

# **Mexico is not only Chiapas nor is the rebellion in Chiapas merely a Mexican affair**

In January 1994, in the south eastern state of Chiapas in Mexico, news of the Zapatistas armed revolt composed mainly of Indian peasants, travelled all over the world bringing about an explosion of interest and information on Mexico because the rebellion was automatically connected with the Mexican revolution. In this text we undertake an analysis of the class struggles in Mexico since the beginning of the century up till now, which includes a critical presentation of the guerilla movement of the Zapatistas. Among last year's events, a presentation of the "National Democratic Convention" was decided upon, not only because its character transcends the boundaries of Chiapas but also because it is indicative of the political direction of the class struggle. More than a year later nothing has been concluded. Whereas the Zapatistas still constitute a considerable force, the recent devaluation of the peso and the attempted military repression of the movement, has created a deeper crisis of class relations in Mexico.

The following analysis is from a viewpoint which goes beyond the outdated anti-imperialist distinctions of a "First World" and a "Third World". The Capitalist International, the only class unfortunately that has the clearest class consciousness, has seen to that. This class wouldn't have won until now if it hadn't imposed itself on "underdeveloped" and "developed" countries simultaneously. Because to every privatization in West Europe there corresponds a new wave of immigrants from East Europe; to every temp worker there's a former "privileged" one and to every homeless person in North America there's a landless peasant in South America. It is against this class that the Chiapas ejidatarios rebel, and their struggle has a universal dimension which transcends south east Mexico. It's in fact the same struggle that takes place everywhere already, with different intensity and forms, against immiseration and alienation. If we have managed to show this, then we think we have contributed not only to the Chiapanecos' fight, but to our own.

## **THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION (CONVENTION NACIONAL DEMOCRATICA-CND), SAN CRISTOBAL, CHIAPAS - AGUASCALIENTES, LACANDONA JUNGLE, 6-9 August 1994**

*"Zapata vive, la lucha sigue!"*

In June 1994 in their Second Declaration from the Lacandona Jungle, the EZLN addressed an invitation to the National Democratic Convention for the purpose of introducing propositions about a transitional government and a new constitution. EZLN's sub-commander Marcos intensified his letter-writing mania inviting Mexican

personalities within the left and center-left spectrum. Due to the Zapatista's appeal to "Civil Society" the range of those who finally participated was quite big: non-government organisations in general, leaders of peasant and Indian organisations, members of "independent parties", a few academics, union delegates, feminists, a few businessmen, lesbians, homosexuals, members of organisations in defense of the vote and naturally journalists or fake journalists (like myself). The organising committee of the CND consisted of Zapatistas delegates and various other organisations (the "Caravan of the Caravans", the "Chiapanecos Assembly for Democracy" etc with a dominant view in favour of the elections).

On Saturday 6th of August in San Cristobal Mesas-workshops were formed to discuss the *"peaceful transition to democracy, the elections, the formation of a National Project and the defense of the vote"*. In spite of the great majority of supporters of the oppositional PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) and the prevalent tendency in favour of the elections there was a general distrust of the parties and a minority (1) against the elections and in favour of the formation of a National People's Assembly --a Transitional Government-- consisting of peasants, workers and Indians.

Among the demands of the Mesas (to which the majority agreed) the following ones were included: Salinas' resignation, expulsion of members of the PRI (Party of Institutional Revolution, the government party) from administrative posts, mobilisation against a possible electoral fraud, political trial of Salinas, electoral reform for the representation of the Indians and all the ethnic groups, recognition of the EZLN as a belligerent force, breaking up the system of National Security, non-assumption of office of any candidates in case of high abstention, expulsion of the army from the states of Chiapas, Guerrero and Michoacan and satisfaction of the 11 demands of the EZLN. All were almost devoutly accepted by the Mesas. The same atmosphere of confusion, recrimination, vexation and euphoria that prevailed on Saturday evening in San Cristobal with thousands of people bustling in and out of the Mesas and discussing in circles in the streets while songs were heard (and tourists were complaining about the sudden lack of rooms) would prevail even more intensely in the jungle.

6 or 7 thousand people -in hundreds of buses- in the drive towards Aguascalientes (2) passed through Mexican army outposts and then through regions controlled by the Zapatistas. Swarms of clapping and cheering Indians could be seen everywhere along the road, many of those holding posters of Zapata and placards with slogans in favour of fair elections.

During the descent to the jungle enthusiasm gave way to exhaustion (the last ones to arrive in Aguascalientes had journeyed for about 24 hours) and then the excitement on first contacting the Zapatistas at their outpost. At last in Aguascalientes Fitzcarraldo's Ship came into view: for 28 days, 600 Zapatistas had constructed this gigantic amphitheatre, made of tree trunks and covered by a huge tent, surrounded by hundreds of smaller tents. Above the stage two Mexican flags were hanging, behind it the honoured guests were seated and the place was full of posters with subjects from the Mexican Revolution. There was a colourful and diverse crowd from elderly, veteran co-fighters of

Emiliano Zapata's original army, to young punks, to contemporary armed Zapatistas scattered all over, to reporters armed with cameras; all in an atmosphere of confusion, exuberance, turmoil and comings and goings beneath the hot tropical sun. Angry protests were caused when a mural appeared on the stage depicting Marcos and Zapata on horseback shaking hands and beneath them Cardenas with the bishop of Chiapas Samuel Ruiz (3). Protests from many sides led to the withdrawal of the painting.

Around evening Marcos' appearance on stage set off an outburst of chanting: "*Marcos, our friend, the people are with you!*", "*Transitional Government and a new constitution*", "*Long live Ramona and Ana Maria*" (women Zapatistas), "*Long live Self-government by the Indians*", "*Let the National Convention be an electoral force*" but by way of a reply: "*All against the electoral farce*". Songs about Zapata could be heard as well as the guevarist anthem of the 70's "*Dressed in olive green, politically alive, comrade, you haven't died, we'll take revenge for your death*". Marcos announced the presiding committee of the CND and called upon commander Tacho to speak, who declared that the EZLN give Aguascalientes over to the CND. He also presented the people's committees of the EZLN, the civil guards, Indian women, men and children with scarves on their faces and staves in their hands -one of the most touching moments of the Convention. Afterwards, Marcos presented the EZLN army, whose gun-barrels had white bands around them, indicating that "*these guns are not to confront the "Civil Society", but paradoxically, they wish to become useless*". Marcos' speech, a mixture of sentimentalism, patriotism, poetry and populism was received reverentially and in dead silence by the audience. After exulting at the large CND attendance, Marcos went on: "*thanks to the EZLN having mobilized parts of society which had until recently been sunk in apathy and inability to get over their localisms*", he made clear that the EZLN, "*(do not expect from the CND) a civil arm... a civil pretext for war...or for submission...nor the dubious honour of a historical vanguard, of the numerous vanguards that made us suffer... We expect from the CND the opportunity to search for and find those to whom we will hand over the flag that we found deserted and forgotten in the palaces of power... To struggle so that all Mexicans will recognize it as their own, to become the national flag again, your flag, companeros... We hope that there will be enough maturity at this CND, so that this place will not be converted into a terrain for settling internal accounts, something sterile and emasculated... We are moving aside but we are not leaving. We hope that the horizon will open up so that we will not be necessary anymore, we the dead since always, who have to die again in order to live. We hope that this CND will give us an opportunity, the opportunity we were denied by those who govern this country, to return to our subterranean life with dignity after we have fulfilled our duty. The opportunity to return to silence, to the night out of which we came, to the death we lived in, the opportunity to disappear in the same way we appeared, one morning, without a face, without future. To return to the depths of history, of the dream, of the mountains...*"

Amidst a deluge of applause, Marcos left the stage giving the Mexican flag to Rosario Ibarra (president of the CND and the FNCR, National Front Against Repression, a leftist organisation). These moments of patriotic effusions were soon followed by a real storm; a tropical rain storm that swept over everything. Despite the witticisms subverting the original slogans: "*Zapata lives, the struggle goes on*" becoming, "*Zapata lives, the rain*

goes on" -and the few brave ones who half-naked were sloshing about in the mud- it meant the sudden end of the first day of the CND in the jungle. The next day after several participants gave speeches that were no more than greetings and a minimal agreement on mobilizations against a possible election fraud was finalized, there followed Marcos' press conference. Confident like a pop star and evasive like a politician, he answered various questions ironically. He expressed again the EZLN's wish for a dignified peace and to make efforts to contact other guerilla armies in the country. To his question if he would take off his mask, Marcos replied, "*Yes, if you want it. You tell me*". The cries of "NO!" confirmed that the Marcos symbol should remain masked in order to preserve the legend and, in no way, becoming an ordinary, recognizable mortal.

So, in this mish mash of people; in this "Civil Society" in a festive and tense atmosphere somewhere between a rave-up and a political meeting; in this National Convention that wasn't really much of a convention at all, there actually was confirmed a vague and abstract will for "change", "democracy" and "peace". It was a symbolic gesture just before the elections. A manifestation of patriotism and reformism, contradictory expectations and general promises amidst the loud "Viva!".

## **FROM THE REVOLUTION (1910-1920) ...**

*"You take Revolucion to the end, turn right and you are on Reforma".*  
- Mexican joke referring to the streets one takes to reach Downtown Mexico City.

At the end of the previous century the Porfiriato, Diaz's dictatorship, combined an expanding capitalist growth with an oligarchic-dictatorial state. Capital's dominance through domestic and foreign monopolies, the centralisation of economy and political power on a national scale caused the gradual disintegration of the old traditional, feudal structures. The new bureaucrats and technocrats (the Positivists and Social Darwinists) provided the ideology necessary for the concentration of capital and the coordination of local big landowners with central political power.

Agriculture, subsumed by capital was creating an increasing class of rural proletarians consisting of landless peasants, unemployed or farm workers alongside peons and immiserated Indian comuneros. On the other hand, small-scale land owners became increasingly disadvantaged with the onset of large-scale units of production. The working class, concentrated in the north because of the high degree of investment there, consisted of independent artisans, the main body of the industrial proletariat and a relatively better paid skilled section. The artisans taking one blow after the another over a period of time gradually united with the rest of the workers who, in their turn, took to strike action or more violent revolts which were ruthlessly crushed.

The edifice of the Porfiriato started to shake due to a multiform discontent reflecting different and conflicting interests which later took the form of an armed revolt. The conflict within the bourgeoisie between its (mainly northern) industrial-financial sector and the more traditional, local big landowners, a conflict which represented the antithesis

of the bourgeois-democratic project to oligarchy and authoritarianism; the discontent of the petite-bourgeoisie in the face of the monopolies; the rage of the proletariat and the comuneros and the ambitions of the intellectuals who were suffocated within the repressive regime were the basic reasons for the explosion which followed.

Emanating from the modern industrial-financial bourgeoisie, Madero came to power supported by Villa, his initial admirer, and [Emiliano] Zapata. The latter, an uncompromising fighter for agrarian reform, faced with Madero's "betrayal" (i.e. his loyal adherence to his class) called for the continuation of the revolution, issuing in November 1911, his Ayala Plan (4). Against General Huerta's dictatorship (1913-14) a loosely united front was formed consisting of three forces: Zapatistas in the south, composed mainly of ejidatarios or landless peasants with a communal social tradition, Villa's army in the north composed chiefly of petite-bourgeois and proletarians and the Constitutionals who represented the middle-classes, some landlords and even some proletarians and peasants who believed in their socialist propaganda (5). The Convention at Aguascalientes in 1914, where these three armies met, proved the impossibility of their alliance.

Beside the legendary figures of a controversial Villa, and a fervent Emiliano Zapata whose indomitable proletarian consciousness combined a romantic nationalism with faith in a democratic government which would make real the popular vision of revolutionary change and agrarian reform, the internationalist, anarcho-communism of Ricardo Flores Magon stands out. Starting as a liberal, Magon gradually formed his anarchist ideas (which for tactical purposes he did not openly declare until 1910) and tried to turn the political revolution into a social revolution. Organizing strikes and revolts, influencing and agitating amongst workers and peasants mainly in northern Mexico (and having taken over the northern part of the state of Baja California) the Mexican Liberal Party (the PLM) founded by Magon, not only ignited many land expropriations and seizures of the means of production but also gave such actions a clear communist perspective, as can be seen in the 1911 manifesto.

The outcome of the class war was determined by the alliance made between the powerful workers' union, the Casa del Obrero Mundial (espousing an anarcho-syndicalist and corporate socialist ideology) and the Constitutionals in exchange for promises of financial support and the satisfaction of some demands of the workers. Among the motives of the workers' class alliance one cannot ignore their discontent with Zapatistas' religiosity and Villistas' brutality, whose increasing militarism had turned them into professional soldiers.

After the crushing of the Zapatistas, the Villistas and the PLM, the 1917 constitution crystallized the dominant nationalist, anti-imperialist and socialist/populist ideology of the post-revolutionary Mexican state (6). Some of its reformist articles which provided for anti-clerical measures, agrarian reform and labour rights had constituted part of the 1906 programme of the PLM. It was the triumph of the liberal wing of the bourgeoisie over the peasants and workers and, ever since, it would make use of the content of the revolution in its own interests.

The enslavement of the working class by the state through limited concessions inaugurated a long practice of populism combined with repression and submission to the state. Alongside a defeated peasantry and a crippled working class an expanding petite-bourgeoisie started forming which benefited from state privileges. During the Revolution military men, bureaucrats, intellectuals and union leaders emerged, who later staffed the new state mechanism. This new bourgeois-bureaucratic state was legitimized with "Revolution" as its ideological banner recuperating and distorting its content. "Revolution" as a myth became the unifying ideology of the state domination in the 20th century.

## **...TO THE MODERN STATE**

*"We want a liberal, democratic and nationalist government...the concessions to labour are granted within the economic possibilities of the capitalist sector" - Lazaro Cardenas*

When the sound of the last revolutionary guns had died away, the Mexican state faced the double need of its reinforcement and capitalist development. The problem of controlling foreign capital (setting up the Banco de Mexico was the first act of co-operation between Mexican and foreign capital) and the class struggle that constantly intensified in the face of state manipulation, together with the corruption of the official labour leaders and the 1929 crisis, meant things couldn't wait any longer. The still unfulfilled promises of the Mexican Revolution threatened the legitimacy of the successive governments and the state in general as a vehicle of its ideology.

With Lazaro Cardenas' "socialistic" rhetoric and populist practises, in 1934 Mexico enters the period of state-regulated capitalism, a strategy already in use in America and Europe. The necessity of reformism which meant concessions to peasants and workers, nationalisations of selected sectors, redefinition of the conditions of the imperialist intervention, discipline of the recalcitrant unproductive landlords and "comprador" bourgeoisie heightened the "popular" role of the state. At the same time it satisfied the interests of the modern bourgeoisie.

The "politics of the masses" consolidated the corporate state that absorbed "Civil Society". The strengthened national political party (7) has acted ever since as a powerful administrative committee organizing and dividing society into separate constituencies that depend on it; class struggle became "legalized" through the recognition of the labour movement as an official, national one: the powerful until today CTM (Confederation of Mexican Workers) was formed. CNC (National Peasant Confederation) was also formed and the "popular sector" of the party consisted of state employee unions, women's and youth organisations.

The consolidation of the democratic-capitalist ideology of the "common interest" became possible through the creation of a climate of "national unity" thanks to Cardenas' "anti-imperialist" politics. This climate reached its height when the mainly American and

English-controlled oilfields were expropriated in 1938. The limited agrarian reform laid the basis for state-regulated capitalist agriculture. Land redistribution (through the expropriation of many unproductive latifundias) and the granting of state credits aimed at aiding small private farms so that the national market could be expanded. However, the intention was the support of the largest and most productive landholdings under state regulation. In 1940, at the end of Cardenas' presidency, his "socialist" politics had produced the following results regarding agricultural production: over 60% of the peasants were either landless or owners of inadequate plots of lands or ejidatarios trying to compete with big owners of fertile lands, capital and technology. Ejidatarios were forced gradually to let their holdings to those big landowners and work the land on their behalf. This led to the flourishing of neolatifundismo precisely in those areas of agrarian reform.

In general, during Cardenas's period the basis of the modern state was laid blunting class conflicts through the combined social-patriotic politics of concessions and repression. Starting in this period, the practise of populism and corporativism would form a historical continuity on the state and ideological level that holds until now.

## **BETWEEN THE SCYLLA OF CAPITAL AND THE CHARYBDIS OF IDEOLOGY**

Cardenas' reforms and the modernization of capitalist development soon bore fruit. The twenty year period (1940-1960), just before the tumultuous appearance of the first threatening radical movements, is the one with the biggest and most rapid capital accumulation. The role of the state becoming more and more authoritarian and technocratic is crucial to this concentration of capital. Industrialization took a different course from the still colonized economies of Latin America (8).

With the "Green Revolution" there begins the modernization of agricultural production, which increases six-fold between 1940 and 1975. The programmes of the "Green Revolution" (a capitalist rationalization) financed by the World Bank (and initially by the Rockefeller Foundation) expressed the state's need both to control the fragile social relations in the countryside and to organize a cheap food supply for the hordes of the proletarians in the cities. This process took place not only in Mexico but also in other countries where the agrarian question was vital (India for example). Initially, regions in the north were selected where "revolutionary" landlords possessed vast quantities of land (10). A series of loans to pay for modern technological input (from irrigation to chemical fertilizers) caused not only the intensification of cultivation and the increase of productivity but also the replacement of traditional crops with new ones for export. The onerous terms of credits for the aquisition of the means of production led ejidatarios or minifundistas (small-scale landholders) to immiseration or to bankruptcy. Many got forced off their land, becoming part of the "surplus population" known since the first enclosures in history and always present when "agrarian reform" takes place, becoming suitable for multiple purposes: as a reserve army, as an industrial proletariat, or, as land labourers. Besides the forced land expropriations, which added to the possessions of the

landlords, another usual practice was the periodical parcelization of ejidos. This functioned as an absorber of social unrest since it maintained the idea of revolutionary land distribution.

On the whole the state's ability to present itself as a guardian of the ideas of the Mexican Revolution explains the relative political stability of the decades after the "pioneer" Cardenas' presidency as well as the recuperation of the social movements. The revolutionary heritage of the peasants and the workers was taught through the state educational system and the state invoked it as its own mother and that's why it assumed the role of its defender (10). When the proletarians did not content themselves with state recognition of their contribution to the making of a "powerful, independent" state and showed vigorously their ingratitude they were turned automatically into "enemies of the Revolution" and "anti-patriots". However, the systematic propaganda of the national-democratic advances gave results: many peasants, workers, petite-bourgeois believed that the big trade unions CTM, CNC and the "popular sector" really represented them.

Interchanging with the unitary ideology of national interest, class harmony and populism other divisive ideologies dominate Mexican society: Indianism (Indigenismo) and that patriarchal Mexican inclination towards machismo. Saint, whore and cheap worker are the three basic roles the Mexican woman is called upon to assume (whereas Mexican capitalism promotes feminism, at the same time, sexism is reinforced -a common practice everywhere).

Indianism, the official recognition of the Indian heritage, was one of the contradictory achievements of the Revolution. It holds a central place in Mexican nationalism (all too often the invocation of the Indian heritage is overestimated as against the dominant mestizo composition of the Mexican people or conflicts with the more conservative, pro-Spanish religious tendencies). Behind the hypocritical ideological mask of the "national heritage", that runs through Mexican history, there lies the state effort to destroy and assimilate the Indian culture within the national commodity economy. Since 1948, INI (National Indian Institute) serves as a channel for the legalization of Indians' exploitation by caciques (11), bosses, recruiters of migrant labourers, moneylenders, merchants, landlords and their thugs. According to anthropologist Marcela Lagarde "INI programmes are directed and planned by anthropologists who proclaim themselves to be for the Indian, but whose end is that he cease to be one" (see Cockroft, p. 147-148).

## **LOS OLVIDADOS - DECOMPOSITION AND RECOMPOSITION OF THE PROLETARIAT**

Rapid industrialization and domestic immigration after 1950 gradually meant the urban proletariat assuming a central role in class struggle increasing its industrial share to 25% of the economically active population. Altogether, the total of salaried workers rose from 46% in 1950 to 75% in 1982. With less than quarter of wage labourers unionized and with the "comparative advantage" of extremely low wages (only after wildcat strikes in 1974, did wages manage to exceed to a great extent their 1939 level, only to come

tumbling down again after 1976) Mexican capitalism reproduces accumulation at one pole and misery at the other.

The first wave of strikes between 1958 and 1962 mainly in the public sector (railways, petroleum) sparked resistance in other sectors (education, agriculture) and ridiculed various marxist drivel about an "underdeveloped third-world" proletariat. It also forced international capital to invest in new sectors (the auto-industry) initially in Mexico City and then in the north - in the same way Detroit had been previously abandoned - when it confronted the workers' insurgence in the 70's reinforcing the industrial zone of the maquiladora camps (12).

Through compulsory or "legal" land expropriations landless peasants swarm into the cities, particularly the capital. A vast lumpen-proletariat composed of unemployed, underemployed and temporary workers is constantly moving within the agricultural, industrial, commercial and service sectors. While this perpetual mobility brings on the one hand workers in the black economy closer to the unionized ones, on the other hand, it undermines the benefits of the better organized industrial proletariat.

Olvidados (the forgotten ones), those crowded in the "lost cities" of Mexico City, in the colonias proletarias (in the larger metropolitan area of Mexico City half the population lives in these slums), work mainly in small owners' workshops, in hundreds of thousands small sweatshops assembling furniture, and making shoes, clothing etc. Capital controls them both through the supply of raw materials and the sale of the finished products. These workshops are more profitable for capital because the wages are extremely low and the splintering of the workers does not allow for any organized resistance. In 1970, the World Bank programmes "Investments in the Poor" tried through credits to further integrate these neighbourhood workshops into monopoly capital.

The state role in the geographical concentration of this lumpen-proletariat and in the organization of its political behaviour (manipulating the leaders of community movements) was always vital: it regulated its local markets, it organized a phoney petite-bourgeois network of petty-trade and it provided for rudimentary social services (state-run cheap food stores, minimal health care, schemes of land and housing distribution to the homeless etc).

However, the subjective dimension of the recomposition of the proletarians must not be ignored. A general class culture is constantly confirmed either through riots or other dynamic mobilizations. A relatively recent example is Tepito slum, in the centre of Mexico City: after the earthquake in 1985 the inhabitants formed autonomous organizations, occupied their rented houses and forced the government to withdraw its development plans aimed at the gentrification of the area and consequently their evacuation. Tepitanos, known for their outdoor festivals, their everyday practical refusal of work, their solidarity and their communal traditions proved that the colonias proletarias are sometimes dysfunctional for the state. That's why when the recuperative practice comes to a deadlock, BARAREM arrives (paramilitary assault squad specialized in driving off "land invaders"). (13)

## **INSURGENCIA OBRERA - WORKERS' INSURGENCY 1973-1977**

At the end of the 60's, a student/youth rebellion began expressing a belief (to the very letter) in the nationalist ideology taught in schools and propagandized by the PRI. Zapata, Magon and Cardenas became symbols of a "national change" which was made materially visible only in the form of statues and busts in plazas everywhere. The end of the student democratic movement came with the massacre in the Plaza of Three Cultures in Mexico City on the 2nd of October in 1968. The participation of many proletarians and peasants in that drenched in blood demonstration (perhaps there were about 500 dead protesters) was an indication of the insurgency that was soon to follow. Guevarism was also a very widespread ideology at the beginning of the 70's and was the basic inspiration behind many urban guerilla groups which by 1975 had been broken up.

Despite some limited populist reforms during the early Echeverria presidency (1970-1976) the industrial proletariat starting turning against the state union leaders, the so-called charros. We are talking about relatively well-paid, militant workers concentrated massively in state industrial sectors, that formed the reformist "Democratic Tendency" within the CTM. During this period the first independent unions emerged chiefly in the automobile sector (some of which were recuperated in the early 80's and their leaders became like a red rag to a bull for the coming radical rank and file movement). A series of wildcat strikes spread a spirit of struggle, on the one hand, in rural Mexico igniting land occupations and efforts at unionizing farm workers, and on the other hand, in metropolitan barrios inciting the marginal proletariat to angry mobilizations. In this period, with the "Democratic Tendency", acting as its spearhead, the workers' movement was hit by the inconsistency of its militancy vis-a-vis their respect for the "nation and the presidential institution". Also the army repression, the lay-offs and the austerity measures imposed by the state and the IMF (through a loan in 1976) and the 100% devaluation of the peso, meant the workers' movement died down only to give way to something new. On the other hand, the PRI was forced to make political constitutional reforms in 1976 (legalizing the CP, increasing minority seats in the Chamber of Deputies to 100 and permitting opposition parties to participate in national elections) in its efforts to confine class struggle within the political arena and thus to disarm it.

## **THE UNBEARABLE "CLASSNESS" OF DEBT: DEBT CRISIS AS A CRISIS OF CLASS RELATIONS**

Mexico was not of course the only field of class struggle in the 70's. In America and Europe (the eastern one included) wildcat strikes as well as the increasing refusal of work brought about the end of Keynesianism. The fuel of capital's counter-attack was oil, the so-called "energy crisis" of 1973. The planned increase in the price of oil paved the way for the simultaneous decomposition of the working class (the curtailment of the welfare

state, wages cuts, unemployment) and recomposition of terrestrial capital accumulation (profiting energy multinationals, finance capital and the oil-exporting states). The recycling of petrodollars financed later the capitalist strategy of automation and introduction of high technology in industries in the west, and what is of importance here, petrodollars were the capital for the loans that generated later the debts (14). In the same period in Mexico capital flows in (through loans) for industrial expansion and the policing of the proletariat, especially after the massacre in 1968. The discovery of oil in Chiapas was of immense importance; Mexico becomes the Arabia of the Caribbean.

At the beginning of the 80's the resurgent class struggle in Mexico took on a more anti-state and anti-party character. Along with the loans working class demands for a slice of oil revenues increased. In early 1981, for the first time for many years, real wage hikes were gained that consequently led to a wider radicalization. Tensions within independent unions intensified and the official union leaders (charros) tried to outflank, though only verbally, the workers' militant demands. Threatened by the pressure of a rank and file movement they begged capitalists to give in stressing the importance of their role. "If we change tactics or abandon the workers to their luck, employers won't have time to realize what will happen: imagine a mob let loose on the streets, out of control", says Velasquez, CTM boss, in March 1982. Just a few months later, in August 1982, the change in international capital's strategy would dispel his apprehension.

What's widely known as "monetarism" or "Thatcherism" is a capitalist restructuring not based on the previous decade's "energy crisis" but on the "debt crisis". Interest rate increases, the investment strike and austerity measures in western economies bringing about a downturn in world trade as well as a decline in the price of oil after 1979, caused Mexico's debt (together with other countries) to increase astronomically. The Mexican government declared a moratorium on the repayment of debts inaugurating the international "debt crisis". The role of the IMF from Africa to Asia becomes decisive: the vicious circle of loans and debts (new loans for the repayment of the old ones) is accompanied with the World Bank's "Structural Adjustment Programmes" which is the more decent name of the restructuring of class relations through privatizations, unemployment, austerity and immiseration. Between 1982 and 1984, 66 countries of the so-called Third World agreed to austerity programmes imposed by the IMF with a pretext about the "restoration of the balance of payments". In essence it is a new political strategy for the reorganization of the relations between international capital and nation-states and the international decomposition of the proletariat. The "debt crisis" becomes a functional means for the control of national economies and capitalist discipline. The case of Mexico is a typical example, where the "debt crisis" caused a chain reaction: IMF intervention; the implementation of austerity programmes, to which the PRI technocrats adhered eagerly; severe cutbacks of the welfare state and encouraging the growth of the maquiladoras zones. This last one helped many north American industries transfer to the south causing the decomposition of both the Mexican and the American proletariat (for example, General Motors in December of 1991 planned to fire thousands of its American workers while at the same increasing the number of its workers in the maquiladora zone, blackmailing its remaining American workforce into accepting longer hours and lower wages).

The integration of Mexican capital with international capital imposes a restructuring of class relations and proves that the "debt crisis" is in effect a productive crisis and therefore, not an obstacle to capitalist development. Debt repayment which is presented as the objective is nothing more than an excuse for an attack on working class struggles and the violent restoration of self-sacrificial ethics in favour of "the national cause", starting, for example with the donation of 1% of workers' salaries to the government, as the CTM asked for in 1982 in chorus with some leftist parties. This practice characterizes the entire 80's decade until today blackmailing the consent to undermining the welfare state, to unemployment and privatizations, all packaged as solutions to the "national problem".

## **THE THEOLOGY OF NEOLIBERALISM**

In the 80's, the prevalent technocratic PRI fraction implemented the IMF-dictated "Structural Adjustment Programmes" to the letter. Over 500 state corporations were privatized and until the early 90's less than 400 had remained under state administration. Some of the most important moments of capital's assault were the subjugation of the independent union at Uramex (state uranium corporation) in 1984, the closure of DINA-Renault in 1986 (after strikes against its privatization), lay-offs at the state oil corporation Pemex, the sale of the state telephone company Telemex, the restructuring of the textile industry... The two sectors of particular importance for the state are the automobile industry in the north (which presents the most rapid development worldwide) and oil in the south. What is notable about the class struggle during the 80's and the early 90's is the emergence of a young unskilled proletariat, not only because it became the main prey of restructuring plans but because of its struggle within some independent unions against the leadership. In Volkswagen, in 1992, a rank and file movement threw out the contract signed by the leadership of their independent union with management which had provided for new flexible work relations. A strike followed which after one month was finally defeated. The management had fired all 14,000 workers only to take them back on again minus 1,500 (who, "accidentally", were the most militant ones) having managed to impose even more unfavourable conditions.

In an attempt to recuperate and check the resurgent movements Salinas' government introduced a policy of concertation (reconciliation) tempting some independent unions to return to the CTM, having substituted some "particularly" corrupt charros, but resorting to violence as well, perhaps more than it wished to. According to the same practice of recuperation and control, PRONASOL (National Programme of Solidarity) was introduced in the late 80's funded by the World Bank and through the sale of Telemex and other former state corporations. This model of "restructuring with a human face" provides sums of money for cheap food, loans to peasants and women's micro-companies, funds for schools, university scholarships, property titles to urban squatters, construction of hospitals and funding infrastructure projects (roads, electrification, dams, draining of lakes etc).

Especially Chiapas in 1993 received more than 100 million dollars in grants. Apart from PRI's electoral benefits through this "decentralizing" methodology, the "participatory" character of these projects was promoted -projects virtually creating the necessary infrastructure paving the way for modern capitalist development in accordance to NAFTA- whereby poor peasants and workers are forced to work at a minimum cost to the state, thereby temporarily alleviating the most painful consequences of capitalist restructuring. Through PRONASOL, a wide spying network was also organised to immediately deal with any possible agrarian movements as it was practised through previous World Bank programmes (e.g. PIDER, c/f next chapter). In general it's part of a long-standing tradition of recuperation/exploitation by the Machiavellians of the PRI - these scientists of manipulation and repression.

The course taken by the PRI integrating the Mexican economy with international capital undermines its own ideological legitimacy: in 1992, article 27 of the constitution, which protected, inter alia, the right to possess a holding on communal land, the ejidos, was modified. This modification of one of the most representative outcomes of the Mexican Revolution intensifies the ever constant proletarianization of the peasantry bringing with it the new enclosures.

## **RURAL MEXICO AND THE NEW ENCLOSURES**

*"Banco Rural is our patron (boss). We're the workers and we don't even get a wage or have a labour union" - a group of ejidatarios in Michoacan, 1981*

Within the peasantry, the ejidatarios take the brunt of the assault of capitalist restructuring and are at the centre of class antagonism (setting in motion, now with the Zapatistas, an organized armed struggle). Ejidos are communal lands, mostly Indian, belonging to the community and the village (the pueblo). Their farming is collective - or was so formerly (15). This ancient Indian communal system (in which the collective cultivation, irrigation, harvesting and the widespread mutual aid was a rule) existed before colonialism and survived within the context of feudalism which was transplanted from Europe. The ejidos were small tracts of land on conquistadores' estates and out of the latter, throughout the generations, creole landowners (the hacendados) emerged who increasingly encroached on large parts of Indian land turning the ejidatarios into peons. The communal system continued to exist after Independence and the Mexican Revolution but, on the other hand, the number of rancheros - the independent small-scale farmers - increased, too. The ejidatarios or comuneros were the social base of the Zapata movement, a source of inspiration for Magon and a reference point for Kropotkin in "Mutual Aid".

Article 27 of the 1917 constitution protects communal land and forbids ejidos' alienation and mortgage. This article also provides that it is within the discretion of the state to nationalize the lands. It authorizes all Mexican states to set a maximum limit to the amount of land owned by an individual or a co-operative. Moreover it protects private land. Since the beginning of the century, the ejidos were already divided into family

holdings (today, less than 10% is collectively cultivated). Given the expansion of the capitalist agricultural production with the help of all governments, capitalist competition, the lack of technology, debts, the brutal force of the landowners' private armies and state compulsion (through loans or "modernization" programmes) the dwindling of the communal land is easily explained.

The various agrarian reforms have left the ejidatarios and the minifundistas with less than 30% of the cultivable land, mostly arid and less fertile. Of course, the official accounts raise the number to 43%. Today more than 80% of those who cultivate the 25,000 ejidos are, at the same time, self-employed, proletarians working as day-labourers for landlords, wandering about the country looking for a job, often forced into domestic migration or going abroad. At the same time there is a permanent rural proletariat that constitutes 12% of the workforce in the countryside.

The "Green Revolution" in the south was relatively delayed compared with the north. Until the 70's, the plan for the south was not development but maintaining less modern social relations whereby landlords were traditionally more interested in primary accumulation than pursuing one on an extended scale -rather reminiscent of the hacendados of the past century- and a mass of farm-labourers, peones, ejidatarios or small holders, often lived in abject poverty.

During the 70's, the World Bank initiated the "Investments in the Poor" project. The PIDER programme (the Integrated Programmes for Rural Development) established big agri-businesses, using peasant labour and financial technical input. "Traditional" Indian smallholders were subordinated to capital through a series of loans and the enforced cultivation of particular crops ready for cheap food processing for export. Their inability to pay off the debts led to the reduction of their land, while on the other hand they had to intensify their subsistence farming (16).

During the 80's, new World Bank programmes (LDA, SAM) approved by the state union of peasants (CNC) led to further expropriations of the ejidos by the large agri-businesses via promotion of the "collaboration" between landlords investing capital in the means of production and ejidatarios providing land and labour.

In the early 90's the most striking feature of rural Mexico is proletarianization and the simultaneous maintenance of subsistence farming and self-employment. Most ejidatarios cultivate their own land to sustain themselves, or on behalf of rentiers and work at the same time as land-labourers or engage in domestic handicraft. They are virtually proletarians disguised as peasants. However, the reform of article 27 in 1992 shows that even this state of semi-proletarian employment does not satisfy capital's demands. The ejidos, only in theory belonging to the ejidatarios, are now virtually expropriated (17). With the acceptance of the production norms set by NAFTA, even the memory of the slogan "*The land to the tiller!*" must be wiped out. The enclosures, which, according to Marx, constituted the basic process of primary capital accumulation marking the starting point of capitalism in England through forced land expropriations aiming at "liberating" the peasants from the means of production and thus becoming "free" wage workers, are

still continuing. The new expropriators, the accountants of the IMF and the PRI, under the pretext of the repayment of the debts, dispossess the peasants of communal land rendering them landless and intensifying capitalist exploitation.

However, the state and capital wouldn't have been able to impose their control without the collaboration of caciquismo, the traditional system mediating social relations in the countryside. Caciques were the Indian leaders who cooperated with the colonialists. Nowadays, whether Indians or mestizos, they are usually political leaders or local magnates, intermediaries between the state and the peasants. The latter consider them as "capable" leaders, "servants of the people", and the caciques, giving out loans or doing "favours" using paternalistic and populist means, manage through political patronage and public relations to defuse or divert class antagonisms, obstructing the explosion of class consciousness and thus fostering state tutelage. Race often takes precedence over class (Indians against mestizos) sharpening internal antagonisms among the poor which are often worked on through the mediation of the caciques. Many agrarian movements and organizations promoting this ideology of "popular interest" ended up as arms of the state, through the co-optation of their charismatic leaders, who took advantage of their representative power over the peasants.

## **MORE FACTS ON THE STATE OF CHIAPAS**

Chiapas differs from the rest of Mexico only in the degree of poverty afflicting the ejidatarios and the minifundistas. Poverty worsened due to the state development programmes introduced to exploit the natural resources of the state (timber, oil). On the other hand, since the mid-60's, 150,000 landless Indians (Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Chol, Sekema and Tojolabal) were allowed to settle and they were given the right to cultivate land in the Lacandona jungle. These tracts of cleared forestland were later bought or forcetaken by the rich landlords and the ranchers, or abandoned by the Indians themselves because the soil was unsuitable for long term cultivation.

The expansion and intensification of cattle ranching, logging and oil exploration in the 70's aggravated the competition for land and tens of thousands of peasants were pushed off their holdings and were turned into land-labourers. The situation worsened since the landlords hired temporary land-labourers from Guatemala, with even lower wages (especially in the mid-80's with the arrival of 80,000 Guatemalan refugees).

Efforts at social organization and resistance have been made by the church, inspired by Liberation Theology, and by a broad, rank and file union movement of teachers, the hijos de campesinos, the children of the peasants. In 1989 a decree banned forest exploration and the government eliminated coffee subsidies -just two other causes that added to Chiapas' increasing social tension. The implementation of PRONASOL didn't really ease things, although Chiapas served as a model for this "poverty alleviation" programme.

## **NAFTA, GATT AND WTO: JUST WHAT'S BEHIND THESE JARRING ACRONYMS?**

Perhaps nowadays we are closer to the verification of Marx's theory about "the immiseration of the working class", "the universal competition among workers", "the expansion of the world market", "the mobility of the capacity to labour and the fluidity of capital", especially if we examine what the above-mentioned initials mean.

GATT and NAFTA's declaration re the "liberalization of trade" allows in other words, capital's unlimited liberty of movement and increased political control. Gatt, like the World Bank and the IMF is a Bretton Woods institution. Bretton Woods was the post second world war meeting place in 1944, of capital's representatives from the US, Britain, France and the USSR. Its intention was to coordinate efforts to avoid crises like the one in 1929 and inter-imperialist wars. GATT, formalized in 1948, has been modified a lot since then and effectively functions in more than 100 countries. The 8th round of the Negotiations took place in Uruguay in 1986 adding to GATT provisions which were rather more than simple tariff reductions. They impose rules which override national laws that regulate domestic markets and labour (environmental restrictions, collective bargaining, agricultural products subsidies) considering them as "trade barriers". The multinational corporations enjoy even more favourable terms for investing in countries where labour costs are lower and the environmental laws less restrictive.

NAFTA eliminates state subsidies for agricultural products and it is estimated that in Mexico 2 to 12 million jobs in agriculture will be lost, which will add to the migratory flow northwards. NAFTA (now effective between Canada, US and Mexico and intended to include many Latin American and Asian countries in the future) is virtually completing the process of global capital integration. Side agreements were made to give NAFTA a democratic facade: there were formed trinational labour and environmental commissions of state bureaucrats, charged with the settlement of disputes regarding the implementation of NAFTA provisions. However, labour laws concerning collective bargaining, the right to strike and unionize are not subject to these commissions' jurisdiction.

In this rock bottom race, capital will flow into Mexico as surely as the deindustrialization of America will continue (especially regarding car, textile and food industries). The PRI has already paved the way for capital's welcoming reception through the dismantling of the welfare state, unemployment, flexible work relations and the recent devaluation of the peso.

This devaluation, that took place a few days after the deployment of the Zapatistas in 38 communities in Chiapas, cannot be explained irrespectively of the fear of class struggle spreading in other areas of Mexico, and above all it is essentially connected with the general crisis in the country as we have described it so far. Monetary issues are nothing but the mystified form of social issues regarding production and wages. Capital is cutting wages on a national scale by devaluating the currency. This move is at the same time defensive and offensive. Offensive, because wage reductions and the further privatizations demanded as precondition for new loans, plus a 40% increase in interest

rates which will bring about the collapse of a 30% of small and medium-size businesses, aim at creating better conditions for future investments. At the same time, the myth is spreading that state coffers are empty and that "sacrifices are necessary" for the repayment of the new loans.

More than a year after the implementation of NAFTA in Mexico, the process of restructuring is intensifying. 99% of the strikes in 1994 were declared either non-existent or illegal and in many cases lay-offs followed, mostly in the car, textile, iron and coal industries and in the maquiladoras sector.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is aiming at "achieving a greater coherence in global economic policy-making", according to its founding document (1986), along with the World Bank and the IMF. Having a "legal personality" the WTO will ensure the conformity and the integration of national economies within the global one according to the GATT rules.

Even talking about "national economic planning" is difficult since what is known as the Nation-State undergoes a serious crisis caused by the agreements and institutions of the Capitalist International. The expansion of the commodity economy -as a result of the defeat of class struggles over the previous decades- brings about decomposition of an intense kind for the Mexican and American proletariat and, in the future, (if it hasn't already) could result in capitalism forcing the abolition of borders, undermining the Nation-State. However, this undermining is inevitably damaging the representative capacities of the political bureaucracies. For example the PRI has not remained in power for 66 years as an elected representative of capital, but as an elected representative of "Civil Society", of the "Mexican nation". While pretending to be powerless to oppose the IMF and the World Bank it is forced to deflate its own nationalist blustering, to undermine its own nationalist foundation, to repeal gradually the constitution, the very source of its legitimacy. As a guardian of the "achievements" of the Mexican Revolution (in reality, the defeat of the peasants and workers as they themselves found out later, at the same time as some rights and demands were statutorily secured) and the populist measures of Cardenas, the PRI should seek the consent of "Mexican citizens" posing as providing for the "common interest" (18). Yet being forced to do this in ways less and less persuasive -especially since the days of the "debt crisis" and now with NAFTA- it is causing increasing disaffection. Within the PRI, the dominant technocratic faction, oriented towards integrating Mexican with global capital, is already being attacked by those factions hesitant about innovation; those that are "traditional", "corrupt" and "backward". The assassination of Colosio, who was in charge of PRONASOL, was followed by the assassination of Massieu, the general secretary of PRI -both close associates of the former president, Salinas.

Amidst these "sordid family quarrels" as Marx described inter-capitalist antagonisms, an uprising that started more than a year ago is continuing, carrying with "the wind picking up from below", all its weaknesses.

## THE ZAPATISTAS WITHOUT A MYTH

The difficulty of analysing a movement like the Zapatistas is not only due to the fluidity of the situation in Chiapas. The very meaning of their words and tactics was gradually unfolding before our eyes as we were trying to connect it with their strategy and Mexican reality in general.

As a national-liberation army, with their First Declaration from Lacandona Jungle in December 1993, they declared war on the Mexican government ready to advance to the capital claiming, as Indians and Mexicans at the same time, their historical continuity with all national and popular struggles since Colonialism. They published then the "Revolutionary Laws of the Liberated Territories", their social and political programme. After the truce agreed by them and the national army on the 12th of January 1994, they sat down at the "dialogue" table with the government presenting their 34-points-demands with an emphasis on political demands of a national character. In mid-March they walked out of the negotiations publishing their Second Declaration from the Lacandona Jungle, in which, addressing the "Mexican people", they proposed a National Democratic Convention for the submission of "propositions about a transitional government and a new constitution".

The PRI under the pressure of the EZLN and the class struggle it had sparked off, suspended the Minister of the Interior and the governor of Chiapas and made a kind of electoral reform allowing for the presence of foreign observers during the elections held on the 21st of August. According to the official electoral results the PRI received 48% of the vote, the PRD 16% and the right-wing PAN 26%. In Chiapas, Eduerdo Robledo Rincon of the PRI "won" with 51% of the vote and the PRD-supported Amando Avendano followed with 34% having adopted the EZLN's 11-points. After the PRI's electoral victory, the EZLN denounced the fraud and called on people to engage in civil disobedience and mobilize in peaceful protest. Avendano formed a parallel government in December supported by a large part of the peasants in Chiapas, the EZLN themselves and the majority of the National Democratic Convention, which at its second meeting in October, demanded the termination of the PRI government. Bishop Ruiz formed CONAI (National Commission for Mediation) in the same month to start new negotiations while land occupations in Chiapas by dozens of peasants' organizations intensified. On the other hand, the police as well as the big landowners' "white guards" violently evicted people from occupied areas. On the 19th of December, the EZLN advanced over a wide part of Chiapas occupying 38 municipalities only to return again to the jungle. The national army, after having already tightened the noose around the zone liberated by the Zapatistas since autumn 1994, invaded it in mid-February 1995 in order to arrest their leaders. After large solidarity demonstrations in Mexico City and lest class struggle should extend beyond Chiapas' boundaries, the army curtailed its advance and the government announced it was withdrawing its proclamation, characterizing the EZLN's leaders as "outlaws" and that it was ready to start negotiations. Despite opposition to the hardline policy and the army repression, the army's presence remained suffocating and when it deployed terrorist tactics many peasants took refuge in the jungle. In the

abandoned villages the government settled poor and landless peasants from other areas. Up till now the situation is still explosive and uncertain...

What we're attempting here is a critical presentation and assessment of the movement avoiding the trap of radical journalism or being just another uncritical solidarity committee. To anyone hastening to accuse us of callousness because of the escalation of the Mexican governments' violence, we will retort that our point of view leaves behind an over-emotional approach that forbids thought, as well as a temporary fascination with just another case, the Zapatistas this time, which will move us for a while to pass onto something else later. We want to approach class struggle from an internationalist angle. We try to analyse how it is mediated by abstract democratic politics and what are the obstacles the insurgents themselves put in their way. Precisely when class struggle becomes intense one must attempt a critique that leaves behind glorification and uncritical identification. This is the best contribution to a rebellion that simply cannot be confined within Chiapas' or Mexico's boundaries. So, let's get down to the essentials:

The EZLN constitutes now the most organised political form of class struggle in Mexico and has helped in an explosion of land occupations in Chiapas and to resurgence of antagonism around the social question in this state. There is a great tradition of peasant movements in Mexico that's led to this outburst and, of course, it's not down to the intelligence of the EZLN's much publicized leaders, Marcos or Tacho, who have become the idols of leftists, "progressive thinkers" and the mass media. Since Colonialism many Indian guerilla movements (Mayas in Yucatan, Yopes in Guerrero, Chichimeca in the north, Yaquis in Sonora, Mixtec in Oaxaca, Tzeltal in Chiapas, Huasteca in Veracruz, Hidalgo and San Luis Potosi) resisted land seizures, and thus becoming slaves or wage labourers, regionally rather than nationally. During the Mexican-american war resistance was conducted with guerilla tactics by agrarian and worker movements, whose aims ranged from social banditry, land takeovers to free peasant communities. After the Mexican Revolution, in the mid-40's until 1962, Ruben Jaramillo's movement in the state of Morelos -once Zapata's co-fighter and member of the CP- propagated "Land and Liberty" by deed. In the early 60's guevarist marxists, peasants, workers, intellectuals, artists and liberal politicians rallied around the agraristas, peasant militants demanding land reform, forming MLN (Movement for National Liberation) for the revitalization of the Mexican Revolution. Later, many peasants, ex-members of the MLN organized a guerilla army in Guerrero under the leadership of the teacher Vasquez. In the 70's dozens of urban and peasant guerilla groups emerged, mainly of guevarist ideology (the "Party of the Poor" of Lucio Cabanas etc) and now several armed peasant movements are active in rural Mexico (in November 1993 a meeting of 52 armed groups took place in Guerrero under the auspices of the "Guerilla General Coordinate"!).

One of the basic reasons that the Zapatistas as a guerilla movement monopolize attention and sympathy, apart from the coverage they get by the media, is the re-adjustment of their former guevarist ideology and the adoption of the dominant, nowadays, democratic pluralistic ideology: *"The EZLN was born having as points of reference the political military organizations of the guerilla movements in Latin America during the sixties and seventies...political-military structures with the central aim of overthrowing a regime and*

*the taking of power by the people in general...(the indigenous people) needed military instruction, and we needed the support of a social base..."*, says Marcos in his interview by the Mexican anarchists Amor y Rabia and goes on *"We are proposing a space, an equilibrium between the different political forces in order that each position has the same opportunity to influence the political direction of this country...This is why we propose democracy, freedom and justice -justice in order that certain material conditions are satisfied so that people have an opportunity to participate in the political life of the country...we are talking about a democratic space where the political parties, or groups that aren't parties, can air and discuss their social proposals"*.

However, he adds enigmatically *"...We are saying that yes, we do have our idea of how the country should be"*, something that is repeated in their Second declaration *"...the EZLN has a vision about the country. The EZLN's political maturity as the expression of the feelings of part of the nation lies in that it does not wish to impose its vision on the country"*. Trying to guess what this vision is, is quite pointless, so let's see something more unequivocal by EZLN, a part from their "Revolutionary Laws of the Liberated Territories". According to their "Revolutionary Agrarian Law":

*"...Third: All poor-quality land in excess of 100 hectares and all good-quality land in excess of 50 hectares will be subject to the revolutionary agricultural law. The landowners whose lands exceed the afore-mentioned limits will have the excess taken away from them and they will be left with the minimum permitted by this law. They may remain as small landholders or join the cooperative peasants' movement, peasant societies, or communal lands.*

*Fourth: Communally-held land and the land of popular cooperatives will not be subject to agrarian reform, even though they exceed the limits mentioned in the third article of this law.*

*Fifth: The lands affected by this agrarian law will be distributed to the landless peasants and the agricultural labourers who thus request it as collective property for the formation of cooperatives, peasant societies or agricultural production/livestock collectives. The affected lands should be worked collectively.*

*Sixth: The collectives of poor, landless peasants and agricultural labourers, men, women, and children without land title, or who have land of poor quality, will have the right to be the first to request land.*

*Seventh: In order to better cultivate the land for the benefit of the poor peasants and the agricultural labourers, the expropriation of large estates and agricultural/livestock monopolies will include the expropriation of means of production such as machinery, fertilizer, stores, financial resources, chemical products and technical expertise. All of these means should pass into the hands of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers, with special attention given to groups organised in cooperatives, collectives and societies...*

*Tenth: ...When a region doesn't produce some product, it will trade justly and equally (sic) with another region where it is produced. Excess production can be exported to other countries if there is no national demand for the product.*

*Eleventh: Large agricultural businesses will be expropriated and passed to the hands of the Mexican people, and will be administered collectively by the workers of those businesses...*

*Sixteenth: The peasants that work collectively will not be taxed. Nor will the ejidos, cooperatives or communal lands be taxed. From the moment that this revolutionary agrarian law is implemented, all debts...are forgiven".*

Such an agrarian programme -the most radical piece EZLN has published until now- does not oppose private property nor market economy and put in the overall context of the "Revolutionary Laws" which provide for:

--respect for a "freely elected" representative government, --stocks to workers in proportion to the number of years they have worked,

--nationalizations of unproductive industries and businesses,

--dual power, with the Zapatistas as self-proclaimed supervisors of the revolutionary process, its participatory, social-democratic character appears more clearly.

In juxtaposition, we will remind the anarchists and libertarians who rushed into embracing EZLN uncritically, Magon's anarcho-communist programme, and in particular some excerpts from PLM's Manifest of 23rd of September 1911 about generalized expropriation (19):

*"Thus humanity remains divided into two classes whose interests are diametrically opposed -the capitalist class and the working class...Between these two social classes there cannot exist any bond of friendship or fraternity, for the possessing class always seeks to perpetuate the existing economic, political and social system which guarantees it tranquil enjoyment of the fruits of its robberies, while the working class exerts itself to destroy the iniquitous system and institute one in which the land, the houses, the machinery of production and the means of transportation shall be for the common use... Expropriation must be pursued to the end, at all costs, while this grand movement lasts...acts of expropriation must not be limited to taking possession of the land and the implements of agriculture alone. There must be a resolute taking possession, of all the industries by those working in them, who should bring it about similarly that the lands, the mines, the factories, the workshops, the foundries, the railroads, the shipping, the stores of all kinds and the houses shall be in the power of each and every one of the inhabitants, without distinction of sex... Everything produced will be sent to the community's general store, from which all will have the right to take what their necessities require, on the exhibition proof that they are working at such and such an industry. The human being aspires to satisfy wants with the least possible expenditure of*

*effort, and the best way to obtain that result is to work the land and the other industries in common. If the land is divided up and each family takes a piece there will be grave danger of falling anew into the capitalist system... Of course there will be enough for each to have his own house and a ground plot for his own pleasure... Let each, according to his temperament, tastes, and inclinations choose the kind of work that suits him best, provided he produces sufficient to cover his necessary wants and does not become a charge on the community... It is for you, then, to choose. Either a new governor -that is to say, a new yoke- or life-redeeming expropriation and the abolition of all imposition, be that imposition religious, political or of any other kind".*

Despite its reformist, social-democratic character, the EZLN's agrarian programme is opposed to Chiapas' big landowners, as well as to the strategy of international capital, since communalism, small-scale ownership or nationalizations (especially giving NAFTA's existence) are obstacles in its way. In this law, as well as in the EZLN's other laws about women's equality, labour, industry and commerce, the explosive potential of social revolution is inherent in an alienated form, and however limited to Chiapas and to the ejidatarios, this revolt expresses the universal demand of the uprooted individual separated from true community, human nature.

Deprived of human community by the Mexican state and international capital through the New Enclosures, the ejidatarios reaffirm community anew occupying land and expropriating the means of production -something they did before the EZLN's existence and now with the help of the latter's armed struggle, carry on doing so even more dynamically. If we consider that the New Enclosures constitute an attack against the communal control of the means of subsistence, then, they are not aimed only at Chiapas' ejidatario or generally the peasants of the so-called "Third World". They affect the "First World" as well, intensifying the mobility of labour, fostering emigration and causing social-democracy to retreat almost to the point of capital's total domination. In this respect, the rebellion in Chiapas, "the expropriation of the expropriators" has a universal dimension that transcends the local social uprising of the semi-proletarian peasants. However, at the same time, while the EZLN wishes to give to this rebellion a supposedly more general and wider character, it limits it, on the contrary, within national and political frames. In their First Declaration from the Lacandona Jungle they made clear that they struggled for the right to "...freely and democratically elect our political representatives..." and went on to mention that through their struggle they applied article 39 of the constitution which reads: "*National Sovereignty essentially and originally resides in the people. All political power emanates from the people and its purpose is to help the people. The people have, at all times the inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government*". This article, part of the constitution of every modern Democracy, inspires the EZLN who want to apply it to the very letter.

In their 34 points-demands addressed to the government they demanded inter alia: "*Free and democratic elections with equal rights and obligations for all political organizations contending for power, true liberty to choose one or another proposal and respect for the will of the majority. Democracy is a fundamental right for all Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Without democracy there can be no liberty, justice or dignity and*

*without dignity there is nothing*". In their Second Declaration from the Lacandona Jungle, the EZLN reject the government's electoral reform because "...it perpetuates the seizing of the popular will", and they repeat their wish for "...a political solution which could lead to a peace with dignity and justice" and address an invitation to the "independent and progressive ones for a national dialogue, for a peace with democracy, liberty and justice", they talk about "...Civil society (which) assumed the responsibility to protect the country" and stress the fact that "(we should provide)...so that those who govern, govern obeying". So they address "Civil Society", proposing to "all the independent political parties to condemn the limitation and deprivation of people's civil rights during the last 66 years and to demand the formation of a transitional democratic government". The EZLN's pluralistic, national-democratic and populist ideology reaches a climax when they declare that "Within the framework of the new political relations, the different propositions about the system and the orientation (socialism, capitalism, social-democracy, liberalism, christian-democracy etc[!] ) should convince the majority of the people of the correctness of their programmes".

One would suppose that the EZLN's language is completely outdated if the Mexican state, an authoritarian democracy, wasn't patriarchal and populist and if, particularly in Chiapas, backward structures, longtime organized political and economic gangs didn't still survive, which the dominant modernizing tendency within the PRI wants to get rid of, too. The Mexican state, even in its present form, seeks to win voters' consent and as for the electoral fraud, its indisputable existence does not refute the success of the PRI's cooptation politics (Alianza Civica, a coalition of non-government organizations, which observed the electoral process, reported anomalies which didn't however alter the outcome of the present elections).

However, what is of interest from the standpoint of social revolution is the context, the essence, the meaning of democracy (whether of the Mexican or european type) and of "Civil Society". Democracy, the democratic state is not a timeless idyllic state of things above history, but the political outcome of class struggles since the French Revolution. In Mexico, through the Revolution of 1910-20, the basis of the democratic state was laid, which resides in the "sovereign people" satisfying legally some of the peasants' and workers' demands after having trodden on their dead bodies.

The basis and the content of democratic "political society", this "spiritual, heavenly community" is none other than the society of private individuals, of real people with their private and competitive interests, of class society. This real competitive society called the "Mexican people" or the "Mexican nation" is unified abstractly in the Mexican state. "Man in his immediate reality, in civil society, is a profane being", says Marx in the Jewish Question. "Here, where he regards himself and is regarded by others as a real individual, he is an illusory phenomenon. In the state, on the other hand [in the "political society"], where he is considered to be a species-being, he is the imaginary member of a fictitious sovereignty, he is divested of his real individual life and filled with an unreal universality". Mexican "Civil Society", which includes ejidatarios, workers, businessmen etc, will probably be able to liberate itself politically, modernizing and liberalizing the political system and abolishing the one-party rule. However, it cannot abolish its

immediate alienating reality. Because this battle is fought by the ejidatario repossessing communal land and by the proletariat against flexibility and immiseration, whereas the EZLN's national-democratic ideology urges them to fight as "citizens", namely as members of an imaginary community.

No government, neither the one that "governs obeying" nor any other, will ever liberate human beings, since it will always re-unify them abstractly as citizens retaining simultaneously their class divisions, even by force. Because, naturally, no "people" in any democracy, even the most liberal was ever convinced by, or, has ever chosen to be governed by capitalism! With their persistence in pursuing "clean elections", the Zapatistas actually favoured the PRD and its leader, "citizen engineer Cardenas" -to use one of their expressions. And now many peasants in Chiapas recognize Avendano, the PRD's candidate, as "their own man" who expresses their will. In their 17/12/94 communique, the EZLN state, among other things: *"EZLN recognize the social forces rallied around engineer Cardenas and the CND, as an honest, civil and peaceful opposition against the government's impositions; for this reason, the EZLN addresses themselves to citizen-engineer Cardenas and the National Council of Representatives of the CND to ask them, irrespective of their political affiliation and party commitment (sic), to convey the EZLN's voice to Mexican society and to the personalities in the political life of the nation that they consider to be competent, presenting them the means which would render a stable truce possible:*

*1. Satisfactory solution for the conflicting parts after the elections in the states of Veracruz, Chiapas and Tabasco.*

*2. Recognition of the transitional democratic government in the state of Chiapas.*

*3. Recognition on the part of the federal government of CONAI as a neutral organ which can make possible the political solution to the conflict. The EZLN recognize the effort of citizen-engineer Cardenas and the CND for a peace with justice and dignity".*

Generally, the EZLN's relationship with the PRD and the CND (which consists mainly of PRD members and cadres) is one of partners-allies against the common enemy the PRI and the one-party state. A partnership wherein each part wants to retain its autonomy.

In an interview in La Jornada (7/12/94), Marcos made clear that the "return" to guns after the second meeting of the CND was the continuation of the EZLN's democratic politics by other means. In fact, the Zapatistas never considered the electoral process and the use of guns as two incompatible activities. In the same interview, Marcos was quite clear: *"The guns ought to open up space again, spitting lead enables politics to be exerted again"*. For this very reason, we do not limit our attention in this text to the EZLN's partial tactics but we try to point out the essential content of their politics on the whole.

Closely related to the EZLN's national-democratic ideology is their social-patriotism. *"We are the inheritors of the true builders of our nation. We, the dispossessed, are millions and we thereby call upon our brothers and sisters to join this struggle as the*

*only path, so that we will not die of hunger due to the insatiable ambition of a 70-year dictatorship led by a clique of traitors who represent sell-out cliques and the most conservative elements",* they said in their First Declaration from the Lacandona Jungle and in their communique of the 6th of January, they made clear that "*...we try to unite the Mexican people and its independent organizations so that through all forms of struggle, a national liberation movement can be formed which will enable the presence of honest and patriotic social organizations for Mexico's progress*". In their Second Declaration, they refer to "*the plunder of national wealth*", to the "*government's persistence in implementing an economic plan that increases poverty in our country for the benefit of the foreigners*" as a reply to the EZLN's demand for a revision of NAFTA. Marcos, in the interview with Amor y Rabia explains the extent of the EZLN's "internationalist" politics: "*...as far as international politics is concerned, we have nothing more than our appeal for solidarity to the Mexican and latino community in the USA, to help us as a fraternal nation*". This nationalism that traps class struggle within state borders or seeks out people of similar ethnic descent without regard to class, sabotages the modern dimension of the rebellion against NAFTA. Precisely now, when it's pointless to refer to Mexicans in general when it's Mexican as well as american proletarians (Chicanos or otherwise) who are being hit hard by capital's world integration, precisely now, when the social question cannot be limited to Mexico's borders, the Zapatistas intensify class struggle whilst holding the national flag as their banner against the "sell-out" government and "foreign capital". They foster the false vision of socialism in one country again and they (together with a fraction of the Mexican bourgeoisie threatened by capital's integration) fill the ideological gap opened by capital's internationalization in the Mexican government's propaganda apparatus. Whereas the PRI in dismantling the welfare state is forced to tone down its nationalistic demagogy, now, it seems, social-patriotic and nationalistic slogans emerge on behalf of the proletariat -another fact indicating that what happens in Mexico is not solely a Mexican affair. Do not the protestations of trade unions in several European countries calling privatizations of nationalized corporations "sell-outs" wrap up class struggle in a social-democratic, nationalist language? Or, don't references to the "threat against our cultural heritage" from european integration signify the false identification of popular culture with the nation?

Do not be misled into supposing that the quarrel between Madero and ourselves is a quarrel between Mexicans, which Mexicans should be left to settle for themselves. It is not. It is the old, inextinguishable quarrel between bourgeoisie and proletariat; between monopolists and disinherited; between those who wish to live peacefully under the existing system and those who know that under the present system there is no peace...This quarrel therefore, is yours. Without playing the traitor to the great international cause of the emancipation of labour you cannot ignore it... We do not appeal to you to help US. Our appeal is that you leave no stone unturned to help YOURSELVES by utilizing the magnificent opportunity of forwarding the common cause which the Mexican Revolution affords.

Regeneracion, PLM's newspaper, from the "Appeal to members of the [american] Socialist Party" of 29/4/1911, later included in the article "Labour's solidarity should know neither race nor colour".

The Zapatistas are therefore criticised in the context of international class antagonism which their nationalist ideology does not promote and not of course because they "do not make the revolution". The dimensions of the social question in Chiapas and Mexico in general transcend their ideology, even if they were the ones who escalated class struggle and are keeping it up to a great extent. The attacks against proletarians in Mexico and the States during the last decade have generated new struggles. In California, Proposition 187, which denies "illegal" immigrants access to health care, education and social care in general has become a law, after a referendum with 59% for and 41% against (20). On the other hand, they reduce the length of time on welfare benefit and lower the age at which children can be tried as adults from 16 to 14...among other things the "Republican Revolution" has accomplished. The first reaction last October was the largest demonstration (over 100,000) in L.A. for several decades. There were also student walk-outs, rallies and sit-ins and there are a lot of indications that maybe the outbreak in 1992 (the big L.A. riot) will happen again. Perhaps the hiring of 3,000 new cops was no coincidence.

As a reaction to NAFTA, transnational networks have already been formed linking activists in the USA, Mexico and Canada. Labour unions, women's groups, farmers, environmental, religious and intellectual organisations -about sixty in all- have formed transnational coalitions demanding a "*revision of NAFTA*", "*democratization of the IMF and the World Bank*", "*equitable, sustainable and participatory development*", a new "*global Keynesianism*", redistribution of wealth between "*poor and rich countries*", "*a civil society without borders...for a participatory and sustainable global village*". This new social-democratic vision without borders, that brings together dissimilar social groups of limited class composition (from the petite-bourgeois to labour unions leaders, from feminists to academics) is forced by the internationalization of capital to get over any idea of exclusively national action. It is precisely this new strategy of capital which, although it precipitates the collapse of the social-democratic parties based on a Keynesian national development, generates a new social-democracy in the form of grass-roots movements of a transnational orientation. It is certainly a positive fact that in this transitional age, one of global restructuring of social relations, neo-Keynesianism recognizes the international character of capital's attack and stresses global solidarity. However, it is not only that this multicultural reformism is undesirable; it is also questionable whether permanent reforms are possible any longer.

Not an unimportant role in the division between Mexican and american proletarians is played out in the ideologies of the "bad gringos" and the Mexican "traitors" who in migrating to the USA "forgot" the nation and the Raza. Against these so-called pochos, the old anti-imperialist hatred rages again vehemently, something that makes the identification of second and third generation immigrants with Chiapanecos or Mexican proletarians in general almost impossible. On the other side of the borders ("al otro lado") racism against immigrants intensifies, especially after its legislative consolidation.

While the New Enclosures are imposed globally through the pillaging of communal land, privatizations, the war on rents, the decline in wages, the destructuration of the welfare

state, immigration, "working in the black", developers destroying the countryside (construction of huge motorways, airports etc), the struggles everywhere against all of this, cannot as yet, go beyond their partiality. While the internationalist vision appears nowadays as an urgent necessity and not as a mere abstract principle, new barriers of nation, race and localism rise up to annul it.

If the Zapatistas, limiting the rebellion in Mexico to a political, national affair, assign us, at best, the tasks of just a solidarity committee, we can only feel for ourselves what is ours in this struggle. Contrary to the PRD which organizes solidarity campaigns for the Zapatistas in Europe gathering signatures from academics, artists and sympathizers in general, our practical solidarity to the ejidatarios and proletarians in Chiapas will be to continue squatting, to struggle against privatizations and the alienation of everyday life, aiming to develop these struggles into the creation of a world human community.

*March 1995*

## NOTES

(1) Marxist-leninist organizations mostly, the so-called "extremists", arousing suspicion from many sides that they are PRI agents -such suspicions and accusations in Mexico are quite common, since the spectacle of terrorism and spying is perfectly organized and adds to confusion.

(2) It is the name the EZLN gave to the jungle meeting place where the convention met referring symbolically to the convention of representatives of Villa's, Zapata's and the Constitutionalist's armies in 1914, in the vortex of the Mexican Revolution. However, comparing these two conventions the only resemblance seems to be the name.

(3) Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, the leader of the PRD, is the son of Lazaro Cardenas, the reformist ex-president. An ex-member of the PRI and ex-governor of the state of Michoacan, gathered round him the "democratic current" within the PRI. Now with the PRD he represents the nationalist, social-patriotic tendency. Gaining 31% in the elections in 1988 he was considered to be the actual winner, although the PRI came to power again through blatant fraud. It's worth mentioning that the abstention then amounted to 50%.

(4) The Plan de Ayala, a concise, fiery outline of the Zapatistas' objectives was written by Zapata and his comrade and former school-teacher, Otilio Montano.

(5) *"Zapata emphasized "land and liberty", that is, restitution of stolen lands, water and pasture rights and the restoration of village democracy. Not that the Zapatistas lacked a proletarian consciousness -on the contrary, they seized all the means of production; fields, mills, railway stations, and distilleries. They set up liberated zones, basing themselves on communal traditions of village self-government. Zapata's was a classic "people's war", fought in guerilla fashion, and his forces enjoyed great popular participation and support. First Diaz, then Madero, then Huerta, and eventually the*

*Constitutionalists launched scorched-earth campaigns of terror against the Zapatistas, indiscriminately killing any civilians in their path, but so long as their charismatic leader lived, the Zapatistas resisted the demoralization that these barbarous attacks sought to provoke.*

*In the north, Villa's forces were less homogeneous than those of Zapata. In addition to former bureaucrats of the Madero regime, who helped administer the immense expanses of territory liberated by Villa's army, the top ranks of Villa's followers included more cowboy caudillos\* (vaqueros or charros), rancheros, and petty bourgeois storekeepers than it did communal peasant farmers; the foot soldiers were usually miners, migrant farmworkers, railway workers, and the unemployed. The aims of the Villistas were thus more worker-orientated or petty bourgeois than they were pro-peasant: as foremen of large estates, vaqueros, or independent ranchers, cowboy caudillos had commanded peasants but had not experienced land hunger at first hand. Workers were more interested in gainful employment than in farming for themselves. Thus lands seized by Villa's army were held by the state, not given to the peasants." J. Cockcroft "Mexico. Class Formation, Capital Accumulation and the State".*

\* strong regional (mostly military) leaders.

(6) US intervention through the invasion of Veracruz not only gave the Constitutionalists a military advantage but also helped them claim credit for "throwing out the yankee invaders" and pose as "anti-imperialists".

(7) Founded in 1929 as the PNR: National Revolutionary Party it was renamed PMR: Party of the Mexican revolution in 1938; we are talking about the PRI, which is still in power.

(8) Nevertheless, foreign (mostly US) capital has always had a strong presence in Mexico, especially in industry. According to a study in 1970, of the 2,040 companies with the largest profits, foreign capital controlled 36% of the income of the largest 400 companies and participated in another 18%, while Mexican private capital and the Mexican government controlled 21% and 25% correspondingly.

(9) We are referring to politicians and army officers, who during the Revolution amassed vast quantities of land for themselves, which they kept later under state support.

(10) Walking the streets of Mexico City, one is immersed in Mexican history and especially the period of the Revolution: subway stations, streets, squares etc. bearing the names of militants assassinated by this very state that later declared them "national heroes". After the student uprising in 1968, even Magon was pronounced a "hero", although formerly he had been condemned as "anti-Mexican", due to his internationalism.

(11) Local bosses, more information in the chapter RURAL MEXICO AND THE NEW ENCLOSURES.

(12) Both Mexican and foreign (mainly US), these labour-intensive assembly plants were first established in 1964 along the borderline by the Mexican government. The maquiladoras run under extremely favourable terms for capital accumulation (no duties are imposed on parts imported from US and similarly there are no duties on the assembled products exported to the US). The workers are mostly landless peasants (especially very young women) from the same region, so that the management (Mexican or not) can better exploit them through traditional, paternalistic methods such as donations to the village, being godparents (compadrazco) etc.

(13) See in "Midnight Notes" #9 H.Cleaver's article: "The uses of an earthquake".

(14) See "Midnight Oil" by Midnight Notes, especially chapters "Oil, guns and money" and "Audit of the crisis".

(15) Ejido means exit since the communal land usually lay on the outer edges of the village.

(16) It is highly interesting to examine the methodology followed in those programmes. The emphasis was laid on the "participation" of the peasants in their exploitation, which presupposed regional "information" about the peasants' behaviour. Usually a spying network was set up to track down the leaders of agrarian movements and then followed the implementation of the programme and the death squads for those peasants disagreeing with development. Both the time -in the 70's- and the place -Guerrero and Oaxaca, states with a tradition of agrarian movements and especially armed ones- were not selected accidentally for this exchange of funds for "information" necessary for disbanding agrarian organizations and the peasants' subsequent subordination to capital (see Kaffentzis, "Let me speak of the end of the World Bank and IMF").

(17) Already since the 60's leasing ejidos, although prohibited according to the constitution, was allowed after certain amendments were made. Ejidal Bank and Banco Rural, both in the interests of big landowners, acted as collective owners and controllers of the ejidos.

(18) However often it resorts to electoral fraud, repression and violence, the Mexican state has also promoted and refined its recuperational practice. As we have already shown, it knows how to use both the rifle and money; to give away scholarships amply or publish Bakunin's collected works and assassinate political opponents. We may then speak of an authoritarian but democratic state.

(19) References to Magon (here and below) serve two purposes: first, to show to what extent the anarcho-communist movement during the Mexican Revolution and the existing Zapatista movement differ, as a response to an attempt by Greek anarchists to present the latter as a direct continuance of the former; second, to highlight the content and perspectives of that defeated movement at the turn of the century which can be very inspiring today, even though the historical context is quite different. Namely, the

communist, internationalist perspective and the rejection of all political party manipulations.

(20) The case was brought to court by the L.A. School Board, immigrant rights groups and civil liberties advocates disputing Proposition's 187 constitutionality. As for the referendum, the white/Anglo electorate voted for Prop. 187 by a 63% to 37%, Blacks against, 53% to 47%, and although the Latinos also voted against by 77%, 23% voted for it. Among the latter two communities those in favour of the Prop. thought that they protected themselves against the threat of the undocumented workers depressing wages and monopolizing unskilled jobs (info from "News and Letters, vol. 39, no 10).

For this text, except for those sources already mentioned, the following ones were also "expropriated":

--P. Newell, "Zapata of Mexico"

--"Land and Liberty, Anarchist Influences in the Mexican Revolution, R.F. Magon"

--K. Dawkins, "NAFTA, GATT and WTO", Open Magazine Pamphlet Series

--"The other side of Mexico", # 34 and 36 --Wildcat, #60

--Marc Cooper, "Zapatistas, Chiapas, Mexico", Open Magazine Pamphlet Series

Excerpts from EZLN's declarations and communiqués were mainly taken from "Love and Rage", vol. 5, issues no 1, 2, 3.