

**MEXICAN SITUATION ANALYSIS
VOLUME II**

Mexico

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 nuncio 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

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 canonic 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 Torielli 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.

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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 Citala. 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 and its ‘bad actions’ government”

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 returned 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 Patishtan 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 Zetz 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.

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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 Pais 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
imposition of Peña Nieto**

against

the

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
by the electoral tribunal**

Nieto

imposed

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.

Mexico

The revenge against the #IAM132 Movement

The repression unleashed by both the federal and state governments against the #IAM132 movement on December 1 hoped to make an example of this movement. All political parties know these outraged youth aren't easy prey for any party. Failing to attract them, they wanted revenge by putting an end to this movement, but they failed there too.

Jorge Alonso

At the end of 2012 a book came out on the #IAM132 Movement with 97 testimonies, all of which expressed the hope that Mexico can change. As part of the struggle for this change, #IAM132 announced a demonstration to protest the imposition of President-elect Peña Nieto of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) for December 1, the day he was sworn in. Demonstrations of repudiation happened in many cities, especially the capital and Guadalajara. The military responded with operations that recalled the repression of October 2, 1968, and June 10, 1971, in the capital, May 28, 2004, in Guadalajara and 2006 in Atenco.

The provoked the taunting

government

Adolfo Gilly recounted how the provocation on December 1 started. At the Monument to the Revolution a "protest encampment" had been set up since before the elections and remained afterward. Weeks before, a contingency of 50 people came to the encampment claiming to be part of the discontented. A few days before the new government was sworn in this new contingent began inviting people to courses on how to use bows and arrows. When there was objection from more long-standing encampment members they responded that they were preparing in case of attack. Days before the presidential inauguration the government police set up an imposing metal fence around the legislative palace. This deployment of force created a jumpy environment and generated protests by local residents against the disproportionate show of force. The intrusive contingent arrived at the demonstration early, armed with bottles, flammable materials and baseball bats. While many of the students expressed disagreement, they couldn't get them to put down their arms. Other infiltrators pushed against the solid metal fence, one of which suspiciously "gave way." While the infiltrators threw rocks and Molotov cocktails, government police swarmed through the opening in the fence, shooting gas and rubber bullets. By this time teachers and students had retreated.

Several of the students saw some of the "intruders" leaving with the police and giving each other hugs like victorious football players. Despite the heavy police barricade, a truck appeared from nowhere, rammed against the fence and caught fire. With that violence broke out in the center of the capital city. Within fifteen minutes the provocateurs, some dressed as civilians, others carrying pipes and chains and some wearing an "A," the anarchist insignia, destroyed store windows and property in Avenida Juárez with precision. The police did not intervene during that lapse of time, but when it had ended, a free-for-all repression by the national and city police rained down on the ordinary demonstrators.

Peaceful accused of vandalism

youth

During the brutal repression, a 67-year-old theater professor, a sympathizer with the “Another Other World Is Possible” campaign, was hit in the head by a grenade thrown by government police, exposing his brain and knocking him unconscious. One youth hit by a projectile later lost an eye. By day’s end more than a hundred people had been arrested, not only demonstrators, but also tourists, photographers and people on the street who rebuked the police for their abusive force against the young people.

Of those arrested and hauled off to jail, 58 men and 11 women were charged with “disturbing the peace,” with the tacked-on charge of having committed the crime as part of a “gang,” which carries a penalty of up to 30 years in prison with no possibility of parole. Photographs and cell phone videos showed the arbitrariness and illegality of the arrests and the presence of police infiltrators among the demonstrators.

With suspect uniformity, the corporate media launched a rabid campaign against the young people of the #IAM132 movement, labeling them vandals.

The peaceful march of young people and families in Guadalajara was criminalized the same way. Some “individuals” who joined the march threw rocks as it passed the PRI and Televisa offices, but the police didn’t arrest them. Although the genuine demonstrators sat on the ground to show their peaceful resistance, they received the full repression of the police force, with many arbitrary arrests. The police were especially brutal with those photographing or videoing their repression. Once arrested, many women were brutally treated by the police, who kept them incommunicado

and without medical attention for hours. The Federal Human Rights Commission acted as an accomplice to the perpetrators. In the end, 27 people were confirmed arrested and the PRI and Televisa made accusations against 25 of them without providing any evidence.

It wasn’t the anarchists

The international press focused on the police repression during President Peña’s inauguration. Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who ran against Peña on a broad coalition ticket and resigned from the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) two months later, holds the secretary of the interior, who is from the PRI, responsible for the infiltrators. Deflecting the criticism, higher-ups in the Interior Department argue that what happened, at least in Guadalajara, was the purview of the local government. In the capital, the city government accused the anarchists. The Black Cross anarchist group responded immediately that it had no responsibility for the destruction but only for fighting on behalf of those unjustly arrested, holding workshops against repression and trying to organize the barrios and communities.

The social networks circulated evidence exposing how the repression was carried out. It showed that the clashes were staged by a well-trained group protected by the police and that those arrested were scapegoats.

Criticism of the new government came from many quarters

Alarmed by the level of government violence, the independent human rights centers condemned the new Peña government for starting a repression campaign to “make an example” of its critics. The Union of Mexican Jurists criticized the police brutality and demanded the release of the

prisoners. The College of Ethnology and Anthropology defended the right of free expression. Academics of various institutions also denounced the provocation, seeing it as an ominous sign that the new authorities had started their administration by incarcerating innocent people.

It was very worrying that Mexico City's new mayor, Miguel Ángel Mancera of the PRD, did not begin his administration by calling for an investigation, and demanding punishment for the city police who used excessive force or freedom for those imprisoned. Instead, he invited prominent cabinet members of the Peña government to his own inauguration on December 5.

The struggle to free those imprisoned

The process to free the prisoners was faster in Guadalajara and longer and more tortuous in Mexico City.

Guadalajara. Professors from the Jesuit University in Guadalajara published a statement condemning the criminalization of the social protest, backed up with video evidence and the testimonies of students from the university who suffered repression. They also denounced the authorities' failure to act against the provocateurs who attacked the PRI and Televisa buildings, pointing out that at least 45 peaceful demonstrators had ended up injured. An independent group of teachers at the University of Guadalajara added to these statements by lamenting the servile actions of the federal government's human rights commission, protecting the authorities and not the citizens.

Two days after the events, those arrested were released after paying 81,000 pesos in bail and individual fines of 1,000 pesos. They were still subjected to a trial even though Guadalajara's security secretary admitted there was no evidence the arrested were guilty of property damage.

On January 9 the city of Guadalajara withdrew its charges against all 27 arrested for lack of proof. The charges by Televisa, PRI and four police remain standing.

Mexico City. The situation was very different in Mexico City because the charge against those arrested was for crimes against social peace, which is not eligible for bail. The #IAM132 movement created a "peace room" to collect testimonies, photos and videos. Those who did this work were harassed and some, without explanation, had their Facebook accounts cancelled. The movement gathered a lot of graphic evidence on the infiltrators, the illegal arrests, police who agreed with the faculty that abuses had been committed but had been ordered to do so, and the innocence of those arrested. The movement showed evidence of people dressed in civilian clothes using a black glove who had police cars and were clearly provocateurs.

A group calling itself the League of December 1 was formed to defend those arrested. There were marches and demonstrations, fasting by prisoners and their families, and street theater. The Mexico City Human Rights Commission confirmed the arbitrary arrests and torture of several of those held. Amnesty International called on President Peña and Mayor Mancera to investigate the police excesses and presented a petition signed by 20,000 citizens asking that no one be prosecuted without solid, reliable evidence.

The majority of the prisoners were released a week after the original events. Thirteen men and one woman were still held even though video evidence proved everyone's innocence.

Peña
of the powerful”

is

a

“puppet

Journalist Pedro Miguel charged that everything both the federal and city government had done in the situation was aimed at discrediting and putting an end to the #IAM132 movement. He noted that the new PRD mayor wanted to ingratiate himself with the new PRI president by maximizing the punishment against the movement.

Other writers confirmed that the old government practice—apprehend, torture, charge, prosecute and jail—was being repeated and reinforced, as was another process, the coming together of those who defend the right to peacefully demonstrate. The group that was about to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the Acteal Massacre suffered by their community, Las Abejas, at the hands of PRI paramilitaries showed its solidarity with those jailed in Mexico City. One of its members said of President Peña Nieto, “To us he’s like a soap opera character, a puppet who is manipulated by the powerful.”

A Fascist legal article

The #IAM132 Movement held its 12th national assembly in the National Anthropology Museum to analyze the situation in which it found itself. It endorsed the determination to continue being peaceful and to intensify the struggle for the liberation of all political prisoners. It conducted several actions to try to get Mexico City’s Legislative Assembly to repeal a city ordinance that forces unsentenced prisoners to spend many years in jail. Despite popular pressure to repeal this fascist legal article, the Legislative Assembly only agreed to a modification allowing prisoners to be released on bail when their lawyers request it. But the measure would not exonerate the prisoners even if there was no evidence against them, so they would still be considered guilty. Maintaining the crime for which they were falsely accused was a reissue of the crime of “social dissolution” used during the Cold War against those fighting for social change.

With a large part of society in solidarity with those arrested, the ones still in jail were finally set free after 27 days. Once released, they repudiated President Peña, his predecessor, President Calderon of the National Action Party (PAN), and Mexico City Mayor Mancera and his predecessor Marcelo Ebrard, both of the PRD. They showed that the oppressors had not succeeded in making them cave in and that they would continue the fight. The #IAM132 movement decided to keep fighting to secure their complete freedom and the repeal of the fascist article.

Peaceful, nonpartisan and pluralistic

Activists of the US Occupy and #IAM132 movements held a first meeting in January 2013 in which they planned to coordinate actions together with collectives of several other nations. The student movement also showed that it was open to joining with movements like the Zapatistas to learn their way of resistance.

In a press conference in mid-January the #IAM132 movement acknowledged that it was more vulnerable after what happened on December 1, which had forced it to stop its work releasing results of the referendum on labor reform due to the need to concentrate on freeing the arrested. It held its first national assembly of the year in Huexca, Morelos on January 19-20, which the invitation said would be a founding meeting. Those living in Huexca asked those attending the assembly to work together with the people and movements fighting the megaprojects that are stripping them of their land and to work on behalf of those being oppressed just like the young people of their movement.

At this assembly several hundred students from 11 states and 56 university campuses examined the conditions in the country since President Peña came to office. Self-critically they looked at ways of restructuring that gave more power to the local assemblies. They admitted they had stopped being a mass movement. They explored how the assemblies could become committees and again criticized the move towards centralism from the capital city since national circumstances lead to very different local expressions and there should be a more integral vision of the people and the country. To achieve this one needs to go to the local bases. And finally they reiterated the movement's characteristics: peaceful, nonpartisan and pluralistic.

With the "hard hand" policy

Peña

Nieto

comes

Subcomandante Marcos portrayed Peña in the following way in the Zapatista comunicués at the end of 2012:

"Isn't he the one who boasted about the police violence in San Salvador Atenco and, from his command position in the bathroom of la Ibero (the nickname for the Ibero-American University in Mexico City), forgetting he was in front of youthful critics and not on a TV set, haughtily slandered those who disagreed with him, thus sparking the student youth movement later known as #IAM132? Isn't he the one who, as his first governing act, now in cahoots with the PDR of Mexico City, ordered the repression of the demonstrations on December 1 that led to the detention, torture and incarceration of innocent people?"

Certainly the new federal government, in complicity with the government of Mexico City, wanted to make clear that protest would not be tolerated during his six-year term. The alternative magazine Desinformemonos (Let's Misinform Ourselves) believes Peña sent a clear message: the "hard hand" policy has arrived and the #IAM132 movement is its target.

Writer Luis Hernández analyzed the December 1 violence as having four aspects: the unusual and exaggerated show of police force, inept for deterrence activities; the great anger of large sectors of youth; the activity of small groups of anti-system activists that supported the #IAM132 movement to carry out exemplary actions; the infiltration of groups of provocateurs that perpetrated acts of violence to try to justify the repression.

Seven lessons of December 1

Juan Manuel Velázquez, a media specialist from the Jesuit University in Guadalajara, drew seven lessons from what happened.

1. In the lapse of time between the "bought" elections in July and Peña's inauguration on December 1, the number of youth who began to participate after previously not being interested in politics had grown, and many of them got involved in the #IAM132 movement. By the time Peña became President, the high point of the movement had already passed and many students had returned to their routines because neither the form nor the timetable had met their expectations. Therefore, the movement against the imposition of Peña didn't mature enough organizationally to maintain a powerful resistance and the movement's volunteer aspect wasn't strong enough to attract the millions who had mobilized before. Thus the correlation of forces on December 1 favored the powers-that-be and their imposed President.

2. The youth's protest actions showed courage and dignity and they were right. But the Peña

government could count on military tactics, infiltrators, provocateurs, institutions, spokespeople and jails.

3. The virtual social networks must critically evaluate themselves. They provided essential space for information, but at the same time provided space to propagate rumors. It's important to use the Internet as a powerful medium to bring people together but it has to be used wisely and with prudence and not for communicating detailed plans, actions, places and names of people.

4. The so-called leftist political parties function with political aspirations to obtain power quotas and economic resources. They know how to negotiate but not how to lead actions against the government. Thus, when the police attacked the young people, the main concern of these parties was how to distance themselves from the protestors.

5. The job of the mass media is to produce, reproduce and maintain power and thus they were constructing an image of legitimacy for this new President who had been imposed and will frantically delegitimize anyone who does not submit to this image.

6. Experience shows that the change Mexico needs won't come via the ballot box because the electoral institutions only answer to the power groups' interests.

7. Since the youth are up against repressive government, they must fight with skill, knowing that the change the country needs will be a long process.

PRI, PAN and PRD are all repressive

Since the #IAM132 movement began, it has confronted media bias and electoral corruption. The December 1 repression didn't just come from the PRI government. The self-defined leftist PRD was actively involved. And it was the PAN that prepared the repressive apparatus that led to the presidency going to Peña. Peña put Mondragón, who served under the PRD government of Ebrad in Mexico City, in charge of the police on December 1. The local police involved in the repression were commanded by the head of the outgoing PRD government, who in a few days would be replaced by someone else from the same party. The whole political class understands that the youth movement won't be easy prey for any party.

Many of those who voted for the PRD became very confused when they saw Mancera, whom they thought had been elected in an alternative and free vote, act in unison with a man who had become President through a massive vote-buying operation. They saw both parties carrying out violent and illegal repression and attacking human rights.

In Guadalajara the repression was carried out by local police controlled by the PRI and national forces in the hands of the PAN. Televisa and its national and local media allies launched a vicious smear campaign to discredit the #IAM132 movement across the country. But the hatred of this powerful oligarchic business grew when its ruse to co-opt members of the youth movement by offering them a TV program failed.

The power of the social networks

What was totally new in the context of this repression was what had animated the youth movement in the first place—the use of social networks. Both in Mexico City and in Guadalajara the involvement of provocateurs, the brutal police repression, the serious human rights violations and the innocence of those jailed were all extensively documented through videos and cell

phones and this evidence was widely disseminated on the Internet. This exposed the perpetrators and became an important element in the defense of those attacked.

The movement went from offering solidarity to receiving it. The #IAm132 movement was born in solidarity with those wronged in Atenco, then suffered firsthand the injustices of the political parties and media and now they have a new incentive to maintain the struggle. The protest against the humiliating treatment will be the trigger for new mobilizations.

There are new feelings and motives for their outrage. Despite internal differences, the repression and jail experience bolstered their feelings of solidarity, as expressed in the slogan "If they touch one, they touch us all."

They were not broken

Through repression the political class tried to either disintegrate the movement or at least oblige it to sit down at the negotiating table in an imbalanced dialogue. But the #IAm132 movement didn't fall into the trap. By keeping to their task of freeing those imprisoned, they took on their former work and restructured themselves as the sum of all the student and grassroots collectives. The powers-that-be wanted to finish off the movement. The revenge of Peña, Televisa and the political parties was crude and violent. But #IAm132 was not broken. It continues its quest.

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Mexico

The Zapatistas begin another stage and, as usual, make us think

*"Did you hear that? It's the sound of their world tumbling down. The sound of ours resurging. The day that was the day was night and night will be the day that will be day."** With this message Subcomandante Marcos, accompanied by thousands of indigenous people who symbolically took over five Chiapas cities, set the stage for Zapatismo's resurgence on the Mexican scene. It wasn't a day like any other; it was December 21, 2012, the day a new cycle of Mayan time began.

Jorge Alonso

**See the January 2011 issue of envío for Guatemalan anthropologist Ricardo Falla's analysis of the Mayan steles that refer to the end of a significant cycle in Mayan cosmology, in which there is a world return or reversal. As one Mayan put it, "It is our supreme ideology. What will fall will rise; what will rise, will fall. But it will not end. There have been plagues, wars, famines, droughts and conquests but everything eventually gives way to light and hope, newer beginnings and fresher eras." Marcos gave it a twist by saying that what previously was day in fact had been night for them and what had previously been night will be a real day.*

On December 21, 2012, the start of a new Mayan era, thousands of indigenous Zapatistas marching in silence symbolically took over five Chiapan cities. Subcomandante Marcos issued a brief statement that said: "Did you hear that? It's the sound of their world tumbling down. The sound of ours resurging. The day that was the day was night and night will be the day that will be day." Analyst Armando Bartra commented that with this powerful staged performance, the EZLN did a roll-call of those present in the socio-political alignments of the new Mexican President's term. In May 2011, 20,000 Zapatistas had come out to support the peace march. Now that number had more than doubled. Bartra's interpretation was that the message was

addressed to the new power. And he wondered out loud what other implications this terse message might hold. The questions started getting clearer a few days later.

Not absent, persistent

The EZLN ended 2012 with three press releases, issued during the inauguration of a seminar of reflection and analysis at the CIDECI-University of the Earth in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. In the media there was talk of a return, a Zapatista resurgence; that they had returned to talk. It was an erroneous perception because the Zapatistas have never been absent; their Good Government Juntas and Zapatista municipalities have published a large number of messages over the past two years. Rather than absence, persistence.

The first statement referred to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) elite and the second to Luis H. Alvarez, the National Action Party (PAN) candidate for President in the late 1950s then president of his party, and the official responsible for indigenous peoples in Calderón Sol's government. The third was dedicated to announcing how Zapatismo will behave.

The interior secretary of Enrique Peña Nieto's new government had boasted that the Zapatistas weren't familiar with the members of the new government and would be surprised by what the government would do with the original peoples. *Subcomandante* Marcos began the first press release commenting that the Zapatistas had thought the statement was a joke for December 28, Day of the Innocents, then proceeded to summarize the trajectories of the government's main members. Peña Nieto was a relative of Arturo Montiel, accused of lining his pockets when he ran the government of the state of Mexico. Peña himself was responsible for the repression at Atenco in which people died, women were sexually assaulted and other grave human rights violations were committed. He was also responsible, along with the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) government of the Federal District, for suppressing the #YoSoy132 (#Iam132) movement and was the electoral beneficiary of the media coup on July 1, 2012.

Who are these PRI politicians?

As for Emilio Chuayffet, the new education secretary, Marcos pointed out that when he headed domestic policy in the Zedillo government, he had at first accepted the San Andrés Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture signed in February 1996 as the result of the government-Zapatista talks, only to recant later on, claiming he was drunk when he did it. Those agreements were never honored by the government. Chuayffet was also one of the intellectual authors of the Acteal massacre in 1997.

Regarding the energy secretary, Pedro Joaquín Coldwell, it should not be forgotten that he was the peace commissioner in Chiapas when the Acteal massacre took place, and remained silent about it. Next Marcos accused Secretary of Social Development Rosario Robles, previously head of the Federal District government and PRD president, of selling out the PRD and suppressing UNAM students at the end of last century. Of Labor Secretary Alfredo Navarrete, Marcos said he covered up the murder of Carlos Salinas' brother and exonerated Montiel, governor of the state of Mexico, from accusations of responsibility for the police beating one man from Atenco so badly he died. And Marcos accused Miguel Angel Osorio, Secretary of the Interior, of diverting government funds to the PRI and having links with the Zetas.

Marcos noted that none of them had governed the country in their time, rather it was former President Salinas (PRI) who plundered the nation's wealth like no other, devastated the Mexican countryside and ordered the assassination of the PRI candidate in March 1994. The PRI members, said Marcos, were those who chose violence over dialog, resorted to force when they didn't have right on their side, refused to comply with the San Andrés Accords, made a school

out of corruption and baseness in all political parties and lacked any credibility. He reiterated that the Zapatistas were not the only ones who weren't scared of them and gave clues to how a true Zapatista could be recognized: they aren't afraid, don't ask for money from the three levels of government, don't seek positions, don't take themselves very seriously, don't give the feeling of saying more than what they keep quiet and don't sell themselves, surrender, or falter.

Calderón's bad government

Marcos reminded Luis H. Álvarez that the multitudinous silence of December 21 must have made it clear to him and Calderón's government that they were a bunch of losers. And he warned him: other governments had tried to put an end to the Zapatistas and others still will, always with the same results: a big failure. He threw it in Álvarez's face that he had let himself be deceived by people masquerading as Zapatistas, because true Zapatistas wouldn't go to a government of criminals to seek any kind of help. Marcos reproached him for having written in a book the lie that the Zapatistas had been in contact with the PAN. Marcos told him that the only proximity Calderón's government had ever had with any representatives of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) was through their armies, police officers, judges and paramilitaries. He blamed Álvarez for having been an accomplice of Calderón's government, the most criminal one endured by Mexico since the dictator Díaz. In response to all this, Zapatistas were punishing his disdain with their "silent and extended walk."

Marcos made it clear that Álvarez had failed in his attempt to buy the Zapatistas and force them to surrender. He said that in the history books of Zapatista schools they will read that Calderón's government is the one that carried absurd death to all corners of Mexico, offered injustice to victims and victimizers then left the Estela de Luz (Pillar of Light) monument as a bloody self-tribute to crime turned co-government.

Álvarez should learn that despite all the criminal activity of the government he served, the Zapatistas had not disappeared and if he had an interest in recovering some moments of the dignity he had when he was part of the Harmony and Peace Commission, he should walk away from his party and political class, "an insatiable parasite," and spend time with the Rarámuri indigenous people of Chihuahua to learn the basics of the indigenous heart, where dignity "combines in the present for the last half a millennium."

"We never left"

The third communiqué of the EZLN Indigenous Clandestine Revolutionary Committee's General Command is addressed to the Mexican people and the peoples and governments of the world. It starts by noting that on December 21 thousands of indigenous Zapatistas mobilized and took five municipal towns of Chiapas peacefully and in silence, and their message was not one of resignation, nor of war, death and destruction, but of struggle and resistance. It explains that after the media coup that extolled the "both poorly disguised and even more poorly made up ignorance" in the Executive Branch, the Zapatistas came out to let them know that if the PRI hasn't in fact left, neither have the Zapatistas.

The statement describes how six years ago a sector of the political and intellectual class (the PRD) wanted to blame the Zapatistas for its defeat, but what they were fighting for was justice for Atenco. This sector first slandered them then wanted to silence them. Because of its incapacity and dishonesty, this sector didn't want to see that it held the seed of ruin within itself. Six years later, two things have become obvious: this sector doesn't need the Zapatistas in order to fail, and the Zapatistas don't need this sector in order to survive.

“We live better now”

The entire media spectrum dedicated itself to making people believe the Zapatistas had gone. But it wasn't true. The indigenous Zapatistas are now reemerging on the public stage, having significantly improved their living conditions in the past few years. The text emphasizes that the standard of living in Zapatista communities is higher than that of the indigenous communities allied to the governments, which receive handouts they squander on alcohol and useless goods. The Zapatistas' homes improve without hurting Nature. In their villages, land that was previously used to fatten the cattle of rich farmers and landowners is now sown with corn, beans and vegetables. Zapatistas' work is doubly satisfying because it both provides them all that's necessary to live with dignity and contributes to the collective growth of their communities. Zapatista children go to schools where they are taught their own history, Mexico's and the world's, as well as the science and techniques needed to grow in stature without ceasing to be indigenous. Indigenous women are not sold as a commodity and indigenous people allied to the PRI go to Zapatista hospitals, clinics and laboratories because the government-run ones have no drugs, equipment or doctors.

The Zapatistas are happy that their culture is flourishing, not in isolation but enriched by contact with the cultures of other peoples of Mexico and the world. They govern and are governed by themselves, seeking consensus over confrontation. They have achieved all this not only without the government and its “sidekicks,” the political class and the media, but also resisting their attacks of every kind.

They announce six points

With their silence they made themselves present. And now, with their words, they were announcing six points in their third communiqué.

The National Indigenous Congress. The first point reaffirms their membership in this gathering space for the original peoples of Mexico.

The Lacandona Jungle Declaration. The second is that they will resume contact with those in Mexico and the world who observe this sixth declaration issued by the EZLN seven years ago.

Building bridges. The third lays out their intention to build the necessary bridges with social movements that have emerged and will emerge, not to direct or supplant, but rather to learn from them, their history, paths and destinations. In further explaining this point, they recount that they have gained support from individuals and groups in different parts of the country, formed as support teams for the Sixth (for that declaration) and “Internazional” (Z for Zapatista) Commissions so they can act as transmission belts between Zapatista support bases and individuals, groups and collectives belonging to the Sixth Commission, who retain their conviction and commitment to build an alternative, non-institutional Left.

Maintaining critical distance. The fourth point reaffirms the Zapatistas' critical distance from Mexico's political class, which has done nothing but prosper at the expense of the needs and hopes of the humble, ordinary people.

The bad governments' dilemma. The fifth point is directed to the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the bad federal, state and municipal governments and to the media that accompany them. The Zapatistas argue that, without exception, the bad governments from all

across the political spectrum have done everything they can to destroy the Zapatistas, buy them off and force them to surrender. All registered parties and all that aspire to register have attacked them militarily, politically, socially and ideologically. The mass media have tried to make them disappear, first with “servile and opportunist slander” and then “through sly and complicit silence.” The Zapatistas warn that those politicians they served and whose money fed them are no longer there, and those who have now taken over the mantle will last no longer than their predecessors, and made it clear that all these powers had failed.

They warned that the three constitutional powers (federal, state and municipal) need to make their minds up whether to venture once more into counterinsurgency policy, which only managed a weak simulation clumsily sustained by media management, or recognize and fulfill their commitments by raising indigenous rights and culture to a constitutional level as was set out in the San Andrés Accords, signed in 1996 but then not honored by the federal government, then led by the same party now returning to government.

They specifically turned their attention to the Chiapas state government and the dilemma it faces. On the one side the new administration could continue the corrupt, dishonest and vicious strategy of its predecessor: spending the taxes of the state’s population to enrich itself and its accomplices, barefacedly buying media voices and pens while plunging the people of Chiapas into misery, and using both police and paramilitaries to try to curb organizational progress in Zapatista villages. On the other, opting for truth and justice, it could accept and respect the Zapatistas’ existence, getting used to the idea that a new form of society is in full bloom in Zapatista territory and is attracting attention from honest people all over the planet.

Lastly, the Zapatistas addressed Chiapas’ municipal governments. These too are faced with the dilemma of continuing with the big lie that anti-Zapatista or supposedly Zapatista organizations are extorting money from them, or use their municipalities’ public resources better so as to improve the living conditions of those they govern.

In this same point the Zapatistas also addressed the Mexican people who only organize for electoral struggle, pointing out that they too are at a crossroads: either they see the Zapatistas as enemies or rivals on whom to take out their frustration for the frauds or they recognize another way of doing politics, with the Zapatistas.

From below and on the left. The sixth point states that in the coming days the EZLN, through its Sixth and “Internacional” Commissions, will be announcing a series of peaceful civic initiatives to continue walking together with the other original peoples of Mexico and the rest of the continent and also with those who, in Mexico and the world, resist and fight “from below and on the left.”

“We’re the same as 500 years ago”

This third communiqué concluded by recalling that the Zapatistas had once had “the blessings of honest, noble attention” from various media, for which they then thanked them, but that this has now been completely eliminated. They claim that those who wagered the Zapatistas only existed as a media phenomenon and, fenced in by lies and silence, would disappear were wrong. The Zapatistas still exist, without the cameras, microphones, pens, ears and eyes. They continue to exist despite being slandered and silenced. Their walk doesn’t depend on media impact, but on the world’s understanding and “the indigenous wisdom that governs their steps, [as well as] on an unshakable decision that gave dignity from below and on the left.” They announced that as of the end of 2012 they would begin to address their word to selected recipients and, except very occasionally, “would only be understood” by those who had walked and were walking

without surrendering to the media and situational trends. This is another resonance with Mayan beliefs as the Popol Vuh says that “only hiding his face is the reader of it.”

The Zapatistas said they’ve proved, despite a number of errors and many difficulties, that another way of doing politics is already a reality, even though they knew that very few would have the privilege of knowing and learning directly from it. If 19 years ago they surprised the world by taking cities with blood and fire, they have now done so again without weapons, death or destruction, thus marking the difference between themselves and those who, during their governments, distribute death among those they govern. The Zapatistas know they are “the same as 500 years ago, 44 years ago, 30 years ago, 20 years ago, only a few days ago,” that they are “the smallest ones, those who live, fight and die in the last corner of the homeland”, but without faltering, selling out or surrendering.

If Marcos doesn’t speak, does that mean the Zapatistas don’t exist?

As what has been said up till now by the Zapatista movement hasn’t been understood, there’s a need for many more details, both to contradict those expecting the Zapatistas to join an electoral front and those who want to accuse them of being against a supposedly progressive Left and playing the PRI’s game. Marcos published an irreverent cartoon as a playful but critical response to his detractors, especially those accusing him of following the logic of those in power. Later he released a long statement on the cartoon.

He recalled that on May 7, 2011, he had come out in support of the movement headed by the poet Javier Sicilia, which was covered in the media. Between then and December 21, 2012, the Good Government Juntas issued 27 public complaints, but because they were by indigenous Zapatistas without intermediaries, they were ignored. Marcos asked why the politicians and media say the EZLN doesn’t exist unless he speaks. It’s nothing less than racist to think that he is the only voice of Zapatismo, and when the Good Government Juntas issue statements, Zapatismo is treated as if it’s silent. Marcos emphasized that the world is round, spins, changes, but no matter how many times the world imposed by those up above spins, many people are always left at the bottom. The Zapatistas want a world where no one “is up above at the expense of those down below.”

“Fear is about to change sides”

The Zapatistas released 20 more communiqués between December and February. Marcos parodied those above, stating that it’s dangerous for them that collectives are coming together below that are saying NO to those above and YES to building their own destiny. He used a Mapuche word that means “we will overcome a hundred times.” He also released another drawing, dedicated to the thieving political class, that mocked the government for the act it put on at Las Margaritas ostensibly to end hunger in Mexico. He ridiculed the opening act of this “national crusade,” and advised the political class to go offer their alms elsewhere. He also did a playful but educational critique of the senselessness of capitalism giving alms to the unemployed and desperate this same capitalist system created. But the system’s raw material, “the plebeian crowd,” he warned, is rebelling. Marcos suggested that the Mexican political class is only doing a foreman’s bad duties for those who have the real power elsewhere. The political class is puzzled and frightened by the persistence of those below who never tire “in their task of building life.”

He stressed that the government’s social programs are a lie, aimed at wiping out indigenous peoples. He alluded to the surprise of the political class upon seeing thousands of Zapatistas

parading in silence and climbing up onto the podium, one by one, showing that they are all chiefs. He criticized the media for lying and representing repression as necessary to continue the order of those above. Fear, he said, is “about to change sides” and, while many of those below don’t yet know it, “they are part of a bigger ‘us’ that is about to be built.”

The Zapatistas expressed gratitude for the support received for imprisoned Zapatista base comrades and members. They demanded justice for the comrade who suffered serious injury in the December 1 suppression and demanded absolute freedom for those detained that day in Mexico City and Guadalajara for nothing more than protesting Peña’s imposition.

Capitalism “in extreme madness”

They announced that they have ended what was called The Other Campaign so they can continue, with some changes, what will be called the Sixth, no longer separating international aspects from Mexican ones, but rather treating them as a whole. They also announced other changes in how they are working. While they are clear about who they are, their place and what they are facing, clear about the NO, work needs to be done on the YES, on why, how, when and especially with whom they are struggling. They reiterated that their intention is not to build a big organization with a ruling center, that they aren’t in favor of centralized command with an individual or collegiate chief. They remain convinced that unity of action can only be achieved if each person’s way is respected. Any attempt at homogeneity is nothing more than a fascist attempt at domination.

The Zapatistas recalled the four wheels of capitalism: exploitation, dispossession, repression and contempt. They asserted that capitalism has reached a stage of extreme madness in its predatory pursuit and contempt for life and is on the way to eliminating humanity. To prevent this, those from below must destroy something else: the relationships that make it possible for someone to be above at the expense of having others below. The Zapatistas make fine distinctions: it’s not enough to criticize machismo, patriarchy and misogyny, because it’s very different to be a woman above than to be a woman below. By the same token, there is also one Left above and another Left below. There are a few “citizens” above and many others below.

“We want to change the world”

The Zapatistas confess that they have learned a lot since they proclaimed the Sixth Declaration. They realize that some people approached them for personal gain, so now they know with whom not to walk. What is now called simply “The Sixth” is a Zapatista summons that doesn’t seek to recruit, replace, subordinate or use, but does offer and demand respect. Belonging to it doesn’t involve affiliation, registration or a fee. They insist that those expecting their resurgence to produce large gatherings aren’t fit to continue walking with them, because the walk of the Sixth is “a long stride” that seeks not to change just the Mexican government but the world.

They reiterated that they will not ally with any electoral movement and from now on will communicate with those they trust in a discreet and secret manner, and will reveal some of the initiatives they have been maturing over the past few years in this way. They will battle, resist and struggle, accepting that the road will be more torturous and costly. Marcos announced that there will be a celebration in the Zapatista communities in August 2013, the tenth anniversary of the Good Government Juntas.

Against and avant-gardism

all

hegemony

In each of these press releases the Zapatistas were breaking away from those of all persuasions and positions who are above, giving many clues about what they understand as “us.” They said that looking is a way of asking and that what is looked at and from where is important. They aren’t with those who argue that the only choice is between the ballot box and arms and are distancing themselves from those who want to lead. Zapatistas accompany, listen to the few and never tell them what to do or not to do; their search is for “what can be.” They know the dictator isn’t defeated by a single thought and a single force. They understand that diversity and difference for those below is no weakness. They oppose all hegemony and avant-gardism, and don’t absorb or subordinate identity; instead emphasizing the bridges between “the different pains and various rebellions.”

They emphasize that those above haven’t known how to look and don’t understand them. The Zapatistas don’t want to recruit, direct, use or tell people what to do. They say they’re in the middle of their most daring initiative since the insurrection. The act of December 21 was important for the organization, a militant effort, a demonstration of force with the presence of young people and women. It was an act of people who went up onto the podium and, without speaking, said: “Here we are, this is who we are, who we will be, all of us are commanders.” And they didn’t look from above downward, but kept their gaze low, among themselves.

“We are little bits of time”

This is the profound meaning of a new way of doing politics. The Zapatistas are inviting us to recognize that something unexpected and new is in front of our eyes and we must look, listen, learn and be silent. And we must also know how to look afar, because “time comes from far away and continues on its path.” The Zapatistas are “little bits of time that make it walk, even though they don’t get to the end to see where it arrives.” Others will push it to get there.

The Zapatistas confess that they rely heavily on the libertarian media, on people, groups, collectives and organizations that have their own means of communication and give space to the Zapatista’s words in solidarity. Another form of issuing these latest Zapatista statements was to accompany them with a background of music and videos. In this new stage the Zapatistas wanted Marcos, their spokesman, to speak again with open texts but also with encrypted texts “for our people” exclusively. They are beginning a stage in which they are looking to those who are similar to them, knowing that doing so also exposes them to the gaze of the dictators who hate them, persecute them and want to attack them. Therefore, autonomy must be looked after and grown “well and quietly.”

Subcomandante Moisés speaks

Marcos announced that Subcomandante Moisés will also speak. While Marcos looks after the window, Moisés is in charge of the door that will be opened to those who want to learn from the Zapatistas’ experiences. Moisés was the one who delivered these 19 communiqués, and who announced that he and Marcos would take turns in the following deliveries.

Moisés recalled that original peoples have been used for centuries so that others might rise to power and once there, despise them, steal from them, exploit and repress them. But the Zapatistas are already in another time and are working to ensure this doesn’t happen again. The original peoples want to live good and want those who govern to be those who obey. Moisés criticized those who say they’re fighting for the people when what they seek is to direct them.

This is simply “climbing on other people’s back to get to the top.” Moisés announced they will fight alongside workers, peasants, youth, children, women and the elderly of Mexico and the world.

He explained their new way of working: those below must bring their thoughts together to learn and then work on them and organize them. We need to build something new, something that’s a people’s proposal, studied by the people and finally the decision of the people. He also explained what Zapatista democracy is like, how it is experienced in the autonomous municipal assemblies and assemblies that make up the Good Government Juntas. They make this democracy every workday in all the self-government bodies and together with the people, women and men who discuss, study, propose, analyze and finally decide.

“When the poor believe in the poor...”

Moisés emphasized that the poor know what they want as the best way to live and they know that to make the change it isn’t necessary to have someone else carrying out their campaign, saying that they will make the change. He called on the indigenous and non-indigenous poor to organize and join the fight by directing it themselves.

Moisés, who is in charge of the Zapatista door, described how neoliberals want to own the world and have underdeveloped capitalist governments as their foremen. This reality offers many reasons for uniting and giving birth to rebellion. The Zapatistas show how they face neoliberal capitalism day and night in their communities, with their autonomous governments. And their example demonstrates that this path is viable. The Zapatistas want to meet like-minded people, so they can get to know each other, learn from each other. They have been learning, with steps forwards and backwards, which they don’t hide. Moisés turned to this verse from the Salvadoran Mass: “When the poor believe in the poor then we can sing freedom.”

“It’s tiny now, but will be huge”

Moisés accepted that what the Zapatistas are doing is “tiny,” but that it will be very big for the poor of Mexico and elsewhere who need to build the world in which they want to live. The Zapatistas have always defended the principle of leading by obeying. For this reason, he pointed to the need to distinguish between people or groups that are in agreement and those that want to lead.

Moisés was encouraged by the fact that there’s light on the horizon of this new world being built by the world’s poor. For this reason, all those below need to look and listen to each other. He explained that what they need is organization, agreement, struggle, resistance, defense, practice, work and everything put forward by the other comrades who are getting closer to the Zapatistas. He invited people to agree on how the “little school” of struggle will be, where it won’t be possible to copy the classmate, where each person raises his or her own struggle and all comrades respect each other.

Notebooks of the Zapatista schools

The last section of the group of statements explaining the Zapatistas' new stage was reserved for comrades of the Sixth. It's part of the EZLN's particular correspondence through two spokesmen: Marcos and Moisés, following the guideline of serving and not making use of or replacing; of building, not ordering or imposing; of convincing; and of going down and not climbing. They have made, are making and will continue to make freedom.

The Zapatistas also shared fragments of course notebooks from Zapatista schools, which explain freedom according to the Zapatistas. The texts have been produced by men and women of the Zapatista support bases and express not only the stages of the fight for freedom, but also critical and self-critical reflections on steps already taken. They share how they see freedom and their struggles to gain, exercise and defend it. They offered to hold these courses for comrades of the Sixth.

Is the term “democracy” of any use?

Personally, I must confess that this new Zapatista stage has awakened a new search in me. Although the Zapatistas still speak of democracy, they are creating something new, different and better. I'd been insisting on identifying the democracy of those from below. But I now see that we must question the very term democracy, because it includes the element *kratos* (the ancient Greek word for power and strength), in which it somehow manages to have some who exercise it and a majority who obey. We need to neutralize that power and look for people's freedom to discern, dialog, discuss, debate and decide among everybody, where no one subjugates and no one allows him/herself to be subjugated. Now I'll start walking to identify not democracy but *demoeleuteria* (*eleuteria* is ancient Greek for liberty). The Zapatistas not only persist and resist. With new vigor they are changing worn-out experiences. They are innovating forms of resonance, convergence and libertarian autonomy, building a *demoeleuteria* from below.

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Mexico

Zapatismo is back and its messages are hitting a chord

The Zapatistas' return to the Mexican stage, with their numerous communiqués and the silent, ordered presence of their thousands of rank and file berating the bad governments, has hit a chord all over the country. Zapatismo is back, its return reviving hopes and encouraging alternative voices that are laying bare national and world injustices.

Jorge Alonso

The Zapatistas' first new communiqués were issued at the end of last year in the Third International Seminar called “Planet Earth, anti-systemic movements,” called by the Zapatistas and held in the Universidad de la Tierra in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. All the issues raised in that seminar were related by Gloria Muñoz in her alternative magazine *Desinformémonos* (Let's Get Disinformed).

From below and to the left

Muñoz stressed that voices from a dozen countries had been heard that were worthy of outlining alternative paths and instilling movements with hope, and that this call to action came from thinkers and battlers for social justice who identify themselves as from below and to the left. Another thing celebrated by the hundreds of participants in this third seminar, together with

thousands more who followed it on line, was the renewed energy of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN).

Thousands of people also celebrated the last night of 2012 and first sun of 2013 in cultural and sports activities organized by the Zapatistas to commemorate the 19th anniversary of their armed uprising in January 1994. One Zapatista leader predicted that there will be no more suffering and poverty for indigenous peoples in 2013 because they aren't going to allow it any more.

Years and decades of struggle

The participants shared their collective experiences of resistance, autonomy, forms of organization and struggles that are keeping alive the hope of building other possible worlds at a time in which the national, continental and global situation is viewed with concern and uncertainty.

Former Black Panther member Emory Douglas spoke about the segregation and resistance of US Afro-Americans and their search for solutions to the problems of segregation. He underscored the important participation of women, often outnumbering men in assemblies and community work.

A representative of New York's Movement for Justice in El Barrio, made up of 73 barrio committees, described how the Zapatista strategy had influenced his movement. He presented a video-message about the resistance processes undertaken in New York City, especially by Mexican migrants, one of whom reported that their struggle in the United States is also for a new calendar "below and to the left" that respects life time rather than money time.

Ivonne María Soto from Puerto Rico recounted her people's independence struggles and recalled that 19 years ago the Puerto Rican Workers' Revolutionary Party began sending letters to the EZLN, sharing their identification of a common enemy and suggesting the globalization of solidarity, exchanges of ideas and love for humanity.

Members of an Argentine anti-capitalist movement reported that it is still blocking roads to demand solutions to problems in the barrios and has experiences of an autonomous education.

Indigenous peoples...

Members of the Southern Cone's Mapuche people explained the collective process through which they learn not to lose their identity. In their ongoing struggle to recover lands, 150 Mapuche leaders have been tried and those jailed have responded to the repression with hunger strikes. Chilean health specialist Andrés Cuyul Soto, himself a Mapuche, described his people's health advances through the implementation of a different model than the official one.

A representative of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) self-critically argued that instead of abolishing the State, the indigenous movements actually buttressed it by entering into the electoral terrain, which is not theirs. He said it's no longer enough to resist; it's time to take rebellion a further step forward.

Salvador Campanur of the National Indigenous Council of Mexico (CNI) spoke about the autonomous community in the municipality of Cherán, in Michoacán. He praised the CNI as an arena where all indigenous peoples and nations willing to walk in autonomy, freedom and resistance can come together and reflect.

Also attending were representatives from Mexico's Wixaritari, who highlighted their defense against the mining companies in their sacred desert of Virikuta; the Yaquis, who defended their river against the National Action Party (PAN) government of Sonora; the Amuzgos of Suljaá, Guerrero, who said their voice is broadcast on Radio Nomndaá; the Assembly of Indigenous Peoples of the Isthmus in Defense of Land and Territory, who denounced abuses by the wind energy transnationals; and the Ikoot peoples of San Dionisio and San Francisco del Mar in southern Oaxaca, who are also defending their territory. The Nahuatl people of the Federal District thanked the EZLN for encouraging indigenous peoples to create the CNI and denounced the continuation of the government's policy of exploitation and robbery. A representative from Las Abejas of Acteal spoke of the need to resist, and Zapatistas from the Voice of Amate sent a greeting to the seminar from the San Cristóbal jail where they are imprisoned.

Feminists, writers, intellectuals...

Feminist Silvia Ribeiro denounced the imminent appropriation of Mexican maize by Monsanto and reminded the seminar that industrial agriculture emits 44-57% of the greenhouse effect gases, but only produces 30% of the world's food. She explained how maize isn't just a food; it is responsible for a set of relations essential to the subsistence of thousands of communities that have maize at the heart of their time, their culture and their life.

French economist Silvia Pérez described how the peasants of Africa, Asia and Europe are survivors of the extermination caused by transnational corporations and have the potential to build a more just society. Former Iranian diplomat Majid Rahnema told how he left his government post to live in a community in which he came to understand the importance of the place from which you see the world, since those above, whether from the right or the left, see people as objects, whereas from below one sees the power of life in each person. He acknowledged that he had learned from the "walk-asking-questions" method practiced by the Zapatistas.

Belgian sociologist François Houtart discussed the contradiction between the fall of a real productive economy and the rise of fictitious capital based on speculation and injustice that prevails in a world in which 20% of the population controls 83% of all existing wealth. All that remains to the excluded 80% is to organize and struggle for another possible world.

Historian Eric Baschet discerned possibilities of creating and expanding liberated spaces within capitalist society and pointed to the Zapatista autonomous municipalities as an important achievement and example.

Anthropologist Mercedes Olivera referred to the Zapatista marches at the end of last year and the new period of peoples' struggles in terms of the start of a new Mayan cycle, which implies a resurgence of life. Her colleague Xóchitl Leyva criticized cultural tourism's appropriation of the Maya cycle, highlighting the Zapatistas' interpretation as more in accord with the spirit of that calendar.

Writer Gustavo Esteva pointed out that even within the context of the crisis of capitalism, Mexico is in the midst of a social, political, economic, food and environmental disaster. He denounced the sale of 40% of the nation's territory to mining companies and the government's use of intercommunity conflicts as a cover for grabbing up Zapatista lands. Esteva, a self-defined "deprofessionalized intellectual" activist, founder of the Universidad de la Tierra in Oaxaca, and adviser to the EZLN in its negotiations with the government, charged the government with designing devious plans to reduce the Zapatista initiative to a strictly indigenous issue, when it

is in fact much broader.

Pablo Casanova, former rector of the Mexican National Autonomous University, said we have the opportunity to organize an immense worldwide network of collectives in defense of territory and the planet. His take on the crisis the world is facing is that it's not cyclical and neither short nor long, but is broad-spectrum, comes from the very roots of capitalism and is jeopardizing the planet's survival. He envisions the alternatives as forms of human emancipation that will be peaceful projects of democracy and autonomy.

Philosophers Luis Villoro and Fernanda Navarro held up the Zapatistas as a great lesson and described them as inciting us to build a world in which every living thing is loved and respected.

Dozens of important Mexican academics backed the Zapatista demands in a public letter talking of difficult times ahead for Mexico because the national territory has been given over to huge corporations to develop mega-projects that are destroying the indigenous peoples and because of the hard blow represented by the recent labor reforms.

Is Zapatismo still a major referent?

Although the reliability of polls in Mexico took a serious hit after the presidential elections last year, they do offer clues to the intentions of both the polling firms and some surveyed sectors. For example, the way Parametría reported the results of its nationwide poll on the Zapatistas' silent marches and communiqués attempted to show that Mexicans "have left the Zapatista movement in the past." But this doesn't even square with its own data, as 44% of those polled think it isn't outdated, and only 37% think of it as something from the past.

What Parametría should have reported is that only a third of those polled were aware of the EZLN's "reappearance" and over half are as yet unaware of the motives of its recent demonstrations. The poll confirmed that 64% know the EZLN still exists and 72% have heard Subcomandante Marcos speak at some time.

Alluding to this poll, analyst Massimo Modonesi suggested that militant youth have entered a new stage in which Zapatismo is no longer the main referent. He believes that Zapatismo has been downsized, reducing itself to the indigenous dimension and abandoning the vast urban, particularly student spheres in which it was firmly inserted in the past. He concludes that youth, urban and civil Zapatismo has either disappeared or been reduced to a minimum expression. But to really appreciate the continuing impact of Zapatismo on the youth sectors, we'll have to see what happens starting in August when the new "Zapatista School" opens its doors.

In contrast to Modonesi's take on events, researcher Neil Harvey reported that the recent silent marches of thousands of Zapatistas had demonstrated the EZLN's organizational capacity and political presence (see the March 2013 issue of envío for coverage of this new stage of activity). He also observed the freshness in their rank and file, with the participation of new cadres of young men and women who have grown up and become activists despite so many aggressions against the autonomous communities. Harvey stressed that the government has tried to divide, coopt and repress, yet the Zapatista marches are peaceful responses to its armed aggression and demonstrate the Zapatistas' great social strength.

A 90-year-old student in the new Zapatista School

Dozens of Zapatista supporters from the San Marcos Avilés ejido have suffered threats, harassment and forced evictions since 2010 for building the first autonomous school on that communal land. In February they were again threatened with forced eviction by Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), Green Party and Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) activists who were aggressively demanding that they pay a land use tax. The Zapatistas argue that they see no reason to pay taxes because they receive nothing from the government. When the threats continued, the Good Government Junta of Oventic issued a communiqué recapitulating the aggressions against San Marcos Avilés just in the past two years: robberies, destruction of crops, land evictions, aggression against individuals...

The increased wave of violence against the Zapatista communities has not halted preparations for opening the “Zapatista School” in August. Ninety-year-old Pablo González Casanova announced that he plans to attend. He said that the Zapatistas have been tutoring him in an extended and fruitful post-doctorate study from which he has learned so much.

“Good news”

Bishop Raúl Vera, referring to the new Zapatista communiqués, said the indigenous project represents an alternative to the failure of neoliberal capitalism, which has taken Mexico to greater levels of poverty, misery and inequality, particularly among the indigenous peoples. He urged the Mexican State to raise the San Andrés Agreements to constitutional rank to benefit all indigenous Mexicans.

Dominican priest Gonzalo Ituarte, who was vicar of the San Cristóbal diocese when the EZLN uprising took place, called the recent communiqués signed by Subcomandante Marcos “good news” that encourage many to speak out about the country’s situation. Recognizing errors and difficulties, the Zapatistas want to build new bridges with others who are also seeking different formulations and platforms for transforming the system.

The new governor of Chiapas accepted that the San Andrés Agreements on indigenous rights and culture must be fulfilled and has pledged his government to respect Zapatista lands and recognize their right to resistance and self-determination. He promised to work to resolve the tense situation in the Zapatista communities of San Marcos Avilés and Comandante Abel. He also called for Alberto Patishtán’s quick release of from prison. The Zapatista campaign to free its nine political prisoners, Patishtán among them, has intensified in 2013.

The Patishtán case

Alberto Patishtán Gómez’s case is paradigmatic. A Tzotzil Mayan teacher from the town of El Bosque in Los Altos, Chiapas, he was arbitrarily jailed in 2000 as a warning to others struggling for social justice, and has since been victim to an array of further injustices. His innocence has been proved and the government knows it, but it has refused to release him. To pull the plug on demonstrations demanding his release, he was even sent to a prison over a thousand miles from his community. In February 2012, Patishtán won a suit to be returned to his community, but the authorities refused to obey the judge’s order.

Patishtán has challenged the Supreme Court ruling ordering the release of those accused of the Acteal massacre while keeping innocent people imprisoned. This March, Patishtán asked God to enlighten the Supreme Court justices so they would be guided by truth and help free him. But the next month the Supreme Court reconfirmed its arbitrariness by freeing still others implicated in the Acteal massacre.

In addition, the indigenous people convicted of that crime, some of whom had even confessed yet have been free since 2009, are now returning to their communities, contravening agreements and official declarations that they would be relocated elsewhere. Their reinsertion is not only an affront to the victims, but also once again endangers the victims' surviving relatives, not to mention the region's unstable peace. Despite being considered one of Mexico's worst ever massacres, neither its intellectual nor its material authors have been sentenced. Bishop Arizmendi charged that in the Acteal case the Court had concerned itself only with legality, not with justice, in evident contrast with Patishtán's case, which is legally flawed and affects an innocent man, yet the Court refuses to order his release.

European collectives have expressed their solidarity with Patishtán's cause and written to him to say that independent of the Court's ruling, they know the authorities want him in prison because his heart was born rebellious, indigenous and poor. Another important international as well as national effort to secure his freedom took place in April, when some 6.000 letters demanding his release were sent to the appropriate authorities while 15,000 marched in the capital of Chiapas to demand justice.

A crusade against hunger or a "lack of moral compass"?

Meanwhile, on January 21, President Peña Nieto officially unveiled what he dubbed a "National Crusade against Hunger" in Las Margaritas, Chiapas, pompously announcing it would massively reduce malnutrition, poverty and social marginalization.

Journalist Luis Hernández saw Peña Nieto's decision to launch his paternalistic program in a place so symbolic for the Zapatista struggle as a sign of the PRI government's arrogance and "lack of moral compass" to resolve the conflict with the EZLN. Las Margaritas is the community in which the Zapatistas initiated their uprising on January 1, 1994.

The Zapatistas mocked the official act's terrible choreography while the organized civil society of Las Abejas criticized the crusade by stating that those who live off the land are free while those who live from the government's handouts are slaves. They also reminded the government that they have a memory and aren't oblivious to the fact that Emilio Chauyffet, who together with President Zedillo masterminded the Acteal massacre, has a post in Peña Nieto's new government.

The indigenous people mobilized in defense of Patishtán argued that Peña Nieto's crusade isn't against hunger but against the hungry. They defiantly insisted that they don't want the crumbs the government throws their way to quiet its conscience. What indigenous peoples and peasants are hungry for, they argued, is truth and justice in the Acteal and Patishtán cases, as well as compliance with the San Andrés Agreements.

Is the government apple poisoned?

Magdalena Gómez, a specialist in indigenous law, applauded Zapatismo's peaceful presence with its great symbolic weight. Her analysis of the reaction to its communiqués stressed the importance that those below are receptive to and open to dialogue with Zapatismo. She also warned of the initiation of a governmental strategy which beneath its benevolent discourse represents a virtual poisoned apple aimed at the EZLN. She explained that the national crusade against hunger must be seen in that light.

The federal government has also appointed a commissioner for dialogue with indigenous

peoples, who would not have returned to the center of national debate were it not for last December's Zapatista mobilization. For its part, the legislative branch named the members of the commission to dialogue specifically with the EZLN in line with the existing Law for Dialogue, Concertation and Dignified Peace in Chiapas so it can collaborate with the federal commission.

At bottom, however, the federal commission violated the objective of that law, whose first article defines the EZLN's status and establishes its objective as establishing the legal underpinnings that will encourage dialogue and conciliation to achieve a concord and pacification agreement that provides a fair, dignified and lasting solution to the armed conflict that began in 1994. The law specifies that it understands the EZLN to be the group of mainly indigenous people who identify themselves as an organization of Mexican citizens who are upset for diverse reason and thus got involved in the conflict.

Magdalena Gómez charged that the new commission wasn't a product of legislative agreement and only duplicates the functions of the former official indigenist authority. She believes its real aim is to continue its policy of giving money to some indigenous groups to divide them rather than resolve the underlying problems.

Building bridges

The new Zapatista proposal to "build bridges" was well received by leaders of peasant organizations and indigenous representatives. They all agree they have more in common with the Zapatistas than differences, since the government is operating with a close-minded charity vision, indifferent to the rights of the poorest indigenous peoples and peasants.

The Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity, headed by poet Javier Sicilia, backed the EZLN and expressed its desire to continue walking alongside the Zapatistas. Like the Zapatistas, that movement's members have seen in their painful travels through Mexico how this world is falling apart. The movement thanked the Zapatistas for having shown the world that morality, ethics and truth are the most powerful tools for building a world with peace, justice, dignity and democracy.

The #IAM132 movement also responded happily to the Zapatista invitation to walk together with other movements, as did a sex workers' collective that calls itself the Street Brigade. The collective praised the Zapatistas' dignified example and said their courage is inscribed in the heart of its members.

Seeds of civilizing change

Ethno-ecologist Víctor Toledo commented on the current breakdown of industrial civilization, which is sustained by competition, markets utterly dominated by capitalist logic, the predominant use of fossil fuels and science and technology as instruments of control and power. Whereas the reigning model destroys nature and exploits human labor, he sees Zapatismo as affirming local and regional self-management in concrete territories and thus demonstrating how to get away from capitalism.

The experience is not limited to the Zapatista region. Toledo has detected autonomous processes in 16 other Mexican regions that, while not explicitly political, function with similar values. He insists that change won't come through either the ballot box or arms; representative democracy has become inoperative due to the deterioration, corruption and inefficacy of the institutions and violence isn't a viable option given the gigantic military power of States. Only

social or civic power exercised in territories, first on a small scale and later expanded by the joining together of geopolitical spaces, will achieve the needed transformation. And in Mexico Zapatismo represents the seeds of such civilizing change.

What they're teaching us

Rafael Sandoval, who specializes in Zapatismo, enumerated the elements he considers relevant in the comunicués: 1) The Zapatistas have no cult to the dead but rather to life; 2) They are not getting caught up in the dilemma between electoral struggle and armed struggle; 3) They are not selling out to those at the top, nor do they accept State handouts or aid; 4) The leaders are invisible because they are everyone; 5) They live better than those who submit to the state programs; 6) They build schools, clinics, hospitals and housing; 7) They have been able to lower crime rates and wipe out alcoholism; 8) They have prohibited the production, distribution or consumption of narcotics; and 9) they recognize themselves as part of a bigger "we" still to be constructed.

According to Sandoval, the Zapatista comunicués raise the following questions: Why are things as they are? Could they be otherwise? How do we imagine this other way, this other society, in fact this other world we want and need? What must be done? And with whom?

What they've learned

Sandoval also observes that in these past seven years the Zapatistas have learned a lot and come to realize that they have to change the rhythm and speed with which they are moving, as well as change company. In this regard, they've made it known that they remember who was where and when, what was said and done, or not said and undone, what was written, what erased. They explain that their invitation doesn't mean uniting, directing, coopting, recruiting, supplanting, imitating, simulating, deceiving, subordinating or using.

He values the heterogeneity and autonomy of the different ways in which the Zapatistas move forward. They have concluded The Other Campaign. The territory of their action will now be the Planet Earth. Now, after the recent comunicués, being part of "The Sixth"—their shorthand for the new vision contained in their Sixth Declaration—doesn't require affiliation, dues, or signing up to be on the list. There will be no huge concentrations. The Sixth will move with a "long stride." They won't ally with any electoral movement, and will reject any attempt at hegemony and vanguardism.

Sandoval criticized efforts in the Mexican Left to push the EZLN to adopt a policy of alliances in the traditional way politics is done, even though the Zapatistas have time and again urged the forming of a Left below and to the left, outside the State and away from capital.

The Zapatistas emerged stronger from the government's military and social encirclement and annihilation policy. They continue teaching us that there are other ways of doing politics that don't revolve around occupying state institutions, but rather around autonomy as a daily practice.

Going forward in silence

Meanwhile, Mexico's "below" is expressed in hundreds of environmental conflicts, a multiplication of community police, teacher mobilizations against the privatizing educational reform and worker demands for a change of economic course because the current one is a disaster.

Some think that because Zapatismo isn't in the media or in the discussions of those above, it no longer has influence and is disappearing. But in this silent walk with those below, exchanging experiences, jointly and subterraneously coming to understand the creation of something new, Zapatismo is taking important steps towards building alternatives.

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Mexico

A resounding NO to the PRI's education reform

President Peña Nieto's education reform bill, passed in December 2012, amends the Constitution. In February 2013, the day after the law was promulgated, President Peña Nieto ordered the arrest of Elba Esther Gordillo, the teachers' union leader, not for her corruption but because she was a hindrance to implementation of the reform. But massive protests by independent teachers across the country are proving to be a greater obstacle to implementing this elitist privatizing reform.

Jorge Alonso

Most primary and secondary education teachers in Mexico belong to the National Education Workers' Union (SNTE), which is the largest union not only in Mexico but in all Latin America. The Ministry of Education estimates the union has 1.2 million members.

Corrupt despotic control

In the 1950s the SNTE was corporatized and integrated as a fundamental part of the governing party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Ever since, SNTE leaders have been called "charros" (cowboys), which is Mexican slang for union leaders imposed by the government. As primary education spread through the country, having the teachers' organization depend on the governing party was crucial for organizing elections and ensuring the fraudulent tactics that characterized them, keeping the PRI in office for an unbroken 70 years.

The SNTE has also harbored teachers who have struggled for union independence. In the 1980s they grouped into the National Coordinator of Education Workers (CNTE). From 1972 to 1989 Carlos Jonguitud Barrios led the SNTE, acting as a kind of despot. Once he was no longer useful to the neoliberal modernization that President Carlos Salinas imposed on the country—and that teachers strongly demonstrated their dissatisfaction with—the government removed him from office and put Elba Esther Gordillo, a teacher, in his place. She finessed the tyrannical and corrupt control of her predecessor, who had promoted her ascent in positions within the union structure.

There's no transparency in reporting the amount of union fees collected, but based on the fact that Mexico's teachers pay 1% of their salary to the union, inferential estimates have been made that the SNTE receives 1.44 billion pesos a year (about US\$111 million) from membership fees alone. To this must be added millions of pesos from state governors and several million more in federal funds through various programs. Gordillo controlled all this money for years, triangulating it to amass a huge personal fortune.

The rise of Elba Esther Gordillo

Soon she wasn't content with arbitrarily handling the union; she also used it to obtain political positions. She became a representative then a senator, headed up a Federal District delegation and directed a grassroots sector of the PRI.

Gordillo was the PRI General Secretary when that party finally lost the presidential election in 2000 to National Action Party (PAN) candidate Vicente Fox so she quickly made friends with Fox's wife. Although the law prohibited the registration of any union party, she managed to found a teacher-based political party for her family and friends, controlling its resources.

Gordillo supported PAN candidate Felipe Calderón in the 2006 federal elections and put pressure on PRI governors to electorally back and manipulate his strongly questioned election. The alliance with PAN worked well for her, as one of her sons-in-law was made under secretary for basic education and friends were put in charge of important state offices

The SNTE made Gordillo its president for life in 2007 and gave her the power to appoint sectional general secretaries. With the huge resources of the teachers' union she supported electoral candidates in every part of the country and furthermore flaunted an expensive lifestyle filled with luxuries.

And the fall of Elba Esther Gordillo

Gordillo believed herself personally untouchable and saw her union in the same way because politicians who owed her many favors and whom she had supported with money always came to her defense. But she had also made many enemies in her career and aggravated a lot of PRI supporters. When the PRI's presidential candidate Peña Nieto wanted to make an alliance with the New Alliance Party (PANAL)—which she controlled—to finance his heavily media-backed election, strong opposition in the PRI prevented it. She overestimated her closeness to Peña Nieto and expected dividends in the distribution of Ministry of Education posts. Nonetheless, with the PRI's return to the presidency in 2012 she lost everything PAN had given her. She was left only with the party she ran like a family and with the union's reserves.

Back in power, the PRI calculated that its plans for education reform couldn't go forward with Gordillo leading the teachers' union so, within the first 100 days of the new government, she was arrested and imprisoned. Peña Nieto's government warned her clique of followers that it had complete files on each of them so if they came out on the streets to protest her arrest, they would land in jail too. The once-powerful union leader was abandoned, which put an end to her shenanigans.

“Wuthering Heights”

The writer and education specialist Luis Hernández has described this episode as “a Mexican Wuthering Heights” since the relationship between the teacher and President Peña Nieto added up to stories of spite, deception, reconciliation and even betrayal.

Gordillo had already backed the neoliberal education reform plans in two six-year PAN terms, but the new President also needed to gain legitimacy by opposing her abominable reputation.

Furthermore, he needed to send a warning to those who opposed these reforms. Peña defended Gordillo's imprisonment as strictly legal, arguing that the union's resources belonged to the members and not their leaders.

Neither for justice nor for ethics

The writer Adolfo Sánchez Rebolledo described Gordillo as a disgraceful and indefensible figure. She had forged her leadership in negotiations where the interests of the workers weren't important, only those of the powerful, and had sold her services to the highest bidder, charging high rates with impunity and blatant corruption. She was imprisoned as a result of research that was always available to the government but was used at this time not through a desire for justice but to settle internal scores.

Bishop Raúl Vera said she was imprisoned because non-acceptance of the education reforms would have caused many problems. The government charged her more for lack of loyalty than to ethically right her immense corruption. This becomes clear when we compare Gordillo with an oil union leader who also flaunts goods and trips way about his income level, but makes a show of obedience to President Peña Nieto.

The Catholic priest Alejandro Solalinde said Gordillo's imprisonment didn't mean the PRI would eschew maintaining the teachers' despotic leadership. And in fact the government replaced her as union president with Juan Díaz de la Torre, who had been her right-hand man, but it was made clear to him that he had to toe the government line. Dissident teachers criticized and opposed this new imposition and demanded that the case of the murder of one of their own, allegedly masterminded by Gordillo, be reopened.

No to the reform

Peña Nieto's education reform goes hand in hand with neoliberal labor reform legislation put together by the PAN, which labor law specialists point out is reversing workers' gains. Neither party wants to see democratic unions; what they want are unions that protect business and leave workers defenseless.

In January of this year the teachers' union backed the presentation of thousands of appeals for protection against the labor reform. In that same month the federal government began an intense media campaign to "sell" the education bill. For example, the education minister declared that the State would reassume its leadership role because education is the property of society, not of a group.

In early March, once the educational reform was promulgated as law, dissident teachers organized a mass march to demand its repeal as well as the dismissal of the new unelected leader. They also announced they were considering how to sue Gordillo for the theft of union fees for 24 years.

Without an education plan

Independent analysts have pointed out that the reform contains no explicit education plan, in fact no indication of where it's heading pedagogically or how to resolve education's main problems. It gives no clue how to stop the enormous inequality and deficiencies in education.

They've stressed that it doesn't actually reform education but is instead a disguised labor and administrative reform that affects the teaching profession. It gives teachers no role in defining the education plan but does contain mechanisms for politically controlling them, via a standardized assessment system usable for that purpose.

Massive teacher demonstrations

Late March saw huge demonstrations against the reform in various Mexican states. The teachers took over the highway to Acapulco for nine hours at the start of the Easter vacation, which forced the governor of Guerrero to begin negotiations. That resulted in an agreement to amend the education law in that state, but once Easter week was over the governor and the local congress ignored what had been agreed. In response the teachers took over the highway again and this time were repressed by the police. But rather than putting an end to the movement, it only made it larger.

Oaxaca businessmen demanded that the governor take a hard line with the dissident teachers. The President declared that no amount of demonstrating would stop the education reform from being implemented and that it would mark Mexico's course. Just as in the case of Atenco, Peña Nieto took over the reins of police repression.

The campaign is a lie and the bill is privatizing

The dissident teachers denounced the government campaign in favor of the education reform as a lie. Although its advocates talked about respect for teachers' rights, in reality teachers went from job stability to job uncertainty as both their income and their tenure will be totally dependent on assessment results.

The government propaganda denies that there is any desire to privatize education, but the dissidents pointed out how the reform will legalize school fees and allow the entry of private companies into schools, undermining the constitutional concept of free public education. While the government blames teachers for the low quality of education, the dissidents argue that the reform doesn't address the socio-cultural factors that determine school life and its results, criticize the erratic policies of recent years or seriously evaluate the shortcomings of standardized testing. Nor does it examine the ravages caused by neoliberal policies in the students' family environment.

The dissidents warned that they won't permit the government to act on its irreversible decision to implement the legislation without compromise. They denounced the PRI's return because it has brought with it the old, stagnant authoritarian style of presidency.

The problems with the proposed assessment

The dissident teachers also charged that the education reform had been dictated by economic bureaus unfamiliar with Mexican reality. They emphasized that it lacks equitable assessment criteria for teachers, describing it as regressive. Francisco Bravo, general secretary of Local 9 in the Federal district, which is aligned with the CNTE, said, "We've always insisted that teachers

don't oppose evaluation or the idea that the best should be chosen for the teaching career, but you can't simply disqualify everything we do in the classroom without knowing the conditions we face and our educational achievements, even if these things aren't reflected in standardized tests."

Dr. John M. Ackerman, a legal expert and professor at the Institute of Legal Research of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, says it's a "vile lie" that teachers reject assessment. What they propose is ongoing democratic, formative, systematic and comprehensive assessment. Rather elegantly he threw down the challenge that all journalists, politicians and businessmen who have launched a rabid crusade against teachers undergo an assessment like the one proposed for the dissident teachers. He suggested that many of the promoters of these hate campaigns would have difficulty passing a rigorous assessment of their performance in their own field.

A grassroots movement is born

The teachers' protests have particularly grown in intensity in the country's poorest states. Thousands of teachers, students, parents, community police, farmers and other citizens in Guerrero organized the Guerrero Grassroots Movement and marched to protest the education reform.

Observers reported that it was no longer like the many other teachers' movements and that grassroots unrest was growing as never before. This movement called for the establishment of a grassroots assembly to draw up a plan of action. The government, repeating the model that reemerged last December 1 when it violently repressed the youth movement, used agents provocateurs to infiltrate the teachers' movement demonstrations and incite events making members criminally liable.

Dissatisfaction was also being converted into organization in other states. On the legal front, the teachers' struggle got federal judges to suspend dozens of teachers from possible dismissal based on the assessment. Lawsuits for constitutional protection were multiplying and by mid-March had reached 350,000. Three federal judges threw out 2,000 such suits culled from more than 200,000 against the reform filed by teachers because a new law that went into effect on April 3 made this legal recourse inadmissible for use against constitutional reforms. Other judges, however, granted it in other suits while lawyers for the teachers whose suits had been thrown out challenged that contrary ruling. In a rally in front of the Supreme Court dissident teachers demanded that it rule on the suits for protection against the educational reform.

Education isn't a business

Independent unions marching on May 1, International Workers' Day, demanded that the government stop attacking workers; repeal the labor and education laws and change the course of the country's economy. Dissident teachers demanded a stop to physical, penal and psychological repression.

When the teachers agreed to dialogue with the government, their negotiating commission offered an alternative proposal: repeal the constitutional reform established by the education law and engage in national grassroots debate forums in which students, teachers, parents and education experts participate together.

They disagreed with a reform advocated by the political class that was reduced to administrative

and labor measures injurious to education workers. They rejected the concept of schools copying a business structure and climate, as the legislation proposes, whereby education would be the responsibility of a charismatic manager who “manages” a group of employees (teachers) and guarantees customers (students and parents) a good quality service.

The teachers’ proposal argues that teaching requires classroom autonomy and pluralistic education from the bottom up; respecting that it be for everyone, at all levels; restoring seasoned and modern teaching methods in the study plans and programs to provide a three-dimensional expansive education.

For an autonomous union

The dissident teachers put forward something that PAN had promised in the 2000 presidential elections: democratization of the entire union structure. But, when it came into power, PAN had made alliances with the worst of them instead of fulfilling its promise to end corporate and corrupt unions. It even allowed for the increase in Gordillo’s economic and political power. Now the PRI had removed her to impose another who had participated in her corrupt dealings. The dissident teachers insisted on something consistent with their original proposals, which have been denied them but are as basic as the right to freely elect their union representatives.

The government-imposed teachers’ leadership met with the Employers’ Confederation of the Mexican Republic and expressed their agreement with the education reform. Declaring that Mexico had an extraordinary opportunity to make fundamental changes, they pledged to support the reform’s secondary laws.

In the US they also have standardized tests

In May, groups of dissident teachers demonstrated in the Mexican capital rejecting the visit of US President Obama, whom they described as a representative of the world oligarchy and main promoter of neoliberalism and its structural reforms.

There’s also been an uprising of students, parents and teachers against educational reform and the standardized tests it proposes in the United States. The multinational Pearson Foundation was among those most alarmed by the rebellion because it designed and administered the reforms and has benefited from them.

A distinguished professor emeritus of education sent an open letter to President Obama pointing out that the reform was being repudiated because it transfers the education sector’s public goods, including facilities, to private administrators, stifles teachers’ collective and independent voice and reduces education to being measured only by standardized tests. In his letter he states that there’s no objective evidence that this reform leads to improved education. He also criticizes the assumption that schools should be like a business run by a CEO, with teachers as workers and students as the raw material. And he asked Obama to remember that opponents of this kind of reform conceive of education as a fundamental human right, not a product. Meanwhile, James C. Scott, a renowned researcher at Yale University, has defined standardized assessments as one of the specific causes of the decline in education in the United States.

**“Televisa
teachers make us wise!”**

stultifies,

Protests against the education law in Mexico have continued to increase. In mid-May thousands of teachers went out onto the streets to demand that the government not impose a teaching model that hasn't been consulted with society or teachers. They claimed that the education law responds only to the economic and ideological interests of national and foreign business sectors.

A Michoacan teacher marched barefoot carrying a placard on his chest in which he suggested that the assessment begin with President Peña Nieto, who doesn't read books and doesn't know the name of some state capitals in his own country. Another rural teacher declared that he would like legislators who don't even lift a finger from their comfortable armchairs to go out into the Mexican countryside and see the efforts teachers make to teach children from families living in poverty.

When the protestors passed in front of the Televisa facilities the teachers chanted “Televisa stultifies, teachers make us wise!” They called on the media corporation to respect the right to reply because they wanted to respond to all the slander it spreads against the teachers' movement.

During the second half of May both the marches and the negotiating with the government continued to prevent the elitist, exclusionary reform and the commodification of public education. The protesting teachers warned that they haven't ruled out a national strike if agreements aren't signed.

Most of the media, led by the TV stations, intensified their campaign demanding that the State repress the dissident teachers, whom they depict as vandals and a destructive enemy within. The media is denigrating the dissidents' educational work because they are daring to reject a law they weren't consulted about and that belittles their professional activity. The media's campaigns not only didn't deter the protesters but further encouraged them.

**A
without decent wages**

teaching

profession

In an article titled “With the teachers,” Dr. Ackerman contested the media barrage, congratulated the new social movement and emphasized that basic education teachers don't earn decent wages in line with the enormous importance of their work for society. The 8,000 pesos (US\$640) they receive a month isn't enough to support their families, yet instead of demanding a wage increase, they've set aside their own needs and launched a movement for a real improvement in public education and in the classrooms, which have serious maintenance problems.

One of their demands is to legally establish that 6% of the gross domestic product be used for construction, maintenance, equipment, furniture, teaching materials, utilities and the other educational service needs. Ackerman stressed that this demand meets international standards on the subject and recalled that Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development statistic show that Mexico only invests 5.3% of its GDP in public primary and secondary education, 3.3% below what Ghana, Bolivia or Jamaica invest and 8.6% below what Cuba invests.

Another demand by the teachers concerns the requirement to increase the number of basic posts that should be assigned to graduates from public teacher training schools.

Marches and forums

The teachers' rebellion got the education authority to agree to the holding of nine regional analysis forums and one national forum throughout the country over a two-and-a-half month period. These forums offered in-depth analyses, formulated viable proposals and provided valuable examples of other ways to educate and evaluate.

The dissident teachers conducted the forums while continuing with constant demonstrations demanding repeal of the amendments to articles 3 and 73 of the Constitution, and calling for a national consultation to promote a new education plan for Mexico. Their movement has argued that it has the right to dissent, to disobey bad laws and to not apply programs leading to illiteracy. It argues that it isn't just capricious rejection but has proof and arguments to show that the reform is tainted by business and privatization. Teachers feel offended, undervalued and even insulted by the law.

Everyone the "Enlace" test

against

In June, teachers from several states rejected the National Assessment of Academic Achievement in Educational Centers (Enlace) test on the eve of its implementation because it promotes an unjust and anti-pedagogical model for assessing teachers, doesn't integrate the real contexts in which children develop, promotes a homogenization process in order to mechanize society to serve the market and hinders critical thinking. They warned that punishing, threatening and sanctioning teachers would have counter-productive results because achieving real change requires changing the structures that have weakened Mexican education. Using this test to measure the teachers' work will lead to them neglecting the knowledge required to face life's challenges.

Some people note that not taking the country's different realities into account implies discriminating against indigenous peoples. This kind of test, it is argued, foments a fragmented, knowledge of reality that is decontextualized because it doesn't acknowledge ethnic, cultural, regional and linguistic differences; discriminatory because it doesn't prepare for a communitarian and intercultural education, instead imposing a single homogenous way of thinking; and mercenary because it privileges competition. The dissident teachers also charged corruption due to prior sales of the assessment tests.

At this juncture, the secretary of education admitted that the test might be discarded and there was talk that the teachers' rebellion might even sink the education reform or leave it suspended. At that point the business sector, which had sponsored the bill and boasted of being its creator, began to pressure the education authorities not to back down. The authorities called off the discussion with the teachers' movement and even said they would try to deepen the reform through the secondary laws.

Teachers destabilize the reform

The elitists who had gotten rid of Gordillo had thought everything would go smoothly without her; that it was just a matter of arranging the leadership. They didn't reckon on the forcefulness of the teachers' capacity to destabilize the reform but the demonstrations radically changed the

correlation of forces in education's political arena. The teachers' movement brought right into the national debate issues about the kind of education Mexicans want and the working conditions education requires. Students, parents and teachers have shown that they can formulate initiatives and will not accept the political and business class imposing the education system.

Support by intellectuals

Dr. Luis Aboites, a historian and researcher on educational issues, revealed the simplistic vision of the business proposal as deeply hostile to strengthening regional plurality and identity. He showed that the struggle of the peoples and regions rightly claiming Mexico to be a plural nation have kept entrepreneurial intentions from succeeding. He also pointed out that the dissident teachers' struggle can't be reduced to the numerous marches and strikes but has turned into the long and patient formulation of multiple education and assessment plans in several federal institutions, which now prove that the reform is a major backwards step.

Prestigious intellectuals and human rights defenders, among them Pablo González Casanova and Bishop Raúl Vera, signed a document in support of the teachers in struggle and against the labor-administrative reform. They said the amendments to constitutional articles 3 and 73 violate the spirit and letter of the Constitution regarding educational matters, and that the reform is contrary to article 123 of the Constitution, don't resolve the serious problems of deficiencies in education and in school infrastructure and breaches free education, as the State's withdrawal from its obligations forces the education system to rely on spurious external financing that could lead to control of public schools by private enterprise.

They also agree that the assessment is racist, classist and discriminatory, as its punitive and standardizing model doesn't take into account Mexican society or its children's social, economic, cultural and pluri-lingual conditions.

The document's signatories oppose the reform because it goes against secular and free public education. They note that the reform initiative comes from entrepreneurial powers-that-be that are seeking to privatize and commodify education and control the students ideologically and politically.

A national form

In July, the teachers went on maximum alert when the legislature began debating the secondary laws to the business-sponsored education reform. A banner in one protest read: "Internal Affairs officials, legislators, public education secretary and SNTE cowboys: Who are you governing for, the people or the businessmen? Reject the education reform's secondary laws." The teachers demanded that the debate on these secondary laws be postponed and agreed to hold a national forum with the education authorities on July 12, in which the resolutions from the regional forums' discussions were made known. Marches against the education bill continued in several states throughout that month.

In the national forum the teachers confirmed that all regional forums opposed the reform. Analysis of the 400 papers reaffirmed that it is seen as privatizing and violates teachers' rights.

The main resolution was the demand for repeal of the constitutional amendments to education passed by the Legislature in late 2012. Other demands were the suspension of any measure linked to the reform and postponement of debates on the secondary laws related to it. They also agreed to promote an alternative education model that responds to community demands that the

diversity of national cultural wealth be respected.

The forum's general report stressed that the government has failed to meet its basic obligations, given that the representatives it sent to the forums didn't participate in the debates and limited themselves to making formal speeches. The report shows the dissident teachers have expressed the political will to dialogue with society and the government.

A significant moment came when a message was transmitted via telephone from Alberto Patishtán, a teacher and Zapatista political prisoner. He urged them not to get discouraged in the goal of building a country with room for everyone. He also let them know that the prison walls haven't stopped him from continuing his work as a teacher, or taken away his ability to laugh, think and continue fighting.

After the forum the participants marched to Mexico City's main square to reinforce the dissident teachers' sit-in, which had begun there in mid-May. The announcement was made that the movement would go into a new stage of struggle.

The Zapatistas' "educational uprising"

Meanwhile, another kind of education is being tested out in Mexico. In his doctoral dissertation, sociologist and anthropologist Bruno Baronnet emphasized that the emergence of Zapatista schools brought with it an "educational uprising" that rejects the educational legacy of indigenismo (nostalgia for an imagined, folklorized view of indigenosity while targeting contemporary indigenous peoples for assimilation).

Autonomous education in the Zapatista communities is regulated by assemblies, which set their own educational practices that challenge national indigenist policies. Its advocates are strongly committed and under community supervision. The Zapatistas have made a commitment to decolonize education taking account of local organizational particularities when defining how the school functions.

Each autonomous municipality determines its specific and creative autonomous project rather than applying a rigid and uniform model. In other words, there is educational self-government. Autonomy tends to favor social appropriation of the school as an ethnic resistance strategy. Teaching practices are collectively reinvented and applied.

Zapatista schools show that an alternative education from below is possible. While this novelty is being developed in Zapatista territories, teachers in the rest of Mexico continued into August to mobilize in search of an education for life, respect and dignity by taking it out of governmental channels that want to degrade it into a commodity.

Mexico

The energy reform: A great loss and a betrayal

The energy reform engineered in Mexico should be understood as part of the steamroller advance of capitalist privatization and extractivism. Even massive resistance from the Mexican

Left, couldn't prevent it being passed or enacted. The task now facing the country's citizens, particularly the indigenous peoples whose vital lands will be affected, will be colossal.

Jorge Alonso

On the last day of 2013, a notice of bereavement appeared in a national newspaper signed by writer Elena Poniatowska, among others. Promoted by playwright Jesusa Rodríguez, it summed up the new constitutional reform on energy as follows: "We deeply regret the death of democracy and handover of sovereignty, consummated by a group of criminals that came to power with no legitimacy whatsoever and is trying to perpetuate itself at the expense of selling underground riches to the national oligarchy and transnational predators. We join in the grief overcoming millions of Mexicans at this grim hour of our history. We will continue to fight to rescue Mexico and for our right as Mexicans to forge our own destiny."

That very same day the Zapatistas were celebrating 20 years of struggle. Historian Adolfo Gilly, who was attending the event, informed the participants that the holders of power had just "finished destroying article 27, opening wide the door to privatizing the nation's oil and natural resources to the neighboring military power [the United States], delivering up our strategic resources to its military machinery. So the oil companies will return with their white guards, their soldiers and private police, their enclaves, spies, lawyers, politicians and imperial arrogance. The United States and its military machinery just won the equivalent of an Iraq war in Mexico, but without a shot fired and right on the other side of its border."

They got what they wanted

In the 19th century, Mexico lost half its territory following a war. Now, the rightwing political class has handed over the country's oil, mineral and hydrological wealth, destroying the present and mortgaging the future of what was left to us as a nation. So it's obvious that those governing are the big transnational corporations while the governments of the day are their servile errand boys.

In 1938 things were different. Lázaro Cárdenas, a President with popular support, nationalized oil, using it as leverage for national development. Unfortunately, the corrupt state party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), squandered this important resource, fostering a voracious, anti-democratic trade union leadership and leaving the state enterprise to founder. Although this could have been remedied with true democratization and by purging the oil company, the current government preferred to open the doors to what remained by signing the free trade agreement with the United States. Instead of taking stock of the disaster that agreement represented for the impoverished majority, it chose to follow the path to boundless riches for a few at the expense of misery for the masses.

For many years the international bodies and transnational corporations that drove neoliberal globalization pressured the Mexican State to stop protecting its oil riches. With federal governments held by the National Action Party (PAN), they were confident they could secure this opening, but the PRI, by then in the opposition, together with leftwing political parties, prevented it.

When the PRI retook the presidency last year, the pressure increased and the corporations finally achieved what they had been after for so long. President Peña Nieto sent an energy bill to the Senate on August 12 that proposed to abolish the ban on the State signing oil contracts with private individuals, remove the nation's exclusive power to engage in oil exploitation, stop the State being the only body to conduct that exploitation and eliminate the nation's exclusive power to generate, conduct, transform, distribute and supply electricity for public service.

The presidential bill was intended to get rid of the nation's mandate to benefit from the natural

assets and resources required to conduct, transform, distribute and supply electricity, instead allowing the State to enter into contracts with others for this purpose. It would remove oil and other hydrocarbons, base petrochemicals and electricity from the strategic areas under exclusive state control. With this bill the State would give up ownership, direct control and the right to exclusive and comprehensive hydrocarbons exploitation.

It could undermine the entire economic system

On hearing about the bill, the Center for National Strategic Studies warned that energy is not an economic sector, but rather the basis of Mexico's entire economic system, with strategic importance in determining the nation's economic, political and military spheres. It reminded the public that oil taxes had subsidized the public coffers, with a contribution varying between 30% and 50%, that the export of surplus petroleum offset the country's trade deficit and sustained 90% of the Bank of Mexico's reserves with which the exchange rate and monetary policy are formulated and sustained.

The Center urged the legislators not to pass a bill that would seriously damage the economy and national sovereignty. It pointed out that the bill had no technical grounding to allege the national oil company's incapacity or lack of profitability. It argued that the bill responded to the interests of the United States and its financial energy corporations and not to Mexican interests and that passing it would strip Mexico of its hydrocarbon reserves and transfer to foreign private ownership the investments made for so many years by Mexicans to exploit hydrocarbons and electrify the country. Its approval would make Mexico dependent on foreign governments and corporations for its energy needs and would hinder its sovereign transition towards renewable energy.

It further warned that if the bill was passed, foreign investors would be under no obligation to transfer technology, use national suppliers or ensure a certain percentage of national content. Nor would they pay tax in Mexico because international treaties prevent double taxation. It warned that all this would lead to economic stagnation, worsen the inequality in Mexico, increase the country's deindustrialization and make it impossible to retain foreign currency from energy exports to bolster the Bank of Mexico's reserves. In contrast to what the government was promising, the Center argued that there would be no way to reduce fuel prices and electricity rates and that, in sum, implementing the bill would imply a serious historical reversal for Mexicans.

Social and union opposition

The National Union of Workers and the Broad Social Front denounced Peña Nieto's proposal and the virulent campaign the government and powerful media were running, making promises impossible to keep. They criticized the use of oil proceeds for the government's running costs for years. They stated their opposition to privatizing strategic natural resources on the grounds that, because they are public assets, they should be put at the service of the country and not just of a few. They demanded the use of natural resources to guarantee the country's energy security and reinstatement of the national petroleum industry's operational structure as well as changes in the oppressive tax regime imposed on it. They called for action against the looting of national energy resources by public officials, contractors, corrupt leaders and organized crime. They proposed that the country be reindustrialized, that there be authentic trade unions and that energy transformation be encouraged based on a real strategic plan that promotes the use of clean energy.

At the end of August, a hundred or so trade union and grassroots organizations met to examine how they could organize to defend Mexican oil, electrical energy and water. They were the same organizations that, remembering the nationalization of oil, had sent out a call last March to rescue the nation, warning that Mexico was in danger of ceasing to be a free and sovereign nation.

A **proposal** **put** **together**
in the United States

We mustn't forget what happened in 2012, when the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations discussed a report on Mexican oil. Historian Ilán Semo's public review of this document concluded that the proposal Peña Nieto submitted to the Mexican Senate in August 2013 had been prepared abroad. For the United States, oil found on Mexican soil constitutes an issue of its national security.

Semo accepted that the way PEMEX had been managed did no more than preserve a predatory bureaucracy, but also pointed out that privatization of Mexico's banking and telecommunications had ended up just as predatory, if not more so. The solution to the PEMEX problems, however, isn't to hand over sovereignty but to change the relationship between PEMEX and the State. Even Nobel economics prize winner Joseph Stiglitz recommended that Mexico safeguard ownership of its oil.

"Let them ask all of us"

Honoring his father, General Lázaro Cárdenas, who had nationalized oil, Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) leader Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas argued that President Peña's proposal would take the country back to the regime that existed before this expropriation, since it would open up the possibility that previously expropriated companies would return to manage the country's oil reserves and oil fields. He invoked article 35 of the Constitution which sets out the possibility of holding referenda on issues of national importance if called by 2% of the voter registration list. If this figure were reached, referendum on energy reform would have to be held in the next federal elections, in 2015.

In late August a massive march went from the Ángel de la Independencia to the corner of 20 de Noviembre and Venustiano Carranza, given that the Zócalo had been taken over by an encampment of dissident teachers. On the march, intellectuals, political leaders, grassroots and trade organizations called for unity to defend national oil, electricity, education and sovereignty.

Meanwhile, Cárdenas started a signature-collecting campaign to support the referendum with the slogan "Oil belongs to all of us, let them ask all of us." He also went to the debates on oil organized by the Senate and again warned that Mexico was facing the immensely serious outcome that companies expropriated in 1938 would return under different names, would again be the ones to decide how extraction would be managed and again be the main beneficiaries of exploiting the hydrocarbon deposits.

A senator from the Work Party complained that the debate had been a sham, since the promise to listen to everyone's voice had been a farce. A specialist on oil issues, Javier Jiménez Espriu publicly stated that he had refused the invitation to take part in these debates because he was unwilling to be part of an opera in whose libretto the ending had already been decided.

It will be the blood of Mexico

On September 8, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who led the struggle for the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) to become a political party, organized a huge mobilization in defense of oil and the popular economy to prevent constitutional reforms that would hand over oil revenue to foreign corporations. Halfway through that same month informative meetings were held in the municipalities.

Although López Obrador also proposed a national march from the Ángel de la Independencia to the Zócalo for Sunday, September 22, it wasn't possible to reach the square because the government had set up a storage center there for people affected by the hurricanes. Instead, the march ended at the Columbus bandstand, where he and Cárdenas made public calls to organize peaceful civil resistance. López Obrador challenged the President to submit his energy reform to the referendum and stressed that if he took Mexico's oil away from it, it would be the same as letting the country bleed to death. Before thousands of people he criticized the government's narrow-minded attitude toward the dissatisfaction generated by this reform.

Resistance and analysis

A third huge march against the reform took place on October 6, called by MORENA. On it, López Obrador urged the President to confirm or deny whether he had come to an agreement outside the country with foreign oil companies. Behind the government's privatization proposal there was a pact to betray Mexico. All along the Avenida Reforma 80 stalls similar to oil barrels were set up for people to deposit their signatures demanding a referendum. With private industry expressing its support for the reform, the fight went on. Writer John Saxe-Fernández considered it a historic irresponsibility to dismantle nationalized oil. Indigenous lawyer Francisco López Bárcenas asked if Mexicans would allow the opening up of a path to extend the pillage of the country, indicating that there were other alternatives to correct the widespread deficiencies and vices in the oil industry.

At the end of October, after three huge protest meetings were prevented from reaching the Zócalo, López Obrador was at last able to hold a rally in this emblematic square. He asked opposition senators to form a bloc that would at least temporarily halt the energy reform, creating time for a referendum in which Mexicans could say whether or not they agree with privatizing oil.

Academics from the Autonomous National University of Mexico published a document expressing their concern about the reform, which strips the national oil industry of its strategic character, given that the government is eliminating state exclusivity in it. The analysis revealed that the proposed reform is devoid of any arguments corresponding to the magnitude of the proposed changes. The authors insisted that constitutional modifications should be decided based on sufficient knowledge of the specific forms the energy policy would adopt. They sounded an alarm on the discretionary nature the permits and concessions would have, which would open the door to opacity and corruption. Instead they urged an energy reform that would guarantee a sufficiently diversified supply of sustainable and secure sources to ensure the country's wellbeing.

US military needs

Cárdenas, López Obrador, Saltillo's Bishop Raúl Vera, sociologist and political critic Pablo González Casanova, Adolfo Gilly and various other distinguished figures sent a letter to the legislators warning that the future of the next generation, stripped of their resources, was at risk.

Considering that this involved the crime of betrayal of the homeland, they exhorted the legislators to act with a sense of patriotism and not turn their backs on the nation's interests.

Gilly made a call to all people, regardless of belief, ideology or political and social position, to unite to avoid the pillage of the nation promoted by the government and the oil corporations, handing over Mexican sovereignty to US military interests and needs. He stated that the energy reform puts Mexico's development as a free and independent country at risk and constitutes an act even more serious than that of handing over Texas in the 19th century. He pointed out that because the United States is a powerful nation permanently at war in a world where its rivals are multiplying, it more than ever needs to extend its strategic domination over the territory of its southern neighbor. Giving it the keys to Mexican oil, mineral and territorial wealth would only add to the financial and media subordination already underway, completing a project of sellout and submission by Mexican governments.

Oil companies warned

In other fora for discussing the energy reform promoted by his party, Cárdenas emphasized that the reform was also illegitimate because the PRI's presidential candidate had proposed no constitutional changes in the campaign that would permit a return of the foreign oil companies. Trusting that a referendum would throw out the changes to the Constitution on the matter of energy reform, he demanded that the government present the proposals for secondary laws on this issue, so it would be possible to see the scope of the reform being suggested.

Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, one of the founders of the PRD, stated that the presidential bill would leave Mexico a permanent supplier of crude oil. The Dominican priest Miguel Concha emphasized that it would place Mexicans in the hands of those who have no interest in benefiting or protecting the country's economy, resulting in the most fundamental loss of a sense of nationality.

López Obrador sent letters to the heads of the 10 most important foreign oil companies in the world warning them that, should the energy reform be passed, any agreement they might make with Peña's government wouldn't be legitimate because the oil doesn't belong to the government or even to the State, but to the people and the nation. He reminded them that the reform does not have the support of Mexicans. Leftwing legislators also sent letters to transnational companies interested in investing in oil exploitation to warn them there would be a national referendum to revoke privatization of Mexican oil.

PRI-PAN pact of betrayal

Analyst Jorge Eduardo Navarrete called attention to a notice appearing in The Wall Street Journal stating that the PRI government and PAN leaders were in negotiations to extend the energy reform even further and enable the State to share oil production and grant license agreements to access shale gas deposits and deep water deposits of crude oil.

Researcher Arnaldo Córdova specified that while the PRI wanted the opening up to be gradual, the PAN wanted it to be immediate and total. He noted that the PAN was winning this argument, from which the Left had been excluded.

More resistance and more analysis

In early November, the Patriotic Union for the Rescue of the Nation, a grouping of artists, unions, politicians, civil society and human rights organizations, held another demonstration against the energy reform in Mexico City. They outlined resistance actions and peaceful civil disobedience to prevent the reform going forward.

Mid-month the PRD held yet another huge rally in the Zócalo. There, Cárdenas said the government's promises had no foundation. While it was being said that the reform would bring more jobs because 3.5 million barrels of oil would be produced, this figure was actually reached in 2004 without the growth of either the economy or employment. He also warned that private companies would exhaust the deposits, because they were only interested in extracting the greatest amount of oil possible without looking after the reserves.

Diego Valadés, a constitutionalist, stated that among the presidential bill's problems were placing policy and decisions exclusively in the hands of the executive branch, giving the President excessive powers without taking either Congress or society into consideration. Contradicting official propaganda, he warned that if the bill were approved there would be more poverty, a bigger deficit in public services and more wealth for individuals at the cost of society's resources.

Disagreements on the referendum's eligibility

At the PRD rally Cárdenas announced that 1.2 million of the 1.63 million signatures needed to call a referendum had already been collected. Meanwhile, in October the President's office had rejected holding a referendum on the reform.

The PRI and PAN say the reform isn't eligible for a referendum because it deals with issues that involve state revenue and spending. Nonetheless, constitutional law experts have stated that article 35 of the Constitution allows a referendum because oil and hydrocarbons are fundamental items of the Mexican economy. The energy reform goes further than fiscal matters and is an issue of national security. The Constitution only restricts the law on revenue and the spending budget, not on the issue of oil profits. Nonetheless, there are those who recall that, thanks to the free trade agreement, Mexico will have to pay compensation to foreign companies if it affects future profits.

A crime against the homeland

On November 22, Bishop Raúl Vera, Pablo González Casanova, journalists and intellectuals published an open letter to the President in which they said they foresaw a risk that Mexico would be destabilized from without in order to provoke foreign intervention. They urged him to withdraw the unconstitutional energy reform bill because it undermines political decisions reserved exclusively for the people's sovereignty.

At the start of December, López Obrador led a massive meeting in the Zócalo, at which he invited his followers to surround the legislative precinct to try and prevent the reform being passed. A text sent by writer Elena Poniatowska, who had just learned she had been awarded the Cervantes Prize, was read, in which she called the energy reform a trap of the "new PRI" and remarked that the only thing still lacking was the legalization of corruption. The academic Gilberto López y Rivas, warning that the collaborating oligarchy's legislative machinery was ready to pass the constitutional reforms demanded by transnational capital to get hold of energy riches that belonged to Mexico and its people, called it "a crime against the homeland."

Despite all the opposition, the reforms are passed and enacted

In the second week of December, despite all these protests, sieges of the legislative and repeated arguments, the alliance between the PRI senators and their satellite parties with the PAN voted to change the constitutional system on the subject of hydrocarbons.

The official propaganda was focused on the progress in changing article 27 of the Constitution, but articles 25 and 28 ended up changed as well, allowing shared service, utility and production contracts and concessions benefitting foreign companies. With the changes, oil refining, basic petrochemicals, natural gas processing and electricity generation ceased being strategic activities. Private industry may now enter these businesses with a wide range of contracts and permits equivalent to public concessions. The executive branch has been granted discretionary powers to identify areas of national land for exploitation by different companies.

One PAN Senator voted against the bill in the name of the country's energy security, arguing that a license is the same as a concession. He said those passing the reform refused to see the predatory nature of transnational companies.

Leftwing legislators explained that the reforms didn't specifically privatize the state enterprises but turned them into empty shells so they would fail by obliging PEMEX and the Federal Commission of Electricity to compete at a disadvantage with transnationals. They also warned that the amendments enabled foreign mining companies to exploit gas as well.

Columnist John M. Ackerman called for a stop to the pillage, since the energy reform made it clear the political class wants to get rich by giving the black gold to the transnationals, given that complicit politicians and officials will get a good slice of this generous give-away.

The United States applauds

Private enterprise expressed its glee over the passing of the reform, which the PRI and PAN interpreted as a victory. The US press made much of the fact that it had gone even further than what was hoped for in opening up to foreign capital. The US government and oil companies also applauded. Although Washington might have preferred the reform to state expressly that concessions would be granted, it knew that licenses would be the same as concessions. Now it only had to wait for the secondary legislation.

For the reform to be consummated, it needed the approval of the House of Representatives and a majority of the Congresses of each federal entity as well as the Senate backing. In spite of the blockades, that consummation happened without discussion and in some cases in only a few minutes. Not only was there no discussion, there wasn't even enough time for local legislators to read what had been sent to them to pass. The executive enacted the reform before Christmas.

Obama congratulates Peña Nieto

In mid-January, 2014, the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum held its 22nd annual meeting in Puerto Vallarta, and the Mexican delegation presented the energy reform as one of its great achievements.

Obama called Mexico's President to congratulate him on the reform and the president of the Italian Council of Ministers did the same during his visit to Mexico.

The fight to annul the reform begins

In a march against the consummated privatization of the country's energy sector, Cárdenas announced that there would be a struggle to annul the sellout reform. He met with parties and 40 organizations to explore actions aimed at reversing the transfer of Mexican subsoil.

One fundamental action agreed on was to continue collecting signatures demanding a referendum. It is envisaged that by March 2014 the number of signatures will be complete and that what had been passed could be overturned in the 2015 elections.

MORENA announced that it was preparing a legal battle against the reform on the grounds that its passage had been marked by irregularities and violated legal and legislative processes, especially in local congresses. It inaugurated a "wall of shame" on Mexico City's grand avenue with photos of these legislators and filed a claim against President Peña Nieto for betraying the country.

Social networks circulated photos of the legislators who voted for the energy reform, calling them traitors to the country. As the opposition unexpectedly mounted, the government warned that its tolerance had limits, announcing that it would criminalize grassroots protest even further. The task now facing citizens is huge.

Towards anti-development

After the energy reform was passed, analysis of its implications multiplied. Writers Arnaldo Córdova and Adolfo Gilly consider that the Constitution has been substantially dismantled and its fundamental articles destroyed, deepening a political, financial, productive, territorial and military subordination to the United States. They recalled that the Constitution is a basic permanent pact and can't be changed to favor a few people. Energy reform means annulling the national system of ownership of primordial assets: its territory, subsoil and sea bed. Instead of a social pact, what we have is an oligarchy turned into a dominant system, a government of the rich for the rich, a total domination of money with its consequential waste and corruption.

Researcher Julio Boltvinik stated that the energy reform encourages anti-development because it hands over the oil to international capital and, regardless of its legality is illegitimate, immoral and anti-national. It is absurd for a poor country to give away the people's resources to the world's millionaires. Jorge Eduardo Navarrete reflected that the reform condemns Mexico to the status of a crude oil exporter and net importer of derivatives and reincorporates the territory and national waters into the hunting grounds of transnational corporations, relegating projects to extend and diversify the national oil and petrochemical industry and placing PEMEX at an impasse, closing off the option for autonomous industrial development.

The philosopher Gabriel Vargas Lozano stated that the massive demonstrations of rejection had been for nothing because the oligarchy had defended its interests against the majority. Nonetheless, there was no shortage of indications that the people don't see PEMEX as an ally, that its products are expensive and it doesn't take responsibility for the disasters it causes, a crisis owing much to the deviation of funds into the coffers of the corrupt, who, under its cover have built huge fortunes.

Environmental organizations warned that Mexicans' water, health and wellbeing will be put at risk with the reform due to the exploitation of shale gas, achieved through fracking, which takes a lot of water and is highly contaminating. Referring to the sellout December bazaar, the EZLN's Subcomandante Marcos stated that the pillage was being covered up by lies. He pointed out that the Mexican countryside has been destroyed since the Salinas reform of article 27 two decades ago.

The new constitutional modification will make oil, electricity and education more expensive. The Chiapas group known as Las Abejas condemned the reform for destroying the gains made with the peasants' blood in the Mexican revolution. The indigenous peoples and peasants, defenders of their lands in various states, lamented that the energy reform would close legal channels for defending their lands and natural resources, but announced they would continue to defend what was theirs with whatever it takes.

How to oppose extractivist capitalism

The Portuguese social scientist Boaventura de Sousa Santos wrote that throughout the world capitalism is tying together environmental, food and energy crises and that, through financial speculation, natural resources are being privatized with predatory voracity. He called attention to mining, oil and natural gas, increasingly more powerful "runaway trains" that annihilate anything that gets in their way or complicates their profits. He is convinced that only powerful grassroots movements can oppose this extractivist capitalism.

Partisan mobilization of the Mexican Left failed to stop the privatizing and extractivist reform so now it will try to reverse it. Nonetheless, the greatest mobilization, the one that will oppose this avarice day after day, will be the resistance of the peoples who see their vital lands affected.

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Mexico

What do you learn at the Zapatista School?

The Zapatistas invited me to enroll in their school, but health problems prevented me from participating. I did join one of the collectives that got the videoconferences and I also received the books. Later they invited me to join their magazine's editorial board. In addition I interviewed several students from the school and reviewed the chronicles of those from Mexico and abroad. Out of 500 pages filled with all this information, here's a brief version of a novel political experience.

Jorge Alonso

In the middle of last year the Zapatistas invited people to participate in what they called "the Zapatista School." The quota planned for August—1,500 people who would visit their communities to see how they live—filled very quickly.

Subcomandante Marcos wrote that because there were more applications than expected they had decided to repeat the school's first course in both December 2013 and January 2014. Since then 2,250 more have signed up. The Zapatistas prepared themselves for the work while

charging that in response to the school the government had reactivated the paramilitaries to cause confrontations.

The first course: What is freedom?

Marcos announced there would be three teams of teachers. The first team would be in charge of housing the participants; the second team would serve as guardians to accompany and care for the visitors; and the third team would teach the courses. For the students who had signed up but were unable to travel they promised the courses as a videoconference. The first course was called "Freedom according to the Zapatistas." It was explained in various statements that their fellow classmates would be those who had preceded them and fallen in the struggle along the unfinished road to liberty. In an early communiqué they referred to "the land of liberty" i.e. the only nation without borders.

Among those unable to attend were many prisoners who had been invited to symbolize how absurd it is to try to lock up freedom since self-respect isn't controlled by guardians, walls or bars. The invited prisoners responded that a day would come when the doors of the prisons would open for them and the cells would fill with bankers. The Zapatistas promised the prisoners would get the class materials.

The Zapatistas listed not only those who were invited, but also those not invited. Among the latter were legislators who had been on the Harmony and Pacification Commission, the presidents of the registered political parties, heads of the legislative boards and coordinators of the parliamentary benches, the Secretariats of Defense and the Navy, the government surveillance and espionage body, the attorney general, the National Security Commission, the Secretariat for Social Development and the Supreme Court. Also on the not-invited list were the US State Department, the CIA, the FBI and "those who really direct the above agencies to whom they bow and scrape." If these officials had attended the classes, they would have been able to confirm the persistence of what they have tried so hard to destroy: indigenous autonomy.

Those who attended the course would have "the best in the world" as classmates, although they would miss many who have been and are very important to the Zapatistas because they've always accompanied, guided and taught the Zapatistas by their example. These are the people in all parts of the world who aren't EZLN but walk the same path. If someone attending the school were to ask why other native peoples of Mexico and the world aren't in the class, the Zapatistas would tell them they weren't invited because they are already teachers and the Zapatistas have nothing to teach them. Their very existence already shows that they are the professors of the great world school and don't need lessons. In fact, the Zapatistas have much to learn from these native peoples.

The profile of the student body

Of the 1,500 people who applied for the first class, just over half were men and 1,400 were adults, more than 200 older than 50 and 2 older than 90. Another 200 would attend the course in San Cristobal de las Casas and 200 more would take the course through the videoconferences. The students were from all over the world, among them 34 with doctorate degrees, more than 50 professors and university researchers with published writings translated into 15 languages. More than 100 were actors, directors, musicians, writers, producers, painters, cartoonists, editors, photographers, cultural workers, politicians, lawyers, union organizers and social activists.

Among other characteristics, according to the Zapatistas, the students "have led their lives with complete disregard for power in any form, have been repudiated by their respected social circles

for their stubborn nonconformity, have gone against both the accepted consciousness and the police with their actions, have repeatedly shown their rebelliousness and passion for liberty without regard for the consequences and have fought based on their conscience rather than the prevailing mores.”

Profile of the faculty

Other communiqués were issued before the first round of classes. The Zapatistas said “the rebellious masses really like to bring everyday happenings to the fore and when the supposed champion of freedom and democracy from up north, i.e. the United States, spies with impunity or commits some atrocity around the planet, the network becomes an irreverent hand that knocks down the scenery hiding power’s great obsession to control everything.” They reminded people that those on top have learned to cover one scandal with a bigger one, “but haven’t figured out that what they’re trying to govern no longer exists.”

The Zapatistas explained that the only thing one needs to be a disciple in the school is a willingness “to look and learn.” The community will be the teaching-learning place. In this school there’s no teacher in the old concept but there is a collective that teaches, shows and prepares. Thus a person learns in the community and with the community, and in turn, teaches others.

The Zapatistas recommended that people not expect the traditional school model. They explained that while in the community each student would live with a family who welcomes them and with them would go work in the fields and cook and eat whatever the family has. They reminded the students that Zapatistas are a people who not only have defied the powerful and remained in rebellion and resistance for 20 years, but above all have succeeded in defining Zapatista indigenous freedom as “to govern and be governed in agreement with one’s ways, within one’s geography and by one’s calendar.”

The students wouldn’t find a model to follow or a manual for how to construct freedom. What they would see is how the Zapatistas live now, knowing that new generations will come and build their own paths because the concept of freedom “doesn’t hand down slavery.” For the Zapatistas freedom is exercising the right to build one’s own destiny without anyone being in charge and saying yes or no. Freedom is built on rebellion and self-respect knowing that there are other worlds and other ways of doing things and that everyone is going to construct their own identity, which is to say their own sense of self-worth. The students would be distributed in the communities but would always find someone in the Caracoles [their movement’s civilian government, health, educational, sports, political and gathering places, one for each of Chiapas’ five geographic and ethnic zones] who would try to answer questions that arise from their experience.

The crucial role of the “votán”

In their communiqués the Zapatistas kept explaining the role of what they call the “votán” in the school: the backbone of the education, “the guardian and heart of the people.” Each student would be assigned a votán, or tutor, to help him or her understand what freedom is according to Zapatista thinking. The votán would explain the history, what the Zapatistas are doing and want to do, their successes and errors. Together with the votán each student would study the assigned books. At the end, the evaluation wouldn’t be an exam. Reality will do it with a single question: What is freedom according to each student?

They also clarified many other issues, such as the fact that the families they live with wouldn’t

accept personal gifts because it destabilizes the community. Anyone who wanted to make a donation should leave it with the main office of the University of the Earth in San Cristobal de las Casas, which would distribute it among the Good Government Boards.

Also, the students hadn't been invited so they could be recruited but so they could share in the life of the Zapatistas. They suggested that when the students returned from their studies they might say "the Bossy One's wall is missing a crack." The students should grasp the organizational strength of such a school that housed, fed and gave them each a votán. This draws attention to the fact that light is born and grows from below and isn't the product of a leader, boss, caudillo or sage, but of common people.

In these comunicués the Zapatistas also spoke of those they called "the exempt ones," people who never demanded that the Zapatistas submit to others or abandon their principles. Although they were sometimes critical of the Zapatistas, they were always supportive, showing that support isn't subordination. They gave as examples of "the exempt ones" some who have died such as Tomás Segovia, José Saramago, Mario Benedetti, Carlos Montemayor, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán and Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez. Among those still living they mentioned Raúl Zibechi, Pablo González Casanova, Luis Villoro, Eduardo Galeano, Daniel Viglietti, Immanuel Wallerstein, Adolfo Gilly, Bishop Raúl Vera, Ernesto Cardenal and various others.

Teaching by narrating life

In their videoconferences for those who couldn't attend, three women and three men from the base Zapatista communities gave talks based on the four notebooks the Zapatistas prepared for this course with narrations by Zapatistas from the five Caracoles about their daily life and problems, how they resolve these problems and how day by day they are building another world outside of capitalism and the State.

These narrations are of two types—those that synthesize in general terms and those that detail many cases having to do with all aspects of their lives of resistance and building autonomy.

The Zapatistas are convinced that freedom isn't going to come from the other side and certainly not from corrupt governments because freedom that comes from above is a lie and bad governments talk about a deceptive freedom. By governing themselves autonomously the Zapatistas experience the freedom to propose, study, analyze, discuss and decide. Freedom exists when people can do all that based on their own experience. By governing themselves, everyone decides how to live and no one says what one has to do. It's a collective government that thinks about what it must do for the people and defines and decides this with the direct intervention of the people themselves. The other aspect of freedom among Zapatistas was learning to know what coordination is. They teach that there's a difference between finding freedom and making freedom. They say that until you understand freedom you can't win it.

They teach that freedom has a woman's face and that they've acquired it through equality. In the homes men work together with women and women in the autonomous government don't feel pressured by household obligations. All this is part of the narration-lessons.

7 principles and 13 demands

The autonomous government that the Zapatistas have been building has three levels: communities, autonomous municipalities and the Good Government Boards.

In these three levels they share opinions, debate and make decisions keeping in mind their seven principles: 1) obey rather than order (follow the people's opinion), 2) represent rather than replace (the representative takes into account what people say), 3) go down the ladder of power rather than up (authorities are simply that), 4) serve the people rather than yourself, 5) convince rather than overpower (authorities should analyze the proposals they bring before presenting them to the people), (6) build rather than destroy (be careful with your words), and 7) propose rather than impose (study and analyze before proposing and call assemblies to make decisions).

To these seven principles they add two big inspirations: aspire to cooperate in building a world within which many worlds fit, and follow the principle "everything for everyone and nothing for ourselves." They know their struggle is to benefit everyone.

These seven principles are the governing guide for the autonomous government's three institutions. They are the law, so the government doesn't do what bad ones do, which is the opposite of these principles.

The Zapatistas keep their 13 demands in force: earth, work, food, housing, freedom, independence, democracy justice and peace. Their main governing principle is to rule by obeying and encourage people to join the collective government.

Education, health and agro-ecology

In the autonomous government education is safeguarded but autonomous education doesn't follow official plans. They have kept mathematics and reading and writing, but added environment and integration. The people appoint the education promoters. The first ones receive training then train those who follow. There's also what they call "leveling" which means there are no exams because knowing is proven in the doing.

Another important area for the autonomous government is health, where women play important roles, and there are herbalists, midwives and a sort of massage-healer. They've revived these traditions so they don't depend on the medicines of bad governments, which are just a business. But the most important aspect of health is prevention of illness. There are trained health promoters. They have clinics, laboratories, workshops where they even make dentures, micro-clinics and central clinics, all of which are coordinated. They've created an autonomous bank to give credit for health care and the governing boards make very low-interest loans. Whoever can't pay pays with sweat equity.

They have an area of autonomous agro-ecology. The governing boards promote collective work to support the authorities, who aren't paid, so they can attend to other needs. Fair trade is privileged in the marketing of coffee and there are artisan coops. The local authority coordinates with the municipal governments which in turn coordinate with the Good Government Boards. All is controlled by a combination of the three levels of government for the benefit of the people.

This is democracy and this is resistance

The fundamental aspect of Zapatista democracy is that the autonomous authorities are appointed by assemblies, which are also where many of the ideas come from, not all of which can be implemented. Although the best method is to decide by consensus, if that's not possible it's done by vote. The winning proposal is adopted and those who promoted the losing proposal accept it.

Zapatistas know that the idea that doesn't win wasn't because it's no good. And if the adopted idea doesn't work, they can look again at what solution to follow. There are processes and changes and they can end up trying all proposals. This happens at all government levels. Democracy is built from the smallest elements. All along one can offer ideas and make decisions. The assemblies are often protracted due to the time needed to reach agreement. Both the authorities and the people know they can make mistakes and also correct them.

There's autonomous social, economic, ideological, psychological, cultural and political resistance. There's resistance to the military presence, paramilitary attacks and economic attacks by the bad government that encourages splits in the communities. The Zapatistas say political parties are made to divide so peoples can't have an opinion on how they want to live. They say parties put forth the ideology of voting so people will think that even if there's just the vote it's democracy. They believe that change doesn't come from government but from people at the grassroots level when they decide what they want to do. This is participatory democracy and so they resist.

The Zapatistas posit that bad government wants to make people believe that the new governing officials will do what the previous government failed to do. But it's all pretense because "their heart isn't with the people." What's important to them is money and power. They're convinced that the three official branches of government serve to destroy resistance in the country by coopting and weakening social struggles. The Zapatistas have thus organized themselves in resistance.

The Zapatistas don't need big buildings to build a government in resistance. When they began, some municipalities had borrowed houses or a roof without walls. They didn't have the capacity to build. Even today their offices are humble and small. They don't need a grand site or a salary. Officials of the autonomous governments make their own food and wash their own clothes. Bad government thinks it must give orders and its authority figures come across as well-cared for and powerful. They use public policies to control people. The Zapatistas tell the bad government its programs are deceitful and tell the parties they don't want their programs.

They do for themselves

The narrations we heard in the Zapatista School show how they've been exercising living autonomous power with no need to relate to bad government. They've used the solidary support they've received from outside, but have done most everything themselves. The outside support has allowed them to build some schools and clinics. The autonomy is so people will have the power to decide what form of political, economic, ideological and social organization they want with a dynamic that comes from the bottom up.

While land is a commodity in capitalism, the Zapatistas defend it and with their collective work both survive and give their autonomy life. They resolve everything with direct action. They want nothing from the government and have demonstrated that they do what they propose. Half the results of their work is for the collective and the other half is for each family. After so many years of capitalism they are resisting it, which is hard, but they're making progress.

This is justice

In the Zapatista School they share how autonomous justice works. There are some minor crimes in their areas such as stealing of animals. When that happens, the offended party comes to the

autonomous authority and a solution is reached, which is either returning the stolen animal or paying for it. There are also problems of alcohol, domestic violence and infidelity. In all cases they seek solutions through agreements. The authorities aren't ruled by cronyism. If a family member of an official commits an offense, the authority figure can't take that person's side. Zapatistas are careful that justice not be corrupted or bought. The guilty party is punished, but through collective work, not money.

There are no written regulations. Each zone has its own forms of justice. The only thing common to all the zones is the seven principles. Punishment depends on the size of the crime. The autonomous municipalities are where they take care of problems that can't be resolved locally. They know everything has a solution so you just have to look for it. The most important aspect is to investigate what happened. The parties are called and the authority witnesses the agreement. No cruel punishments are handed down and care is taken not to affect the families and to ensure that human rights always prevail. The authorities learn from each case presented, aware that they might be wrong. If the case isn't analyzed well, it's amended.

How government harassment

they're

facing

The bad government attacks Zapatista land and seeks confrontation in order to throw them off it. It pressures them by taking away their water. Official public land authorities pressure them to pay land and electricity tax and if they don't they are persecuted and thrown out of their communities.

The bad government's programs cause confrontations in the communities. It gives out alcoholic beverages in the communities to make both the Zapatistas and non-Zapatistas consume them and provoke fights. It tries to destroy the shared life of the communities and incite invasions of their lands, and it seeks to sell off the natural resources and the biodiversity. Despite the provocations, the Zapatistas always seek nonviolent solutions.

A path of trial and error

The Zapatistas have been experimenting in their autonomous government and have made tiered changes so as not to lose experience. The presence of women has been increasing in the Good Government Boards. Some proposals don't turn out well because their consequences weren't calculated. In everything, they've adopted a process of trial, error and correction of errors through collective discussion.

The Zapatistas recognize failures needing correction and the path they need to travel. But some who become discouraged on that path go back to the bad government. That's a particular problem in communities where there are few Zapatistas and they become disheartened in their resistance.

The Zapatista communities make self-respect and dignity a priority. There are traditions they preserve and others—such as the subjugated role of women—they don't. While at first they wanted to take power by arms, they quickly realized that people can build everything they need. They are continuing on the nonviolent path not because they're afraid but because they want life. As a whole the Zapatistas haven't responded to the provocations of the bad government. Their experience demonstrates that another way of living and resisting is possible.

In of living together

the

classrooms

In the school there was mutual learning; the students learned about the Zapatistas' daily life and those who were in contact with the students asked questions about their visitors' life. It was a fellowship of social organization, their surroundings and mother earth. The testimonies were very profound and one didn't perceive any coercion or submission in the man-woman-nature relationship. An in-depth way of thinking, imagining and acting was validated. There was a palpable atmosphere of freedom. People shared knowledge, life lessons, experiences and feelings and learned about the Zapatista geography. They were able to grasp the Zapatista organization with its idea of freedom that comes from autonomous resistance, family self-reliance projects and expenses for running the three levels of autonomous government.

The Zapatistas aren't interested in convincing those above of the importance of their project but they do want to share with those from below like themselves how they confront and resolve problems. Those who attended this experience tasted Zapatista freedom and in the process became aware of radical democracy and practices outside of capitalism. Learning came about through living and sharing life.

They learned that autonomous power comes from collective acts. Those who attended the school understood that the Zapatista view of freedom comes from their history, culture and the land they live on and care for. They are free because they are owners of their organizational models and their decisions, which are made through consensus, little by little, with everyone's input and with patience and experimenting in a horizontal manner without imposing ideas.

They propose, discuss and hammer out agreement with everyone participating at each governmental level. In this freedom they resolve their main demands and needs for food, housing, education and health. In this freedom what is difficult becomes possible, sadness and happiness are shared and the distance between those who give orders and those who obey disappears in favor of new forms of relations.

Through the looking glass

In November 2013 a new magazine was announced in which the Zapatistas' evaluation of the School would be published. They promised there would be words by guardians, teachers and families expressing their thoughts and feelings about those who came to learn.

The first edition of *Rebeldía Zapatista* appeared with the Zapatistas' words this February. In it support bases, guardians and teachers in the school from the five Caracoles reflected on the experience and evaluated the performance and work of the students who had come to the Zapatista territory.

They were also preparing another magazine that will be called *A través del Espejo* (Through the Looking Glass). Instead of a writing committee they would have a body of "associates against capitalism," a mixed group that would encourage the building of a tool that in these dark times would show the existence of a thinking other than that which leads to resignation and grief. After the school the idea of mirrors was no longer sufficient; one had to go through them. The first edition of the magazine gathered the chronicles, feelings and analyses of the meaning of the Zapatista School.

A and political logic

different

educational

Prior to the appearance of this magazine Raúl Zibechi, who participated as a student in the Zapatista School, reflected that the school's logic is opposite that of traditional political culture given that it's not about listening to leaders but rather about sharing daily life with ordinary people.

Each student could formulate the most varied questions in the daily life they shared. There will be a before and an after of this school with a slow impact that will make itself felt in a few years. It was a non-institutional educational experience in which the community was the subject that educated. Selecting seeds to scatter around, their germination can't be planned. It was a different way of learning.

An unprecedented experience

Zibechi underscored his realization that the Zapatistas had beaten the counter-insurgent social policies used to divide, co-opt and put down rebel peoples and saw beside the Zapatista communities the pro-government ones that had succumbed to government gifts. What is relevant is that thousands of families are continuing to move forward without accepting anything from the government. Knowledgeable about many Latin American processes, Zibechi stressed that he knew of no other movement on the continent that would have been able to neutralize the government's social policies with such firmness and ability to sacrifice. This teaches us that it's possible to defeat dependence-creating social welfare policies. He perceived a comprehensive autonomy and testified to the fact that the Zapatista families live their lives outside the world of capital and the State.

He also verified that collective work is the motor for the process. He saw men cooperating in domestic work and the care of their children when the women had to do their work as officials. He admired the affectionate and respectful family relationships filled with harmony and good feelings. He didn't detect violence or aggressiveness in the home. He was amazed by the great number of young Zapatistas. He verified that those who rule obey the people's wishes and noted that it's the first time a revolutionary movement has achieved an experience of this type, as up to now revolutionaries have reproduced academia's intellectual molds with an above and a below. The students lived this experience with the Zapatista families and learned firsthand, with all their senses.

The pedagogy of accompaniment

The world can never be the same for those coming out of the school. Neil Harvey highlighted several lessons learned: the Zapatistas had shown him how one can respond in an inclusive and creative manner to the problems one is facing. They showed him that rehabilitation is the best justice for establishing greater security and avoiding corruption because rehabilitation based on collective work and learning a trade allows for reintegration into the community and stops the continuation of crimes.

For Miguel Concha the School was full of experiences, learning and hope. He appreciated the opportuneness of the course since movements, collectives and social organizations need to keep weaving together their knowledge with peoples in resistance. The school demonstrated to him that another world is possible. In one week of encounters the people who attended were able to verify the advances of the Zapatista struggle through the pedagogy of accompaniment,

care

and

humility.

No recipes

What stood out the most in this complex horizontal educational process was that there were no recipes for copying these experiences. Rather one saw how the Zapatista communities are creating autonomy in their daily lives and showing this is possible by living their freedom.

The Zapatistas invited those from very different parts of the country to reflect creatively on their own collectives and how they can inspire the building of another world that is not only possible but already exists.

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Mexico

Subcomandante Marcos: Never more... or forever?

The premeditated murder in Chiapas of José Luis Solís, a Zapatista “votán” (guardian) and teacher committed to his community, and the avalanche of international solidarity from all over the planet, condemning the crime and empathizing with the Zapatista cause, was the moment “Subcomandante Marcos” chose to leave the stage. He will reappear as Insurgent Subcomandante Galeano, the alias Solís once took due to his admiration for Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano.

Jorge Alonso

Death will go away, fooled by an indigenous man whose nom de guerre was Galeano, and those rocks that have been placed on his tomb will once again walk and will teach whoever will listen the most basic tenet of Zapatismo, which is, don't sell out, don't give in, don't give up.... Death commits us to the life it contains. So here we are, mocking death by fooling death in La Realidad.

Compas: Given the above, I here declare, at 2:08 am on May 25, 2014, from the southeast combat front of the EZLN, that he who is known as Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, self-proclaimed ‘Subcomandante of Stainless Steel,’ ceases to exist.... The Zapatista National Liberation Army will no longer speak through my voice. Okay. Health to you, and never more... or forever. Those who have understood will know that this doesn't matter anymore, that it never has.”

With those words Subcomandante Marcos concluded his extensive speech to the EZLN chiefs of staff, some 3,000 Zapatista support bases, and another 1,000 people who had gone to the Caracol of La Realidad. Then after one of his usual brief humorous exchanges, he greeted the people again: “Good morning, compañeras and compañeros. My name is Galeano, Insurgent Subcomandante Galeano... They told me that when I was born again, I would do it collectively. So be it.”

They killed Galeano

What immediate events led Marcos to bring to an end the Zapatista's legendary spokesperson in such an original way? In late March, the Zapatistas had announced several activities. In the last week of May they would hold a meeting with around 30 indigenous organizations in one of their Caracoles, or centers of autonomous government; on June 1 they would pay homage to writer Luis Villoro; and

days later, in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, they would hold an international seminar on “Ethics in response to dispossession” that artists and intellectuals from various countries had said they would attend. At that seminar, the EZLN would unveil a proposal involving national and international initiatives.

The government tried to prevent all of this and on May 2 launched its paramilitaries against the Caracol of La Realidad, which is seven hours from San Cristóbal de las Casas. They destroyed the autonomous school, cut the Zapatistas’ water pipeline, killed José Luis Solís and wounded 15 others. Solís, who had taken the alias Galeano, had come out unarmed to defend his compañeros and was beaten, shot and finished off with a coup de grace. Standing up to their fear, the women of La Realidad recovered his body.

A planned attack

On May 8, Subcomandante Marcos arrived in La Realidad and spoke there. He recalled how 20 years ago pain and anger had given birth to the public uprising of Zapatismo. And pain and anger were why they were in La Realidad. Solís had been one of the teachers of the course on “Freedom according to the Zapatistas” recently given in the Zapatista Little School. Marcos admitted he felt envious of those who had had the privilege of living alongside Solís... alongside Galeano.

His murder, Marcos said, had been a militarily pre-planned act of aggression executed with malice aforethought, premeditation and advantage. He charged that leaders of the Historical Independent Federation of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (Historical CIOAC) had been involved in the murder, as had the Ecologist Green Party, through which the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was governing the state of Chiapas. He also implicated the National Action Party (PAN) and the PRI itself. The Chiapas government was clearly involved and it remained to be seen whether the same was true of the federal government. Marcos recalled that the Historical CIOAC, its rival, the Independent CIOAC, and other organizations with links to the government such as the Ocosingo Coffee Growers’ Regional (ORUGA), were provoking paramilitary confrontations with the Zapatistas knowing that the government would reward them for doing so.

“I will continue it”

Subcomandante Moisés announced that all programmed activities were being suspended and that homage would be paid to Galeano on May 24 in La Realidad, the venue for many international and national meetings. It has been visited by Manu Chao, Eduardo Galeano, Juan Gelman, Madame Miterrand, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Ignacio Ramonet, Carlos Monsiváis, Oliver Stone and many other personalities.

Adolfo Gilly wrote to Eduardo Galeano to inform him of the murder in La Realidad of a Zapatista teacher who had adopted his name in memory of his stay there and because of his writings. Gilly told him that this Galeano was not a combatant and didn’t go around armed; he just taught, dialogued and convinced through words, and had been killed because the owners of power had fed and unleashed so much resentment and hatred. The writer and lifelong political activist replied from Uruguay: “I hope that other Galeano has not died in vain: I will continue [the struggle] in any event.”

**Waves
from around the world**

of

solidarity

The global response to the murder of José Luis Solís, or “Galeano,” was quick, powerful and overflowing. Over 50 national and international academics and artists, including Pablo González Casanova, John Berger, Hugo Blanco, Immanuel Wallerstein, Gustavo Esteva, Marcos Roitman, Raúl Zibechi, Jean Robert, John Giber and Jerome Baschet, publicly expressed their indignation, demanding the definitive cessation of acts of aggression against the “most consolidated civilizing project that has existed in Mexico and the world.”

People who had come from Argentina, Costa Rica, Bolivia, Uruguay, Brazil and Venezuela to participate in the Zapatista Little School in La Realidad expressed the pain they felt at the attack against “a political project that is an inspiration for many who are organizing for the building of another world.”

Around 30 collectives from around the world and 174 people, including Naomi Klein, Manuel Castells, Arundhati Roy, Noam Chomsky, Yvon Le Bot, Michel Hardt and Raquel Gutiérrez, wrote that the Zapatista struggle had been “a school of dignity that has sown rebelliousness and hope in the whole world.”

“This rage is a seed”

Meanwhile, another 130 personalities, among them Angela Davis, David Harvey, Mike Davis, David Graeber, Catherine Walsh and Arturo Escobar, issued a communiqué stating that attacking the Zapatistas amounted to attacking them. And more than 150 signatures of groups and individuals from Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina, Canada, the USA, Great Britain, Belgium, France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Hungary and Mexico were used to make an Abya Yala mourning textile (Abya Yala is an indigenous name for the American continent) that called the rage caused by the attack on the Zapatistas a seed.

Finally, a hundred artists and community and grassroots organizations from different parts of Mexico, Panama, Argentina and Spain told the Zapatistas that, learning from their example, they were resisting along with them and building a possible world from their particular geographies and based on their ways. One communiqué that brought together signatures from various countries said that the absences of those who had been murdered were not voids because “they were filled with living memory and the duty to continue the work.” They pointed to “a pyramid of guilty parties” responsible for the ambush in La Realidad: the neoliberal policies, Mexico’s President, Chiapas’ governor and those who had done the dirty work at the grassroots level.

For days and days, people and collectives from Latin America, the USA, Canada and Europe, even countries of the Middle East and New Zealand, connected with the pain felt for Galeano’s murder and the solidarity with the Zapatista cause.

“Let them do it; we won’t”

The solidarity response was also abundant and intense in Mexico itself. In addition to statements, there were many diverse protests, reaffirming that the Zapatistas are not alone. In the face of so much national and international pressure, on May 17 the Chiapas government detained La Realidad’s municipal agent and the president of the communal land commission, accusing them of being directly responsible for Galeano’s murder. Against all evidence, the media reported it as “a confrontation” not a crime. In this atmosphere, the conviction grew that the event in Galeano’s honor announced for May 24 in La Realidad would have a special importance.

Subcomandante Moisés provided new information about the circumstances surrounding Solís' murder: women had been involved in the attack and the name of the woman who had macheted and dragged Galeano's body was known. Moisés told the Zapatistas and sympathizers that they shouldn't forget that their struggle is civic and peaceful and urged them to direct their rage against the system rather than "those people who are wrong in the head and only following the orders of the bad government." He ended his speech by saying, "If they provoke, then let it be them who do so, not us. We're fighters."

It was already the early hours of May 25 when Marcos spoke as Marcos for the last time.

"Negotiate or fight wasn't our dilemma"

Marcos started his speech by stating that he was going to announce a "collective decision," which raised expectations: "Perhaps as these words are being spoken there will be a growing feeling in your hearts that something is out of place, that something doesn't add up, as if one or several pieces were missing to make sense of the jigsaw being revealed to you... Maybe afterwards, days, weeks, months, years, decades later, what we're saying now will be understood."

He talked about history, evoking the start of the Zapatista struggle and the questions that emerged among the Zapatistas after the first 12 days of fighting against the Mexican army, which he listed in the following way: "Should we prepare those who come after us for the path of death? Should we develop more and better soldiers? Invest our efforts in improving our battered war machine? Simulate dialogues and a disposition toward peace while preparing new attacks? Kill or die as the only destiny? Or should we reconstruct the path of life, that which those from above had broken and continue breaking?"

"Nobody listened then," he said, "but in the first babblings that were our words we made note that our dilemma was not between negotiating and fighting, but between dying and living... And we chose. Rather than dedicate ourselves to training guerrillas, soldiers and squadrons, we developed education and health promoters who went about building the foundations of autonomy that today amaze the world. Instead of constructing barracks, improving our weapons and building walls and trenches, we built schools, hospitals and health centers; improving our living conditions."

The many "handovers" in zapatismo

Twenty years later, as Marcos explained, the EZLN "not only hasn't weakened, let alone disappeared, but has grown both quantitatively and qualitatively," always true to the slogan they were born with: "Nothing for ourselves." As Marcos said, this wasn't some good catchphrase for posters and songs, but rather a reality.

The third part of his text, which Marcos titled "The handoff," is important to understanding why they have grown. "In these 20 years, there has been a multiple and complex handoff, or change, within the EZLN. Some have only noticed the obvious: the generational. Today, those who were small or had not even been born at the beginning of the uprising are the ones carrying the struggle forward and directing the resistance. But some of the experts have not considered other changes. That of class: from the enlightened middle class to the indigenous peasant. That of

race: from mestizo leadership to a purely indigenous leadership.

“And the most important: the change in thinking: from revolutionary vanguardism to ‘governing by obeying’; from taking Power Above to the creation of power below; from professional politics to everyday politics; from the leaders to the people; from the marginalization of gender to the direct participation of women; from the mocking of the other to the celebration of difference.”

Creating the figure

Finally, in the fourth part of his speech, Marcos referred to the role he has played during these 20 years of the EZLN. “Before the dawn of 1994, I spent 10 years in these mountains. I met and personally interacted with some of those whose deaths we all died in part. Since then I have known and interacted with other men and women who are here with us today. In many of the smallest hours of the morning I found myself trying to digest the stories they told me, the worlds they sketched with their silences, hands and gazes, their insistence in pointing to something else, something further.”

He lamented that many had focused only on him. “Their gaze had stopped on the only mestizo they saw with a ski mask, that is, they didn’t see. Our authorities, our commanders, then said to us: “They can only see those who are as small as they are. Let’s make someone as small as they are, so they can see him, and through him can see us.

“And so began a complex maneuver of distraction, a terrible and marvelous magic trick, a malicious move from the indigenous heart that we are, with indigenous wisdom challenging one of the bastions of modernity: the media. And so began the construction of the figure named ‘Marcos’.”

Marcos was a distractor

Marcos describes himself as a distractor, a hologram, a colorful ruse... He explained that this character needed to be built to buy time to build Zapatista autonomy in Chiapas and launch initiatives that would reverberate throughout the world. “That was how it was,” he said, “until the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle, the most daring and most Zapatista of all of the initiatives we’ve launched up until now.”

After the experience of the Zapatista Little School, they considered that the Marcos character was no longer necessary as either spokesperson or as distraction and that Zapatismo was ready to enter a new stage.

“Now we’re destroying the figure”

“So,” Marcos concluded, “the change or handoff of responsibilities is not because of illness or death, nor because of an internal dispute, ouster, or purging. It comes about logically, in accordance with the internal changes the EZLN has had and is having. I am not nor have I been sick, and I am not nor have I been dead. Or rather, despite the fact that I have been killed so many times, that I have died so many times, here I am again. And if we ourselves encouraged these rumors, it was because it suited us to do so.

“This figure was created and now its creators, the Zapatistas, are destroying it. If anyone

understands this lesson from our compañeros and compañeras, they will have understood one of the foundations of Zapatismo.”

So Galeano can live

Finally, Marcos spoke of Solís, who wanted to be called Galeano, and whose name “Marcos” took to “disinter it.”

“We ask ourselves not what we should do with his death,” he stated, “but rather what we must do with his life.... All his tenacity, his daily punctual sacrifice, invisible to anyone other than us, was for life. I can assure you that he was an extraordinary person and that what’s more—and this is the marvelous thing—there are thousands of compañeras and compañeros like him in the indigenous Zapatista communities, with the same determination, the same commitment, the same clarity and one single destination: freedom....

“We have come, as the General Command of the Zapatista National Liberation Army, to exhume Galeano. We think one of us must die for Galeano to live... And to satisfy the impertinence that is death, we put another name in place of Galeano so that Galeano lives and death takes not a life but just a name... That is why we’ve decided that Marcos will cease to exist today.”

All of this amounts to an original way for the Zapatistas to reaffirm their struggle in a new stage, this time without the legendary spokesperson Marcos, and from now on with the new Subcomandante Galeano.

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Mexico

“The ‘haves’ destroy but we, the ‘have nots,’ rebuild”

The increasing neoliberalism imposed by Mexico’s elite, has moved the struggle of the poor and working class into a new phase. Condemnation is not enough. Indigenous peoples and organized collectives are preparing for intense and sustained resistance.

Jorge Alonso

Mexico’s politicians and economic elites have introduced economic reforms that are intensifying the plundering neoliberal model. The major parties are proud to have promoted these reforms, which are handing the country over to large capitalist corporations. The government has promised improvements but Mexico continues to be affected by serious economic difficulties while the major environmental disasters provoked by extractive policies go unpunished.

Peña Nieto’s second presidential report contained a lot of propaganda, but little transparency and garnered scant public approval. Faced with limited results from the reforms, the government tried to defend itself by saying they aren’t magic solutions and the benefits will only begin to be seen after many years. In international circles, Mexico is said to have changed, but the change has only been for the worse and disillusionment and discontent are growing.

In this context, indigenous peoples and collectives have intensified their resistance while the regime has stepped up its repression. Pablo González Casanova sustains that the country's long night of neoliberalism is getting darker. He believes it is no longer enough to denounce the illegality of the government's reforms and people should prepare themselves for a new period of resistance. He insists on the need for consistency of thought and action to confront "the policy of carrots, sticks, corruption and repression." At the same time, he praises the rise in organization among groups belonging to the emancipatory movements.

Confronting soulless machine

a

In the middle of the year, groups from a majority of the country's states organized a demonstration that brought 35,000 peasants to Mexico City to protest the reforms promoted by the government and supported by the legislature. They came to defend their land, which they know is threatened by the facilities the reforms give to big businesses. When the civil society organization called Las Abejas denounced the government's release of 54 of the 70 paramilitaries responsible for the Acteal massacre, it also summed up the government's long history of responding with repression to indigenous people organizing to resist megaprojects menacing their territory (airport construction, highways, dams, mines, etc.). They know indigenous peoples have no recourse other than nonviolent struggle to defend themselves against the neoliberal capitalist system, to which their autonomy is an obstacle. In their words, autonomy allows them to defend Mother Earth while the neoliberal capitalist system is "a monster, a soulless genocidal machine."

The the "new neoliberal war"

Zapatistas

and

The Zapatistas have continued to organize their autonomy and their resistance. In early August, 312 people representing 29 different indigenous peoples, each with its own colors and language, participated with more than a thousand Zapatista supporters in the National Indigenous Congress, held in La Realidad. In his welcoming words, Comandante Tacho congratulated them for coming so far to recount the suffering and pain caused by the neoliberal system as well as to share precious knowledge, experiences of struggle and organization, and challenges. He reminded them that native peoples, who have long been ignored by the powerful, are facing a new plan to dispossess them, without any protection by the law or the government, but with hope in themselves.

These people and the Zapatistas held their "sharing" without the presence of outsiders. At its end, the free and autonomous media were invited to the closing session, during which two declarations were presented. The first dealt with the repression suffered by indigenous peoples. Once again, they declared that the war against indigenous peoples has been going on for over 520 years and that capitalism was born from the blood of the millions who died during the European invasion as well as of those who died in the wars of independence, through the imposition of Liberal laws, during the Porfiriato as well as and during the revolution. In the "new neoliberal war of conquest," the death of the indigenous peoples is a precondition for that system's survival.

Places and names, one by one

During the last few decades, thousands upon thousands of indigenous people have been tortured, killed, imprisoned and disappeared for defending their land, family and communities, their culture and even their lives. The places where people had been murdered or disappeared

were listed and the people themselves were named and remembered one by one. The same was done for political prisoners and people who are wanted for defending their land. The harassment and threats received in recent years were also listed and the demand was made that this hostile climate be ended. The declaration concluded: "Our anger was born from our pain, our rebellion from our anger, and the freedom of the peoples of the world will be born from our rebellion."

Mexico has always ignored them

The second declaration from the "sharing" between the National Indigenous Congress and the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) concerned the dispossession suffered by indigenous peoples in the land of their birth, where they live and will rest eternally. "We are the guardians of these lands, of the country, the continent and the world."

The indigenous people recalled that Mexico has ignored its native peoples since independence, enacting Constitutions and laws that privatize their land and seek to legitimize the pillage of their territories. They haven't forgotten the thousands of individuals and dozens of entire peoples exterminated through military campaigns and mass exile. They are well aware that, despite the death of a million indigenous people and peasants during Mexico's revolution, the agrarian laws were conceived by the murderers of Emiliano Zapata to protect large landholdings; block the restitution of communal land, water sources and woodlands; and convert autonomous communal property into ejidal property. Nonetheless, after so many deaths they are still living peoples, responding to dispossession and extermination with rebellion and resistance.

A list of grievances and dispossession

Hundreds of rebellions, in particular the Zapatista revolution, have challenged the colonizing society throughout the country. "In 2014, the neoliberal capitalists, backed by all political parties and bad governments and led by the criminal paramilitary leader Enrique Peña, are applying the same large-scale dispossession policies that the Liberals pursued in the 19th century and the revolutionary factions of [Venustiano] Carranza and [Álvaro] Obregón renewed in the 20th century, underpinned by militarization and paramilitarization and advised by the US intelligence services."

The plunder, takeovers and spoilage of land they denounced a year ago continue and have been extended with new modalities and new sites of dispossession. Nevertheless, they have fought against these dispossessions in which they see "mirrors" reflected in the mirror they themselves constitute. The 29 mirrors listed include places where government-supported organized crime and large corporations take over communal land, plunder minerals and precious wood and cause toxic spills; land invasions by agricultural colonizers; pollution of water sources; evictions in favor of wind energy companies; dispossession disguised as land rental; usurpation of water sources... The long list of grievances against indigenous peoples was explained in detail.

Indigenous peoples find themselves in a "life-threatening emergency" but are not giving in or selling out. The people of the corn know the cornfield belongs to the community and announced their renewed decision to build from below a new world in which many worlds can fit. They closed with the slogan: "Our mother earth's heart lives in our peoples' spirit."

Towards a gigantic “sharing”

The National Indigenous Congress delegates and the EZLN announced that the peoples, tribes and nations had agreed to hold what they called the First World Festival of Resistance and Rebellion against Capitalism. After sharing their own experiences, they proposed the slogan: “The ‘haves’ destroy but we, the ‘have nots’, rebuild.”

The proposal is to conduct a gigantic global “sharing” from December 22, 2014, to January 3, 2015, in various venues and different days. The conclusions and declarations will be presented in the Universidad de la Tierra (University of the Earth) in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

Message to the media

Marcos, now known as *Subcomandante Galeano*, held a press conference with the free, autonomous and alternative media. He referred to the ways in which the disappearance of “the late Subcomandante Marcos” have been interpreted and clarified that what had happened was that the EZLN changed its representative.

He referred to the “paid media that live on publicity and have a top-down, authoritarian and arbitrary structure through which capitalism converts everything into merchandise.” He posed that the Zapatistas had shown how collective anonymity is a real problem for the elite media, which always looks for individuals and personalities. He explained that the best information is that which comes directly from the protagonist, not from the person covering the news, and that the free, autonomous and alternative media are able to report in this way.

He sustained that the paid media are in decline because they’ve allied themselves with a weakened political class and will disappear, replaced by the Internet. He explained that the Zapatistas believe the free media will eventually fill the hole being created in global information sharing and have already radically changed their own media policy: the Zapatistas aren’t interested in talking to the elite media; they want to talk with and listen to the free media. If they want to find out what’s happening, they first turn to the free media.

Remembering Compañero Galeano

Galeano also referred to those who ask why the Zapatistas make such a big deal about one dead person, Compañero Galeano, murdered by paramilitaries.

Subcomandante Galeano emphasized that one death is important to the Zapatistas because if they failed to pay attention to one then tens or even thousands of dead would also go unheeded. The Zapatistas will not allow the murder of even one of their number to go unpunished. For them even one wrongful death is too many so they are ready to take whatever action is necessary. He reminded his listeners that Compañero Galeano was responsible for welcoming the paid press: he carried their backpacks, fed them and escorted them to the locations for their reports but they never even asked him his name, they were only interested in interviewing Marcos. To the paid press, the Zapatistas are a commodity, while the free press sees them as a site of struggle, like many others around the world.

Specialists in listening

Asked where the Zapatistas were going to get their information, Subcomandante Galeano answered that they would use neither the paid media nor the social networks, “fishing in the rough and unstable sea of the Internet.” The Zapatistas view listening as the main means of communication, so they refer to the free media as “the listeners.”

He explained that native peoples are specialists in listening and in the current context of ultrafast and chaotic information, the most important means of communication is direct sharing, as practiced by the participants in the National Indigenous Congress: to listen to what they were hearing and take it to the people so that they can listen too.

A lot of a few makes many

Subcomandante Moisés began his presentation by affirming that indigenous and non-indigenous people should join hands, as indigenous people still have a common life in their communities whereas this is more difficult for city people to attain, as “behind your walls, nobody knows what problems your neighbors have.”

He clarified that he wasn’t asking people to become indigenous and that ideas shouldn’t be imposed. Rather they should see what works and that means they need to listen and watch. He also remarked that the National Indigenous Congress sharing doesn’t end with a closing speech; being an assembly it needs to be closed by the assembly members. During the assembly, nobody said what needed to be done; instead ideas began to be shared until they discovered “what they felt as *compañeros*.” Moisés further explained the sharing methodology: each person presents his or her thoughts and then there are questions about what was said and seen, what people think and want, and what they imagine.

As a space was created for the free media to participate, some people ended up feeling there should be more “sharings” in many places, observing that it doesn’t matter if there are only a few people in each because a lot of a few in many places make “many many.”

Atenco opposes the airport

During August, there was also a national meeting in Atenco, at which 70 peasant, trade union and social organizations proposed the creation of a National Assembly of Peoples in Resistance to engage in simultaneous protests all over the country against the plundering reforms promoted by the government and approved by the legislature. Representatives of different peoples in struggle participated in the event where they discussed a range of topics: dispossession; indigenous autonomy; food sovereignty, security, production and consumption; energy and Nature. They proposed creating a national mediation commission to avoid isolated struggles by peoples fighting for the same reasons.

Members of the Peoples’ Land Defense Front (FPDT) in Atenco condemned the federal government’s plan to expropriate their land for the construction of a new airport for Mexico City, as announced in the second presidential report. The FPDT reacted to defend its land with a plan for protests as well as opposition through legal action.

Atenco community members marched

to the agrarian courts to demand the annulment of a bogus assembly promoted by the government several weeks earlier that had approved a soil-use change for over a thousand hectares of land from communal usufruct to absolute ownership so as to be able to transfer their ownership. The FPDT announced roadblocks, marches and other protests, as well as a legal appeal against the authorization of the soil-use change. They made clear that they would be constantly alert and would respond to any federal government attacks because their lands are not for sale.

The government has put in motion a strategy of fear in the region but the community members are continuing to defend their land “against a criminal organization that has no respect for indigenous peoples.” They know that Atenco is just one example of a situation being repeated throughout the country.

They will give their life for their land

The newspaper *La Jornada* reminded its readers of the brutal repression unleashed in Atenco in 2006 by current president Peña Nieto when he was governor of the state of Mexico. The lack of justice for the victims and the impunity of those responsible for the excesses committed against the people mean this is still an open wound. The newspaper highlighted the lack of consultations and open negotiation with the communities around the projected new airport and the existence of underhanded dealings including the pressure and rigged ejidal assemblies it has been denouncing for months.

The airport project provides confirmation of a land expropriation war that had already begun. With the help of the major media, the government is trying to present the opposition as an intransigent group standing in the way of progress. The elites applaud the revival of the airport project and are applying pressure to suppress the opposition but the FPDT members have declared that they will give their lives for their land. This conflict is at the center of a fight that will be long and hard, but they are not alone as several collectives are supporting their struggle.

This is a crisis of a way of life

The approval of energy laws has legalized the expropriation of indigenous land to benefit major capital investments and will increase the criminalization of social struggles. The government will try to divide communities, buying some leaders and repressing those who don't comply with its wishes. The collectives that try to defend their land and maintain their autonomy will find themselves in worse conditions than before. A new wave of dispossession is arriving but the have nots' collectives are looking for new ways to defend themselves.

As Boaventura de Sousa Santos warned, neoliberalism's destructive prescriptions are destroying social cohesion. Neoliberal capitalism takes over land with no respect for the communities' ancestral rights. With their resistance, however, indigenous peoples have exposed the dimension of the crisis. It is not only a crisis of a means of production, but also of a way of life, of living together and relating to the natural world, in short of a civilization.

A nonlinear vision and a different way of doing things

The innovation envisaged by the Zapatistas is found in “sharing.” By exchanging experiences about the attacks they suffer, indigenous peoples realize they aren’t dealing with unique problems but rather with a generalized pattern of dispossession. In sharing their experiences they find ways of pursuing active resistance together. The practice of listening replicated in many communities facilitates the analysis of common problems and the search for answers, not only locally but regionally, nationally and even internationally.

These wide-ranging shared reflections start to create a new body of knowledge. Systematizations are done that promote comparisons, both time-bound ones and others with long-term relevance. Questions are raised and new visions are energized. This all strengthens the struggle.

The indigenous people in resistance view their history over the long haul and from a non-linear perspective. In their vision, events far-off in time are also present in the here and now.

The merciless, voracious appetite of the dominant classes makes these difficult times. Nevertheless, they are also times that encourage the creation of new ways of doing, sharing and building from below. Faced with destructive attacks, there really is a reconstructive way to defend life.

Number 403 | Febrero 2015

Mexico

The Ayotzinapa movement is transforming the country

The Ayotzinapa movement is a novel experience. All attempts by those at the top to contain it have failed. The US government’s answer has been to buttress Plan Mérida, which provides weapons to Mexico’s government, supposedly only to combat the drug trafficking cartels. But those below haven’t been frightened off by the repression; they’ve been creative in their actions, and now represent the thousands upon thousands of people fed up with the impunity, corruption and generalized crime. They have proposals for transforming Mexico.

Jorge Alonso

The tragedy of the still-missing Ayotzinapa teacher training school students who were forcibly disappeared by government security forces in Iguala, Guerrero, last September continued impacting Mexico and the world in the last months of 2014 and will surely go on doing so well into 2015, a municipal election year.

Three caravans toured the country in late September bearing the name of each of the disappeared students, then joined together in the capital. Marches calling for people to rise up were held in all the cities they passed through. A peaceful grassroots demonstration on November 20 again brought out thousands of citizens. That day the parents of the Ayotzinapa students created a social front, a huge national movement to demand resolution of the cases involving not only their own children but also the thousands of other people who have disappeared in Mexico. In addition to this fourth march, there were work stoppages in 114 universities and work centers, takeovers of highway tollbooths and other acts in 30 states of the Republic. Mobilizations in solidarity with Ayotzinapa also took place in 237 cities of 33 countries, including the United States.

Peña nothing but promises

Nieto

offers

Amnesty International declared that President Peña Nieto doesn't seem to fathom how serious Mexico's humanitarian crisis really is, while US senators sent a letter to Peña Nieto's secretary of state expressing their profound concern for the life of the 43 disappeared students. Even the president of the World Bank declared that their families deserved justice.

Given the insecurity, Peña Nieto was forced to present a plan at the end of November, pulling out proposals from years back that prompted several people to remark that they were nothing more than a "refried" version of the Mérida Initiative and Plan Puebla Panamá. Human Rights Watch criticized the government plan as empty promises that did not address the grave human rights crisis.

The President was denounced for not taking into account the suggestions by either society or victims themselves and only trying to concentrate more power, attempting to deploy more security forces with no human rights guarantees and without reflecting on the infiltration of organized crime into all government entities. The opposition questioned his lack of self-criticism and considered his announcements insufficient and unworthy of trust. Although he talked about the need to attack corruption, he said nothing about the shady circumstances of the construction of his own wife's house.

Investigate the Army

Given the absolute lack of progress in the search for the disappeared students, their parents announced they were going to implement their own search plan, calling for support from community police. During their searches they found nine clandestine graves in Guerrero, but didn't find their own children..

The parents insisted that the search should also involve checking the military bases and that the Army's role had to be investigated, given the evident neglect by those on a nearby base the day the students were disappeared not to mention the central role Mexico's Army has played in other people's disappearance.. The representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico also reiterated that the investigations must cover everyone alleged to have any responsibility and that all dimensions of the incident had to be cleared up.

On the second anniversary of Peña's administration, cloth effigies of him with bloody hands were burned in different places. People's indignation and disgust with his government's performance were reflected in the failing grades it received in the polls for everything from corruption, impunity, poverty and human rights violations to the lack of economic growth.

#Yamecansé

The mobilizations didn't let up in December, illustrating that the fear of repression had been overcome. Early in the month, members of the independent teachers' organization in Guerrero burned busts of the former governors of that state and 43 tractors driven by members of the Barzón social organization rolled down the street in a march to remember the disappeared students. Their faces were also present in the International Book Fair in Guadalajara, where solidarity with the struggle to find them was expressed in several events by placing 43 empty seats in the auditorium.

And with #YaMeCansé saturating the social networks, replicas of this hashtag also began to be

created in English (#IAmTired) to continue expressing international rejection of Mexico's situation.

Put the pain behind them?

Even with the United Nations demanding an in-depth investigation and discontent mounting, President Peña issued a call to put the stage of pain behind them. The movement responded by intensifying its actions demanding that the students be returned alive and accusing the government of wanting to even make their memory disappear.

The government attempted to close the case, claiming the disappeared had been incinerated. But having inspected the Cocula garbage dump, where the Attorney General's Office (PGR) said this alleged act had occurred, the parents didn't believe a pyre capable of cremation had been built there, and further argued that it had rained in the area that day.

Businesspeople pressured the government to come down hard on the marchers, while legislators tried to resuscitate legislation to punish the demonstrators. The Mexican Institute of Human Rights and Democracy charged that the government was busy infiltrating supposed anarchists into the protests to try and detract from their legitimacy.

One student identified

In early December the government released the results of DNA tests done in Austria identifying Alexander Mora, one of the 43 students, as dead or incinerated. The parents of the disappeared responded that from that day forward they would refuse to recognize the Peña government because it was an assassin. They argued that this was a state crime and would not go unpunished, that they would not cry for their children or give the government any respite. They prophesied that Mexico would never be the same after Ayotzinapa.

The Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center declared that the identification of Mora's remains did not mean the other 42 had suffered the same fate. Argentine forensic experts who confirmed his death specified that they had no proof the remains had come from the Cocula garbage dump.

Toward phase of struggle

another

Although marches and demonstrations continued in various parts of the country, above all Guerrero, the parents of the disappeared students proposed moving on to another phase of struggle, demanding the departure of the authorities in Guerrero and the cancellation of the 2015 municipal elections.

The 24th Ibero-American Summit was held in the state of Veracruz the second week of December. Although the Mexican government did everything it could to keep the issue of Ayotzinapa from cropping up in that forum, it failed.

Furthermore, in Sweden, a Mexican youth waving a bloody Mexican flag interrupted Malala Yousafzai's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech to beg her to speak out about Mexico. In later declarations, the young Pakistani did at least refer to Mexico's "problems."

“Propelled by pain”

In commenting on Peña’s failure in the anti-crime struggle, the US government offered help in getting to the bottom of the Ayotzinapa case. The Mexican government acknowledged the presence of FBI agents in the investigations, in the context of the Mérida Initiative.

On December 10, Mexico’s secretary of the Navy declared that the disappeared students’ parents were being manipulated. They shot back that he and his underlings were puppets obeying a corrupt and murdering President and that what was propelling them to pursue the case was their own pain.

It was revealed that the Center for Research and National Security, the intelligence agency of Mexico’s Secretariat of the Interior, had begun spying on members of Guerrero’s Montaña Tlachinollan Human Rights Center. The government hoped to turn the defenders of basic guarantees into suspects and to intimidate and demobilize the groups organizing to protest the country’s utterly unsustainable situation: even according to official figures, nearly 34,000 people have disappeared in Mexico, 9,790 of them during these first two years of Peña Nieto’s government.

The Army and Federal Police implicated

Researchers from the Physics Institute of the National Autonomous University of Mexico and from the Metropolitan Autonomous University presented the results of a study showing that the PGR’s hypothesis that the 43 disappeared students were incinerated in a Cocula garbage dump lacked scientific evidence. In mid-December the Mexican magazine Proceso published a feature article based on journalistic investigation, official documents, videos and testimonies that also refuted the official PGR version.

An UNAM physics researcher hypothesized that the only way the Ayotzinapa students could in fact have been cremated would have been by using private and Army ovens. He later charged that he had been harassed by the government after making his views public. Despite the fact that the sources in the Proceso article showed that both the Federal Police and the Army were involved in the attack on the students, the PGR stuck to its version.

On December 21, Proceso published new data revealing a cover-up by the State the night of the crime to exonerate the Army and Federal Police. The magazine referred to a flight log from that night by a military pilot of Guerrero’s Secretariat of Public Security and Civil Protection who was sent to look for the disappeared students yet recorded no sighting of any enormous bonfire such as the PGR insists occurred.

Reports in Proceso’s final 2014 issue highlighted the Ayotzinapa movement’s demands that the Army and Federal Police be investigated. The movement’s protests featured banners reading “Search in the barracks, the Army has them!”

The magazine’s first issue for this year returned to the theme, reporting that the Army’s prints were found even in the PGR’s own dossier on the Ayotzinapa case. The Secretariat of Defense limited itself to declaring that it had no crematoriums and the PGR again repeated its discredited version.

Days of struggle over Christmas

As solidarity actions multiplied all over the country, the universities began their sixth round of actions for Ayotzinapa on December 21, to ensure that the issue wouldn't be forgotten over the year-end vacation. For several days they did theater performances and organized health brigades and other activities. The demonstrators insisted that cases such as Ayotzinapa and the preceding one in which at least 15 alleged delinquents were executed in Tlatlaya, in the state of Mexico, are not isolated as the federal authorities would have people believe. They argue that they show the structural nature of violence in a country in which it is no longer possible to differentiate organized crime from that of the political class.

The People's National Assembly of Guerrero drew up a plan of action for Ayotzinapa: both Christmas and New Year's Day would be days of struggle and they would issue a call for voters to boycott the June 2015 municipal elections in that state. They also proposed intensifying the blockade of ports and airports, "liberating" toll booths, taking over gas stations and various media centers and continuing with the global action campaigns. They repeated the demand that the Army, Navy, national gendarmerie and all official police bodies leave Guerrero and called for the continuation of people's assemblies in each community, *ejido*, neighborhood, settlement and factory.

Assigning responsibilities

Mexico's human rights situation in 2014 was one of the most complex in recent years, according to social organizations. Spain's social movements joined forces with some of the associations of Mexican students and citizens in that country in a public offensive to denounce Mexico's authorities.

By failing to seriously and responsibly take on investigations into this and other cases, the Mexican State is encouraging the impunity and corruption that already exists in public administration and in the armed and police forces. The protesters demanded an intensive investigation that establishes responsibilities at all three levels of the government and in the Federal Police and Army, including the pathetic role played by the National Human Rights Commission.

The Bishops declare "Enough!"

Mexico's Episcopal Conference warned that there will be no peace in Mexico if the victims of the violence and insecurity aren't properly addressed. The bishops believe there is a humanitarian crisis not only in Guerrero but throughout the country that has grown into a social and political crisis.

Christopher Pierre, the Vatican nuncio in Mexico, celebrated a Mass for the parents of the 43 students on December 22. They took the opportunity to give him letters asking the Pope to intervene, requesting an audience to personally express their experiences and begging him not to leave them alone.

Priests in Saltillo, the capital of the state of Coahuila, closed their churches to protest the lack of results in the search for the 43 students. Raúl Vera, the bishop of Saltillo, told the parents of the

disappeared that “you haven’t remained fearful and paralyzed in a kind of still shot of the terror, contemplating the pain overwhelming you and the tragedy of not seeing your children and husbands returned; rather each day awakens a hope in you.” He described the relatives of the disappeared as a sign that Mexicans are no longer willing to allow these tragedies to happen in their country. In his Christmas message, Bishop Vera stated that organized crime members are part of the governmental structure in all three levels of public administration, adding that the business and financial sectors are colleagues and business partners of organized crime.

After Christmas the bishops also demanded an investigation into the case of Father Gregorio López Gorostieta in Altamirano, kidnapped and murdered a few days earlier after accusing the Guerreros Unidos drug cartel operating in Guerrero and Morelos of the Ayotzinapa crime in his last homily. The priest had also insisted that the Church would not remain silent in the face of such abominable events.

Other elders of the diocese of Tlapa who have supported the demand for the appearance of the teaching students have received death threats. With that the Mexican bishops again issued their demand: “Enough!”

The weapons that killed them

Parents of the disappeared students demonstrated on the night of Christmas Eve near the presidential palace, but were kept at a distance by police. The Federal District’s religious community of the Movement for Peace and its People’s Social and Civic Congress led a public prayer for the students and called on people to move from indignation to dignified action. A demonstration was held in the Zócalo at almost the same time to express solidarity with the students and urge the population not to forget the multiple grievances suffered by Mexican society.

On December 25 parents and friends of the disappeared students demonstrated in front of the German Embassy to condemn that country’s sale of arms to the Mexican government, which the Federal and State Police used to kill three of the students at the moment the others were taken away. The parents warned again that there would be no elections in Guerrero because they will not allow politicians protected by organized crime to govern them.

The demonstrations intensify

The demonstrations only intensified after December 26, the third month anniversary of the tragedy. In Iguala, where the Ayotzinapa teacher training school is located, the protest went as far as the military zone itself. Students and teachers battered down one of the doors of the 41st Infantry Battalion headquarters and the parents of the disappeared students accused the Army of having their children.

A Mexico City march ended up with a rally at the Monument of the Revolution during which demonstrators called on the population not to vote in the 2015 elections until the youths appear and those responsible are punished. There were also protests in Guadalajara, Culiacán, Colima and Saltillo. It was the first time in recent history that there were so many protest acts during a vacation period.

By the end of December the Ayotzinapa movement had taken over 28 mayor’s offices in Guerrero, setting up municipal councils in several of them. The goal is to take all 81 mayor’s offices in that state.

The Network of Intellectuals, Artists and Social Movements in Defense of Humanity concluded its December meeting in Caracas with a declaration expressing its profound indignation at the disappearance of the Ayotzinapa students in Mexico, which it defined as a state crime against humanity. They said President Peña Nieto was the main person responsible for the tragedy and extended their support to the Mexican people, stressing that Ayotzinapa synthesizes the assaults against them by the empire and the local oligarchy.

“The tragedy that changed everything”

The Mexican newspaper that has provided the most information about this tragedy has been *La Jornada*, but *El Universal* came in a close second with titles like “Ayotzinapa was the event of the year” and “The tragedy that changed everything.” In a vote promoted by that publication, three quarters of those who responded listed Ayotzinapa as the news event of the year.

The case also generated more than 11.4 million documents in the social networks. *El Universal* tallied 17 mobilizations in October, 9 in November and 10 in December, together with 22 other forms of protests in October, 11 in November and another 11 in December, with 74% of the demonstrations held in Mexico and 27% in other countries of the Americas, Europe, Asia and Oceania. A YouTube video showed citizens of 12 European, American, Asian and African countries saying that “43 are missing” in the world. In short, there was no let-up; the issue was not being forgotten, as the government had hoped.

Boycotting the elections is a major objective

On the final day of 2014 the relatives of the disappeared students marched as close as they could get to the presidential palace. Although the police again blocked their progress, they fulfilled their promise to be in front of the presidential residence demonstrating their indignation on Christmas and New Year’s Eve. There they announced that they will conduct even more forceful actions in 2015 to demand that the students be returned alive, and charged that the government is more interested in training criminals than educating students.

In January, President Peña visited the state of Oaxaca, where he came up against demonstrations by teachers who declared him persona non grata. And in Guerrero teachers pledged to boycott the municipal elections in June and encourage the formation of people’s assemblies to govern the communities instead.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights opened 2015 with the statement that human rights violations such as the attack against the Ayotzinapa teaching students and the Tatlaya executions are directly connected to the impunity that reigned for crimes during what has been dubbed Mexico’s “dirty war.”

The People’s National Assembly meeting in Ayotzinapa, attended by 147 organizations, agreed to a campaign that would escalate the search for the disappeared students and to a massive concentration in Mexico’s capital on the fourth-month anniversary of the State crime. It also ratified the decision to boycott the municipal elections.

Support for the call to boycott the 2015 elections was expressed by Mexican poet, essayist, novelist and journalist Javier Sicilia, who tenaciously led a massive peaceful movement in 2011

to find those who had been disappeared during Felipe Calderón's government after his 24-year-old son, a health administration student, was killed by drug traffickers in March of that year. Sicilia has insisted that the only way to break away from the political parties' criminal culture is to take advantage of the moment of inflection Mexico is going through and "refund" the nation, pushing for a new Constitution and creating a Committee of National Salvation as the decisive voice leading the people instead of the "party-ocracy."

President Peña gets a mixed welcome in the United States

Given President Peña Nieto's visit to the United States in the first days of the new year, Human Rights Watch called on President Obama to insist Peña investigate and judge the atrocious abuses committed by members of Mexico's security forces, particularly the executions in Tlatlaya in June and the forced disappearance of the Ayotzinapa students in September. The New York-based human rights organization stressed that Mexico is going through its most serious human rights crisis in years, with security force members participating in terrible abuses that are rarely ever sanctioned. It added that despite this the US government has provided significant funds to Mexico's governments through the Mérida Initiative since 2007.

Although Washington says the Mérida Initiative requisites with respect to the defense of human rights are being met, it is clear this is not the case. President Obama said his government had followed the "tragic" events of the Ayotzinapa students with concern, but decided to back Peña's strategy after speaking to him.

Protest actions around Peña's visit were held in more than 10 US cities to demand the students be returned alive and repudiate US aid to Mexico's security forces. The US media gave greater coverage to the protests than to the presidential visit. In the end, Peña opted not to attend the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos to avoid triggering still more international protests.

They will continue the struggle

The eighth national and international day of activities for Ayotzinapa was held at the end of the fourth month after the attack. In addition to marches and rallies in various parts of the country demanding that the students be presented alive, four marches starting at different points converged in Mexico City's Zócalo the evening of January 26.

The day after that sizable march, the Attorney General's office held a press conference yet again stressing its own discredited version: the 43 students had been killed then incinerated in the Cocula garbage dump and their remains thrown into the waters of the nearby Río San Juan. Following that, Peña Nieto ratified his wish that "Mexico must not remain trapped in the tragedy." But the students' parents unhesitatingly responded by ratifying their decision to keep fighting because they don't believe the official version and are determined that their strategy encourage the continuation of a broader struggle for human rights.

Even before the January 26 march and the PGR's reiteration of the official version, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights decided to technically assist the investigation into what really happened to the 43. After signing an agreement with the Mexican government and with representatives of the families of the disappeared students, it put together a team of several lawyers, a doctor, a sociologist and a former attorney general from different countries to help

resolve

the

case.

A movement of a new type

There hasn't been a single day without some protest action since the Ayotzinapa movement was created. It's a movement of a new type, given its depth, breadth and scope.

Ever since last October, all grassroots movements that have spoken out in Mexico have included the demands and presence of parents of all disappeared, not just those of the Ayotzinapa teacher training school. The Ayotzinapa movement has also made important alliances with the independent teachers' movement and the Zapatista movement.

Its impact has been to demonstrate the corruption and inefficiency of the Mexican State and of the political class of all stripes. It has promoted the creation of autonomous governments in several municipalities and proposed putting the 2015 municipal elections in check. It has refused to be intimidated by repression and has shown a great deal of creativity in its actions. Its international repercussions haven't let up, but have been buoyed by the dynamism that still remains of the #Yosoy132 (#Iam132) social movement. That movement began as student opposition to Enrique Peña Nieto's candidacy in 2012, but when major Mexican media claimed those protesting at one of his appearances were not students, 131 of them appeared with their university ID cards on a YouTube video, which quickly went viral. Support for their opposition quickly branched out to general residents of Mexico, gaining support from some 50 cities around the world in which those backing the students and their cause identified themselves as number 132.

Ayotzinapa both tragedy and hope

expresses

Those at the top have failed in all their attempts to silence this movement. The United States has tried to buttress the Mérida Initiative, which supports both the Mexican State and the drug traffickers with arms, as exposed through the "Fast and furious" project.

A large part of those at the bottom know that the drug cartels, the Mexican State and US imperialism have been waging a war against the people in their determination to consolidate a decadent capitalism. In turn, those at the bottom are testing out a broad new repertoire of strategies to defend themselves.

Despite the horror of the tragedy that has brought about the Ayotzinapa movement, it is giving reason for hope through its creation of new forms of relationships and its proposals for in-depth social change. With a large part of Mexico constantly under siege from the harshness of the capitalist exploitation and displacements, the Ayotzinapa movement is proposing to transform the country into a livable place. Given the system's deadly pounding of people, the movement has put itself at the center of the national reality, demanding the rebuilding of life.

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Mexico

Ayotzinapa on the world map of dignity

"The few are few until they meet and find themselves in others. Then something miraculous happens. Those who thought themselves alone and few discover that we are the majority in every sense. In truth, it is those from above who are few." The parents of the young men from Ayotzinapa received this solidarity message and many other greetings from the Zapatistas.

Jorge Alonso

After the big demonstrations in Mexico and around the world at the end of January demanding the return of the students from Ayotzinapa, the Mexican government tried to close the case, giving way to repression of a movement that hasn't stopped speaking out for even one day since the tragedy occurred. The government insists that the young men are already dead and made into ashes because it wants to leave behind what, according to a great number of newscasters, has been its Waterloo. It doesn't want the 2015 elections to be blocked by an indefatigable movement. The Zapatistas intervened in a very clear way to undermine the official version, which has attempted to clear the Army of its role in this and other disappearances and thereby get around the evidence that this was a government crime.

"We thank you"

The Zapatistas have had very intense and ongoing contact with the Ayotzinapa movement. In mid-November one of the caravans of parents met with them. At that meeting Comandante Tacho told them that the Zapatistas wanted to listen to their pain, anger and anguish. Afterward Sub-comandante Moisés issued a message thanking the parents for having come to the Zapatistas to talk with them directly and for "their duty to not abandon the compañeros disappeared by bad governments, to not sell them out or forget them."

Here are some of his words: "It is for that duty that you began your struggle, even when they were not paying the least attention to you and the young men who are now disappeared were called hairless newbies, unruly radicals, agitators, future criminals who got what they deserved. That's what they were called by many who now are joining you with self-righteous anger either to be fashionable or for convenience.... Because of this duty you began to talk, to shout, to explain, to tell your story, to use your words courageously and with dignified anger.... Through this pain, converted into noble and dignified anger, you have made many in Mexico and the world wake up and begin to ask questions.... For this we thank you.

"We want to thank you for what you have taught us and continue to teach us. It is both wonderful and terrible that from poor and humble families, students aspiring to be teachers have become the best teachers this country has seen in recent years."

"The State of Mexico is a death machine"

"We hear, see and read that out in society there is disagreement between the right-wing and the left-wing and that when we get rid of one there is the other. And we forget that the whole political system is rotten. It's not only that there's a relationship between the political system and organized crime, drug trafficking, harassment, assaults, rapes, blows, prisons, disappearances and murders but that this is an essential aspect of the political system.

"You can't talk about the political class and differentiate it from the nightmares that millions suffer in this country. Corruption, impunity, authoritarianism and organized and disorganized crime are already in the emblems, statutes, declarations of principles and practice of the whole Mexican political class. We don't care about the agreements or disagreements that those at the top have in order to decide who's in charge of the destruction and death machine the Mexican State now has

become. We care about you.

“The demands are simple and clear: everyone has to come back alive, not just those from Ayotzinapa. There is blame for the guilty in the entire political spectrum at all levels and we must do what’s necessary so that never again is the horror repeated against anyone in this world, whether they are little known or are someone with prestige.

“We hear you tell us in your own words that no one thinks about the poor below. No one—absolutely no one—thinks about us. They only come to see what they can take, grow, gain, charge, do, undo, say and silence.”

“Don’t stop your words”

“You’re not alone, brothers and sisters. Look for your voice also in the family members of the children killed in the ABC nursery in Sonora; in the organizations of the disappeared in Coahila; in the relatives of the innocent victims of the war against drugs, a lost cause from the beginning; in the families of the thousands of migrants eliminated throughout Mexican territory. Look among the daily victims in every corner of our country, who know that legal authority is the one that attacks, extorts, kidnaps, annihilates, robs, rapes, imprisons and murders—sometimes disguised as organized crime and sometimes as a legally constituted government. Look for the original peoples who, since the time before time, treasured the knowledge of resistance; there is no one who knows more about pain and anger.

“Millions have seen themselves reflected

in your words. Many say this, although the majority stays quiet but makes your protest theirs and repeats your words within themselves.... We don’t want to be more noise. We only want to tell you not to stop your words. Don’t stop your voices, don’t get faint; let your voices grow so they rise above the noise and the lies.”

“You might end up alone”

“Brothers and sisters, we think you probably already know you might end up alone and are prepared. It might be that those who now gather around you to use you for their own benefit will abandon you and run to the other side seeking other movements.... Realize about 100 are now accompanying you in your demands. Of these, 50 might change because of some incident that comes up during the year. Of those 50 who remain, 30 will buy into the oblivion that is offered in installment payments and will say that you no longer exist, that you did nothing, that you were a farce to distract from other things, that you were a government invention to keep some party or political person from advancing in their career. Of the 20 that remain, 19 will run away terrified at the first broken window because the victims of Ayotzinapa, Sonora, Coahila and anywhere else are in the media only a moment and they can choose to not see, hear or read by turning the page, changing the channel or station, but a broken window, on the other hand, forecasts something foreboding in the future. And then from the 100 you will see that only one remains ... but this one has discovered him/herself in your words; has opened his/her heart, as we say, and thus the pain and the anger of his/her indignation....

“Because the fact is that the few are few until they find each other and discover themselves in others. Then something miraculous happens. Those who thought themselves alone and few

discover we are the majority in every sense. In truth, it is those from above who are few. Then we will have to turn the world upside down because it's not right that the few rule the many or that there are dominators and dominated."

"An organized rebellion"

"We as Zapatistas think that the really important changes—those that go deep and change history—are those that begin with the few and not the many. We know that you know that even when Ayotzinapa goes out of style, when the tactics and strategies and big plans fail, when the event has passed and other interests and forces are in fashion, when those who jumped on the bandwagon with you—like animals of prey who feed on the pain of others—have gone, even when all this happens, we both know there is pain, anger and commitment like ours in every corner. We know that when different pains meet they don't germinate in resignation, shame and abandonment but in organized rebellion.

"With our small efforts and with all our heart we have done and will do whatever possible to support you in your just cause. We haven't said much because we have seen that there's a lot of interest by the front-running politicians to conveniently use you for their own purposes. We will not join the rapacious stampede of shameless opportunists for whom nothing is important unless it's something they need and it feeds their ambition. Our silence is a sign of respect because your struggle is so enormous.

"The events that change the world are not born from the regular calendars but rather are created through stubborn daily work by those who choose to organize instead of joining what's fashionable. True, there will be a deep change, a real transformation in this and other countries of the world in pain. Not just one but many revolutions will have to shake the whole planet. The change, however, will not be one of names or labels where the ones above will continue at the cost of those below."

"it will not be easy or quick"

"Real transformation will not be a change in government but rather in relationship. One in which the people rule and the government obeys, the government is not a business, women are not humiliated, the indigenous are not looked down on, the young are not disappeared, differences are not demonized, childhood doesn't become a commodity and the elderly are not discarded. A transformation to a world in which terror and death do not reign, there are no kings and subjects, nor bosses and slaves, nor exploiters and exploited nor saviors and saved, strong men and followers, those who order and those who follow orders, pastors and their flocks. We really do know that it will not be easy or quick, nor will it only be a change in names and signs in the system's criminal offices. But we also know it will happen. And we know that you and others will find your disappeared loved ones, that there will be justice and that for all those who have suffered and are suffering this sorrow will be relieved through answers to the questions of why, what, who and how, and with these answers you will not only build a case against those responsible but also make sure that never again will being a young person or student or woman or child or migrant or indigenous person or whatever else be the reason to be identified as the executioner's next victim. Thank you because by knowing you we understand we are looking into the future."

On the world map of dignity

In mid-December the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) released an important communiqué in which the Zapatistas said they were seeing that the words of the relatives and companions of those killed and disappeared in Ayotzinapa were starting to lag and there was now a discussion about whether the marches and demonstrations belonged to the “well behaved” and about how to “transcend” the movement.

For the Zapatistas, what put Ayotzinapa on the world map was the dignity of the relatives and of the murdered and disappeared young men, their tenacity and uncompromising insistence on seeking justice and the truth. In their voices many around the planet recognized themselves and they had spoken the hurts and anger of others.

Invited to the first festival against capitalism The Zapatistas once again spotlighted for the discussion that capitalism feeds on war and destruction; that in the new hierarchy speculative capital is rife with corruption, impunity and crime. Knowing it was important for the voices of the relatives and friends of the young men from Ayotzinapa to be heard again, they decided to give them their place in the First Worldwide Festival of Resistance and Rebellion against Capitalism. They asked the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) to dedicate and apply its efforts to this cause. It had been planned that the Zapatista delegation to this gathering would be formed by ten Zapatista men and ten Zapatista women. They asked the relatives and companions of the disappeared from Ayotzinapa to accept the invitation and appoint a similar delegation to participate as guests of honor at the festival.

Days of “sharing”

On December 21 the EZLN inaugurated the Festival in the state of Mexico, which was attended by organizations from 32 of the states in Mexico and 26 countries. At that opening, they placed 43 empty chairs with photos of the teaching students. The event included the participation of more than 80 organizations that adhere to The Sixth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle and members of the Indigenous National Congress, who warned that the government would not be able to quiet their voices even if they disappeared their children and their identities.

The “sharing” of common experiences was held in the Ñahtó community of San Francisco Xochicuautla in the state of Mexico on December 21 and in the Nahua community of Amilcingo in the state of Morelos on December 22 and 23. On December 24-26 the sharing took place in the space of the Francisco Villa Independiente Popular Front in Mexico City; December 28 and 29 in the Monclova community in Campeche; December 31 and January 1 in the Zapatista Caracol of Oventic in Chiapas; and finally January 2 and 3 in CIDECI in San Cristobal de las Casas.

When the parents of the Ayotzinapa students arrived at the festival’s final celebration in the Caracol of Oventic they were received with great affection by the Zapatistas. The parents shared with the Zapatistas the torment they had suffered since the end of September and recalled how the government only made fun of them. They were determined to find their sons even if they lost their own lives doing it.

On January 1, 2015, with the voice of Subcomandante Moisés, the EZLN spoke first to the relatives of the murdered and disappeared students when remembering the 21st anniversary of the beginning of the war against forgetting. The Zapatistas thanked the parents for honoring them by being present.

The “the common enemy”

State

is

The Zapatistas asked the indigenous peoples of the CNI to embrace the relatives from Ayotzinapa and welcome them to their territories. They told the national and international adherents of The Sixth that in the last days of 2014 history had placed before them something that unified them: Ayotzinapa. They would have to organize and fight for the disappeared compañeros and for those taken prisoner. The Zapatistas asked that the delegates help, accompany, fight for, organize, work for and mobilize together with the relatives of the young men since they had been left alone and the “narco-government” was hoping the elections would make people forget about them.

The relatives of the Ayotzinapa student teachers asked the 1,300 indigenous delegates for their help in continuing the struggle to find their sons. The CNI agreed to make a public statement calling the State a “common enemy.” CNI’s indigenous members reaffirmed their decision to continue to build autonomy in their communities. And the teaching students proposed making their rural school autonomous entities.

An intense experience

The festival the Zapatistas convened turned into two weeks of intense experiences sharing problems, solutions, difficulties and a rich cultural interchange. In all, beside the CNI delegates, people from 42 other countries participated all or part of the time, including delegations from 35 different indigenous peoples. Everyone shared their struggles, pain and anger. CNI reactivated its national indigenous network.

The festival had been planned before the tragedy in Ayotzinapa but this event and movement, which were of national and world importance, was fully represented and became central to the gathering. The Zapatistas once again showed their ability to handle large gatherings. They issued a proclamation: “May death that capitalism imposes die and may life that resistance creates live.”

Inconsistencies official version of Ayotzinapa

in

the

In February a Zapatista radio station pointed out the inconsistencies in the official government version of the Ayotzinapa case. Here are its questions.

In 2013 the Attorney General’s Office received two charges from the Solidarity Decade Network against Impunity accusing the municipal president pro tem of Iguala [where the Ayotzinapa school is located] of the murder of three people. Why did the Attorney General’s Office not investigate this?

If the Attorney General’s Office knew about the testimonies connecting the municipal president’s wife with Los Guerreros Unidos Cartel, and if she was preparing to succeed her husband as Iguala municipal president—which would mean she would directly head the police—why did it not investigate?

What investigation has the Attorney General's Office done into the link between former governor Angel Aguirre Rivero and the murders of the teaching students and his close relationship with the wife of Iguala's then municipal president?

If the Attorney General's Office has vehemently repeated that "it cannot act based on the words of a third party," why is the word of a criminal suddenly so valuable?

And the role of the Army?

If there are testimonies about the immediate response by elements of the 27th Infantry Battalion to "anonymous" phone calls from two hospitals in Iguala where there were students wounded by police bullets, why is the Attorney General's Office maintaining that soldiers can only move on orders from a superior?

What are the names of the doctors who would not treat the wounded youth and who, according to this version, knew an emergency Army telephone number they could use to make "anonymous" phone calls? Where are the photographs the military officers took of the students and of a teacher in one of the hospitals and where are the cell phones they stole from the students?

If military personnel deployed in two brigades of seven soldiers each witnessed the work of the forensic experts and patrolled the streets until 3 am on Sept 27, 2014, why does the Attorney General's Office claim the military did not intervene in any way?

What is the Attorney General's Office referring to when it points out that it's good the Army did not intervene because it would have been worse? Wasn't what happened the worst? What kind of unimaginable atrocities could the Mexican Army commit that the Attorney General's Office knows about and ordinary citizens do not?

More questions than answers

The questioning asked who murdered each one of the students known to have been killed. It asks about who kidnapped the student whose face and eyes were ripped off and who wounded the student who was in a coma. It refers to the other wounded students and their health status at the current time.

It wants to know the ballistics reports on the 228 police weapons (131 handguns and 97 rifles) used against unarmed citizens. How many cartridges were used against Iguala's students and inhabitants on September 26, 2014, the day of the tragedy?

Another question refers to what the Attorney General's Office did to prevent Los Guerreros Unidos from accumulating 55,000 usable cartridges? It asks for the name and current whereabouts of Iguala's public prosecutor, who received 15 arrested youth the night of September 26 and let the Cocula police take them. It questions those who work in the Iguala police department who were ordered to print stickers with false license plate numbers 500, 501 and 502, which were given to the police doing the kidnappings so they could cover the real plates of their patrol cars.

It refers to the video in which the Attorney General's Office establishes its "true story." What stands out is that in minute 7 the hit men maintain that while traveling in a small Nissan truck,

they run into a large 3.5-ton Ford truck carrying all the students. In minute 16 another hit man states that he was carrying three students in his Nissan truck and also threw them into the Ford truck. Why, then, in minute 8 do these same hit men state that they dropped all the students off at the Cocula dump in their small Nissan truck when not all the students were in the Nissan truck? At what point did a 3.5-ton truck vanish?

The role of “El Cepillo”

Why does the narrator of the video state that 15 students arrived lifeless at Cocula while the ministerial declaration by “El Cepillo” states the contrary, that “only from 15 to 18 students” arrived alive?

Why, in “reconstructing the events,” does the interrogator of the Attorney General’s Office offer data to the hit man to direct him in his response about the defamatory accusation against one of the students? If “El Cepillo” is responsible for the massacre, why did he enter the SEIDO facilities on January 16, 2015, with a bottle of water in his hands and badly faking that he was handcuffed? And if “El Cepillo” planned the whole thing, who is “El Fercho,” who “El Cepillo” says told him to tell the hit men to throw the remains of the students into the Río San Juan? Why did the Attorney General’s Office female interrogator not think it necessary to ask who “El Fercho” is when in this logic he would be higher up the chain of command?

And the genetic evidence?

If the Genetics Laboratory at the University of Medicine in Innsbruck, Austria, only identified the nuclear DNA of one of the students, Alexander Mora, and there are no results from the mitochondrial DNA and no massive parallel sequencing studies, why does the Attorney General’s Office insist that it has scientific evidence of what happened to the other 42 young men? Why does it deal with an unsubstantiated hypothesis as if it were a fact?

The Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team declared that it was not present at the time the divers and Attorney General’s Office experts recovered the plastic bag with the remains of Alexander in the Río San Juan and could not claim with certainty that it came from Cocula. Why, therefore, does the Attorney General’s Office lie by assuring that its experts worked at all times with the Argentine Forensic Team?

And the other graves filled with cadavers?

If the investigation is not completed, as is evident and as the Attorney General’s Office confirms under pressure, why has the President opened a micro website on the Internet with the title “Final Report on the Ayotzinapa Case”? Why would it do this several days before the intervention by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights? Why does the name of the still-at-large ex-secretary of public security in Iguala, who is also the cousin of President Abarca, disappear from the Attorney General’s Office “final report,” when he was a “key piece”? Who prepared, wrote and subtitled this “final report” and why have these people not been fired?

How many secret gravesites with human remains have turned up in the wake of the events in Iguala and how many people were buried there? Who are these people, who murdered and buried them, when and why? How many of these “historical truths” about forced disappearances

of Central American nationals and migrants is the Attorney General's Office really investigating?

How long can we bear this?"

The Zapatistas ask how long we have to bear the Attorney General's body language in a television interview, lounging comfortably in a chair, his left arm on the back of the chair and his right resting on the table, his fingers tapping to indicate his feeling of annoyance, his tie lying on a more-than-satisfied stomach, his legs calmly crossed—the posture of someone discussing something of no importance when he is in fact presenting a version of the facts that describes the possible destruction by fire in an open-air garbage dump of dozens of young students at the hands of the police in collusion with drug-trafficking groups, directed by the city authorities in a context that could involve the federal Army?

Why will the National Human Rights Commission never send a recommendation to the Attorney General's Office for the psychological torture the students' relatives and friends have been subjected to for more than four months?

All these questions raised by the Zapatistas against the official version make clear the contradictions in it.

This is a time bomb

Ayotzinapa has shown how widespread the discontent is in the whole country and among all sectors. In an interview with La Jornada de Oriente, Fernando Fernández Font, the Jesuit priest and rector of the Ibero-American University in Puebla, spoke in these terms: "I hold a very concerned outlook with many reservations about what is happening in this the country. It seems to me that we are now building a time bomb that could explode at any moment. Unfortunately, those who will capitalize on this bomb will be the far-right groups—that is my great fear. It might be the Army, the most reactionary forces, the big business magnates who are able to make alliances beyond any specific party in order to maintain a peace that suits them. Not the peace of the people, not a peace with justice or dignity but order for order's sake. This is what worries me.

"The institutions are broken. Nowadays who can believe in a political party, the congressional representatives or senators? Who can believe in the exercise of authority? Where is the rule of law? A great polarization is occurring, with large accumulations of capital in the hands of a few and the great majority of people with increasingly less. And the drug-traffickers capitalize on all this. They are an ever greater force and the government seems to need to lie and conceal the great problems saying 'nothing's happening here.' There is a loss of credibility in people who are in the forefront of the government and when people stop believing in the authorities any possibility of harmonious development is lost. Yes, I am worried—very worried—by the situation."

"I don't see a way out"

Here are other quotes from the interview with Rector Fernando Fernandez Font. "Unfortunately I don't see any way out. Unfortunately I see that the avenues are closed in many directions. Ideally I could easily propose something but would it be realistic? I say that one of the pending agendas of this society is a fair distribution of wealth. Mexico is a rich country, with a lot of money, many possibilities, many conditions and resources but ultimately this is accumulated in few

hands. It seems to me that the main work at this time is this: while there is no equitable distribution of wealth there is going to be no way out.”

“A social economy with solidarity”

“Next is the challenge of employment. A while ago we were discussing how all this very impressive technological development—which poses that even cars can be automated—shows us that with automation of all processes the companies are going to need less and less people. What does this mean?”

“It means there is going to be less need for manual labor and more need for people with education. When people say education is the solution for Mexico I agree but only if it is accompanied by sources of work. Brain drain has been going on for years. What good is it for people to graduate with undergraduate or graduate university degrees if they end up working as taxi drivers? I have run into taxi drivers who graduated from prestigious universities. I think education should be a major response to our problem but it has to be in combination with the rule of law and with economic possibilities.”

“In the universities we are increasingly taking a stance in the arena of social economy and solidarity, which has a lot to do with entrepreneurship. But it goes beyond that, because entrepreneurship doesn’t go past a group of friends who want to solve the problem but within the neoliberal model of capitalist production. Social economy and solidarity goes beyond that: it’s how we as a country can be solidary with small producers so they can live throughout the whole region with what is most basic—dignity.”

“It doesn’t seem realistic to me that people with privilege will give up their privileges. It doesn’t seem realistic that the country will be able to generate new job posts, restructure the State and all the institutions in the short run. But if we push for a fairer minimum wage and organizational processes that are linked with the social economy it seems to me we can move forward.”

How can we make sure there are never any more Ayotzinapas?

“Basically the problem is one of economics and survival but there is an urgent national demand for security and justice. How can we make sure there are never any more Ayotzinapas or Coculas or Chalchihuapans?”

“All these are related as part of one structural reality. The security problem is not isolated from the economic, educational, family or social problem. While families continue to fall apart due to problems of divorce and both women and men having to go to work just to make ends meet, these abandoned children are the ones who become the large army of ‘ni-nis’ (neither/nors), neither working nor studying. Interviewed by Carmen Aristegui, the great Uruguayan researcher Eduardo Buscaglia said ‘As long as the drug lord remains the country’s main employer we are not going to be able to fight drugs. And if we don’t fight drugs, there will be no security. If there is no security the groups that have the power are going to become more radical to defend themselves or to put the state institutions at their own service. In this situation we can only aspire to apparent security and peace processes but this is not going to solve the problem.’”

Former Autonomous National University of Mexico rector Pablo González Casanova, in a presentation he made at the last Zapatista “sharing,” states that even under the most difficult conditions one cannot abandon the study and analysis of reality since practice and theory aren’t

separated and there's not one path but many, even though the end is the same: liberty.

Both the Zapatistas and the Ayotzinapa movement are intensifying their building of liberty from below.

Number 409 | Agosto 2015

Mexico

Critical thought versus the capitalist hydra

The Zapatistas held an international seminar in early May that they titled "Critical Thought Versus the Capitalist Hydra." It was a week-long event, with intense workdays full of passion, and many voices warning of the damaging advances of capitalism, which we must stop with rebellion, resistance, organization and hope. This is only a summary of some of the thoughts shared, mere seeds of the ideas offered by intellectuals and activists from all over the world.

Jorge Alonso

Despite increased military and paramilitary activities within the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) area, the Zapatistas began organizing an homage to Spanish–Mexican philosopher, researcher, university professor, diplomat, academic and writer Luis Villoro in March of this year, the first anniversary of his death at 91. The homage would be held on May 2, and would be followed by an international seminar they titled "Critical thought versus the capitalist hydra."

The seminar itself was held from May 3 to 9 in the installations of the University of the Earth, whose dean is Raymundo Sánchez Barraza. Some 2,500 people registered with a floating population of another 1,600 attending the seminar tables.

Luis Villoro was a sentinel

The homage to Luis Villoro, which also honored Zapatista teacher Galeano, killed by paramilitaries earlier this year, was held in the Caracol of Oventik. Subcomandante Galeano, who adopted the murdered teacher's name in his honor, explained that when Zapatistas name the life of those who are missing, they come to exist in a different way. He insisted that each person must struggle for freedom in whatever corner of the world they live. He reminded us all that being a Zapatista means organizing and working collectively, without selling out, until the capitalist system is destroyed. He revealed that Luis Villoro had clandestinely joined the Zapatistas a while back and had been a sentinel who saw changes unnoticed by a great many intellectuals. The urn with Villoro's ashes remained on Zapatista lands.

The importance of critical thought

In the communique about the event, Subcomandante Galeano stated that Zapatistas see critical thought as having the same task as being a sentinel. He warned of the sentry syndrome in which the lookout tires in his work and no longer perceives danger. He explained that the Zapatistas could see a catastrophe approaching while others went on with their same methods of struggle, and for that reason had sent out this invitation to a seminar, or seedbed, so others could say what they were seeing ahead.

In a talk at the seminar itself he spoke more specifically about the storm they are seeing today. It's an economic crisis such as no other seen before because it has turned the most basic

elements—water, air and light—into merchandise; its traditional institutions have lost their legitimacy and the corruption of the political classes is scandalous. Most once-national big businesses are now straw-men for the giant world capitalists linked to the international banks and the traditions and customs of the corrupt political class have moved to organized crime, not the other way around.

Those invited were asked to bring not “fads, dogmas, lazy thinking and lies, but words that will spark and encourage reflection.” Later, at the seminar itself, Subcomandante Galeano explained that the reason for holding it was to invite participants to bring their seeds and the Zapatistas would examine which ones could be useful for them. The objective was not to receive recipes but to spark ideas.

Many people came to present their comments personally, while many more who couldn't attend sent papers, videos, photo exhibits and artwork. What follows is only a brief summary of some of those seeds. The audios and some of the transcripts are available for review on http://radiozapatista.org/?page_id=13233.

An impressive number of young people from different entities in Mexico and other parts of the world swarmed around the university. They abounded in the main hall, with its capacity for about a thousand people, while other large rooms nearby were set up so the interventions could be transmitted electronically. A professional team of interpreters did simultaneous translation into other languages.

The seminar was intense, with long working hours and theoretically dense expositions. After each round table came interventions divided between Subcomandante Moises and Subcomandante Galeano. Their interventions were thus a break despite their length, due to their unique way of talking (the one poetic and masterly; the other concrete and deliberative).

<h2<="" h2="" style="color: rgb(0, 0, 0); font-family: arial, sans-serif; font-size: 14px; font-style: normal; font-variant-ligatures: normal; font-variant-caps: normal; font-weight: normal; letter-spacing: normal; orphans: 2; text-align: start; text-indent: 0px; text-transform: none; white-space: normal; widows: 2; word-spacing: 0px; -webkit-text-stroke-width: 0px; text-decoration-style: initial; text-decoration-color: initial;">Families of the student teachers who were “disappeared” in Ayotzinapa, who have still received no response from the government but have been supported by the Zapatistas, attended the inauguration of the seminar, which also took place at the Oventik Caracol. Subcomandante Galeano said some think capitalism is an indestructible wall, but assured that Zapatistas aren't concerned by its alleged omnipotence and eternity because they know it's false. Cracks are appearing in the system's wall, and the family members of the disappeared in Ayotzinapa have become one of those cracks.

He urged them not to falter because there's still a long way to go but the perseverance of the rebellion and resistance of those below who don't give up or sell out is what terrorizes the ones above. “Don't allow [the crack] to close up. Not only do your children breathe through that crack, but so do the thousands of others who have disappeared across the world.”

Resistance and rebellion
He also described the everyday practices of the Zapatista communities and the history of the Zapatistas. Zapatistas have been exercising resistance and rebellion for more than 20 years, he said. To resist is to stand firm in response to enemy attacks, to resist their threats and provocations and not depend on the government. Resistance requires discipline and involves

learning to solve problems and develop one's own initiatives.

He wove everything together with many concrete examples. It's about organized disobedience that has been improving and is taught to the new generations. They have come to understand what to do with their resistance and rebellion, how, why and for what. He confessed that the continuous implementation of resistance and rebellion has cost them a lot of work, effort and sacrifice, but it has also helped them practice their freedom. With rebellion and resistance, the Zapatistas can freely practice what they think at each level: local, autonomous municipality and the Good Government Council. They are practicing a new democracy

Governing isn't about having power

Subcomandante Moisés also referred to Mexico's current electoral dynamics. He explained that Zapatistas aren't calling on people either to vote or not to vote: "We understand there are those who believe they can change the system by voting in the elections. All we say is that it's nonsense, because the same power organizes the elections; decides the candidates; says how, when and where to vote; announces the winner and determines whether or not it was legal. Solutions come from people, not leaders, not party followers."

He explained that in Zapatista lands autonomous authorities are elected through true democracy and another kind of justice is done, that of the organized people. They begin by organizing assemblies where they give their opinions and search for proposals, studying their advantages and disadvantages to choose the best ones. Before the decision-making process is over, the results are taken to the people so a decision can come from below. Governing the Zapatista way doesn't mean having power. We need to remind those who say there are only two ways to become government—by armed force or by voting—that there are other options, one of which is to buy the government, which is what the current President has done. Another way, Moisés said, is to "take charge without being in government," explaining that "we must organize and unite our organizations in favor of a world where the people rule and the governments obey."

>h2>Another world has to be constructed
Economist Sergio Rodríguez Lazcano spoke on how capitalism has moved from its industrial form to financial speculation, acting on the border between legality and illegality, with financial interests pushing for the fourth world war, most workers lacking steady employment, capital being dislocated; the welfare State gone for good and the nation State unable even to play its regulatory role any longer. We're seeing a settling of scores between capitalism and humanity in which another geography, another time and other kinds of social relationships that aren't capitalist will have to be constructed.

Luis Lozano Arredondo, who directs an interdisciplinary analysis center, explained why the capitalist system can't recover. Economist Rosa Albina Garavito, once a guerrilla fighter, focused on the urgency of stopping capitalism's destruction of Nature.

Dispossessing indigenous peoples of their common goods

Painter María O'Higgins sent a piece she had written to the gathering; videos of Oscar Chávez and the poet Guillermo Velázquez were shown; and a group of graphic artists participated with art work created for this occasion, titling their exhibit "Signs and Signals."

Muralist Efraín Herrera addressed ethics and aesthetics against the capitalist hydra, arguing that we must resist the capitalist individualist dynamic by creating many collectives, while Eduardo Almeida, a psychologist from the Jesuit University of Puebla, delved into the value of dignity for a devastated country.

An academic from the same university, Maria Eugenia Díaz y Rivera, criticized pseudo-national identity and used her learnings compiled from living in a community of indigenous people to talk about their intellectual and emotional capacity to deal with adversity and harassment. Vilma Almendra, a Colombian indigenous woman, referred to the war in her country as an instrument to displace indigenous people from their lands. Anthropologist Alicia Castellanos spoke of the crisis of a social system in which violence has become inseparable from it.

Young urbanologist Jerónimo Díaz presented the effects of neoliberal urbanization on Valle de Mexico. Writer Rubén Trejo spoke of the dispossession of common goods, capitalist exploitation and the resistance of the “*comuneros*.” Cati Mirielle, from the “*Sin maíz no hay país*”

Don't remain in symbolic resistance

Pablo Reyna, member of the YoSoy132 movement in the Iberoamericana University, warned that capitalism is patient and wherever it encounters resistance, it waits to attack. We saw a video sent from France by a theater group working in poorer barrios that calls itself “Tu madre en chanclas” (Your mother in flip-flops). Its members showed how theater is used to potentially emancipate children.

Migrant activist Malú Huacuja del Toro sent a document from New York highlighting that Mexico is among the top places in disgrace and in first place in exploitation of the cheapest manual labor in the world. Javier Hernandez, member of a free and independent medium called “Zapateando,” posed that one should not stay in symbolic resistance and that the Zapatistas need others, not as disciples but as compañeros. Academic Ana Lidya Flores, also from the Jesuit University in Puebla, warned about the vastness of the social networks and the urgent need for free communication against the domination of the media-ocracy.

Sociologist and world systems analyst Immanuel Wallerstein sent a document in which he reflects on anti-system movements and the future of capitalism. He argues that the system is in a structural crisis and cannot return to its previous stage, and that while the results of the struggle against it are uncertain, it depends on creativity, where small actions can detonate large consequences. French-Brazilian Marxist sociologist and philosopher Michael Löwy also sent a document, in which he presents eco-socialism as a social alternative. Mexico's distinguished sociologist and critic Pablo González Casanova was present via a document read by his assistant, in which he questions whether we are before the terminal crisis just of capitalism or of humanity itself. War is being waged militarily, economically and culturally, which combines what is virtual with what is real and is destroying the Earth. Salvador Castañeda, director of “Unidad Comunista” (Communist Unity) magazine, pointed out that those governing are just front-men for the transnationals.

The Kurdish people's experience

In a round table made up exclusively of women, journalist Havin Güneser, a militant of the Kurd's liberation movement, talked about the Kurdish revolutionary process and presented a flag of the Kurd student's movement to teacher Galeano's family. She explained that the Kurd's ancestral territory is divided into what are today four States (Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran).

Güneser said women and armed women's groups have an outstanding position in their struggles, and have struggled within and from outside to gain respect. In 1993 they founded a women's guerrilla organization without male leadership and later founded a revolutionary women's party. Finally they have become a women's movement fighting for autonomy and against hierarchies. They have established armed self-defense units. There is autonomy from the local level and in all decision-making bodies and a federated coordination. The women have been transforming their men through these dynamics. Recently, women's armed contingencies defeated and expelled the Islamic State from their territory, something no other army in the region has accomplished.

The Kurds have been advancing in their own autonomy and feel united with the Zapatistas. Since it was founded in 1978, the Kurd Communist Party has resisted fascism, colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism. Its leader, Adullah Öcalan, was kidnapped and is being held by NATO in solitary confinement on an island, sharing his reflections with his people from there. In another table a text from him was read in which he referred to democratic modernity versus capitalist modernity, in which the paradigm of democratic modernity is based on the liberation of women.

Three generations of Zapatista women

Karla Quiñónez, a Mexican woman living in Brooklyn and leader of Alianza Adelante, sent a video shown at the women's round table, in which she speaks about exploited migrant women and women's cooperatives. The young Mariana Favela, member of the #YoSoy132 movement, pointed out that indeed if women were the first colony, they were also the first to resist. She discussed the movement she participates in, and how it doesn't have representatives or leaders.

Silvia Federici participated with a paper in which she noted that capitalism goes against the Earth and against women's bodies. Academic Margarita Millán, from Mexico's Autonomous University, spoke of the need to put "what's fair" at the center of the ordinary and between genders. Sylvia Marcos, a feminist ecologist, said resistance isn't only about enduring, but also about building. Because we are equal and different, she explained, we should examine the practices of both genders.

Five Zapatista women also spoke during this session. A young woman named Selena referred to the war the government and capitalism wage against young people and how Zapatista youths, though poor in material goods, are rich in the way they think. Lizbeth, from the support base, told how the Zapatistas live their autonomy. Comandante Dalia narrated women's process of awakening in defense of their rights and stated that they are no longer humiliated by anyone. They know that if they don't organize, capitalism will do away with

everyone. Comandante Rosalinda recalled how the EZLN recruited women and formed them and Comandante Miriam described the deplorable situation in which Chiapas women lived before the Zapatista uprising in 1994; they were like merchandise and got no rest, with triple exploitation. They have been freeing themselves through organization.

Subcomandante Galeano noted that the EZLN women who had spoken spanned three generations and mentioned men's resistance to women's liberation in the Zapatista process. "The women fought against us and defeated us," he said, clearly pleased with this irreversible victory.

Seeking hope in catastrophe

Argentinian Juan Wahren, from *Autonomía Libertaria (Libertarian Autonomy)*, highlighted the ideas of strength in horizontality while Arturo Anguiano, a researcher from UAM, alluded to four types of dispossession: of common goods, of people, of work and of salary. Capitalism restricts and distorts politics, while the politics of the oppressed is to resist and construct new roads. Political Science Professor Paulina Fernández spoke about how she had written the book that recently appeared about Zapatista autonomous justice. Chilean-Spanish sociologist and political analyst Marcos Roitman sent a document in which he argues that critical thought is nourished by a lot of knowledge and goes against the current. He points out that capitalism reinvents itself, and has the capacity to break down resistance and get people to monitor, censure and exploit themselves and each other.

Academic Daniel Inclán said that the worst part of the war to conserve capitalism, designed from the top, is that it pits people against people. Writer Gustavo Esteva posed the tension existing between individualism and solidarity. And if there are those who think the structures of power can be used for change, evidence shows that this is unfeasible. The disaster caused by capitalist dispossession is widespread and overwhelming, old responses no longer work and resistance alone is not enough. Imagination and creativity are needed.

Manuel Rozental, a Colombian physician, analyst and participant in indigenous and other grassroots processes, reflected on how we haven't learned from fascism, which recommends breaking out of economic stagnation by reactivating the economy with wars. Capitalism is facing a surplus population combined with a resource deficit, which is why Nature and people are being privatized. Guatemalan researcher Sergio Tishler posed that the wall isn't an external reality but is subjective and proposed developing the concept of the crack. He also referred to the Zapatista concept of the different types of time: exact time, which is displayed by a clock and is used for commerce and urban exchanges; revolutionary struggle time; and just time, that of Nature and community. Clock time doesn't have to subordinate the others. Irish John Holloway emphasized that those below are putting capitalism in crisis and are proud of it, as they're subjects, not victims. Critical thought isn't thought about catastrophe but a search for hope in the catastrophe.

Capitalism is an inch away from extinguishing human life

Donovan Corcuff, from southern France, sent a video in which he discussed the plasticity of capitalism, which is now trying to present itself as "green," but it is a huge lie because the

dynamics of capitalism are based on the relentless search for profits. He praised the Zapatistas for creating a language that is uncommon in academia. Another Donovan, this time Donovan Hernández, a university student from Puebla, argued that grassroots expressions don't need leaders because people construct themselves.

I spoke about the experiences of collectives that are outside of capitalism and State and go beyond parties, elections, social movements and even farther beyond the democracy of those on top, constructing the freedom of those below. Considering that capitalism doesn't want to leave anything on the margins but rather to devour everything, those who want to escape from it are facing a hard struggle. Patient labor exists from below and little by little it is building something different from capitalism. I threw out the question about whether we would have enough time since capitalism is an inch away from extinguishing human life from the planet. Uruguayan Raúl Zibechi delved further into the systemic chaos and referred to the dispossession caused by extractivism.

Capitalist greed seen from the indigenous perspective

Peruvian Hugo Blanco pointed out that the defenders of Mother Earth have to engage in an internationalist dynamic. Indigenous intellectual Xuno López, spoke in Tzeltal then translated himself. He said capitalism deceives and harms. It's a way of being in this world that we reproduce in the relationships we weave everyday through our consumerism. Mayan Juan Carlos Mijangos talked about how capitalism mocks, sickens and deceives.

Bolivian Óscar Olivera sent a video about the struggle to stop water privatization in Cochabamba that has served as an inspiration so others will stand up against capitalist despoiling of water. Carlos González, leader of the Indigenous National Council (CNI), did an overview of the struggles indigenous peoples in Mexico, who in spite of the repression are defending their lands; creating autonomy and opposing capitalism. He referred to data presented by CNI that reveal a violent strategy of dispossession throughout the country: cities devouring peasant lands; indigenous people and peasants becoming migrants without leaving what was once their land; everything converted into merchandise; gender violence... He recommended updating the genealogy of capitalism. Capitalism has created fictitious money that's not backed by labor while financial capitalism steals everything it can and puts up Nature as collateral. In the current capitalist dynamic entire countries will go broke and the migrant populations will increase. He recalled that language is also a form of resistance.

A war against humanity

In the last session, Swiss-born Jean Robert, an architect, researcher on the history of perceptions and an adviser to the Zapatistas who has lived in Mexico for 43 years, sees the Zapatistas as the regeneration of a territory with a people. He reminded the participants who attended the Zapatista school that they were asked if they were free, because what people from the city consider freedoms are commodities, not the freedom to truly decide in their lives.

English art critic, novelist, painter and poet John Berger sent a writing describing how the world has changed as migration has become the main form of survival. He says the rebels

have to trust themselves and that the desire for justice is multitudinous. Historian Jérôme Baschet praised the Zapatistas for opening a gap in this dark world. He considered that the catastrophe is already beginning to happen and we live in the middle of the storm unleashed by capitalism's war against humanity. He said Zapatistas are warning that a worse storm is approaching with the devastation of Nature and all forms of life, but an effort to build a non-capitalist world with autonomy as the main policy also exists. Philosopher Fernanda Navarro stressed the importance of the questions of what to do and how, noting that the seminar had shown encouraging signs of alternatives.

It was a voice of alert

At the end of the packed week, Moisés summarized the seminar's works. The subcomandante said the seedbed must be increased because this seminar at the University of the Earth was just to get it started. It should be seen just a beginning, and reproduced everywhere we came from. He said we need to trot, not walk, to face down and destroy capitalism because time is running out.

Comandante Tacho did the closing presentation, exhorting those of us who came to the seminar to return home to share the thoughts on the harms of capitalism that we had heard, organize, grow and widen the crack in the wall. We need to defend ourselves against the capitalist disaster with organization. We need to say "that's enough!" to capitalism and take the world into our hands and build a world without rulers.

Here I've only presented a short summary of the wealth of interventions. I urge you to listen to the voice of warning issued by the Zapatistas and replicate the reflections available on radiozapatista.org. We're living in a time of great darkness, but we ourselves can ignite lights that will illuminate us.

Number 415 | Febrero 2016

Mexico

It's going to be a long struggle

The struggle, efforts and commitments to change things in Mexico —its abysmal inequality and ceaseless violence— will take a long time, but the route is open. Today it's being traveled by original peoples in resistance

Jorge Alonso

Mexico's economic, political and social situation has gone from bad to worse. This year opened with a *New York Times* editorial criticizing the Mexican President for "stubbornly resisting accountability" and for having "swiftly and systematically whitewashed ugly truths and played down scandals."

Concretely, it referred to the decision not to penalize the corruption of top bureaucrats with their juicy businesses, the cover-up of the gift of a lavish home to the President and his wife by a government contractor, and suspected complicity in the second prison escape last July of "El

Chapo" Guzmán, who boasts of being the world's greatest heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and marijuana dealer. It added to the list the forced disappearance and presumed massacre of the 43 teaching students from Ayotzinapa in September 2014, seen as one of the largest and most atrocious human rights violations in Mexico's recent history.

The seeks kudos

government

Days later El Chapo was caught again, and the government tried to present it as a great triumph meriting applause. And despite the plunge in the price of Mexican oil in December and the peso's huge devaluation compared to the dollar, President Peña Nieto reiterated that the national economy was doing well, as if he had achieved a huge mission.

Despite the firing of the journalists who had broken the story of the governing couple's luxury house with what the Times editorial called "meticulous, unimpeachable reporting," the independent press still hammered away at the fact that the corruption in the upper government spheres isn't being penalized. It also claimed that the staging of the drug dealer's capture was fictitious. Academics specializing in security issues called attention to the fact that the investigations and information about this event should have focused on both the national and worldwide network of business and political accomplices that had allowed El Chapo to become such a powerful drug distributor, instead of being distracted by the banalities of his dialogues with movie actors.

The unresolved case of Ayotzinapa and the evidence that the work of a group of experts from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) is being hindered is still more baggage for the President. The parents of the teaching students called the progress in the investigation of this tragedy presented by the government in mid-January "insufficient." New facts about the case arising at the beginning the year left no room for the government lies that the cohort of servile media tried to peddle.

Mexico's disaster in brief

- Worldwide, Mexico is in third place among countries that export laundered money.
- Seven of every ten Mexicans feel unsafe in the cities where they live; poverty has continued to increase and the vast inequality is deepening the differences as a very small minority accumulates most of the country's riches while the majority barely has enough to survive.
- Corruption and impunity, which has gone untouched, is increasing. The violence is ceaseless and forced disappearances with the participation of the armed forces don't end. People cried out against a new Ayotzinapa this January, with the disappearance of 17 people in a town in Guerrero,. Amnesty International has noted that Mexico suffers from an epidemic of forced disappearances with a full half of the 27,600 recognized disappearances occurring during Peña Nieto's term. The ruthless war against indigenous peoples and the poor is also continuing at an overwhelming pace.

We live in dark times

The conclusions of a just-issued independent human rights commission analysis of the fight against crime in the context of the neoliberal Mexican State argued that true public safety should prioritize the rights of the majority of the people over the economic and political interests of the privileged minority. It emphasized that decisions cannot be made without consulting the people and that safety cannot be guaranteed only by increasing police and military forces. Social order imposed solely by force turns into a regimen that is the opposite of the rule of law and sends out the message that order is established through the law of the jungle. The fact is that the economic power of crime remains intact in Mexico because it suits capitalist interests. The report criticized the government for making the Mexican people have to choose between public safety and human rights, which is a false quandary.

The last report from the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center points out that the defense and promotion of human rights in Mexico is becoming more and more complex because the national context makes this kind of work harder. It describes the practice of torture as deeply seated and generalized throughout the country in a reign of cynical impunity. The situation in the state of Chiapas, where this center is located, is even more overwhelming given the atrocious war against the people resisting eviction and defending their autonomy. The report, which is full of data, concludes that the Mexican context is in dark times due to the implementation of repressive methods definable as state terrorism, but that the struggle will continue as long as the resistance continues to build community, hope and life throughout the country.

The massacre of Acteal

unpunished

At the end of last year, the organization called Las Abejas, in the small village of Acteal in the municipality of Chenalhó, Chiapas, again commemorated the December 22, 1997, massacre, which remains unpunished to this day. They recalled how paramilitaries came onto their lands to kill 45 men and women, four of whom were pregnant and were found stabbed and shot in the belly, during a day of fasting and prayer to ask for peace in their municipality and Mexico in general and to implore the State to end the war against organized communities.

Yet again they charged that instead of investigating the masterminds of the massacre, the country's infamous Supreme Court of Justice simply ordered the incarceration of the paramilitaries directly involved in the massacre. The people say they have learned an important lesson: if they want true justice, Mexico's organized communities have to construct it themselves from below.

They said that last October they had delivered an investigation of the massacre to the IACHR during a public hearing and had clearly stated to the representatives of the Mexican State that the families and friends of those killed reject the "friendly solution" they were offered because the blood of their people is not to be played with. They reported that members of political parties, paramilitary groups, and government officials in their region attack them even though their struggle has been and will continue to be nonviolent. They reminded the hearing that Father José María Morelos, a leader of Mexico's War of Independence, had written in "Sentiments of the Nation," a document containing 20-odd points he wanted the incipient Congress to consider in the drafting of a Constitution, that laws were needed to moderate misery and opulence. However, in today's Mexico, while the government rhetorically exalts Morelos, it's helping the rich become immensely rich and impoverishing the poor to scandalous levels.

They concluded their statement by highlighting that impunity is so widespread in Mexico that it

can't even be measured. They pledged that they will continue to speak out against the State's crime in Acteal, as well as the one against the teaching students of Ayotzinapa and many others that are multiplying in every corner of the country

Building from below

At dawn of the first day of 2016 in the Zapatista region of Oventic, where hundreds of EZLN sympathizers, supporters and aspirants came together to commemorate the 22nd anniversary of the insurrection with cultural activities, the Zapatistas issued an important communiqué. It stressed that for over 500 years indigenous peoples have suffered the war to annihilate them waged by the powerful of different nations, colors, languages and beliefs. Even though these powerful have tried to extinguish the different original peoples by killing their bodies and their ideas, they have resisted as guardians of Mother Earth.

The Zapatistas recalled that 22 years ago they shook up "the stupor of a world resigned to defeat." Once again, they presented their eleven demands: land, work, food, health, education, decent housing, independence, democracy, liberty, justice and peace. They recalled how for the rich and powerful, indigenous peoples could only serve as slaves to make them ever richer. After the Zapatistas took up arms and fought, "dignity" took to the streets and asked to speak in Mexico and around the world. The Zapatistas understood that calling and changed their way of struggle. Their ears are attentive and their voice open, because they know that the people's just struggle is for life and not death. Nevertheless, they warned that they still have their weapons and will not give them up because even though they offered an open heart, they have realized that those from above only opt for deception, greed and lies.

The war of those above against those below continues and is worsening. One of this war's objectives has been to exterminate the Zapatistas. That is why, instead of simply resolving their fair demands, the government hasn't stopped waging its war, still financing the paramilitary groups while handing out crumbs, taking advantage of the ignorance and poverty of some. The Zapatistas have confirmed that those above thought their war plans would make the Zapatistas give up and sell out, but it was a miscalculation. Zapatistas are "not beggars or good-for-nothings who hope everything will simply resolve itself" on its own. The communiqué highlights that the Zapatista struggle isn't local or even national, but universal, because the injustices, crimes, looting, disdain and exploitation are also universal, as are rebellion, rage, dignity and the eagerness to live better.

The Zapatistas understand that they need to build their own lives autonomously. Thus, despite great threats, military and paramilitary harassment, and constant provocation by the government, they've taken on the task of forming their own governing systems, their own education, health and communication, their own way of caring for and working with Mother Earth. As a people with a different culture they have promoted an autonomous politics and an ideology of how they want to live. While others wait for those from above to solve the problems of those below, the Zapatistas have been building their freedom from the bottom up. They acknowledge that their world isn't perfect, but it's different and has been created with patience and determination by women, men, children and the elderly.

Pains near and far

Looking back on past years, the Zapatistas congratulate themselves for constructing another

way of life, governing themselves as collective peoples through a dynamic of ruling by obeying, in a new system and another way of life. And when they refer to this, they can't help but make comparisons and confirm that where people bought the bad government lines, there's helplessness and misery. Laziness and crime rule; community life is broken. Those who sold out to the government haven't seen their needs met and instead more horror has piled up, because where there was once only hunger and poverty, there is now not only those same evils but also hopelessness.

Summarizing what one can see in the communities that sold out to the government, there's no longer a work spirit but rather a dependency on handouts, above all during electoral campaigns. In contrast, the Zapatista zones may not have cement houses given by the government, or digital televisions or the latest model trucks, but what's important is that the people know how to work the land. They live from what they produce and not from handouts from anybody. The Zapatista communities live better than those who sold out to the politicians. That being said, however, the Zapatistas aren't yet satisfied; they admit that there's still much to be done, above all to organize themselves better.

The Zapatistas also listen to the pain and suffering from near and afar, particularly in these times in which "a bloody night extends over the world." Those who really rule in capitalism aren't content with continued exploitation, repression, despair and looting, but "are determined to destroy the entire world if in doing so they can create profits..." The rich multimillionaires of a few countries continue in their objective of looting the entire world's natural wealth, everything that gives us life, such as water, land, forests, mountains, rivers, air— and everything that's below the ground: gold, oil, uranium, amber, sulfur, carbon and other minerals. They don't consider the earth a source of life, but a business, turning everything into merchandise. Real solutions cannot arise from the same place the problems do.

Facing the approaching storm

The Zapatistas reflect not upon what was taught to them but upon what they have learned from their own experience: that nobody will solve their problems, relieve their pain or give them justice. All that will only come from what they do collectively in an organized way. And they also know from experience that this is extensible to others. They say that when many become outraged, a light turns on in a corner of the world and illuminates the face of the earth for a few moments. However, they've learned that if that same outrage is organized, that light, which might be ephemeral, could shine for a longer time. That's why they insist on the need to organize themselves for the struggle to change things, to create a new way of life and other forms of self-government by the peoples themselves. They know that if peoples don't organize, they'll be enslaved. There's no salvation in capitalism.

Another lesson they've learned is not to trust leaders. Instead each collective must think how to solve its own situation. That's why they recommend strengthening the areas of collective work as they face "the approaching storm."

A route is open

This communiqué delves into what I call "*demoeleuthery*," the untiring search for the freedom of those below. It also confirms what Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar recently said in his analysis: that it is the knowledge of the peoples in movement and those in communities of

resistance that are confronting the current grave ecological and social crisis. He praises the Zapatistas' autonomous thought, their struggle from below, from the left and with the Earth. He calls attention to the fact that the struggle for autonomy is that theoretical-political force that's boiling throughout all of Latin America, a wave created by the condemned of the earth in defense of their territories faced with the threats of global neoliberal capitalism.

Escobar highlights the fact that the construction of autonomy by Zapatistas and other peoples is establishing that the Earth rules, that the people give the orders and the government (self-government) obeys. He adds that the knowledge of the peoples who are resisting from their own worlds are in fact worlds in movement that are disrupting the globalizing project. That project wants to create a homogenous world, and is opposed to the idea of many different worlds founded upon people's ancestry and open to the future in their autonomy.

What's urgent now is that these autonomies get to know each other, enrich each other with their own experiences and connect without any rigid or vertical structure. They need to spread out like rhizomes, creating a network in which the plurality of nodes connect and strengthen each other.

The Zapatistas have shown that there is a route that can confront capitalism and all the disasters of planetary destruction, a route that is open and ready for walking in freedom.

Number 418 | Mayo 2016

Mexico

A history of challenging messages

The Zapatista movement has proved to be exceptionally collective and provocative in its thinking, actions, feelings and transformations. In only a brief review of its messages, we can capture this movement's essence, crucial in our continent's history.

Jorge Alonso

Insurgent *Subcomandantes* Marcos and Galeano are the same person yet at the same time are two outstanding personalities in the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN). For many years Marcos was the only spokesperson for the Zapatistas. More recently, as Galeano, he has shared this role with Insurgent *Subcomandante* Moisés.

Marcos/Galeano has been an exceptional exponent of not only Latin American but world critical thinking. There are 1,267 writings by Marcos, several by Galeano and still more by Galeano and Moisés together on the Zapatista's web page (enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx)

The impact of this complex personality's speeches has been palpable on the Internet, where a search shows us half a million visits. With over 10,000 citations, he has also made a dent in the academic world. Marcos' writings, as well as books based on him, have been referenced by a large number of researchers from different countries and in several languages. He has been interviewed by Mexican and international media, most memorably by Elena Poniatowska, Carmen Aristegui, Julio Scherer, Gabriel García Márquez, Ignacio Ramonet, Yvon le Bot and Vicente Leñero.

Emergence

The man known as *Subcomandante* Marcos came to Chiapas with academic formation and with political training based on the concept of guiding the masses to take power with revolutionary

slogans. He had the good sense to listen to the indigenous peoples and open himself up to their wisdom. With this profound change of mentality he put himself at the service of the indigenous worldview, struggles, aspirations and transformations they had already been making from the bottom up. It was then that he took on the role entrusted to him by these peoples: to be their interpreter to Mexican civil society and the world, explaining the feelings and proposals of original peoples who not only claimed their place in geography and time but also contributed findings for a wider-ranging emancipation.

The Zapatista's spokesperson was himself changed by the process the movement was going through. When the EZLN burst publicly on the stage in January 1994, it issued the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle in which it declared war on the State of Mexico and made demands about work, land, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace.

Dialogue

While the Mexican Army responded by massacring rebellious indigenous peoples, much of Mexican civil society was open to considering the analysis and demands broadcast by Marcos and went out onto the streets demanding a peaceful solution based on dialogue. The Zapatistas agreed to the peace movement's proposal and in mid-1994 made its own new proposal in the Second Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle. In it they still demanded freedom and justice, but no longer with weapons; instead it would be based on the building of a new political culture.

The Zapatistas accepted dialogue as a way to find solutions to the serious injustices all those from below have endured for centuries, without limiting them to the specifically indigenous rights that are still pending. At first they agreed to enter into the discussion about democracy and didn't oppose the holding of elections in their territories. However, they soon detected that the electoral option and connections with political parties wasn't any way to achieve profound changes.

Fascination

The Zapatistas set out to insure that the rights of indigenous people would become concrete by listing them in the San Andrés Accords. Knowing that Mexico's executive branch wasn't to be trusted, they pressed for the legislative body to take up the accords and turn them into law but the Mexican State as a whole betrayed the Accords with legislation that contradicted them. Marcos responded by making it known that the Zapatistas would remain in resistance and rebellion.

In this lengthy phase there were long silences from the Zapatistas and Marcos promised "the words will come when they come." Mexican society was fascinated with the Zapatistas' most visible aspect, its spokesperson. They were won over by his questioning, acid, relaxed language, far removed from the stuffiness of politicians and academics, full of metaphors and parables and with dazzling depth.

Achievements and mistakes

In early 2003 Marcos again began broadcasting the Zapatista message and impacting the country by reporting on the consolidation of the autonomous Zapatista municipalities, which had adopted self-government in what they called Caracoles. Marcos pointed out that they were already making “govern by obeying” a reality.

Knowing that the Zapatistas had no chance militarily and were thinking about life, not martyrdom, Marcos continued to employ his mastery of language to advance the struggle, basing his discourse on what he heard in the Zapatista communities and the desires of those from below.

At this stage Marcos announced various initiatives. The Tijuana Reality Plan involved linking all of Mexico’s resistance movements in order to reconstruct the Mexican State “from below.” Marcos said that one of the fundamental goals of the Zapatistas was to build “a world holding many worlds.”

Marcos’ messages not only evaluated the positive things that had been achieved in the Caracoles but also pointed out their mistakes. The most regrettable one he detected was the subordinate position given to women. He saw the relationship established between the EZLN’s political-military structure and the autonomous governments as another mistake. Identifying mistakes involved trying to correct them. Another of Marcos’s phrases, which showed the Zapatistas’ continual effort to fine tune their autonomy and correct their mistakes, was: “We’re still missing what’s missing,” combined with “We have to build something else.”

Mexican civil society learned from Marcos that Zapatista communities were immersed in internal consultations; that the Zapatista way wasn’t to rule anybody but rather to look for paths, steps and company. The Zapatista peoples examined these routes and analyzed what would happen if they decided to follow each one.

The invitation

The Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, which sought “to touch the hearts of plain, ordinary, decent and defiant” people, appeared in mid-2005, after one of these consultations. Through their spokesperson, the Zapatistas stated where they were, what their worldview was, how they saw Mexico, what they were thinking of doing and how they would accomplish it, and invited people of that definition to walk the same road. “According to our way of thinking and what we see in our hearts, we’ve come to a point where we can’t progress further and, moreover, it’s possible that we’ll lose all we have if we remain as we are and do nothing more to advance. In other words the time has come to once again take risks and take a dangerous but worthwhile step because, perhaps together with other social sectors with the same shortages we have, it will be possible to obtain what we need and deserve. A new step forward in the indigenous struggle is only possible together with laborers, peasants, students, teachers, employees and workers from the cities and the countryside.”

Since then, the Zapatistas’ “we” sought to include all the rebels abounding in Mexico in a more organized way. Through Marcos, the Zapatistas announced that they proposed making an agreement with leftist people and organizations in which they wouldn’t tell anyone what they should do or give orders. They proposed coming to an agreement on struggles unconnected with each other, but assembling a civil and peaceful movement. And when they said “with everyone” they were also including migrants who had had to go to work in the United States to be able to survive.

The According to what they were hearing

Other

Campaign

and learning, the Zapatistas wanted to participate in the building of a national anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberal leftist program of struggle. Marcos stressed that the Zapatistas would try to help build another way of doing politics. At that time they aspired to achieve a new Constitution with new laws that recognized the demands of the Mexican people: roof, land, work, food, health, education, information, culture, justice, independence, democracy, liberty and peace.

Marcos said they would create a policy of alliances with non-electoral organizations and movements that defined themselves as leftist, but with several conditions. They wouldn't make agreements from the top to be imposed below, but would agree to go together to listen to and "organize the indignation." They wouldn't set up movements that would later be negotiated behind the backs of those who made them, but would always listen to the opinions of those involved. They wouldn't seek gifts, positions, advantages or political posts; they would go beyond the electoral calendar; they wouldn't try to resolve the problems with Mexico from the top but instead would build an alternative from and through the base.

Other conditions involved reciprocal respect for organizations' autonomy and independence and their forms of struggle, organization and internal decision-making processes. In this way, Marcos, on behalf of the Zapatistas, officially announced the invitation to the "National Campaign with Other Politics, through a National Program of Leftist Struggle and a New Constitution." And because the name came out a tad long, he decided to abbreviate it, calling it "The Other Campaign."

The tour

By then the Zapatistas had succeeded in uniting the universal with the local and had rearticulated and redefined the national and social struggle, the struggles of indigenous peoples and of workers, communities and citizens. The project involved society defining its own politics geared to a social Left.

Marcos spent several months in 2006 travelling around the country. He didn't present himself as a leader, but as a friend, putting himself at the service of the cause that encapsulated the sympathy the Zapatista movement was generating so that those who otherwise wouldn't even talk to each other could struggle together.

Once out of Chiapas, the Right began to demand that he remove his ski mask, a demand some provocateurs repeated at certain public events where he officiated. Marcos answered that if he spoke without the Zapatista emblem many wouldn't know who he was. They only saw him with the balaclava on. The indigenous struggle, he said, needs to hide itself in order to make its demands visible, and he invited those who demanded he remove his mask to insist that the rich remove theirs.

Joining the Other Campaign in the tour through the country were peasants, trade unionists, commune members, fishers, cooperative members, teachers, nurses, employees, students, cultural groups and advocates defending natural resources, opposing privatizations and favoring the release of social and political prisoners.

The Zapatista tour didn't try to form a political party. Marcos was emphatic: they weren't seeking political office nor were they backing any candidate. "The Other" was the place for people without a party. Marcos called on "those from below" not to fight each other but to focus their energies on those responsible for poverty.

In so doing way he was weaving a network where people were learning to listen, to lose or control their fear, to not be alone, boosting their dignity, courage and rebellion, fighting for and conquering rights through organization and promoting a national program of struggle. The goal was to transform Mexico into a new, fair, free and democratic country. "Let's sweep everything away and make everything new."

The theory

In late 2007 a seminar was held at the University of the Land in San Cristóbal de las Casas involving many of the world's leftist intellectuals. Marcos presented a set of reflections titled "Neither the center nor the periphery." In the first, subtitled "The geography and calendar of the theory," he began by saying he would present the basis of a theory "so 'other' that it's actually practice."

He explained how the conceptual stone, when it touches the surface of theory, produces a series of waves that affect and modify various scientific and technical tasks. These waves are maintained until a new conceptual stone drops and a new series of waves changes theoretical production. Reaching the edge of reality depends on the density of that theoretical production. He criticized the aseptic zeal imposed by today's social sciences, which lead to the idea that if reality doesn't behave as indicated by the theory, "so much the worse for reality."

He said that theory is used to hide reality and ensure impunity and presented some theses about the anti-systemic struggle, among them that the capitalist system can't be understood and explained without the concept of war. He rejected the theory that capitalism would collapse by itself. He insisted that major transformations don't begin from the top but rather with small movements, with the organized awareness of groups and collectives that know and mutually recognize themselves to be "below and to the left."

Marcos also referred to the theories coming out of the metropolises and exported to the periphery, giving as an example metropolitan feminism that wants to impose itself on the communities without consulting or understanding what was already being done. He mentioned what the Zapatista women and those from the Other Campaign have been doing in one of the anti-systemic struggles that are "more weighty, complex and constant through equality and difference, which will not only shake the whole patriarchal system but also those who are just beginning to understand the strength and power of that difference."

The movement

More important than the number of people in a movement, its media impact or the forcefulness of its actions or its program's clarity and radicalness, said Marcos, is its ethics. The top's lack of ethics is the ethics of fear. He defined the capitalist system as "the empire of fear": fear of gender, which not only involves women's fear of men and vice versa but also women's fear of women and men's fear of men; inter-generational fear; fear of otherness; fear of race...

He said that there's no hierarchy of areas among the Zapatistas: the struggle for land isn't prioritized over the gender struggle, nor is the gender struggle more important than recognition and respect for difference. The Zapatistas only asked for their rights to be recognized, leaving them to be what and how they are. They want to be able to get up each morning without fear: be it of being indigenous, women, workers, homosexuals, lesbians, young people, seniors, children... and this isn't possible in the capitalist system.

Marcos explained how different indigenous peoples—Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Ttojobales, Choles, Zoques and Mames—and also mestizos converge in the Zapatista movement. Indigenous peoples had communities that formed zones, and in each zone was a non-military, organized collective leadership. Each zone had its own way of dealing with and resolving problems and the EZLN was like a bridge linking the zones. EZLN represents all the zones as a whole against the outside. When male and female *comandantes* spoke, or when Marcos did so, it wasn't in a personal capacity.

Marcos told how the Zapatistas were astonished by the sympathy and support they received since the start of their uprising from so many different sectors of the population: indigenous people; women; young people; homosexual, lesbian, transgender and transsexual people and sex workers. All these groups had understood that what they had in common was "otherness:" excluded, persecuted, discriminated and fearful.

The anger

The Zapatistas went to the 2007 seminar to express their anger and take responsibility for it. In an atmosphere of analysis and celebration everyone shared their anger. The Zapatistas weren't concerned how and with what they would aim this anger, nor at what pace, rhythm or speed. What concerned them was if the world that emerged from this anger would be like the one they were currently suffering in. They were worried that a world generated from so much struggle might still see women with all the kinds of contempt imposed by the patriarchal system, see people with diverse sexual preferences as strange or sick, want to tame young people and still scorn and humiliate indigenous peoples.

In this context, Marcos confessed that the EZLN was at one point tempted by hegemony and homogenization so as to impose ways and identities, presenting the Zapatista way as the only truth, but the peoples had prevented that from happening. Having overcome that temptation, the Zapatistas proposed the plurality of anger and differences in the way of feeling it. They were convinced they had to "come to an agreement to struggle together for the whole group and for each and every one in it."

The wars

Early in the 21st century's second decade Marcos elaborated on the subject of war. There was a "top war," in which the winners aren't content with military triumph but try to defeat the losers morally by gaining legitimacy through propaganda broadcast by the mass media.

He also elaborated on the "geography of war." In the scenario of a nuclear war, he said, there would be no winners or losers, only total and irreversible destruction, and that's why we've gone

from great wars to medium and small ones, combining international diplomacy with regional and national wars. And that in turn is why there are innumerable conflicts at all levels, with millions killed and displaced by war, with nations destroyed and millions in profits for the transnationals. The aim is to annihilate everything that gives society cohesion and rebuild what's been destroyed, reordering the social fabric with a different rationale and other actors. Today's wars impose new geographies.

Marcos also mentioned Mexico's top-down war. With abundant and precise data taken from various official sources, he showed that war in Mexico is big business for some people. The Mexican government has combined its military war with another against decent work and fair wages and the result of the latter is economic gains, thousands of dead and a destroyed and broken nation.

Marcos criticized many self-proclaimed left contingents for not having mobilized their forces to stop this war so the country could survive, and for making miserly calculations with the aim of mobilizing only for voting in the 2012 elections. In that year the Zapatistas supported the peace movement led by the poet Javier Sicilia.

Autonomy

Marcos reported that in recent years the indigenous Zapatistas' standard of living had improved and was higher than in the indigenous communities under the auspices of the government in power, which receive alms and squander them on alcohol and other useless things. For Marcos, beyond the many mistakes and difficulties, the Zapatista way is a new way of doing politics. And in his usual style of splitting hairs, he warned that it isn't enough to criticize machismo, patriarchy and misogyny, because it's one thing to be a woman at the top and something very different to be a woman from below. There was also a Left at the top and another from below.

In reviewing the seven years that have passed since the Sixth Declaration, he said the Zapatistas already knew who not to walk with when he launched the Zapatista invitation to what he called "the Sixth." They invited but not to recruit, supplant, subordinate or use. One of the Zapatista ways had been to walk and question. Looking, Marcos said, is a way of asking and it matters what they look at and from where. They differentiate themselves from those who want to lead the masses that will follow them, because the Zapatistas accompany and listen; they don't say what to do and not to do, and they seek to be what they can be. He criticized all hegemonies and vanguards and encouraged taking care of autonomy and growing it well and "very gently."

This was when the Zapatista spokesperson changed. It would no longer be exclusively Marcos, who announced that it would also be *Subcomandante* Moisés.

The replacement

In late March 2013 *Subcomandantes* Marcos and Moisés began making invitations for the first-level course on "Freedom according to the Zapatistas." All that was needed to enter this "little school" was the willingness to look and learn. The teaching-learning place would be the community.

The Mexican government always insisted on trying to defeat the Zapatistas with various strategies such as using the paramilitary to attack the communities. In one of these attacks they

killed a Zapatista teacher who had taken the name of Galeano, the Uruguayan writer. On reporting the crime, Marcos said they didn't want revenge but justice. In late May 2014 Marcos spoke as Marcos for the last time.

It was a collective decision. After 20 years the Zapatistas would replace their spokesperson. The first reason was generational. Those who were young or not even born in 1994 were now leading the resistance. At the same time they replaced the mestizo leadership with a clearly indigenous one. Throughout those two decades there had been a change of thought, going from revolutionary vanguard to governing through obeying, from taking power from above to creating power below, from forgetting professional politics to making everyday politics. The Zapatistas had also gone through another change: from gender marginalization to women's direct participation. They also changed from mocking others to celebrating difference. They created a grassroots government without specialists in it. Another change was that an indigenous man became their spokesperson and leader.

Galeano

When Marcos began to call himself Galeano he confessed that he had to learn to see a world he had already passed through. In 1994, he said, they didn't see indigenous people who had risen up and only saw a mestizo in a balaclava.

He explained how the idea that he would be the spokesperson had emerged. The indigenous people said they had to put up someone so that people by looking at him could see them. They built the Marcos personality as a distractor so the Zapatistas could be seen for what they are.

The Sixth Declaration, he said, had been the boldest of the Zapatista initiatives. And in the little school's course on freedom according to the Zapatistas, seeing that there was a new generation that could look straight at them, listen and speak without waiting for a guide or leader or for submission or follow-up, they understood that the Marcos character was no longer necessary. They had shown that leaders or strong men weren't needed in order to struggle.

Marcos recalled the teacher Galeano as an extraordinary person, like so many in the Zapatista communities. By killing him those from above had wanted to kill the Zapatistas. And for Galeano to live, the Marcos character had to die. Marcos' time was over and a new stage was opened with the spokesperson Galeano.

Galeano had been talking with Moisés in the Zapatista spokesperson role. His most outstanding contributions can be found in the book *El Pensamiento crítico frente a la Hidra capitalista* (Critical thought versus the capitalist Hydra).

In the most recent 2016 communiqués, Galeano has referred to the arts and not to politics, because it's the arts that rescue the essence of what is human showing the possibility of another world. He also appeals to the sciences because they have the possibility of rebuilding the now global catastrophe, not to patch together what has fallen but to remake it as new.

The women

When Moisés and Galeano reviewed the Zapatista communities they found that those who had advanced the most in production and trade collectives were the women, that they were better

administrators than the men. They recognized that progress doesn't happen evenly and knew they had a challenge. Galeano says that the key to understanding the Zapatistas' underground message is "to imagine what, through necessity and urgency, is seemingly impossible: a woman who grows without fear," because chains have been added onto women: "indigenous, migrant, worker, displaced, illegal, missing, subtly or explicitly subject to violence, raped, murdered, forever condemned to have more burdens and sentences added to her condition as woman."

The Zapatistas want "women to be born and grow without the fear of violence, harassment, persecution, contempt, exploitation" and "to make a world where women are born and grow without fear," without "being afraid because they are small or big, thin or fat, pretty or ugly, pregnant or not pregnant, fearful for being a girl, young, mature, old...."

The Zapatistas are pledging their life so that women can grow without fears. The other, new world has to abandon patriarchy and machismo and open up to the dynamism of fully respected women. This, one of the latest of the Zapatista messages, is profoundly emancipating.

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Mexico

Peña Nieto's "imbecility" and the teachers' ability to keep struggling

Poet Javier Sicilia, leader of Mexico's Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity, wrote this about US Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump's visit: "It doesn't matter what Peña Nieto said to Trump or how he justifies that visit. The act has been consummated and it shows, unequivocally, that politics in Mexico no longer exist, having been devoured by imbecility." Right now it defines even better the teacher's nationwide struggle against the educational reform imposed by Mexico's President Peña Nieto.

Jorge Alonso

The Mexican teachers' constant and determined struggle, underpinned by their unshakable resistance and convictions, continues in a context in which President Enrique Peña Nieto, despite expensive media publicity, has the lowest acceptance ratings of any President in Mexican history. Each step he takes worsens the national situation and further deteriorates his image.

An invitation to Trump

Peña has been governing with a handful of corrupt and incompetent friends. He's responsible for the economic disaster that has taken the Mexican debt to scandalous levels just so he can continue having resources that guarantee his close buddies' illegal enrichment. He has devaluated the Mexican peso with respect to the dollar to pitiful levels, proposing a budget with major health and education cutbacks to be able to pay that exorbitant debt without altering the high salaries of the political class.

Treasury Minister Luis Videgaray, a key figure in the presidential team, has actually been governing given his control over public finances. It was also he, perhaps claiming privileged information, who convinced his friend Peña to invite Donald Trump to Mexico. There is massive consensus that this invitation was a monumental mistake due to the insult it implied for millions for Mexicans living in the United States and those in Mexico who feel Peña doesn't represent us.

With that decision, the Mexican government stuck its nose into the neighboring country's election dynamic and relaunched Trump's campaign at a moment when it was faltering. After the visit, Trump's propaganda spoke of Peña as an important backer. The bottom line of the decision to invite him was thus totally negative because if Trump wins, he won't moderate his position towards Mexico. And if Clinton wins, she's not likely to forget Peña's insulting boost to her rival.

“What Peña did was imbecilic”

Rejection of Peña has been tremendous in Mexico. He's been likened to Santana, the traitor who gave up half of our territory to the “gringos.” The fact that he didn't question Trump, and instead visibly groveled before him is unforgivable. Peña had to accept Videgaray's resignation, not to calm the outraged general population as much as to temper the anger of the rich who are promoting Clinton's campaign.

For Javier Sicilia, poet and leader of the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity, the best word to describe what Peña did is “imbecility.” These are fragments of what Sicilia wrote in Proceso magazine: “Political life in Mexico is full of imbecility and imbeciles. It's not only imbecilic to degrade what little was left of the presidential investiture by inviting Trump, the xenophobe, Mexico's enemy, the apologue of segregation and crime. It's also imbecilic to try to hide the reality of violence and human rights violations in Mexico. It's imbecilic to still deny, in spite of civil society's findings, the existence of hundreds... thousands of disappeared, and of clandestine graves made by the State. It's imbecilic to destroy the life of Mexico's people and environment, granting concessions to the country's water, land and air to predatory transnationals. It's imbecilic to keep criminal governors in power and impunity because just because it suits the interest of the parties and the State...”

Trump is only the tip of the iceberg

Sicilia didn't stop there: “Trump's invitation leaves no possibility to think anything else. Having brought him to the immense mass grave that our government, in complicity with organized crime and people like Trump in the United States, have turned our country into, is to say to ourselves and the rest of the world that this imbecile is right: Mexicans are despicable and it's not only good to send back the 11 million who live in his territory so they can be persecuted and disappeared, but also a wall must be built between our borders to avoid their escaping again from the Mexican concentration camp...”

“It doesn't matter what the President said to Trump in Los Pinos or how he justifies that visit. The act has been consummated and already shows, unequivocally, that politics no longer exists, having been devoured by imbecility... The imbecility with which our political class has been governing for decades hasn't stopped producing irreversible damage measured by the hundreds of thousands of dead and disappeared, insecurity, fear, mistreatment, human rights violations, corruption and misery. Trump in Mexico was nothing more than the tip of the iceberg of the imbecility that long ago destroyed a lot of the country's political life and moral backbone.

“It's also the demand that the country deserves a national re-founding if it wants to escape disgrace. Idleness, in this sense, is also a form of imbecility. If the moral reserve still in the country isn't capable within its indignation to set aside its ideological differences and go out and protest in the streets to tell Trump, the President and all the corrupt parties that there's something to defend, then Trump's imbecility and that of our own political class would've been right about

us.”

An exemplary struggle by the dissident teachers

At this particular moment, the teachers' struggle against the educational reform imposed by Peña Nieto stands out even more. The essence of the reform became clear during the summer of this year: it is the predatory voracity of those on top to take away teachers' labor rights and commercialize education.

Basic and middle school teachers in Mexico have a long history of struggle. After several irruptions that crystallized into different organizations, the National Education Workers Union, the largest in Latin America, came into existence 73 years ago. Soon after, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) regime corporatized it, put in its own leaders who in return for certain benefits used this enormous instrument whose presence reached the farthest corners of the country to control the State party's electoral results. It wasn't long before this engendered resistance and there were struggles for democratization and workers' welfare, but they were always repressed. At the end of 1979 the National Coordination of Education Workers (CNTE) emerged with a democratic profile. It soon began shaking free of its official tutors, organizing sectors in several states around the country.

The CNTE has waged many battles to democratize an authoritarian structure. Since 2013 its struggles have taken on a new look after Peña Nieto imposed one of the neoliberal reforms: educational reform.

Rejecting the educational reform

The teachers who opposed the reform were armed with many well-founded facts and documents showing how it was crafted in the executive office of international centers of power that, in their effort to squeeze every last drop of activity into earnings for capitalism, have pushed privatization processes that turn everything into merchandise.

The education reform was promoted and imposed in Mexico by powerful business groups that denigrated the teachers and violated their labor rights, demanding control over them. The reform did nothing to improve the quality of education or collegial collaboration but instead promoted individualism and competition. The State abandoned its responsibility for solving public education's material needs and through the delusion of "autonomy" transferred the schools' financial and managerial responsibilities to the parents. Result: the end of free education.

The reform promoted that public education be managed as a business. It used punitive standardized teacher evaluations without taking the country's different social-cultural contexts into account. And it sought to replace the current teachers with people submissive to the interests of the rich.

Pablo González Casanova, the former dean of Mexico's Autonomous National University, as well as Bishop Raúl Vera and many more came out against the reform for violating both the spirit and the letter of the Constitution's articles that protect education and work and for breaking the social pact. They criticized it as an authoritarian action of the neoliberal model because it was drafted without involving society and much more importantly without seeking the consensus of the teachers, who are the ones who uphold the national education system.

Strikes, sit-ins, marches...

The CNTE strongly resisted the educational reform from the outset. More recently, it has engaged in an intense four-month struggle since May 15, when Mexico celebrated Teacher's Day, and after the Independence festivities in September. Their actions have included a national strike, shutdowns, sit-ins, roadblocks, marches, building takeovers and boycotts of big shopping malls and transnational corporations.

Initially, the authorities said they would dialogue with the CNTE teachers if they would first accept the reform, which was absurd as it was precisely what they were opposing. This naturally intensified the conflict, which first started in four states where the CNTE has been hegemonic: Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero and Michoacán. Soon thereafter, states from the center of the country joined in followed by states from the north, and marches were organized in all of them. At the end of May, 200 university professors presented a document analyzing how the reform infringed upon the constitutional, labor and human rights of the nation's teachers. They proposed a national debate and called upon the government to dialogue with the CNTE.

That repudiation of the educational reform soon gained support from other sectors. More marches, protests, roadblocks and public building occupations took place in many parts of the country and a caravan starting in the south began a several-day trip to Mexico City. In mid-June, the CNTE agreed to the university professors' proposal to raise the level of dialogue to the highest spheres of the federal government.

The government, however, reacted with greater violence, detaining important union leaders with accusations such as "textbook theft." It presumably thought that by throwing the CNTE leaders into high-security prisons as if they were the worst of criminals, that would put an end to the struggle. It didn't understand that it wasn't facing a hierarchical organization, but a democratic one. The protesting teachers just added to their demands the liberation of the unjustly detained teachers and increased their protest.

Repression in Nochixtlán

On June 19, after evicting teachers from a roadblock, police forces went into the town of Nochixtlán in Oaxaca and started shooting at people supporting the teachers, resulting in at least eight dead and hundreds wounded. The government claims the police weren't armed even though foreign reporters have presented pictures of the police not only armed but shooting.

The government then tried to justify their actions claiming it was a confrontation, but in reality it was an armed attack by several state and federal police forces against the people, not only on land but also from a helicopter. Authorities simply tried to construct a false version, as they had in the case of the disappeared student teachers in Ayotzinapa.

World and national reaction was immediate. Different academic, church, student, artist, grassroots and human rights organizations and individuals from different sectors of civil society condemned the massacre and demanded truth and justice as well as an end to the repression. Massive protests in several parts of Mexico condemned the aggression and the excessive and arbitrary use of police force. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico called on the government to promptly conduct an independent, thorough and

impartial investigation of the repression that took place in Nochixtlán.

“Bloodshed no, dialogue yes”

Firm in their stance, the teachers announced that the protests would continue until a dialogue was set up with the secretary of government, as the education secretary had been so incapable of solving the conflict that it had now reached the point of bloodshed.

In the protests were posters that said “Bloodshed, no; dialogue, yes.” Such outrage over the repression in Nochixtlán forced the government to agree to dialogue with the teacher’s movement. At the dialogue table, after pointing out that it had been achieved by the intense protests that had developed, the teachers demanded the end to the discounts, dismissals, cessations and punitive evaluations ordered by the educational reform. They proposed that a model be designed that would guarantee comprehensive public education. But President Peña insisted that the educational reform was not subject to negotiation.

The result was that the protests continued and increased. There were even marches by doctors and nurses in solidarity with the protesting teachers in 19 states around the country. The bishops of Chiapas asked the government to listen to the teachers, a petition that more and more sectors joined.

As expected, the business sector intervened in the conflict by pressuring the government to stick to the reform and urging it to use force to take down the roadblocks the teachers kept putting up. They also kicked off a heavy media campaign arguing that the roadblocks were producing major shortages. Several investigations by independent reporters showed that nothing was lacking in the popular markets and that the big malls were the ones being affected because the roadblocks were only holding up vehicles with transnational imports.

Support for the teachers grows

At the end of June, even teachers submissive to the pro-government union leadership also began to rebel. With that the government promised to repair the damages in Nochixtlán. But the CNTE held firm, continuing to insist that the only way to solve the conflict was to review the educational reform.

When the secretary of government threatened that time was about up and the roadblocks upsetting the business sector would soon be removed by force, the CNTE warned in response that violence would only increase the conflict. Many mayors and local agrarian authorities rejected the Government Secretariat’s ultimatum and defended the teachers. Municipal presidents in Oaxaca said they intended to expand the protest statewide. Indigenous people from Juchitán set up a big communal kitchen to support the teachers’ struggle.

Eighteen days after the Nochixtlán massacre, federal authorities had visited the place and promised total reparation of the damages, but the investigation had gone no further. After two months with no response, the people, parents and CNTE teachers organized a march in the country’s capital to demand punishment of those responsible for the massacre; they charged that the government was making up lies to explain what had happened in Nochixtlán, trying to place the responsibility on the victims.

As details of what happened in Nochixtlán became known, it was learned that the local community hospital had suffered attacks by Mexican armed forces and been turned into a war hospital surrounded by the military, which attempted to take out the wounded. A representative from the Office for the Defense of the Human Rights of the Indigenous People of Oaxaca defined as biased an investigation conducted by members of a special Senate commission appointed to follow up the happenings in Nochixtlán, as they were not listening to all parties involved.

The commission turned in its report at the end of August. Validating what the Oaxacan indigenous human rights office had said, the Committee of Victims from Nochixtlán challenged the report, claiming it only had testimonies from the attackers, and none from those affected. It demanded the creation of a special prosecutor's office to investigate the operation with international participation to give credibility to the results.

A route and a process

As the struggle continued in several parts of the country the government opted to mount a simulation of agreements between the government and the pro-government union leadership that had initially accepted the educational reform but had later begun taking on some of the protesting teachers' demands.

Before that dialogue with the government opened on July 11, the protesting teachers marched again to demand the end of "merely talking tables," from which no results emerged. They posed the need for a national debate to build a true transformation of the educational model with all the sectors. The CNTE has always insisted that three concrete demands need to be resolved: permanent suspension of the reform, the construction of a comprehensive education model and immediate reparation of the reform's damaging effects.

The Education Secretariat's presentation of a new educational model and plans and programs for basic and high school formation levels created new tensions in the dialogue taking place between the CNTE and the Ministry of Government. Specialists in educational research analyzed the new proposal and found it contradictory and insufficient to guarantee authentic education and charged that the educational reform threatened children's right to receive quality education.

Calling the Education Secretariat's proposal a failure, the protesting teachers presented a document titled "A process route for the construction of a democratic education project." They warned that the CNTE teachers would not attend the forums programmed by the Education Secretariat because they had no intention of validating a rigged process.

A national conflict

And so the marches and the roadblocks continued, even reaching the point of blocking railways. The business sector also continued trying to abort any plan that would affect the educational reform they wanted. The business organization called Mexicans First announced it would oppose any agreement against the educational reform. The Employers Confederation of the Mexican Republic presented a petition requesting that "grave human rights violations" caused in several states by the CNTE be investigated and urging the government not to yield to the teachers' "blackmail." The Confederation of Chambers of Industry complained that the teachers' actions were affecting many industrial activities.

The archdiocese of Mexico questioned several of the government's structural reforms, among them the educational reform, while the Episcopal Conference declared that the priority should be to open up spaces for the government and society to decide the needed steps to take in this educational reform conflict. They pointed out that Mexico, as a diverse nation, required different treatments. At the end of July, using the "moving like ants" technique, the teachers slipped past the police and took their protest all the way to the main square of the capital city.

In just a couple of years, the imposed educational reform has produced a conflict that not only threatens public education, but has also disrupted national life.

The threats continue

Education experts recalled that the private sector has sought to control national education ever since Vicente Fox's presidential term (2000-2006). Writer Adolfo Gilly pointed out that education isn't an industry, a business or a banking or financial system based on capital. He congratulated the thousands of teachers who have stood firm for months exposed to the elements in the sit-ins, the many teachers who have suffered in prison and those who even lost their lives in this struggle.

On Friday, August 12, some of the leaders who had been detained during the repression were released. The CNTE demanded that 75 more political prisoners be freed. The private sector went so far as to publicly regret the release of the teachers' leadership because they wanted revenge. The secretary of government again tried warning that force would be used if the dialogue didn't produce satisfactory results. The National Institute for the Evaluation of Education reported that authorities will not select teachers who should be tested for evaluation for the rest of 2016, that this procedure would be voluntary except for those who received bad results the year before. At the same time, however, it announced that the obligatory evaluations imposed by the educational reform would continue next year. This tug-of-war in which threats abound are prolonging the conflict.

Teachers go on strike

State Parents' Committees in Chiapas, Guerrero, Michoacan, Oaxaca, Campeche, Quintana Roo, Tlaxcala and Mexico City marched on August 13th from the Mexican capital's "Angel of Independence" monument to the Government Secretariat demanding that agreements reached with the CNTE be fulfilled, and giving the teachers their full support if classes didn't start on August 22, as marked on the school calendar.

Given insufficient results at the dialogue tables, the CNTE discussed what measures to take with its rank and file. On August 18, the CNTE assembly decided to maintain the teachers strike and not return to classes. The teachers argued that it was better to lose some school days than to lose public education.

When the government declared that there would be no dialogue if the teachers did not return to teach, the CNTE reminded President Peña that the government itself had closed down the dialogue tables while the teachers were teaching, so they had no reason to trust it to renew the dialogue if they went back to classes.

On August 26, the government announced that it would fire hundreds of teachers in several

states. The CNTE responded that the only thing intimidation could achieve is deeper conflict. At the same time, it pledged that its teachers would apply programs for the students to recover any missed classes once the conflict was resolved. The CNTE in Oaxaca agreed to start the 2016-2017 school year on September 7. In Chiapas, it decided to continue the roadblocks, strike and occupying of businesses, and warned that the arrival of thousands of police to intimidate them wouldn't scare them.

On September 10 the CNTE held several marches in different parts of the country to clarify the fact that even though each section decided what to do autonomously, it didn't imply a rupture in the movement or its demands. The struggle that had started in mid-May would adopt different modes according to what each section decides. And the strike would continue being the central element of the teachers' strategic plan.

Shouts of independence...and alternative parades

On September 15, during the country's independence celebration, the traditional shout of "Long live Mexico!" was celebrated with alternative activities and parades for the struggle in several cities. The CNTE stopped its sit-in in the capital city and the teachers' contingents returned to their states to start a period of reorganization and regrouping of the struggle.

In Chiapas, the CNTE agreed to stop its sit-in in the state's capital that day and return to classes on September 19, based on the commitment that the educational reform would not be applied in that state for the rest of Peña Nieto's six-year term. Chiapas's teachers said they were only withdrawing to recharge their batteries because the struggle isn't over.

Oaxaca's police repressed the teachers who wanted to celebrate September 15 with an alternative slogan and several were wounded. In Juchitán, teachers and students protested the educational reform during the parade of the official Independence activities. In Michoacán classes started up again, but the protests didn't cease.

This moral reserve

The struggle is continuing. The CNTE is debating the next steps they need to take to cancel the educational reform and has evaluated the four months of intense struggle as fruitful because it has kept the reform from being applied and shown that a better educational model is not being sought.

The teachers in the struggle are an expression of that "moral reserve that is still left in the country," described by Sicilia. They are driving home the conviction that this country deserves not only free quality education but also a "national re-founding if it wants to escape from its disgrace."

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Mexico

An independent indigenous candidate to mobilize the dispossessed

After amply consulting its supporters, Mexico's National Indigenous Congress decided to shake up the nation's conscience by assuring that indignation, resistance and rebellion will be on the ballot of the 2018 presidential election. While neither the Congress nor the Zapatista movement will directly run against the other political parties

Jorge Alonso

This year began in Mexico with growing waves of discontent among much of the population with the "gasolinazo": a huge hike in fuel, electricity and gas prices, with consequent increases in the cost of all basic goods and services, transportation foremost.

This new crisis is proof that the Peña Nieto regime's structural reforms, which he boasted would improve people's lives, have failed and that his promise to keep fuel prices from rising was not to be trusted.

In reality, the only ones whose lives have increasingly improved are those linked to the large corporations as well as the political elite mired in corruption while common folk suffer scarcities and a dizzying drop in the value of Mexico's peso.

The government is attempting to assuage the discontent by reiterating false speeches, but they deceive hardly anyone. Completing this picture is yet another offense that stains our sovereignty: the selection of Luis Videgaray, Peña Nieto's close ally, as Mexico's new foreign minister. Videgaray, inexperienced in international relations, was the one who promoted Donald Trump's visit to Mexico.

To mobilize the discontented

Despite repression, protest marches haven't ceased. It's an enormous challenge to organize people's discontent and anger with a government unable to perceive reality and the signs of social upheaval.

In October of 2016, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) and the National Indigenous Congress (CNI), which is made up of 66 different ethnicities, proclaimed during the celebration of the CNI's 20th anniversary that the time had come to make Mexico reverberate with Mother Earth's ancestral heartbeat. In that gathering, they went over each of the grievances and abuses they had suffered, insisting time and again that their resistance and rebellion should strengthen collective decision-making arenas, operating independently from political parties that only generate corruption and sell out their dignity.

They declared themselves in permanent session to continue discussions aimed at creating an indigenous government council to be led by an indigenous woman who would become its independent presidential candidate for the 2018 election representing both the CNI and the EZLN.

The idea sparked an intense debate

The two groups proclaimed that this initiative isn't about taking power but about uniting all of the dispossessed in order to put a halt to capitalist destruction and build a new nation for all, women and men alike.

Their decision produced considerable unease throughout the country, triggering an intense and

prolonged debate. The Zapatistas discerned racism even in the reactions of the forward-thinking media.

Since the mere suggestion of an indigenous woman representing the nation had caused something of an uproar, they wondered what would happen if her words were to catch on with those at the bottom of Mexico's society.

As the CNI would make no decision prior to consultation, the Zapatistas encouraged people to read its proposal carefully. They recalled the words of the indignant movement, that "the dreams of the disadvantaged do not fit in the ballot boxes of those at the top" and emphasized that the CNI is the only space where native voices can be heard. They were proud that the CNI members had taken the offensive by proposing that the country could be governed with an indigenous woman as the helm, even when they knew that Mexico's electoral system is designed to benefit only the traditional political parties.

The initiative's relevance

The relevance of this initiative lies in its capacity to unleash a combative reorganization, not only among indigenous Mexicans, but also workers, farmers, employees, settlers, teachers, students and other sectors whose silence and immobility may well be less a sign of apathy than the absence of a call to action. Moreover, whether they win the electoral race or not, the relevant feature is the challenge, the total collapse of the image of indigenous peoples as objects of pity. The daring challenge underlying this initiative would raise hopes not just among Mexico's dispossessed but also those in other parts of the world.

There is relevance in making the CNI a crucial point of contact with the chosen indigenous woman. This contact could generate a great movement, one that could shake the nation's political system. Zapatistas agreed to respect the CNI's decisions, steps and pathways, seeing themselves as just one more force called upon to support this challenge, and to do so fully.

Zapatismo and the scientists

While the CNI was consulting Mexico's different indigenous peoples about this daring proposal, the Zapatistas organized an innovative eight-day meeting with interested scientists from 11 countries between December 25 and January 4. Some 80 distinguished biologists, mathematicians, astronomers, ecologists, bio-technicians, doctors, agronomists, geologists, computer scientists and others gave up their holidays to participate in those eight intense days in which a great deal of wisdom was shared.

Behind the invitation was the Zapatistas' desire to know if science can be considered a common property and what its role might be for or against either the forces of oppression or those of liberation. They wonder if it can contribute to the world's transformation. They want to know if capitalism uses science to destroy nature, to make the rich richer and whether and how they can use "good" science in the struggle against capitalism. The scientists attending the event were asked to prepare not just technical but scientific studies demonstrating a use of science and technology capable of making life prevail over death. They want to understand the world, for only then can they make it new and better.

The Zapatistas didn't take this event lightly. They prepared themselves ahead of time with

community and area assemblies where they elected representatives who would participate in the meeting. The communities sent a hundred women and a hundred men as students. They didn't intervene individually but worked collectively to understand the presentations and then transmit them to their communities.

The collective questions referred to genetically modified materials, to the harm foods and chemical medicines can do, and how production can be improved. They wanted to know the causes of earthquakes, and the advantages of vaccines. They wanted to know if cell phones are harmful and if illnesses can be prevented through the study of the human genome. They asked about the cloning of people and animals and about science's ethical principles. They were interested in knowing if one can live without capitalism, if we can put a halt to the destruction of Mother Earth and if there is a purely human science in which inhumanity is not implicit. They also wanted to familiarize themselves with the best methods to teach science to children and youth in the Zapatistas' autonomous schools.

They want to learn in order to advance

With growing concern in the Zapatista movement that pseudo-science is attracting ever greater numbers of adherents, the communities looked for scientific proof, not slogans. They know they need genuine scientific investigation to confront the challenges before them.

There is now education and agroecology in the communities, and community radios over which knowledge is shared. Children are born into a context in which the construction of their autonomy requires science. The communities have learned to use ultrasound equipment and read X-rays, and now there are dentists and laboratory experts. Young people who are concluding their formal studies want to learn more. The coming generations want to know more in order to move forward. They understand that they need classes, workshops and laboratories to improve their diets, health and production and to confront the capitalist hydra. They also know that uniting original peoples' wisdom with the expertise of scientists and artists is required to achieve an alternate form of seeing, thinking and imagining to produce change given the dimensions that the world's structural crisis has reached, with today's criminal violence, natural catastrophes, growing scarcities and unemployment, lack of basic services, collapse of energy sources, migration, illnesses and dehumanization.

They need science

At the end of the Congress, the Zapatista women students representing each of the communities in the different Caracoles (the name given to the seat of the geographic territory where the five Good Government Juntas in the autonomous municipalities officiate) stressed that although science is the task of both men and women, they perceived machismo in the scientific community. They said it was the first time they had met with female and male scientists and that what they had learned awakened still more questions and concerns and that there was much they didn't understand.

During the Congress they had realized that the injustices suffered by their communities are justified in the name of "progress," and that this makes ever more pressing the need to master a "Science" that can overcome the weight of gravity of a system that smothers those below. They wondered how they would be able to explain the scientific words in the languages of their different peoples, acknowledging that, despite the great value of their native knowledge, they

also needed scientific data to improve their health, education, production and nutrition.

Sub-comandante Galeano underscored the importance of scientific teachings. The other Zapatista *sub-comandantes* invited the participants to another meeting, scheduled for a year from now in Zapatista lands so that the scientists—again both women and men—can reflect among themselves on the tasks that lie ahead, offering proposals and discussing them with each other, so the Zapatistas can observe the scientific process of coming to agreement.

Shaking up the national conscience

Simultaneous to this meeting, the second stage of the work of the Fifth National Indigenous Congress was conducted on December 29-31, which involved a review of the results of the internal consultation among the communities. In the end, the CNI decided to shake the conscience of the Mexican nation by making sure their indignation, resistance and rebellion is inserted on the ballots of the 2018 presidential election. The CNI and the EZLN announced that, while it is not their intention to compete with political parties, they will indeed run an indigenous woman as a candidate. They appraised the fact that while the country remains submerged in fear and terror generated by the thousands of deaths and disappearances, security exists in indigenous communities. While destruction reaches all corners of the country, many towns are defending their lands, water and territory. And while inept governments are leaving education in the hands of capitalist corporations so that it's no longer a right, the native communities have created elementary and secondary schools with graduates who go on to universities that have their own educational systems focused on the protection of Mother Earth, defense of their territories, production, sciences and the arts. And while the major capitalist media deceive people and keep them asleep in rural and urban settings, defining as delinquents those who defend what is theirs, people's own forms of communication are being created in indigenous towns and villages to strengthen their grassroots organizing.

Peoples' democracy

While representative "democracy" in the hands of traditional political parties has become a mockery of the people's will, in which votes are purchased and poverty is manipulated, indigenous peoples continue strengthening consensus and assemblies as local government bodies in which agreements are truly democratic because the voices of all are heard.

While governments impose their decisions to benefit just a few, ignoring the collective will of the people, criminalizing and repressing those who oppose their deathly projects, indigenous peoples constantly defend prior, free and informed consultation.

The response of both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples is growing ever stronger to the bad governments whose privatizing projects are giving away the nation's energy sovereignty to foreign interests whose high gasoline prices reveal the capitalist lie that only leads to inequality.

Closing ranks and taking the offensive

Based on these perspectives of struggle and hope, the CNI reported that 43 indigenous peoples had finally agreed to designate an Indigenous Council of Government with representatives from each of the member peoples, tribes and nations. This Council proposes to govern the country under the principles of obey, not disobey; represent, not supplant; serve, not be served; convince, not conquer; reach down, not rise up; propose, not impose; and build, not destroy. Its representative will be an indigenous woman associated with CNI who will be the independent candidate for President of Mexico in the 2018 elections.

With this initiative, the CNI and the EZLN call upon Mexico's native peoples; the collectives of the "Sexta" (referring to those who observe the EZLN's Sixth Declaration of Lacandona, issued in 2005); the country's working men and women; urban and rural committees; student, intellectual, artistic and scientific groups; informal civil society and all good-hearted citizens to close ranks, take the offensive and bring down the powers on high, reconstituting themselves from below and to the left not just as separate, distinct groups but as one organization.

Bridges to civil society

With this announcement, the CNI and the EZLN are extending bridges to civil society, the media and native peoples, encouraging them to overcome their fear and fight for the recuperation of their invaded or destroyed lands, the whereabouts of those who have been disappeared by the government, the release of political prisoners, the dignity of the city and countryside, and truth and justice for those who have been killed.

The presidential candidate will be chosen in May 2017 at the constituent assembly of the new Indigenous Government Council of Mexico. There is a firm conviction that both the indigenous peoples and Mexico's society at large will see this as a last opportunity for a radical and peaceful change in the nation's form of government.

A final opportunity

Upon marking 23 years since its birth in January 1994, the Zapatista movement sees that Mexico is in worse condition now than it was that year when the EZLN cried out, "Enough is enough!" and is thus pleased that the CNI has approved the proposal to embark on a new path. If in 1994 not everyone could support the Zapatista uprising, everyone in Mexico's cities and rural areas can participate in the struggle suggested now by the CNI, thus opening the way to unity in the struggle of the dispossessed.

The struggle undertaken by the CNI encourages participation by everyone, wherever they are, using their own methods and at their chosen times. The Zapatistas will support the CNI with all its forces, aware that its proposal is their last chance to prevent the destruction of Mexico's soils and skies. They are confident that this initiative will animate, organize and mobilize the Mexican people and the peoples of the world with dignity.

An audacious gamble for life

At the start of this year, Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos wrote that the engine of capitalism has led to a radical crisis, in which the sustainability of life on earth is threatened. He singled out as interrelated proof of this devastation the increase in droughts and floods, the ongoing threat of food shortages, the migratory waves of environmental refugees, the increase in illnesses caused by contamination of the environment, the ever more voracious exploitation of natural resources and the stripping of native lands from indigenous peoples to benefit huge mega development projects and the violence they produce.

The proposal of the CNI and EZLN hopes to be the answer. According to Raúl Zibechi, it is an attempt to create conditions to organize and overcome the fear caused by the march of genocide. The proposal will embolden diverse grassroots sectors of Mexican society to organize, giving them an instrument with which to join forces. The shift from indignation and anger to organization is the key to any process designed to produce deep and radical changes. The Zapatistas and the CNI propose the joint election in order to favor their linked organization. It is a gamble, an opportunity for power from below to express itself in different ways, including in electoral ballots.

Diana Itzu, a member of the Chiapas branch of the General Confederation of Labor and an adherent of the Sixth Declaration of Lacandona sees the process of constructing the Council with an indigenous woman as its spokesperson and independent candidate to confront patriarchal and colonial institutions and their forms of domination and extermination as a challenge for and by life. The initiative doesn't arise from the cult of personality but rather elevates the essence of life into view. The figure of the indigenous woman symbolizes Mother Earth and the Communal House.

With struggles that already exist

Faced with the degeneration of politics as practiced at the highest levels, some of us had begun to think we would have to let that segment of political activity rot away on its own while those below attempted to create another form of democracy that would lead to their autonomy. Now Zapatismo and the CNI are showing us that democracy is another of the most serious losses the people have suffered, and that the power exerted from above with its defective democracy is causing immense ills.

By proposing an indigenous CNI woman as an independent candidate for the 2018 presidential election, we're not being invited to dispute power wielded from above but to use this process so that peoples and collectives can renew their resistance and rebellion with organization. We are being invited to join hands to create an alternative democracy to thus defend ourselves from so much plunder and destruction.

The discontented are called up to expand their organization to halt that plunder. Since these struggles already exist, their growth and multiplication must be supported especially in the areas of organization and linkage with the Council as their instrument.

The very consultation conducted by the CNI will reactivate and revitalize its organization. The process that follows will be a form of defense of the rights of the dispossessed and the creation of another form of democracy. But that isn't all. This new phase of the struggle has features that will lead to promising innovations. Without doubt, it is a risky undertaking, but one that could generate a dynamic that by crushing old routines and dogmas could provide the momentum for the transformation Mexico so urgently needs and for which it can wait no longer!