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From Zapatistas to Democracy?

Mexico's Political Transition

by Peter S. Moore, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Journalism.

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
August 27, 1999

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acceptance of the thesis

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the degree of Masters of Journalism

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ABSTRACT

The appearance and persistence of the Zapatista rebellion against the Mexican government in the southwestern state of Chiapas sparked the transformation of Mexican politics into a more open, participatory system. However, the government has successfully limited political change to republican institutions such as Congress and the Senate, while entrenching the liberalized economics that provoked the rebellion. Thus the Mexican "political opening" is designed to co-opt the political opposition through a policy of pluralism and participation restricted to these institutions. This divide-and-conquer strategy for the Nineties has permitted the Mexican president and the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to marginalize the extra-legal rebels from the national agenda, while playing the major opposition parties against each other in order to maintain PRI hegemony in Mexico.

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INTRODUCTION

Canadians know far too little about Mexico. The growing economic importance of Mexico to Canadian investors and businesses has not been matched by a discernible increase in news coverage or attempts to spark public interest. Only one newspaper, the Toronto Star, maintains a small bureau in Mexico City. Five years after the agreement came into effect, Canadians appear to know as little about Mexico as Americans reputedly know about Canadians.

While the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994 is viewed primarily as an economic union, it has necessarily begun to make an impact on the social, political and cultural conditions of the United States, Canada and Mexico. The insurrection of a guerrilla Indian army in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas is one of those consequences.

This thesis is a personal effort to bridge the gap in understanding between Canadians and Mexicans. Studying the literature of Mexican authors Carlos Fuentes and Octavio Paz naturally led to learning more about the country itself. I wrote my first piece on Mexico about the surprising Indian insurrection of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation

(EZLN) in 1994. Mexico appeared to be falling apart and I wanted to know why.

Given the political events of 1994 alone -- an Indian rebellion, the assassination of a presidential candidate and the crash of the peso -- the last thing one would expect to result is democracy. Yet this result was heralded by the national and international press in July 1997 after the opposition parties won control of the Mexican Congress. In 1994, I wanted to discover what had gone wrong. In 1997, I wanted to find out what had gone right.

Instead, I found that appearances are deceiving. Democracy in Mexico is a hollow power sharing scheme. The ruling party (PRI) continues to dominate the policy and political discourse of Mexico. The opposition parties for all their gains in seats, influence and resources are split on ideological grounds and cannot provide a united alternative to the PRI. In effect, democracy has become a divide-and-conquer strategy that ensures the dominance of the PRI.

I used as a lens the demands of the zapatista rebels for shelter, land, work, health, food, education, democratic

representation and elections, national sovereignty, peace and justice. These demands address the basic needs of the Indians that have resulted from centuries of neglect, discrimination and oppression. That these demands are the same demands brought forward by hundreds of non-governmental organizations that try to address the concerns of 40 million poor Mexicans is no coincidence. Unlike the opposition party elites, impoverished Mexicans have yet to see the spoils of democracy in their daily lives. In the case of the Indians whose rebellion helped pressure the government to court the opposition parties' demands for electoral reforms, the new democracy means nothing. The highlands of Chiapas have become militarized, polarized and fratricidal.

By taking the point of view of the impoverished Mexican Indian, I freely acknowledge my empathy with the Indians' needs and demands. As this thesis considers the subjective question of justice for Mexico's Indian peoples, it must be an engaged work of journalism. My participation in the Xcumumal and Puebla rescues, the burial of the victims of the Acteal massacre and a two week stay in an overcrowded,

miserable refugee camp have all contributed to the formation of this analysis.

This work was written as an overview of Mexican politics. The first chapter provides the historical context of the Indians' role in the struggle for liberation and democracy in Mexico. The second describes the initial responses of the government to the rebels and the social context of being an Indian in Mexico. The third chapter describes the electoral reforms and benefits of the elections to the opposition parties and their arch-rival, the PRI. The fourth considers the presidential ambitions of Mexico City's first elected mayor, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, to the presidency of the republic in the context of his election and of a strengthening left-wing Democratic Revolutionary Party in Mexico. The sixth chapter reviews the internal democratic reforms that are transforming the ruling party from an electoral bludgeon to a sophisticated political machine that uses elections to restore its legitimacy and power. The seventh chapter reassesses events in Mexico within the context of escalated repression and political violence in northern Chiapas, most notably the

Acteal massacre, in an attempt to discover the options available to the zapatista rebels if they are to remain on Mexico's national political stage and achieve their objectives.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MEXICAN LABYRINTH

Naked, barely covered with rags or loincloths of half-tanned leather, they have abolished the time that once separated them from bygone ages. Neither before nor today exists. It is always. Always defeat and persecution. Always the master who is not appeased by the most abject obedience or the most servile humility. Always the whip falling onto the submissive back. Always the knife lopping off the gesture of rebellion. In this eternity, the tribe's eternity is fulfilled.

-Rosario Castellanos
*The Book of Lamentations*¹

Born the daughter of a Chiapan landlord, Rosario Castellanos had Indian servants feed her, dress her and soothe her to sleep with a bedtime story. She gained an education in Mexico City and shortly after finishing, returned to Chiapas to work with the National Indigenous Institute, founded by Lázaro Cárdenas during his presidency in the late Thirties. She was the first female Chiapan author and, aside from a Catholic nun in the 17th century, the first female Mexican author of note. That she was a woman writer was exceptional. That she wrote about the Indians with sympathy, as she did in *The Book of Lamentations* in 1962, seemed inexplicable. The fictional

¹ Rosario Castellanos. *The Book of Lamentations*. Trans. Esther Allen. New York: Marsilio Publishing, 1962, 393-394.

revolt in the novel is set in the southern state of Chiapas during the land reform days of President Lázaro Cárdenas. Castellanos modeled the book on the last Mayan rebellion, the 1867 Caste War.

The protagonist of the novel is a Tzotzil Indian judge who settles community disputes, but finds himself impotent to resolve his people's exploitation, abuse and rape at the hands of the white landlord. White demands always defeat Indian justice. The judge and his barren wife bring a young woman raped and impregnated by a white rancher into their home and adopt her child as their own.

The injustice of the rape is multiplied for the judge as he finds it impossible to eke out a living on his mountain plots and becomes an indentured laborer on a plantation. He learns Spanish, meets and hears the promises of land from President Cárdenas and agitates. But for ten years his hopes for liberation are met with indifference and fatalism among his people.

Haunted by her barren womb, his wife becomes a mystic and searches the caves until she finds ancient Mayan idols. She becomes their priestess and medium. To summon up a saint

strong enough to fight the white's patron saint on the spiritual plane, she offers up her adopted child for crucifixion during the Easter Holy Week celebrations. Armed with the spiritual power of this "new Christ", the seed of injustice crucified, the judge finally finds his people ready to rebel. But the rebellion deteriorates to raiding ranches and fails to conquer the white capital, the Royal City. The ranchers rally, crush the rebels and try to impose a final solution by massacring the Indians. Only the timely intervention of the state governor prevents the genocide.

Order restored, the novel ends. But the judge, who was the symbol of justice for the Indian people, is not caught or killed. He escapes the white man's justice and wanders the highland paths in search of Indian justice. The novel's message is clear: When will justice come to Mexico's Indians?

The 1994 uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) sought to answer this question by demanding "jobs, land, shelter, food, health, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice and peace." The demands ranged from practical to historical and garnered

widespread sympathy. The zapatistas had resorted to the traditional Mexican strategy to achieve freedom, democracy and peace: armed struggle.

A hundred years before the Mexican revolution of 1910, Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla rallied the Indian tribes in a rebellion against the Spanish viceroy with his famous Cry of Dolores:

Will you free yourselves? Will you recover
the lands stolen three hundred years ago from
your forefathers by the hated Spaniards?
[...] Will you not defend your religion and
your rights as true patriots? Long Live our
Lady of Guadalupe! Death to bad government!
Death to the *gachupines* [Spaniards]!²

Instead of achieving these goals, the Indian fighters who died by the thousands found themselves under the thumb of the new Mexican aristocrats, who demanded tribute and service in much the same way as the Spaniards and the Aztec overlords before them. The Indians who fought the war returned to their dirt floor homes as servant citizens of the Mexican republic.

² Michael Meyer et al. The Course of Mexican History. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 287-288.

Time and again, the Indians fought while the victors, General Antonio López de Santa Anna, the Mexicanized Indian Benito Juárez, and Porfirio Díaz, each elected by the social elite, replaced the dictator before them.

The free market, individualistic liberal reforms of Juárez and Díaz profoundly affected the Indians. Their land reform consisted mainly of expropriating and privatizing the Catholic Church's vast tracts of lands. But much of the land held in title by the Church was communally-owned Indian land. This practice of the Church holding the titles to Indian land dates back to early colonial times when Indians were judged unfit to administer their own affairs. The Church became their guardian and held their land titles as its own. As a result, the expropriation and private sale of church lands dispossessed many Indians and created a large number of landless agricultural workers for the new ranches and plantations. By the end of the century, "almost 87 per cent of rural dwellers had no land whatsoever."³ The 1867

³ Tresierra, Julio C. "Mexico: Indigenous Peoples and the Nation-State." Trans. Charles Roberts. Indigenous Peoples and Democracy in Latin America. Ed. Donna Lee Van Cott. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, 187-210.

Caste War which swept southern Mexico, especially the Yucatán Peninsula, was a response to this unscrupulous expropriation of the economic, cultural and social foundation of Mayan culture. The rebellion was crushed and used as an excuse to massacre thousands of Indians.

The Mexican Revolution called by Francisco Madero in 1910 was supposed to be different. Emiliano Zapata recruited and led a revolutionary army of fellow Nahuatl-speaking Indians from Morelos. In his recruitment cry, he asked:

We no longer wish that our Father Díaz watch over us. We want a much better president. Rise up with us because we don't like what the rich men pays us. It is not enough for us to eat and dress ourselves. I also want for everyone to have his piece of land so that he can plant and harvest corn, beans and other crops.⁴

His call for land and dignity resonated with other Indians and his army came to control much of southern Mexico. Zapata was assassinated by the Mexican government at the Chinameca ranch, where he had come to negotiate a peace settlement that involved redistributing land.

⁴ Meyer, 507-509.

The assassination of Zapata in 1919 was followed by the redistribution of 70.6 million acres of arable land by the revolutionary government. The administration of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) redistributed more than two-thirds of the land and came to be revered by Mexican farmers and Indians alike for restoring communal landholdings in the institution of the *ejido* or communal lands. Under no circumstances could the *ejido* be sold: the lands would remain in Indian hands. Aside from enforcing the land rights provided for in the 1917 Constitution, Cárdenas implemented an "indigenist" policy of official state help and support for improving the status of the Indians. He founded the National Indigenous Institute, ensured agricultural lines of credit for Indian farmers, mandated obligatory primary education for all Indians, and included the confederation of farmers unions into the ruling party, which would become the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

The restored land, the legal institution of the *ejido* and the new institutions to meet the needs and aspirations of the Indian people were all steps toward reconciliation and recognition for the Indian in Mexican society. Justice

for the Indians appeared right around the corner. But the ideology of nationalism and modernization coupled with entrenched racism once again marginalized the Indian. The nationalist idea of a modern, sophisticated and self-sufficient "First World" Mexico summarily excluded the Indian identity as a backward remnant from the past. Industrialization programs bypassed the countryside and little agricultural credit was made available to the *ejidos* as they were deemed high risk debtors. Finally, the entrenched racism of Mexican society took the form of patriarchal clientelism. Indian institutions and peasant unions founded or strengthened during the Cárdenas regime were coopted and controlled by the ruling party. In return for their votes, Indians received social services. The government swiftly coopted or destroyed dissident Indian organizations as a matter of government policy.

The Indians had found that their new government ally was in fact their new master. The post-Cárdenas regime excluded Indians from the national plan, neglected them economically and removed all illusions of autonomy from their institutions. The Indians once again found themselves

under a dictatorship - not of one man, but of one party; one party that held sway over every citizen and every sector of Mexican society.

To outsiders, this reality was not immediately evident. On the surface, Mexican politics are those of a straightforward republican democracy. After 1939, two main parties competed for power: the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the National Action Party (PAN). The PRI's ideology is best described as "revolutionary nationalism", which permits collaboration with business interests while embracing social reforms to meet the demands of the peasants and workers; a formula for stability and peace. The PAN's ideology is free market liberalism mixed with a social doctrine of conservative individualism that respects the family and the Catholic Church.

However, the PRI's mass appeal, government power and control over elections have allowed it historically to beat the PAN in every election in every city, in every state. Only the PRI held power in the three branches of the Republic: the Executive, Legislative (Congress and Senate) and the Judiciary.

Political dissent was repressed or co-opted. In the Fifties, the government arrested thousands to break the communist-controlled railway unions. In 1968, the army killed more than 300 students at a student movement meeting in the Plaza of Three Cultures of Mexico City. In 1971, the student movement disintegrated as thugs linked to the government broke up demonstration after demonstration, killing and maiming the protesters. Dissidents were either offered jobs within the PRI and government, joined guerrilla groups or became one of the more than 300 dissenters who simply disappeared. Guerrilla leaders such as Rubén Jaramillo and Lucio Cabañas were hailed as the heirs of Zapata, before each was hunted down and killed by the army and police.

Overall, at least 14 guerrilla movements formed during the late Sixties and Seventies. All were crushed or disbanded.⁵ A few of the guerrilla bands enjoyed support from poor farmers and Indians, but most Indian organizations worked within the margin of the law, within government

⁵ Poniatowska, Elena. Fuerte es el silencio. Mexico: Ediciones Era, 1991, 143-154.

institutions such as the National Indigenous Institute or the National Council of Indigenous Peoples.⁶

The only opposition permitted to function were those political parties branded as PRI "satellite" organizations and assigned seats in Congress through a manipulated proportional representation formula. Mexican intellectual, poet and diplomat Octavio Paz described these client parties as "a poor imitation of pluralism." He proposed in 1979 that the other way to create genuine democracy in Mexico was "to divide the PRI. Perhaps its true left wing, united with other forces could be the nucleus of a true socialist party."⁷

Paz's vision took a decade to become reality. One of the gains of the struggles in the Seventies was the destruction of such political taboos as criticizing the President or the PRI. The removal of those restrictions proved crucial in 1988, when a coalition formed from expelled members of the PRI, communists, socialists and spurned satellite parties and challenged the *status quo*.

⁶ Tresierra, 1994, 198-200.

⁷ Paz, Octavio. The Philanthropic Ogre. Trans. Lysander Kemp, et.al. New York: Grove Press, Inc. 1985, 395.

How close this National Democratic Front and its presidential candidate, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the son of former President Lázaro Cárdenas, had come to winning the presidency will never be known since the PRI presidential candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, claimed victory and then burned the ballots after taking power. From then on, Salinas' supporters waged a "dirty war" against the party that formed from the Front, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), killing more than 300 party activists in his six year term. "The PRD for the entire Salinas six-year term was a party under siege," noted Carlos Navarrette, a PRD deputy and member of its national executive.⁸ The party that survived this trial by fire has emerged as a centrist social democratic party.

Salinas had taken power to remake Mexico. Educated at Harvard University, he came to the presidency armed with the ideas of the Chicago School of Economics: deregulation, privatization and the removal of trade barriers. To effect this ambitious plan which ran against the ideological grain of even his own party, Salinas handpicked a cabinet composed

⁸ Interview with author, Dec. 11, 1997.

of like-minded individuals also educated at top American universities. Few had held political office. Many were economists like Salinas himself. His successor, Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de Leon, who served as Budget Secretary and Public Education Minister under Salinas, had received his Master's and PhD degrees from Yale University.

Salinas' cabinet was convinced of the need to remake Mexico in the image of their prosperous neighbor to the north. The country would need all of the Chicago School's harsh economic medicine before the U.S. Congress would deign to include Mexico in its free trade pact with Canada. The economic reform would force an ideological transformation of Mexico from economic nationalism to free market capitalism.

Wielding the highly centralized, near-dictatorial power of the Mexican presidency, Salinas implemented his neoliberal economic program. He jailed labor leaders, launched a clientelist anti-poverty program, and privatized hundreds of state industries, which were then snapped up at bargain prices by business supporters of the PRI. He also annulled the Indians' one gain from the revolution by privatizing the *ejido*. The privatization of land is part of

Salinas' plan to modernize agricultural production and reverse the trade deficit that forces Mexico to import basic foodstuffs like beans and corn from the United States. The marketplace would reform the countryside, he claimed.

To calm Indian fears of a complete abandonment, he rewrote Article Four of the constitution:

The Mexican nation has a multicultural composition originally based on its indigenous peoples. The Law shall protect and promote the development of their languages, cultures, uses, customs, resources, and specific forms of social organization, and shall guarantee their members effective access to state jurisdiction. In the trials and agrarian proceedings to which they are a party their legal practices and customs shall be taken into account as established law.⁹

The opposition National Action Party gave the PRI the necessary support in Congress to amend the constitution and make the changes to Articles Four and 27 (the *ejido*). For dissenting Indians, the constitutional assurance carried little weight. Many times before they had seen the weakness of words on paper. Falling international prices of key crops such as coffee and corn augmented the crisis in the fields.

⁹ Tresierra, 202.

The government and its right-wing ally ignored the criticisms of Cárdenas' PRD to push the change through Congress and the Senate.

By the end of 1993, Mexico's economy had stabilized after nearly two decades of heavy debt, inflation, peso devaluations and recession. Inflation dropped from over 100 per cent to 15 per cent. The economy began to grow. Impressed by Mexico's recovery, the US Congress finally voted in favor of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). On January 1, 1994 the trade agreement would come into effect. With minimal political reform, President Salinas had controlled dissent and instituted radical economic reforms that would make it next to impossible to reverse without dire economic and political consequences. International investors hailed the country's recovery as "the Mexican miracle."

But the Mexican miracle ended abruptly on New Year's Day of 1994. The zapatista army's initial assault "liberated" half a dozen towns in the southwestern state of Chiapas. While their attack seemed unprovoked to the outside world, it was clear enough to the rebels: without

constitutional protection for the *ejido* and with a government intent on turning Mexico into a free-for-all marketplace, the Mayan rebels had no choice except armed struggle. Their First Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle issued the same day as the rebellion read, in part:

We are the product of 500 years of struggle: first against slavery, in the War of Independence against Spain headed by the insurgents; afterward to avoid being absorbed by North American expansionism; later to proclaim our Constitution and expel the French Empire from our land; afterward, when the Porfirian dictator denied us the application of the just Reform laws and the people rebelled forming their own leadership from which came Zapata and Villa, poor men like us, to whom the most basic preparation was denied so they could use us as cannon fodder and sack the riches of our homeland without it mattering to them that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not a dignified roof, nor land nor work, nor health, nor food, nor education, without having the right to freely and democratically elect our authorities, without independence from foreigners, without peace or justice for us and our children.¹⁰

The rebels identified themselves with Mexico's own tradition of revolution and justified their revolt by citing the

¹⁰ EZLN. "Declaración de la Selva Lacandona: Hoy Decimos ¡Basta!" *La Republica en Chiapas*, January 2, 1994, 7.

constitution. Their rebellion was a patriotic, nationalistic struggle for Mexico and its forgotten seven million Indians. The ranks of the rebel army were filled by members of seven Mayan tribes. Against the powerful centralized Mexican state, the rebels claimed no other option but armed insurrection, an act tantamount to suicide. As an eyewitness of the January 1 rebellion remarked, "What really amazed me was they rebelled knowing the army would strike back brutally. It goes to show the desperacy of their situation."¹¹

After a military counter-offensive which killed an estimated 400 people, mostly civilians, the political pressure to find a peaceful solution and to negotiate with these forgotten heirs of the Mexican Revolution became too great. The zapatista demands were so elementary that anyone - especially the 40 million poor Mexicans - could relate. The demand for democracy rang especially true, capitalizing on the frustration generated by the fraudulent 1988 presidential elections. The rebels' political program

¹¹ Moore, Peter. "Reformist Revolution," *The Gateway*, March 22, 1994, 10.

succeeded in making Mexico's national and revolutionary symbols its own. President Salinas, concerned about arranging his presidential succession and unwilling to lose his "reformer" reputation by a repression of the guerrillas, decided to negotiate with this bloodied specter risen from Mexico's past.

Five chaotic years later, Mexico appears to have changed radically. Despite the Indian insurrection and the March assassination of Salinas' chosen candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio, the 1994 election proceeded with relative calm and fairness. Under the new PRI president, Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de Leon, further electoral reform came in 1996. This included the long sought after independence and civilian control of the federal electoral institute from the Interior Ministry. This reform would hinder government attempts to enforce fraudulent victories such as the 1988 presidential election. The pressure of an armed rebellion forced the government to look for ways to include the political opposition.

The opposition parties quickly reaped the fruit of the seeds sown by the reforms. During the July 6, 1997

congressional elections, the two main opposition parties, the National Action Party (PAN) and the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), gained a slim majority in Congress. In effect, a coalition of the opposition now controls Congress and can stop its historic habit of rubber-stamping presidential policy. More importantly, the opposition victory may have given the Congress a new legitimacy to use the Peace and Concordance Commission to help mediate the zapatista conflict in Chiapas.

However, this historic "first" victory for the federal opposition is not as clear as the newspapers or numbers make it appear. The opposition parties may control the Congress, but the administration of this lower legislature may be all it controls. Over the last year, the opposition coalition confronted the jolting reality that their status as opposition parties may be all they have in common. The parties are split ideologically between the PAN's free market capitalism and the PRD's social democratic nationalism. Thus on the key questions of economy and social policy, the opposition parties have little common ground.

For a political "dinosaur", the PRI has proven unusually adept at wrangling the democratic process to get the votes necessary to support Zedillo's policies. The success of the PRI in the face of a divided opposition and its attempts to reform itself internally to select the presidential candidate for 2000 also raises the question of whether life for the minority Indians will improve under the policies of a newly legitimate and democratic PRI.

Waiting in the wings is Cúahtemoc Cárdenas, the son of President Lázaro Cárdenas, who had implemented the *ejido* land redistribution program so successfully in the Thirties. Viewed by some Indians as well as by members of his PRD as a contemporary messiah, he can only benefit from his lineage. The younger Cárdenas had run for the presidency twice and in June 1999 secured the presidential candidacy of the leftist Labor Party in a bid to form an electoral coalition with his party, the PRD. His sweeping victory in the July 1997 election to the post of mayor of Mexico's capital city is seen as an indication he can gain the requisite support to follow his father's footsteps to the presidency and thus fulfill the promise of the Mexican revolution. Part of that

process would be the restoration of *ejido* rights to the Indians. The success of his party in recent elections has shown its potential to take power electorally.

His reputation, his lineage, his party and his presidential ambitions all make him arguably the second most important man in Mexican politics after President Zedillo himself. To the Indian rebels a man such as Cárdenas could mean easier negotiations. For negotiations to proceed, the rebel army needs to know that it will be protected from retaliation by death squads or the military if it disarmed. Again, Cárdenas is the man who would most likely be able to win their trust.

Electoral democracy is the tonic the PRI is giving the Mexican opposition and public to cure it of any insurrectionary inclinations. If anything, the electoral reforms have served to distract the Mexican people from the demands of the Indians with the novelty of whether the democratic reforms will benefit them in their daily struggle to survive. The quantity of media reportage of the political debates, votes and intrigues in government on the municipal, state and federal levels is mind-numbing enough. Add to that

the intricacies of negotiating and drafting constitutional amendments to satisfy the aspirations of more than 50 different indigenous tribes composed of up to seven million people in 32 states, it is little wonder that the zapatista rebels may seem forgotten or lost in this labyrinth of discourse. Only an independent press, opposition parties, and the zapatista rebels' own unique communications strategy have kept their struggle alive.

Outside of Mexico, the name Zapata is almost synonymous with a seemingly incongruous phrase, "Internet revolutionaries." By publishing their manifestos on the Internet and using the internet as a platform for on-line referendums, the zapatistas have acquired the dubious title of "the first post-Cold War revolutionary group in Latin America." But the zapatista "Infowar" on the Mexican state is limited. As in all wars, soldiers have to take ground and hold it. The zapatista rebels did so by establishing 38 autonomous municipalities that rejected government aid and intervention throughout northern Chiapas in November 1994.

President Zedillo's response was to order a military offensive to arrest the zapatista leadership in February

1995. The offensive failed, leaving the army to fight the rugged highland mountains instead of the zapatista rebels. The objective of this war is not military victory, but to achieve a voice and influence on national affairs that would translate into concrete benefits and long-term change for the Indians.¹²

The zapatistas thought they had achieved part of their objectives when a year of negotiations resulted in the signing of the San Andrés accords on "indigenous rights and culture" in February 1996. The two sides had agreed to hold a second round of negotiations entitled "Democracy and Justice" but that round is now not likely to happen. The Congressional Commission for Concordance and Peace drew up legislation which the zapatistas, church mediator and congress all approved by the end of 1996. Once again, justice for the Indians seemed right around the corner. However, the President refused to endorse it in January 1997, submitting his own version of the legislation to the Mexican Senate and Congress in March 1998. The President's

¹² Ronfeldt, David and John Arquilla. The "Social Netwar" in Mexico. Rand 1998, MR-994-A.
<http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR994/>

legislation was harshly criticized by Congress, the church mediator and the rebels. A year later it remains frozen in Congress.

While President Zedillo and the rebels vie for political advantage, violence has filled the vacuum created by a three-year halt in the dialogue, among the Indians of northern Chiapas. The example of the zapatista insurrection revived the old demand for land. Emboldened Indian farmers occupied more than 370,000 acres on 1,000 farms and ranches by April 1995.¹³ In addition to the traditional harassment by the ranchers' personal armies, known as the White Guards, some 15 heavily-armed militias have appeared in the zones under zapatista influence. They define themselves as "self-defense groups", while their zapatista rivals denounce them as "paramilitaries." The impunity, if not assistance, from the Chiapas state police has encouraged a "low-intensity war" that amounts to seeking personal revenge, "resolving" intercommunitarian struggles by killing one another, and stealing from groups that refuse to support the local PRI.

¹³ Womack, John. Rebellion in Chiapas: an historical reader. New York: The New Press, 1999, 47.

Over 300 people have died in ambushes, shoot-outs and assassinations since 1996. The armed militias have also shut down 36 churches in the northern Diocese of San Cristobál, which they blame for seeding and spreading the zapatista rebellion. Thousands have fled their homes because of the violence.

All of this has happened under the nose of the largest mobilization of troops in contemporary Mexican history. Chiapas now hosts more than 55,000 soldiers, one for every 65 Chiapans, according to the Fray Bartolome de las Casas human rights center based in San Cristobal, Chiapas. In early 1998, President Zedillo ordered the army to dismantle several zapatista autonomous municipalities and arrest the leaders. The action raised tensions, while the president reminded the public of the importance of a "state of law and order in Mexico."

As the debate on Mexico's "democratic transition" intrigues the intellectuals in Mexico City and the electoral reforms allow the opposition parties to flex newfound muscle, the zapatista rebels find themselves in a tight spot. The government's strategy to channel dissent into

official institutional channels has so far worked well with the opposition parties. Meanwhile, Zedillo has introduced a new social development program designed to erode the credibility of the zapatistas while satisfying the needs of the agrarian poor. On the state level, Zedillo's appointed governor of Chiapas, Roberto Albores Guillén, has begun to rezone the state's municipalities according to ethnicities, and has offered amnesty for zapatistas willing to disarm and disavow the rebellion. The rebel position is further weakened by the dissolution of the trusted negotiating team that presided over the San Andrés accords. Meanwhile, the military continues to control northern Chiapas while the militias slip through their security net to harry if not massacre the zapatista base communities.

Should the PRI government continue this political-military strategy, the reform project of the zapatista rebels may never bear fruit. Their struggle has so far followed a historic pattern: Mexicans before Indians, white before brown. Negotiations and public consultations have given them a voice, but have shown no results.

CHAPTER TWO: REPRESSING A REBELLION

"Be careful. There's a war there."
-Marcos, Mexico City riot policeman¹⁴

A series of large red, white and green signs stud the highway leading to Tuxtla Gutierrez, the capital of Chiapas. Each sign touts the impressive improvements in public infrastructure for the 3.6 million Chiapans who live there.

"In the last two years, the government built 7,800 kilometers of road," reads one. Another announces: "Over 300 new public works built."

"Deeds count" is a common slogan. From the previously dusty, pothole-ridden roads of Oaxaca to the smooth state highway, the signs seem to confirm the claim that in Chiapas, the government does what it promises.

After all, President Salinas personally attended the opening of one of the state's four new hospitals. And he funneled money to help bring electricity to 1,200 villages and refurbish 4,000 schools. His Solidarity program also helped hone the athletic talent of the Chiapan Indians by paving hundreds of basketball courts in the highlands.

¹⁴ Interview with author, Dec. 18, 1997.

Salinas' successor, President Ernesto Zedillo, has visited the state probably more times in the last five years than have all of Mexico's post-revolutionary presidents combined. In one of the towns seized four years before by the zapatista rebels in 1994, Zedillo proudly announced an impressive list of his government's social infrastructure projects: the opening of a new health center every 10 days since he came to power; a reduction of infant mortality by more than 40 per cent; the construction of 4,500 new schools for 200,000 new students; the provision of 356,000 people with clean drinking water; and the distribution on 227,000 hectares to 54,000 families.¹⁵ San Cristobál de las Casas even has its own airport (although the zapatista rebels suspect it is part of the military's air strategy).

Since 1994, Chiapas has received more than \$11.4 billion Cdn in public infrastructure funding. In the light of these massive expenditures, a PRI chief's desperate request to the government development agency Solidarity in July 1993 for \$13 million US to fund infrastructure projects

¹⁵ Elvira Vargas, Rosa. "Pide Zedillo al Congreso debate constructivo de su ley indígena," *La Jornada en Internet*, <http://www.serpiente.dgsca.unam.mx/jornada>, March 17, 1998.

that would undermine the zapatista rebels appears wholly inadequate.¹⁶ In Chiapas, throwing money at injustice would never resolve the deep roots of the conflict.

Yet poverty still rules the roads of Chiapas with barefoot children and dirt floor shacks. A recent study in prenatal care revealed that 60 per cent of women in one region of Chiapas gave birth in those shacks.¹⁷ The absence of telephones, electricity, water purification filters, and plumbing of any kind is especially evident in the villages higher in the mountains, away from the main roads. Education levels average at a Grade Three level, and women generally have less than men. The rapid deforestation of more than a third of the Lacandón forest's 600,000 hectares in the last two decades demonstrates the great need for arable land in northern Chiapas.¹⁸

¹⁶ Andres Oppenheimer. Bordering on Chaos. Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1996, 35.

¹⁷ The study used a sample of 297 women in the Fraylesca region of Chiapas. Sanchez Pérez, H.J. "Childbirth in Chiapas, Mexico: Who provides delivery care and where," *Salud Pública de Mexico*, Nov-Dec 1998, Vol. 40, No. 6, 494-502.

¹⁸ Ortiz Epsejel, B. "Deforestation tendencies of the Lacandón Forest: The Case of Las Cañadas," *Interciencia*, Nov-Dec 1998, Vol. 23, No. 6, 318.

Despite its vast resources, the government has failed to alleviate the landlessness and poverty to effectively undermine the rebels, who for twelve years had recruited and trained among the poorest, most isolated communities in the mountains, canyons and jungles. The warning offered to the author by the riot policeman from Mexico City, "Be careful. There's a war there," was a reminder that some of these Indians had rebelled four years earlier to fight these same conditions.

The hope of change offered by guerrilla training and arms tapped into the anger in the Chiapan highlands and helped launch the zapatista rebellion on New Year's Day 1994. Under cover of darkness, about 1,500 guerrillas took six towns in northeast Chiapas, including the old state capital, San Cristobál de las Casas. In San Cristobál, they burned the state Attorney-General's office and sacked the city hall, scattering its archives in the streets. They then laid a 10-hour siege to the nearby Rancho Nuevo base of the 31st military zone which encompasses Chiapas.¹⁹

¹⁹ John Ross. Rebellion from the Roots. Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1995. 83-85; Eyewitness interview with Ursula Misztal, February 1994.

Reeling from the surprise attack, the Mexican army first called in reinforcements from the 30th military zone in neighboring Tabasco and from central Mexico. The army did not want to risk ordering Chiapan troops to fight Chiapan rebels. Helicopter gunships and fighter-bomber jet planes strafed and bombed towns and country held by the rebels. The rebels withdrew into the jungle pursued by 15,000 well-equipped, well-trained soldiers who took out their frustrations on the civilian population. Skirmishes between both sides and aerial bombing of outlying hamlets suspected of harboring rebels continued for nearly two weeks.

Anti-war demonstrations in the cities gathered momentum. On January 12, 1994, a quarter of a million people marched in Mexico City to stop the war. Under heavy national and international pressure, President Salinas de Gortari defied the right wing of his party, declared a unilateral cease-fire and called for dialogue.²⁰

For Salinas, negotiation was the only way to avoid a public relations scandal that would threaten foreign investment and scare the US Congress into repealing the

²⁰ Womack, 44.

North American Free Trade Agreement. At the negotiations, peace activists spontaneously organized "security belts" of human rights workers, Indians and other Mexican volunteers, to stand hand-in-hand through fog and rain, surrounding the delicate peace talks. As talks stalled, the rebels decided they needed to do something to prove their importance to the new president.

Less than two weeks after President Zedillo's inauguration, the rebels took 38 municipalities in northern Chiapas without spending a precious round of ammunition. On February 9, Zedillo responded by announcing Sub-commander Marcos' identity as a former Mexico City intellectual and launched a military offensive. The offensive was a military success and overran every EZLN stronghold. The rebels withdrew into the mountains and jungles without firing a shot. But reinitiating the war also sparked public sympathy for the rebels and demonstrations again forced a ceasefire and return to negotiations. The guidance of a national mediation commission led by liberation theologian Bishop Samuel Ruiz of the Diocese of San Cristobál de las Casas, proved essential to ensuring the sides stayed at the

negotiation table and negotiated in good faith. On February 16, 1996 the two sides finally signed the San Andrés accords.

The goal of the accords was to create a new relationship between Mexico's Indians and the Mexican government through constitutional reform. The accords would:

1. Give Indians the ability to decide their own internal government;
2. Legislate changes that broaden Indian participation and representation on the local, state and national levels;
3. Recognize that Indian communities have their own methods of resolving community problems;
4. Stimulate the production, re-creation and diffusion of Indian culture;
5. Use state-sponsored education to broaden access to culture, science and technology to help develop Indian communities, while respecting Indian culture;
6. Guarantee basic living conditions of health, housing, and food, especially for women and children;
7. Develop an economy that lets Indians sell extra produce at a good price;
8. Enact social policies to protect migrant Indian workers, nationally and internationally.

In sum, the rebels wanted to gain resources, access and influence for Indians, their culture and their way of life in exchange for their cooperation within a reformed Mexico.

But the deal struck at San Andrés is only the first part of the dialogue. Nowhere in its vaguely-phrased pages is the answer to their age-old demand for "Land and Freedom." Without the second round of talks, the land would remain in the hands of those who hired the Indians to work it. The possibility that the second round of negotiations, which included the land issue, will ever occur now seems remote.

In the Fall of 1996, President Zedillo asked the PRI-controlled Congress to form a multi-party commission whose duty would be to draft legislation to implement the accords. After reaching an agreement between the commission and the zapatista rebels through Bishop Ruiz's mediation team, Congress presented the draft legislation to Zedillo. But Zedillo refused to back the legislation and stepped away from the San Andrés accords.

"We will do only those reforms which will restore the genuine interests of the indigenous people," he said on Feb. 12, 1997, reasserting his presidential authority over the the welfare of the Indians.

Sub-commander Marcos accused the president of delaying the accords in a furious communiqué. "He uses the accords to win time and attempt [...] the annihilation of the EZLN and of the Mexican indigenous peoples who back us."²¹ The brief hope that the war would be over by Christmas 1996 now has become a bitter recollection.

Life in the highlands of Chiapas has turned from hope to horror. Encouraged by the signing of the accords, 44 communities in the tiny municipality of Chenalhó, about 100 km north of San Cristobál de las Casas, denounced the elected PRI government as illegitimate.²² These communities of Chenalhó including the village of Acteal, declared themselves autonomous in April 1996. They were following in the footsteps of the more than 30 communities that split from the municipalities controlled by elected PRI officials to form their own autonomous municipalities in November 1994. Their autonomy is defined in part by a return to

²¹ Ciro Gomez Leyva. "Lo Que No Funcionó," *Milenio*, 17-20.

²² In a presentation to Elections Canada in Ottawa, José Woldenberg, the president of Mexico's Federal Electoral Institute, used Chenalhó as an example of Indian voting. Its PRI municipal president Jacinto Arias Cruz, had ordered its inhabitants to vote for the PRI. Most did.

traditional Mayan collective decision-making processes and their refusal of all government aid. That refusal also extends to the eviction of government teachers.

The formation of autonomous municipalities known as communities in rebellion was one way of focusing public sympathy and reinforcing unity within the zapatista communities. Although the autonomous municipality has precedents in other states and even a neighborhood of Mexico City, never has it been organized on a scale large enough to cover most of northern Chiapas. The zapatista autonomous municipalities "represent an example for all of us," claimed Manuel Fernández Guasti, a physicist who helps organize the National University aid caravan Everything for Everyone.²³

The structure of the autonomous municipality of Chenalhó is as follows: 44 different communities are represented by a council of eight representatives as well as a municipal president, elected every two years. The council is all male, although complemented in authority and influence by a parallel women's council, made up of the

²³ Interview with author, Manuel Fernández Guasti, Dec. 24, 1997.

wives of the representatives. The participation of the women is essential, according to President Domingo Plascencia. Without a wife, no man is eligible for election because he is "not complete."

Most authorities are recognizable by a white woven shirt worn over shorts. The president and municipal council wear black ponchos and straw hats decorated with multi-colored ribbons at festivals and, increasingly often, at funerals. With the help of health promoters, catechists, and Indian law enforcers whose symbol of authority is a polished black stick called an "acteal", these authorities handle the daily administration of the municipality and its policy. The village of Polhó became the seat of this "government in rebellion."²⁴

To foreigners, the more familiar costume of the zapatista rebels is a handkerchief over the face or black balaclava. Twelve members of the rebel army compose the political directorate within the municipality, which consults directly with the municipal council. These twelve in turn consult their zapatista representatives, one in each

²⁴ Interview with author, Domingo Plascencia, Jan. 2, 1998.

of the villages included in the autonomous municipality. While next to impossible to confirm, there is little doubt that a special armed unit of zapatistas patrols the municipality gathering intelligence on potential dangers from paramilitaries, police and the army.²⁵

The immediate response to this well-organized rejection of PRI authority was violent. A group of drunk men kidnapped six young men from the municipality's official capital, San Pedro Chenalhó, denounced them as zapatistas, and threw them to their deaths in a 100-meter deep crevice used as a garbage dump. None of the bodies could be recovered. The families of the youths demanded justice and on Sept. 2, 1996 nine men were arrested. To the families' outrage, they were released several weeks later with a warning.²⁶ The public message was one of immunity for people who killed "zapatistas."

Tensions over territory and political affiliations continued into the next year in the municipality of about 6,000 people. Fist fights and beatings turned to shootings.

²⁵ Confidential interview with author, January 1998.

²⁶ Fray Bartolome de las Casas Centre of Human Rights.
<http://www.laneta.apc.org/cdhbcasas/>

Leaders of PRI communities began to buy high-powered rifles and pistols, funding their purchases with a "war tax" they imposed on their neighbors. Everyone became a target: negotiators sent by the autonomous municipality, teachers, children returning from school and catechists (who say Catholic mass in the absence of a priest). Even PRI members who protested the violence were found dead in the ditches of Chenalhó.

Milenio, a Mexican weekly magazine, estimated that 300 people have died in Chiapas since the signing of the San Andrés accords in 1996. Carlos Tello, an independent Mexican scholar, reported to the US Congress in October 1998 that 2,000 people had died since the conflict began in 1994. Thousands of Indians have fled their homes and now live in miserable refugee camps on mountain sides. In the tiny municipality of Chenalhó, more than 6,000 people - 20 per cent of its population - have fled their homes.

Catholic churches in 36 communities have stopped services as a result of death threats by the militias. Some of the militia leaders have converted to protestantism and see the Catholic Church as a cause and supporter of the

rebels. Forcing the closure of Catholic churches was only the first step for the militias. The next step was the assassination of Bishop Samuel Ruiz. On Nov. 4, 1997, the militias ambushed the bishop's motorcade as it returned from serving the Eucharist in a mountain village. Two catechists and a community leader were wounded, but the bishop escaped injury. Well aware that his death would spark violent outrage among the Indians who see him as their spiritual "father", the federal attorney-general appointed five bodyguards to protect Ruiz. The bishop cheerfully calls them his "altar boys", but help from the Judiciary branch of the Mexican government has not prevented the Immigration ministry from extraditing foreign priests who serve in his Diocese. Suspicion of "foreign intervention" in the internal politics of Mexico is sufficient ground for extradition.

Faced with increased persecution of their one faithful if reluctant ally, the Church, and the preoccupation of the political parties with winning elections and taking power, the zapatistas have sought to mobilize a "third force" in the reform of Mexico: civil society. In their June 1994 "Second Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle", the zapatista

rebels credited civil society with the end of the 12-day war in January 1994. Not knowing themselves who these anti-war protesters were, Sub-commander Marcos issued a communique that renounced the rebels' role as a vanguard in the armed struggle and offered instead to fsupport a popular movement he dubbed "civil society" as the standard bearer for their demands.

To convene this third political force and come to know who these supporters are, the zapatistas called a national democratic convention in the Chiapas highlands shortly before the August 1994 presidential election to write a new Mexican constitution. At the convention of 6,000 people, the key zapatista leader, Sub-commander Marcos, reaffirmed that only Mexican civil society - not an armed movement like the EZLN - could carry forward the struggle for a democratic, just and free Mexico.

It is not our time now, it is not the hour of arms. We have moved to one side, but we are not gone. We will wait until a new horizon opens, or until we are no longer necessary, until we are not even possible, us, the forever dead, those who must die once again in order to live. ... If the peaceful transition to democracy, dignity and justice

wins, never will there have been a defeat so sweet.²⁷

But the constitution was never completed and the national democratic convention fell apart. Civil society was too fragmented. In August 1997, 1,111 zapatista delegates arrived in the heart of Mexico City, their arrival heralded by a flight of military helicopters, to convene the Zapatista Front of National Liberation as the civilian arm of the zapatista army. The Front established a national network in each of Mexico's 31 states, but again, civil society did not rush to make the Front their own. The zapatistas could not convert the tremendous sympathy of the Mexican people into concrete political action.

This reticence could be seen in the response of civil society to the horrific Acteal massacre. Days after the massacre, the Front, aid caravans and other organizations such as the radical Assembly of Neighborhoods, organized the occupation of the Angel of Independence monument in the commercial zone of Mexico City. It gathered tonnes of supplies and spare clothing for the Indian communities, but

²⁷ Subcommander Marcos. Shadows of Tender Fury. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995, 250.

its political actions, such as splashing the Mexican stock market with blood-red paint, or marching to the cathedral of Mexico's Indian saint, the Virgin of Guadalupe, have failed to attract the crowds who marched against the war.

Just a few blocks down, along the route of the stock market demonstration, no-one budged from the two block-long line leading to the front door of Bancomer, one of Mexico's large commercial banks. Nor did anyone leave the shuffling line of nearly 200 people in front of the United States embassy. Businessmen and women were applying for travel visas, mothers for visitor visas to spend Christmas holidays with their children in Texas or California, students for visas to study at American colleges. For them, supporting Indians would be unwise. Asked how the zapatista uprising has affected them, some refused to answer; others responded hesitantly, as if they had never thought about it before.

"I guess we should be concerned about it," said one woman, her voice lilting into a question mark, looking to her friend for support.

"Terrible, terrible thing," says her friend, nodding her head reassuringly.

Part of the confusion of the average Mexican over the Mexican Indian dilemma is the prevalent attitude that what is new and modern is good. Indians are a cultural and economic throwback, the unwashed root of the Mexican nation.

Neoliberal policies dominated Mexican economic policy with the austerity and privatization schemes introduced by President Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988). These policies echo the positivist goal of modernizing Mexico. Author and diplomat Octavio Paz described positivism's effect on the liberal elite as corrupting and demoralizing:

Their social eminence was the result of a usurpation and a misconception, but positivism could not remedy or palliate this shameful situation.²⁸

In the same way that the Indians felt the brunt of the liberal reforms in the mid-1900s, today's Mexican Indian feels the impact of the privatization of the *ejido* and the removal of trade barriers that kept cheaper American crops out of Mexico. In the same way that the intelligentsia of Mexico's longest ruling liberal president, Porfirio Díaz,

²⁸ Paz, Octavio. The Labyrinth of Solitude. Trans. Lysander Kemp et. Al. New York: Grove Press, 1985, 132-33.

benefitted from the expropriation of church properties, the contemporary business class has benefitted from the sale of state enterprises at bargain prices. The purchasers of the state monopolies inherit the monopoly and continue to make a tidy profit, while the government did nothing to enforce anti-combine laws to give new competitors a chance.

The difference in both economic and cultural status between Indians and Mexicans can be seen at all levels. The discrimination is easily seen in the frequent arrests and violations of Indian rights. The federally-funded National Center for Human Rights freed 802 Indians wrongly imprisoned and investigated more than 300 Indian-related complaints in 1996. From 1988 to 1994, there were 18,031 violations of the individual rights of indigenous peoples, reported the Mexico City-based Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Centre to the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. More than half of the violations occurred in Chiapas.²⁹ Throwing Indians in jail on flimsy pretenses,

²⁹ "Discriminación racial en México," Centro de Derechos Humanos "Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez", Centro de Derechos Humanos "Fray Bartolomé de las Casas", and Organización de los Pueblos Indígenas de la Chinantla. <http://www.sjsocial.org/PRODH/discesp.htm>

denying them legal counsel and even torturing them, is so commonplace in Mexico it is practically a habit.

The presence of racist stereotypes in Mexican literature and language gives insight into the character of anti-Indian discrimination. In the colonial novella *The Escape*, Chiapan author Jesus Agripino Gutierrez Hernández, clearly shows the disdain the whites have for Indians. A rancher badly beats an Indian for bumping into him on the street and afterwards, orders his assistant to recompense the Indian:

Pay this Indian immediately for the beating. They are very savage, but very dangerous when they see blood. [...] So pay him. Give him something for his blood and surely everything will calm down.³⁰

This language betrays a long history of racism and discrimination. Along with the all-American saying, "The only good Indian is a dead Indian," other sayings include, "There are Indians who get mad because they're Indians," "He stopped being a good Indian", and "The land provides and the Indians work it." The prevailing traits of an Indian

³⁰ Gutiérrez Hernández, Jesus Agripino. La Huyendo. Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Editorial Ariel, 196, 52.

according to these and other sayings are stupidity, ignorance or innocence, deceitful, lazy and dangerous when plied with alcohol.³¹ Notably, these stereotypes and racist rationalizations do not differ substantially from views held by citizens in Canada and the United States.

That these perceptions affect the treatment of Indians on the streets of Mexico City and in the fields of Chiapas is evident in everyday conversation. To the urbanized people in the states lining the American border where the right-wing opposition party has won its most stunning successes, the Indians who mostly inhabit central-southern Mexico are even less of a priority. Chiapas is 3,000 kilometers to the south of a region that looks unblinkingly north. "They are a tiny little point in only one small part of the country and there are treaties that take care of all this," said Modesto, a security guard in the bustling border city of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. When asked what he thought about redressing the rights of the Indians, he replied, "The

³¹ Colby, Benjamin N. Ethnic Relations in the Chiapas Highlands of Mexico. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico, 1966, 29-34.

government is putting factories there... so they can develop."³²

One of the more articulate proponents of integration for Mexico's Indians, writer and journalist Luis González de Alba, invokes a mix of liberalism and social darwinism in the political monthly magazine, *Nexos*.

There is no recourse: If individuals must live, the poverty-producing cultures will have to disappear. The only way that they aren't exterminated is the reservation where they're artificially supported and kept foreign to the exterior. And this is another form of extinction.³³

But in Mexico, integration of the Indians has never been the only option. Conquest remains a part of the political agenda among PRI hard-liners. Upon hearing about the rebellion in 1994, the leader of the Mexican Workers Confederation gave his advice to then-President Salinas: "Wipe them out."

Even sympathizers have a tendency to patronize or pity the Indians rather than look on them as equals. One woman volunteering at the Angel of Independence encampment said

³² Interview with author, December 20, 1998.

³³ González de Alba, Luis. "Del indigenismo," *Nexos*, June 1999. <http://www.nexos.com.mx>

she was there because "they're our Indians and we have to protect them." Other sympathizers described them as "like children" or praised their mystical connection with nature.

These attitudes reflect the three common responses of Latin Americans in general to the so-called "Indian problem" of the Americas. Traditionally, the discourse has provided three options: wipe out the Indians, segregate them on reservations or integrate them into society.

The revolutionary government of Lázaro Cárdenas chose the integration option, articulated in a national policy known as indigenism. Its goal was to give the Indians economic and educational equality and integrate them into the Mexican national project, mainly as farmers. He encouraged pride in Mexico's Indian heritage and artists such as Diego Rivera responded by including the Indian as a protagonist in the formation of Mexico. Cárdenas even named his son Cuauhtémoc after the Aztec leader who defended Tenochtitlán from the conquistadors.

The Mexican state's indigenist project was to involve and integrate Indians into the economic and political affairs of the nation, but within such prescribed channels

as the National Indigenous Institute. Integration soon became a cooption strategy rather than a synthesis of ideas and social action between Indians and Mexicans.

The Indian response to such government strategies has resulted in a political strategy of self-determination called indianism. By no means is the zapatista struggle a unique one. Indians throughout Central and South America have come to the same conclusion about their need for self-determination to preserve and protect themselves. In 1980, hundreds of Indian representatives from across the Americas met in Peru and issued an indianist manifesto that defines their position:

We reaffirm *indianismo* as the central category of our ideology, because its vitalist philosophy advocates self-determination, autonomy, and the socioeconomic and political self-direction of our peoples and because it is the only life alternative for the world today, which is in a total moral, economic, social and political crisis.³⁴

Within this declaration one sees the demands of the zapatista army for "self-determination, autonomy and the

³⁴ Tresierra, 191.

socio-economic and political self-direction of our people." In neighboring Guatemala, with a population 40 per cent Mayan Indian, similar demands have been brought to the peace talks after a bloody civil war.

The rebellion had lifted the spirits of many Mexican Indians. The response of regional and national Indian organizations to the revolt was a radical endorsement and show of support for the rebels' demands, which differed little from their own. These organizations founded the National Indigenous Congress to bring an independent national Indian voice to bear on the federal government. Delegate Julio Atenco said "the armed insurgency of '94 opened up a new historic period, and made visible the Indian peoples, their needs and demands."³⁵

Bridging the gap between the Mexican public and the Indians they ignore, despise or patronize seems to be more difficult than ever. The state's own indigenist policy is in part responsible for these social attitudes and the

³⁵ Blanche Petrich and Angélica Enciso. "Indígenas de siete estados crearán un frente común para defender derechos," *La Jornada en Internet*, www.serpiente.dgsca.unam.mx/jornada, October 12, 1998.

frustrations which provoked the zapatista rebellion. Despite media coverage, the zapatista public consultations and the low-intensity war occurring in Chiapas, the average Mexican remains no more aware of the conditions under which "their" Indians live than their North American counterparts are aware of the poor living conditions of many Indians on Canadian and American reservations.

This incomprehension of the condition of the Mexican Indian extends to the aid sent them by their urban sympathizers. On a highlands basketball court which also serves as a place to dry the coffee harvest, Tzotzil women sort through clothes trucked to the zapatista autonomous community by Zapatista Front aid caravan from Mexico City. A young Tzotzil woman plucked a pearly-white high-heel shoe from the pile of polyester shirts and cotton pants that will never replace the women's traditional blouses known as *huipiles*.

She looked at the shoe curiously, feeling the heel and tweaking the shoe's pointed toe as if wondering where anyone could walk with this shoe. Not two meters away is the steep dirt path leading to the makeshift shelters of the refugees.

Sorting through the pile of clothes, she found the other half of the shoe and promptly tossed the pair aside to look for something more useful.

Mexico has a long way yet to walk before it can bridge the two solitudes of Mexican and Indian. But perhaps the better question to ask is, now that democracy appears to be on the table, will Mexicans remember the Indian who helped win it for them?

CHAPTER THREE: REBELLION'S FRUIT: DEMOCRACY IN MEXICO?

The vanquished must abstain from the politics of resentment and rancor. The victors must not be deaf to adverse views.

-Octavio Paz³⁶

About 30 million voters left Mexico's polling booths July 6, 1997, their thumb stained with black ink and their Polaroid-made tamper-proof Federal Electoral Institute card in hand. As they left the polls, had their names checked off the voters lists, and responded to the eager exit pollsters' questions, the results became clear: the opposition had won a majority in Congress.

"The End to 70 Years of Hegemony," trumpeted the daily newspaper, *El Financiero*. The two major opposition parties, the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) and the National Action Party (PAN), had won the governorships of two states and the Federal District of Mexico City. In Congress, the PRI had 239 deputies, but faced a formidable opposition block - 125 PRD deputies, 123 PAN deputies, and 13 deputies of the two smaller parties.

³⁶ Julia Preston. "President will now face checks and balances from legislature," *New York Times*, July 8, 1997, A1.

The press of Mexico's NAFTA partners heralded the good news. "Mexico's Democratic Vote," read a *Wall Street Journal* headline. "July 6, 1997 may well come to mark the real birth of Mexican democracy," read the editorial, which then proceeded erroneously to belittle the rebels for disrupting only five of the 104,000 polling stations in the country.³⁷

To the Mexican technocrats, another *Wall Street Journal* headline had better news: "Mexican Election Bolsters Stock, Peso." The fear that an opposition victory would reverse Mexico's economic recovery appeared to be groundless. Political change could mean economic stability.

The press of Mexico's other NAFTA partner, Canada, also responded positively. Canada's annual trade with Mexico since the agreement came into effect on Jan. 1, 1994 has doubled to \$7 billion Cdn. Canadian investors looking for high returns have invested \$493 million Cdn. in Mexico to become the most important foreign investor after the United States.

³⁷ The independent Civic Alliance electoral observers reported 260 polling stations affected, including 160 burned or robbed. Alianza Civica Chiapas. "Análisis del proceso electoral federal de Chiapas," *Boletín Alianza Cívica*. No.6, Vol. 1, Sept-Oct 1997, 21-22.

"After a long incubation, Mexican democracy has hatched," said a *Toronto Star* editorial, the only Canadian newspaper to have a Latin America news bureau. "PRI monopolized the media, bought the loyalty of powerful landowners and union bosses who then delivered the votes, and intimidated opponents. [...] No longer," predicted the editorialist.

"For the first time, Mexico does not just look like a democracy; it is starting to behave like one," read *The Globe and Mail* editorial titled, "Mexico: less banana, more republic."³⁸

In the eyes of the world, Mexico had become a multi-party democracy. The reforms the President, the Congress and the Senate had signed on July 25, 1996 have worked. The Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) is now autonomous, citizen-led and no longer under the control of the President's Interior Minister. The meaningless spending limits - up to \$40 million US for presidential candidates - are scrutinized to guarantee transparency and

³⁸ Editorial. "Mexico breaks out," *Toronto Star*, July 8, 1997, A14; Editorial. *Globe and Mail*. July 8, 1997, A10.

accountability. And the Federal Electoral Court is under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Justice to prevent presidential meddling in election results.

To the world, Mexico had become democratic, putting an end to the political mystery of whether it was an authoritarian or democratic regime. The elections proved internationally that the PRI could reform the system and restore the legitimacy of the government. But inside Mexico, the election was met with cautious optimism and analysis from the independent press and intellectuals. President Zedillo's post-electoral television address set off warning bells. In the address, Zedillo identified himself with the democratic movements of the Sixties:

We were the young people of that time who took the first steps to reclaim the democracy that a country like Mexico needs and deserves. And after nearly 30 years, it's been clearly demonstrated that we who believe in freedom and democracy also believe in our country's institutions.³⁹

The overwhelming concern among the opposition press was that the elections helped the PRI more than the opposition.

³⁹ Sam Dillon. "Mexico's president triumphs in defeat," *New York Times*, July 9, 1997, A3.

"Zedillo: The PRI acquired perfect legitimacy," read the front page headline of Mexico's major leftist daily, *La Jornada*. Would the opposition's victory merely reinforce the legitimacy of the PRI, which still more or less controlled all three branches of the Mexican Republic?⁴⁰ In the leftist monthly, *Memoria*, National University philosophy Elisabetta Di Castro warned:

We shouldn't fool ourselves. The results of the sixth of July don't eliminate the fact that we will continue talking about politics, about power and about the words that are used to win.⁴¹

José Woldenberg, the citizen president of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), also spoke cautiously of Mexico's so-called triumph of democracy:

Each and every one of the [electoral] processes is very, very well taken care of. I stress that I don't want to say that there can't be irregularities, which can happen anywhere. But I believe that at this time we have a process in which the irregularities end up on the margins, rather than at the center.⁴²

⁴⁰ "Zedillo: The PRI acquired perfect legitimacy," *La Jornada*. July 8, 1997, 1.

⁴¹ Elisabetta Di Castro. "Después del 6 de julio," *Memoria* 102, August 1997, 12.

⁴² Interview with author, Nov. 5, 1997.

But the question remains as to how the election of a multi-party opposition congress would bring concrete relief to the people who live in the margins, such as Mexico's seven million Indians.

In a country where 20 million people live in extreme poverty, the margins are what concern Martha Pérez Bejarano. She is the executive secretary of the Civic Alliance, an electoral observation group founded in 1994 by a coalition of Mexican non-governmental organizations. For July 6, the Alliance had observers in 5,040 voting booths, the largest independent observer presence.

She says the vote is still being coopted and influenced by government officials.

"They are still bribing people," she claims. In an investigation of 1,400 complaints to the Alliance, more than half of the abuses were linked to public aid programs and 89 per cent of the complaints fingered the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).⁴³

⁴³ Alianza Cívica. "Compra y Coacción del Voto," *Boletín Alianza Cívica*, No. 6, Vol. 1, September-October 1997, 5-8.

"How can a vote be sold? It's that they are dealing with such poverty. So for tortillas, for milk, for sugar, of course the people are going to sell their vote," she said.⁴⁴

Like Pérez, the opposition parties feared they could not compete for the vote against the vast resources of the government. This same government every day gives a kilogram of free tortillas to each of 1.8 million families, subsidizes milk for 5.4 million children, provides scholarships for 900,000 children and through government stores sells subsidized foodstuffs and products to 30 million people.⁴⁵

As a result, the Alliance paid special attention to "high risk" districts such as the extremely poor and indigenous state of Oaxaca and the militarized states of Chiapas and Guerrero, which have guerrilla armies. In their electoral report, they found that the serious irregularities - violation of voter secrecy and pressure on voters - nearly

⁴⁴ Interview with author, Dec. 18, 1997.

⁴⁵ Press release. "Social Policy: A Commitment to Mexicans," Mexican Embassy of Canada, September 1997; Victoria Rodriguez and Peter Ward. "Disentangling the PRI from the Government in Mexico," *Mexican Studies*. Winter 1994 Vol. 10 No 1. 163-186; Roderic Ai Camp. Politics in Mexico. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

doubled in the high risk zones. The other electoral tradition of a local boss giving his employees or peasants a ride to and from the electoral booth also doubled in high risk zones.

Woldenberg said the presence of observers from the three major parties is the best way to ensure respect for the vote. Representatives of the three main parties, the PRI, PAN and PRD, observed the vote at 92 per cent of the polling stations. Only 200 stations had just one observer from a political party.⁴⁶ But Pérez said democracy means more than elections and strong political parties:

I hope that there will be a strong system of political parties in Mexico, but, calmly, we consider that it isn't the only way. This isn't going to carry us to representative democracy. It's important to rise to power. That's all right, but it isn't enough.

She says the Civic Alliance wants "direct democracy" for Mexican citizens to participate in through referenda and plebiscites on laws passed in the Chamber of Deputies. But opening the political system to the average citizen is "not convenient" for the handlers of the democratic transition,

⁴⁶ Woldenberg, Jose. Presentation to Foreign Affairs in Ottawa, Nov. 5, 1997.

according to Pérez. "I believe that right now there is an attempt to shut the channels of participation outside of the institutions."

Other citizen organizations question the value of congress even more vigorously. Citizens' Coordination is a non-partisan network of Mexico City activists with the goal of informing and mobilizing citizens to make their own choices directly, rather than rely on "representative" intermediaries such as political parties and Congress. The volunteer organization operates out of a cramped tiny office on the second floor of a printing press plant in a working class neighborhood. A call-in radio show broadcasts their ideas weekly on how to improve their lives and meet their basic needs. One project of the Coordination was to organize bulk purchases of basic foodstuffs, such as beans and rice, for a Mexico City neighborhood.

Organizations like the Citizens' Coordination are trying to implement a "direct participatory democracy" that would preclude betrayal by elected representatives.

"What will the deputy's discussion about what is good for Mexico do? [...] All of the decisions are given by

"representatives" who are caught up with what they say, not representing the people," said Pedro Castillo, a Coordination organizer. He says the only people elected deputies represent are themselves in a "struggle for power."

The disillusionment of this three-year old grassroots movement with the political system is striking. These citizens have decided to simply drop out of the political institutions and search for alternatives in their own neighborhoods guided by their own priorities. This type of "ultimate pluralism", like the autonomous municipalities of the Chiapas Indians, is a threat in itself to President Zedillo's goal - as well as the goal of the opposition - of restoring legitimacy to Mexico's misused political institutions. The other side of this anti-political coin is electoral abstentionism. Less than half of the eligible voters voted in the July 1999 Mexico state election. In the October 1998 elections, less than half of eligible voters participated.

For Woldenberg the question of further electoral reform such as the use of referenda and plebiscites is for the parties in Congress to decide, not the IFE.

"It's more their job than ours," he says. "I believe that in electoral matters, the foundation of the reform is done."

However, the money that helped lay the foundation for Mexico's democratic structures may have come to an end. And with it, there are concerns that Mexico's elections may return to old-fashioned fraud.

President Zedillo's last two budgets have cut more than ten per cent from the 2.5 billion peso budget of the IFE. While IFE councilors do receive perhaps the best public service pay in the country, a personal budget of 1.7 million pesos (\$140,000 Cdn) per year to run their offices, opposition critics say the cuts will compromise the upcoming state and presidential elections. Woldenberg's reaction to the first cut was stoic.

"What we'll do is make an adjustment, and perhaps by some luck maybe some low priority program can be canceled," said Woldenberg. But councilor Jaime Cárdenas said the cut eroded the independence of the IFE by forcing it to rely on state governments to fund state elections. For years, state governors have been *caudillos*, strong men who rule their

state like a kingdom. The underlying fear of complaints like that of Councilor Cárdenas is that the party ruling the government might underfund an election it can win through fraud.

Most recently, the cuts have faded into the background and a graver challenge to its authority has arisen. In March 1999 the PRI and PT laid 49 charges against four IFE councilors for prejudice against the PRI and misuse of funds. The charges range from a councilor giving his sister an \$85,000 Cdn research contract to spending \$13,000 Cdn on alcohol for a conference. The seriousness of the charges is not so much in the charges themselves, but in the impact they will have on the public's perception of the electoral institute. "Things have gotten to the point in which we all must think and meditate on which initiatives strengthen the institution in charge of the elections in 2000, and which ones wear away and erode it," cautioned Woldenberg.⁴⁷

The controversy over the conduct of the councilors has in part obscured the larger issue pointed out by councilor

⁴⁷ Méndez, Enrique. "Llama Woldenberg a partidos a no erosionar la confianza en el IFE," *La Jornada en Internet*, March 17, 1999.

Jaime Cárdenas and Martha Pérez of Alianza Cívica, which is how clean the state elections in 1998 and 1999 will be.

"Ninety-seven was a great advance, but if the Federal Electoral Institute isn't purged, what was won in '97 is going to be lost," warns Pérez.

As if to contradict her prediction, the last two years of state elections have so far proven clean. The opposition parties have scored some important victories in often close contests with their arch-rival, the PRI. The PAN won the governorship of Aguascalientes for the first time, while the PRD used coalition strategies to win in Baja California Sur and Zacatecas. Much like the President, each governor holds the post for six years, enough time to make an impact on the population. If it were not for Guerrero, the clean elections may have forced Mexicans to question whether they were in Mexico anymore, where contriving electoral fraud had become a career path.

Guerrero is a rural state known to the outside world for the bright lights and discotheques of Acapulco on the Pacific coast or for its omnipresence in Amnesty International's human rights reports on Mexico. The police

massacre of 17 peasants in June 1995 near the small Guerrero town of Aguas Blancas became the catalyst for the Revolutionary Popular Army (ERP) to launch a retaliatory guerrilla campaign complete with Marxist slogans on the massacre's first anniversary. Its cadres launched attacks on the military and police in the states of Mexico, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Guerrero and Chiapas. The government counter-insurgency campaign has militarized these states. The zapatista army, for its part, has maintained a hostile silence about the violent and intransigent strategy of revenge conducted by the ERP.

Since the massacre and initial retaliatory attacks of the ERP, the political situation in Guerrero has chilled political initiative and certainly the blood of its inhabitants. The conflict swiftly spilled over to affect civil society, as the state authorities, police and army searched for the guerrillas. The formation of death squads to provide an informal military solution was not far behind. In September 1997, the state attorney's office published a list of alleged ERP sympathizers. All 27 accused were journalists. Days later several of them received death

threats. Survivors of torture, kidnappings and mass arrests have begun to file scores of human rights complaints. The Latin American repression trademark of "disappearances" has also returned to terrorize the Indian, independent trade unionists, teachers, community and student activists. Even a PRI senator for Guerrero was attacked and beaten in 1996 by men who remain at large.

Under such conditions of militarization and terror, Guerrero was the democratic test of Zedillo's electoral reform agenda. For the PRD, it failed. The official results were 51-49 per cent of vote in favor of the PRI candidate, a difference of about 17,000 votes. In response PRD militants protested in rowdy demonstrations and occupations.

"In Acapulco, we won the governorship two to one, but the PRI says it won in the most remote communities of the state where there are coincidentally more than 80 per cent of the registered voters. This machination against the will of the Guerreran people is not only absurd, but it is, frankly, insultingly impudent," declared Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, Mexico City's first democratically elected mayor.

In response to the alleged fraud the PRD launched an "Exodus for Democracy" march to the federal electoral tribunal in Mexico City, demanding the annulment of the elections. Instead, the tribunal threw out the charges.

The Guerrero PRD threatened to launch a civil disobedience campaign that would force the new governor out. "We calculate that at most in 30 days of continuous post-electoral mobilizations he will have to resign and the local Congress can name an interim governor who will call new elections," said Wilibaldo Rojas Arellano, PRD press secretary for Guerrero.⁴⁸ The new PRI governor took office surrounded by riot police.

The anti-fraud fight by the PRD failed as it did in other states such as Michoacan and Quintana Roo. But it raised the question of whether the militarized south will be stable enough to permit a free vote in the upcoming presidential elections.

⁴⁸ Guerrero, Jesús. "Habr mobilizaciones hasta que renuncie Ren Jurez si el Trife ratifica su triunfo, anuncia Wilibaldo Rojas," *Excelsior en Internet*, <http://www.excelsior.com.mx>, March 30, 1999.

On the federal level, the presidential elections are also preoccupying the political opposition. The opposition is vying for new electoral reforms to remove restrictions on coalition candidacies, balanced media coverage and the use of Mexico's colors in the political symbol of the so-called "party of state", the PRI.

However, the PRI has been able to use a divide and conquer strategy effectively to split the opposition vote and hamper these efforts. As the opposition parties are learning, overcoming electoral fraud to win power and wielding the power that comes with election require different skills.

Upon winning the July 1997 congressional elections, the four opposition parties took the initiative immediately after election by signing a "pact of governability" in August. The pact gave the opposition control over the administration of congress, its budget and committees. The elimination of the PRI's Grand Commission in favor of a participatory administrative commission that shared the Congressional Speaker's chair was tantamount to a coup.

The key leaders of this opposition coup were Carlos Medina Plascencia of the right-wing National Action Party (PAN) and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo of the left-wing Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD). Alongside them sat the leaders of the small Green and Labor parties. For the first time the opposition had a taste of real power.

In response, Zedillo called for an "ethic of responsibility" to promote respect, collaboration and mutual responsibility between the powers of the Republic in his September 1 State of the Union address.

The testing ground for the opposition's new power was President Zedillo's 1998 budget, which enforced the neoliberal economic policies that had driven the privatization of the *ejido*. The reaction from the first opposition Congress in Mexico's history would result in a pyrrhic victory.

After over 20 meetings in nine weeks with the Treasury Minister, the opposition parties disagreed irreconcilably with the President's budget. The PRD's left-wing policies demanded more social expenditures, while the PAN's right-wing policies demanded austerity. Personality also played a

part in the split. PRD caucus leader Porfirio Muñoz Ledo practiced a bombastic brinkmanship throughout the first session, to the irritation of his right-wing opposition allies who felt forced to choose between maintaining the opposition block and promoting their own agenda. And the Democratic Revolutionary Party leader, Manuel Lopez Obrador, had tied his own hands by promising publicly not to interfere with his party's elected representatives, a common practice in Mexico's political system.

The PAN party leader, Felipe Calderón, had not made such a promise and kept his options open. When it became clear to him that maintaining this alliance would gain nothing for PAN voters, Calderón chose to collaborate with President Zedillo, meeting with him on Nov. 5 for a "positive, constructive, long, cordial" meeting. Two days later, Congressional leader Medina Plascencia breakfasted with Zedillo to present the PAN's legislative goals. That evening, Medina Plascencia told a reporter, "There is no block."⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Antonio Jáquez. "Regresa el PAN a los Pinos: Se ha perdido tiempo cuidando las formas, dice Calderón; se dialoga con quien está abierto," *Proceso* 1097, Nov. 9, 1997, 10-11.

Despite that early declaration, the PAN did vote with the other opposition parties against the president's budget. With both sides of the Congress declaring their vote for the good of the country, the opposition defeated the budget by 13 votes.

The vote surprised the PAN leaders, who had agreed in the finance commission to vote in favor. However, as a result of a miscommunication between caucus leaders and deputies, the Group of Four had made history. It could be done. The opposition could block the President's program. But the historic vote shattered the opposition block.

The PRI caucus leader Arturo Nuñez skillfully turned a procedural error by the session's house leader to his advantage and threatened legal action against those who "trampled" the Mexican Constitution. Shaken by the fist-fights on the plenary floor and outmaneuvered politically, the opposition block submitted a copy of the President's budget to the finance commission. The PAN restored voting discipline within its ranks and on Dec. 11, voted with the PRI in favor of the budget. Its vote broke away from the Group of Four, to the dismay of the PRD.

At a press conference at the Hotel Cobandonga by Metro Insurgentes, PRD leaders criticized the PAN for returning to a political alliance that had let the PRI amend the constitution in the 1991-1994 term.

"The PAN decided on a different alliance. It met with the Executive power in its very own offices," said Jesús Martín del Campo, a subcoordinator of the PRD deputies. Party executive member and senator Mario Saucedo questioned the integrity of the PAN. "What promises did the government give the PAN? What type of payment did Zedillo give for them to take this position?"

Still, Martín del Campo refused to recognize the end of the opposition Group of Four. "The Group of Four exists but within it is the Force of Three (the PT, the PRD and the PVEM) ."

But Martín's bravado did little to impress the reporters at the press conference. They were doing the math: the 138 votes of the shaky Force of Three would be helpless before a PRI-PAN block of 361 votes. Despite the denunciations of cooption from the PRD, PAN leaders insisted

their party would remain an independent player in Congress, ready to ally with whomever they wished.

"They are mistaken, those who thought that the PAN could be taken hostage by a party or a fraction within this Chamber," said a defiant Carlos Medina Plascencia.⁵⁰

On Dec. 15, the PAN published a half-page advertisement in major newspapers announcing its legislative victory. The advertisement blamed the other opposition parties for their inability to cooperate with the President.⁵¹

On the left-wing, the politics of confrontation continued to the last day of the opposition Congress's first session, with members of the small debtors' movement, El Barzón, leading the charge. The Barzón's national director and a PRD senator led a group of deputies to occupy the president's platform. They bore blankets that had switched the letters "PRI" over the blue circle of the PAN and the letters "PAN" over the red, white and green symbol of the Party of State. Beneath the icons were the accusations:

⁵⁰ Camacho, Oscar and Ciro Pérez. "Acuerdo AN-SHCP permite la aprobación del Presupuesto de 98," *La Jornada*, Dec. 14, 1997, 16.

⁵¹ Grupo Parlamentario del PAN en la Cámara de Diputados. "A La Opinión Pública," *La Jornada*, Dec. 15, 1997, 39.

"Turncoats!" and "Traitors, you supported the bankers." Infuriated, PAN and PRI deputies shouted insults and tore the blankets away from the PRD protesters.⁵²

In four months, the PRD had lost everything - the pressure of a mass protest by small debtors outside Congress, its dreams of increasing social spending and the very opposition block that put those dreams within reach.

The division between the PAN and the PRD once again allowed the PRI to control Congress. PRI caucus leader Arturo Nuñez denounced the extreme anti-PRI attitude of the opposition for their downfall. The opposition was "trying to be against everything," he told *Milenio* magazine.⁵³

The Oaxacan Indian leader and Green Party congresswoman Aurora Bazán who serves on the congressional peace commission for Chiapas, said the opposition should not have over-estimated their public mandate.

"The people didn't vote for the block. They voted for the PRD, for the PAN, for the PVEM," she observed. "The

⁵² Rubén Vázquez Pérez and Alberto Ramírez. "Sigue el circo en la Cámara," *unomásuno*, Dec. 16, 1997, 1, 6.

⁵³ Ignacio Rodríguez Reyna. "La Oposición Sobreestimó la Fuerza del 6 de Julio," *Milenio*, Dec. 15, 1997, 31-34.

block was not formed against the PRI, but against the injustices of the past."⁵⁴

The problem is how to implement the solutions to the injustices of the past, such as the San Andrés Accords without a united opposition. And even if the commission's legislation passed Congress, it is unlikely that the PRI-dominated Senate would approve a piece of legislation a PRI president rejected or did not specifically endorse.

Thus the electoral victory of the so-called opposition congress holds little meaning for the zapatista rebels or the disenfranchised poor of Mexico. The very institutional pluralism of the new political system praised by President Zedillo divides political parties against one another in the struggle for power. This very division is the genius of a pluralist democratic strategy. It splits the opposition vote and prevents the formation of long-term coalitions. The PRI can then slip in to power by playing the stabilizing, centralist role which it has played for so many years.

The only threat to this elaborate strategy of divide-and-conquer is the possibility that opposition governments

⁵⁴ Interview with author, Dec. 12, 1997.

can demonstrate a marked improvement in their everyday lives. In the more modern, better educated states of northern Mexico such as Baja California, Chihuahua and Nuevo Leon, this strategy worked well to keep middle class voters loyal to the PAN.

But the PRI's primary rival, the PRD, threatens the ruling party's vote in working class, indigenous and rural constituencies. Should Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the first PRD governor of Mexico City, demonstrate that his party can rule better, then the PRI's strategy of divide-and-conquer may collapse, allowing the opposition to conquer the coveted Presidency in the elections of 2000.

CHAPTER FOUR: MAYOR CARDENAS: A NEW HOPE?

A city politically disintegrated, far from economic reactivation. Unreliable, commercialized, privatized and exclusive, violent and morally in crisis; with sprawling growth, segregated and polarized, highly vulnerable to disasters, out-of-touch and exhausted, polluted, with an authoritarian government.

--Maria Scherer Ibarra
Proceso reporter⁵⁵

On Dec. 5, 1997 the crowd clogged the narrow Francisco Madero street, named after the democratic father of the Mexican Revolution, as Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas walked to take his seat as governor of the nation's capital, Mexico City.

"Cárdenas! Cárdenas!" shouted the crowd to the man who had promised democracy, fairness and security.

For the first time since the Twenties, the nine million people who lived within the Federal District boundaries had elected their governor. Before the July 6, 1997 election, the Mexican president had appointed loyal PRI friends to govern the Federal District, which for its size and national prominence is the equivalent of a state governor's post.

⁵⁵ Maria Scherer Ibarra. "Cuauhtemoc Sabe a lo que se enfrentera: una ciudad privatizada, excluyente, vulnerable y violenta," *Proceso* 1100. Nov. 30, 1997, 14-18.

Voter turnout was 67 per cent, almost ten percentage points higher than the national average. And half of the five million voters had voted for Cárdenas, vaulting his Democratic Revolutionary Party into a majority in the local legislative assembly.

Much like his namesake the Aztec leader Cuauhtémoc (meaning Setting Sun) who defended Teotihuacan on the site of today's Mexico City against conquistador Hernán Cortés, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas has fought many battles. Removed from the public eye by a PRI-friendly mass media, he lost most of those battles: an attempt in the Seventies to democratize the candidacies for the governorship of his home state, Michoacán; the attempt to gain an official foothold within the PRI for the dissident Democratic Current in 1986-87; his defeat by fraud in the 1988 presidential elections; the PRD's poor showing in the 1991 congressional elections; his failed bid to win the presidency in the 1994 elections. His defeats have been marked by blood. Since 1988, he has seen more than 300 activists including a close friend, die for their loyalty to the PRD.

Until now, his only political victories had come to him as a member of the PRI: he was a senator for Michoacan in 1976; a subsecretary of the agriculture ministry of President Lopez Portillo; and like his father, Lázaro, he became the governor, Michoacán from 1980 to 1986, a small rural state with half the population of Mexico City.

Now Cárdenas governs the Federal District, the first governor of his party. The responsibility is awesome. Because he rules the capital city, with an estimated population of 20 million people, Cárdenas automatically is in the national spotlight. If the garbage is not collected on time, if robberies increase, if labor unions strike, if corruption is exposed - if anything happens in the day-to-day lives of the inhabitants of Mexico City - the entire nation will watch and evaluate how Cárdenas responds.

"Mexico City has become a challenging ground between the political parties and the battle has no barracks," observed Manuel Perló Cohen, in *etcetera* magazine.⁵⁶ The

⁵⁶ Perló Cohen, Manuel. "El primer año del gobierno de Cárdenas," *etcetera* 307, 1998. <http://www.etcetera.com.mx/307/pcm0307.htm>

battle between the new governor and the opposition has been fierce.

The pressure of becoming the first opposition governor is controlling people's expectations, according to PAN leader Guillermo Luján Peña, whose party lost the Chihuahua governor's seat to the PRI in 1998. "There was an expectation ... that all of their problems would be solved instantly."⁵⁷

For Cárdenas' victory may become bittersweet. His glut of campaign promises has only heightened the expectations of the city's residents. As he had in the 1988 and 1994 presidential campaigns, he promised everything to everyone to maximize his vote.

Cárdenas promised to decentralize the city's social life, become a socially responsible government; create an urban economic growth fund; share the responsibility between government and society; and sustain the city's governability with democracy, citizen participation, transparency and a strict sense of honor. Naturally, children are a top

⁵⁷ Rice, John. "Mexico's politics balance on state elections: Ruling party's future depends on outcome of governor races," Associated Press.

priority. With so many promises, it is no surprise his critics call him a populist demagogue.

One of the promises that gained Cárdenas some of the most enthusiastic cheering during his acceptance speech in Mexico City's main plaza was his promise to "make the plazas safe again."

But in Mexico City making the plazas safe again means making the police safe too. With the average police officer earning a monthly salary known as "two minimum wages", about 2,000 pesos (\$400 Cdn.), demanding bribes or receiving pay-offs can look very tempting for the young police officers. Or the frustration of not being able to make a dent in the estimated 15 million crimes committed in Mexico City every year may bring the police to push the line of legality and use torture to get information - or satisfaction. To fight corruption and crime, his PRI predecessor replaced the police in several neighborhoods with the military. The conflict in Chiapas prevents Cárdenas from choosing that quick fix. The use of soldiers to police Mexico City would provoke a great controversy within his

party which in turn could jeopardize his presidential aspirations.

And the public fear and loathing of police is not without substance. In September 1997, just three months before Cárdenas' government assumed office, special police units known as the Foxes and the Jaguars allegedly murdered six young men in the Buenos Aires *barrio*. The coroner reported that the murderers kicked two of the men to death. The district attorney has laid murder charges against 52 police officers and has launched an investigation of Mexico City's former chief of police, General Enrique Salgado Cordero, an investigation Cárdenas' attorney-general, Samuel del Villar, inherited.⁵⁸

Cárdenas hired human rights advocate Rosario Ibarra de la Piedra to act as his conscience on human rights.

"It is a grave problem which confronts Engineer Cárdenas with all of the abuses there are. The very machine of government has created, as we say, a Frankenstein

⁵⁸ Raul Monge. "Ya de salida, Salgado Cordero se enreda en sus declaraciones para encubrir a militares acusados de homicidio calificado," *Proceso* 1100, Nov. 30, 20-24; "Mataron a patadas 2 de los 6 de la Buenos Aires," *La Jornada*, Nov. 25, 1997, 49.

[monster], that lets (the police) do whatever they want," said Ibarra.

But the challenge of restoring faith and order in a city described so aptly by *Proceso* reporter Maria Scherer Ibarra as "unreliable, commercialized, privatized and exclusive, violent and morally in crisis; with sprawling growth, segregated and polarized," lies in finding the right people to do the job.

A short controversy broke out when he appointed Jesus Carrola Gutierrez chief of judicial police. Carrola, a former policeman in the drug-infested border city of Tijuana, Baja California, allegedly had tortured to death a detainee and was linked to the notorious Arellano Felix drug cartel. Within days of his appointment, the district's human rights commission, the national human rights commission, the federal attorney-general, the Interior Minister and the Treasury Minister, all accused him of crimes. The denunciations surprised Cárdenas, because President Zedillo, who had committed to supporting Cárdenas, had himself approved the appointment. Even the city legislators who had ridden Cárdenas coattails to power denounced the mayor.

"If, as the opposition, we denounce any cover-up, today as legislators of a majority party we are obliged to demand clear accounts," said Rene Arcé, a vice-coordinator of the PRD caucus.⁵⁹

Cecilia Romero Castillo, secretary-general of the PAN in the district, shook her head at the new mayor's mistake. "Engineer Cárdenas gave himself five months to organize his government and in five days he has admitted the extremely grave error ... of having named [Carrola] as director of the Federal District's judicial police."⁶⁰

To resolve the scandal, Carrola took a leave of absence. District attorney Samuel Villar announced the replacement shortly after. As for many of the other appointments, Cárdenas followed the political practice of favoring his *camarilla* - a political clique whose mentor-leader rewards his supporters with posts in his government. Cárdenas gutted the PRD's national executive by appointing

⁵⁹ Humberto Ortiz Moreno, Ricardo Olayo, et.al. "Carrola pidió licencia para separarse de su cargo; 'limpiara su buen nombre,'" *La Jornada*. Dec. 11, 1997, 49.

⁶⁰ Interview with author. Dec. 18, 1997.

seven of its members to positions within his government, all old friends.

The keeping of promises to old friends, however, is easier than satisfying the demands of the man on the street. In the bustling Zócalo on the day of his inauguration, more than 100 street cleaners and garbage men marched behind a banner demanding better pay, longer contracts and a little vacation time. They had come to collect on Cárdenas' promise to help them.

"Cárdenas is committed to us," said Miguel Hernández, the spokesman for the marchers, mostly former farmers who have moved into the city. Before "no one showed any concern for us or anything, not vacations, not anything." But with Cárdenas, he said, life would get better, they would get longer contracts than every three months, get a raise from the 830 pesos (\$103 Cdn) a month pay and maybe vacation time that was not actually a lay off between contracts.⁶¹

Like most politicians, Cárdenas will have to choose which of his more expensive promises to implement. Creating a city-wide day care program or building neighborhood sports

⁶¹ Miguel Hernández, interview with author, Dec. 5, 1997.

facilities. Founding a Secretariat of Education or refinancing district health services. Creating an assistance fund for "vulnerable" citizens or a savings and loan fund for building and repairing housing.

The overriding question for the PRD government is how to afford even half of the social projects proposed, especially since another campaign promise was to give a tax break to home renters who earn less than 50 pesos a day, like the street cleaners. The complicated anti-corruption audits of the previous PRI government have not yielded the monetary or political capital required. In fact, one audit revealed that Cárdenas had inherited a city with an even heavier debt load than expected, estimated to grow to \$7.2 billion Cdn by the end of his term in 2000.⁶² Many wonder how the man who promised to put a moratorium on federal debt payments during the 1988 presidential elections will handle such a debt.

Six days after he took office, one answer came when the federal Congress approved an extension of \$1.5 billion Cdn

⁶² Juan Antonio Zuniga M. "Llegaria a \$36 mil millones la deuda del DF en 2000," *La Jornada en Internet*, <http://serpiente.dgsca.unam.mx/jornada>, Dec. 6, 1997.

for rebuilding Mexico City's infrastructure. Surprisingly, Cárdenas' allies were his rivals, the PRI and PAN voting in favor, while his own party, the PRD, voted against the plan to further "indebt the nation." By the next year, the PRI and PAN had come to their political senses and began to cut federal funding received by Cárdenas' government in 1999.⁶³

Faced with an urban monster that would savage any politician, let alone one with aspirations for the Mexican presidency, Cárdenas has switched from electoral rhetoric to a more pragmatic tone. In August 1997, he wavered on privatization, which he had condemned during his campaign. "For me, to privatize or to nationalize is not an ideological affair. Both are tools of the economic system in some specific circumstances."⁶⁴

For Cárdenas, making promises seems to be a hard habit to break. In a surprise appearance at the Angel of Independence plaza occupied by the civilian Zapatista Front for National Liberation on Jan. 4, 1998, Cárdenas continued to promise vague solutions, once he became the Mexican

⁶³ Oscar Camacho and Cira Perez. "PAN-PRI aprobaron el dictamen de la Ley de Ingresos," *La Jornada*, Dec. 12, 1997, 19.

⁶⁴ Maria Scherer Ibarra, 14-18.

president. Asked what should be done about the Chiapas problem, Cárdenas replied: "When we become the government then I can give you an answer." The activists caught in the Mexican media scrum's weave of microphones, arms and television cameras broke into applause for the man respectfully known as "The Engineer."⁶⁵

That the EZLN would prefer to negotiate peace with such a man has provoked the accusation that the rebels are refusing to negotiate until Cárdenas wins the presidency in 2000. Cárdenas has frequently advocated a peaceful and just solution of the Chiapas conflict in public statements and his party have staged a campaign of public rallies in support of "our indigenous brothers and sisters." Thus, a closer look at the PRD is worthwhile in assessing whether this party will provide a qualitatively different response to the demands for democracy and justice of the Chiapan rebels.

"If Chiapas is now a nightmare," said Manuel Lopez Obrador, president of the PRD, "we believe that there is still time to rectify and substitute the low-intensity war

⁶⁵ Cárdenas, Cuahtémoc. FZLN press conference. January 5, 1998.

for a strategy of high-intensity politics that will eliminate completely the vision of violence as a solution to the problems of injustice and poverty."

In his speech, Obrador offered a four-part political strategy for President Zedillo: 1) the substitution of force with dialogue and negotiation with the "true actors" of the Chiapan conflict; 2) legalize the San Andrés accords on indigenous culture and rights in order to continue negotiations; 3) the honorable withdrawal of the army to its barracks coupled with granting the Federal State Attorney the responsibility of dismantling the paramilitaries; and, 4) call free and democratic elections for Chiapas and remove the state from being "a federal territory governed by the President."⁶⁶

The President has not got back to Obrador on his suggestions. Instead, Zedillo called on the opposition parties to "freely and openly" examine the Law of Indigenous Rights which he introduced to the Senate on March 17, 1998. Obrador responded by saying the PRD would absolutely refuse

⁶⁶ López Obrador, Manuel. "March for Peace speech." Direccion de información, <http://www.cen-prd.org.mx> January 12, 1998.

to deal with the legislation nor propose their own indigenous initiative because "we don't agree with the decision of the government and the PAN to take the unilateral road" to solving the conflict. Their refusal to participate without the zapatistas, resulted in accusations from both the PRI and the PAN that they were the "political arm of the EZLN."

Fearing the PAN would ally itself with the PRI to pass the President's law, the PRD offered accords and badgered the PAN in the media. The PAN succumbed to the pressure, and the party's national council announced the "National Action won't go forward with the reform without the participation of the PRD."⁶⁷ The Congress that had once been called the "freezer" for opposition party initiatives had become one for the President's own legislation.

Despite the difficulties of Cárdenas in his first year of power since he was a PRI governor of Michoacán in the early Eighties, his victory strengthened the credibility of the PRD, which has begun to show fruit in the 1998-1999

⁶⁷ Manuel Venegas, Juan and Enrique Méndez. "Tregua en la reforma indígena, viable acuerdo PAN-PRD," *La Jornada en Internet*, April 17, 1998.

state elections. The PRD won its first state governorship, Baja California Sur, handily defeating its PRI rival. In Quintana Roo on the Yucatán peninsula, the PRD won the key city of Cancún, while in Guerrero a remarkably close finish between the PRI and the PRD for the governor's seat, 51 per cent to 49 per cent, has led to calls of fraud.

The victories mean the elected officials are scrambling to find enough skilled PRD militants to serve in their respective governments, a problem of which the PRD's national executive is very much aware.

The PRD is "growing too large for its base of support," said Carlos Navarrette, a federal congressman and national executive leader.⁶⁸ To respond to this need, the PRD has formed political training schools and put to work a political plan to expand the "building blocks" of the party throughout the country. With the presidential elections only a year away, on July 2, 2000, it's a race against time that Navarrette seems confident the PRD can win.

A further sign of strength and political maturity for the party's state organizations is their ability to combine

⁶⁸ Interview with author, Dec. 11, 1997.

forces with their ideological foils but opposition allies, the National Action Party (PAN). In the central state of Nayarit, the two opposition parties have sponsored a joint candidate for the governorship in the upcoming July 1999 election. How the two parties work together in that campaign may determine whether they will run a joint presidential candidate to compete with the PRI. The PRD is already preparing its election coalition for the 2000 elections. In March 1999, Cárdenas sought and won the presidential candidacy of the Labor Party. While the PRD has not yet officially chosen its candidate, Cárdenas' acceptance of the Labor Party nomination demonstrates his confidence in securing the nomination.

Porfirio Muñoz Ledo has his own ideas. The present leader of the PRD caucus in Congress, a former diplomat and member of the PRI, as well as founder of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), Muñoz Ledo announced his willingness to be the PRD candidate in January 1999. His platform includes changing the federal government structure to a parliament modeled on the United Kingdom.

Aggressive, talkative and unpredictable, Muñoz Ledo is the opposite of his pensive rival and former friend, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. He had lost the internal party race to become the candidate for Mexico City; he would not sit by and let Cárdenas take the presidential candidacy away from him as well. To support his ambitions, he launched a campaign of accusations against Cárdenas in an effort to discredit him, accusing him of being a pawn of former President Carlos Salinas.

The candidacy of Cárdenas "is the hand of Carlos Salinas de Gortari," said Muñoz Ledo, referring to President Salinas' help in founding and financing the left-wing Labor Party in 1989.⁶⁹ In May 1999, Muñoz Ledo exposed a secret meeting between Cárdenas and Salinas after the 1988 election, and demanded a full account. The revelation was the "collapse of a myth," according to Muñoz Ledo. But Cárdenas skilfully turned the attack back on Muñoz Ledo, saying he kept the meeting secret because he is a man of his

⁶⁹ Pérez Silva, Ciro. "CSG, detrás la candidature petista del jefe de GDF," *La Jornada en Internet*, June 1, 1999; Oppenheimer, 140-141.

word, adding that the meeting was necessary to calm fears of post-electoral violence.

As Muñoz Ledo expected and hoped, his accusations against the father figure of the PRD has resulted in tremendous controversy within the party. Even close allies of Muñoz Ledo, such as Zacatecan senator, Amalia García, who helped him win the presidency of the PRD in the early Nineties, has denounced Muñoz Ledo's tactics. "He's desperate," she said. Other PRD officials are more concerned that he's destroying the PRD's public image, which has relied heavily on the Cárdenas myth.

"What he's doing is building prejudices against the PRD, prejudices against a center-left option, prejudice against a national project and prejudice against the possibility of an alliance [with the right-wing PAN]," said Demetrio Sodi, who works beside Muñoz Ledo as a congressional vice-coordinator.⁷⁰

But few people believe Muñoz Ledo can compete. *Proceso* magazine columnist Juan José Hinojosa put Cárdenas' chances

⁷⁰ Delgado, Alvaro and María Scherer. "La disputa entre Cárdenas y Muñoz Ledo llegó al límite," *Proceso*, May 1999.

of becoming the presidential candidate not as a matter of political possibilities, but as a matter of personal destiny.

About the outcome, there are no doubts: in the internal election, Cárdenas will be the indisputable winner; he is the myth, the legend, the sphinx, the glue of the *perredista* mosaic, the patriarch, the voice coming from Olympus.⁷¹

With this type of political canonization, one wonders whether the Cárdenas myth will crack should Cárdenas lose his third presidential election. And if so, what would then happen to the PRD?

Muñoz Ledo's public attacks on Cárdenas' prestige and reputation in part address the "cult of personality" problem within the PRD, only one of many organizational problems facing the young party. In March 1999 the party botched its internal election of a new PRD president to replace outgoing president Andrés Manuel Obrador. The results were annulled and an interim leader was appointed. The election was rescheduled for the end of July. The vicious public infighting of the internal election damaged the public image

⁷¹ Hinojosa, Juan José. "Los Tres Estilos," *Proceso* 1178, May 30, 1999.

of a party that seeks to project "democracy" as its guiding principle.

The conflict also revealed internal organizational weaknesses and ideological splits within a party that is trying still to decide whether its ideology is "social democratic" or "socialist." This confusion is seen in Cárdenas' promises to cut taxes, maintain law and order and bring "participatory democracy" to the people.

Another part of the "identity crisis" of Mexico's only significant left-wing party is its practice of offering a home for almost any politician jumping the PRI ship. Ricardo Monreal, a rising star within the Congress, lost the PRI's nomination to become the candidate for the governorship of Zacatecas. So he defected to the PRD to run - and win - the governorship. While Obrador defended the party's decision on the basis of Monreal being "a good candidate" running on "a good platform," the common criticism was that both candidate and party had been opportunistic rather than principled. The other question is whether Monreal's political agenda will follow PRI or PRD lines. In a surprising interview, Monreal said he would "consider" staying on with the PRD after his

six-year term expired. The PRD's strategy of bleeding the PRI of candidates and talent has in fact led to a blurring of party lines. And as the grassroots of the PRI gain more power in the reform of that party, the difference between the two revolutionary nationalist parties may decrease even further.

This political ambiguity provides ammunition for the zapatista rebels. In his communiques, Subcommander Marcos has often harshly criticized PRD policies and unorthodoxies. The zapatistas are wary of being used as political capital for the PRD or of tactics which they see as restricting their negotiating power with the government through a perceived or real alliance with an opposition political party. The mistrust between the rebels and the parties extends even to the rebels' civilian arm, the Zapatista Front for National Liberation. The Front was conspicuously absent from a December 1997 rally for Chiapas, organized by the PRD. Since then, the Front remains a force apart from the rallies of the PRD.

While the PRD proved its political value to the zapatista rebels in freezing President Zedillo's indigenous

rights reform law in Congress, the zapatista leadership remains aloof from allowing shows of support for the party. In the October 1998 municipal elections, the PRD expected to make impressive gains. The result was quite the opposite.

The PRI swept Chiapas once again, handily winning 77 of 103 municipalities and 17 of 24 seats in the state legislature. Instead of taking 47 municipalities as it expected, the PRD lost 18 it had won previously, holding only 17 and winning one seat in the legislature by direct election. Less than half the eligible voters participated, the zapatista command having ordered its supporters to abstain.

But the PRI's success obscures the fact that most Chiapans chose not to vote at all. Fewer than half of the eligible voters participated. Election observers from Amnesty International and California-based human rights advocate Global Exchange noted many irregularities at the polls; the militarization of the state meant "there are not conditions for democracy" in Chiapas. Many of the occupying soldiers were said to have voted in the elections. In response to their defeat, the PRD challenged the results of

48 municipal elections and five state legislature districts. To the chagrin of some PRD officials, the zapatista rebels claimed that voter absenteeism meant that the EZLN remained the preeminent political force in the state.

The enduring lack of a formal or informal political alliance between the PRD and the zapatistas means that even if Cárdenas assumed power in July 2000, peace would not be the immediate result. For now, Cárdenas must satisfy his present constituents and reinforce his credibility as a governor - no mean feat in Mexico City.

While his credibility is low with the EZLN, Cárdenas must satisfy his present constituents and reinforce his credibility as a governor - no mean feat in Mexico City. For the average voter, Cárdenas' inability to control crime and make good on his promises, coupled with the in-fighting and ideological ambiguity of his party, all work to the disadvantage of his presidential candidacy. At the December 5 rally, his supporters hung and then left their signs like presents on the wire fence under the gigantic Christmas tree in Mexico City's main plaza.

"Cuauhtémoc, no te rajes!" said one sign, "Don't back down!" or "Keep your word." The pleas reflect the cautious hopes of the citizens who voted for Cárdenas. For them, the best present of all would be a politician who does what he says. In his second rule as mayor of an "out-of-touch and exhausted" Mexico City, that seems less and less likely.

As Cárdenas struggles to deal with the challenges of governing, his former arch-rival, President Zedillo has come to a similar realization. Faced with genuine electoral competition, the PRI needs to rebuild its support by healing divisions that arose during the term of President Salinas. Through internal party reform, Zedillo is overseeing the resurrection of his party's legitimacy.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PRI: RESURRECTING AUTHORITY

Gather your grain and seeds and collect the young shoots, because times of drought and hunger are approaching. Sharpen your weapons because it will not be long before enemies hidden behind mountains and hills will spy with greed the expanse and richness of these lands.

-Popol Vuh
Mayan epic

Long considered by political scientists as the perfect model of an authoritarian party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) is fighting democracy with democracy. Half a dozen new currents have prompted a revision in the PRI's political strategies.

This "party of state" emerged after more than ten years of bloody, fractitious ten-year war. It adopted as its ideological guidepost the 1917 constitution, which reinforced the Republic's corporatist tradition. The ideology of the party became known as revolutionary nationalism supported by the key sectors of the Mexican people - workers, peasants, bureaucrats and soldiers.

The brainchild of President Plutarco Elias Calles (1925-1929), the PRI's antecedent, the National

Revolutionary Party (PNR) was formed as a coalition of local strongmen, regional and national parties. Its first test, the 1929 election was won easily and ushered in an era of electoral fraud. Calles' liberal intellectual rival José Vasconcelos only received five per cent of the two million votes cast, and fearing for his life, fled into exile. Calles reinforced the principle of no consecutive re-election in the Congress and Senate to prevent his rivals from building an independent power base and to retain the servile loyalty of his party. After his six-year term ended, Calles controlled the party from behind the scenes, handpicking his presidential successors.

While Lázaro Cárdenas put an end to Calles' presidential puppeteering, he maintained and strengthened the powers Calles had wielded so skilfully - the power to handpick his successor, and the centralization of all authority in the Executive Branch. The president had become the ultimate *caudillo* or boss of Mexico. The benefits of such an arrangement became evident to the people almost immediately. In March 1938 Cárdenas expropriated the foreign-owned oil fields and invoked the wrath of Europe

and the United States. And throughout his presidency, Cárdenas redistributed thousands of acres to the peasants and Indians who had lost them to greedy plantation owners and ranchers. Only a strong *caudillo* or regional boss could defend their interests.

Cárdenas reorganized Calles' party to accommodate all interests - military, labor, agrarian and popular sectors. The ideology he passed on was "revolutionary nationalism," which came to be known as *cardenismo*. Cárdenas believed in a state system which had the support of the masses to achieve its goals and reflected popular desire for social and economic justice. A strong state that took care of its people was the best way to create change, amass wealth and keep the peace.⁷² In 1946, President Manuel Avila Camacho removed the military sector from the party, solidified civilian control and renamed the party the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). From 1952 to 1979, the PRI swept elections with an average of 83 per cent of the popular vote. Its membership became Mexican society itself. If one

⁷² Donald Hodges and Ross Gandy. Mexico 1910-1976: Reform or Revolution. London: Zed Press, 1979, 57.

belonged to any organization in Mexico, one held a PRI membership card.

Today, democratic reforms threaten the rule of the 68-year-old Party of State. Previous attempts had been swiftly repressed. A new PRI president, Carlos Madrazo, had tried in 1961 to introduce policies which would have seen party members choose candidates on the municipal level. President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz quickly removed the reformer from the party. Eight years later, he died in a mysterious plane crash.⁷³

Today the challenge for the party that has ruled Mexico for more than 70 years is to resurrect its own legitimacy. For some members of the PRI, democracy is a plague, for others an opportunity, for others a confused idea. What had become clear in the 1988 presidential election was that the sectoral approach of recruiting or coercing votes through clientelist associations had failed. Instead, the working class had revolted against the party, their unions and associations. None of these three institutions could match

⁷³ Enrique Krauze, Mexico: Biography of Power. Trans. Hank Heifetz. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997, 685.

the hope felt by the voters as they swung to support Cárdenas in 1988. The removal of "corporatist power" by Carlos Salinas and then-PRI president Donaldo Colosio, in favor of individual membership and territorial association, reduced the influence these organizations held, in turn forcing the membership to either quit the party or participate under the new rules.

At the grassroots of the PRI, this weakening of the corporatist power model within the party gave the rank-and-file membership the opportunity to revolt against the arbitrary decisions of a vertical leadership. This "democratic opening" within the party meant that the rank-and-file politicians could finally launch a revolt and hope to succeed against the "technocrats" who had controlled the party since Miguel de la Madrid's ascension to the presidency in 1984 and had implemented austerity and privatization policies to modernize the economy.

"The strength of Mexican democracy depends in large measure on the capacity of political parties to represent and respond to the nation's growing social and political plurality, articulate the many demands of the nation's

citizens, and translate them into political platforms," wrote the president, who sat with the opposition parties to create an independent electoral institute. "With the government acting as facilitator, all four national political parties represented in Congress participated freely and equally in determining the agenda for the political reforms."⁷⁴

How could the PRI, which had thrived on clientelism to control the masses, the absolute power of the president and the powerplays of political cliques, become democratic? The answer to this renovation of the PRI came from the same place from which Pancho Villa issued his warning that the Mexican revolution had replaced one dictator with another in the person of President Venustiano Carranza: Chihuahua.

Chihuahua is hot, dry cattle country along the United States border with Texas and Arizona. The largest state in the union, it has had its prospects revived by the *maquiladora* plants that allow foreign companies to take advantage of Mexico's young and cheap labor force to produce

⁷⁴ Ernesto Zedillo. "The Right Track: Political and Economic Reform," *Harvard International Review*. Winter 1996, v.19, no.1., 38-39, 67.

goods, while avoiding paying export on the finished goods. NAFTA has provided more *maquila* jobs and increased cross-border trade.

The Chihuahua state election in July 1998 has become the model for the PRI strategy to win the Presidential elections of 2000, to discredit and demoralize its rival political parties, and to continue with the "liberalization" of the Mexican economy, a trend which the opposition, should it ever assume office, could do little to reverse without severe economic and social disruption.

Capturing Chihuahua for the PRI was, in effect, like capturing the flagship of the opposition PAN. In 1992, the PAN won the governor's race in Chihuahua and became the first state to come under opposition rule. Previous close elections were always tipped in the PRI's favor by the President. In 1992, President Salinas endorsed the PAN victory. This surprising endorsement was part of Salinas' bid to weaken the left-wing PRD by shifting dissident support to a party that could win elections. The PAN victory also demonstrated to the US Congress that Mexico's political

system was democratizing, thus supporting Salinas' bid for entrance into a free trade agreement.

The key to winning back Chihuahua amounts to one thing: a functioning internal democracy within the party, which sees the local PRI select and support its own governor-candidate as part of a larger "citizen consultation." This consultation allows every citizen to vote in favor of the PRI candidate of their choice, effectively predetermining and mobilizing the vote in favor of the PRI. Results speak for themselves. In July 1998 the PRI received 50.3 per cent of the vote to the 42.1 per cent of the incumbent right-wing National Action Party (PAN).

Since the July 1998 election, this strategy has become popular in nine of the 14 states contesting the governor's seat. In turn, the governor himself has come to see the local PRI party and voters as the priority constituency, rather than the national PRI or the President. Governors are no longer willing to be the watchdogs of the presidency. This decentralization of power has already had an impact on national politics. Both the governors of Veracruz and Puebla, Roberto Madrazo and Manuel Bartlett, respectively,

have defied decisions and political pacts made by President Zedillo affecting their states. Both men have also declared their presidential ambitions for the elections in 2000. To subdue this in-fighting, President Zedillo had called both Madrazo and Bartlett into his office for separate meetings from which both pre-candidates emerged declaring their friendship and allegiance to the President.⁷⁵

Zacatecas was the only state that had the party's political committee appoint their candidate, and not only did the left-wing PRD steal the election, it also stole the ignored PRI candidate. The PRI lost Aguascalientes, too, with a candidate appointed by a convention of PRI state delegates, commonly seen as a rigged process.

If internal democracy and grassroots decision-making could send the previously moribund Chihuahua PRI to victory, then the next target for this reform was the national party and the selection of the PRI candidate for the Mexican presidency. President Zedillo had encouraged this important devolution of his informal presidential responsibilities

⁷⁵ Hernández Rodríguez, Rogelio. "PRI: Un rompecabezas," *Nexos*, <http://www.nexos.com.mx>, May 1999; Barranco Chavarria, Alberto. "¡Ah Chihuahua!" *Proceso* 1174, May 2, 1999.

down to the national party structure. And the militant tone of the rank-and-file *priistas* at the party's national convention last year was evident when they imposed the condition that any candidate for high posts such as governor and the presidency had to have experience as an elected representative and membership within the party. Neither Salinas nor Zedillo had ever held elected posts before they became Mexico's "supreme boss."

The response of the party leaders to the rank-and-file's demands has been the proliferation of "currents" which erode the image of the PRI as a political monolith. Thirteen years ago, internal dissent was not tolerated, as seen in PRI president Jorge de la Vega's speech as he formally expelled "democratic current" leaders Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo in 1986:

In the exercise of our rich internal democracy we will not waste time fighting tiny minorities or persons that have other objectives, other purposes and other banners. We will fight united against our adversaries outside; those inside, if they exist, have the doors open for them to act where it most suits their personal interests.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Kathleen Bruhn. Taking on Goliath. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997, 97.

Today, if the party president adopted the same stance he would have to expel most of the party.

The return of the party's leadership to a closer, more interdependent relationship with the rank-and-file members breaks from the autocratic style of Salinas. When he came to power in 1988, Salinas' cabinet of American-educated experts known as "technocrats," remade the Mexican economy in the image of the United States. He freely used the presidency's enormous power to enforce those changes and fend off the objections of the hardline right-wing of the PRI, such as the leadership of the central trade unions which had held power since the latter days of the Mexican Revolution. In 1994 the resentment of the right-wing for having its cabinet candidates blocked, losing its patronage engines with the privatization of state enterprises, and being stripped of its power and prestige boiled to the surface with two high-level assassinations of PRI party leaders.

The first leader killed was Salinas' appointed successor, presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio. He was shot dead at a campaign rally in the border city of Tijuana, Mexico in March 1994. The assassin was arrested and

convicted of the murder. Officially, he was the lone assassin, although forensics and eyewitnesses suggest otherwise. The Tijuana police chief who initiated an independent investigation was murdered and his files stolen. The investigation ended with the assassin. For Mexicans and for the zapatista rebels the message of Colosio's assassination was that the PRI was at war with itself and could not guarantee anyone's safety. Shortly after the assassination, the zapatistas villages voted against a 32-point government peace proposal and negotiations hit their first stalemate since the war stopped on January 12, 1994.

The second leader killed was another close friend and ally of President Salinas, PRI party secretary general José Francisco Ruiz Massieu. The assassin shot Ruiz in his car in broad daylight, but was arrested when his gun jammed. He named a PRI congressman from Tamaulipas as the intellectual instigator. The congressman disappeared and further investigation into the high ranks of the PRI were stonewalled.

Without Ruiz and Colosio as allies the incumbent president, Ernesto Zedillo, faced a hostile right wing

practically alone. Both victims were strong allies of Salinas, who would have provided support and protection to Zedillo. To make matters worse, Zedillo had angered the military in 1992 when as Salinas' Public Education Minister, he had issued a history text book that blamed the military for the Tlatelolco student massacre in 1968. Salinas withdrew the text book under heavy pressure from the military and party right wing. Even before he took office, Zedillo faced a party revolt that had tacit military support.

To recover ground and gain allies among the right wing, Zedillo went after their enemy, Salinas. The prosecution and conviction for conspiracy to murder of Raul Salinas, former President Salinas' brother, and the February 1995 offensive against the zapatistas appear to have been concessions to the right wing to gain their support. The former president chose self-imposed exile in Ireland, which has no extradition treaty with Mexico. To the public and to the foreign press, Raul Salinas' conviction strengthened Zedillo's reputation as an honest president who touched the

untouchables. To the party's right wing, Zedillo had demonstrated his allegiance.

As he comes closer to the end of his term, Zedillo has signalled that he still does not trust his party's ability to ensure a democratic process for the presidential nomination. On March 17, 1999 PRI president Mariano Palacios and the secretary general resigned in front of the National Political Council of the party. Zedillo ordered both of their resignations in order to open the position for personal friend and one of his few trusted allies, Labor Minister José Antonio González Fernández.

The only dissident candidates quit the race the day before the vote. By April 9 González had consolidated his position by appointing one of the dissidents as a personal advisor.⁷⁷ González then won support from the National Political Council for the rules governing the general referendum of the 10 million PRI members to elect the presidential candidate.

⁷⁷ Televisa. "Gonzalez Fernández con Echeverría," <http://www.televisa.com.mx/noticieros/ortega/noticiero/no090499.html> Broadcast April 9, 1999.

"The rules will be clear, the bodies trustworthy and the process transparent," announced González. Now Zedillo is counting on González to ensure this process is seen by the public as legitimate and does not become a logistical nightmare that would damage Zedillo's successor.

However, not all dissident PRI members believe the rhetoric. Pablo Salazar Mendiguchía, the PRI senator for Chiapas and member of a group of reformist PRI senators, resigned on May 1999. He has since begun an independent campaign for the governor's seat of Chiapas in 2000. With Salazar's reputation as a PRI dissident and his popularity among corn growers and ranchers, the opposition parties may back his candidacy. A victory by an opposition-backed Salazar would be a serious setback for the federal government's militarization strategy.⁷⁶

Despite the assassinations and controversies, the party's public relations policy is to project an image of unity and harmony. Even President Zedillo's official

⁷⁶ Hidalgo, Onésimo. "Chiapas al día," Center for Economic and Political Investigations of Community Action, A.C., <http://www.ciepac.org/bulletins/Ing156.html>, No. 156, May 21, 1999.

biography does not acknowledge he replaced an assassinated candidate.

While the public relations officers spin the foreign media on the PRI and Mexico's stability, the Mexican press is on high alert for evidence that the PRI is backsliding. Already the press has interpreted as a presidential endorsement a favorable comment by Zedillo about his Interior Minister, Manuel Labastida Ochoa, who has handled the Chiapas crisis since the December 1997 Acteal massacre. Labastida resigned from his governmental post on May 21, 1999 to begin campaigning for the presidential nomination. Considerable campaign and fundraising support offered by state governors and businessmen appear to confirm him as a favorite for the position.

Despite the factions formed within the party as a result of the competition for the presidential spot and the public scepticism that the PRI will transform itself democratically, the PRI remains the strongest contender to win the Mexican presidency in 2000. No other party has the resources, membership or experience of the PRI. These three factors alone give the party an edge. Its decision to

maintain the neoliberal economic track through privatization and fiscal austerity has bought the PRI the allegiance of the business classes of not only Mexico, but of the United States, Canada, the European Union and, increasingly, Asia. The ability of the party to open itself to a more genuine participation by the rank-and-file membership has helped sate the ambitions of the rank-and-file, as the party suffers from the deterioration of clientelist relationships through social programs, business associations and unions.

But the key factor in the projected victory of the PRI in the 2000 presidential election is only partially to be found in its internal reform. The key is its ability to keep the opposition parties from uniting behind one single candidate such as the PRD's Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas or the PAN's candidate, Vicente Fox. By splitting the vote, the PRI will not only triumph, it will gain a social mandate for an imposed resolution of the "guerrilla problem" in Chiapas, through social programs, cooption, misrepresentation and repression.

A PRI victory in the presidential election means the death of the zapatista movement through isolation and

attrition. The indianist dream of their First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle will once again fade under the government-imposed doctrine of indigenism which, while recognizing cultural aspirations, effectively removes any possibility of political democratization or autonomy.

CHAPTER SIX: HIGHLAND JUSTICE

"We have always lived here. We have the right to go on living where we are happy and where we want to die. Only here can we feel whole; nowhere else would we ever feel complete and our pain would be eternal."

-Popol Vuh
Maya epic

While the opposition parties fight amongst themselves for power and influence, the crisis in the Chiapas highlands has become a civil war. At 11 AM on Dec. 22, 1997 an armed PRI militia raided Acteal, a small village that supported the zapatista rebels. The village was host to a group of refugees of the non-violent and neutral civil organization, "The Bees" who had fled their village due to death threats by PRI supporters.

Forty-five were killed and twenty-five wounded. Some were shot while praying in the single-door plankboard church. Others died as they threw themselves down a steep incline cut by a brook, dropping shawls, hats and toys in fearful haste. Behind them came the militia, waving machetes or shooting AK-47s, shotguns and pistols whose bullets splintered tree trunks, cut branches and finally found their targets. A hat, one tiny shoe and dyed wool lay in the

trampled mud where one path intersected with the brook. Many of the Bees died for choosing to be neutral.

The attack also wiped out the zapatista community's leaders. The catechist, the health promoter, the zone leader and his wife were all shot dead. This hamlet is just four kilometres away from Polhó, the seat of the zapatista municipal government.

Before the Acteal massacre, Bees refugees had founded a mountainside refugee camp, Xoyep, to maintain their unity and independence, despite the privations. But the Acteal massacre drove hundreds of Bees to accept the shelter offered to them by the zapatista autonomous municipalities. This detail has not prevented the international press from labelling them as just another group of zapatista supporters.

The community knew the date and time of the massacre the day before it happened.

"We had an oreja (spy) at the meeting," said José Vasquez Gutierrez, a representative of the Bees and one of the Red Cross volunteers who entered the community around 1:30 AM to search for the wounded.

"We [warned] the Public Ministry but they didn't pay us any attention." The human rights center Fray Bartolomé de las Casas and the PRD's sole Chiapan federal congressional deputy who holds the EZLN portfolio, Patria Jiminez, also called the government to warn of the planned massacre. But the calls were ignored. A Red Cross truck was stopped by state police at a roadblock outside of the community around 11:30 am after reports of gunfire had come to San Cristóbal de las Casas. The truck was turned back and could not gain entry for the next 14 hours.⁷⁹ State police collected the bodies and sent them for autopsy in the distant state capital.

One child hid in a nearby cave and survived. Two other female survivors hid in a cave until two days later; villagers combing the woods for survivors, found them trembling from exhaustion, hunger and fear. In total, 25 wounded men, women and children escaped to fill the hospitals and clinics of San Cristóbal de las Casas.

⁷⁹ Interview with author. Cipriano Villegas Apolaca, Red Cross state delegate, Dec. 26, 1997.

Another survivor, Pedro Perez Lopez, after being hit in the knee with what doctors believe to be an AK-47 bullet, played dead in a ditch for more than twelve hours until he was rescued. He recognized one of the gunmen as his cousin, although he wore a mask. Pedro's father suggested the cousin was forced to participate in the massacre.⁸⁰ While political allies like the PAN and PRD turned on each other in Congress, family members in Chiapas were training guns on one another.

The first arrests began on Christmas morning during the funeral wake for the victims. Mourners stopped a truck that crossed the wake's path on the highway and denounced the men inside as murderers to the state police following it. When several of the young men among the mourners began to pull these men from the truck, punching and kicking them, the police took the accused men into protective custody and later charged 15 of them in San Cristóbal de las Casas. The arrested men's expressions ranged from fearful and worried to laughing and amused.

⁸⁰ Interview with author, Dec. 23, 1997.

After the arrests, the procession quickly crossed the remaining kilometer to reach Acteal. Sharing pick axes and shovels, villagers and aid workers fought with roots, stone and clay to dig two deep trenches in a clearing that before had hosted religious ceremonies.

The banana leaves on the frames that provided the only shade in the clearing withered in the heat. While the truck bed that transported the bodies from their autopsies in the distant state capital of Tuxtla Gutierrez were packed with ice, little could prevent the sickening smell of the corpses or ward off the hovering flies.

One by one, each casket, small or large, was opened so surviving relatives could identify their dead. Weeping women, upon recognizing their child or sister, placed over them a fresh *huipil* or flower. For a few survivors the identification process was one horrifying casket after another. For sixteen of the dead, no relatives or friends could be found to positively identify them before they were buried. Each casket was then lowered into the mass graves and the earth thrown over them was packed by stamping feet and cut branches.

When the mourners returned to commemorate the dead on New Year's Day, the violence had destroyed yet another part of the Acteal community. The communal oven was smashed. The military had occupied the town immediately after the massacre to provide protection for the few villagers who had decided to return home. Whoever destroyed the oven did so under their noses.

Or perhaps with their complicity. Polhó official "Mauro" said PRI supporters or *priístas* had destroyed other communal ovens in Xahalucum and Mahalmut. He guessed that they did the same thing at Acteal. When asked how the vandals could have got past the military guard, he shrugged his shoulders and smiled. His unspoken answer was clear: he thinks the *priístas* and the military are one and the same.⁸¹

The investigations into the reasons behind the massacre are almost as varied as the participants and observers of the conflict. The government claims the attack was a family feud between communities. The zapatista rebels claim the attack was a blueprint for the government's strategy of crushing their insurgency. The civilian Zapatista Front

⁸¹ Interview with author, Jan. 2, 1998.

claims conspiracy reaching to the highest levels of the Presidency. And human rights organizations accused the government of high-level complicity, arguing that Indian hunters are usually armed with .22 hunting rifles, not AK-47s, available only to the military and state police.

But the Acteal massacre did not put an end to the violence. The following day, human rights groups warned that another group of 40 armed men had camped only several kilometers away from the mountain village of Xcumumal. They were preventing anyone from leaving. The armed blockade broke camp on Christmas Day but the people of Xcumumal wanted to take no chances.

Village leaders asked human rights organizations to help them flee, demanding accompaniment. The night before, at least three houses of alleged zapatista supporters in the nearby community of Bajo Oventic were burnt down. Thirty aid workers, the Chiapas Red Cross and even a few Mexico City actresses participated in the Xcumumal rescue of Dec. 26, 1997. Under a steady drizzle that turned the narrow mountain path to mud, the rescue evacuated more than 1,500 refugees past a state police post and down the main Chenalhó road to

Polhó. Soldiers from the Mexican army looked on from trucks and all-terrain vehicles, photographing refugees, foreigners and aid workers.

As night began to fall, unarmed *priístas* emerged from among the huts of Bajo Oventic and threatened to kill straggling refugees. In response, aid workers struggled to get the exhausted refugees who had been marching since five in the morning to move up the mountain. Two trucks, one belonging to the Red Cross, shuttled along the road to remove exhausted women and children from harm's way.⁸²

The Xcumumal rescue showed the potential of civil society's role in bringing peace to Chiapas. Despite the danger, more than a thousand people found temporary safety in Polhó, in the face of the army's indifference and the *priístas'* threats.

Civil society organizations' attempts to cooperate with the state authorities and army have proven difficult and often become public relations events for the government. The Puebla rescue several days later demonstrated the difference

⁸² Caravana Para Todos Todo press conference, Manuel Fernández Guasti, Dec. 29, 1997.

in how the government works with civil society. If the Puebla rescue was meant to be a replica of that at Xcumumal, it swiftly became a blatant public relations exercise that went wrong.

The Puebla *ejido* is one of the strongholds of the PRI in the highlands. This village is the home of the municipal president. A two-storey house painted pink and blue stands on one of the higher points in the village. Nearby is an outhouse with a concrete seat, also painted blue. A gravel road connects the village to other villages and the main road. In Chiapan terms, this village is a rich one. But the wealth may not all come from hard work and sacrifice. The stories of clientelism, bribery and extortion are rampant in the Chiapas highlands. Residents who did not support the PRI have been routinely threatened. As early as 1996, PRI leaders in the villages levied a "war tax" to raise money to buy guns to protect themselves from the zapatistas. Puebla is suspected of being the organizing center for the armed militia of Chenalhó.

Only in the context of the Acteal massacre could the Red Cross, Diocese and its human rights center persuade the

state attorney (PGR) to help evacuate the Indians trapped in Puebla. The operation consisted of taking whoever was afraid to live in Puebla to the already overcrowded refugee camp in Polhó.

The operation was a disaster. PGR agents wearing suits, polished leather shoes and toting M-16 rifles dashed from one house to another, slipping in the mud. A squad of Mexican soldiers surrounded each house as the agents attempted to persuade the occupants of the house to come with them. Some villagers refused to even come to the door. One grandfather refused to leave his plank board shack, even though his son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren began packing their few belongings. In front of network television cameras, about 30 people, mostly women and children, rumbled down the dirt road in a military truck and a Red Cross land rover. When human rights workers tried to get the names of the evacuees, a crucial ingredient to tracking them to assess their needs, the state attorney ignored her, saying, "The media are here. They have their names."

But the protection offered by the military and state attorney was short-lived. The rescue had in fact just begun.

Now without a military presence, many more villagers requested asylum and the Red Cross and human rights workers once again faced the grim task of evacuating refugees as darkness fell. Two more truck loads of dozens of refugees left the village, without the protection of the military. "We left another half a dozen families standing on the roadside. There wasn't any room," said Rafael, his brow knit with frustration and disappointment. He was one of a handful of civil society volunteers available for the rescue.

To add insult to the botched rescue, the military established a road patrol on the two-lane highway cutting through Polhó on the way to Acteal. Repeatedly, aid workers, volunteers, FZLN members and the villagers themselves clasped hands to form human "security chains" to separate the military from Polhó. After a tense face-to-face negotiation between General Jorge Jiminez and PRD deputy Patria Jiminez, the soldiers were withdrawn on New Year's Eve. But the military and police still maintained a presence through convoys along the main road and low-flying helicopters.

Several days later, a single truckload of blankets, clothing, beans and rice arrived. The Puebla rescue had prompted the appearance of red-jacketed agents of the National Commission of Human Rights (CNDH). Mireille Roccatti, president of the commission, visited Polhó to assess the situation. As they unloaded the truck, a CNDH photographer snapped a few shots, his flash illuminating the muddy hillside.

"Wherever they go, they take pictures to prove that they are doing good," said one Mayan young man as he helped unload the truck. His scepticism mirrors the mistrust of many Mayans, young and old alike, who have seen the police attempt to conscript them for "community patrols," a counterinsurgency strategy used in neighboring Guatemala.

As the political debate continues, state and federal authorities continued their investigations and arrests, moving up from the actual shooters to the political instigators of the Acteal massacre. The Chiapas governor resigned. Local strongman and president of the Chenalhó municipality Jacinto Arias Cruz lost his job and now awaits trial in jail. Ninety-six suspects are in jail. Mariano

Perez Ruiz, a Chiapan soldier accused of providing weapons and training to the militias in his spare time, is awaiting his court martial.⁸³ The official report on Acteal, released on the eve of the massacre's first anniversary, summarized the slaughter as a neighborhood dispute.

To provide "protection," the army deployed a battalion of 2,000 soldiers to Chenalhó. Ruiz's negotiating team denounced the influx of soldiers to Chiapas, which last August had 209 military installations and occupied 66 municipalities, an increase of 135 installations since the February 1995 offensive.

The Mexican government is up to its old tricks in Chiapas, according to human rights activist Rosario Ibarra.

"It has always been the same," she said, recalling her experience as a delegate of the National Front Against Repression, founded in the Seventies. The Front visited Chiapas several times in the early Eighties to investigate human rights abuses. She said the government is behind arming the paramilitary militias.

⁸³ John Ward Anderson. "Mexico Arrests Top Police Official: Failure To Stop Massacre is Alleged," *Washington Post*, April 4, 1998.

"This is what the government wants so that it can come in, to have a pretext for repression," said Ibarra.⁸⁴

In January 1998, the weekly magazine *Proceso* published a confidential military document detailing a plan to use death squads to disrupt zapatista base communities. Military instructors would provide "assessment and support for self-defense forces and other paramilitary organizations," according to the document. And a month before the Acteal massacre, the "Peace and Justice" militia received a federal grant for "community development projects." The military denied that the document published in *Proceso* was part of their containment strategy in Chiapas.⁸⁵

However, the current investigation reveals that high-level complicity, if not involvement, was responsible for the massacre. The Chiapas state police chief of staff was in Acteal during the four hours of shooting, reporting to headquarters that nothing unusual was happening.⁸⁶ Personnel

⁸⁴ Interview with author, Dec. 18, 1997.

⁸⁵ Carlos Marin. "Plan del Ejercito en Chiapas, desde 1994: crear bandas paramilitares, desplazar a la poblacion, destruir las bases de apoyo del EZLN," *Proceso* 1105, Jan. 4, 1998, 6-11.

⁸⁶ "Chiapas probe brings arrest of top officer: Ex-general hid as Mexican peasants slain," *Toronto Star*, April 4, 1998, A22.

at a military outpost just three kilometers away could hear the shooting. When members of the state attorney-general's office were arrested for complicity, Zedillo ordered the federal prosecutor to take over the investigation.⁸⁷

President Zedillo's other response to the Acteal massacre was to use it as a pretext to impose law and order on the region, in turn escalating the conflict. The military began searching for weapons in zapatista base communities. Finding Bishop Ruiz's books on liberation theology in their searches, the army accused the bishop of collaborating with the rebels, when in fact he has long advocated non-violence and actively opposed the zapatista army's decision to go to war.⁸⁸

The military raids scared and angered the Indians. They demonstrated in the streets, forming human chains to block military incursions. At a January demonstration in the town of Ocosingo, Chiapas state police fired on protesters, killing one woman, wounding her daughter and another child.

⁸⁷ Southam News. *Ottawa Citizen*, July 4, 1998, A8.

⁸⁸ Womack, John. "A Silent Cry of Sorrowful Warning. Bishop Ruiz's Letter, cc Pope John Paul II, August 6, 1993," Rebellion in Chiapas: A Historical Reader. New York: New Press, 1999, 234-244.

The shooting was captured on film and broadcast around the world. Not one police officer was in sight at the woman's wake.

To minimize international awareness of the crackdown, immigration and army officials systematically began to arrest and extradite foreigners suspected of sympathizing with the zapatista rebels. Using Article 33 of the constitution, which bars foreigners from interfering with the affairs of state, immigration officials have expelled hundreds of foreigners. The most spectacular case was the expulsion of more than 200 Italian foreign observers, who had refused to let the government dictate their movements. Foreign journalists faced alarming new reporting guidelines, forcing them to hand over lists of contacts and scheduled interviews.

The EZLN, the Zapatista Front, leftist politicians and civil organizations called for the implementation of the San Andrés accords. But the President did not plan to play into either the opposition or the guerrillas' hands.

"We have given the guerrillas a power which they did not have," said Interior Minister Francisco Labastida, who

had replaced Emilio Chuayffett, forced to resign after the Acteal massacre. "The priority for us is to respond to the needs of the people and Indian communities."⁸⁹

At the same time, President Zedillo introduced his Indian rights legislation which restricts Indian autonomy and representation exclusively to Indian communities. The legislation restricts political freedom to the local level and does not guarantee Indians a voice in state or federal affairs. "With specific deeds, repeated proof has been given of the political will to agree, within the standard of the law, to a political solution for Chiapas," he said.

The proposed legislation would amend seven articles of the Constitution. The amendments would guarantee equality before the law; recognize the right to promote and preserve indigenous culture; strengthen Indian education; allow Indians their own forms of social organization providing they respect the rights of other organizations; reinforce their access to the state, especially in human and women's rights; and widen their political representation through

⁸⁹ "Mexico va boudier les zapatistes," *Le Devoir*, March 4, 1998, A8.

amendments to municipal electoral divisions. Zedillo's "new deal" would strengthen existing means, but it is far from the new relationship between state and Indians demanded by the zapatistas. The reform keeps the Indian demands within the government's indigenist framework, and away from the indianist autonomy demanded by the zapatistas.

In a message directed at the San Cristobal Diocese and the zapatista rebels, Zedillo clarified the government's definition of Indian autonomy:

The proposed concept of autonomy excludes privileges or special rights, as well as any means of discrimination. As a consequence, it rejects any claim of separating or excluding the indigenous peoples, including by those who justify protecting them from co-existence with the plural components of national life.⁹⁰

Zedillo's speech reiterated the government's indigenist policy of integration and rejected the authority of Bishop Ruiz and Subcommander Marcos to dictate otherwise.

In Congress opposition deputies immediately denounced the president's "unilateral action." And three days later, Bishop Ruiz and the negotiating commission that had

⁹⁰ Zedillo, Ernesto. *Iniciativa de Reformas Constitucionales en Materia de Derechos y Cultura Indígena*, March 15, 1998.

shepherded the San Andrés accords issued a letter denouncing the president's attempt to "wear away and abandon" those accords. The Bishop criticized the president's proposal for breaking the rules of negotiation and diluting their content. The president's proposal would restrict the exercise of Indian rights to their communities, would "grant" rights rather than recognize them, would not recognize Indian territorial rights, would omit the International Labor Organization's definition of an Indian community, and would not recognize Indians' right to decide how they elect their officials.

Tensions between the military and the zapatista autonomous municipalities escalated in April 1998 when the army began to dismantle the autonomous municipalities. The army arrested 16 alleged zapatista leaders in Ocosingo, and raided the founding ceremony of the Taniperlas autonomous municipality, arresting the alleged leaders as well as a dozen foreigners, including human rights workers and international press. Mexican soldiers beat two photojournalists with rifle butts and confiscated their film at the airport before they were deported.

This further escalation by the military resulted in the first exchange of fire between the zapatista rebels and the Mexican army since the signing of the San Andrés accords more than two years before. In the El Bosque *ejido* on June 10, 1998, more than a thousand police and soldiers raided three communities. Nine people died, nine were wounded and 57 people were arrested during the firefight. The police also burned down a building used by the zapatista leaders as a jail, reclaiming the state's monopoly on justice.

In response to zapatista denunciations that followed, the Chiapas state government accused the zapatistas of trying to provoke another Acteal. Further confrontations have occurred throughout 1998. In 1999 the military has occupied six zapatista communities. They also occupied the San Andrés autonomous municipality where the accords were signed, but withdrew when two days later, more than a thousand unarmed zapatistas marched into the community to re-occupy this symbol of the one concrete success of the zapatista rebellion.

As the military continues to occupy zapatista communities and draw the noose surrounding the zapatistas

ever closer, other parts of the government's political machine have moved into high gear.

The mutual mistrust among opposition parties, the zapatistas and President Zedillo leave few credible mediators capable of helping resolve the conflict. Having weathered two economic crises, Zedillo is sensitive about the country's international image to international investors and the United States. On a state visit to Nicaragua before Christmas, Zedillo referred to the zapatistas as "a group [that] appeared in Mexican life in a violent way" in 1994; however, he said, there are now conditions to prevent that from happening again.⁹¹

To save face nationally and internationally, he cited national sovereignty to prevent international interference from the regional Organization of American States or from the United Nations. When UN Secretary General Kofi Annan suggested UN involvement, Zedillo swiftly dismissed the idea.

⁹¹ Rosa Elvira Vargas. "Zedillo: Mexico no está en crisis ni el PRI desgastado," *La Jornada*, Dec. 20, 1997, 1, 12.

That leaves the Catholic church, to which many Indians remain devout. It is no small irony that an Indian rebellion in Chiapas catapulted the church onto the national stage as mediator. The last time the church held such prominence in national affairs was when it provoked a civil war in 1926 with a national strike of priests, who had refused to give mass in order to protest the revolutionary regime's anti-clerical policies. Catholic associations formed a guerrilla army which tried to overthrow the central government. The church called a cease-fire in 1929, although fighting continued in Chiapas into the Thirties.

However, the prominent mediator role played by Bishop Samuel Ruiz is unlikely to repeat itself. His mediation team officially dissolved on June 7, 1998 just three days before the assault on El Bosque. In his press statement, Bishop Ruiz said the commission would not act in complicity with the government's new policy of repression.

Since the El Bosque attack, Zedillo has called for a state of law and order without violence.

In Chiapas we no longer have to accept heroics, messianic leadership nor apostles of hypocrisy. We must think only of the people, in the future that will be better if we work

within the law, with the strength of our institutions, in democratic conciliation.⁹²

Zedillo may even rule out public mediation by the church, in order to remove as many allies from the zapatistas as possible. In a television interview June 12 he said that the only successful negotiation "would be done in a direct way" and with discretion, thus distancing it from the "great propaganda and great publicity of the past four years."⁹³

An episcopal conference in April 1998 raised hopes that a new mediation organization would form called the Bishops for Peace and Reconciliation Commission in Chiapas. It would consist of the four bishops of Chiapas, the archbishop of neighboring Oaxaca, and presided over by Luis Morales Reyes, the president of the Episcopate of Mexico.⁹⁴ However this body has not yet materialized. A March 20, 1999 Mexican Episcopate report delivered to the Latin American Episcopate Conference in Ecuador criticized the government for its attacks on the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas and for

⁹² President Ernesto Zedillo. Comunicado No. 948, July 1, 1998.

⁹³ Rosa Elvira Vargas. "'Dialogo directo y sin condiciones' con el EZLN, plantea Zedillo," *La Jornada en Internet*, June 13, 1998.

⁹⁴ Rodrigo Vera. "Marcos pronosticó el 'viaje al infierno' de la Iglesia y el gobierno aliados," *Proceso* 1121, Apr 26, 1998.

prolonging the resolution of the Chiapas conflict. It also blamed the government and the zapatistas for being "intolerant" and unwilling to negotiate. As a result, it is unlikely that either side will want the Catholic Church to resume a mediating role.

The government's military hard line and its insistence on "direct negotiations" have raised zapatista fears of betrayal. The rebels want to avoid another Chinameca, where in 1917 their namesake, the revolutionary hero General Emiliano Zapata was murdered in an elaborate government trap masquerading as peace talks.

To ward off such a betrayal, the EZLN has laid down five conditions before they would come to the negotiation table.

1. Liberation of all imprisoned presumed zapatistas and people from zapatista base communities;
2. A government liaison with decision-making power, political will to negotiate and respect for the zapatista delegation;
3. Creation of a Verification and Follow-Up Committee to ensure and review the fulfillment of the San Andrés Accord on Indian Rights and Culture;
4. Serious and concrete proposals for the Democracy and Justice table and a compromise for reaching accords on this theme;

5. End of the climate of police and military persecution and hostility against Chiapan Indians and the disappearance of the "white guards" (or a law that recognizes them institutionally and dresses them in common uniform so they cannot operate with impunity).⁹⁵

The government refused to meet these terms and again called for "direct dialogue."

The removal of the church and international community as mediator leaves both sides with a flawed instrument, the congressional peace commission. This is the same body that President Zedillo neutralized in December 1996 by ignoring its draft of the indigenous law, endorsed by both the zapatistas and Bishop Ruiz's organization. Thus discredited, the commission has become little more than a political football, incapable of action and aware that both sides are using it as part of their propaganda campaigns. Most recently, the congressional commission refused to sponsor or take part in the March 1999 zapatista referendum, for fear it would compromise its already tarnished neutrality.

⁹⁵ <http://www.ezln.org/xcondiciones.htm>

But after five years, a new civilian negotiating force may be emerging to fulfill the zapatista dream of a civilian reform movement, rather than an armed one such as the EZLN. The March referendum was the second attempt to involve the Mexican population. The previous zapatista referendum had raised 40,000 volunteers and collected 1.2 million electronic ballots. More than ninety per cent of voters approved the zapatista demands for land, housing and, among other demands, women's equity, as well as the rebel strategy for democratic reform and a broad front to make such demands. However, only 43 per cent voted in favor of the National Democratic Convention's union with other organizations and 57 per cent for the EZLN's transformation into an independent political force. The "virtual zapatistas" were united behind the goal of democratic reform, but split on how and with whom to cooperate.

The zapatistas hoped that the March 1999 "National Consultation for the Rights of the Indian Peoples and the End of the War of Extermination" would pressure the government to adopt the congressional commission's original legislation. Announced in the zapatista's Fifth Declaration

of the Lacandón Jungle, the national consultation would rely on civil society to organize voting stations in every one of Mexico's 2,506 municipalities. The consultation posed four questions:

1. Do you agree that the indigenous peoples with all their strength and richness, should be included in the national project and take an active part in the construction of a new Mexico?

2. Do you agree that indigenous rights should be incorporated into the national Constitution in accordance with the San Andrés accords and the corresponding proposal of the Commission of Concordance and Peace of the Congress of the Union?

3. Do you agree that we must reach a true peace through dialogue, demilitarizing the country with the return of the soldiers to their barracks as established under the Constitution and its laws?

4. Do you agree that the people have to organize themselves and demand that the government "governs by obeying" in all aspects of the national life?

As expected, the results, compiled by a respected polling foundation, were in favor of the zapatista perspective.

Nearly 97 per cent approved the inclusion of the Indian people in the national project and to do so by entrenching

the Congress's proposed legislation in the constitution. Ninety-four per cent supported sending the military back to their barracks, and a regime that "governs by obeying" the public will.

An independent poll of 900 people (with a five per cent error margin) conducted by Investigaciones Demoscópicas de México in March, revealed that there was popular support for a negotiated solution in Chiapas. Eighty per cent favored dialogue over war and, notably, 68 per cent agreed that the EZLN should disarm and become a legal political entity.⁹⁶ But contrary to the zapatista dream of reforming Mexico through civil society, 76 per cent of those polled believed that negotiating with the government was essential to resolve the problem.

By the EZLN's own count, national participation fell short of its goal of bringing the consultation to Mexico's 2,500 municipalities, although to accomplish the consultation, the EZLN sent nearly 5,000 Chiapan zapatistas

⁹⁶ Navarrete, Alberto. "Lucha Política más que Bélica: Encuesta Transformen al EZLN en Grupo Legal y de paz," *Excelsior en Internet*, <http://www.serpiente.dgsca.unam.mx/jornada>, May 9, 1999.

to help organize and publicize it. Only a few communities refused outright to allow the consultation.

Despite the obstacles, the consultation reached 1,299 municipalities and garnered more than 2.8 million voters. This impressive increase in participation is significant, since the consultation appeared to be more of a recruiting drive to form zapatista organizing committees across the country. More than 27,000 militants participated, many from the Democratic Revolutionary Party. The network formed through contacts made with 1,141 social and political organizations will also prove useful in future zapatista organizing drives.⁹⁷

The first such drive was an invitation to the consultation's "brigades" to visit Chiapas on May 10 and discuss the results with the zapatista leadership, including the charismatic Subcommander Marcos. Two thousand attended. At the meeting, Marcos described the EZLN's vision of future organizing:

We imagine that we have a puzzle, which was
the puzzle of the consultation ... and that

⁹⁷ EZLN. "Los zapatistas y la manzana de Newton," <http://www.ezln.org>, May 11, 1999.

we had one part of this puzzle, 5,000 pieces, one for each delegate and we think that what we have to do is convoke a meeting to find the other pieces, that supposedly are you, but behind this puzzle we found another puzzle which was the puzzle of a Mexico that doesn't have access to the [media], that isn't part of the political parties, [that is part] of all those people that don't have a face and don't have names.⁹⁸

Through the consultation, the zapatistas continued to declare their faith in and allegiance to a civil society that would find a way to end the war and reform the country, without falling into the trap of endorsing political parties or resorting to violence.

The government response to this new zapatista organizing drive was the launching a new regional development program the acronym of which means "progress." The program targets regions, notably the south, that lack resources and infrastructure to develop their economies and to meet their social needs. Zedillo inaugurated the program in the state of Puebla, a PRI stronghold and one of the poorer southern states. In general, PROGRESO is seen as

⁹⁸ Becerril, Andrés. "Encabezaré el EZLN Movilizaciones que Produzcan una Revolución Social: Marcos," *Excelsior* en Internet, <http://www.excelsior.com.mx>, May 10, 1999.

Zedillo's effort to draw supporters away from guerrilla movements such as the EZLN and the more violent ERP.

The Chiapas state government has employed a dual initiative that complements the federal strategy of cooption and repression. The interim governor Roberto Albores Guillén, appointed by Zedillo after the Acteal massacre, announced the rezoning of municipalities in Chiapas state and proffered an amnesty law for zapatistas who want to disarm. The first part of Albores' tactic is to implement on his own terms, with President Zedillo's blessing, the municipal reforms set forth in the San Andrés accords. The reform affects seven municipalities and is being tested as a prototype for reform within the zapatista zones such as Chenalhó. However, the effects of the rezoning will not become apparent for some time.

But Albores' amnesty law has already attracted attention. In March, 27 families from an *ejido* in the municipality of Las Margaritas, deep in EZLN territory, quit "the ranks of the EZLN and renounced the Democratic Revolutionary Party." The reasons were altruistic and practical. The surrendered zapatistas had realized they were

wrong to live "on the margins of the law," and "they had fallen on harder times since they rejected 'productive projects'." The next day a combat unit of 14 presumed zapatistas marched out of the highlands brush and surrendered in person to Albores, revealing the location of a "zapatista training camp" to the military.

"We must eradicate the conditions which support confrontation between peoples, groups and political currents; banish once and for all aggression and violence as a means for resolving our conflicts and bury our weapons, hate and rancor," said the exultant governor of Chiapas.⁹⁹ The surrender blipped across the screens of the international press, assuring investors that the rebellion is under control. But Mexican analysts and reporters saw the surrender and amnesty law as a public relations exercise designed to confuse and isolate the zapatista leaders. The EZLN denied that the Indians who had surrendered to Albores had ever come under its command.

⁹⁹ Riquelme, Ethel y Rafael Victorio. "Sepultemos las Armas, Odios y Enconos en Chiapas: Albores Recibió los Fusiles que Depuso un Grupo Zapatista," *Excelsior en Internet*, <http://www.excelsior.com.mx>, March 30, 1999.

Human rights centers have denounced the amnesty law as a means to prolong the war, not end it. According to a Mexico City human rights center, the zapatistas who surrendered were really members of the PRI militias. The Indians who surrendered received perks for setting an example, including heads of cattle, farming tools and cash. But the human rights center argued that rather than defuse the conflict, the amnesty law could act as an incentive for the militias to attack and terrorize zapatista communities, be absolved and then receive financial rewards rather than punishment for their crimes. In this view, the amnesty law amounts to an official sanction to kill zapatistas.

The dual strategy of repression by the federal and state government is putting pressure on the EZLN and its supporters. Despite the remarkable recruitment exercise of the March consultation and the growing awareness of the conflict within the larger Mexican society, the zapatista dream of a civil society capable of persuading the government to adopt a more lenient stance toward the zapatistas appears a long way off.

What is clear, however, is that the EZLN is under growing pressure from the federal, state and military authorities, who are targeting the zapatista power bases with money, food and promises of political inclusion in the system. This strategy of attrition is likely to erode the base of the zapatistas and while the guerrilla army may be able to elude the military's patrols, the civilian Indian peoples, the EZLN's own constituency, are more vulnerable to violence, cooption and persuasion. As this happens, the bargaining power of the EZLN in Chiapas will decrease, and the political dream of "starting something new" may become the nightmare of ending their uprising, the old way, in violence and division.

CONCLUSION: DEMOCRATIC FUTURES?

Changes in people are never quick. ... And the change will come, is coming; the long climb out of the darkness. Already the people are learning, changing their lives, learning, working, living in new ways.

- John Steinbeck
*The Forgotten Village*¹⁰⁰

Democracy in Mexico is incomplete without justice for the seven million Indian peoples. The euphoria over the July 1997 congressional elections obscures a much more somber reality for those Mexicans who have borne the brunt of neoliberal economic reforms.

President Ernesto Zedillo and the Institutional Revolutionary Party have made a calculated choice to broaden the political system to include the main opposition parties. Only by introducing these reforms could Mexico and the PRI regain the legitimacy which they needed to re-establish economic and political stability. For the PRI, democracy means containment. For the opposition, democracy means a political opportunity. But on the streets and in the fields,

¹⁰⁰ John Britton. Revolution and Ideology: Images of the Mexican Revolution in the United States. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995, 154.

Mexicans need more than clean elections and strong political parties to survive.

Chapter One, the Mexican Labyrinth, established a political context for the contemporary reforms. Chapter Two, Repressing a Rebellion, explored the events, reactions and reasons behind the zapatista insurrection. Chapter Three, Rebellion's Fruit, demonstrated that the so-called democratic triumph of the July 1997 congressional elections was a "first" for the opposition, but in fact it had little impact on President Zedillo's neoliberal reforms. Chapter Four, Mayor Cárdenas, showed that the rise of the Democratic Revolutionary Party's messiah to the seat of power in Mexico City is a limited victory that does not herald a presidential triumph in the 2000 elections for him or his party. Chapter Five, Resurrecting Authority, described the internal reform of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party that will resurrect the party's organizational machinery on the state and national level. Chapter Six, Highland Justice, described the Acteal massacre, the consequent violence and the government's renewed hardline policies toward the rebels, forcing the zapatistas to search

for an ally in civil society. This conclusion briefly looks to the future prospects for the zapatista struggle.

Despite surviving the military encirclement and occupations and the well-armed militias of PRI sympathizers, despite gaining a public voice and thousands of adherents in Mexico and across the world, despite the chants of "you're not alone" in the plaza of Mexico City, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) remains very much alone in Mexican politics. The EZLN remains alone because of the racism against and ignorance of Indian cultures within Mexican society. And the rebels remain alone because the PRI, with more lives than 20 cats, has resurrected its own authority through internal reforms, electoral reforms and a campaign of military encirclement and repression.

True to Mexican history, this Indian army has provoked rebellion and reform, but faces the distinct possibility it may reap none of the benefits. The fundamental demands of the zapatista rebels include democracy, Indian self-determination and land. Their demands cannot be addressed through social services and electricity. With the failure of

the armed option, the EZLN has placed its hopes on civil society, which may yet prove to be a chimera.

Barring the political miracle of Cárdenas being elected president in 2000, the EZLN will face another PRI government and the same exhausting strategy of political containment, military encirclement and "direct negotiation."

President Zedillo's stance against the "violence of the rebels," his many visits to Chiapas and his anti-corruption profile, reinforced by the conviction of Raúl Salinas, has earned him grudging respect as a man who touches the untouchables and can weather political and economic tempests. His renunciation of the personal right to select his successor has met approval among the rank-and-file members of the PRI. Party militants see Zedillo as having returned competition and grassroots participation to the PRI, rather than maintaining the authoritarianism which allowed him and his predecessors to entrench the neoliberal project in the Mexican economy. Indubitably, his successor will face the challenges of devolving many federal powers to the states and municipalities. Barring further serious

economic and political crises, the PRI is ready to win the presidential elections of 2000.

This grim reality presents several harsh scenarios facing the EZLN in the next two years. The first scenario entails that repression coupled with government services would erode their base of support substantially and cause large defections from its ranks. The second scenario has the PRI winning the presidency in clean elections, the PRD falling into crisis, and the new government using its popular mandate to escalate repression, with potential zapatista reprisals. A third scenario would be Cárdenas winning the presidency, but without a PRD majority in Congress or the Senate. A fourth scenario depicts civil society organizing a "national mobilization for dialogue" campaign in 15 or more states, involving at least five million people.

All four scenarios point toward the necessity for the EZLN to return to the negotiating table. Even if the fourth scenario were to materialize, the zapatista command would still need to negotiate with the federal government on which it has declared war, to arrange demobilization terms and a

timetable for reforms that would benefit the Indian communities. Armed struggle may get the government's attention, but negotiating is how the zapatistas are going to keep it.

For the EZLN, waiting for a better government to come along is a dangerous strategy. Building a civil society movement of any strength will take many years, time that the zapatistas may not have. The present government has already turned the EZLN's strategy of delayed negotiations against it.

By coming to the table with proposals on the Democracy and Justice round of the talks, the zapatistas would force the government to choose between negotiations and the public relations disaster of being seen rejecting the talks it has repeatedly called for. For the zapatistas, negotiations are necessary if they are not to become yet another example of an Indian movement first bloodied, then coopted and finally destroyed.

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Green Party of Mexico (PVEM)

<http://www.pvem.org.mx/index.html>

Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)

<http://www.pri.org.mx/home2.html>

La Jornada en Internet

<http://www.serpiente.dgsca.unam.mx/jornada>

Labor Party (PT)

<http://www.pt.org.mx>

Mexican Bank for Foreign Trade

<http://mexico.businessline.gob.mx>

Ministry of Finance and Public Credit

<http://www.shcp.gob.mx>

Ministry of the Interior

<http://www.quicklink.com/mexico/gober.htm>

Ministry of Social Development

<http://www.sedesol.gob.mx>

National Action Party (PAN)

<http://diputados.pan.org.mx/>

<http://200.15.46.190/>

<http://www.df.pan.org.mx/>

National Institute for Statistics, Geography and Informatics
(INEGI)

<http://www.inegi.gob.mx>

Office of the Attorney General (PGR)
<http://www.pgr.gob.mx>

Office of the President and Information Office
<http://www.presidencia.gob.mx>

RAND <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR994/>
Ronfeldt, David and John Arquilla. The "Social Netwar" in
Mexico. Rand 1998, MR-994-A.

Televisa
<http://www.televisa.com.mx/noticieros/ortega/noticiero/no090499.html>
"Gonzalez Fernández con Echeverría." April 9, 1999.