited the company's generating capacity and forced it to acquire electricity from the Federal Electricity Company (CFE), which resold to LFC at a higher rate than it applied to the public.

In addition, the government wanted to deal a blow to the Mexican Electricians Union (SME), an independent company union that had been active in many grassroots protests against neoliberal policies. The union was an obstacle to privatization of the nationalized electricity industry and the handing over of the million-dollar fiber optic business and electricity networks to big national business.

**Well organized and  
seeking legal channels**

Violating the transparency law, ostensibly for reasons of national security, the government classified the files on which it based the disappearance of the LFC and the CFE's assumption of its electricity generating, supply and commercializing operations as confidential, meaning it will be a long time before they can be consulted. It was later revealed that months earlier, a businessman from Sonora, who was president of the Confederation of National Business Chambers and later headed up the Business Coordinating Council, had asked the government to do away with this state company, promising that the decision, while angering the over 40,000 workers it would throw out into the streets, would earn the applause of many more businesspeople.

To get the workers to accept their severance pay, the government offered an amount greater than stipulated by law and promised those who accepted that they would be rehired by the CFE. Over two-thirds agreed, but fewer than 400 of them were rehired. Thousands of those who refused to be paid off maintained the SME and sought legal channels to revoke the decree dissolving the company. Above all, they are arguing the legal figure of the “substitute employer”: whoever acquires a liquidated company takes on the obligations of

the previous employer.

Parliamentary representatives from leftwing parties supported the idea of the Supreme Court reviewing the legal errors in the liquidation decree, even though its own rulings tend to be ideological and political. The group of democratic lawyers working with the disgruntled workers argued that the liquidation decree was itself illegal.

#### **They silenced a hunger strike**

In addition to the legal struggle, the union members have also staged marches, protests and hunger strikes. The first hunger strike, in late 2009, lasted 17 days and ended with the government announcing it would establish negotiations with the SME. No acceptable accords were forthcoming, however, and by the end of April a second hunger strike was initiated that has lasted over two months so far.

One relevant factor in this hunger strike was that while certain governing National Action Party (PAN) legislators requested visas to visit opposition hunger strikers in Cuba, they never visited their compatriots refusing food nearby, in Mexico City's Zócalo Plaza. The major media covered the hunger strike in Cuba, but showed contempt for the SME one at home. The Cuban hunger strike got the island's government to apply certain measures demanded by the strikers, while Mexico's government has proved impervious to its own workers' demands.

#### **Blackouts no accident**

The government accused the SME members of sabotage to explain the many electrical problems in the center of the country caused by the disappearance of the LFC, but it offered no proof for that accusation. Finally, top officials had to recognize what the workers had repeated again and again: the problem was that the government had not maintained the electrical installations.

Repression and the threat of imprisonment have reared their heads on different occasions, and in late May, 600 police officers violently removed electrical workers protesting in Cuernavaca. Despite all the obstacles and attacks, however, the SME members have maintained their resistance.

#### **Against the Cananea miners**

In mid-April last year, a decision by the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board backed the powerful family-owned Grupo México company that owns the Cananea mine in the state of Sonora, one of the biggest copper producers, in its decision to lay off its workers. The workers had been on strike for a long time without the owners ever agreeing to sit down with them to try to hammer out an agreement. The strike had continued thanks to a court ruling that it

could go on as long as the case brought to contest that decision was still open.

In February 2010, a collegiate court agreed that the working relationship between company and miners would terminate once the workers had been on strike for over 30 months. Prestigious labor lawyer Arturo Alcalde denounced this decision as a government maneuver in favor of the mine owners backed up by the judicial branch with no solid foundations. Alcalde called it a legally grotesque case and said he had never before seen such a clumsy maneuver to get rid of a union in all his 40 years working in the labor sector.

While the government institutions were succumbing to the real powers in Mexico, in this case the country's third richest family, the workers agreed not to leave their workplace, to be on guard and defend it to the end. The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (ALF-CIO) condemned the judicial ruling against the Cananea miners because it denied the right to strike in Mexico. Members of The Other Campaign agreed to act in solidarity with the miners and set off from various points of the country to form a solidarity cordon. The mineworkers denounced the Mexican State to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and a federal judge granted a provisional suspension of the previous ruling during appeal, making it impossible to evict them. The Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board declared the strike illegal three times, but these resolutions were reversed in the appeals court. Finally, the Supreme Court supported the mine owners, enabling them to terminate their labor relations with the miners.

A	historical	dark	page
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in anti-worker history

On the night of Sunday June 6, federal forces took control of the mine by force. The government declared that the action was carried out without any injuries, but other information gave the lie to these statements, revealing that there had been violent repression. Weapons and tear gas were used resulting in injuries to two miners, a shock force set fire to one building, blows were meted out and arrests were made. The company owners announced that the workers would be given severance pay and new people would be hired, and took actions to establish a union loyal to their own interests. The workers responded that the only thing they wanted was to work in accord with their collective contract and promised to retake the mine. Their first attempt to do so was met with further repression, with the police involving the nearby population in the skirmishes.

Grassroots organizations protested that the State had turned its repressive, police, military and paramilitary apparatus against the Cananea workers. Telephone and electrical workers and peasant organizations all condemned the taking of Cananea and warned they would up their protests. The president of

United Steel Workers accused Mexico's President of having set in motion a regime of terror against workers and called on the US Congress to stop giving funds to Mexican security forces that would be used to attack workers exercising their right to free association. The workers themselves argued that the action revealed the government's complicit subordination to the owners of capital. Events had shown that the administration wasn't interested in dialogue or negotiation, opting instead for violence hypocritically camouflaged in false legal arguments.

This violation will be consigned to the darkest pages of anti-worker and anti-union policy in Mexico. The government and capital destroyed the right to strike in a style worthy of the pre-Mexican revolution Porfiriato era.

**Injured miners,  
satisfied mine owners**

The workers called the aggression unconstitutional. The government opted for repression even while a special commission of the Mexican House of Representatives was still pursuing a negotiated solution to the conflict in Cananea, and the country's business sector declared its satisfaction with the workers' defeat.

The Mexican Human Rights Academy, the Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center, Mexico's Commission for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights, the Mexican Human Rights and Democracy Institute, the Mexican Human Rights Defense League, the Ecclesial Observatory and many other grassroots organizations all demanded the government immediately establish negotiations to resolve the miners' demands. On June 11, the Secretary of Government offered a negotiation meeting between the company owners and the miners. The workers accepted but the owners said the time for negotiating was past.

The miners have placed their hopes in international bodies and have therefore expanded the requested IACRH intervention to include the new grievances resulting from the illegal eviction, which violated constitutional and labor rights. The workers are fighting to defend the right to strike, keep their source of work, have their collective contract respected and not fall into the hands of a union manipulated by the owners.

**Against the relatives  
of the dead miners**

The same day the family that owns Cananea mine took control of it, it also took over the pithead of the Pasta de Conchos coal mine in Coahuila. This involved the forceful eviction of relatives of miners killed in an explosion there caused by security failures in February 2006, for which the owners are alleged to have

been criminally responsible. The relatives had continued to demand the recovery of the bodies to give their dead a proper burial, but the company declared it would seal the mine, leaving the 63 bodies inside.

Raúl Vera, the bishop of Saltillo, charged that sealing the mine meant that Grupo México was intentionally concealing all the evidence those remains would reveal. He pointed out that many of the widows of the tragedy still had lawsuits pending against the company and hadn't even been able to resolve the problem of their pensions. He stressed that by sealing the pithead the company would be committing an illegal act and deplored the fact that the government didn't care that the relatives had spent 1, 582 days demanding both justice and the bodies of their dead. The lawsuit effectively pitted the dignity of the miners against the greed and voracity of the owners. Some relatives of the dead miners joined the SME hunger strike.

The same human rights organizations that defended the Cananea miners' rights condemned the eviction of the Pasta de Conchos mine workers' relatives. The Mexican House of Representatives' special commission for mining conflicts demanded that the federal government order the immediate withdrawal of the public force deployed in the two mines. The Permanent Commission of the Congress of the Union sent a strong condemnation of the repressive actions against the miners to President Calderón, while independent commentators analyzed how maintaining a neoliberal policy, unconditional support for the rich, growing repression of the poor and workers were leading the government to further ignite the country.

#### **Against an autonomous municipality in Oaxaca**

On another front, an autonomous indigenous municipality in the community of San Juan Copala had started organizing an autonomous municipality in early 2007. In an agreement reached by the neighborhoods and communities of the lower region of the Triqui indigenous people against the official municipality, which was controlled by the political bosses from a nearby town, the community's inhabitants wanted to recover the municipality status taken from them in 1948 by the Oaxaca legislature. They oppose the sacking and exploitation and want to create the conditions for a decent life, but the Oaxaca state government has encouraged paramilitaries to harass the incipient municipality.

In April of this year, the autonomous municipality charged that it was surrounded by a well armed contingent that was cutting off its electricity, water and telephone lines and maintaining road blocks a few kilometers from the entrance. The inhabitants of San Juan Copala ran a real risk if they left their community to get water and food. The siege has been the initiative of a PRI

group that, just to confuse matters, goes by the name of the Social Welfare Union of the Triqui Region (UBISORT).

#### Against a humanitarian convoy

In response to the calls for help, a peaceful international observation convoy was organized to take clothes and food to the community. The convoy included members of organizations from Mexico, Finland, Italy, Belgium and Germany. As it approached the autonomous municipality on April 27, armed men from UBISORT opened fire, killing two people—Beatriz Alberta Cariño of the Community Working Together Support Center (Cactus) and Tyri Antero Jaakkola, an international activist from Finland. Many convoy members fled into the forest and were there for days before they were rescued. The reaction of Oaxaca Governor Ulises Ruiz smacked of the old Latin American dictators, as he only commented on the “strange participation of foreigners.” The group responsible for the killings called for the area’s militarization and declared cynically that the convoy was looking for martyrs to draw attention.

A paramilitary attack  
foretold and unpunished

Grassroots and human rights defense organizations demanded an end to the repression and militarization of the country. The Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center held the Mexican State responsible for the attack by not complying with its obligation to safeguard the right to life through prevention and protective actions, and called for an exhaustive investigation. Amnesty International demanded that the Mexican authorities conduct an in-depth and impartial investigation of this attack on an international mission of human rights observers, while the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights condemned the ambush and the European Union called for those guilty to be punished.

One key element is that the paramilitaries had announced on radio that they would attack the convoy but the governor of Oaxaca did nothing to prevent it then failed to act to apprehend the murderers. Lawyer Francisco López Bárcenas, himself a Triqui, published an article stressing the viciousness with which defenseless people were attacked and denouncing the disinformation campaign mounted by the Oaxaca media.

Promoted by “the  
bad government”

Several independent editorial writers in the Mexico City press underscored the disproportionate degree of aggression, previously announced as if circulating in territories dominated by paramilitaries adopted by the state government were prohibited. The impunity of the murderers was evident, as one of the main people accused of responsibility was state governor Ulises Ruiz, whose

declarations violated the right to solidarity. One reporter from the magazine *Contralínea* was shot and wounded and its director accused the federal government of negligence.

President Calderón ran into a demonstration demanding justice for the attack on the convoy in a European forum he attended in early May. Magdalena Gómez, a specialist in indigenous law, charged that the government was using paramilitaries to cover up the repression, disguising it as intercommunity conflicts. Indigenous organizations insisted that such actions amounted to confrontation promoted by the “bad government,” a term coined by the Zapatista movement. But despite all the national and international condemnation, the state and national governments offered no consistent response.

#### **Paramilitary groups and a corrupt local government**

On May 11, the autonomous municipality called on civilian organizations to organize a new observation convoy, which would bear the name of the activists murdered on the previous one. It argued that the community was living under extreme humanitarian conditions and urged national and international media committed to the truth to document the real situation of San Juan Copala. It claimed that the integrity and security of those on the new convoy were the responsibility of the Mexican State as a whole, as paramilitary groups and corrupt local governments cannot limit the rights established in the Constitution and in international treaties.

In mid-May, the European Parliament’s Subcommittee on Human Rights asked the Spanish government to ensure that the case of the activists murdered in the Oaxaca ambush would be addressed during the Mexico-European Union Summit and to demand an urgent, transparent, rigorous and impartial investigation of events. It went on to state that the European Union should demand that Mexico bring those responsible for the attack before the courts, while a Finnish Euro representative lamented the high levels of impunity in Mexico, where the lives of human rights defenders are at risk.

#### **Crime and no punishment**

A full three weeks after the ambush President Calderón finally expressed his commitment to clarify what had happened and punish those responsible but, even then, UBISORT continued imposing its will on the region. Once again it kidnapped a group of women and children from San Juan Copala with impunity. After holding them for many hours and threatening to kill them, the kidnappers stole the money they were carrying, which came from the Opportunities program. UBISORT also took the luxury of publicly threatening the new convoy.

Another event further ratcheted up the tension in the region. On May 20, an important leader promoting the autonomy of the municipality of San Juan Copala was murdered along with his wife. The representative of the municipality's human rights commission asked that this murder not stop the peace and aid convoy, programmed for June 8. Some inhabitants of the autonomous municipality and PRD legislators held a protest outside the Oaxaca state government's delegation in Mexico City, demanding that Governor Ruiz punish those responsible for the armed aggression and break up of the paramilitary group. One representative from the autonomous municipality blamed the over 100 deaths in the Triqui area on Governor Ruiz. The leader of the PRD parliamentary representatives said that it is absurd for the governor to claim that he can't guarantee the supply of food and medicine to the municipality, but can get the ballot boxes to the polling stations for the July 4 state elections.

#### **How many more crimes will it take?**

Jurist Magdalena Gómez demanded that the siege of the autonomous municipality be broken and lamented that the obvious ungovernability and impunity in that region of Oaxaca was of little concern to the State. Beyond the official versions, the State was actually using the paramilitary groups to encourage and increase the socalled intra-community conflicts. The attempts of the ruling politicians to ensure impunity were a way of dodging compliance with the obligation of all States to guarantee the rule of law.

Gómez asked how many crimes would have to be committed before the State withdrew the paramilitaries, brought them to justice and demanded investigations to demonstrate both who had ordered the murder of one of the most outstanding promoters of municipal autonomy and who had executed the order. Activists from the Finnish Peace Union issued a complaint to the Mexican human rights agency for the San Juan Copala ambush.

**Another**

**convoy harassed**

**humanitarian**

Members of The Other Campaign condemned the attack by the State as part of its policy of repressing the social movements and the municipal autonomy of San Juan Copala. They denounced the indolence with which the State responded to the attack on the international solidarity convoy and the murder of the Triqui leader and his wife, blaming the government of President Calderón and Governor Ulises Ruiz for these crimes. It was clear to them that the intention was to wipe out the efforts aimed at autonomy. And they held President Calderón and Governor Ruiz responsible for any aggression or intimidation against the new convoy.

The convoy of June 8 was prepared with great care. By June 2, the members

still hadn't received responses to the letters they had sent the Secretary of Government and National Defense and the governor of Oaxaca asking them to order actions to guarantee the participants' lives, freedom and security. Euro representatives and German parliamentary representatives also asked Mexico's executive branch to ensure the participants' security.

One response from the local government indicated that UBISORT had redoubled its blockade of the road to the autonomous municipality. PRD legislators from the Mexican House of Representatives denounced the Ruiz state government for refusing to provide minimum guarantees of security to the convoy, in which PRD representatives would be traveling. The National Human Rights Commission announced that one of its observers would be in the convoy.

**"We all know who's directing the criminals"**

Two days before the convoy set off from Mexico City, a spokesperson from the autonomous municipality released a public communiqué stressing that June 8 would go down in the history of indigenous communities for the disinterested solidarity displayed, which is the maximum expression of love.

The people of the autonomous municipality of Copala thanked the convoy organizers for the respect and interest they showed in the people's autonomy. "We all know that the new threats appearing in the media launched by the leader of a band of criminals that operates in the Triqui region obey the criminal order of the powerful person who is governing our state so badly," they said.

The community of San Juan Copala again demanded that the state and federal governments assume their responsibility to guarantee the free transit and security of the new convoy, which was carrying 35 tons of provisions and consisted of 300 people from various civic organizations, human rights centers, churches, solidarity groups, political organizations, unions and media.

**A government that protects murderers**

When the convoy was within eight kilometers of the autonomous municipality, it finally gave up on its attempts to proceed any further as it was up against UBISORT's barricades and armed groups firing shots to intimidate the convoy members. The declared that it was shameful that a group of political bosses could impose their own conditions outside the law, violating the legal order. The autonomous municipality's spokesperson announced that he would ask the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations to intervene to ensure that the convoy's provisions reached their destination. The

autonomous municipality denounced the federal and state governments' complicity with the group of criminals holding their municipality under siege. It was clear that the state government had orchestrated a governmental ring of protection for UBISORT to stop the convoy entering Copala. In other words, the government of Ulises Ruiz had protected the paramilitary cordon with another consisting of state police and officials who instead of guaranteeing security and free movement had gone out of their way to protect the murderers. For its part, the federal police, under the ultimate responsibility of President Calderón, was also there to dissuade the convoy from proceeding, rather than to detain the aggressors.

#### **Militarization and paramilitarization**

Once again, Amnesty International and grassroots organizations condemned the climate of violence against the autonomous municipality. Activists from The Other Campaign manifested their annoyance that members of the political class had tried to orchestrate the convoy in favor of their electoral campaigns, and reiterated their solidarity with the autonomous municipality project.

The Other Campaign summed up the situation by stating that "a state policy of repression, of terror, reigns in Mexico towards social movements that fight and resist, that question and oppose the advance of the capitalist policies. That repression extends to the majority of the population which, in the framework of the structural crisis, is suffering from dispossession, misery, exploitation and marginalization.

"The militarization and paramilitarization are part of that state policy. The State attacks the efforts of the working class, indigenous peoples, students, the exploited and oppressed of the countryside, city and sea that are fighting to defend their rights, the earth, the territory and their right to organize autonomously in order to make their own decisions."

#### **Represion and resistance**

These four acts of official repression are by no means the only ones. There are many more. But despite the growing repression, there are also many instances of resistance in which the workers will increasingly convince themselves of the need to free themselves from the shackles of the old corporativism to find their own autonomous expressions and thus not remain exposed to negotiations among different elites.

Each day in every corner of the country those on top strive to intensify their exploiting and subjecting project. But in many places, those below are attempting ways of living on the margins of capital and the State. Only a great convergence of real solidarity will turn all of those expressions into a critical mass.



## 200 Years of Independence, 100 Years of Revolution

*Those up above promise a noisy, demagogic, manipulative celebration, empty of any content belonging to the deeper Mexico, invoking historic dates, bronze heroes and calcified tableaux that could make one forget the grassroots rebellions that accompanied Independence and the Revolution. Those down below persist in a discreet commemoration, full of substance and small actions that revitalize memories and take risks on the changes Mexico needs.*

Jorge Alonso

Thanks to the Mexican government's deep-rooted conservatism, it seems unable to cope with Independence and the Revolution that marked Mexican history. Questioned for its anti-democratic origins, this government has attempted to intensify ruinous neoliberal policies rather than transform that worn-out economic model. Its central plans include the privatization of strategic sectors: energy, mining, water, health, science and technology. It has tried to roll back the Revolution's social triumphs, violating the rights of indigenous peoples, farmers and workers. It has persistently violated elementary human rights and its failed war against drug trafficking has increased violence virtually everywhere in the country, which is now drowning in bloody insecurity.

Subject to the real economic and media powers behind the scenes, this government has been infiltrated by organized crime, which champions corruption and inefficiency. Poverty is on the rise, public resources have been squandered and inequality has become intolerable. While Bishop Raúl Vera insists President Calderón Sol is leading the country into failed statehood, Calderón attacks those who don't want to submit to him, just as the dictator Porfirio Díaz did, and spends lavish amounts on the centennial and bicentennial celebrations.

Cárdenas says we have  
“nothing to celebrate”

The National Action Party (PAN) government is uncomfortable with a past that hails from a revolutionary tradition: the movements for Independence and the Revolution were grassroots uprisings against conservative orders just like those misgoverning the country today.

At the outset Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, founder of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), agreed to coordinate the bicentennial events but he soon realized

he couldn't work coherently with such an anti-people PAN government and he resigned. Cárdenas declared that we Mexicans have nothing to celebrate in 2010 given that Mexico is undergoing one of the greatest crises of its history. Instead of more jobs, better incomes and better social and economic conditions, there are fewer opportunities, a lack of economic growth and deteriorating social conditions. "I can't see that we need to celebrate unemployment, fewer salaries and emptier tables," he said.

#### What remains of all that?

Some 50 million Mexicans don't have enough income to satisfy their basic needs. Of these, 20 million aren't able to buy the basket of basic food provisions. Cárdenas regretted that a country with resources and human potential should today be at a standstill. He recalled that from Independence we should defend the notion that the country's sovereignty resides in its people and that we're all free and equal. He also said we need to remember that in 1810 Hidalgo called for the overthrow of the bad government and that thousands of Mexicans unleashed the first great revolution of their history. He evoked Morelos who insisted that good laws would be needed to moderate opulence and misery.

In 1906 Ricardo Flores Magón argued for abolishing the death penalty, creating a lay State, obligatory schooling, an eight-hour day, the minimum wage, domestic labor regulation, the State's obligation to house its workers, the obligation to provide land to those who wanted to work it, limits on rural property and the establishment of a union with Latin American countries... The birth of the 1917 Constitution was the fruit of the 1910 revolutionary movement. That first social Constitution outlined the restitution of land to communities that had it taken away, recognized the rights of workers and prohibited monopolies, except for those perceived as State instruments for collective benefit. Cárdenas recalled all this and made us see that both Independence and the Revolution had drawn on other freedom struggles of the Mexican people, bringing about great changes in Mexico. These movements didn't develop in a lineal fashion.

Mexico's current situation is highly precarious and the country obviously needs profound changes in its social and economic circumstances, given that many aspirations of our great revolutionary movements have remained unfulfilled. Cárdenas criticized political opportunism; the dismantling of key sectors of production such as agriculture and small and medium enterprise, which are the greatest job creators; privatization and foreign involvement in basic services such as banking. He urged Mexicans to transform the present degradation and desperation by fulfilling

the ideals of the Independence movement and the Revolution.

#### How to celebrate that rebelliousness?

The historian Lorenzo Meyer has reflected that two centuries on from the Independence struggle and one century on from the struggle to destroy an oligarchic dictatorship, we can confirm that neither event turned out the way we hoped, given that they didn't manage to set Mexico on the road to concrete, fair material and social development.

He criticizes the PAN government for wanting to celebrate two dramatic events of popular rebellion in a spectacular manner, when it would be more appropriate to initiate a mass reflection on why these two historic moments have not fulfilled the expectations of those who initiated them, nor their long-term promises. Given the conservative and anti-people nature of the PAN regime, this reflection could not come from the official group, but rather only from outside.

Porfirio Muñoz Ledo has pointed out that Independence and the Revolution put an end to long periods of history that ended up with the overthrow of political systems. What Mexico is suffering now is the slow agony of governmental decadence and its impotence to reverse national disintegration. Those who are actually carrying out a living celebration of these two events are the workers and grassroots sectors resisting government and transnational oppression.

What they are saying from above

From above in regime circles the voice of a commentator who has prospered through the last two governments, both the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the PAN, has been raised along with that of one of President Fox's former foreign relations secretaries. Both are putting forward proposals for what they call "the future of Mexico."

Their main argument is that Mexicans should break with the past because they've been immobilized by the weight of their history. They claim that this accumulated history is obstructing the future. They recommend abandoning "energetic nationalism" and the defense of farmers and common property and suggest the construction of a middle-class society. They advise abolishing and privatizing state monopolies—the Mexican Oil Company for starters. They maintain that Mexico isn't in danger of rebellions, but rather enjoys clear stability. They come down on the side of concentrating army and police efforts on sealing off the south of the country and recommend that Mexico put its Latin American sentiments to one side and swallow a reality that places it fully in North America.

They say another direction  
is urgently needed

Also from above, but not from the regime, two other voices have been heard, those of economists Carlos Cordera and Carlos Tello. They have proposed analyzing the nation's new challenge, maintaining that the economic policy applied since 1982 hasn't yielded the promised results and other directions must be sought. Their opinion is that history is a fundamental analytical instrument for constructing the future. They criticize the privatization of public companies, public spending cuts, the re-privatization of banks, the corrosion of the labor market and massive youth unemployment. Many young people have emigrated and send remittances back to the country but the amount, while significant, isn't enough to compensate for the flight of human capital.

They propose state social reform. Without state intervention, poverty and inequality feed social demands that they believe could lead to a crisis and greater dislocation in basic social relations. They argue that social dissatisfaction is on the rise and has become a political storm, causing diverse social mobilizations. They propose a return to society and insist on nationalizing globalization and a mixed economy rather than free market fundamentalism. If this isn't done, they say, the social contract is at risk.

What they're saying from  
below and in the Left

All these analyses focus on the State and its behavior and propose changes to avoid rebellion from below. Not a few grassroots leftwing groupings have been analyzing things differently. They claim that there were important movements of the exploited and oppressed both in Independence and the Revolution, but in the end the elite took advantage of them. In the case of the Revolution, a dominant new order was inaugurated with corporativism and paternalism directed at the subjugated lower classes.

Some groups think an authentic celebration would be to organize another revolution. They argue that with the arrival of 2010 the possibility of starting an insurrectionary struggle should be introduced into the collective discussion, instead of falling into the trap of bi-centennial myths. They recall the Cananea and Río Blanco strikes at the start of the 20th century, which were hit hard by the Porfirio dictatorship; while at the beginning of the 21st century movements such as those in Atenco, Oaxaca, the miners in Cananea and the electricity workers have been harshly repressed.

These groups see the capitalist crisis as a good opportunity for an insurrection. They argue that the struggle has to be along class lines, consciously organized and with a global perspective. These are small groups that insist the State must be overthrown and political power taken over through a revolutionary party in

order to build a “different world.” They are keeping the dogmas of the Left alive, but apart from their pronouncements there are no signs they might possibly incite and command this insurrection.

What those from “the  
insurrection in progress” say

There are also a large number of groups who have set themselves an anti-capitalist and anti-State goal for the long run, without hierarchies, without chiefs or parties, unaffected by the calendars of those on high. It is these widely varying grassroots organizations that have identified themselves with the so-called “Other” Campaign.”

They are aware that they are educating for, in and on behalf of the resistance. The experiences of different initiatives circulate among them and they are learning from them. They are respectful of the knowledge of the peoples who existed before Spanish colonization and have retained their independent spirit. They have been working to shape an anti-capitalist identity, encouraging autonomous projects. There is a great spirit of solidarity among them and they continually collect each other’s proposals to systematize them and translate them into lines of action in what Gustavo Esteva has called “the insurrection in progress.”

This isn’t the coming insurrection but rather one that can already be found in many places around the country. It’s not announced with drums and cymbals and doesn’t consist of manifestoes, marches, pickets, or armed uprisings. It can be found where people with dignity and courage pressure for their own ways of living, defying the status quo, the dominant system, the economic and political regime that has brought the country to its knees in a catastrophic situation. It’s a rebellion of the discontented but also one of knowledge and imagination that are expressed in unusual and hidden ways.

#### In this dangerous moment

These new converging groups are dealing with the bicentenary and the centenary by following the advice of Walter Benjamin: own their shining memories in the moment of danger, with the idea that the dead below will not be safe from the capitalist enemy if it continues imposing itself. They know that Independence wouldn’t have happened if it had been left up to the will of a few native-born colonialists and if it weren’t for the uprisings throughout the country of thousands of indigenous people who fought for respect for their territories and their ways of being and deciding.

The Mexican Revolution was neither a homogenous nor a unitary movement. Adolfo Gilly has defined it as a peasant, agricultural and radical-democratic revolution, made up of diverse forces and changing alliances. Gilly has

emphasized that it was a radical struggle of the masses with their weapons in hand against exploitation, humiliation and contempt that had an anti-capitalist dynamic at its core. Its spirit still inspires many movements, among them the Zapatistas who rose up against the theft of common property.

### How they are celebrating in Mezcala

One example of how the groupings in the Zapatistas' Other Campaign are relating to the Bicentennial can be found in the indigenous community of Mezcala, located on the shores of Lake Chapala. These communards have an exceptionally solid historical identity, which is a living legacy and inspiration in their current fight.

Indigenous people from Mezcala fought on Hidalgo's side in the fight for independence. When he was defeated in 1811 by the viceroy's forces at the Battle of Calderón Bridge, many of these indigenous groups dispersed. The viceroy's forces opted to suffocate all embers of the rebellion and were succeeding, but when they arrived at Mezcala, located between a big hill and the lake, the indigenous people defeated a well armed contingent with only their slingshots. The rest of the viceroy's troops were billeted in the region's most important town so to stop them from carrying out reprisals, the natives went after them and defeated them too. Later on they decided to entrench themselves on the island facing their town.

### How the indigenous peoples remember their independence

The viceroy's army decided this made things easier for them. They sent for boats from the Pacific coast and rebuilt them in front of Mezcala Island. Meanwhile the indigenous people surrounded the island with stakes submerged in the water. When the boats arrived they got stuck a stone's throw away. The Indians' skill with their slingshots once again ensured them a great victory.

From 1812 to 1816 the Mezcala insurgents resisted the siege; several times breaking through and attacking the viceroy's fortifications on the lake shore. Out of 25 significant skirmishes, only in one did they lose a significant amount of warriors; they won all the rest.

The indigenous people managed to seize a lot of weapons and cannons, which they then used. They also captured one of the viceroy's biggest boats. On seeing that they couldn't defeat the Indians, the royalists offered them a truce.

After much consideration the insurgents accepted, because they had been decimated by plague and the terms implied a great victory for them since their lands were returned, they were given seeds, oxen and food, and the viceroy's

army agreed not to levy civil or religious taxes. They appointed the indigenous leader José Santana to be in charge of the region and the island.

The communards of Mezcala celebrate this struggle every year, emphasizing that they weren't defeated and that the current defense of their lands is a continuation of their ancestors' struggle. They don't celebrate September 16 like the rest of Mexico but November 25, the date on which they won back their territory and their autonomy was respected.

### **Victorious after a four-year siege**

One crucially important element of this struggle is that they resisted and won after being besieged for four long years. History is full of tales of heroic resistance by besieged peoples who fought with dignity, but most of them were defeated. Under Roman domination, Numantia is memorable because after 13 months of siege its people preferred death to defeat. At the siege of Constantinople a whole era was broken. In 1808 in Spain the siege of Gerona by Napoleonic troops should be remembered; it was defeated a year later. In the 20th century many Spanish cities suffered terrible sieges in the 1930s civil war, Zaragoza among them, and they also succumbed. At the end of the 20th century we were witnesses to the bloody siege of Sarajevo.

Only a few have come out victorious from prolonged sieges, as happened in the Second World War with Leningrad. The island of Mezcala sums up resistance to a long siege in which the defenders ended up winning.

### **"They wanted to capture the island"**

Another original way the communards of Mezcala had of commemorating their bicentennial was the idea that the town's children would hold workshops to put together a book that in their words and drawings would tell other children the history of the island's defense in the era of Independence.

The children called their colorful 92-page book, including drawings and text, "Mezcala, they wanted to capture the island." Their book relates not only the townspeople's daily lives but also the strength it gives them to feel they're heirs of the island's defenders.

Some of the illustrated phrases are: "The rebels went to the island of Mezcala to fight the Spanish because the Spanish said the island was theirs, but the rebels wouldn't let them say these things. So the rebels fought the Spanish"; "The Spanish fought the rebels, they fought because they wanted Mezcala Island and they wanted it in order to defeat the rebels. The rebels came from here and the island was... is ours"; "In the town the women made food and prepared bombs and took them to them"; "The Spanish wanted to take the

island but they couldn't"; "In the end the Spanish gave up and left the island to the indigenous people. In this way the indigenous people could live happily and plant their crops so they could eat as free people"; and "The fight was over and the indigenous people won and were happy because they had saved the island."

## From to grandchildren

The historian Elisa Cárdenas pointed out that the children narrated these events in the first person plural—"We defended the island"—because there's no separation from their ancestors; there's a historical continuity from one generation to the next.

This book reveals that oral history doesn't reside only in old people; it can also be incredibly alive among children. The common property commissariat president in Mezcala stressed that the book not only contained the thoughts of children but also of young people, parents and grandparents, "because we've grown up with this birthright and responsibility."

In the book's presentation the communards wrote: "We want to say to all the boys, girls, men and women who read this composition that they will enter into a dialogue with our history and our ancestors; they will find one of our country's most beautiful indigenous struggles; they will dream about the heart of our people: the island of Mezcala. So we invite you to hear the thoughts of our community's children who today, two hundred years later, proudly remember our rebels, those men who gave us liberty and taught us to live with dignity."

## Where the dead live on

A young woman from Mezcala insisted that the dead come back to life when the communal land and the island are being defended. The weapon they wield is their own history. The island is the heart of the community because it pulses with her people's rebel blood. When one asks the old communards where the community's borders end they say "in the middle of the water," "just a bit behind the island" because it's part of their land, just as the primordial 16th-century treaty established and as was accepted in the 1970s by the 20th-century agrarian documents.

## In defense of history and the land

The Mezcala communards are engaging in other actions in defense of their history and against the government's impositions. They oppose the reconstruction the government has been implementing on the island for the bicentenary celebrations. They have accused the organizers of the government's bicentennial shindig of trying to ignore the communards'

traditional government, their general assembly.

The indigenous community has made various public statements. They have argued that any work in the community related to the land must be directly authorized by their assembly. Knowing their island and its history so well, they have accused the outsiders who turned up to restore the island's old constructions of not respecting the buildings' stones and rebuilding the floors without having salvaged the archeological remains to be found there. The community questioned why the conservation of the technical, historical, environmental and archeological conditions and heritage weren't being taken into account. They complained that the intrusive restorers had destroyed the insurgents' defenses or trenches and accused them of not working on rebel areas such as the underwater armaments and the trenches, prioritizing the jails instead, which were built after the insurgents' resistance.

They made it publicly known that they disagreed with converting into a huge esplanade the area containing the remains of monuments that were part of the construction and the historical sense for which they were created. In particular they mentioned the defenses their ancestors used to shield themselves from the Spanish invaders' attacks.

And of course they opposed the attempt to convert the island into a tourist trap. They reminded the government that they couldn't do away with a people that has been defending its land and community with their lives for hundreds of years. The community opposed the intention of federal and state authorities to install a booth to charge people to visit the island, considering it a privatization of communal space and a merchandizing of their history.

They considered that reconstruction work done with the National Anthropology and History Institute's permission had violated their territory and committed technical, historical and archeological errors. Through this dispute they have unmasked the ignorance and bad faith of the reconstruction work and put a stop to the actions the government had planned for bicentennial parties on the island.

The region's new municipal president has accepted that from now on nothing will be done without the community's consent. And the communards have announced a series of works autonomously implemented by them, with the people's resources and efforts, for their town's benefit and the protection of their territory and history, which won't be connected to either political parties or personal interests.

#### A situation akin to 200 years ago

Just like the dictator Díaz, the PAN government is trying to take advantage of

the centenary celebrations to shore up a rotten regime. But the discontent of those down below goes on growing. The elite struggling to prop up their domination without reaching agreement and those who maintain the feeble neoliberal project hold the upper hand. There are groups that aspire to solutions but find themselves tied only to what can be done from the State. The bicentennial and the centennial allude to uprisings by the downtrodden against bad living conditions and bad governments.

The current situation of aggravated poverty, great insecurity, abuses and insulting social inequality is similar to if not worse than that which unleashed the movements for Independence and the Revolution. Without forgetting that there are no predetermined mechanisms at work in history, this dramatic situation is a reality clamoring for drastic change.

The government and powers that be would like to invoke historic dates, bronze heroes and calcified tableaux to conceal grassroots processes. They want to break with the true significance of our history and our Latin American ties. They aim to strip the people of the historical potential that could make the current protest irresistible.

#### Above and below: Two celebrations

One of the biggest offenses of those up above against those down below is to try to perpetrate a theft of huge proportions: that of their history's significance, of all symbolic charge, its dynamism and its affirming and ever-renewing flow.

Nonetheless, there persists down below the defense of a history that is still an active memory and this hinders plans for mystification with no questions asked. Up above there is a noisy, demagogic, manipulative celebration, empty of any content from the deeper Mexico, that is trying to make the country's festival one more piece of the status quo. Down below the stealthy celebration of the grassroots movements persists, full of active content at the service of transformation and emancipation.

Up above they want to impose heteronomy and turn the bicentennial and centennial into fetishistic merchandise. Down below, liberating the catalyzing memory, changes are being generated in the silence of autonomous, daily events.

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#### Vatican vs. Maciel: The Legionaries Won

*The case of pederast priest Marcial Maciel, founder of the Legionaries of Christ, revealed an impenetrable web of complicity with sexual crimes and financial*

*corruption that reached to the Vatican's highest levels. It first seemed Benedict XVI would be hard on the Legion. But it wasn't to be; the pope backed off. While acknowledging that Maciel had been shielded, he didn't name or punish those responsible for the cover-up. Worse yet, he announced that John Paul II, one of those who protected Maciel, will be beatified on May 1.*

### **Jorge Alonso**

After poring through newspapers from March 2010 to early January 2011, consulting the official Vatican and Legion web pages, following up the writings of numerous Mexican researchers and reading several books, particularly journalist Carmen Aristegui's Marcial Maciel. A Criminal's Story (Grijalbo 2010), I share this essay in the hope that the truth will set us free and at some point in this case justice will be done.

#### **They finally admitted it**

When Mexico's Catholic hierarchy appeared to be institutionalizing its hegemony at the head of Mexican society, the crisis of Maciel and his Legionaries of Christ suddenly broke, revealing the complicity between economic, ecclesiastical, political and media elites, as Maciel acted as a bond in those interactions. The crisis marked the start of this group's loss of prestige, which wasn't limited to Mexico, because the case has become paradigmatic of the devastating tempest lashing the Vatican with the numerous cases of clerical pederasts discovered in North America and Europe.

After not only having covered up for Maciel but even wanting to raise him to the altar, the Legionaries finally had to accept that their founder led a despicable life. The Vatican appointed a team of investigators who would examine what was going on in that religious congregation. In late March 2010 the Legion's general director, its council and territorial directors released a rather lukewarm statement if one takes the facts into account, but one very hard on the members of that religious institution given the cult they established and used to lavish on Maciel. At last they publicly admitted that their founder had sexually abused children, teenagers and young adults; had maintained a prolonged stable relationship with a woman with whom he had a daughter; and possibly had more children. Without specifying exactly what, they spoke of other instances of Maciel's "serious conduct." They referred to the visit of the Vatican mission and insisted that God had chosen Maciel to found the Legion. They asked for a general pardon and offered Maciel's victims prayers, but no justice.

#### **A financial empire**

Elio Masferrer, president of the Latin American Association for Religious Studies, calculated that the Legionaries have contributed millions of dollars

annually to Vatican finances. He maintains the Church knew what Maciel was and has lost respectability by protecting him. In April 2010, Masferrer could see no other solution equal to the dimensions of this crisis than to disband the Legion.

The network of survivors of abuse by priests asked the Vatican to dissolve the Legion, warning that it couldn't be renovated by the same upper circle of directors because it would be naive to believe they hadn't been party to Maciel's sexual and financial misdeeds. That same month the press learned about the powerful network of relationships Maciel had fabricated in the Vatican and with numerous businessmen.

An article in the National Catholic Reporter demonstrated how Maciel, abetted internally by his organization, bought influence, handing envelopes stuffed with money to key Vatican figures. The Mexican magazine Milenio confirmed it, showing how this corruption had opened the Vatican's doors to Maciel. Writer Jason Berry also provided lots of information showing that Maciel bought support for his congregation and protection for himself. In an interview with Berry published by Carmen Aristegui in her book, he defines the Legion as an ecclesiastical-entrepreneurial holding able to bribe and entrap many people, including powerful Vatican political figures. He argues that the Legion's upper echelons knew what Maciel was doing, as various directors even lent their names to the bribes. Maciel also doled out presents and favors among the Vatican clergy. He and the Legion built a financial empire and indoctrinated those who entered its ranks, both in the reading of Maciel's letters and in ways to raise funds. It's been estimated that the Legion's assets reached 25 billion euros.

#### The Vatican and the Legion wrangle over the loot

As writer Vicente Leñero puts it, a chorus of voices in Carmen Aristegui's book is still demanding justice. Leñero points out that the ecclesiastical hierarchy's high command, from John Paul II to Benedict XVI, was and has remained complicit in a social crime never admitted at the time. He clarifies that these deeds do not touch the church of the gospel belonging to so many believers.

In the same book another highly respected prize-winning Mexican writer, Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa, says we're witnessing the Catholic Church's greatest crisis in contemporary times. He reminds us that Maciel was put forward by Pope John Paul II as a role model for young Catholics, even though he was a pederast dictator who imposed his perversions on those forced to keep quiet and to commit sins he then absolved. Despite this, he was never punished when he was alive with the severity merited by his immoral conduct. He is revealed in this book as a greedy criminal. Also revealed, as Granados

Chapa says, is “the money-making machine, whose capital worth represents a sort of booty fought over by the Vatican and the not yet frustrated heirs” of Maciel’s institution.

#### A devil and a father

Lawyer Jeff R. Anderson argues that the Vatican, the Legion’s highest authorities and Maciel’s inner circle all knew he lacked scruples and knew what a danger he represented to minors, yet opted to let him retain his institutional authority. Another specialist in the investigation into the Catholic Church, Roberto Blancarte, views preserving the Legion after Maciel as comparable to not dissolving the Nazi party after Hitler’s death.

Aristegui also interviewed former legionary Miguel Angel Díaz Rivera, who put his signature to a letter implicating Maciel but later withdrew it at the request of the Legion’s founder. From that moment on, Díaz Rivera became a defender of the Legion. He accepts that Maciel could be a devil but says he was like a father to him. He says his memories are of a man he describes as exceptional, a confession that shows what’s currently happening to many of Maciel’s followers: even with proven accusations before them it’s impossible for them to free themselves of their bond with Maciel.

#### The religion of power

In an interview with Aristegui, Flora Garza, daughter of one of Maciel’s greatest benefactors, is obviously amazed at the fact that there are still people in Monterrey City who keep up the cult to Maciel in 2010 and pray to him as if he were a saint, in open disregard of Rome’s official disapproval. She says some of the businessmen who supported Maciel were duped but others were openly in league with him.

Aristegui also interviewed the daughter of impresario Lorenzo Servitje, who in the nineties tried to stop the program on which some of Maciel’s victims would recount their stories. Lucía Servitje, a theologian, denounced the “religion of power” the Legion represents. She points out that Maciel was emblematic of a Church that sought proximity to power and money and that this is perverting the faith. She argues the need for an in-depth look at what causes this in order to understand why Maciel’s rotten seed took root with such force. She explains that the Legion would seek out basically unsound families, where the patriarchal system was applied with a heavy hand; the Legion favored a highly consumer-orientated family model with very little consideration of women.

With regard to education, it proposes an individualistic, competitive model in which the triumph of some is only possible at the expense of others’ failure. In Maciel, Servitje sees a man with little culture, who favored an ethic based on appearances and artifice. Because of this he created a network of accomplices

who feel no guilt. She believes the Legionaries shouldn't work in the educational field because they've shown themselves incapable of preventing such serious incidents as those that occurred. Maciel knew how to instill silence and people who received the bulk of their education under this conviction can't possibly be good teachers.

In her opinion, the Legion displays a twisted morality when it describes Maciel as a pervert but also a genius and continues blessing God for having founded it. This is an example of the double standard that justifies evil actions because they supposedly generate goodness.

Fernando González, an academic who has written several well documented books on the Legion, criticized the Vatican's and Legion's mechanism of converting Maciel into a "solipsistic pederast," because of the existence of hard data that prove he acted with the help of a group of accomplices. González describes the Legion as a sect consisting of a sort of despotic leadership that lent the ecclesiastical element an entrepreneurial aspect. Some of Aristegui's other interviewees described Maciel as a narcissistic, amoral, malign and criminal impostor, and the Legion as an organization marked by complicity and manipulation.

**"Incredibly serious and immoral crimes"**

In April 2010 José Barba, a university professor and one of Maciel's victims, admitted that he didn't expect much from the Vatican's resolution on the Legion and predicted that whoever was assigned to lead the Vatican investigation wouldn't get to the bottom of the case, citing how hard it was to deconstruct the psychology of Maciel's followers.

On May 1, 2010, the Holy See released a statement on the result of its visit to the Legion. It confirmed that Maciel's conduct had caused serious consequences in the life and structure of the congregation he had founded. The papal statement describes his behavior patterns as highly "serious and objectively immoral." It states that these patterns were confirmed by "incontrovertible evidence" that represent "real crimes and manifest a life devoid of scruples and of genuine religious feeling." While it emphatically pointed out the existence of a system of relationships created by Maciel that allowed him to live the life he led, the statement also tried to save the Legion by claiming a large part of it was unaware of its founder's life. In contrast, the governing National Action Party's coordinator in the House of Representatives called Maciel a criminal with a life of corruption made possible only because of the complicity of many.

**The Legion resists**

The visiting investigators perceived the need to redefine the congregation's charisma and appraise the exercise of authority within the Legion, arguing that the congregation expected a "path of purification" from it. There was an offer of "dialogue" with those who might have been victims of abuse, both inside and outside the Legion.

In mid-May 2010 the newspaper El Sol de México gave space to a religious researcher's hypothesis: faced with the threat of the Legion's upper echelons leaving the Church, the Pope opted for an intermediate position that would save Maciel's congregation. Roberto O'Farrill, spokesman for a Catholic television program, reported on the Legion's fierce resistance, noting how close it was to rejecting the Pope's authority. Threats are a tool the congregation's management knows very well how to use.

#### Ratzinger: Judge and jury

There were many reactions to the Vatican's statement. Mexico's Cardinal Sandoval called Maciel "psychopathic, criminal, crafty and duplicitous" and wondered why someone like him had emerged from the Mexican people. He accepted that the cases of pederasty in the Church led it to an extraordinary crisis with no close comparison, although he tried to exonerate the Legionaries. A former legionary and abuse victim called the cardinal complacent, recalling that he did nothing when he took his story to him.

As to the Legion's "charisma," Roberto Blancarte analyzed that it was nothing more than getting rich at the expense of the wealthy. The ex-priest Alberto Athié, who has attempted unsuccessfully to get justice for one of Maciel's victims, denied the Legion might possess something that could be referred to as "charisma." He complained that the papal statement said nothing about investigating Maciel's accomplices and suggested that some international organization should be formed to prosecute the Vatican, because in this instance the Pope was acting as both judge and jury.

#### Silence the scandal or resolve the problem?

Félix Alarcón, who left the Legion to become a parish priest, noted the statement's absence of compassionate words to the victims. Professor Barba argued that Maciel's case went beyond pederasty since he had committed criminal acts of various kinds. He considered it a step in the right direction that the Vatican admitted the existence of an unscrupulous network created by Maciel, but criticized the Legion's lack of reaction. And while praising the victims' perseverance, the Vatican was not self critical. Because of this, Barba proposed organizing international jurisprudence that would oblige the Vatican to answer to society and do an independent study that would lay everything bare, not just what the visitors wanted to reveal.

The Ecclesial Observatory of Mexico declared that it was an important step for the Pope to have acknowledged that those in Maciel's Legion who had covered up for him had also committed crimes. Now justice must be brought to bear on those collaborators who abetted the vile behavior.

Journalist Ciro Gómez Leyva commented that evidence of Maciel's sexual crimes was overwhelming, that the Legion had been an accomplice and it shouldn't be forgotten that lying had been indoctrinated as a habit within the Legion. Another journalist, Antonio Navalón, believed the Vatican was only concerned with the responsibility of the now deceased Maciel, but that legal action against those who accompanied him was also necessary. Roberto Blancarte emphasized that the Holy See was more concerned about silencing the scandal than getting to the bottom of the problem.

Another researcher into religious affairs, Bernardo Barranco, stressed that the Maciel affair darkened not only the Legion but also Mexico's Catholic hierarchy. The systematic cover-up, institutional silence, double standards, complicity and hypocrisy were undermining the Mexican Church's credibility.

A criminal suit against his accomplices

Rosario Robles, who was head of the Federal District government at the time, wrote that it isn't enough for the top Vatican hierarchy to ask forgiveness. The damage must be repaired. He made it clear the Mexican bishops who had protected Maciel, notably the archbishop, primate of Mexico and the Ecatepec prelate, were remaining silent, showing no repentance or engaging in self-criticism.

Spokespeople for Evangelical believers demanded the Government Secretariat investigate the Legion so that those who were guilty could be punished. It was inconceivable to them that the Mexican federal authorities didn't intervene even after the facts had been revealed.

A Democratic Revolutionary Party federal legislator filed suit with the Republic's Prosecutor General (PGR) to punish Maciel's accomplices and abettors, insisting that he hadn't acted alone but had had a network of accomplices who helped orchestrate the abuse. She demanded these acts be classified as "organized crime" given there was a boss and operators, warned that if those who were keeping quiet weren't prosecuted, it would constitute complicity, insisting that these crimes be punished. The suit issued against the Legion was for the crimes of pederasty, rape, corruption of minors, money laundering, tax evasion and organized crime. Among those being sued were the Legion's director and the rector of the University of Anáhuac. The Archbishop

of Mexico was sued as well, in his case for negligence.

Former Legionaries said the PGR should investigate the whole congregation, arguing that the archdiocese of Mexico didn't want to recognize existing evidence and that its leader had covered up for Maciel. Their lawyer, who believes Maciel created a school within the Legion, demanded the whole truth.

#### **Also crimes of slavery and swindling**

In May, an article by Jairo Calixto, a journalist whose sources were women formerly consecrated to the Legion, revealed the existence of a structure close to slavery within the organization. The article showed that Maciel had consecrated 900 women in order to exploit them economically. He had built a women's army, bound by ironclad statutes, similar to terms of slavery, in order to get his hands on their families' millions. Two civil society organizations sent another demand to the PGR accusing the Legion of committing crimes of slavery and fraud against these women.

#### **What was stopping the Vatican?**

Although public opinion in Mexico and abroad was convinced the papal statement meant the Legion would be re-founded, its directors refused, excusing themselves of any responsibility. For journalist Carmen Aristegui, the statement acknowledged

the existence of powerful and influential networks that had kept accusations against Maciel from prospering. She was also convinced that condemnation of Maciel would never have come about had it not occurred within the international crisis of priests' sexual abuse. Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa wondered why the Vatican, despite its certainty over Maciel's guilt, was inconsistent and didn't disband the Legion, considering that it wasn't licit to give an honest appearance to the fruits of the founder's criminal hands.

Although an examination of the statement made it clear that part of the Legion was aware of Maciel's conduct, the Vatican didn't accept the consequences of this complicity and cover-up. Something held it back from taking this step. Carlos Martínez García explained it like this: the legionaries were past masters at the art of prestidigitation. They now accepted what they had always refuted: Maciel's pederasty and his administration of his institution's financial and human resources for his own ends. Nonetheless, they tried to argue that everything came down to his personality and avoided casting light on the problem of the institution that had protected him for decades. This analyst wondered how the Vatican statement managed to say nothing about how it was possible for the chief legionary to have been a child sex abuser for six decades while being presented as a role model by successive Vatican authorities.

There was no indication of any real desire by the Vatican for a thorough re-founding of the Legion, given the generous financial resources it had been given. Bernardo Barranco commented that forgiveness is no substitute for justice, recalling that Maciel's cult had been promoted by the Legion's upper echelons, and that the Church was risking its pastoral legitimacy in this affair.

The director of the Association of Victims of the Legion believes that there could be as many as 200 victims of Maciel's abuse and pointed out that the priests in his inner circle, who had themselves been abused by their founder, used to abuse others, thus turning the Legion into a chain of sexual abuse.

**They acknowledge all of it and aren't changing anything**

A Catalan newspaper leaked a recording of a meeting chaired by the Legion's vicar general. A legionary was protesting about Legion officers who still kept photos of the founder in their offices and the fact that many legionaries continued to read Maciel's letters and treatises. Others complained that there was no spirit of truth and they were still being deceived.

In the recording, the vicar accepted that Maciel had performed homosexual acts, sexually abused minors, had a stable marital relationship with a woman, a sexual relationship with another woman and various children. He even recognized the Legion didn't have a distinct charisma and that trying to attain it would be very difficult. He recalled that what they referred to as "the congregation's spirituality" was Maciel's letters. He told them that until 2006 the congregation didn't have a consolidated accounting system for their resources, that Maciel administered a discretionary monthly fund of US\$20,000 and for some expenses requested cashier's checks in the name of some high-up member of the congregation. He would cash the check using a false signature and had instructed a top member of the organization to buy his lover an expensive house. The vicar also revealed to the meeting that the Legion's directors had managed to conceal or only partially release information on the founder's situation and that Maciel had not repented on his death bed. Nevertheless, the vicar stated resolutely that the Legion could not accept that the citizenry wanted to correct them.

### **Complacency and complicity**

Another recording was released of a Legion meeting with the Spanish territorial director. This recording shows that rank-and-file legionaries do believe that hiding Maciel's sexual abuse was unacceptable. The territorial director believed that re-founding would be a highly complicated path to take and reflected that that the Legion had allowed Maciel to get hold of enough money to live in the sort of ostentatious luxury that not even the very wealthy could attain. When commenting on the vicar general's revelations, Bernardo Barranco highlighted

them as proof of the fact that Maciel had not acted alone, but rather with the systematic complacency and complicity of his religious organization, which brought to light the systematic lying of the Legion's upper echelons. Both recordings showed that prominent Legion members knew about their founder's sexual and economic abuses, unmasking the discourse that helped blur the actions of the Legion's upper echelons.

In May, former legionary Alejandro Espinosa, another victim of Maciel's sexual abuse, declared that the Legion was tearing itself apart in an internal conflict. He recalled that Álvaro Corcuera—who replaced Maciel in the Legion's directorate—had not been elected by a general branch vote, but was imposed by Maciel. Vatican watcher Sandro Magister explained that both Corcuera and the vicar general since 1992 were drawn from a bloc loyal to Maciel and were surrounded by groups of staunch supporters, so that the whole of the Legion's upper echelons were faithful to Maciel.

Protected by a financial labyrinth

In July 2010, Monsignor Velasio de Paolis was named the Legion's papal delegate, and the legionaries had to act according to his directions. Ratifying the members of Maciel's inner circle in their posts, one of the delegate's fundamental tasks was to review the Legion's regulations. The pope's delegate would depend on four counselors who would assist him in his work.

Commentators noted that one of the delegate's most important tasks would be to ascertain the origin, destination and application of the congregation's resources and that achieving this would be extremely hard because it would prove impossible to find a lot of money in the organization's accounts. Elio Masferrer showed that a large part of the Legion's funds was held in tax havens, in shares and in association with big business groups. Also in the power of the Legion were the inheritances of many of its members. Auditing the Legion's finances would be a labyrinthine task.

Jenaro Villamil, a media specialist, called attention to the fact that the Legion was still an extremely powerful transnational whose profits hadn't apparently shrunk, despite it falling into general disrepute. The Legion's business aspects were so dispersed that it proved extremely difficult to investigate them. And the Vatican foot-dragging in appointing a delegate had given the Legion time to make enough financial movements to protect themselves.

Bernardo Barranco declared that the Legion operated in consortium mode and wondered if a business model that offered salvation to the rich and powerful without questioning how they had accumulated their wealth or the ethical values with which they gained power was evangelical. In his opinion the official

statements of the Legion's upper echelons reeked of "calculated hypocrisy."

The Mexican government:  
**Another accomplice**

Barranco also commented on the Mexican President's insensitivity in appointing Bruno Ferrari as his secretary of the economy in July. Ferrari had been the operational liaison between Maciel and Mexican business circles. According to reports from the Treasury Secretariat, the Legion received the solid amount of 673 million pesos from public funds in 2009. Furthermore, it had been receiving donations of land from local governments, which basically amounts to taxpayers' money.

In a country with so many needs it's monstrous that highly opaque governments squander public funds by giving them to a multi-millionaire private organization. The ombudsman in the Federal District complained that the government lacked the will to act against the Legion despite the criminal charges that had been filed. This could only be explained by the central government being in league with it.

The only solution  
**is to disband it**

In August news got out that Corcuera had approached one of the victims to propose an economic settlement. Journalist Sanjuana Martínez reports that he even got down on his knees to the former legionary, who told him to stop the theatrics. After thanking him for seeking forgiveness, the victim told him in no uncertain terms that this wasn't the answer because they had to compensate the victims for the damage and wounds caused by such long suffering of indifference and disdain. When Corcuera asked him how much money he wanted, the former legionary told him that moral damage can't be repaid with money. Alberto Athié again argued that the best solution for the Church was to disband the Legion.

**Maciel's cult continues**

At the end of September, on the same day the press learned the Vatican bank was investigated for money laundering, the pope specifically greeted a group of legionaries in St. Peter's square calling them "friends." And Legion sources reported that the papal delegate had left unchanged the vocational promotion for capturing new legionaries.

The time during which the Pope's delegate took no action discouraged some legionaries who complained that nothing had changed in the Legion. After a high-up leader in the Legion stated that legionaries couldn't be prevented from possessing photos of Maciel, legionary Peter Byrne sent a letter to Corcuera asking him about the abysmal message being given to victims by keeping

photos of him. He asked that the founder's body, which lay on the central altar in the Legion's temple in his city of birth, be removed to a peripheral crypt. Byrne also lamented some of the practices imposed by Maciel that lived on, such as the continuing existence of Legion tutors' "vile" lists that classified people and families by social rank and economic prospects.

Maciel's personal secretary between 1982 and 1987 asked for Maciel's cult to be thoroughly reviewed. He said the Legion's main concern always had been and still was to ingratiate itself with those with money.

#### No serious measures

All these facts make it evident that apart from its discourse, the Vatican had taken no serious measures and the Legion's corruption continued to entangle more accomplices. This is corroborated by the Vatican's decision to offer 93 bishops a course examining what they should do against clerical pederasty in one of the Legion's own universities. One can't help but be cynical about the choice of location.

While the Pope occasionally spoke out severely against the abuse, passivity reigned when faced with established facts and nothing was done in Rome to make the guilty pay.

A survey in Mexico conducted by Parametría showed that the Catholic Church's credibility during the first decade of the 21st century had fallen 13 points precisely because of the cases of sexual abuse. In early November an article in the Mexican newspaper Crónica reported that many pederasts were continuing to operate in the Legion.

Benedict

XVI:

"The Legion retains vitality"

On the last day of September the Vatican appointed four counselors to assist the pontiff's delegate to the Legion. It also designated an apostolic visitor for the Legion's lay movement of 70,000 people, present in 30 countries.

On October 19 the papal delegate sent a letter to the Legion and its lay movement clarifying that the Legion had not been subordinated to a "superintendent" but rather would be accompanied by him. It also stated that the Vatican had recognized, ratified and confirmed the superiors who dated from Maciel's time, and instructed them to speak to him. He let them know that the task of the pontiff's delegate was to accompany the Legion on its path to renewal so that a new constitutional document could be drawn up in some future extraordinary moment—in two or three years, or even more.

He told them that the Pope renewed his confidence in the Legion in this new

phase and announced that one commission would be named to study the economic problems, another to attend to people, including Maciel's sexual abuse victims with complaints against the religious organization, and another to see to the new legislation.

In his letter, the delegate informed them that some of the Legion's priests had made suggestions and expressed confusion, doubts and difficulties to him, especially regarding the statutes and internal praxis, the exercise of authority and the appointment of superiors. Some had asked for a period of reflection away from the Legion's houses or had expressed their intention of leaving the congregation. Some stated they found it impossible to believe their superiors hadn't known what Maciel was doing.

The delegate hoped for a positive path toward renewal, accepting that the shock provoked by Maciel's actions had caused a "terrible" impact, capable of destroying the congregation, but he insisted that it not only would survive but that "its vitality" was intact. He called on them to avoid divisions and was glad that a commitment to discipline and loyalty persisted in the Legion.

The Vatican won't do a thorough job

In fact at that point various legionaries had already left, going to work in different dioceses, and the vocational promotion had decreased, as had the previously abundant economic support.

Public opinion reacted angrily to the papal delegate's letter because it gave carte blanche to impunity and the organization remained intact in its corruption. Alberto Athié saw the document as an attempt to exonerate John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger himself, now the pope, of their part in protecting Maciel and yet another sign that there was no inclination to seek justice for the sexual abuse victims.

The Vatican wanted to make it look like Maciel was a criminal working on his own rather than acknowledge the organization's responsibility. Athié strongly argued that the commission set up for the victims was only designed for those who sought some type of economic compensation, a superficial solution since they would receive money, but wouldn't see justice done. At this point it was already obvious that the Vatican didn't want to do a thorough job and would not touch the profoundly anti-evangelical structure erected by Maciel, sustained by power and economic accumulation.

José Barba believed the delegate's letter wasn't impartial and appeared to be written by someone loyal to the Legion. There was no real will to completely restructure the congregation. It revealed a desire to separate the founder's

excesses from the leaders who surrounded him, despite the abundant evidence indicating complicity during the 64 years Maciel was in charge of the institution. It was impossible that his conduct hadn't permeated his organization and unacceptable that responsibility wasn't shared.

Attempting to excuse the Legion's entire upper circle, as the papal delegate indicated, was a maneuver without substance, yet another insult. Vatican watcher Sandro Magister compared the letter's conciliatory tone with the Vatican's statement on May 1, pointing at the existence of a system of relationships with Maciel at its center, which it was now apparently excusing.

#### **Removing the pope's responsibility**

Back in May the Legion had announced the creation of a study centre on the life and work of John Paul II, to push for the beatification of the pope who had protected them to such an extent. Reactivation of John Paul II's canonization process indicated that for the Vatican the Maciel episode apparently hadn't happened.

Another Vatican watcher, Andrea Tornelli, reported serious tension and that to avoid it the papal delegate was planning to reduce his own authority, despite the July decree conferring full powers on him. It was impossible for Maciel to have moved without the structural complicity of his first circle of power and there was evidence of structural pathologies, with Maciel's cover-up reaching the highest circles in Rome, including Pope Ratzinger.

Justo Mullor, the papal nuncio in Mexico, said Maciel had deceived John Paul II, but Athié refuted that excuse and José Barba said that, knowing Maciel's case well, Mullor had whitewashed the situation in his interview with the journalist Alazraki in an attempt to remove responsibility from Pope John Paul II.

In a dialogue, Barba, Athié and Fernando González presented the abundance of hard facts that proved the complicity of both John Paul II and Ratzinger with Maciel. Letters exist that show John Paul II knew about Maciel's crimes and then-Cardinal Ratzinger, also aware of them, didn't dare act for fear of the pope's reaction.

#### **Beatify John Paul II?**

Investigator Bernardo Barranco argued that this evidence gave rise to real doubts about John Paul II's beatification. The Maciel affair and the filth that covered the Legion spattered the Pope.

Journalist Valentina Alazraki wrote a book, *La luz eterna de Juan Pablo II* (The Eternal Light of John Paul II) last year to try to convince her readers that Maciel,

the Legion and its collaborators deceived the Pope. Nonetheless the corruption in the Vatican that even she acknowledged implied papal responsibility. The numerous interviews and documents in Carmen Aristegui's books implicate John Paul II conclusively and categorically in protecting Maciel and his Legion because of the money he contributed to the Vatican and its political causes.

#### Benedict

#### XVI:

##### **"The Legion is healthy"**

In the middle of this storm, Pope Benedict XVI permitted journalist Peter Seewald a series of interviews that were published in the form of a book (Light of the World) last year. The Pope told Seewald that the sexual abuse cases hadn't come as a surprise but the size of the scandal had indeed constituted a huge shock. He called the Legion's founder an "adventurer," "a squanderer," "fallen by the wayside" and "false prophet." He accepted there had been serious slowness and delay in dealing with the case but defended the Legion as a "healthy" community. Zenit, the press agency linked to the Legion, publicized the book's release, but said nothing about Benedict XVI's opinions of Maciel.

Athié commented that Benedict XVI was obliged to reveal the interests he had covered up in the nineties when he didn't want to initiate a sexual abuse case against Maciel. Bernardo Barranco said he knew Maciel was "very well protected" but didn't want to specify by whom, much less refer to his own responsibility. It's astonishing that he would want to make people believe a person riddled with perversity could leave a healthy religious work. The book lacks self-criticism by the pope.

##### **Legionary Santiago Oriol's gesture**

The papal delegate's letter caused strong repercussions in the Legion. Its leaders jumped for joy, but others felt betrayed. An important person in the Spanish Legion, Santiago Oriol, left the congregation saying that others would follow in his footsteps. In answer, the Legion's secretary general cynically recommended that the legionaries listen and sing along with Julio Iglesias' song "Life goes on as usual."

Oriol's exit was interpreted by theologian and sociologist José Manuel Vidal as a way to turn the Legion's leaders into co-respondents of Maciel's abuses and show that a number of legionaries didn't believe "the story" that their leaders hadn't covered up their superior's misdeeds.

Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa wrote that Oriol's gesture unequivocally undermined the Pope, who had gone from robust condemnation to conformism, disappointing those who were expecting actions consistent with the severity of the crimes. There were clearly many interests within and surrounding the Legion and its leaders would not only end up unaccountable

for their complicity but would also continue to be invested with the authority that had let their founder consolidate his empire. This is what Oriol, known as the main Spanish legionary, rebelled against.

#### Everything carries on just as Maciel left it

In early December of last year, Milenio reported that a letter was being circulated in the Legion accusing its old guard of having employed Maciel's techniques in assimilating the papal delegate. It gave an example: 60 priests, more than 100 devotees and a similar number of seminarians had left the Legion. The text stated that once the directors had been ratified, they had put into operation a tight watch over the others, just like the old days. Those who were unhappy with this accused the directors of lying and running the internal forum with impunity. Vatican watcher Sandro Magister was pleased to note that the criticism of the circle that had formed around Maciel showed that the silence and fear of the congregation had been broken.

On December 8 the Legion's leaders announced the formation of the commission that would be in charge of reviewing its statutes. Elio Masferrer warned that if the Legion's culture indoctrinated by Maciel over many years wasn't changed and the pattern of inertia wasn't overturned, little good would result from reviewing the Legion's Constitution. Although announcing a legal revision was a way to make it seem they were taking measures, the Legion's essence remained intact: both Maciel's cult and the authoritarian institutional culture continued as before.

#### A scandalous document

On December 13 the director general released a decree he'd signed a week earlier ordering an end to public references to the founder and the withdrawal of all photographs of Maciel in which he appeared alone or in the company of John Paul II. At this point, his writings were no longer on sale but the mausoleum where he'd been laid to rest would be conserved and legionaries were at liberty to keep photographs of him, read his writings and listen to his interviews, while his writings could be used in public sermons, homilies and reflections.

Athié reflected that the Legion had Maciel engraved on its soul. The cult of Maciel was permitted in private and once again the papal delegate's great weakness was obvious. The decree was scandalous; it showed the Legion lacked the will to separate from its founder. Carlos Martínez called it an act of prestidigitation that only fooled its creators since most other people could "see through the trick." Highly revealing is the phrase in which the director general says he hopes the decree will help the Legion and its lay movement center more in Christ's person. Did they feel off center? After all the words and

whitewash, it was obvious from the facts that Maciel was still their centre.

**Extreme expression of impunity and arrogance**

A book on Maciel and his Legion was presented by photomontage artist Jabaz at the Guadalajara International Book Fair in November–December 2010. Researcher and psychoanalyst Fernando González wrote the prologue, in which he said: “If Maciel was able to commit his fraud with such elegance for more than sixty years, it wasn’t due to his astuteness alone but because he could depend all this time on the conscientious collaboration of scores of people, at times working in coordination, from the dominated legionaries, priests, businessmen, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, popes—via religious realpolitik—[to] rich married women and generous widows, women seeking marriage, gullible in all good faith, useful and useless dummies, the media, etc.”

The prologue’s author tried to interpret the credulity of so many people and highlighted Cardinal Ratzinger’s lengthy complicity. Now pope, Ratzinger accepted the Legion’s responsibility but without daring to implicate Vatican bodies. Then he retreated and the Vatican opted to present Maciel as a lone criminal.

Academic Sergio Aguayo maintained that Maciel was the most grotesque and extreme expression of the Church’s impunity and arrogance: “This successful bisexual pederast and drug addict who procreated children with those he also raped, created a network of accomplices in the Vatican and erected a religious empire so powerful that during his lifetime he was a candidate for the altar.” Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa referred to important Mexican bishops who threw a cloak of complicity over Maciel and his Legion, ecclesiastical authorities that haven’t been at all self-critical or repaired the damage for which they were jointly responsible.

**Monsignor Raúl Vera was an exception**

Just as in any collective body, there are exceptions. This is true of Bishop Raúl Vera, who said the Church had minimized the problem of pederasty within its rank-and-file and dealt with it superficially. He accepted that hierarchies had impeded the investigation’s progress in Maciel’s case. He urged priests to abandon their alliances with power and stop creating scandals by acting as accomplices. He called for a Church that would answer the victims and defend the rights of the aggrieved.

**Rome lost its opportunity**

Bernardo Barranco described 2010 as an unfortunate year for the Catholic Church because it experienced its greatest crisis

in living memory. Charges of pederasty undermined ecclesiastical authority, not just because of the child abuse but also because of the systematic protection of the criminals, the cover-ups and pretense. Maciel's case brought to light a network of complicity, favors, cover-ups and corruption at the Vatican's highest levels in which financial corruption in the Rome bureaucracy must be added to the pederasty scandals.

The world expected firm measures that would eradicate the pederast cancer in the Church, which had had a great opportunity to show decisive will in the Legion's case, but it was not to be because the pope retreated from naming or punishing those who protected Maciel. Despite announcing the Legion's review, he let Maciel followers continue a private cult to their depraved founder.

#### Carmen Aristegui speaks out

Journalist Carmen Aristegui's book, presented at the 2010 International Book Fair in Guadalajara, demonstrates Maciel's reiterated criminal conduct, constantly permitted by the Legion's directors, even though it deserves to be sanctioned. She highlights the fact that the archbishop of Mexico, an effective element in Maciel's institutional protection and cover-up, recently received a high Vatican appointment as a reward.

Aristegui declared that it seemed the Church would take a Copernican turn in Maciel's case, but it all ended in a fiasco. The pope lacked the strength to call to account the powerful protective structure created both inside and outside the Legion. "It was protected by a huge mantle of impunity for which no one wanted to take responsibility." The papal delegate not only did not restructure the leadership left by Maciel but in fact strengthened it.

The Vatican decided to maintain the machinery from whence many children, teenagers and adults had been abused and victimized throughout the decades. While Benedict XVI had acknowledged the existence of pederasty in the Church and said the "persecution" suffered came from within its ranks, he has closed the door to justice in Maciel's case. Before and now, that case puts him in a compromising position. Aristegui asked whether anyone would relinquish a structure that generates such wealth.

#### Gambling on being forgotten

On January 3 of this year, the Legion celebrated its seventieth anniversary without Maciel in the world, but defended and sustained within.

Milenio Columnist Carlos Marín speculated that something very serious must be happening within the Vatican for the pope to allow the Legion to remain as alive as when "the monster who founded it was in charge." He recalled that for

the Church to accept a religious congregation, it had to recognize in it “a divine inspiration and God’s experience in its founder,” but the Legion turned out to be as criminal and vulgar as Maciel’s crimes. “As it lacks ‘divine’ substance the only thing fitting for it is its disappearance,” the journalist concluded.

Also in January, Mexican historian Humberto Monteón argued that the more Maciel and his deeds fade with time, the more clearly the monster and his atrocities stand out. Nevertheless there are powers that like “feudal Pharisees lacking in self-critical capacity” unashamedly bet on forgetfulness.

Pope Benedict XVI made an acceptable analysis in May but, entangled in Vatican complicity, has been unable to deal either with the Legion’s cancer or its metastasis. In a soccer metaphor, it started the game 1-0 up and is now losing 1-3 despite a series of own goals. Sandro Magister predicts that there will be replacements in the Legion’s leadership by Easter week.

Even if this comes to pass, they have been able to strengthen a solid defensive structure during the whole period the Vatican was ratifying Maciel’s accomplices. On January 14, the Vatican II officially set John Paul’s beatification for May 1.

#### **Heading for the abyss**

In joining together the most important pieces, the chronological narration presented here allows one to appreciate in all its rawness the image of a highly damaged institution that facilitates the propagation of ecclesiastical corruption and impunity in order to continue existing. Initially there was an apparently serious attempt by the Pope, but he backed off before the threats of an organization that pulled the strings of its traditional network of criminal accomplices.

The worst danger is that this money-focused organization will contaminate and cheapen the Catholic Church even more and drag it along with it toward the abyss. The canonization of John Paul II who, faced with the proliferation of pederasts would end up being their patron saint, will be one more step towards that abyss. To date, everything points to changes being made so that everything will remain the same.

In the fork of the road signified by the explosion of the Maciel affair, the religious courageously heading off down the path of truth and justice, opted for the path where deceit, cover-up, complicity and impunity would sully them even more. It preferred to heighten the scandal by sending its faithful the message that an unscrupulous organization, complicit in horrendous crimes and focused on amassing a huge fortune, doesn’t contradict the Gospel.

The ecclesiastical hierarchy still has a chance to learn how to use the Greek's *parrhesía*, the practice of telling the whole truth about oneself, hiding nothing. Foucault, who calls it not free speech but fearless speech, notes that it has to do with examining one's conscience, with "knowing thyself," having the courage to tell the truth without dissimulation, reserve, stylish clauses, or rhetorical ornamentation that might codify or mask it from running all the risks of truth. In this case the risk of the truth means an ineludible commitment to justice.

Number 357 | Ap 2011

### The Lost War against Drugs And Other Wars

*The war on drug traffickers and organized crime is lost and its net result will be enormous profits, thousands dead and a broken nation. Mexico's government is compounding this by using its national war against drugs to crush the Zapatistas in a local war. This "other war" isn't limited to Chiapas, but is being brutally directed against indigenous communities all over the country that are defending their territories against the government and the market.*

Jorge Alonso

According to the 2010 census, Mexico has 112.3 million inhabitants, making it the world's eleventh most populated country. The population pyramid narrows at the base and widens in the middle due to a decline in the ratio of children.

Another notable finding of this census is the existence of great inequality, which is also corroborated by data that appeared in the March issue of Forbes: the richest man in the world is Carlos Slim, a Mexican businessman whose personal fortune of US\$74 billion dollars increased by 38% in just one year.

A country of millionaires  
and the very poor

Data on Mexicans with immense fortunes shows that the very wealthiest are those who benefited when President Salinas privatized state enterprises. The Mexican drug trafficker Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán is on the list of the world's richest millionaires. Another of these mega-millionaires is the owner of the mine responsible for miners' deaths at Pasta de Conchos in 2006 and repression against the Cananea miners. The eleven richest Mexicans amass US\$125,000 billion, equivalent to 12.4% of Mexico's gross domestic product, an atrocious fact when one considers that 44% of Mexicans live in poverty. Most Mexicans' welfare levels were reduced during 2010. Organizations advocating worker's rights have reported that Mexico's wage policy continues to be one of the most dilatory of all countries. Small wage increases have been rapidly overtaken by

escalating inflation in the cost of goods and services. The rising prices of basic goods have resulted in workers' buying power dropping by 30%.

Besides all this, the increase in drug trafficking, which follows the capitalist business logic of maximum profits in the shortest time, plus the particularly essential additions in this "business" of violent suppression of competitors, corruption and impunity, has plunged the country into a severe crisis of insecurity.

#### **Drowned in blood**

The war against drugs, promoted by President Calderón in an attempt to obtain a legitimacy he didn't win through the ballot box, has been drowning Mexico in blood. Although the business organizations initially supported that policy, entrepreneurs now admit to being frightened by its consequences, particularly in the north.

This war has involved thousands of deaths. The media report a large number of murders throughout the country, many with sadistic and terrifying violence, as a routine fact of everyday life. Many people who aren't remotely involved with drug traffickers are dying in Calderon's war, yet drug addiction has only increased in recent years. And some drug gangs now lethally attack rehabilitation centers to avoid losing clients. The government has been intentionally negligent about touching the drug business' raw nerve: its finances.

#### **Nightmare for migrants**

There's also been an increase in the kidnapping of both nationals and Central American migrants enduring a painful and dangerous odyssey to reach the US border, where they once again meet an entanglement of drug traffickers and ruthless traffickers in persons.

This alliance frequently forces those who want to go work in the United States to organize into groups to saturate the migration police vehicles, so other groups forced to carry drugs in their backpacks can make it through. More than a few Central American migrants who fall into the hands of drug gangs, have to stay as hostages until their families pay a heavy ransom or they are forced to work as slaves for the drug traffickers. Collective death is not an exceptional danger any more.

#### **Absent government**

Another effect of Calderón's war is the fragmentation of the drug cartels, and the emergence of new gangs that fight for areas of influence. Drug trafficking has taken advantage of the serious crisis affecting voracious neoliberal capitalism, which has left masses of young people without study or job

opportunities. It recruits many of them to act as spies in everyday life. Placed at the town entrances or central plazas, they use disposable phones to report who's on the move and who's susceptible to attack. They also recruit drug retailers and even hired killers from amongst these young people. Whole regions of Mexico are controlled by different drug gangs and the State is virtually absent.

To further compound the situation, the government has taken advantage of this war to attack and criminalize social protest, enormously increasing violations of the most fundamental human rights. In addition to harassing, persecuting and criminalizing human rights groups, the government is also infiltrated by the drug gangs, increasing the endemic corruption.

#### **Wikileaks: Unsuccessful war**

As if all that weren't enough, cables revealed by Wikileaks show that national sovereignty has been seriously damaged, with the US government deciding on strategies in this war. The cables show the failings of both Mexico's politicians and its army.

The US consul in Monterrey expressed doubts about the effectiveness of the Mexican army in the fight against drugs. And it can be deduced from a cable from a former US consul in Ciudad Juárez in 2009 that he felt that the Mexican army looked favorably on the Sinaloa cartel taking over Juárez in the dispute for control of this city. In 2011, the Secretary for the US Department of Homeland Security considered that the situation in Mexico was worsening. The FBI agreed that the Mexican authorities have had no success in the fight against drugs.

It also uncovered a covert operation called "Fast and Furious," through which an official US agency had given approximately 2,000 heavy-caliber weapons to criminal groups, allegedly to track them, but hadn't been able to effectively do so. It was also learned that US spy planes routinely fly over Mexican territory.

#### **Loss of sovereignty**

Given this information, Mexican legislators have protested against the United States doing business with criminal gangs while Mexicans supply the cannon fodder. They have condemned US intervention, complaining that a foreign government is deciding Mexico's domestic action and positing that we pull out of the so-called Mérida Initiative, a security agreement that involves Mexico receiving US aid in exchange for being subject to that country's strategies.

Representative Muñoz Ledo pointed out the huge contradiction of the US declaring that it can't prevent the sale of guns to Mexican groups, yet decreeing an arms embargo on Libya. Prolific writer and political analyst John Saxe-

Fernández admonished that we Mexicans suffer from an anti-national, pro-consular regime with Mexican-based US officials and agencies acting as authorities on matters of domestic security. And the Archdiocese of Mexico directly blamed the United States for the violence in Mexico.

#### **“No more bloodshed”**

In January of this year, given the evident failure of his war against drugs, President Calderón denied having used the word “war.” He has been contradicted by many analysts who have shown how, emphatically and with a lot of symbolism, Calderón has used the media to try to impose a war that he can’t win. Radio and TV anchorwoman Carmen Aristegui showed that this war had become the government’s main and practically sole commitment... at which it had proved inefficient.

There have been spontaneous demonstrations against the violence in many cities, particularly in the north but also in the west and the center of the country. A few newspaper cartoonists launched a “No more bloodshed” campaign, acclaimed by artists and intellectuals. Independent TV producer Epigmenio Ibarra said people mustn’t become inured to the killings and accept the government’s excuse that the drug traffickers are killing each other. Novelist, essayist and poet Fernando del Paso declared that violence is the result of many years of poverty and of failures in the education system. Many insisted it’s essential for society to express its opposition to Calderón’s war, which has increased the climate of insecurity and fear in Mexico. Playwright Luis Mario Moncada said society is sick and tired of not being consulted about ineffective actions that don’t correspond to a genuine state policy on security. Leftist university professor and art critic Alberto Híjar stressed the need to respond to the increase in state terrorism.

#### **They terrorize more this way**

The “No more bloodshed” campaign led to people finding their own ways to protest in their hometowns and tell the government that enough is enough. Award-winning journalist Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa described how the government’s repressive forces go where atrocious mass murders have taken place not to prevent such acts but to further terrorize an already injured people. He praised the campaign that emerged from the base, declaring that “No more bloodshed” makes the protesters feel less powerless.

A number of indigenous communities have had to defend themselves, under disadvantageous conditions, from the incursions of drug traffickers. In January, a commando force of dozens of men burned down houses and the school in a north-western community of Tepehuán people. The villagers, knowing the government lacked the capacity to combat this crime, decided to defend their territory themselves. Harassment from drug gangs has forced other Tepehuán

people to migrate.

#### Marcos: A revealing text

Political writer and university professor Víctor Flores Olea views the war started by Calderón as a business that is destroying and terrorizing the country and praised Subcomandante Marcos, spokesperson for the Zapatista National Liberation front (EZLN), for his “incisive analysis, both true and revealing, about the state of war prevailing in Mexico.” After a long silence, Marcos’s words appeared in the form of a letter addressed to the distinguished philosopher Luis Villoro and published in the newspaper *La Jornada* between January and February. Marcos explains that his long communiqué, titled “Notes on Wars,” deals with fragmented ideas just as the Mexican reality does. His words had to “go and come, dodging roadblocks and police and military patrols, and describe a reality without anesthetics.”

The writing has an introduction and four parts. The first part is dedicated to “the war from above,” in which Marcos reminds us that war statues conceal more than they show; that they are erected as a song in stone to recall military victories, concealing the horror, destruction and death of all wars. These statues try to provide the victors a reminder of their success and make the vanquished forget their defeat. He refers to the war in Iraq, with the business of destruction being followed by the business of reconstruction. Although there are still ongoing casualties amongst US troops, the important thing is that the money comes and goes, smoothly and abundantly.

#### “Legitimate” barbarism

In this same section, Marcos also speaks of the “legitimization of barbarism.” Victors are not content to win wars; they also want to morally defeat the vanquished with publicity that legitimizes themselves. Regarding the US justification for invading Iraq—the danger of weapons of mass destruction—it didn’t matter that they didn’t exist or that Bush’s government knew he was lying; a massive and expensive media montage was used so that the horror, destruction and death unleashed wouldn’t upset the invaders and their allies. Marcos considers that not only is material strength essential in a war; equally indispensable is having the “moral” force of the mass media, both electronic and written. As part of the lie, he reminds us that they also decreed the war had ended when it’s still continuing.

Marcos also explores the “geography of war,” the attempt to destroy not only the enemy’s ability to fight in order to impose the victor’s will, but also his moral ability, even when he still has physical capacity. Marcos points out that it’s no longer possible to situate a conflict in a purely physical terrain, as the field of war is becoming increasingly more complicated.

In a nuclear war scenario, for example, there would be no victors or vanquished after total and irreversible destruction. And that's why we've moved from great wars to medium and small ones and international diplomacy is integrated into regional and national wars. Instead of one nuclear war, there have been innumerable conflicts at all levels, with millions of people dead or displaced, nations destroyed and multi-millions in profits for the transnational companies.

#### **Destroy to rebuild**

Marcos stresses that military theory has discovered it's possible to have conflicts where an militarily superior opponent can't impose its will on a weak rival. He gives the examples of the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam.

He asks us not to forget that those making war want to impose their will on the conquered territory. Today, capitalism wants to destroy/depopulate, and rebuild/reorganize the conquered territory. In today's wars it's not enough to conquer territory and receive tribute from those defeated. Capitalism is currently at a point where it wants to destroy and depopulate the conquered territory and destroy the social fabric of the conquered people, which means annihilating everything that gives it cohesion as a society. Parallel to the destruction and depopulation, it conducts the territory's reconstruction and the reorganization of its social fabric with another system, logic and actors. Wars impose new geographies.

#### **War on crime is big business**

In the second part of his treatise, Marcos talks about Mexico's war from above, emphasizing that Mexican reality is invaded by it. He astutely suggests that, thanks to Calderón, it's no longer necessary to go to the Middle East to reflect critically about war. The war has erupted into Mexican daily life because it's been imposed from the place of power, from above. "The one who took over the federal executive by the de facto route wasn't content with media support and had to resort to something more to distract attention and evade the massive questioning of his legitimacy: war. He thought it would be good for Mexico to have a war, which had the enthusiastic approval of the military high command and the real boss: foreign capital."

Marcos invites criticism of that national catastrophe called the war against organized crime by "exploring those who economically encourage it." He suggests looking into the international patents, suppliers and credits of the so-called  
Mérida Initiative.

With abundant and accurate data collated from various official sources, Marcos shows that the war in Mexico is a huge business and focuses on who is profiting from it. The state agencies responsible for waging this war received the equivalent of US\$30.8 billion in the first four years. Marcos offers a detailed

breakdown of the budget allocated for this war and leads the reader to visualize the war industries that have benefited with the purchase of weapons, equipment and ammunition. Economically, the United States is the one profiting from selling weapons to the official armed forces and to the drug gangs. And in addition to profits, the war provides it territory and political and military control.

#### A lost war

Calling on his accumulated data, and that which WikiLeaks has uncovered, Marcos summarizes that this is a lost war for the government that started it. However much the government tries to convince people it's winning, most people know it isn't true, especially because the media has been outdone by the complex networks much of the population has been using to exchange information. Marcos brings together some very disturbing data: such as that many of those in charge of fighting drug traffickers are in fact infiltrated by them.

Marcos says the government doesn't want to recognize that the war, the centerpiece of this administration, has failed both militarily and politically. Despite this, he's convinced the government won't change its strategy because war is a business that will go on as long as profits can be made.

#### A broken nation

Calderón has accompanied his military war with another one: against decent work and fair pay. Large numbers of innocent people have grievously been accused of being members of organized crime and have died as a consequence of this terrible and unending war. Marcos stresses that there won't be a Mexican victor in this war, though an obvious foreign power does have plans to rebuild and reorganize Mexico as a war territory. Worst of all is that this war is destroying the last stronghold a nation has: its social fabric, now completely in shreds.

Marcos describes this failed war as promoted from above, while death spreads below. One wonders how many of the thousands killed were criminals and if the more than a thousand children already killed, which the government has forgotten to enter into its accounts, were organized crime's hired killers.

He believes that while those above ineffectively try to play down the statistics of the crimes caused by his war, the social fabric is being destroyed throughout Mexico. What prevails is a weapons-based imposition of fear, uncertainty and vulnerability. The net result of this war will be economic profits, thousands of dead and a destroyed and broken nation.

"They managed to

**stop the other war”**

In the third part of his writing, Marcos asks if anything can be done at this point. He refers back to 17 years ago when a massive mobilization of citizens—without bosses and without leaders—stopped Salinas’ war of extermination against Chiapas’ indigenous rebels.

He deplores the attempt to discredit the cultural workers’ “No more bloodshed” initiative for having refused to subordinate itself to an electoral project. Marcos criticizes the many self-proclaimed leftist contingents that didn’t mobilize their forces to stop the war so the country could survive, instead making petty calculations to mobilize only for the vote in the 2012 electoral campaign. Marcos knows that, despite this, there are those who resist and don’t give up, understanding that solutions don’t come from above but are built from below, among those who aren’t betting on the dreams peddled by a “moribund political class,” who don’t stand still in the face of a war and are actively working for a social alternative of freedom, justice, work and peace.

#### **What is the Zapatista war?**

In the fourth part of his letter, Marcos argues that war is inherent to capitalism and that the struggle for peace is anti-capitalist. If in the second part he only touched on the war against the Zapatista communities, which increases when hidden, in this last part he deals directly with the issue of the war waged by the Zapatistas, in which there is the paradox that if they lose they win and if they win they win because their war isn’t one that aims to destroy their opponent.

The Zapatistas are making war to stop being what they currently are and thus to be what they must be. This is possible because they recognize all those both on Mexican soil and in the whole world who, without being the same as the Zapatistas, suffer the same pain, have similar resistance movements, and are fighting for a multiple identity that doesn’t nullify, subjugate or conquer: a world without armies.

**The Zapatistas haven’t sold out or surrendered**

Marcos reminds us that the war against Mexico’s indigenous peoples became visible on January 1, 1994. At that time, 17 years ago, Mexican civil society asked them to try to resolve their demands via dialogue. Over and over again, the Zapatistas have complied and, despite the persistent war against them, have insisted on peaceful initiatives.

For years the Zapatistas have resisted military, ideological and economic attacks. So far this year nothing is being said about what’s happening in Zapatista lands; about how, even under the harshest conditions, they haven’t surrendered sold out or given up. They’ve been building a better life for their

peoples. The Zapatistas have a sense of community and don't expect or want solutions to come from above. They have maintained independence of purpose, and their identity gives them a solid shot at survival in the face of disaster. Their agenda isn't ruled by anxiety because they fearlessly handle it themselves.

#### **Taking advantage of the war**

It's been 17 years since the Zapatistas first made their public appearance. The government has tried to eliminate them in many ways, all tied into a counterinsurgency war and all unsuccessful, because the Zapatistas have been able to progress in building a peaceful autonomy despite it.

In mid March, a national gathering of human rights activists and defenders took place in Chiapas. Marcos clarified that the rumors spread by people in government that he was seriously ill were untrue. He sent a message to the meeting, conveying the Zapatista peoples' recognition of those who chose the most difficult, uncomfortable and thankless route of defending and promoting human beings' fundamental rights. He praised those who could have been above and chose to "be with those from below."

The Zapatista communities have continued building their autonomy, but the government has intensified the counterinsurgency war it has constantly maintained against them. The news filling the media is of a failed war against drugs, but the government is trying to take advantage of that war to crush the Zapatistas, aided and abetted by most of the media.

#### **Official maneuvers**

In January the media tried to saddle the Zapatistas with the kidnapping of the controversial National Action Party (PAN) politician, Diego Fernández de Cevallos. The EZLN immediately distanced itself from this event. The maneuver failed because there was no point of contact. Throughout their long years of activism, Zapatistas have never kidnapped people because it goes against their principles. Ever since the ceasefire was declared, Zapatistas have complied with their word and kept to peaceful ways.

The solidarity network against repression immediately refuted the government's false accusations. There was widespread solidarity among international groups in support of the EZLN, the Zapatista communities and the Other Campaign against the Mexican government's lies.

The government then devised another way to strike at the communities. Citing errors in legal procedure, the Supreme Court released the people that relatives and friends of those massacred in Acteal in 1997 had identified as the perpetrators of this crime.

The government continued its undeclared fight against the communities' daily life. Early this year the Tzotzil community of Miztión again denounced violent aggressions by government-protected paramilitaries. This community has opposed the building of a new highway through its land. Bachajón, another Zapatista community, investigated and detained assailants, handing them over to the authorities, but they were released.

Another official maneuver, in collusion with government authorities, is for people to violently occupy farms, falsely presenting themselves as from the Other Campaign. Authorities have also promoted and protected persons affiliated with political parties who evict members of the Other Campaign from the places they control and have imprisoned people blamed for crimes they haven't committed, to wear them down with rigged lawsuits.

#### **Through their lands**

The government uses paramilitaries to attack Zapatista communities, evict them from their land and then accuse them of the aggression. Later, sham agreements, excluding the assaulted community, are made with government supporters to divvy up the spoils. When the communities demonstrate to defend themselves, they are repressed.

There have been many demonstrations calling for the release of imprisoned Zapatistas. The government uses those unjustly imprisoned to pressure and blackmail the communities into negotiating and surrendering their land rights to permit governmental tourism and investment plans benefiting the companies involved. The communities have both nationally and internationally denounced all the attacks, sparing no detail.

In the first quarter of 2011 the Chiapas government launched an official offensive against the Zapatistas' Other Campaign, unjustly imprisoning community members and human rights lawyers. The World Organization against Torture denounced the arbitrary arrest of Other Campaign members and the violation of their human rights.

The Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center has accused the Chiapas state government of criminalizing Zapatista support bases and seriously violating their human rights in judicial proceedings the government has brought against them. The center underscores the fact that the Chiapas government is creating and managing conflicts to exercise territorial control that stomps on the indigenous communities' rights.

The territorial dispute is based on the fact that private investors covet these lands. Investment projects have proposed dispossessing people through forced

evictions; co-opting them to sign agreements; military and police occupation and criminalization of the defenders.

#### **The government's on the offensive**

The government has set aside the dialogue and the community arrangement made in 2010 by which local people manage and preserve their resources, moving into an aggressive offensive. The human rights organization believes the government is trying to make the conflicts it's causing seem as if they are between communities. The situation is the result of a comprehensive war of attrition against organizations in the region.

The communities' autonomy project to defend their lands negatively affects the government by preventing the privatization of these lands for business projects. In New York, London, Edinburgh, Paris, Berlin, Barcelona and Buenos Aires, groups associated with the Zapatista Other Campaign denounced the Mexican federal government and the Chiapas government as repressive, pointing out that the continuous repression against the communities by the military, police and paramilitaries is a disturbing problem.

**This other war is against all indigenous peoples**

This other war is against communities, especially the indigenous communities that are trying to find ways to survive away from capital and the government. And it's not confined to Chiapas; it's brutally apparent throughout the country.

The Mexican government has sided with the predatory companies endeavoring to control the natural wealth of indigenous peoples who are unwilling to be despoiled of their heritage. Many of them oppose the mining companies' activities because they pollute their lands. Numerous communities are fighting the so-called mega-projects—large dams—that are trying to evict them from their lands and homes. In other words, indigenous peoples are facing multiple disposessions and are resisting them.

An account of their struggles was given at the National Indigenous Congress meetings held in the Mezcala community on the banks of Lake Chapala this January, and in the Purépecha community of Nurío in March.

#### **They spoke out in Mezcala**

That first meeting included a statement from the attending communities against the privatization and manipulation of Mezcala Island in the State of Jalisco, demanding the annulment of dozens of mining concessions granted to large national and foreign mining companies. They raised their voices to defend the peoples opposing the violation of their sacred sites by road construction. They denounced the massive invasion of transnational avocado companies in

southern Jalisco. They rejected the despoiling of the Purépecha community forests. They demanded respect for the Michoacan community of Santa María de Ostula and respect for its community police.

They also demanded a declaration of innocence and unconditional release for several indigenous political prisoners across the country whose only crime was defending their communities. They rejected the military response through Calderón's ordering of harassment of the villages by the army and many paramilitary groups. They defended the Triqui people of Oaxaca and the Zapatista *Caracoles* and Good Government Councils in Chiapas, and rejected the dispossession of lands belonging to the people of the Tehuantepec Isthmus.

#### **And they spoke out in Nurío**

At the second meeting they continued listing all these problems and emphatically added the demand that the paramilitaries leave the various communities, recalling that 15 years ago they signed the San Andrés Agreements as the supreme law of the indigenous peoples, expressing their autonomy. They announced that they will continue building their peoples' autonomy and stressed that they will defend the ancient right to land in every beach, lake, river, forest, desert and jungle because Mother Nature is not a commodity and they are all a part of her.

They affirmed that the National Indigenous Congress doesn't forget its dead, which give them the strength to resist the onslaught of bad government and the threats of big capital. They defined the Congress as a safe place for indigenous peoples, an arena for reflection, where their word can flow back and forth; a word that is history, work, dance, music, school, land, dignity, form and autonomous life. The indigenous peoples are gratified to have a place where they can share experiences, sorrows and joy; where they have built brotherhood and sisterhood and rebellion and defended their lands, water, community radios and dignity.

Members of the Zapatistas' Other Campaign, indigenous peoples, peasants, workers of all kinds, young anarchists, neighborhood organizations, and so many more are suffering the onslaught of this other war that the government and capital have unleashed on them under the cover of the failed war against drugs. This congregation of those from below has learned persistence, patience and long-term creativity from the indigenous peoples.

#### **Clues from the Arab world**

In our attempt to understand the dynamic of those from below facing the ambiguous war of capital and of the State against drug trafficking and the war against the autonomy of those from below, we can be helped by certain clues

that the Moroccan-born French philosopher Alain Badiou has offered us in his analysis of what's currently happening in the Arab world.

Badiou draws attention to the decadence of any State, which means that one day, freely associated in deploying the creative power they possess, peoples can manage for themselves without fatal state coercion. Another of his clues deals with the fact that those from below don't breed an alleged contagion that spreads but rather create a resonance, something formed in one place that resounds with a shock wave elsewhere. This is precisely what has happened with the Zapatist movement in Mexico; it has produced resonances, especially in the building of autonomies.

Badiou emphasizes that resonance has to do with what he defines as an event, the creation of innumerable possibilities that aren't a repetition of what's already known. Badiou tells us that at the start of an event, "the people" consists of those who know how to resolve the problems that event presents them with.

The destiny of an event is to resolve insoluble problems, without the help of the State. Badiou calls attention to the fact that thousands of new possibilities related to the contradictions arise all the time, possibilities to which the State, any State, is totally blind.

#### **In response to a blind State**

Before such a state, an organized fidelity is forged that begins imagining the successive stages of action in a dynamic of emancipation. All this is happening in the Zapatistas' Other Campaign, but it's not enough. The creative survival of those from below also requires staunch solidarity to impede the constant aggression of the war they're suffering.

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#### **We're sick to death!**

*In a dramatic setting of violence heightened by an ineffective drug war, the murder of poet Javier Sicilia's son has unleashed a grassroots movement clamoring for an end to the war with fair compensation for its victims. Demonstrations by indignant citizens "sick to death of it" are voicing demands, proposals and complaints all over Mexico.*

Jorge Alonso

Official figures from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography indicate that 65% of Mexicans perceive insecurity as being worse or much worse than a year ago and 34% believe it's just as bad. In early April the FBI director called Mexico's levels of violence "unprecedented" and the World Bank pointed out that the worrying surge of violence was being encouraged by the trafficking in drugs, arms and people.

In April and May the number of corpses found in narco-graves in northern Mexico reached the hundreds and the United States had to admit its error in thinking the drug trafficking problem in Mexico could be solved with a quick campaign. Rupert Knox of Amnesty International declared the situation exceptionally serious, particularly because of the continuing impunity linked to cases involving public or military officials. Knox thinks that the Calderón government didn't calculate the consequences of the drug war it had undertaken.

Italian journalist Gianni Mina contributed this statistic: since Calderón took office, more than 5,000 people have disappeared in a wave of terror in which it's not easy to identify a dividing line between state terrorism and activity attributable to criminal organizations, given that a growing number of the disappeared are due to the army.

#### **The poet's son lights the fuse**

In this dramatic setting, one more act of violence was the drop that overflowed the citizenry's patience: the killing of a group of young people, one of whom was poet Javier Sicilia's son. Sicilia wrote an open letter addressed to both politicians and criminals, in which he summed up the national mood with a popular phrase: "We're sick to death!" The poet accused the political and criminal classes of tearing Mexico apart, pushing its citizens to indignation. Like him, many citizens were sick to death of politicians because their power struggles have ripped society's fabric to shreds, and with the government because its war is ill conceived, poorly executed and badly directed. Sicilia said that many citizens feel this way not only because the young people's killers weren't brought to justice but also because the State wanted to make them the guilty party to justify itself. He recalled that many young people didn't have the chance to get an education or find a decent job and this put them in the way of being possible recruits for organized crime. Sicilia announced that citizens' networks in the state of Morelos were calling a national march to demand justice and peace. With his letter and its message this Catholic writer committed to the poor promoted the birth of a novel citizens' movement.

#### **"No more deaths!"**

On April 7 civic demonstrations against Mexico's violence were held not only in

more than 20 Mexican cities, but also in Paris, New York, Barcelona and Buenos Aires,. In Mexico City they chanted, “They’re our dead, but this isn’t our war!,” “Calderón’s war is a young person’s holocaust!” and “14,000 orphans in Ciudad Juárez, more than 300 children murdered!” As they passed a military barracks, the poet explained that drug trafficking and use has grown rather than decreased after four years of this war, and he demanded that the military not shelter crime in its ranks. The marches called for “no more blood” and “no more dead.” Sicilia chose to remain in the picket in Cuernavaca Square until April 13 to demand an investigation into his son’s death. Initially the prosecuting attorney in Morelos said that former military officers and active soldiers were responsible for the killing but the government later twisted the information in an attempt to exonerate the armed forces with unclear and contradictory data about the motive for the killing.

Despite the civic indignation, President Calderón insisted on continuing his war strategy. He criticized the demonstrators for accusing the government when they should only accuse the criminals. The rector of the National University of Mexico (UNAM) and some lawyers asserted that the demand to stop the war shouldn’t be directed at the authorities, since it’s the State’s duty to watch over public security, but writer Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa said the President was wrong, that criminal bands aren’t society’s interlocutors and citizens have a legal basis on which to demand that the authorities end the generalized impunity, which is the breeding ground of criminality.

#### **“This isn’t our war!”**

Citizens want a different strategy for fighting organized crime: an effective one that doesn’t involve such high costs to society. The cost in human lives caused by the failed official strategy is leading citizens to demand that the government take another path.

Writer Epigmenio Ibarra reproached Calderón for ignoring the masses who had taken to the streets. He sees the President as an expert at promoting the discourse of hatred, presenting as suspicious those who raise their voices against his doctrine of war, trying to turn those who don’t agree with the government into defenders of drug trafficking.

Calderón’s brutality has not only failed to offer citizens security but has put the nation’s integrity in jeopardy. Why risk all on a military strategy when there are other more comprehensive social solutions that the government refuses to listen to? Ibarra charged that the massive troop mobilization, fear and resulting deaths suit Calderón and that he prefers to respond to brutality with brutality.

#### **40,000 dead begin to have faces**

Sicilia continued producing public analyses that identified the government,

politicians and top religious hierarchy connected to the wealthy and big businesspeople as co-responsible for the security crisis Mexico is suffering. He described his picket as a sign of the country's open wound caused by poverty, instability, defenselessness and vulnerability and called for another national march that would set out on foot from Cuernavaca on Thursday, May 5 and reach the center of Mexico City on Sunday May 8. The walk would be in silence as a demand that the State, businesspeople, churches and their hierarchies, and trade unions and their leaders assume their responsibility to keep millions of Mexicans from seeing their futures written off. He called for the signing of a pact to give the nation back its dignity. He banked on grief acting to restore love and justice.

Oaxacan activist Gustavo Esteva wrote a letter to Sicilia telling him that by ripping away the veil of complicit language he had made it possible for "40,000 dead to soon begin to acquire faces and cease to be collateral damage... Their deaths, which had become a daily custom, would soon become unbearable." Sicilia had managed to express the general state of mind in the form of a real movement with dispersion, multiple initiatives, bottom-up drive and horizontality. It was time to act, to put a stop to the senseless war sponsored by national power and the US government. Esteva praised the poet for putting his finger on the cancers: the constitutional powers, big money, mass media, the churches and unions. The tattered social fabric would have to be rewoven to save and transform what remained of the country. From Madrid, Marcos Roitman wrote that Mexico was being hurt by violence "as irrational as it is excessive" and denounced both the origins and the methods of illegitimate political power.

#### **Voices from around the world**

Instead of attending to growing public demand, legislators tried to pass a security law that would legalize the army's presence in the streets. Sicilia insisted in his call for the formation of a new national civic pact that would restore peace and tranquility to the country. He believed society feared that legislators would approve the bill without consulting the population. Amnesty International warned that the bill would seriously weaken human rights defense work.

Sicilia also called for dignity for the victims of the war against drug trafficking, who the government views as little more than collateral damage. Nobel Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel sent a letter to Sicilia in solidarity with the movement he's leading. At the end of April some 200 writers, poets, musicians, artists, journalists and university lecturers from different corners of the world sent Calderón a letter expressing their profound concern for the incredibly painful events occurring in Mexico. The signers accompanied the relatives of the thousands of people who have lost their lives and demanded that the

killers shouldn't be sheltered by a cloak of impunity. International organizations such as the Permanent Tribunal of Peoples, the International Tribunal of Conscience of Peoples in Movement, the International Association of Migrants, the International Association of Democratic Jurists, the Association of Peoples' Lawyers, the Network of Alternatives to Impunity and Market Globalization and the Inter-ecclesiastical Peace and Justice Commission showed their solidarity with the movement sparked by Sicilia. They agreed that Mexico's militarization has favored recurring state crimes within a context of growing impunity, including the current genocide of migrants in transit through Mexico. They demanded justice and compensation for the damage.

The dead scream in the  
silence of the living

In May, many civic organizations joined the march called by Sicilia from their own towns. They emphasized that there are already more than 40,000 dead in the war against drug-trafficking during Calderón's Presidency, equivalent to one death every hour, and thousands of disappeared, widows and orphans. Sicilia asserted the war was turning Mexicans into people with "mutilated souls."

Sicilia met with the man who had been the Federal District's ombudsman, the president of Common Cause, the person who had led Mexico United against Crime, priest Alejandro Solalinde who defends Central American migrants and a Mormon who is leading a movement against kidnapping in Chihuahua. Together they prepared the march for peace with justice, dignity and the country's reconstruction. They decided it should be silent in order to express how fed up Mexican society was and made it clear that they weren't talking about the silence of the grave but rather another way the living could shout out to prevent more useless graves.

Although later on Calderón said he "respected" the march, his first retort was that he was right, the State would not give in to criminals, and he had law and might on his side. Social and academic organizations reproached him for not listening to those who didn't follow him, instead seeking to damage their reputation. Sicilia argued that the marchers weren't looking to bring down the government but rather to reconstruct the social fabric in a country torn to shreds and that national security wouldn't be achieved without education and culture, an idea disdained by the authorities. Sicilia believes Calderón's statements show he doesn't understand people's complaints. The nation's pain is so strong that the aggrieved joined together from many parts of the country, independent of ideology.

**"No more violence!"**

Raúl Vera, the bishop of Saltillo, joined Sicilia on a stretch of the march. He

reflected that the country is leaderless, given that presidential messages reveal a man with great weaknesses and without acceptance, imposing himself by force. With their testimonies and placards the demonstrators showed the national tragedy on an enormous map. They wanted to make the government aware of the urgent need for change. Hundreds of civil society organizations joined together and by the time the march reached the center of Mexico City it had become a multitude.

There were also marches in dozens of other Mexican cities and all exceeded the number of people who had taken part in previous marches. There were also solidarity demonstrations in Paris, New York, London, Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Barcelona, Los Angeles, Washington, Chicago, Houston, Río de Janeiro and other cities around the world, all demanding an end to militarization and justice for the dead civilians.

They marched in a heart-constricting silence and on ending the marches their voices reappeared. They chanted “No more deaths!” and “No more violence!”

#### **Mexico is an ensnared country**

The speeches in Mexico City were preceded by five minutes of silence in honor of those killed. Sicilia said they had marched in silence because the pain is so huge and so deep and the horror it comes from so immense that words can no longer describe it. With this silence the protestors demanded an end to the deaths. They don't want to bequeath their children a helpless country full of fear, indolence, cynicism, brutality and deceit, where the lords of death and of the ambition for boundless power and complicity reign. So many open wounds obliged them to walk, threading the silence with their grief, so that those responsible for security would hear all the names of the dead. In silence the demonstrators named the vile reality that the political classes, the powers that be, the monopolies, the hierarchies of economic and religious powers, the governments and police forces were all denying.

In the speeches the victims of violence raised their voices. Many who had previously kept their grief private expressed it publicly. The multitude asked the parties to clean their ranks of those colluding with crime. People asked why Calderón had been allowed to deploy the army in the streets in a farcical war that had cost thousands of deaths and abandoned millions of Mexicans to fear and uncertainty.

They complained that the presidency and the political class, faced with the underworld, assumed there were only two ways to confront it: managing it illegally or with the army in the streets. They criticized a society that pays tribute to success, money and power as absolute principles that must be conquered by any means and at any price.

In this setting crime expands into charging protection money, kidnapping, theft, trafficking in people and criminal business complexes. To all this, already quite terrible in itself, is added the US dimension, where drug trafficking money is laundered, arms are sold and a security policy is designed whose logic basically responds to the global interests in which Mexico has become ensnared.

#### **For a six-point pact**

Sicilia's suggested pact is a basic commitment to peace with justice and dignity that would allow the country to set out on a new path. It can be summarized in six points. First, truth and justice: detain the true intellectual and material authors of crimes with transparent processes for investigating and trying them and administering justice. Second, replace the war strategy with a civil security approach. Third, fight against corruption and impunity. Fourth, fight against the economic roots and profits of organized crime. Fifth, create a national emergency plan to support children and young people and offer real opportunities for restoring the social fabric. And sixth, construct a participatory democracy and democratize the mass media.

The march organizers announced a civic caravan for June that would terminate in Ciudad Juárez with the signing of an agreement for a Mexico with peace and dignity. Verification and Sanction commissions made up of specialists and honorable people chosen by the citizenry would verify it point by point to see if there had been any progress. It was made clear that the blood of the dead wasn't negotiable and the immediate demand would be de-militarization and justice for the dead and disappeared. Ciudad Juárez was chosen for being the area that has suffered the most killings. A proposal was made to raise a holocaust wall making the victims visible. The great achievement of this movement has been to show the faces of the victims and speak their names out loud.

#### **Calderón insists on war**

President Calderón responded to the march by saying he was willing to set up a dialogue so its main promoters could hear the government's reasons, which showed that the government was only reiterating its declaration of war. The formats that had been adopted in official dialogues after other civil society marches had demanded security had come to nothing. Members of the organizations marching on this occasion were in favor of dialogue, but not from a position of subordination. The President would have to stop the war immediately.

Several civic groups were not surprised by the President's first response, given that Calderon's government prides itself on governing without the people. They warned that if the government and mass media continued to oppose

demilitarization, bigger movements would follow. It was a scandal that the public purse was paying six times more for this war than to fight poverty. The head of government showed himself authoritarian, unwilling to listen to the people's clamor.

The march organizers agreed to dialogue with the government but asked that it be public and in the presence of families of victims disappeared, killed and executed in this war, because the government officials had to understand that the country was undergoing a national emergency. If they didn't take any notice of the pact, the country would slip from their grasp.

**Marcos**

**speaks:**

**Sicilia embodies indignation**

The Zapatistas joined the civic mobilization as well. Subcomandante Marcos sent a second open letter to Luis Villoro on ethics and politics that started with a reference to Sicilia. He said the poet's grief, geographically distant but close to the ideals of the past, echoed and reverberated in the Zapatistas' mountains. Marcos hoped that Sicilia's legendary tenacity, given that he was taking up the Zapatistas' words and action, would succeed in uniting the rage and pain proliferating on Mexican soil. He recalled Sicilia's intransigent but fraternal criticism of the Zapatista communities' autonomous education system.

By touching on Sicilia in particular through the murder of his son, the collective tragedy of a senseless war had put the poet in a difficult situation because so much grief hoped to find an echo and volume in his demands for justice and many concerns hoped his voice would embody the unheard indignant voices. Marcos stated that Sicilia did indeed embody them, but he shouldn't aim to become a leader of operators. Nonetheless, Marcos discerned that around the poet's figure, magnified by worthy grief, there were those in high-up political circles who were laying in wait to take advantage of the movement the poet had stirred up. The Zapatistas expressed respect and support for the demand for justice. Marcos argued that the war was continuing up above and that its destructive advance was trying to ensure that everyone accepted this routine horror as if it were something natural and impossible to change.

Precisely because of this, it was necessary in times of organized confusion and exercised arbitrariness to disorganize the confusion with critical analysis. He insisted that solutions can only be born from below, from radical proposals that don't wait to be legitimized by a council of wise men. This response is pluralist and can be found in many places. Many collectives are no longer interested in changing or renewing a parasitical political class. They don't want to change their masters but rather to live without them.

Pablo González Casanova sent a message to young people praising the youth

movements opposing the war, discrimination and imitation democracies. There are those from above who want to destroy young people with drugs and arms sales, who want to make youth a consumer niche. He underscored that wherever one looks, young people are the preferred victims of a system that is making them lose their sense of life and alienating them with educational policies based on ignorance.

### The Zapatistas join in

Marcos' letter to Sicilia said the Zapatistas had given him the job of telling the poet they felt summoned by his brave words and were answering the call to the national march that would leave Cuernavaca for Mexico City on May 5. Although they wanted to march at his side, they would do so in San Cristóbal de las Casas; would march in silence and at the end would say the words in Spanish and their original languages. On their march they would carry placards with these messages "Stop Calderón's war", "No more blood" and "We're sick to death".

They asked him to carry their words to the relatives of the 49 children killed and 70 wounded in the Hermosillo ABC nursery tragedy, to the admirable mothers of Ciudad Juárez, to the Le Baron and Salazar families of Chihuahua, to the relatives and friends of the victims of the concealed war, to defenders of the human rights of nationals and migrants and everyone called on to march. Responding to Sicilia's call to name the victims, the Zapatistas would say the names of the children killed in the Hermosillo nursery, for whom justice has not been done. The Zapatistas know well that naming the dead is a way of not abandoning either them or the living. The Zapatistas kept their promise and called on the peoples of Mexico and the world and the followers of the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandona Rain Forest and the followers of the Other Campaign.

"Men with noble hearts  
are summoning us"

More than 15,000 Zapatistas marched in San Cristóbal de las Casas on May 7. It was the biggest march people there remembered since 2001 in what was called the Color of the Earth march. It was the first time the Zapatistas had ever rallied to a call from outside their movement. Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Tojolabal, Chol, Zoque and Mam Zapatistas raised banners showing their solidarity with the grieving families who had lost loved ones in Calderón's cruel war. At the rally point they shouted long live life, freedom, justice and peace and offered speeches in their different languages.

At the end of the march Comandante David read the Zapatistas' communiqué, which explained that thousands of Zapatista men, women, children and elders were there to say their word. They were there because people with firm dignity

and noble hearts had called on them to demonstrate to stop the war that had filled Mexican soil with sadness, pain and indignation. They were there because they had felt drawn by the clamor for justice of the parents of children shot dead and the high-handedness of bad governments; they felt called by the merited rage of the parents of young people murdered by criminal bands and governmental cynicism. Mexico's history had once again been stained with innocent blood and tens of thousands of people had died in an absurd war that's going nowhere.

Peace and justice no longer find a place in any corner of Mexico. The victims' only guilt is that of having been born in a country ill governed by legal and illegal groups with a thirst for war, death and destruction. This war has had as its main target innocent human beings who have nothing to do with either drug trafficking or government forces. Bad government has turned streets into war zones without the agreement of those who walk and work in them, and has also turned schools and universities into war zones. Meeting places and recreational areas are military objectives. Bad governments have caused the problem and now not only are they not solving it but they're exacerbating it.

#### **"They're sick with power"**

The Zapatistas told us that good people's silence and words don't represent bad governments or criminals or the political class that wants to take advantage of a national tragedy. That even though the relatives of children who died in the Hermosillo nursery fire have demanded justice, the government has responded with lying declarations and answers, trying to wear them out and make them give up. That those who take part in the marches aren't looking to take over the government but only demand that it strive to take care of the life, freedom, justice and peace of those governed. That politicians are lying when they say that anyone who doesn't agree with their war is on the criminals' side. That to see a threat in every justified pain was typical of those sick with power. And that correcting the mistake is not the same as giving in.

The Zapatistas weren't there to talk about their own pain, which is great because they suffer serious aggression every day from governments of all parties, but to tell those who are marching throughout the country that they support them.

#### **The drug war is a farce**

There are continuing actions all over the country: demonstrations by Workers and Socialist Unity, the Network against Repression and for Security, the Mexican Sex Work Network, the Street Brigade for Women's Support, the Magonist autonomous collective and many other organizations. In Jalisco the Mezcala Communards Assembly, the Libertarian Solidarity Group, the

Resistance Notebooks Collective, the Save the Forest Committee in defense of Nixticuil, the Daily Rebellion Collective and many more held meetings for reflection, called press conferences and distributed 10,000 flyers in towns, neighborhoods and suburbs containing their arguments, setting out a reasoned list of everything they were fed up with and stressing that they were “sick to death” of state violence and organized crime.

They argued that Calderón’s war against drugs is a farce because it won’t work without the complicity, permission and participation of the political class and public institutions that control it. It’s a war that has devastated cities, with growing militarization and a media campaign aimed at legitimating an iron fist and exceptional measures as a way of governing.

The wave of violence during Calderón’s term has added to the ancestral and recent violence suffered by those on the bottom. Those with power seize land, natural resources, water, forests and urban collective plots to privatize them. The attempts to strip indigenous communities of their lands for agro-cattle farming, mining and tourism businesses are a constant, always accompanied by violence. Women suffer high rates of femicide and young people, especially from the urban peripheries, are harassed daily by police who persecute and rob them.

This war has other purposes. After the electoral fraud, Calderón used it to legitimate himself and to justify and normalize the presence of the armed forces in the country’s streets and towns in open violation of the law. The criminalizing of social protest has grown under the Calderón government.

With his war, Calderón is seeking US backing. This war is really the continuation by other means of the economic policy of savage capitalism implemented in Mexico by all the governments of all parties in the last 30 years. Never have so many millions of young people been left with no chance to study or work. Capitalism has turned them into throwaways.

#### **The war of bullets and the everyday wars**

The collectives assert they are sick to death of capitalism that glorifies the search for power and wealth. They are fed up with the political class and hold them responsible for the social crisis, illegal drug business and other highly profitable illegal businesses. Politicians are part of the problem, not the solution. These collectives say they have no expectations of the political class and the only thing they ask of it is to leave them in peace.

This war of bullets comes on top of many wars that those on the bottom must wage every day: the war on hunger, speculation and informative silence, and

on social policies that only seek to domesticate them. The collectives are calling on communities, neighborhoods, suburbs and families to find among themselves the security and peace that governments and criminals have taken from them.

With self -vigilance, self-defense and self-management they must ensure that nobody starves to death in their areas; they must look after their children and siblings so they don't become cannon fodder as police or soldiers or as drug dealers' hit men and employees. The solution won't come from above; it's being built from below, with no help from the politicians, their parties or governments and certainly with no help from capitalism.

#### A new pluralist civic movement

The most obvious thing about this new citizens' movement is its broad, pluralist convergence. Another fundamental element is that it has inspirers, rather than leaders and is happening on horizontal planes, attracting spontaneity and creativity. It's aiming at insecurity's structural nucleus: corruption and impunity.

At the outset, one could see a sort of ingenuousness in some of those making the call, a belief that dialoguing with power would cause it to abandon its warlike strategy. But they soon realized that a dialogue with those at the top will resolve nothing. Groups taking part in this convergence have had to privilege what they titled a civic agreement and so have been forming a broad network for peace and justice that reflects horizontally on what it ought to do. The most important thing is the potential that springs from below.

#### The Zapatista contribution

Contact with the Zapatistas has been another of its values because Zapatism already has important experience in this realm. At the beginning the Zapatistas also believed that a road map to a solution could be found through dialogue with the government. The San Andrés Accords signed by the government and the EZLN grew out of dialogue in 1996. But they were betrayed by the executive branch. Later the Zapatistas calculated that the legislative and judicial branches could push for new legislation that would drive the San Andrés Accords. By the time the 21st century came around, they had confirmed that the entire Mexican State was racist and didn't care about the rights of first nations.

So they began to look for solutions autonomously and also came to realize that solutions would have to be separate from capitalism and the State. The Zapatista example of expecting nothing from those on top but rather letting loose the creativity of those below can be a contribution to this new civic

movement.

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### The Comfort Caravan's achievements

*The Comfort Caravan, an expression of the movement started by poet Javier Sicilia, has affected public opinion, showing that he's touched a nerve in Mexican society. The Caravan seeks to give meaning to the build-up of pain and suffering provoked by President Calderón's drug war. Sicilia's movement, born of grief, makes the victims visible, unites families destroyed by so many deaths and lets them set fear aside to comfort each other.*

Jorge Alonso

The brother of one of thousands of people disappeared in Mexico said the dead, orphans and widows were infinite. He insisted all were good people, killed and disappeared during Calderón's absurd war against crime, adding that the Comfort Caravan has made them visible.

This caravan, another expression of the peace movement begun by poet Javier Sicilia, has affected Mexican public opinion. According to a June 2011 poll, 52% said that fighting organized crime with police was not the best way to deal with the problem; 56% stated that these police operations increase the number of murders and 58% complained that the actions don't respect citizens' rights. While 80% asked that more attention be paid to youth and 84% that money laundering be combated, and a resounding 85% came out for fighting corruption and not allowing crimes to go unpunished, 70% want an end to the war strategy, 71% said the insecurity and violence is affecting family economies, 75% wants the government to talk with those who are marching for peace and 79% wants the murders clarified. People were evenly split on whether dialogue between the government and those participating in peace marches would change the government's strategy for combating organized crime, with 41% believing it would and 43% skeptical of that possibility.

300 organizations and thousands of individuals

On June 4 the Comfort Caravan, Sicilia in the lead, left Cuernavaca to travel through the northern states, which have been the most affected by the drug war. The powers-that-be tried to discourage the Caravan by pointing out that they would be traveling through very dangerous areas. Sicilia responded that the government is obliged to take care of its citizens. The Caravan's first important achievement was thus that the government has to protect citizens who participate in it.

The movement brought together 300 civil society organizations and thousands of individuals. Two days after the caravan set out, artists, academics and journalists in Mexico City showed their solidarity with it in a public act they called “One minute for no more blood.” Sicilia sent them a greeting by telephone. Among the demands of this gathering were that the President of Mexico be tried politically, the army return to its barracks, and the secretary of public security be removed. An organization called Civil Alliance launched a letter campaign to the US President demanding a halt to arms smuggling.

#### **Morelia, San Luis, Zacatecas, Monterrey, Chihuahua...**

On its travels the caravan began collecting stories from thousands of relatives of those murdered. It was a dramatic history of death, disappearances and impunity at the hands of criminals and the armed forces. In its travel through Morelia, the caravan embraced the pain of the Cheran indigenous people, who had organized themselves to defend and protect their forests and were now being harassed by loggers and the paramilitary who enjoy protection by the authorities.

In San Luis Potosí, many people came forward to speak out against unemployment, poverty, corruption and impunity. The victims recounted stories of kidnappings, murders of many people and repression of social activists. Even though they had fully identified the murderers, the authorities chose not to arrest them. The government also supported the Canadian mining companies that are contaminating the sacred waters and earth of the Huichol indigenous people.

Sicilia thought about all this carefully during the march. On this issue he invited people to participate in civil disobedience to symbolically close this mine. During the march the national police, with no warrant, broke into the Ciudad Juarez office of a human rights organization participating in the march. Sicilia condemned the break-in and demanded that the President publicly explain it. He made clear that the caravan was not against the President but against his bad war- on-drugs policy. Sicilia emphasized that he was willing to talk with whoever it took. In a large demonstration in San Luis Potosí, when the people booed upon hearing President Calderón’s name, Sicilia asked them to stop feeding on hatred.

In Zacatecas people condemned crime and impunity. They gave testimonies that they want hospitals not military stations. In Durango they asked that the former governor be punished for his connections to drug trafficking.

In Monterrey people spoke about their feelings of anguish, abandonment, and fear. They said that organized crime rules in Monterrey and that any citizen

could be attacked, kidnapped, disappeared and murdered. Because of high unemployment, organized crime recruits young people and the government says nothing. While there, Sicilia proposed another act of civil disobedience: a march to the state attorney's office to demand that he deal with the cases brought to him by the authorities. They did march and were promised results within a month.

In Torreon there were complaints because the State refused to look for the disappeared, arguing without evidence that they were criminals. When the caravan passed through the city of Chihuahua there was another act of civil resistance. Sicilia placed a nameplate honoring human rights defender Marisela Escobedo, who had been gunned down with impunity in front of the government palace in mid-December of last year simply for demanding an explanation for why the confessed killer of her own 16-year-old daughter was still at large. On June 10 the Huichol regional indigenous council decided to agree to the caravan's points in the fight against impunity, corruption and mining companies that want to destroy their sacred sites.

Nine discussion tables  
in Ciudad Juarez

After seven days and thousands of kilometers the caravan reached the most affected city, Ciudad Juarez. There were so many charges of deaths without arrests and so many years of femicide there that they put up work tables by theme. The first one discussed the theme of "Truth and Justice for the Victims." The demands that grew out of this discussion included a law to protect the victims and their families, efficient police and an end to corruption and impunity. Among the resistance actions agreed upon were demonstrations, monitoring and demands for media ethics.

The second table demanded an end to the war strategy, demilitarization of the police and the return of military personnel to their barracks. They also opposed passage of the security law the government is proposing. They supported the Michoacan communards movement from Cheran and proposed holding a national forum favoring demilitarization and engaging bi-national actions in Mexico and the United States to denounce militaristic strategies.

The third table dealt with corruption and impunity. They agreed on a demand for judicial reform and citizen oversight. They proposed a tax boycott if the government failed to respond to and implement the pact's demands.

The fourth table analyzed the economic root of organized crime, posed the urgent need for government accountability and insisted that the government act fairly and effectively. They proposed forums to discuss the ideas of decriminalizing drugs and eliminating secret bank accounts in order to attack

money laundering.

The fifth table examined alternatives for youth and ways to repair and rebuild the social fabric. They demanded that welfare policies be replaced by ones that promote social organization-building and proposed increasing college enrollments and salary raises based on the inflation rate.

The sixth table dealt with the issues of participatory and representative democracy. From there came demands to institute a national consultation, referendum, plebiscite and revocation of mandate, as well as restore civic organizations such as the Federal Electoral Institute and human rights organizations, and promote community radio stations.

The seventh table dealt with networking and the movement's internal workings. It defended the idea that this is a civic movement independent of parties that seeks a horizontal structure. Among the proposals were to organize another caravan to go to the southern part of the country, promote civil resistance actions around the 2012 elections and create a database of victims.

The eighth table discussed labor reform, unemployment and economic alternatives. It opposed the criminalization of labor protests, rejected the labor reform the government is pushing and proposed restoring labor rights. The ninth table analyzed indigenous rights and culture, migration and alternatives in the countryside. From this table came the demands that the Mexican government fulfill all agreements signed internationally concerning indigenous rights and culture, recognize indigenous possession rights to their ancestral lands, cancel the mining concessions that affect indigenous lands, respect the autonomy of the Michoacan community of Santa María Ostula and create a national emergency food program. The document ended by saying that the citizens and organizations that sign the pact would bring it to a broad national consultation for signature.

In a closing plenary assembly a document called the Citizen Pact for Justice and Dignity was indeed passed around for approval and everyone's signature. The document emphasizes that the war on drugs is a war against people that has left 10,000 disappeared and cost the lives of 40,000 people, mainly youths. It sets forth the idea that this is a citizen's movement of resistance and proposals by diverse groups organized horizontally around the problems of violence that are hurting the nation. It puts forth charges, demands and social proposals to both the formal powers and the de facto ones, not because they are trustworthy or legitimate, but because they are obliged to respond to this ethical statement.

**Sterile radicalism?**

Most of the participants felt they had drafted and signed a collective pact. The next day, however, Sicilia pointed out that it was only a preliminary document of demands and would have to be refined.

Some of Sicilia's spokespeople complained that people with extreme political views had "assaulted" the discussion tables and a journalist wrote that the Pact's content had grown in Juarez due to demands of radical groups that had taken control of the tables. According to this journalist, the radicals had made the demands excessive and Sicilia and his group had not endorsed the pact.

The magazine *Milenio Semanal* strongly stated that the Sicilia-led march had been in danger of losing what it had won and limiting its achievements, due not to the government's closed-mindedness but to "sterile radicalism." The article went on to say, however, that the top leaders had retaken the reins and returned to the six demands put forth at the end of the first march on May 8.

While the poet disagreed with the notion that the process had been hijacked by anybody, he did critique the document for having too many points, explaining that it needed to be reduced to viable demands. Among his objections was that it would be irresponsible to withdraw the army all at once since many people in places like Tamaulipas were demanding its presence. Stressing that the original purpose of the caravan had been to give the victims' families a place to be heard, he said the most important aspect had been the great solidarity that it had brought about

The controversy over  
"the return to the barracks"  
One of the participants in the Juárez tables answered that the criticisms of the discussion process were baseless, recalling that the pact had been ratified by the whole assembly and signed by hundreds more people at the Monument to Benito Juárez, with Sicilia the first to do so.

What caused the most controversy was the first demand by the second table, which literally said, "We demand the immediate end to the war strategy, demilitarization of the police and the return of the army to its barracks." This demand received the most applause both in the plenary and in the reading of the pact. Although the table had not reached consensus about the immediacy of the military's withdrawal, there had definitely been a unanimous response to ending the war strategy, demilitarization and the soldiers' withdrawal to their barracks. Even though they had not given the withdrawal a timetable, the statement of immediacy of the withdrawal was what provoked the controversy.

"Among equals and from below"

Faced with the accusation that radicals had taken over the Juárez tables, the workers' pastoral organization of the Juárez diocese issued a clarifying statement that the organization in Juárez had worked hard to put together the Pact, that everyone had listened fraternally to each other and that those in charge of each report from all parts of the country had tried their best to summarize. They described the pact as a covenant among equals from below, without professional event organizers.

The Plural Civic Front and the Worker Pastoral Center in Ciudad Juárez later disseminated another document with similar content to those in Juárez who had signed the Pact and to both the Mexican and international community. It stated that "there was neither intended or simulated disturbances at the tables" and asked that the absurd, deceptive talk about tables being manipulated cease as there were many witnesses to the discussions and agreements. The document invited a continuation of the dialogue begun at the tables for groups in rural communities and in the cities to come up with coordinated agendas and proposals based on the agreements. It ended with these words: "To those who would impose decisions from the few above on the many below, we say that we prefer other horizontal and democratic ways of deciding."

#### Bishop Paul Vera speaks up

On June 19 Raul Vera, bishop of Saltillo, declared Calderón's war on drugs a farce that is seeking to create a security perimeter for the US that includes controlling migrants. On July 14 he again denounced the forced disappearance of hundreds in Coahuila, the recruiting of children by drug traffickers who pay them 1,500 pesos a week to be "in informers," the continuation of extrajudicial murders and the lack of solutions because the authorities not only do nothing but obstruct and discourage anything the people try to do. The bishop called the official institutions ineffectual and expressed his support for the movement promoted by Sicilia, which is accompanied by a specialist in civil disobedience who values Mexican society's moral reserve.

#### Calderón says "I have no regrets"

The peace movement and the government agreed to meet on June 23 to dialogue with President Calderón. Sicilia insisted on the importance of giving voice to the victims of the war on organized crime and of bringing to this meeting only the six points voiced in Zócalo Square in Mexico City and not the seventy of the Juárez document.

First it was agreed that the meeting would be in the Anthropology Museum but at the last minute the government changed it to the Chapultepec Castle. Sicilia gave in but opposed not letting in the media. At the meeting there was one minute of silence for those who had died in the drug war. Sicilia asked Calderón

to seek forgiveness for the 40,000 victims of the drug war and asked if he considered them collateral damage.

Sicilia questioned the gains from Calderón's strategy and demanded that he recognize it had been counterproductive. Calderón vehemently responded that Sicilia was wrong and that he had nothing to regret in ordering the army into the streets, although he did accept that the State is responsible for not having protected the victims. Sicilia asked for immediate attention to the most emblematic cases and reparations for the damages caused.

Five more people also spoke. They told the President they wanted no more deceit. Three gave their testimony, charging that both military and police federal forces had taken part in murders and disappearances. It was agreed that they would hold another meeting in three months.

#### **The dialogue was an achievement**

After the meeting the President said the encounter had been enriching, but again emphatically defended his actions. His viewpoint is that most of the deaths are connected with drug production and distribution. He did say, however, that the dialogue showed that when there's a will, the search for solutions can be shared. For all that he insisted that his strategy isn't a war but rather a fight against crime.

The dialogue organizers considered it an achievement to have sat down with the authorities to hear victims' testimonies, to have confronted those in power with their complicity in organized crime and to have pointed out their inability to provide justice and security. They lamented that the government emphasized the embrace between Calderon and Sicilia.

The victims' main demands were to adopt a model of citizen security; to immediately produce the disappeared; to create a national victims law; to establish specialized prosecuting attorneys for femicides and forced disappearances; to deal with the paradigmatic cases of both civilian and murdered police; to form a national bank of genetic information for the victims' families; to obey the international resolutions on human rights; to show a video (which they provided) of the victims' testimonies in all public schools; to protect the Cheran communards, their forests and the Huichols' sacred places from the Canadian mining company; to stop the harassment of the Ostulas and the Zapatista communities; to guarantee the water rights of the Morelos people and to dismantle the paramilitaries in the San Juan Copala area.

#### **Other caravans**

Sicilia declared that the victims had won governmental acceptance and

recognition and that the government had promised to deal with 25 emblematic cases and come up with a victims law. In the next meeting, experts would speak about and show the failures of the war against criminals. In spite of this, Sicilia saw the President's stubbornness in pursuing his strategy as very serious. The movement decided that the next step should be to make sure the government followed through on these demands, to work in the commissions and to conduct new mobilizations. A new caravan would go to the southern part of the country to listen to and learn from the experiences of the southern indigenous communities.

The Sunday after the meeting with Calderón, a peace caravan, without Sicilia's presence, arrived at the Michoacan community of Cheran, which had spent several weeks defending its own forests given the government's inaction. The caravan was received by 3,000 communards and it was decided that this place would be the seat of the first national community self-defense encounter.

At the end of June the peace movement met with several indigenous communities in Santa María Ostula to prepare for the first encounter to exchange experiences and ideas concerning community expressions on the topic of security.

#### **Who won the dialogue?**

The majority of commentators assessed the dialogue with the government as a mixture of dark and light. Those who are pro-government praised the President for his ability to listen to his detractors. They pointed out that every struggle that is not insurrectionist must negotiate its demands for justice, reparation and policy changes with the government. They insisted that the movements have to talk with those able to resolve their demands. They described the victims as commendable for speaking the truth and calling for justice. According to them, the encounter strengthened Calderón.

Who won the dialogue? Calderón kept his strategy and gained many acceptance points for having organized the encounter. According to one poll, 85% thought the encounter went well and 77% said their opinion of the President had changed after the dialogue. The great majority thought the head of State was the winner.

Pro-movement commentators saw the heightened visibility of the victims and their families to both government and society as a major achievement. Others emphasized the movement's achievement in opening a door that the government would find difficult to close again, in that the families of victims were able to lodge a claim with the government without being criminalized, as usually happens. Thus collapsed a de facto state of exception that had allowed the government a free hand. They also stressed the importance of victims and

the powers-that-be meeting face to face for the first time. They saw it as another achievement that during its walk the movement had met up with indigenous peoples and their demands. Yet another was that Sicilia had opted for dialogue as a way to humanize government officials.

Some, however, lamented that the movement had run into an authoritarian ideology that did not care whether or not the people trusted them to govern. The Mexican Human Rights and Democracy Institute interpreted the immovability of the public security policy in these dialogues as clear evidence of the executive branch's commitment to the army rather than to the citizens. The Mexican Academy of Human Rights regretted that the President, thinking only about the security of institutions and not of citizens, had not in fact listened.

#### **Everything still the same?**

As some of the journalists wrote, Calderón had shown himself an authoritarian President and had handled the session according to his interests. Thus the peacemaking theses did not move forward. Other journalists criticized the President's obstinacy for deepening the rift between him and those who pay the cost of his badly designed strategy. Critics pointed out that there had only been one emotional meeting. They recalled other major meetings with the complete executive, judicial and legislative branches present for the signing of never-implemented agreements. In this meeting no agreements had even been signed. While citizens were awaiting firm decisions about demilitarization, they had only been given the hope of another meeting.

Internally the movement also took differing positions in evaluating the dialogue. While those close to Sicilia saw it as an important step in the face of the government's closed-mindedness in that Calderón had been forced to listen to the victims' voice, others expressed discouragement and sharply criticized the government's use of the media in the dialogue. Was this nothing more than a failed attempt to stop the violence?

The demand to demilitarize was growing from Chihuahua, where the government remains silent despite proof that the army has disappeared people. This specific point was crucial inside the movement. In Ciudad Juárez they had seen the Mexican State fail in its responsibility to respond to the corruption and the impunity surrounding the thousands of deaths. Many consider it dangerous to bring charges because it means risking their lives with the armed forces. The economy is also suffering because the peasant farmers are directly harassed by both drug traffickers and the armed forces.

Lamenting that the June 23rd meeting had been decided without everyone's input, other caravans invited Sicilia and his group to return to the movement's

grass roots so they could establish a form of participation that was really democratic, where everyone took part in the decision-making.

### **It's already genocide**

The solidarity network against repression, while showing its support for the victims' movement, emphasized that the majority of crimes had been committed by military, police and paramilitary personnel. While the armed forces have had 700 casualties in this war, the dead and disappeared from the ranks of the general population are in the thousands. Young people are harassed, persecuted, criminalized and annihilated. The majority of the dead in this war are from the lower classes and it can already be called genocide.

The network insisted on the need to demilitarize and end the harassment of people. It expressed its lack of confidence in those at the top who commit crimes against humanity, and proposed autonomy as a way out for those at the bottom. Several organizations asked the International Criminal Court to try the President for these crimes against humanity committed by security forces under his command.

### **Sicilia's appraisal**

Despite everything, Sicilia defended his action and his search for dialogue, calling attention to the fact that the country is "broken." He warned that the political infighting around the presidential election will soon be added to the violence Mexico is now suffering. To end a dialogue with an embrace is not a sign of failure. Sicilia said he wasn't sorry for this embrace because it didn't indicate any ceding of his principles. To change the language of war to one of pain by seeking comfort, demanding justice, wanting to reestablish the country on the logic of nonviolence and changing people's hearts was a great achievement.

Sicilia said the fact that the movement had succeeded in breaking the President's monologue was a first step in a long process. Refusing to dialogue only feeds the violence. He complained that Calderón had hit the table, which he saw as a major sign of disrespect. He clarified that he had opposed including the other agendas put forward by groups in Juárez because they put at risk the victims' claims, insisting that the foundation of this movement is the pain of the victims. Those in Juárez could ask for the army to be withdrawn if that's what they wanted, but it's not an appropriate demand for the whole country. He reported that the Zapatistas recommended that he go to the dialogue so the government couldn't later claim that he hadn't sought it out.

### **Why have a dialogue?**

When Sicilia was in Guadalajara to receive a university award, he stated that the movement had kept the country from falling apart and had gotten people

who were hurting to start joining together and demanding what was due them. The country's moral reserve had emerged with the movement. But the dialogue would not be able to go forward unless accompanied by mobilizations and international pressure.

While there Sicilia talked with human rights groups, with defenders of their peoples threatened with being flooded out by a dam, and with Christian base communities. These groups all told him the government was using him as an escape valve and the President had increased in popularity at his expense. In the case of the village of Temacapulin, the government was determined to submerge it in the waters held back by the dam, and while people had held talks with the government, it was paying no attention to them. They needed to use grassroots assemblies to see what actions to take.

Sicilia answered that, while he was on the side of the indigenous communities' proposals, he had been driven to this movement because of the pain caused by his son's murder. Together with others in pain he had seen that if they wanted reparations and to see those who had killed their family members go to jail they had to talk with those responsible. That's where the idea of dialogue comes in: the desire to touch everyone's heart. The movement, born of pain, made the victims visible and connected destroyed families, letting them leave their fear behind and comfort each other. Sicilia told them that no one has a monopoly on pain or ethics.

The President had told Sicilia that the dialogue had led him to critically evaluate many aspects of his strategy. Sicilia's vision relies on the fact that Calderón may have called on the governors to respond to the call by the victims of violence, in that after the meeting the National Public Security Convention agreed to open a fund of the national governors' convention to ensure scholarships for youth between the ages of 15 and 20 to incorporate them into the education system and into a job bank. Another positive sign was that the group that killed Sicilia's son and his friends was arrested. The poet demanded that the other cases be treated similarly and that the effectiveness and speed with which they had handled his case be used for all citizens suffering the same realities.

The movement also demanded a dialogue with the legislative and judicial branches. The legislative branch accepted, but procrastinated. Sicilia warned that if it didn't show signs of willingness to talk, he would call for a national mobilization to make them sit and listen to citizens' demands for a political reform that would give people instruments to put limits on the formal powers.

#### **How to characterize this movement?**

There are academics who point out that the peace movement is somewhere between consolidation and evaporation and, although nothing is definite, it will

probably be able to survive. Others note that if the President was strengthened by the meetings, so was the movement. Both the government and the movement have been recognized as interlocutors.

Sicilia has touched a nerve in a society trying to find meaning in an amalgam of sorrows and grievances. Even in its incipient phase, his movement is the most important in Mexico so far in this new century.

It's a different type of movement from the usual ones. Thus it shouldn't be asked to do something it can't. It's a movement of victims who are appealing to human decency and ethical conscience. Lorenzo Meyer pithily summarized what he saw in it. It was born of a Catholic poet whose son was one more victim in the growing violence and has brought together many civil organizations and individuals who are fed up with the lack of security. Without resources and amidst internal tensions, it has organized two caravans, pulled together hundreds of testimonies of victims of violence, made demands and put forth proposals. According to journalist Luis Hernández, it's not a social movement but a mobilization of victims accompanied by the phenomenon of collective solidarity.

There are two tendencies in the movement. One advocates talking to the government as a necessary way for the victims to find justice. The other argues that there must be searches from below and outside the state structures. One wants the poet to become its leader. The other resists being led and demands horizontal decision-making.

It's understandable that the movement Sicilia started would raise expectations among other movements that their agendas might be included. But this new movement can't carry other agendas. Each movement, while seeking to come together with others, must mobilize based on its own agenda. Even with these tensions, the movement against Calderón's war has succeeded in bursting on the scene. A careful examination shows that it's one of these new types of movements that are beginning to erode the prevailing system...

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### The peace movement and the government's warlike responses

*After five years of Calderon's "war on drugs," the terrible results are 63,700 dead and more than 10,000 disappeared, with 98% of these cases unsolved. The peace movement poet Javier Sicilia heads is continuing to speak out, organize, mobilize and continually call for meetings and dialogue. Calderon's response has been ferocious repression. Amid so much horror, the peace movement and*

*the Zapatistas are both announcing new plans.*

Jorge Alonso

At the end of the fifth year of Calderon's six-year term in office, the situation in Mexico is deplorable. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has declared that Mexico's growth rate in 2011—and the estimated rate for 2012—are below the region's average. Millions are unemployed, underemployed and poor. Among the countries in the Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development (OCED), Mexico has the second greatest social inequality, with the wealthiest 10% of the population receiving 26 times more than the poorest 10%. The mean for the OECD countries is nine times more.

#### **As much insecurity as in a war**

According to a National University study, the minimum wage three decades ago could buy 51 kilos of tortillas or 12 kilos of beans—two of Mexico's staple foods. Today it can only buy 5 kilos of tortillas or 3 kilos of beans. In other words, the minimum wage has lost 82% of its purchasing power in 30 years. Today 64% of workers can't afford all the products in the basic market basket. According to the Secretariat of Education, 20% of youth between the ages of 12 and 29 are neither working nor in school.

The Washington Office on Latin America blames the so-called Mérida Initiative, a security cooperation agreement involving the US, Mexican and Central America governments with the declared aim of fighting drug trafficking, transnational organized crime and money laundering, for stirring up the violence in Mexico. Seconding that assessment, the investigation unit of the main financial group operating in Mexico admitted that no other country in the world not officially in a declared war has had the drop in public safety that Mexico has suffered in recent years. Yet, even though Calderón's drug war has not reduced the violence, he insists on following his mistaken strategy to the end of his term.

The Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center spoke out against Calderon's plan to pass on to his successor a repressive government by pushing through harsher definitions of terrorism and linking them to social protest, thereby criminalizing any demonstrations of discontent. Although that has increased the danger for its members, the peace movement has traveled all through Mexico.

Javier Sicilia, the poet organizer of the peace marches, emphasizes that a characteristic of his movement has been to show the faces of this strategy's victims. Behind the banners and peace flags march a sea of photographs of the

murdered and disappeared demanding justice. They are “neither a painful discouragement nor an incitement to revenge.”

### The movement and elected representatives

The national legislature agreed to talk with the movement in late July of last year. There Sicilia accused the legislators of acting on behalf of those with political interests, running the country like a source of booty and not prioritizing education, culture and science. He explained that all three branches of government share responsibility for the violence the country is experiencing. He blamed them for not preventing the militarization of public safety and called on them to ask forgiveness of the victims and be accountable to citizens whom he sees as estranged from their elected representatives. Alluding to the official figures of 50,000 dead, 10,000 disappeared and 120,000 displaced by the war, he urged them to clearly define where they stand on war vs. peace, demanding that they establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a law to respond to the victims’ needs. He also said he considers unacceptable the abuses suffered by thousands of Central Americans who pass through Mexico on their way to the United States.

During the meeting, Miguel Concha, a Dominican priest, called on the House representatives to reject the proposed national security bill approved by the Senate because it would further militarize the country and increase the human rights violations. This bill seeks to guarantee the country’s security but not the citizens’. He proposed to draft a bill based on human and civic security. Farmer/freelance writer Julián Le Barón accused the elected representatives of being blind to the death all around them and insisted that they not make laws permitting atrocities to go unpunished.

The senators from the governing National Action Party opposed Sicilia’s proposed Truth Commission. They were backed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) bench and by Senator Pablo Gómez of the Democratic Revolution Party. Gómez said the already established National Human Rights Commission had the powers of a truth commission and the PRI members agreed with his assessment.

Despite that, Sicilia and those who accompanied him were satisfied with the meeting because they saw a big difference from the previous meeting with the President. The legislators had shown humility, had not tried to justify themselves and had admitted the impact of the victims’ testimonies exposing the horror of the war. Sicilia declared the movement in recess from demonstrations awaiting the results of the talk with those in power.

**The movement suspends the dialogue, but only temporarily**

The results were not long in coming. The Green Party opposed Sicilia's request that it abandon its electioneering petition to establish the death penalty in Mexico and the legislators showed their insensitivity to the movement by generally approving the national security bill and sending it on to committee for its findings.

To show their indignation and repudiate these decisions the movement held a demonstration in front of the House of Representatives at the beginning of August. Sicilia suggested that the political class was suffering schizophrenia and leading the country in a terrible direction, and that the bill's passage was an insult to the victims. Thus, the movement considered the dialogue with Congress broken. Sicilia declared that they couldn't dialogue with people who don't speak the truth.

Nonetheless, it was only a temporary suspension of dialogue. When Congress announced that it would open its doors to the movement to participate in the findings process prior to passing the national security bill into law, the movement announced it would go back to dialogue with the legislators.

#### **Be indignant in demanding peace!**

In mid-August the peace movement marched again in opposition to the bill, this time in silence. Backed by various academics and activists, Sicilia asked rhetorically in his speech why the politicians had been moved by the victims yet remained obstinate in their strategy. He also announced that the movement would renew its dialogue with the legislators on August 17, despite the betrayals. In that meeting Sicilia voiced the movement's distrust of the politicians and demanded that they be allowed to hear the reasons given by the armed forces.

While the government did not accept this demand, this meeting ended with five agreements: continuation of dialogue, the setting up of a bicameral working group with movement representation, a request that the budget include specific resources for care of victims, outlining a mechanism for discussing the security bill, and an invitation to the legislators to join the movement's trip to the south. Sicilia urged Mexican students to imitate Spanish youth by going into the streets to demand peace.

At the end of August a small cell of drug traffickers burned a casino in Monterrey, killing 52 people. By early September groups in various cities around the country were speaking out against the devastating violence, but President Calderón used the massacre to insist on his failed strategy against drug trafficking.

"Calderón will be remembered

**as a war criminal”**

A caravan of Central American emigrants, inspired by the caravans Sicilia promoted, left Guatemala on July 23 and arrived in Mexico City on August 1. To show his solidarity, Sicilia joined the caravan, which called itself “Step by Step,” and once in the capital, he demanded that the Senate set aside all its bureaucratic business, eliminate the visas required for the Central Americans and look for the disappeared. In the name of the Mexican people he asked the Central Americans for forgiveness for the abuses they had suffered.

In mid-September the peace movement made its own caravan trip—its third so far—to southern Mexico. Prior to its departure, Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos issued his third letter on ethics and politics to philosopher Luis Villoro, one of Mexico’s most distinguished intellectuals, in which he assured that the Zapatistas were still resisting. He asked how one could talk about justice in Chiapas when those responsible for the Acteal massacre are still free and paramilitaries continue to be encouraged.

Condemning the President’s war for blaming the victims, Marcos predicted that Calderón will be remembered as a war criminal. He said the Zapatistas were following the peace movement with interest, making efforts to understand this new mobilization which was finding its own path and deserved respect. They could see that it was awakening hope and offering consolation to the victims’ family members and friends. He added that the Zapatistas had held out hope that a movement would arise that would stop this absurd war, but this had still not happened. The important thing was that it had made the victims visible, that they began to have names and that the lies about fighting organized crime were beginning to crumble.

Marcos said the Zapatistas still didn’t understand why the movement dedicated so much energy to talks with the political class, which is no more than a gang of criminals, but had decided that those in the movement would discover this for themselves. The Zapatistas neither judged nor condemned but only tried to understand the movement’s steps.

#### **The caravan gathers testimonies**

Sicilia thanked Marcos for the lines he had dedicated to the movement. He told the Zapatistas that even if they couldn’t understand his desire to make peace even with adversaries, to pull them back in line with “patience and love,” he shared the same longings and hopes as the Zapatistas, and was convinced that Chiapas’ autonomous areas were one hope of rebuilding the nation. He asserted that stopping the war was everyone’s work, and that while they slowly wended their way to the south, to Zapatista lands, he sent them a kiss. Zapatista authorities met with Sicilia when the caravan reached Oventic. There the poet questioned the government for not taking on its historic responsibility

with the Zapatista cause and made clear that while there was no alliance between his movement and the Zapatistas that they indeed agreed upon the struggle for a Mexico with peace, justice and dignity.

The caravan gathered testimony from many victims. It became clear that three types of trafficking intersect in Tabasco: trafficking in persons, drugs and arms. In Veracruz there was an attempt to ambush the vehicle in which Sicilia was traveling. In Xalapa the poet announced that during this caravan they had documented 221 cases of violence, mainly the forced disappearances of people.

**“Juárez’s wound is spreading like gangrene”**

When the caravan reached the center of Mexico City, Sicilia proclaimed, “The wound of Juárez is spreading like gangrene to the south of the country.” He also denounced the immoral economic model that’s destroying the land, stripping away cultures, causing massive displacements and generating paramilitary groups. He declared that the movement had no power because those in it—the victims, and their widows and orphans—were the poorest of the poor, the war’s “collateral damage.”

At the end of September the movement announced that it had entered a very critical moment because there was no progress on various points in the dialogue with the politicians and there were profound differences regarding others, including matters related to the security law. Although a meeting had been planned with Calderón for September 23, the President canceled without setting another date. Sicilia complained that the judicial branch hadn’t even responded to the movement’s call for dialogue.

The government wanted a dialogue but with many more organizations, including those with affinities to the executive branch. The poet questioned the intention of diluting the moral force of the movement and accused the government of failing to understand the level of Mexico’s national emergency. In a march commemorating the October 2, 1968, massacre in Tlatelolco square, the demonstrators demanded an end to both the militarization and the repression of the movement’s leaders.

#### **Ten thousand more deaths**

Finally the second meeting with the President was rescheduled for October 14. The movement agreed to participate with others involved in movements against violence who were allies of Calderón and with various business leaders who were members of the Ombudsperson’s Office for Victims’ Care. Academics had discredited this new government entity because it was created without consulting any human rights groups, hadn’t been approved by Congress and was a farce rather than a real path to justice.

Sicilia's spokesperson, Pietro Ameglio, recapitulated that with 10,000 more people killed after three months of dialogue with the government, the expectation of stopping the deadly dynamic had not been accomplished. He also announced that one of the victims, a member of the community of Ostula, would participate in the dialogue with Calderón.

Sicilia has always emphasized that one of the movement's great successes is to have brought the victims out of anonymity, thus unmasking the victimizers, among them politicians and businessmen. He never fails to point out that the war, kidnappings, drug trafficking, forced disappearances and murders, particularly feminicides, are the perverse consequence of the prevailing economic, political and social model.

#### The second dialogue between the movement and the President

Before the new dialogue with President Calderon, the peace movement declared that since there had been more dissent than consensus in the previous one, they expected very little from the meeting, to take place in Chapultepec Castle. Once in the dialaogue, Sicilia criticized the atmosphere of violence and terror that was growing every day. He demanded that the political class, already immersed in the electoral process of buying votes, volitions and dignities, come up with a plan to demilitarize the country, ensure justice for the dead and disappeared, invest in education and employment to guarantee young people some options in life and recognize indigenous peoples' autonomy.

Movement leader Emilio Alvarez Icaza, who headed the Federal District's Office of Human Rights Defender for eight years until resigning in 2009, stated that the dialogue was "an achievement of Mexican society in its struggle against arbitrariness, barbarity and authoritarianism." He told the meeting that government officials in the work tables had dedicated themselves to refuting the movement's proposals and even its name. He complained of the pitifully poor government responses to the ideas put forth by the movement because problems of violence aren't resolved with more violence.

#### Calderon autistically clings to his war

Indigenous groups also spoke to Calderón. They said that, as original peoples, they spoke from the oldest core of Mexican identity. They demanded clarification on numerous murders, the return alive of community members who had been disappeared by paramilitaries, respect for communal lands, guarantees for community police, an end to the military and paramilitary harassment of indigenous leaders, respect for their own forms of social organization, dismantling of organized criminal groups, compensation for the

damage caused to victims and punishment for those responsible.

The President's response to all these appeals was that he intended to pursue his strategy. Changing the dialogue format proved to be in the government's interest when two of the business leaders who accompanied the President seconded him. When the meeting ended, Sicilia called on society to demonstrate on October 31 in memory of those who had died due to the violence, regretting that there had been no serious agreements to change Calderón's war strategy. He said the President seemed stuck in a position "that bordered on autism."

After this difficult meeting, Bishop Raúl Vera together with a hundred civil organizations and well-known personalities accepted an invitation to hold a national meeting to analyze and propose measures and actions oriented towards peace and putting an end to the war.

#### There's a national emergency in Mexico

The First National Meeting on the Emergency Situation in Mexico took place on October 22. Besides the members of the peace movement, representatives of hundreds of social, political, trade union and student organizations as well as nine human rights organizations attended.

In the gathering it was strongly stated that Mexico is suffering a social crisis that originated in the capitalist system and is confronting a militarization and recolonization process. The neoliberal policies have raised the level of violence and lack of protection for social rights. The shameless US interference is an attack on national sovereignty. The worldwide energy, agricultural and social crisis has dominated the savage capitalism served by this violence. All of this will be reinforced in the 2012 presidential elections. Calderon's drug war strategy is part of this process because it serves the major weapons industry and increases human rights violations. Democracy is a sham in Mexico because it adjusts to the mafia and the groups in power.

#### Proposals, agreements, convictions...

Starting with this analysis, the gathering reached three areas of agreement. The first has to do with reconstructing the country and generating alternatives to violence, promoting food sovereignty, employment, salaries, work, health, housing, public safety, education, opportunities for youth, strengthening of unions and civic participation. The second has to do with national sovereignty, which includes opposing US intervention, open-pit mining projects and multinational corporations, and promoting native peoples' autonomy. And the third is rejection of the war strategy as a national security method to protect

victims, opposition to the proposed national security bill and the demand for demilitarization.

At the gathering, examples of community and movement resistance in confronting the crisis were also examined. As society hasn't been able to struggle articulately and effectively against capitalism, it was agreed to explore the need to build a "movement of movements." There's a strong belief that only widespread social mobilization can create a peaceful alternative. The call for peace can bring together a broad collective of people with a sense of belonging. There was the sense that with everyone working together they could make a common diagnosis and build a common agenda. They saw the need to build a national space for convergence and unity of action among movements.

A second gathering was held on November 20. In it the conviction grew that only an increased mobilization of citizens that take over the streets will be able to influence the building of a new majority that could change the correlation of forces and turn the violence around.

More symbolic actions and more violent repression

On November 1, 2011, the peace movement and other organizations held a vigil for the dead in various cities around the country. Symbolic actions were promoted—fasting, silent walks, prayers, days of music, presentations of victim's testimonies... They took advantage of the Day of the Dead festivities to make visible those who had died due to violence. In Ciudad Juárez the police moved against the demonstrators, hit them, arrested peaceful demonstrators and even jailed a journalist who was interviewing one of them. Some of the arrested were tortured. One of them was intimidated by the police who told him, "We've identified you and we're going to make your life impossible." They threatened another one with making him "disappear."

The academic Victor Quintana warned that this was not a local incident but part of a violent strategy being put into place to restrict people's liberties and rights, including those of media workers. Amnesty International repudiated the repression in Ciudad Juárez, and the city's civil society protested energetically. Days later, ten years after finding numerous bodies of women murdered in this city, an Interior Ministry undersecretary asked forgiveness for the murders of these women and recognized the Mexican government's responsibility by omission. The victims' relatives, however, charged that this was a mere affectation as the government had only fulfilled one of the 13 resolutions of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and even then only partially.

This isn't the way to fight drugs

In a visit to Los Angeles in early November to attend an international conference to reform drug policies, Javier Sicilia spoke about organizing another caravan from El Paso, Texas, to Washington, DC, to demand an end to the war in Mexico, which is partly financed by the United States, and to make US citizens aware of the failure of this war. He reminded people that drug traffickers get arms from the US and suggested that the emphasis on drugs as a criminal issue should be discarded in favor of treating it as a public health problem.

Afterward, the US Ambassador in Mexico asked for a meeting with members of the peace movement. Sicilia once again set forth the idea that the strategy used to combat organized crime was a mistake since it generated so many disappearances, deaths, displacements and widows and orphans. Movement members criticized the lack of strong actions against money laundering.

Human Rights Watch, a US organization, presented its findings after two years of investigating executions, disappearances and torture in the war on drug trafficking in Mexico. The 212-page report titled “Neither Rights Nor Security: Killings, Torture, and Disappearances in Mexico’s ‘War on Drugs’” details serious human rights violations committed by armed forces and police elements at all government levels of five of Mexico’s most violent states. It provides data on 170 cases of torture, 39 forced disappearances and 24 extrajudicial executions since Calderón took office. The document shows that his government’s strategy not only has not reduced the violence but has increased it, which shatters the official claim that 90% of the deaths are related to delinquency.

#### **Foretold murders**

At the end of November 2011, young people in various cities held marches for peace. In Mexico City a large part of those who demonstrated wore skeleton masks to repudiate the violence. In Guadalajara the demonstration was called after a truck was discovered full of 26 murdered people. In Ciudad Juárez the youth protested the arrest and torture of 14 people a few days earlier for having placed crosses at various points. The demonstrators demanded that the municipal police chief be punished for being a torturer. When he appeared with a sizable backing of armed personnel to violently repress the protest, it triggered a national outcry and new marches all around the country. Members of various civic organizations in Ciudad Juárez charged the military and police with being advisers for disappearances, massacres, and torture, and with supporting the paramilitaries.

At the end of November Nepomuceno Moreno, who had become an important peace movement activist after the disappearance of his son, was murdered. Given the threats he was receiving, he had directly requested protective measures in the dialogue with President Calderón. Sicilia condemned both the

killing and the government's attempt to criminalize Moreno, and noted that his murder had been foretold and given impunity.

The following month, after the death of a student at Mexico's Autonomous University was confirmed as murder, both the university president and the peace movement demanded that the government find the perpetrator. A large group of well-known writers, editors and intellectuals signed a display at the International Book Fair in Guadalajara in those same days, in which they rejected the criminalization of victims of violence as a government response and demanded clarification of the murders.

#### **Non-stop official violence against movement members**

Despite everything, the escalation of violence against members of the peace movement continued. An activist in Chihuahua suffered a cunning direct attack that nearly killed her. Another movement member, a community leader in Ostula, Michoacan, was violently kidnapped and murdered, even though he had been under a protection order from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights since September. The federal police supposedly protecting him left him to his fate only meters from the spot where his captors appeared. The Mexico City office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights strongly condemned the community leader's murder and the other attacks against the peace movement, demanding that serious, impartial, expedited and diligent investigations be carried out.

In the city of Guerrero several days after this crime, public forces intervened in the kidnapping of two environmental rights defenders, also members of the movement. With that, Professor Pietro Ameglio, a well-known Gandhian civil rights and peace activist, warned that anyone working for peace runs the risk of being killed. If this ironic warning hadn't already been sufficiently confirmed, it was sealed by the government's attempt to imprison the famous priest Alejandro Solalinde, using a slanderous campaign of false accusations to discredit his commendable work defending Central American migrants.

#### **Calderón accused of war crimes**

In December, at a commemoration of the 63rd anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Sicilia announced that the investigations of various organizations counted 63,700 people murdered and more than 10,000 disappeared, of whom 63 of those murdered and 40 disappeared are human rights defenders. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has issued 158 precautionary measures for 200 rights defenders working under threat of death.

This unending tragedy gave rise to an important initiative supported by more

than 23,000 Mexicans: to charge President Calderón in the International Criminal Court with war crimes and crimes against humanity. The government responded by threatening to sue the signers in local courts.

**For which drug cartel will Mexicans vote?**

Analysts of Mexico's violence have warned that the mass murders in various states are aimed at escalating the violence of fear and have nothing to do with ordinary criminal events or with settling of accounts, but with seeking national media coverage. Writer Carlos Fazio shows that Calderón's crusade is state terrorism. It has led to the commission of war crimes, summary extrajudicial executions, torture, forced disappearances of people and paramilitary attacks.

In mid-December Sicilia announced that the peace movement would designate as criminals those who approved the national security law. He warned that with the present state of affairs, voters will have to ask themselves which drug cartels to vote for in this year's presidential elections. It was a searing comment on the drug war's failure to achieve its stated goal.

**A new way of being is forming**

In this complex situation the peace movement, which has grown by intuition and without resources or structure, has had to redefine its organization. Given its important media presence it has become a target of dangerous persecution.

While the weight of decision-making needs to be collective and horizontal, Sicilia must continue being an important moral figure. Time Magazine chose him as one of the important figures of 2011. There's general agreement that the movement should take no part in the electoral campaigns and that it needs to transition into a nonviolent civil resistance movement.

The Zapatistas invited Sicilia to the Second International Seminar for Reflection and Analysis "...Planet Earth: Anti-systemic movements" held in Chiapas between December 30 and January 2 of this year. During his remarks on January 1, the 18th anniversary of the EZLN uprising, he called the Zapatista movement and the peace movement new forms that are a prelude to the new way of being that is forming in the midst of the disaster Mexico is living through today.

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**Pope Benedict XVI's visit to violence-torn Mexico**

*Pope Benedict XVI visited Mexico for three days. It was a trip full of silences and contradictions in a country that has been lacerated by violence caused by the*

*war against drug trafficking.*

### Jorge Alonso

Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Mexico at the end of March can be divided into three phases: the preparatory stage, the visit itself and the post-visit evaluation. In the first stage, the case of Mexico's deceased pedophile priest, Marcial Maciel, was very topical.

#### A logical expectation

It was logically assumed that the pope would meet with victims of sexual abuse by the clergy, given that he had done so on his previous visits to the United States, Australia, France, Germany, Ireland, Portugal and Malta.

The exclusion of a meeting with Maciel's victims from the papal agenda may have been due to the Legionaries' influence on Mexico's most powerful politicians as well as the Catholic hierarchy, given that Maciel was the founder of their organization, the Legion of Christ. Whatever the reason, silencing the subject was further proof of the network of complicity and cover-ups that protected him when he was alive and still protects him even today.

Reparation for the damage to Maciel's victims implies not only fair compensation, but also rehabilitation and guarantees that what he did will not reoccur in any ecclesiastic setting. To date, we've seen nothing like that in Mexico. In an attempt to justify the lack of a meeting with Maciel's victims on the papal agenda, Christophe Pierre, the papal puncio in Mexico, claimed that the pope would give a talk to a group of children. The Catholic episcopate then alleged that no such meeting had been requested, a fact refuted by Maciel's accusers.

#### José Barba's testimony

El Universal, one of the most influential and widely read newspapers in Mexico, published an extensive article on the eve of the papal visit based on the testimony of an eminent and respected professor, José Barba, who had been abused by Maciel in his youth. Barba recalled that in January 2005, Maciel had been enthusiastically praised by the then-president of the Mexican episcopate, Guadalupe Martín Rábago—Benedict XVI's host during this visit—and Bishop Onésimo Cepeda.

Barba also recalled that two years ago, incontrovertible testimonies from former Legionaries who had reported Maciel on different occasions forced the Vatican to concede that Maciel's behavior was grievous and immoral. Those same ex-Legionaires then wrote to Bishop Ricardo Watty, who was in charge of investigating the Legion's crimes in Mexico, to present several demands.

Given that Watty had accused them of being slanderers and conspirators, they insisted that he recognize their innocence in writing and that the Legion put aside its fictitious petitions for pardon and apologize to the former Legionaries abused by Maciel, giving their full names. Neither the Legion nor the Vatican ever responded to these demands.

El Universal's story also reported that, despite Benedict XVI's 2006 order that Maciel retire to a life of prayer and penance, he continued going to Europe's most exclusive spas accompanied by his putative wife, daughter and members of the Legion's leadership, facts corroborated by images from a Millennium TV program aired in September 2011.

Yet another front in addition to that of Maciel's victims opened prior to the papal visit: the victims of the drug war.

#### **"Love of the Father and not of Caesar's power"**

After Benedict XVI's visit was announced, Javier Sicilia, Catholic poet and moral leader of the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity, was invited to attend the Mass the pope would celebrate in León, Guanajuato. Sicilia declined to participate in what he called a "media show" and announced that, instead, he would personally take a letter to the pope before his visit, in which he would talk to him not as a representative of the Vatican but as the Vicar of Christ.

In his letter, Sicilia told the pope about the victims suffering from President Calderón's drug war and informed him how Mexico had been suffering the agony of an ongoing "Holy Week" for the past five years. He provided official statistics: 47,551 murdered in the most ruthless way, 20,000 missing and more than 250,000 displaced. According to Sicilia, 98% of the crimes have gone unpunished.

He added that Mexicans aren't the only ones suffering in Calderón's war; so are the Central Americans who cross Mexico in deplorable conditions as emigrants trying to find work in the US. "Mexico and Central America are today's body of Christ, abandoned in the Garden of Gethsemane and crucified." A body bombarded by crime, governmental omissions and serious corruption, by the weapons the US sells to criminals, by money laundering and, with few exceptions, by a Church hierarchy that keeps a complicit silence.

Sicilia reminded the pope that he represents the love of the Father and not the power of Caesar and warned him that, behind the media and political gloss they will put on for him in Mexico are thousands of people dead and suffering. For those reasons Sicilia asked him to embrace this "broken body of Christ that

begs for a Father's response, over and above political order and criminal chaos."

Bishop

Raúl

Vera:

#### Time to examine our conscience

Sicilia delivered his letter at the Vatican on March 22, where he was assured it would reach Benedict XVI's hands. On his return, Sicilia said he was hopeful that the pope would give the victims of the drug war a message of solidarity and condemn this war and its accomplices. "If he doesn't, the Church will lose credibility."

One of the ecclesiastical exceptions Sicilia referred to in his letter is Bishop Raúl Vera who, before the visit, declared that the pope was coming to a fractured country and that his visit would force an examination of conscience. Vera was confident that the pope would have words of consolation for the victims of the drug war and said he was ashamed that his country is led by a self-proclaimed Catholic who, without law enforcement and in violation of human rights, is using the army to implement a strategy against street crime. He declared that the Church is also responsible for abandoning youth in this context of widespread violence.

#### Drug charity and drug chapels

Certain aspects of Mexico's omnipresent drug trafficking and organized crime involve ecclesiastical power, which is why, after the papal visit had already been announced, the Mexican Bishops' Conference declared in a note that there would be no so-called "drug charity" in the event.

It has long been an open secret that many Mexican parishes receive donations from organized crime. In April 2007, the bishop of Aguascalientes justified it by saying that a woman anointed Jesus Christ with very costly perfume and that he received this homage without asking her where she got the money for something so expensive.

In 2008, the House of Representatives' Center for Social Studies and Public Opinion acknowledged that it knows criminal organizations launder money by funding religious activities.

The case of a modest village chapel in Hidalgo became renowned in October 2010 for having been transformed into a luxurious church through donations from a leader of Las Zetas, whose name appears on a plaque in the church.

In November 2010 the Catholic hierarchy was forced to declare that in certain communities "the dirtiest and most bloody money may have been used" in the

construction of some chapels, suggesting that this only happened with some small-town priests. The hierarchy also asked which state in Mexico or sector of society hasn't already been infiltrated by drug trafficking. Given these statements, the National Fellowship of Evangelical Christian Churches asked the federal Attorney General's Office to investigate donations from drug trafficking to the Catholic Church.

In January 2011, research led to proof

of drug money being used in hospitals, schools and Catholic churches in many parts of Mexico, while a researcher from the Monterrey Technological Institute noted that when the time came to investigate drug charity, the government's "hand was shaking." In March 2011 the archbishop of Puebla urged his priests not to accept drug money.

#### The arrival and the first gestures

The pope arrived in the country on the afternoon of Friday, March 23, to an atmosphere ripe with expectations of statements and attitudes responding to Mexico's harsh reality. On the flight he had said that the violence in Mexico is caused by the idolatry of money.

In his first speech, Benedict XVI simply praised Pope John Paul II, thanked President Calderón for his warm reception and specially mentioned Archbishop Rábago, his host, and the president of the Mexican Episcopal Conference. He referred to the bicentennial celebrations, spoke of the fundamental right to religious freedom and promised to pray "for those who suffer from old and new rivalries, resentments and forms of violence." In his welcoming address, Calderón told the pope he was being received by a people who had suffered a lot from violence, although he obviously didn't see himself as one of its causes.

The next day the pope met privately with Calderón. They spoke of the need for an international treaty on small arms, whose rapid and excessive spread favors organized crime, and also mentioned world hunger. Afterwards, the President took Benedict XVI to meet with several people, among them eight victims of the war, invited by Calderón for self-justification.

Although the press wanted to be present for this meeting with the war victims, the papal spokesperson, Federico Lombardi, explained that it was a general meeting and not specifically with the victims of violence. That same day the pope sent a message to a thousand children telling them how concerned the Catholic Church is about them, although he made no reference at all to the crimes of sexual abuse against children.

The pope's achievement:  
A constitutional reform

On Sunday the 25th, before half a million Catholics, the pope celebrated a Mass attended by the Mexican elite and their presidential candidates for the July elections. As Guanajuato is a state with a preponderance of National Political Action Party (PAN) supporters, many present cheered Josefina Vázquez Mota, the PAN candidate. The pope ended the Mass with a prayer to the Virgin of Guadalupe for an end to the violence.

This is what the public saw. Privately, Tarcisio Bertone, the Vatican's secretary of state, met with Mexico's secretary of the interior in which he said that Mexico should guarantee religious freedom, meaning more than freedom of worship. Within days after the pope's departure, with support from PAN and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and opposition from the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD), the lawmakers passed a constitutional reform that opens the door to the Catholic Church having mass media and allowing religious instruction in public schools. The Bishops' Conference acknowledged that Congress had consulted the bishops about this change and praised the importance of this advance in the understanding of religious freedom.

#### **Pederasty: an ever-present issue**

The pope also addressed the Latin American Catholic hierarchs who had travelled to Mexico to greet him, telling them that they should take care of their seminarians and punish clergy who engage in "inappropriate attitudes."

Upon leaving, the pope called on the Mexican people to be brave and "not be intimidated by the forces of evil." Calderón asked him to take with him "the tears of those he had comforted," hoping he had seen that the Mexican people weren't without hope, despite the difficult circumstances.

Although the Vatican and the Mexican episcopate wanted to hide the serious problem of pederasty during the papal visit, the shadow of Maciel never left Benedict XVI. The Maciel case, although only the tip of the iceberg, is the most scandalous in Mexico and perhaps the whole world.

The subject of Maciel hasn't stopped being topical, as new information and allegations come to light. A book appeared in 2011 by Nelly Ramírez Mota, a former nun consecrated with Regnum Christi, an international lay apostolic movement founded by Marcial Maciel and associated with the Legion of Christ. In her book, *The Kingdom of Marcial Maciel: The hidden life of the Legion and Regnum Christi* (Editorial Planeta), the author reveals the oppressive system he created and its vice-like grip based on mistrust and denunciation.

In March 2011, Richard Gill (for 29 years a Legion of Christ priest and long-time US director of Regnum Christi who left the Legion in 2010 and is now an incardinated priest in the New York Archdiocese) analyzed the impossibility of

restoring the Legion. In his view, its members have internalized a culture creating a submissive and fearful mindset and making them evade the responsibilities of their superiors.

The scandals of the Legion's founder and the fact that the same clique that covered up for him still directs the Legion has caused numerous priests, seminarians and consecrated nuns to desert. The Legion's female branch has been seriously depleted. In early 2012, Malen Oriol—who was at Maciel's deathbed and directed the consecrated women's division of 600 women who live like nuns and work in the Legion's schools, as well as in recruiting new members and fundraising—left the Legion, followed by 30 other women. Several declared that they wanted out of such a harmful and erroneous organization.

### **Willing ignorance**

The international press covering the papal visit knew all this. On Saturday March 24, a hundred foreign correspondents attended the presentation of the book published by Grijalbo, *La voluntad de no saber* (Willing ignorance) in León, just a few blocks from the residence where the pope was resting. Its authors, José Barba, Alberto Athié and Fernando González, are the three people best known for their struggle to unravel the truth about Maciel.

Athié left the priesthood when he saw how the Vatican nullified a case he was trying to defend of a former Legionary raped by Maciel. Barba, as mentioned above, is a former legionary who denounced Maciel for abusing him. And González is a university academic and Legionary specialist.

The 600-page book contains 212 previously unpublished documents from the Vatican's archives showing that the Roman Curia knew about Maciel's serious crimes as long ago as 40 years.

Bernardo Barranco, a specialist on religious subjects and meticulous researcher on the Catholic Church, who wrote the book's prologue, defines the documents as specifically being "classified documents from the Vatican's archives, especially from the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy [part of the Roman Curia responsible for overseeing matters regarding priests not belonging to religious orders, excluding sexual abuse cases, which are handled by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith]. He describes its publication as "part of the phenomenon of information leaks known as Vatileaks, which are compromising leaks about the Vatican's burning issues."

### **Irrefutable documents**

Barranco sees the book as a commitment to truth based on irrefutable documents. In the prologue he reflects on the responsibility of all those who

defended and legitimized Maciel, noting that among the most enthusiastic was Mexico's Archbishop Norberto Rivera. He emphasizes that the book's major success is showing that Maciel's behavior cannot be explained as the actions of a single man. He recalls that while Benedict XVI told Peter Seewald in his 2010 book *Luz del mundo* (Light of the World) that he had no reasons to check out accusations of Maciel's pederasty until 2000, Vatican documents show that he knew of the case much earlier.

And if that's true, how can it be explained that even in February 2001, with the reasons already apparent, he congratulated Maciel on his upcoming birthday and thanked him for favors, among them the collaboration of a Legionary, who served in the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, then led by Ratzinger. That admission means that a Legion operator worked in the same offices that received the charges made against Maciel.

Many people believe Pope Benedict XVI speeded up John Paul II's beatification Many people believe that Pope Benedict XVI speeded up John Paul II's beatification so as to blur his predecessor's and his own complicity in the protection of a pederast to blur his predecessor's and his own complicity in the protection of a pederast. According to Barranco, if the documents published in the book had been taken into account in time, they could have called the beatification into question.

"The book says nothing new about Maciel; it just confirms what we all knew," says Barranco, adding that the responsibility for restructuring the Legion now falls to Pope Benedict XVI and questioning his slow and lukewarm response to this task. He warns that testimonies showing many harmful practices relating to the Legion remain unchanged and that the Vatican and the Mexican episcopate owe Mexico a comprehensive and detailed public statement pinpointing accountability.

#### **Freely accessible documents**

With this book, researcher Fernando González puts many documents into the readers' hands. He explains that evidence in the files from the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the secretary of state and the pope's personal files prove John Paul II's knowledge of the case.

The documentation also incriminates the Legion's high-ranking officials for blocking information they had about their founder's behavior. González shreds the current Vatican strategy that tries to present John Paul II as one of Maciel's victims.

González also clarified that the pontifical vicar appointed to reform the Legion

protected Maciel's accomplices and censured the Legion's dissidents, expressing contempt for them and for Maciel's victims. Although he believes many Legionaries have no responsibility for the actions of the Legion's founder, they acquire responsibility if they support the current version of what happened. For anyone interested in reading the 212 documents in the book, they are freely available on [www.lavoluntaddenosaber.com](http://www.lavoluntaddenosaber.com)

#### An important timeline

José Barba offers the reader an important timeline. On December 8, 1997, former Legionaries published an accusatory letter. On January 13, 1998, the original of this letter was delivered to the apostolic nuncio in Mexico City and the nuncio promised to turn it directly over to Pope John Paul II. On October 17, 1998, the report against Maciel was delivered to the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

On February 18, 1999, the letter was presented to that Congregation, presided over by Cardinal Ratzinger. On May 18, 2001, in the light of these charges, Ratzinger made canon changes that favored Maciel, prescribing crimes until then classified as exempt from prescription. On November 11, 2002, a letter of complaint in Spanish and Polish was given to John Paul II's personal secretary. These documents show that the Vatican was fully informed about Maciel's criminal behavior.

#### Why no mea culpa?

The unveiling of the book was presided over by the journalist Carmen Aristegui, who said that the pope should issue a "liberating mea culpa" in the name of the Church, although she assumed this gesture was stymied because the pope himself was involved.

Athié charged that the reason the Vatican didn't act on so much evidence was that Maciel had bought protection at the highest levels of the Roman Curia.

Fernando González pointed out that the Vatican had opted to "make disappear, euphemize, protect, silence and transfigure" a history of allegations. He thus considers it regrettable that the pope remained silent about ecclesiastical pederasty during his visit to Mexico, the country where Maciel was born, founded his organization and chose his victims and where those who denounced his crimes live.

José Barba couldn't attend the presentation because he was convalescing, but he sent a video. As a Maciel victim in his youth, he says on the tape that what the victims want is for the truth to come to light so that behavior like Maciel's will never happen again.

Commenting on the recent book *In defense of the Pope*, by Vatican apologists Andrea Tornielli and Paolo Rodari, about the palatial conspiracies against Benedict XVI, researcher Bernardo Barranco said it adds nothing new.

He instead advises reading the documented book *Render unto Rome* by investigative journalist Jason Berry, which reveals the high levels of corruption in the Roman Curia by following up on compensation for sexual abuse that the Catholic Church has had to give in various countries. Berry analyzes how Marcial Maciel corrupted the Curia so it would cover up his crimes.

#### **“We don’t know who they are”**

Maciel’s wasn’t the only case. Victims of sexual abuse committed by other clergy in Mexico—who have formed a Network of Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Priests—expressed sorrow that their request to meet with the pope was ignored. They handed in their request for an audience to the nuncio’s office seven days before the pope’s arrival. The reason for not responding offered by Carlos Aguiar Retes, the president of the Mexican episcopate, was pitiful: “We can’t take leadership of something we know nothing about. Until the victims appear, we don’t know their faces; we don’t know who they are... They are only visible for the media.”

The cardinal emeritus of Guadalajara, Juan Sandoval, had already made a disparaging remark about the victims, saying it was to be expected that what he called “the usual tune” would be heard again in the context of a papal visit. The pope’s spokesperson, Federico Lombardi, gave an even more flimsy explanation: the pope didn’t need to meet with victims of sexual abuse by the clergy on every one of his trips.

#### **Religious bipolarity**

Javier Sicilia said the members of his Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity had felt unheeded because the pope had been insensitive to their position, preferring to side with the political elite and the high clergy rather than listen to the victims of pederast priests and of the violence caused by Calderon’s drug war.

Sicilia said that ever since the Church became an imperialist religion, it had joined “the poor man from Nazareth,” as Father Larrañaga Ignacio called him, together with Caesar.

Miguel Concha, former provincial superior of the Dominican Order, also regretted the pope’s silences about the victims of violence and pederasty.

Various citizens’ organizations criticized the spending of public money on the papal visit. Other critics called the coverage of the visit by Mexico’s Televisa

repetitive, sentimental, poor and inconsequential, without allowing for the viewpoints of Catholic Church scholars with critical positions. Televisa is the largest multimedia corporation in the Spanish-speaking world, much of whose programming also airs in the United States on Univision.

Religious studies specialist Bernardo Barranco—who expressed some criticism of the CNN Spanish edition's coverage—said it was hard to understand the pope's silences. He summarized the trip as an expression of “religious bipolarity: a honeyed Christian speech on the one hand, and acts and facts on the other,” referring to dramatic facts that media triumphalism found impossible to eclipse.

#### **A success?**

Although the government and the Catholic hierarchy wanted to sell the visit as successful and smooth, the international press was aware of this visit's severe contradictions, among them Maciel's ominous shadow, which accompanied the pope's movements. It is just another expression of the dark side of the Church's history, built by its elites' discrepancies.

Nonetheless, as always throughout history, there's potential for hope in this church's base, which draws its vitality from the example and the liberating, committed teachings of one who denounced the elites of his day: Jesus of Nazareth.

## **Mexico**

### **Indigenous communities under government siege and repression**

*Indigenous peoples defending their lands and autonomous organizations are suffering increased attacks and repression by the Mexican government. If they don't cave in to the authorities' attempts to co-opt with social programs, it increases its use of paramilitary soldiers to threaten, plunder, burn, harass and kill. Behind the siege and repression are the interests of the large corporations, which are determined to get the riches found in the indigenous lands. The resistance of Mexico's original peoples is part of the struggle throughout Latin America today for public goods.*

#### **Jorge Alonso**

Famine, death, repression and eviction hang over Mexico's indigenous communities. Climate change made last year's drought worse, causing famine in many places by the beginning of this year. In January 2012 the Fray Francisco De Vitoria Human Rights Center issued a report showing that the Mexican government had basically failed in its obligations to respond to the population's right to food, education, health care, work, decent housing and a clean environment. Instead the government has facilitated the transnational mining and construction companies that are contaminating the indigenous communities' environment.

**52 million poor with multi-dimensional problems**

The food emergency that arose early this year is due to a lack of adequate public policies for vulnerable populations. The northern indigenous communities, which were thrown off their lands during the Spanish conquest and interned on lands where they have survived on subsistence farming, are now particularly exposed to depredation and injustices by large companies that are threatening the few resources the communities still have. Hunger, a chronic problem in the Rarámuris area, has worsened due to drought and frost. The government and political parties are taking advantage of the situation to offer palliative stop-gap measures in return for votes without dealing with the fundamental problem of generating work that provides food.

Some 28 million Mexicans suffer from hunger and are at risk of moving into a state of famine due to the increase in food prices. Official poverty figures published in February show that, despite social programs, the number of poor with multidimensional problems has reached 52 million. A person is considered to be living in multidimensional poverty when he/she does not earn enough to acquire basic goods and services and exhibits at least one of the following indicators: lack of education, inability to access health services, no social security, lack of quality housing, lack of basic services in the home and problems getting enough to eat every day, not to mention the inability to feed themselves well.

Poverty is worse among the indigenous peoples, who have also been suffering increased repression lately simply for defending their lands and autonomous ways of organizing. First of all, the authorities try to co-opt them; if this fails, they employ other methods, such as rewarding with social support those who desert the Zapatista resistance movement. The government then uses paramilitaries to repress those who don't submit to the plans by the government or those who hold economic power. Finally, arbitrary imprisonment is used to pressure the autonomous communities.

Let's look at several outstanding examples of these methods from last year and

the beginning of this, especially in the Zapatista areas.

**The** **Acteal** **massacre:**  
**Still an open wound**

The Zapatista's Las Abejas Collective decried the daily massacres in Mexico in March 2011, reminding people that for 20 years indigenous people had been charging that Mexican military personnel learned their counterinsurgency techniques in US military schools where the violent drug traffickers called Los Zetas had also been trained. They have also denounced the fact that many innocent people have been killed in President Calderón's War on Drugs and those who demanded justice, peace and dignity have been jailed for no reason other than that the government fears the voice of the people and wants it silenced.

Those responsible for the December 1997 Acteal Massacre are still free. Las Abejas spoke out about this crime against humanity again in August 2011, charging that former President Zedillo, current President Calderon and both former Chiapas governor Ruiz and the present governor, Juan Sabines, were responsible for the crime. It was learned the following month that Zedillo was being sued in a US court for the massacre. Although Las Abejas denied having filed the suit, they were glad Zedillo would be judged for this crime, although it is regrettably being tried as a civil and not a criminal case.

In January 2012 the Abejas Collective demanded that the Chiapas governor explain what had happened to the special investigation report on Acteal, which was never explained to Mexican society but was now being used in the US civil case against Zedillo. Two months later the collective stated clearly that even if Zedillo stood trial in the United States it wouldn't mean that justice had been fully done.

The Acteal crime was planned by three levels of government to do away with the human rights organizations. Several of those who physically committed the massacre had been released from prison by the Calderon government. Last February, when seven more accused of the massacre had been released from prison, the bishop of San Cristóbal declared that because the arguments for letting them go were based on findings that correct judicial process hadn't been followed, this didn't mean they were innocent. Now that they were freed, they could take revenge on those who had accused them.

Neither truth nor justice has been honored in the Acteal case. Sufficient evidence exists against those freed but it hasn't been taken into account. Rather, the State supported the paramilitary personnel and then freed them. The crime that left 45 dead—among them children and pregnant women who were praying in a hermitage—has gone unpunished and remains an open wound that continues to incense Mexican society. In mid-April of this year the People's Permanent Court

held the first preliminary hearing concerning the massacre as one of the emblematic cases of systemic, structural state violence.

### A violent eviction at Agua Azul Falls

The case of the Tzeltal peasants involved in Another Campaign is Possible in Chiapas is another serious situation. These indigenous farmers were in charge of the gatehouse the community had established in 2009, where tourists paid their entrance fee to Agua Azul Falls—a beautiful tourist site on their land.

In February 2011 they were attacked by paramilitaries and police, who threw them out of the gate house. During the operation the government jailed more than 100 others who defended their land, but released all but five, whom they mistreated, depriving them of medication, food and family visits. The Zapatistas recovered the gatehouse on April 9, but the government and state police took it from them again the following day.

The Zapatista communities have opposed an ambitious road and ecotourism project in this area. The government has used political prisoners as hostages to get the communities to cave in and abandon their struggle for the land. Simple economic interests have encouraged such repression and those who hold the land fear a forced expropriation of the road to Agua Azul Falls.

Although the charges were unfounded, the prisoners were held in jail as hostages for six months. It became very clear that the government had criminalized the protest and stirred up the conflict to violate their right to life, liberty and security while leaving unpunished those responsible for the violent acts. The prisoners were freed in late July last year through local, national and international pressure.

### Paramilitaries in Mitzitón

In late September last year those in possession of the San Sebastian Bachajón communal land (ejido) in Chiapas again charged publicly that official authorities had kidnapped, threatened and tortured a community member. They considered this yet another threat against social activists. On November 30, the ejido issued another public statement regarding 600 hectares and a guardhouse the community had already been stripped of and announced that they had decided to take back the guardhouse.

In the town of Mitzitón the followers of the Zapatista Other Campaign have seen their land attacked by the “Army of God” and “Eagle Wings” paramilitary units. In May of last year, a day after attending the massive March for Peace in San Cristóbal de las Casas, the town itself was attacked by armed paramilitaries. In August the town’s residents condemned “the bad government” for using

paramilitaries like puppets to threaten, defame and pressure townspeople so it could reactivate the construction of a road project. In late March of this year the community declared that it was continuing the resistance, would not allow itself to be drawn into the games of the bad government and would keep defending its lands and people.

**Zapatista good government boards  
denounce the “bad government”**

The Zapatista communities have continued to report periodically on what is happening to them with dates, places, names and figures. In early April of last year the Good Government Board of La Garrucha denounced provocations by the Cintalapa ejido authorities in the municipality of Ocosingo, which were attempting to make the Zapatistas pay a property tax even though their land is autonomous. By mid-2011 the Board of this Caracol had denounced land evictions and attacks on two communities by a pro-government farm owners' organization. The “bad government” had intensified its counter-insurgency campaign by manipulating the leaders of organizations to cause clashes between peasants and invading the Zapatistas' land to throw them off it.

The Zapatistas have suffered the theft of crops from their coffee plantations, corn fields and sugarcane fields, as well as livestock, wire fencing and trees. The invaders have illegally extracted gravel from their land to sell to construction companies. This same Good Government Board alerted the community about an attempted eviction in the immediate surroundings of the archeological site of Tonina and announced that they would defend this zone which they identified as “rebel territory.” In August 2011 the Board again condemned attacks by pro-government organizations backed by state armed forces in an attempt to invade the lands of members of Zapatista organizations. The three government levels organized the paramilitary troops using money provided to Mexico by the United Nations Development Programme.

In April last year the Good Government Board of La Realidad complained about provocations and damage to their belongings in the Monte Redondo ejido. Several Zapatistas had been beaten, others jailed and the official ejido authorities wanted to throw Zapatistas off their land so they torched their houses. In July Zapatista communities in the border region reported being thrown off their land and receiving death threats for having created an autonomous school.

The following month the Government Board spoke out against the provocations and damages by the Monte Redondo authorities supported by the governing National Action Party (PAN), Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and Green Ecologist Party of Mexico (PVEM), all of which are against the Zapatista support bases. There are farmers who have been in possession of these lands since 1972, have worked for years without problems

and only now have begun to be robbed of their corn, beans and coffee and thrown off their lands by the official municipal authorities.

This same Government Board stressed that the provocations correlate with the “bad government” plans of the PRD governor, Juan Sabines, who tricks and manipulates people with political lies. In October the Board reported death threats with firearms, theft of produce and the attempted killing of Zapatista supporters, warning they would not let themselves be evicted from land that was theirs.

#### **Three months of attacks on San Marcos Avilés**

Also in April 2011 the Good Government Board of Oventic reported the intentional burning of a health center in the Pikote community in the municipality of Citalá. In October Zapatista community bases in Altos de Chiapas suffered persecutions specifically to prevent autonomous education.

In the middle of the year the Good Government Board of Morelia condemned the violent acts of a pro-government regional organization that was trying to throw Zapatista supporters off their lands. This organization had cordoned off lands belonging to Zapatistas, destroying, pillaging and setting fire to the houses. The Board denounced the kidnapping, abuse and injury of several Zapatistas who were released after a few days. For three consecutive months the San Marcos ejido condemned the harassment, death threats, eviction and risk of forced displacement from members of the PRI, PAN and PRD.

#### **“Bad government” and its ‘bad actions’**

Then in August the Good Government Board of Roberto Barrios reported that 150 armed individuals, instruments of a government plan by PRD governor Sabines and President Calderon, destroyed a Zapatista house that served as a refectory for national and international observers. He charged that “the bad government doesn’t want its bad actions against the Zapatistas to be known.” These same people had tried to destroy an autonomous school and a month before that a group photographing the Board had been kidnapped and their cameras taken.

Despite all the money the government has spent on bribing people, it hasn’t been able to eliminate the belief in the Zapatista movement or to demoralize its followers, who keep defending their lands and their autonomy. In September this same Board reported that the community of San Patricio was being besieged by a hundred paramilitary forces who pillaged cornfields, burned 18 hectares of land and threatened to kill any Zapatistas who didn’t abandon their lands. The invaders began to build houses on Zapatista land, destroyed wire fences and

stole animals. By late 2011 a report was released showing how difficult it was for the community of San Patricio to feed itself because of the theft of crops and animals.

#### **Marcos: “We are the target of all the parties”**

Subcomandante Marcos also mentioned all the affronts at the same time the boards were making these charges. As early as March he asked rhetorically who was defending the human rights of the human rights defenders because the powers that be were persecuting, harassing, slandering, beating, jailing or killing them or trying to convince them to give up or sell out.

In late August, Marcos reported that the attacks came from everywhere on the political spectrum. “We serve as an example that it’s possible for all political parties to actually share the same objective. Backed by the federal, state and municipal governments, all the parties are attacking us... Before or after each attack there’s a meeting among the government officials and party and society leadership. Little is said about this, only what’s necessary to agree upon the price and form of payment...”

Marcos questioned whether one can talk seriously about justice in Chiapas when one of those responsible for the Acteal Massacre, former Governor Ruiz Ferro, is still free. He also referred to former Governor Albores, responsible for the massacre at El Bosque. Governor Sabines, Marcos said, encouraged the paramilitaries to attack Zapatista communities. With so much impunity, simulation is used as a government program.

#### **The government is behind the war of eviction**

The persecution of members of The Other Campaign hasn’t been limited to Zapatista areas. The same government model is used in other places. In April of last year peasants in the Venustiano Carranza municipality reported a land takeover by members of a pro-government peasant organization with the support of authorities. In August, the members of the Tila ejido declared that after over 30 years of struggling to defend the mother earth, the three levels of government and the local parish wanted to throw them off their land.

In January of this year the community of Candelaria el Alto reported that with the impunity the government guaranteed they were suffering robberies, attacks, kidnappings, threats and evictions. An organization close to the government had invaded their lands and, since they weren’t able to harvest, they were now going hungry. Groups of paramilitaries protected by the government were attacking several families in the Busalja and Cintalapa ejidos. And in late 2011 there were reports of kidnappings of children, rapes, unjust imprisonments, house and land

evictions and death threats.

The displaced families of these ejidos organized a month-long camp-in to demand the release of the political prisoners of Playas de Catazaja and that a young woman who had been kidnapped be return alive. They were unsuccessful.

At the beginning of this year various communities and collectives that are part of The Other Campaign demanded an end to the evictions, repression and harassment of the Zapatista communities. They accused the government of attempting to break the indigenous peoples' autonomous processes, of responsibility for a war of eviction that generates attacks, privatization of natural resources, overexploitation of labor, repression, persecution, imprisonment and killings in order to contain the social struggles. The offensive against the lands the Zapatistas recovered made this clear.

#### **Political prisoners go on a hunger strike**

Innocent people in the Zapatista support bases have suffered imprisonment and particularly inhuman treatment. This has forced the prisoners sympathetic to the Zapatistas to organize. Depending on which prison they are in, they have baptized their organizations The Voice of El Amate (the name of one of the prisons) and Innocent Voices. In March of last year La Voz del Amate released information about the repression and mistreatment they were suffering, as well as the fact that one of those unjustly imprisoned had been taken to a prison over a thousand miles from his home to prevent his relatives from visiting him.

Back in March and April 2008 The Voice of El Amate had organized a hunger strike and secured the release of about 50 prisoners innocent of anything other than having participated in demonstrations. In late September last year a group initiated another hunger strike. By mid-December it had only led to the release of two prisoners from Mitzitón after nine years of arbitrary imprisonment. The rest remained on the hunger strike. When day 21 of the strike arrived they were denied visits and at day 27 the authorities prevented a doctor from checking them.

#### **Lives with meaning, violence without meaning**

British writer John Berger sent the hunger strikers a letter telling them that the treatment they were receiving set off alarms about the present government and that the courage of the strikers arose from the realization that they knew their lives had meaning while their captors were lost in meaningless violence.

On day 34 of the hunger strike, the authorities allowed a medical check-up. After 39 days with no response from the government, they decided to suspend the

action, which was putting their lives at risk, since they could only continue the struggle alive. The pressure of related organizations fighting outside the prison for their release was decisive. In January of this year these same prisoners again condemned the harassment, torture and outrageous violations by the prison authorities.

One paradigmatic case has been that of teacher Albert Patichtán, who was arbitrarily jailed to teach social activists a lesson, and has suffered a wide range of injustices while incarcerated. He was taken out of the hunger strike and sent to

a prison two kilometers away in order to diffuse the demonstrations demanding his release. In February Patishtán won an injunction to return him to his original place of incarceration but the authorities defied the judge's order. His innocence has been proven and the government knows he's not guilty of anything, but they have kept holding him. In mid-March, 60 human rights organizations demanded his immediate release and on April 10 a march arrived in Mexico City to demand not only his release but also that of the other political prisoners. Solidarity actions for the release of these prisoners have been extensive and have even been backed by the United States and Europe. Faced with the lack of any government response, a forum made it clear that Calderón's government puts all those who defend their lands in jail. By late April the international campaign for the release of these prisoners grew, with Twitter and Facebook messages sent to President Calderón.

### **Repression against indignation**

The Fray Bartolome de las Casas Human Rights Center has been one of the most active in the defense of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas. In January of this year it demanded an end to the systematic attacks against the Zapatista support bases. It has documented the land grabs, harassment, displacement of families, unjust imprisonments, violations of human rights, tortures and more. It has also denounced state authorities for not investigating but rather covering up for the attackers.

The Center thinks that the situation of indigenous peoples is so terrible because the prevailing economic model provokes violence. While the government supports the neoliberal economic projects demanded by the large capitalist corporations, many of the indigenous peoples will not submit. Faced with this just rebellion, the government buys consciences, promotes armed groups, tries to divide communities and criminalizes human rights workers. The Center publicly condemned the judicial harassment of lawyers of the Digna Ochoa Human Rights Center by fabricating crimes they were alleged to have committed and failing to respect protection orders.

In December 2011 about twenty human rights centers and organizations issued a

statement exposing the threat that the local Chiapas government, the federal government and private businesses represent to the integrity of the land of indigenous people and peasants as well as their way of life.

They charged that security forces and the judicial system strongly repressed the social protests growing out of people's disgruntlement and indignation. In February of this year the National Human Rights Commission reported that they had received dozens of complaints of attacks against human rights workers in 2011.

#### **Eviction of the Yaqui people from their river**

The harassment aimed at the Zapatistas is also being suffered by other indigenous communities throughout Mexico. In March 2011 the authorities in Morelos criminalized the struggle of the San Juan Tlacotenco autonomous community. In May the Mezcala indigenous community in Jalisco condemned the paramilitary attacks aimed at stripping them of their lands. Throughout 2011 the Purepecha community of Cherán lived in constant fear of the attacks by loggers backed by drug traffickers. In February of this year this community was finally able to drive out both the authorities and the police, who were accomplices of the criminals, and install their own autonomous authorities.

In June 2011 the Maíz-Mixteca organization denounced acts of intimidation against members of The Other Campaign in Mixteca. In August, in response to the government's concessions to contaminating mining companies in a 500-kilometer area without asking permission of the communities, indigenous community police positioned themselves in 63 entrances to the 10 municipalities of Costa Chica and the mountain area of Guerrero.

At the end of that same month, the town of Vicam in Sonora, territory of the Yaqui people, reported that a highly criminal robbery was being perpetrated on their land against that original people: taking away their ancestral right to the use of the Yaqui River through the construction of an aqueduct. By early September the Yaquis suffered repression from Sonora's PAN government. A thousand state and federal police carried out a violent eviction with injuries and disappearances. And in the community of Ostula, Michoacán, paramilitary groups alongside government troops killed and tortured several community members who were trying to organize an autonomous community.

#### **Charges by the Indigenous National Congress**

In mid-October the Indigenous National Congress alerted Mexico's civil society to maneuvers by the government, political parties and business to repress, evict and appropriate indigenous peoples' resources and territories. The Congress

supported the communal guard in Ostula and demanded the return alive of the community members who had been disappeared and respect for Cherán's autonomy. They also backed the demand by the Wixarika that the mining projects in the Wirikuta's sacred land be cancelled and the Yaqui people's demand to cancel the aqueduct that would affect their water and called for the restitution of invaded territory in the indigenous community of Mezcala, respect for a community radio in Guerrero, an end to the harassment of the Good Government Boards in the Zapatista communities and the release of Alberto Patiștan and all the political prisoners in Chiapas.

In November the Indigenous National Congress had to speak out against the violent repression of the Indigenous People's Assembly in the Tehuantepec Isthmus for defending their land. It demanded the immediate cancellation of the isthmus' Wind Corridor Magaproject.

By the beginning of 2012 the indigenous community of Tetelpa, Morelos, launched a fight to avoid the construction of a housing complex on communal lands. By late January members of the Oaxaca community of San Juan Copala began to return to their land in a convoy after being displaced following the massacre of their families in 2010. They demanded that the government investigate and arrest those responsible for the dozens of killings, rapes, tortures and evictions. But the Oaxaca government, protecting the attackers, first prevented the convoy's return and then threatened its members, claiming that if they were attacked, it would be the responsibility of those returning to their homes. At the end of March many indigenous peoples participated in the first large national movement against unjust electricity rate charges and to protest the repression suffered by those resisting these abuses.

### **Widespread international solidarity**

The national and international solidarity with their struggles has been essential to the defense of indigenous peoples' rights. The political prisoners of Bachajón received the support of national and international human rights commissions and of New York's Movement for Justice in El Barrio, an immigrant-led grassroots organization that fights for the rights of local neighborhoods in East Harlem. In April 2011 collectives of The Other Campaign, among them Zepta International, initiated actions in Mexico and worldwide to demand the release of these prisoners, given the clear evidence of their imprisonment for political reasons since no other motives could be found in the acts of the accused.

There were peaceful occupations of the Mexican Consulate offices in New York and demonstrations in front of the Mexican Embassy in London. The Bachajón prisoners declared they were kidnapped by "the bad government." There were demonstrations against the kidnappings In India, South Africa, Italy, Austria, Colombia, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, France, Switzerland, Canada, Spain and

Argentina. Demands for their release were issued in 63 events in 22 countries.

In May Uruguayan activist and writer Raúl Zibechi wrote that the only crime they had committed was to want to live on their lands, which are sought after by the multinationals. Although the government kept them in prison so that the community would accept the land grab, the ejido members had not given in to the blackmail. Other writers including Noam Chomsky, various personalities and 55 international organizations issued a worldwide statement demanding respect for the right of free determination and exercise of autonomy for the people of San Sebastián and called for the release of the political prisoners.

### **Paramilitary actions are increasing**

In September 2011 a solidarity network opposing the repression and siege of Zapatista communities decided to organize an observation brigade. They concluded that protection of their lands was an historical claim by the original peoples, a right in international agreements recognized by the Mexican government, and that the economic mega-projects were an attack on these lands. The brigade's report showed that the attacks on the Zapatista communities were becoming increasingly systematic, continuous and violent.

In October the Movement for Justice in El Barrio, numerous human rights organizations and collectives from Canada, Catalonia, France, Spain, Uruguay, Great Britain, Nicaragua, Switzerland, Greece, Colombia, Brazil, South Korea, Ireland and Sweden, as well as a great many Mexican collectives, sent a public letter to President Calderón and Governor Sabines. They expressed concern for and rejection of the constant actions against the Mexican people's human rights, particularly in Chiapas, which they saw as government policy.

They pointed out the most recurrent violations, among them the omission of multiple accusations and requests for intervention that the report was aware of; allowing the breakdown of the community social fabric by polarizing the conflicts; creating food and health emergencies in the communities that are living under siege; and flagrantly violating the political and judicial human rights of the indigenous populations in Chiapas.

They underscored they had verified that the hostilities of paramilitary groups in complicity with authorities had been increasing in the past two years and that the paramilitaries took community land as war booty. They charged that the Chiapas governor's official discourse had turned respect for human rights into a publicity slogan to disguise his actions. And finally, they criticized as scandalous the millions spent on Sabines' propaganda campaign while he sentenced so many communities to be marginalized and forgotten.

In a public letter many organizations and individuals also demanded that the

Mexican government and state and municipal authorities assume their responsibility to intervene immediately to stop the provocation, harassment, threats and attacks, all of which were part of the counterinsurgency policy against the Zapatistas.

**The worldwide call reaches Mexico**

By the end of 2011, 122 organizations and 586 individuals from 30 countries had signed a worldwide declaration in solidarity with the Zapatista bases of support in San Marcos Avilés. They had information about new land invasions, theft and destruction of cornfields and coffee and fruit tree plantations by PRI, PRD and PVEM members. Activists from these parties had even threatened to kill Zapatistas. One of the reasons for these attacks was their autonomous educational system.

The document demanded the immediate and permanent cessation of these actions. In addition, 150 intellectuals and artists from 30 countries, including three Nobel Prize winners for literature, delivered a document in which they asked President Calderón to cancel the Canadian mining concessions in Wirikuta, the sacred center of the Wixaritari peoples.

Demonstrators of Occupy Wall Street sent a solidarity message to the Zapatistas that was recorded in Liberty Square in New York City and broadcast to an international gathering in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

At the end of last year some 8,000 Catholics, headed by Bishop Felipe Arizmendi of San Cristobal de las Casas, made a pilgrimage to demonstrate against the mining exploitation, destruction of nature, planting of transgenic seeds, militarization and mistreatment of migrants. The UN Permanent Forum demanded that the Mexican government respect indigenous rights. In mid-February of this year the UN Committee against Racial Discrimination stated its concern about the indigenous population's situation in Mexico and the judicial system's lack of guarantees for them.

**Cherán's struggle**

The indigenous community of Cherán, fed up with the local bad governments, refused to allow local municipal elections to be held in their area. The citizens held their own electoral process and set up an autonomous city government. Community people formed their own police force to defend the forests from the loggers and paramilitary groups. In March of this year they spoke out against the kidnapping of eleven community members.

On April 18 a group from the community was ambushed, leaving two dead and two others wounded. The state's public prosecutor wanted to make it seem as

though the confrontation was between two communities in which the other one had suffered six deaths, but Cherán's community members showed that there had been no such confrontation, that they had been ambushed and that the dead the prosecutor wanted to attribute to them were people killed by the paramilitaries the government was protecting and dumped on their lands. They quickly organized a petition that was signed by many national and international organizations and many well-known personalities around the world demanding punishment for those responsible for the murders, disappearances and kidnappings and demanding respect for the municipality's autonomy and its forests.

## Communities for public goods

that

**fight**

Not content with just the use of pressure by those who support it, the Mexican government is now going around indigenous lands and stirring up the paramilitary groups. In so doing it is reversing the rule of law and playing with fire by siding with those who practice eviction and aggression. In March of this year a UN committee declared that Mexico is marginalizing its indigenous population in order to exploit their lands.

Despite the government's siege, the Zapatistas have maintained their autonomy, which is one of the most advanced and comprehensive on the continent. The Zapatistas reject any party support or government program, don't participate in official elections, promote collective, horizontal and inclusive organization, and are in charge of their own health, education and judicial systems.

Our indigenous peoples are taking part in the fight for public goods that is developing today throughout Latin America. The defense of water, earth and biodiversity could be seen as a succession of local conflicts, but that would be incorrect. Today we see a special dynamism in the resistance of those from below in the defense of common possessions.

The increase in the price of minerals has increased extractions from mining in Latin America, consequently exposing millions of people to illnesses and threats to the environment. This reality has seen the birth of social resistance movements. The globalization directed by finance capital has pushed to increase the extraction of minerals and has run into major resistance by people who defend an alternative way based on the self-management of collectives that protect nature and public goods.

## Time for “the good life”

The Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos has called attention to the indigenous concept of “*buen vivir*.” This concept is based on building indigenous resilience and on adaptive strategies that enhance biocultural

diversity for food sovereignty and self determined development by enriching production based on sustainability, solidarity and reciprocity in a way that mitigates impacts. He has called for the end of the criminal economic model that is destroying the planet, supported by the denial of human rights by the multinationals that hide behind what they call “green capitalism.” Such labels aside, capitalism doesn’t guarantee the survival of most people and tries to privatize everything having to do with life, even privatizing nature by converting ecosystems into commodities. It’s time for activists of life to multiply.

ENVIO, 375, OCTOBER 2012

Mexico

### **#IAm132: A symbol of outrage and resistance**

*Here we offer a chronological reconstruction of #YoSoy132 (#I am132) in its first four months of life, tracing its evolution and explaining the beginnings of this energetic, playful and intelligent movement. These months express the process the movement has gone through and the trends defining its direction.*

Jorge Alonso

The propaganda coming out of Mexico’s 2012 presidential campaign presented Enrique Peña Nieto, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidate, as having won even before voters went to the polls. Rigged surveys gave him an unbeatable lead. And in the seven years prior to the elections, the powerful television consortium Televisa dedicated itself to forging an image of Peña as the future President despite his shortage of good qualities and his poor governing of the state of Mexico.

### **Peña Nieto: A violent governor**

Using an international index to determine the quality of democracy, well documented studies of all the states in the Mexican republic found the state of Mexico, governed by Peña Nieto, trailing in positive items and leading in negative ones. In 2011 the Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights

Center published a book on the systemic violations of human rights during his government. These included criminalizing social protest, leaving real criminals unpunished and persecuting the innocent. His administration saw an alarming increase in femicides. The publication gave concrete facts showing the state of Mexico to be one of the most institutionally broken and corrupt, in which the rule of law was absent and authoritarianism prevailed.

The center published another book this year that delved further into the six years of impunity surrounding the Atenco case, one of the emblematic cases of repression for which Peña is held responsible. In May 2006 the police in Atenco carried out an operation in which they violently attacked protestors against the construction of an airport on cooperatively held land. Dozens of women were sexually assaulted during the operation. The wife of one of the leaders of the Atenco incident stood up to Peña during an event of the Peace Movement in which the presidential candidates participated and stated, “While you were governor of the state of Mexico you ordered the operation against our people. Your government caused the violence. It was an act of vengeance planned by you against the people who resisted being thrown off their lands. You are responsible for two murders that have gone unpunished and for the fact that a band of rapists is still acting with the protection of the police you created. You used all the powers of your government to condemn those who were only defending their land to 112 years of prison. What you represent is an arrogant and violent government.”

### **“Atenco is not forgotten!”**

On May 11 of this year Peña Nieto spoke at the Jesuits’ Ibero-American University in Mexico City as a presidential candidate. It was a well-organized event for which his campaign team had invited a large number of sympathizers from outside the university to occupy the main seats. University students with posters criticizing the candidate tried to enter but Peña’s security personnel wouldn’t let them in. Some of them made it inside but without their posters.

When Peña ended his boring political spiel, these students criticized his actions in Atenco. Peña took the microphone to emphatically assert that he had decided on the Atenco operation to impose order. At that point a woman student shouted that he was a murderer and a chorus of voices outraged by the candidate’s arrogance and lack of self-criticism ordered him to leave their university. Thus cornered, Peña hid in a restroom and finally fled the university among shouts of “Atenco is not forgotten!”

Peña's team tried to minimize what happened, claiming it was a small group, while the president of the PRI accused them of not being students but rather outsiders manipulated by the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) candidate. The students, outraged they were not respected as people thinking on their own, responded by making a video in which 131 of them showed their student ID cards. Within minutes this video went viral throughout Mexico's Internet social networks and beyond. Students from other private and public educational institutions showed their solidarity with these students by holding up their own student ID cards and claiming I am number 132. This quickly sparked a spontaneous movement among the social networks called #IAm132.

### **From social networks to the streets**

A week after this unexpected echo, the young people moved from internet social networking to the streets and on May 18 they held the first massive demonstration against Peña and the PRI. There were marches in the capital and in other major cities in the country. With that the Spanish newspaper El País announced the birth of a Mexican movement of outraged youth. The marches multiplied creatively across the country. The youth's main demands were democratization of the media and criticisms of the media's manipulation of the campaign in favor of the PRI candidate. But they seemed to be cooking up something larger, something beyond the elections.

On May 26 in the emblematic Plaza of the Three Cultures, Tlatelolco, where dozens of students were killed by the Mexican government on October 2, 1968, young people from a variety of universities joined in an assembly where they came out against the PRI candidate for representing the business class, which wanted him imposed as President. They urged citizens not to think that the elections were already decided, as the media kept saying. On that day they agreed to combine their social network activism with taking to the streets.

### **"The Mexican spring"**

On May 29 the coordination of the #IAm132 movement stated that Mexico's economic and political system did not respond to people's demands. They made right to information and freedom of expression their main demands, and declared themselves autonomous, nonpartisan and anti-neoliberal, and promoters of an informed vote. They demanded that an upcoming presidential debate be broadcast on a national channel rather than the weaker channels they were going to use.

On May 30 the movement held its first general assembly in Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM), in which 54 universities were represented. There were group discussions then a plenary session. They rejected the return of the old regime, which they identified as the face of Peña. They declared they had suffered economic crises and electoral frauds and were the heirs of the previous student struggles. They demanded a political trial of outgoing President Calderon for the thousands of dead left by his failed anti-drug campaign and a separate trial of Peña for the repression he ordered at Atenco. They called this event "the Mexican Spring."

During the first week of June there were marches throughout the country repudiating Peña and the media attempt to impose him as president. The movement was fed up with the manipulation of information directed by the Televisa station, which had led to its creation. It stated that it had sufficient evidence of media manipulation to see that Peña was imposed.

#### **Against "a soap-opera democracy"**

The #IAm132 movement was also building in other states of the republic. Wherever the PRI candidate appeared in public there were student groups rejecting him. On June 10 the movement organized a large carnival in the country's capital. They demanded that the television stations cover the news impartially and not contribute to a "soap-opera democracy." They chanted "Peña, the TV is yours, but the streets are ours!"

The movement took shape with its ability to discuss and debate. On June 13 it held a festival of lights outside the Televisa station to protest the actions of the television station. They shouted "Turn off the TV and turn on the truth!" On June 14 they demonstrated in front of the Canadian Embassy in solidarity with that country's student movement and that same day met with the Chilean student leader, Camila Vallejo, who declared herself as 132.

The second assembly of #IAm132 was held at the Ibero-American University. The declaration of principles—nonpartisan, nonviolent and pluralistic—was approved and they agreed to strengthen what they called the "defend the vote brigade."

On June 19 the movement organized a third debate which was broadcast on Internet. Candidate Peña did not attend. Three days later they held

the third inter-university general assembly in which the various commissions—communications, press, logistics, brigade work, finances and security—were formed. They also agreed to seek ways to change the neoliberal economic model and the education model.

### **“A vigil for democracy”**

The night before the July 1 elections they promoted a demonstration they called “en vela por la democracia.” Vela means both candle and vigil, while en vela means staying up all night. They carried lighted candles as they marched. It was the first time in the history of Mexican elections that a citizens’ march demanded clean elections on the very eve of those elections.

The coercion and massive buying of votes was evident on election day. Throughout the country students marched against the imposition of Peña in the nondemocratic election process. The movement distributed 16 pages in which they listed the results of the citizens’ oversight committee and the serious irregularities attacking a free vote that occurred on election day.

On July 4 the movement held its fifth national assembly in the UNAM with representatives from 108 public and private universities and 250 observers. Each local assembly shared its point of view. The assembly pointed out that the imposition process had been conceived several years earlier by the national and foreign powers behind the scenes. Thus the assembly decided to camp out around the electoral headquarters. They argued that those in power took advantage of people’s poverty, that the media manipulation was massive and that the opinion polls had been tampered with. The result was a marred process with institutions deliberately incapable of preventing and sanctioning the anomalies aimed at imposing the PRI candidate. Election day was filled with irregularities and unlawful actions that provoked outrage by a large sector of the Mexican population.

### **Repudiation of Peña and Televisa**

The movement held the first national student gathering on July 6 in the town of Huexca, the state of Morelos, with 354 representatives from 26 universities and 8 states. The meeting was designed more for reflection than for coming up with resolutions. For two months the Huexca community has been fighting to defend its lands against the government’s construction of installations that put the population at high risk. The #IAm132 movement gave its support to the people from

Morelos, Puebla and Tlaxcala in their struggles.

The next day, 70,000 people, not all of them from the student movement, marched on the capital in repudiation of Peña, Televisa, the PRI party and the retail store chain Soriana, which had participated in the vote-buying with its credit cards. The march had no bandstand, speakers, speeches or leaders. It was only a citizens' repudiation. There were also marches in 28 other cities in a majority of states throughout the country—20,000 marched in Guadalajara alone.

Another of the movement's actions was to go on July 11 to the embassies of those countries that had congratulated Peña to make clear to them that the legal electoral process was not over until the authorities issued their findings on the challenges of serious improprieties in the electoral process. To recognize Peña prematurely implied endorsing these illegal acts, about which they provided information in a detailed report.

### **Symbol of resistance**

In the second week of July the movement held its sixth assembly in the National School of Anthropology and History, in which 173 spokespeople from 115 local assemblies attended to discuss a plan of action. A few days later there was a second massive march in the capital city against Peña's imposition. Many wore #IAm132 tee-shirts. Again there were no speakers but they formed groups that became small assemblies.

The First National Convention against the Imposition was held in the village of Atenco. In attendance were 2,600 delegates representing 360 organizations from 25 states. It was organized by the People's Front in Defense of the People, dissident teachers, electricians, peasant farmers and #IAm132. They analyzed the evidence and concluded that the electoral process had been corrupt for the past six years, during which the campaign headed by Televisa to promote the figure of Peña had intensified, paid for by millions in public resources.

Government programs—credit programs to the countryside, the food program, the program to support working mothers, the aid in housing construction—had also been used to buy votes. Immense amounts of public funds from 20 states and thousands of mayors had illegally been used to shore up the Peña campaign. The trade unions in support of the PRI were seen to be using coercion in the voting process. It was verified that on election day some polls were only open half the day, exchanges of money were proven by photographs, ballot boxes were stolen, Monex

and Soriana credit cards were distributed to buy votes... The electoral body in charge of the election process saw all of this and became an accomplice.

### **“It’s dangerous to return to the PRI”**

Their analysis was that the PRI had introduced neoliberalism to Mexico and Peña was committed to deepening it. But the greatest danger of returning to the repressive and authoritarian PRI regime was that it would worsen corruption, state violence, government in service to the drug traffickers, violation of human rights, etc. They announced they would fight to stop Peña from becoming President.

UNESCO-decorated Mexican sociologist and critic Pablo González Casanova urged the convention participants to form an umbrella organization made up of the various organizations, linked into networks of collectives that would encourage dialogue and fraternal debate in making decisions, without making concessions that would involve negotiating democracy, justice or the general national interest. Atenco’s leader asked that they not stop with just marches and public statements but move forward to more forceful actions.

They agreed on a national demonstration against fraud, in which there would be boycotts against the businesses that had participated in the electoral fraud, ringing or takeovers of Televisa offices and closing of highways. The convention was understood as a long process, a place to link up the plans of action and struggle coming from the local assemblies and going beyond election issues. The organization was declared to be broad, inclusive, sovereign, democratic and horizontal, with rotating representation and commissions and with long- and short-range objectives.

### **The surrounding of Televisa**

In the middle of July youth who had not been accepted to UNAM held an assembly on the esplanade in front of the President’s house and joined the #IAm132 movement. Between July 20 and 22, the third massive march against Peña was held in the capital city and in 18 other states. In those same days 69 local assemblies in public and private universities studied what they would do for the opening of the Olympic Games in London, which would be broadcast by Televisa. They decided to nonviolently and symbolically surround Televisa—which they called “the television station of the lie”—for 24 hours on July 27. Among their many different banners was one that said “The PRI can buy the bed but not the

dreams."

They also read a position statement that began, "When we arrived there was the world and we were already a hungry people with centuries of oppression. We are an accumulation of discontent... We are the effect of outrage. We take on the dignity of the defamed and their fight as our own....We say #IAm132 which means directly face the insult and emphatically refuse to bow our heads. It means don't accept their depiction as the truth...."

They stressed that their movement is a student movement that is social, political, nonpartisan, nonviolent, anti-neoliberal and independent of political parties, candidates and organizations that answer to an electoral program. They defined themselves as a democratic movement that makes decisions through local and general assemblies, goes beyond the present electoral scene and will continue to fight to profoundly transform Mexico.

They strongly criticized the fact that over half of the Mexican population lives in poverty while a few enjoy obscene wealth and that economically abandoning the countryside produces migrants. They opposed the mega-projects that threaten collective rights. They harshly criticized the disinformation and the fact that a minority controls public opinion and that information has become a commodity to be bought and sold. They emphasized that they had decided to go forward and not turn back and they proposed to build true democracy in Mexico.

They presented the Mexican people with a program of struggle including six major points: democratize the mass media, transform the education model, change the neoliberal economic model, abandon the current national security model so peace can be restored, achieve political transformation and promote connections between social movements with solidarity and respect for autonomy. At the same time they recognized themselves as one among many actors expressing social discontent.

That day's symbolic peaceful takeover of Televisa, which was protected by thousands of police, was an historic event, expressing the struggle against the monopolies that control and manipulate information by excluding society. As in all previous demonstrations of the #IAm132 movement, an atmosphere of creativity and festiveness prevailed. A similar action was held in 12 other cities in the country.

## **Democracy abused in the elections**

Towards the end of July the movement held its seventh general assembly in the city of Morelia, which was attended by 104 representatives from local assemblies. As in all previous meetings, they were able to clearly differentiate consensus from dissent. Among the issues of consensus they defended were the way of working together and participating through local assemblies, that those assemblies were the basis of the movement's coordination and that the general assembly was the governing body. They recognized the need to decentralize the structures so they could be adjusted to the specific local, state and regional issues and problems. One of the issues of dissent was disagreement on how the local assemblies should be composed—whether only of students or open to other sectors of society. Another problem was how to define the criteria for representation and how to establish what coordination methods should be adopted.

The declaration of the academic #IAm132 assembly on the electoral process was presented in the Morelia assembly. The academics called it an abuse of Mexico's fragile democracy. The number and severity of the irregularities had been overlooked by the institutions in charge of safeguarding the process. The media manipulation in favor of the Peña campaign had been obvious and there was fully documented massive coercion and buying of votes. They also criticized the National Action Party (PAN) and the candidate of the party known as PANAL for accepting their defeat as early as the presentation of the preliminary voting results. They considered the fact that the media called Peña the winner based on results from a sample of voters a mockery of legality.

### **Evidence against the imposition of Peña Nieto**

In early August the #IAm132 movement reported that it had 52 local sites of representation internationally—the most active being in London, Barcelona, Madrid, New York, Washington DC, Chicago and Quebec.

The communications and press commission warned that the health assembly, made up of medical students and unemployed doctors and nurses had information that Peña was planning to privatize the health services. The movement also published the second 100-page report of electoral irregularities and crimes, which specified the use of government programs and other public resources for campaign activities, buying of electoral credentials, illegal campaigning before and during the actual voting, buying of votes and coercion, stealing and burning of

ballots, voting crimes involving violence, irregularities in the candidate listings on ballots and threats against observers. Attached to all of this were videos that showed these election irregularities. The document was based on 2,700 pieces of evidence.

The provisional national coordinating committee met in Guadalajara on August 4 and 5 to prepare for the second National Convention against the Imposition of Peña. The #IAm132 Movement and 130 organizations from various places in the country had an active presence. The objective was to create a broad national front to implement strong actions against Peña Nieto's imposition to keep him from assuming the presidency and to lay the groundwork to fight the foreseeable structural reforms the PRI party would promote.

On August 11, the movement held a sit-in to reject the imposition in front of the national PRI headquarters, in which they silently read from among a pile of books. It was a reminder to people that during the 2011 International Book Fair in Guadalajara, Peña had been unable to answer what three books he had read, and couldn't recall who had written the only one he did remember.

The movement's eighth general assembly was held at UNAN on the 18th and 19th, with 136 assembly representatives and 210 observers in attendance. They did a political analysis, discussed organizational problems and worked more on preparing for the Second National Convention against the Imposition. One of the disagreements at this assembly was about how to prevent a nucleus in the capital city from centralizing decisions. It was decided that each region would discuss issues beforehand so they could arrive at the general assembly with clear points and the decentralization would be reflected in the facts. On the 19th the movement blockaded the daily paper Milenio, which was acting in conjunction with Televisa and was openly partial to the PRI candidate.

**Peña Nieto imposed by the electoral tribunal**

On August 30 the electoral tribunal, without speaking to the merits of the documented accusations of multiple abuses, decreed the elections clean, legal and exemplary; thus Enrique Peña Nieto was President-elect. The #IAm132 movement repudiated this inconsistent ruling and held many demonstrations in which they depicted the death of Mexican democracy. Each assembly carried out the actions decided upon by its own members: demonstrations in front of public offices, the takeover of toll booths on highways and very active participation on Internet's social networks.

On September 1, following Calderón's last presidential report, the movement held several events to present a 300-page counter-report pointing out the outgoing government's lies, corruption, complicity and state of exception, backing it up with data and analysis. Peña's imposition seeks to finish up the work of Presidents Fox and Calderón in which the private sector benefits at the expense of the people. The poet peace activist Javier Sicilia, on tour in the US those days trying to make the victims of both sides of the drug war visible, endorsed the counter-report as clearly demonstrating Calderón's lies.

On September 4 the #IAm132 movement's legal and human rights committee reported that all levels of authorities had reacted violently to the many demonstrations against the electoral tribunal's validation of the presidential election, particularly violating demonstrators' human rights in Nuevo León, Veracruz, Tabasco, Jalisco, Yucatán and the capital city.

Since the University of Saltillo authorities opposed the movement's use of it for the ninth general assembly, Bishop Raul Vera offered a retreat house. Everyone attending worked to ensure an autonomous and non-violent citizen agenda. They unanimously approved the proposal to make the National Convention an arena of convergence to nourish and strengthen the social processes and better prepare for the struggle with the arrival of the Peña government. More than 200 students—62 spokespeople and 91 observers—were in attendance. They decided to participate in local grassroots Independence celebrations and thus replace the traditional cry of "Long live Mexico without the PRI!" with alternative nonviolent events instead of the official events and military parade.

### **They changed Televisa's script**

As its own writings attest, the #IAm132 movement was born of disgust at the cynicism of the political elite cut off from society, personified in the repressive candidate as an enthronement of the old authoritarian regime. This regime never left and the false illusion of a democratic transition has now gone up in smoke. The movement straddles two protests: opposition to the repression of the popular movement in Atenco and repudiation of the present powers' ability to impose an oppressor as President, mainly through the mass media.

Born of a specific event, it had immediate and generalized repercussions

for solidarity among students who refused to allow their dignity to be violated. They rejected the candidate and his party for all they represent of corruption and violence and rejected the media that manipulated information to orchestrate a political imposition.

The movement proposed to stop this imposition, first by exposing it and then by seeking ways to see that the presidential election would be based on an informed and free vote. The first emphasis was on the election, which consequently raised the issue of the television companies' script.

At first those who back the political game didn't see a movement pushing for electoral participation from a civic perspective and outside the parties in a bad light. But the movement suffered the aggression of PRI followers from the beginning. They also suffered an attempt by the PRD to co-opt them. Nevertheless, they managed to maintain independence from the parties—which is one of their defining characteristics. The movement then decided to document the electoral irregularities, believing this would oblige the electoral tribunal to act accordingly. This didn't happen and all the parties accepted the election verdict. Only the movement headed by López Obrador, now separated from the PRD, and those in the #IAm132 refused to accept either the fraud or the imposition.

The grassroots student movement considers the electoral path to be closed to those citizens from below, both due to the powers that be and to the institutions that must supposedly guarantee equal participation and a free vote. Once the vote was stripped of its civic nature and turned into a commodity like any other at the mercy of who has the most money, the movement declared democracy dead and symbolically buried it. Another kind of democracy would have to be built.

### **Learning along the way**

On this path, the youth movement has been joining with other grassroots movements that have their own struggles. Given the drive, vitality, freshness, joy and creativity it has shown, it has survived two important moments in this respect. The first was characterized by the attempt of other movements to take advantage of its dynamism. The same thing happened earlier with the Javier Sicilia's Peace Movement. In the second, the other movements came to understand that this was one more movement within the concert of movements and that what was needed was a common arena of convergence, which the Convention against the Imposition has become.

Each movement is continuing with its own autonomy and specific agenda and finding places for designing common actions. The student movement learned a lot in its contact with the existing grassroots movements, which widened its perspective. It could have remained limited to dealing with electoral politics but quickly realized it had to incorporate a long-range struggle against neoliberalism together with other grassroots forces. For this reason the aggression against it grew not only from the PRI and the powers behind the throne but also from other parties, indeed from a whole spectrum of those in power. Faced with the danger of massive repression, the movement has been very careful to try to avoid repression.

#IAm132 also confronted the problem of many people, particularly academics and politicians, wanting to define what these young people should do. The movement defended itself by insisting that it chose to seek its own expression and development and not accept anyone's line. It was tempted to become part of the old line but overcame that temptation. In its search for organic expressions it has defended the autonomy of the collective participants and has continued to try new forms of internal convergence with new ways of leaderless open discussion and assemblies.

It also experienced the temptation to centralize in order to move with greater force, but preferred to give expression to its own rich diversity and thus try to find consensus, leaving disagreements for larger discussions.

### **The challenge**

The youth movement's enemies tried to break it through internal divisions, but they failed. It has been able to maintain an agile, horizontal, non-bureaucratic way of working. It has proposed a profound change in Mexico in which democracy from below, created by everyone without contradictions and tensions, will reign. Its members have sought to express themselves massively in the streets and in the Internet social networks and have also sought dialogue with other grassroots organizations.

Even though they did not succeed in ensuring free elections or in getting the electoral tribunal to take the serious electoral irregularities into account, and even if they are most surely unable to stop Peña Nieto from taking office, they have helped delegitimize both the process and the anointed. The challenge is to deepen their learning together with the

other grassroots collectives and use their actions to open a deep crack in the power of the State and the control by capital.