

Coordination of the Kurdish Women's Movement: Letter from Kurdish Women's Movement to Spokeswoman of Indigenous Governing Council

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For María de Jesús Patricio Martínez, representative of the indigenous people of Mexico and the National Indigenous Congress CNI.

First of all, we want to send our deepest respect and revolutionary greetings to our Mexican sister, from the mountains of Kurdistan to the Sierra Madre mountain range beyond the oceans. Despite the rivers, mountains, deserts, valleys, canyons and seas that separate us, we are indigenous sisters and brothers, no matter what part of the world we are in.

With you, we share our struggle, our resistance against occupation and colonialism, and our dream of a free life, and in this sense, we who belong to the Kurdish Liberation Movement

declare that we consider the struggle for self-determination, self-administration and self-defense of the indigenous peoples of Mexico organized in the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) as our own struggle, and we support you on the basis of principles of revolutionary solidarity.

Indigenous peoples are the veins through which the most important social and cultural values of humanity have been transmitted, from the first moments of socialization until our times. Without a doubt, no people is superior to another, but at a time when capitalist modernity is trying to destroy every communal value, indigenous peoples are the safeguard of the social fabric of all humanity. Thousands of years of collective memory resurge in our songs, our rituals, our prayers, our tattoos, our dances and our traditions. And so the struggle for our own identity against the efforts of capitalist modernity to erase the roots and the memory of our peoples becomes the most meaningful of all forms of resistance.

In Latin America, as in Kurdistan, women are leading this resistance. In our countries, which were the cradles for thousands of years of the culture of the mother goddess, we see that women and life, women and freedom, women and land, and women and nature are inextricably related. In Kurdistan, we express this reality in our slogan "Jin Jiyan Azadî," which means "Women Life Freedom."

The bodies and souls of women are the reflection of the universe on the land. Thousands of years ago, during the Neolithic Revolution, it was the women, through their social organization, who led in making changes that enabled the cultivation of the land and the beginning of a sedentary life in harmony with nature. That's why women were the first to be enslaved by the patriarchal state civilization, which arose as a counterrevolution based on domination, exploitation and occupation.

Parallel to the domination of women was the ever more rapid domination of nature. It was through the oppression of the first form of nature that the second came about, transforming both into the pincers that capitalist modernity used to forcefully exert pressure against historical society, with a greater ability to destroy it. Consequently, legitimate resistance arising in pursuit of self-government, self-determination and self-defense represents the greatest possible struggle for freedom.

We in Kurdistan, enlightened by the struggles of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, have developed our own defense against modernist capitalist forces and attacks from the colonialist states that occupy our soil. We want you to know that we continually receive special inspiration from your experiences of self-government, good government and communalism. We hope that our experiences and breakthroughs in the struggle will likewise serve as sources of inspiration for you.

One of the greatest achievements in our movement is the equal participation and representation of women. This was the result of great sacrifices made and intense struggles

waged by women, and we finally won equal participation in making all decisions. Not as individuals, but as representatives of the organized, collective will of the Kurdish Women's Liberation Movement. This is the way we are taking our place in each and every aspect of struggle. With our system of co-presidencies, established from the ground up, we represent the will of women in each and every decision and develop a democratic kind of politics that goes against all patriarchal, traditional forms of politics. But to be able to do this, it was necessary for us to become an organized force once and for all. Being organized is the most important requirement for winning victories. To the extent that we're organized, we're capable of resisting the dominant colonialist system and building our own governmental alternative.

For that matter, organization is our most important arm for self-defense. In the past, many peoples and movements have not been able to attain the hoped-for results because they weren't well enough organized. It wasn't possible to transform some historical moments into great victories precisely due to the lack of organization. We may not have reached an in-depth understanding of the meaning and importance of this fact, but we're now in another stage of struggle. We're obliged to multiply our efforts to heighten our levels of organization in order to take advantage of this new opportunity to triumph - at a time when the modernist capitalist system is going through yet another deep crisis in its most decisive aspects. History demands it of us. You of the National Indigenous Congress have shown that you recognize this reality by declaring the presidential elections in Mexico a key stage in a process that will result in a rise in your levels of organization.

We, of the Kurdish Women's Liberation Movement wish to express our support for your decision, based on the conviction that this goal will be reached and taken to a much higher level, starting with these elections and the strategies developed around them. Our leader Abdullah Öcalan, who has been imprisoned under the harshest of conditions of isolation by the Turkish colonialist state since 1999, made a highly important analysis of this at the end of the twentieth century. Our leader Apo, foresaw that the twenty-first century would be the century of women's liberation if we are able to grow and decide on our manners and mechanisms of organization. The reason for this conclusion was the evident structural crisis of the patriarchal system, which has been based on our enslavement.

The patriarchal system seeks to overcome this crisis by raising the level of attacks against women to the level of a systematic war. By concentrating its attacks against women the world over through different means and methods, the system aims to cut off the road to liberation that we've taken. The murders of women that have reached the level of genocide in your country, and the murders of women leaders in Latin America are the most concrete indicators of this reality. We want you to know that we consider all the women and leaders of indigenous peoples who have been killed by the operative arms of the dominant system as our own martyrs. We are also struggling to make our hopes and dreams reality. Our martyrs

never die. We draw force from them, and they are reborn in every struggle we undertake.

In this context, your decision as Mexican indigenous people to name a woman comrade as representative of your will and make her your candidate in the upcoming presidential elections is very significant. As a matter of fact, comrade Marichuy is not only the voice of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, but at the same time, the voice of the women of the world. We want to say that we affirm the importance and value of her candidacy as the representative of peoples denied, women enslaved and thousands of years of ancestral wisdom threatened with disappearance by capitalist modernity.

As the Kurdish Women's Liberation Movement, we declare our support and solidarity with the compañera and the National Indigenous Congress, not only at the moment of this electoral juncture, but in the entire struggle that your movement is pursuing. We know that the results of the elections themselves do not matter, that they are only one of the roads that the indigenous peoples of Mexico have taken in this process at this particular moment of struggle. In this light, the victory is already a fact because the modernist capitalist system feeds off of the division of forces and the disorganization of peoples and societies that it aims to dominate, but you have constructed the terrain for success by forging organized unity.

From this point on, it is important not to lose sight of this goal, which is none other than stronger organization. Your triumph will be our triumph. Our struggle is your struggle. We are the brother and sister people of the mountains that have risen from the same deep waters. Even in our different tongues, we share the same dreams, we fall in love with the same utopia, and we resist for the sake of the same love. From here, we send you all the force necessary in this new stage, we greet you with our most genuine revolutionary feelings, and we embrace you with all our solidarity and comradeship.

Long live the sisterhood of the peoples!

Long live the sisterhood of the people!

Long live revolutionary internationalism!

Women-life-freedom! Jin Jiyan Azadi

Coordination of the Kurdish Women's Movement Komalén Jinén Kurdistan (KJK)

June 7th, 2017

Swearing in of the Indigenous Governing Council and its Spokeswoman

This is a transcript of the swearing in *ceremony*, which took place on May 28, 2017 at the CIDECI-UNITIERRA in Chiapas, Mexico.



“Compañeras, compañeros, we now ask everyone to please rise. Please remove your hats. We are now going to do the swearing in and take the oath by which we are formally constituting this Indigenous Governing Council for Mexico.

Brother and sister council members, sister spokesperson for the word of this Indigenous Governing Council.

We are in the middle of a war, a cruel war. We need your strength, bravery, determination,

intelligence, and above all love, a great deal of love from all of you, to move forward with the purpose and task that we have set for ourselves, for the good of our peoples, for the good of our communities, for the good of this abused, pained, and humiliated country.

Brother and sister council members, sister spokesperson for this council:

Do you swear to uphold the word and the decision of your peoples and communities, fulfilling and struggling for freedom, justice, and democracy, and respecting the seven principles of the National Indigenous Congress?"

"We do."

"Do you swear to care for and respect your peoples, communities, girls, boys, elderly, men and women, our mother earth, our cultures and our languages?"

"We do."

"Do you swear to defend with your life, your thoughts, your hearts and your bodies, our peoples, communities and our mother earth?"

"We do."

"Do you swear to be the spokespeople for the word of our peoples, of the National Indigenous Congress, without lies, duplicity, or betrayal of any kind, remaining steadfastly anticapitalist, below and to the left, constructing rebellion and resistance with all the exploited men and women of this country and this world, against those above, the capitalists and their administrators and overseers, for a world where many worlds fit?"

"We do."

"Finally, do you swear to not fall into the temptation to seek votes and power, to not sell out, not give up, and not give in to those above?"

"We do."

"That is what we demand of you, and if you don't do it, we won't complain or bring suit against you: we will sanction you and remove you. Thank you, *compañeras, compañeros*.

Long live the National Indigenous Congress!"

"Viva!"

“Long live the Zapatista Army of National Liberation!”

“Viva!”

“Long live Mexico!”

“Viva!”

“Long live the anticapitalist and leftist struggle!”

“Viva!”

“Long live our peoples!”

“Viva!”

“Long live Mexico!”

“Viva!”

“Long live the National Indigenous Congress!”

“Viva!”

“Long live the struggle of the exploited men and women of this country and this world!”

“Viva!”

“Thank you *compañeros, compañeras.*”

CNI/EZLN: And the Earth Trembled! A Report From the

Epicenter...

This communique was originally published by [Enlace Zapatista](#).



To the Originary Peoples of Mexico:

To Civil Society of Mexico and the World:

To the National and International Sixth:

To the Free Media:

Brothers and Sisters:

This is the time of the originary peoples, the time for us to replant and rebuild ourselves. It is time to go on the offensive and this is the agreement that we have laid out for how to do so, from our perspective as individuals, as communities, as originary peoples, and as the

National Indigenous Congress [CNI]. It is time for dignity to govern this country and this world and for democracy, liberty, and justice to flourish in its step.

We are announcing here that during the second phase of the Fifth National Indigenous Congress we meticulously analyzed the results of the consultation process that we held among our peoples during the months of October, November, and December of 2016. In that process, we issued agreements from communal, *ejidal*, collective, municipal, inter-municipal and regional assemblies in all of the ways, forms, and languages that represent our peoples in the geography of this country, once again bringing us to understand and confront, with dignity and rebellion, the situation that we face in our country and the world.

We appreciate the messages of support, hope, and solidarity that came from intellectuals, collectives, and peoples in response to our proposal entitled "Let the Earth Tremble at its Core," which we made public during the first phase of the Fifth National Indigenous Congress. We also acknowledge the critical voices, many of them making fundamentally racist arguments, that expressed indignant and contemptuous rage at the idea that an indigenous woman would aspire not only to contend for presidential election, but would propose to truly change, from below, this broken country.

To all of them, we say that the earth indeed has trembled, and we along with her, and that we intend to shake the conscience of the entire nation, and that, in fact, we intend for indignation, resistance and rebellion to be present as an option on the electoral ballots of 2018. But we also say that it is not at all our intention to compete with the political parties or with the political class who still owe this country so much. They owe us for every death, disappearance, and imprisonment, and every dispossession, repression, and discrimination. Do not mistake our intentions. We do not plan to compete against them, because we are not the same as they are. Unlike them, we are not filled with lies and perverse words. We are instead the collective word of below and to the left, that which shakes the world and makes it tremble with epicenters of autonomy, and which makes us so proudly different from them that:

1. While the country is submerged in fear and terror born from the thousands of dead and disappeared, in the municipalities of the mountains and the coast of Guerrero our peoples have created conditions of real security and justice. In Santa María Ostula, Michoacán, the Nahuatl people have united with other indigenous communities to ensure that security remains in the hands of the people. The epicenter of the resistance there is the communal assembly of Ostula, the guarantor of the ethic of a movement that has already permeated the municipalities of Aquila, Coahuayana, Chinicuila, and Coacomán. In the Purépecha plateau, the community of Cherán has demonstrated that by organizing to eliminate the politicians from their bad government structure and by exercising their own forms of security and government they could not only construct

justice, but also, as in other geographies across this country, they showed that only from below, from rebellion, can a new social pact be constructed that is autonomous and just. And we have not and will not stop constructing from below the truth and justice denied to the 43 disappeared students from the teacher's college of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, the 3 student *compañeros* who were murdered, and their *compañeros* who were injured, all by the Mexican narco-government and its repressive forces. Meanwhile, all levels of the bad governments criminalize social struggle and resistance and rebellion, persecuting, accusing, disappearing, imprisoning, and murdering the men and women who struggle for just causes.

2. While destruction reaches every corner of the country, knowing no limits and distancing people from their land and from that which is sacred, the Wixárika people, together with the committees in defense of life and water from the *Potosino altiplano*, have shown that they can defend a territory and their environment and can create an equilibrium based in an identification with nature, with a sacred vision that recreates, every day, the ancestral links with life, land, the sun, and the ancestors, reaching across 7 municipalities in the sacred ceremonial territory of Wirikuta in San Luis Potosí.
3. While the bad governments deform State policies on education, placing education at the service of capitalist corporations such that it ceases to be a right, the ordinary peoples create primary schools, secondary schools, high schools and universities with their own educational systems, based in the protection of our mother earth, in defense of territory, in production, in the sciences, in the arts, and in our languages. Despite the fact that the majority of these processes grow without the support of any level of the bad government, these institutions are meant to serve everyone.
4. Meanwhile, the paid media - spokespeople for those who prostitute every one of the words that they circulate and fool the people in the country and the city so that they don't wake from their slumber - criminalize those who think and defend what is theirs, making them out to be delinquents, vandals, and misfits, while those who benefit from ignorance and alienation are the ones with high social status. Those who oppress, repress, exploit and dispossess are always made out to be the good guys, the ones who deserve to be respected and allowed to govern so that they can serve themselves. While all of this is happening, the communities have made their own media, creating ideas in different ways so that conscience cannot be overshadowed by the lies that the capitalists impose, and instead using them to strengthen organization from below, where every true word is born.
5. While the representative "democracy" of the political parties has been converted into a parody of the popular will, where votes are bought and sold like any other commodity and poverty is used to manipulate people so that the capitalists can maintain the division between the people of the countryside and the city, the ordinary peoples continue to care for and strengthen their forms of consensus and to cultivate assemblies as organs of government where through the voice of everyone together profoundly democratic agreements are made, across entire regions, through assemblies that articulate with

agreements of other assemblies, which themselves emerge from the profound will of each family.

6. While the governments impose their decisions to benefit the few, supplanting the popular will of the people and criminalizing and repressing whoever opposes their projects of death which they impose at the cost of the blood of our peoples—such as the New Airport of Mexico City, pretending to consult them while actually imposing death—we originary peoples have consistent ways and forms for free, prior and informed consent, however small or large that may be.
7. While the bad governments hand energy sovereignty over to foreign interests through privatization, and the high cost of gasoline reveals the face of capitalism which in fact only opens a road toward inequality and the rebellious response of the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples of Mexico, the powerful can neither hide nor silence this rebellion. We peoples unite and fight to stop the destruction of our territories through fracking, wind farms, mining, oil wells, and gas and oil pipelines in the states of Veracruz, Sonora, Sinaloa, Baja California, Morelos, Oaxaca, Yucatán and the entire national territory.
8. While the bad governments impose their toxic and genetically modified food on consumers across the countryside and in the cities, the Mayan people continue their indefatigable struggle to stop the planting of genetically modified seed on the Yucatan peninsula and across the country in order to conserve the ancestral genetic wealth that also symbolizes our life and collective organization and is the basis for our spirituality.
9. While the political class only destroys and makes empty promises, we peoples build, not only in order to govern but also in order to exist with autonomy and self-determination.

Our resistances and rebellions constitute the power of below. We don't offer empty promises or actions, but rather real processes for radical transformation where everyone participates and which are tangible in the diverse and enormous indigenous geographies of this nation. This is why, as the National Indigenous Congress, which brings together 43 peoples of this country in this Fifth Congress, WE AGREE to name an Indigenous Governing Council with men and women representatives from each one of the peoples, tribes, and nations that make up the CNI. This council proposes to govern this country. It will have an indigenous woman from the CNI as its spokesperson, which is to say a woman who has indigenous blood and who knows her culture, and this indigenous woman spokesperson from the CNI will be an independent candidate for the presidency of Mexico in the 2018 elections.

That is why we, the CNI, as the Home for All Indigenous Peoples, are also the principles that configure the ethic of our struggle. In these principles there is room for all of the originary peoples of this country. Those principles that house the Indigenous Governing Council are:

To obey, not command

To represent, not supplant

To serve others, not serve oneself

To convince, not defeat

To go below, not above

To propose, not impose

To construct, not destroy

This is what we have invented and reinvented, not simply because we want to, but because it is the only way that we have to continue existing - by following new paths forged from the collective memory of our own forms of organization and that are the product of resistance and rebellion, in order to confront, every day, the war that has not ended and yet has not been able to do away with us. Using these forms it has not only been possible for us to build a path toward the full reconstitution of our peoples, but also toward new civilizational forms. In other words, it has been possible to build collective hope that is transformed into communities, municipalities, regions, states, and which is able to respond precisely to the real problems that the country is facing, far away from the political class and their corruption.

From this Fifth National Indigenous Congress, we call on the originary peoples of this country, the collectives of the Sixth, the workers, the coalitions and committees who struggle in the countryside and the city, the students, intellectuals, the artists, and scientists, the elements of civil society that are not organized, as well as all good-hearted people to close ranks and go on the offensive. We call on you to dismantle the power of above and to reconstitute ourselves now from below and to the left, not only as peoples but as a country. We make a call to come together in a single organization where dignity will be our final word and our first action. We call on all of you to organize with us to stop this war, and to not be afraid to build ourselves and sow our seeds on the ruins left by capitalism.

This is what humanity and our mother earth demand of us. It is the time for rebellious dignity. We will make this a material reality by convoking a constituent assembly of the Indigenous Governing Council for Mexico in the month of May 2017. From there we will build bridges toward the *compañeros* and *compañeras* of civil society, the media, and the originary peoples in order to make the earth tremble at its core, to overcome fear and recuperate what belongs to humanity, what belongs to the earth and what belongs to the peoples. We do this so that we can recuperate the territories that have been invaded or destroyed, so that the disappeared of this country can be returned, so that all political

prisoners are freed, so that there can be truth and justice for all of those who have been murdered, so that there can be dignity for the countryside and the city. That is, have no doubt, we are going for everything, because we know this might be the last opportunity we have as originary peoples and as Mexican society to peacefully and radically change our forms of government, making dignity the epicenter of a new world.

From Oventik, Zapatista Territory, Chiapas, Mexico

Never Again a Mexico Without Us

National Indigenous Congress

Zapatista Army for National Liberation

CNI/EZLN: May the Earth Tremble at Its Core

This communique was originally published by [Enlace Zapatista](#).



To the people of the world:

To the free media:

To the National and International Sixth:

Convened for the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the National Indigenous Congress and the living resistance of the originary peoples, nations, and tribes of this country called Mexico, of the languages of Amuzgo, Binni-zaá, Chinanteco, Chol, Chontal de Oaxaca, Coca, Náyeri, Cuicateco, Kumiai, Lacandón, Matlazinca, Maya, Mayo, Mazahua, Mazateco, Mixe, Mixteco, Nahuatl, Ñahñu, Ñathô, Popoluca, Purépecha, Rarámuri, Tlapaneco, Tojolabal, Totonaco, Triqui, Tzeltal, Tsotsil, Wixárika, Yaqui, Zoque, Chontal de Tabasco, as well as our Aymara, Catalán, Mam, Nasa, Quiché and Tacaná brothers and sisters, we firmly pronounce that our struggle is below and to the left, that we are anticapitalist and that the time of the people has come—the time to make this country pulse with the ancestral heartbeat of our mother earth.

It is in this spirit that we met to celebrate life in the Fifth National Indigenous Congress,

which took place on October 9-14, 2016, in CIDECI-UNITIERRA, Chiapas. There we once again recognized the intensification of the dispossession and repression that have not stopped in the 524 years since the powerful began a war aimed at exterminating those who are of the earth; as their children we have not allowed for their destruction and death, meant to serve capitalist ambition which knows no end other than destruction itself. That resistance, the struggle to continue constructing life, today takes the form of words, learning, and agreements. On a daily basis we build ourselves and our communities in resistance in order to stave off the storm and the capitalist attack which never lets up. It becomes more aggressive everyday such that today it has become a civilizational threat, not only for indigenous peoples and *campesinos* but also for the people of the cities who themselves must create dignified and rebellious forms of resistance in order to avoid murder, dispossession, contamination, sickness, slavery, kidnapping or disappearance. Within our community assemblies we have decided, exercised, and constructed our destiny since time immemorial. Our forms of organization and the defense of our collective life is only possible through rebellion against the bad government, their businesses, and their organized crime.

We denounce the following:

1. In Pueblo Coca, Jalisco, the businessman Guillermo Moreno Ibarra invaded 12 hectares of forest in the area known as El Pandillo, working in cahoots with the agrarian institutions there to criminalize those who struggle, resulting in 10 community members being subjected to trials that went on for four years. The bad government is invading the island of Mexcala, which is sacred communal land, and at the same time refusing to recognize the Coca people in state indigenous legislation, in an effort to erase them from history.
2. The Otomí N̄hañu, N̄athö, Hui hú, and Matlatzinca peoples from México State and Michoacán are being attacked via the imposition of a megaproject to build the private Toluca-Naucalpan Highway and an inter-city train. The project is destroying homes and sacred sites, buying people off and manipulating communal assemblies through police presence. This is in addition to fraudulent community censuses that supplant the voice of an entire people, as well as the privatization and the dispossession of water and territory around the Xinantécatl volcano, known as the Nevado de Toluca. There the bad governments are doing away with the protections that they themselves granted, all in order to hand the area over to the tourism industry. We know that all of these projects are driven by interest in appropriating the water and life of the entire region. In the Michoacán zone they deny the identity of the Otomí people, and a group of police patrols have come to the region to monitor the hills, prohibiting indigenous people there from going to the hills to cut wood.
3. The originary peoples who live in Mexico City are being dispossessed of the territories that they have won in order to be able to work for a living; in the process they are

robbed of their goods and subjected to police violence. They are scorned and repressed for using their traditional clothing and language, and criminalized through accusations of selling drugs.

4. The territory of the Chontal Peoples of Oaxaca is being invaded by mining concessions that are dismantling communal land organization, affecting the people and natural resources of five communities.
5. The Mayan Peninsular People of Campeche, Yucatán, and Quintana Roo are suffering land dispossession as a result of the planting of genetically modified soy and African palm, the contamination of their aquifers by agrochemicals, the construction of wind farms and solar farms, the development of ecotourism, and the activities of real estate developers. Their resistance against high electricity costs has been met with harassment and arrest warrants. In Calakmul, Campeche, five communities are being displaced by the imposition of 'environmental protection areas,' environmental service costs, and carbon capture plans. In Candelaria, Campeche, the struggle continues for secure land tenure. In all three states there is aggressive criminalization against those who defend territory and natural resources.
6. The Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Tojolabal, Chol and Lacandón Maya People of Chiapas continue to be displaced from their territories due to the privatization of natural resources. This has resulted in the imprisonment and murder of those who defend their right to remain in their territory, as they are constantly discriminated against and repressed whenever they defend themselves and organize to continue building their autonomy, leading to increasing rates of human rights violations by police forces. There are campaigns to fragment and divide their organizations, as well as the murders of *compañeros* who have defended their territory and natural resources in San Sebastián Bachajon. The bad governments continue trying to destroy the organization of the communities that are EZLN bases of support in order to cast a shadow on the hope and light that they provide to the entire world.
7. The Mazateco people of Oaxaca have been invaded by private property claims which exploit the territory and culture for tourism purposes. This includes naming Huautla de Jiménez as a "Pueblo Mágico" in order to legalize displacement and commercialize ancestral knowledge. This is in addition to mining concessions and foreign spelunking explorations in existing caves, all enforced by increased harassment by narcotraffickers and militarization of the territory. The bad governments are complicit in the increasing rates of femicide and rape in the region.
8. The Nahua and Totonaca peoples of Veracruz and Puebla are confronting aerial fumigation, which creates illnesses in the communities. Mining and hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation are carried out through fracking, and 8 watersheds are endangered by new projects that are contaminating the rivers.
9. The Nahua and Popoluca peoples from the south of Veracruz are under siege by organized crime and also risk territorial destruction and their disappearance as a people because of the threats brought by mining, wind farms, and above all, hydrocarbon

exploitation through fracking.

10. The Nahuatl people, who live in the states of Puebla, Tlaxcala, Veracruz, Morelos, Mexico State, Jalisco, Guerrero, Michoacán, San Luis Potosí, and Mexico City, are in a constant struggle to stop the advance of the so-called *Proyecto Integral Morelos*, consisting of pipelines, aqueducts, and thermoelectric projects. The bad governments, seeking to stop the resistance and communication among the communities are trying to destroy the community radio of Amiltzingo, Morelos. Similarly, the construction of the new airport in Mexico City and the surrounding building projects threaten the territories around Texcoco lake and the Valle de México basin, namely Atenco, Texcoco, and Chimalhuacán. In Michoacán, the Nahuatl people face the plunder of their natural resources and minerals by *sicarios* [hitmen] who are accompanied by police or the army, and also the militarization and paramilitarization of their territories. The cost of trying to halt this war has been murder, persecution, imprisonment, and harassment of community leaders.
11. The Zoque People of Oaxaca and Chiapas face invasion by mining concessions and alleged private property claims on communal lands in the Chimalapas region, as well as three hydroelectric dams and hydrocarbon extraction through fracking. The implementation of cattle corridors is leading to excessive logging in the forests in order to create pastureland, and genetically modified seeds are also being cultivated there. At the same time, Zoque migrants to different states across the country are re-constituting their collective organization.
12. The Amuzgo people of Guerrero are facing the theft of water from the San Pedro River to supply residential areas in the city of Ometepec. Their community radio has also been subject to constant persecution and harassment.
13. The Rarámuri people of Chihuahua are losing their farmland to highway construction, to the Creel airport, and to the gas pipeline that runs from the United States to Chihuahua. They are also threatened by Japanese mining companies, dam projects, and tourism.
14. The Wixárika people of Jalisco, Nayarit, and Durango are facing the destruction and privatization of the sacred places they depend on to maintain their familial, social, and political fabric, and also the dispossession of their communal land in favor of large landowners who take advantage of the blurry boundaries between states of the Republic and campaigns orchestrated by the bad government to divide people.
15. The Kumiai People of Baja California continue struggling for the reconstitution of their ancestral territories, against invasion by private interests, the privatization of their sacred sites, and the invasion of their territories by gas pipelines and highways.
16. The Purépecha people of Michoacán are experiencing deforestation, which occurs through complicity between the bad government and the narcoparamilitary groups who plunder the forests and woods. Community organization from below poses an obstacle to that theft.
17. For the Triqui people of Oaxaca, the presence of the political parties, the mining industry, paramilitaries, and the bad government foment the disintegration of the

community fabric in the interest of plundering natural resources.

18. The Chinanteco people of Oaxaca are suffering the destruction of their forms of community organization through land reforms, the imposition of environmental services costs, carbon capture plans, and ecotourism. There are plans for a four-lane highway to cross and divide their territory. In the Cajono and Usila Rivers the bad governments are planning to build three dams that will affect the Chinanteco and Zapoteca people, and there are also mining concessions and oil well explorations.
19. The Náyeri People of Nayarit face the invasion and destruction of their sacred territories by the Las Cruces hydroelectric project in the site called Muxa Tena on the San Pedro River.
20. The Yaqui people of Sonora continue their sacred struggle against the gas pipeline that would cross their territory, and in defense of the water of the Yaqui River, which the bad governments want to use to supply the city of Hermosillo, Sonora. This goes against judicial orders and international appeals which have made clear the Yaqui peoples' legal and legitimate rights. The bad government has criminalized and harassed the authorities and spokespeople of the Yaqui tribe.
21. The Binizzá and Ikoot people organize to stop the advance of the mining, wind, hydroelectric, dam, and gas pipeline projects. This includes in particular the Special Economic Zone on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and the infrastructure that threatens the territory and the autonomy of the people on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec who are classified as the "environmental Taliban" and the "indigenous rights Taliban," the precise words used by the Mexican Association of Energy to refer to the Popular Assembly of the Juchiteco People.
22. The Mixteco people of Oaxaca suffer the plunder of their agrarian territory, which also affects their traditional practices given the threats, deaths, and imprisonment that seek to quiet the dissident voices, with the bad government supporting armed paramilitary groups as in the case of San Juan Mixtepec, Oaxaca.
23. The Mixteco, Tlapaneco, and Nahua peoples from the mountains and coast of Guerrero face the imposition of mining megaprojects supported by narcotraffickers, their paramilitaries, and the bad governments, who fight over the territories of the originary peoples.
24. The Mexican bad government continues to lie, trying to hide its decomposition and total responsibility for the forced disappearance of the 43 students from the Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers College in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero.
25. The state continues to hold hostage: *compañeros* Pedro Sánchez Berriozábal, Rómulo Arias Míreles, Teófilo Pérez González, Dominga González Martínez, Lorenzo Sánchez Berriozábal, and Marco Antonio Pérez González from the Nahua community of San Pedro Tlanixco in Mexico State; Zapotec *compañero* Álvaro Sebastián from the Loxicha region; *compañeros* Emilio Jiménez Gómez and Esteban Gómez Jiménez, prisoners from the community of Bachajón, Chiapas; *compañeros* Pablo López Álvarez and the exiled Raul Gatica García and Juan Nicolás López from the Indigenous and Popular Council of

- Oaxaca Ricardo Flores Magón. Recently a judge handed down a 33-year prison sentence to *compañero* Luis Fernando Sotelo for demanding that the 43 disappeared students from Ayotzinapa be returned alive, and to the *compañeros* Samuel Ramírez Gálvez, Gonzalo Molina González and Arturo Campos Herrera from the Regional Coordination of Community Authorities - PC. They also hold hundreds of indigenous and non-indigenous people across the country prisoner for defending their territories and demanding justice.
26. The Mayo people's ancestral territory is threatened by highway projects meant to connect Topolobampo with the state of Texas in the United States. Ambitious tourism projects are also being created in Barranca del Cobre.
 27. The Dakota Nation's sacred territory is being invaded and destroyed by gas and oil pipelines, which is why they are maintaining a permanent occupation to protect what is theirs.

For all of these reasons, we reiterate that it our obligation to protect life and dignity, that is, resistance and rebellion, from below and to the left, a task that can only be carried out collectively. We build rebellion from our small local assemblies that combine to form large communal assemblies, *ejidal* assemblies, *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* [Good Government Councils], and coalesce as agreements as peoples that unite us under one identity. In the process of sharing, learning, and constructing ourselves as the National Indigenous Congress, we see and feel our collective pain, discontent, and ancestral roots. In order to defend what we are, our path and learning process have been consolidated by strengthening our collective decision-making spaces, employing national and international juridical law as well as peaceful and civil resistance, and casting aside the political parties that have only brought death, corruption, and the buying off of dignity. We have made alliances with various sectors of civil society, creating our own resources in communication, community police and self-defense forces, assemblies and popular councils, and cooperatives; in the exercise and defense of traditional medicine; in the exercise and defense of traditional and ecological agriculture; in our own rituals and ceremonies to pay respect to mother earth and continue walking with and upon her, in the cultivation and defense of native seeds, and in political-cultural activities, forums, and information campaigns.

This is the power from below that has kept us alive. This is why commemorating resistance and rebellion also means ratifying our decision to continue to live, constructing hope for a future that is only possible upon the ruins of capitalism.

Given that the offensive against the people will not cease, but rather grow until it finishes off every last one of us who make up the peoples of the countryside and the city, who carry profound discontent that emerges in new, diverse, and creative forms of resistance and rebellion, this Fifth National Indigenous Congress has decided to launch a consultation in each of our communities to dismantle from below the power that is imposed on us from above and offers us nothing but death, violence, dispossession, and destruction. Given all of

the above, we declare ourselves in permanent assembly as we carry out this consultation, in each of our geographies, territories, and paths, on the accord of the Fifth CNI to name an Indigenous Governing Council whose will would be manifest by an indigenous woman, a CNI delegate, as an independent candidate to the presidency of the country under the name of the National Indigenous Congress and the Zapatista Army for National Liberation in the electoral process of 2018. We confirm that our struggle is not for power, which we do not seek. Rather, we call on all of the originary peoples and civil society to organize to put a stop to this destruction and strengthen our resistances and rebellions, that is, the defense of the life of every person, family, collective, community, or *barrio*. We make a call to construct peace and justice by reweaving ourselves from below, from where we are what we are.

This is the time of dignified rebellion, the time to construct a new nation by and for everyone, to strengthen power below and to the anticapitalist left, to make those who are responsible for all of the pain of the peoples of this multi-colored Mexico pay.

Finally, we announce the creation of the official webpage of the CNI:

www.congresonacionalindigena.org

From CIDECI-UNITIERRA,

Chiapas, October 2016

For the Full Reconstitution of Our Peoples

Never Again a Mexico Without Us

National Indigenous Congress

Zapatista Army for National Liberation

CNI/EZLN: The Time Has Come

This communique was originally published by [Enlace Zapatista](#).



To To the People of Mexico,
To the Peoples of the World,
To the Media,
To the National and International Sixth,

We send our urgent word to the world from the Constitutive Assembly for the Indigenous Governing Council, where we met as peoples, communities, nations, and tribes of the National Indigenous Congress: Apache, Amuzgo, Chatino, Chichimeca, Chinanteco, Chol, Chontal of Oaxaca, Chontal of Tabasco, Coca, Cuicateco, Mestizo, Hñähñü, Ñathö, Ñuhhü, Ikoots, Kumiai, Lakota, Mam, Matlazinca, Maya, Mayo, Mazahua, Mazateco, Me`phaa, Mixe, Mixe-Popoluca, Mixteco, Mochó, Nahuatl or Mexicano, Nayeri, Popoluca, Purépecha, Q´anjob´al, Rarámuri, Tének, Tepehua, Tlahuica, Tohono Odham, Tojolabal, Totonaco, Triqui, Tseltal, Tsotsil, Wixárika, Xi´iuy, Yaqui, Binniza, Zoque, Akimel O´otham, and Comkaac.

THE WAR THAT WE LIVE AND CONFRONT

We find ourselves in a very serious moment of violence, fear, mourning, and rage due to the intensification of the capitalist war against everyone, everywhere throughout the national territory. We see the murder of women for being women, of children for being children, of whole peoples for being peoples.

The political class has dedicated itself to turning the State into a corporation that sells off the land of the ordinary peoples, campesinos, and city dwellers, that sells people as if they were just another commodity to kill and bury like raw material for the drug cartels, that

sells people to capitalist businesses that exploit them until they are sick or dead, or that sells them off in parts to the illegal organ market.

Then there is the pain of the families of the disappeared and their decision to find their loved ones despite the fact that the government is determined for them not to, because there they will also find the rot that rules this country.

This is the destiny that those above have built for us, bent on the destruction of the social fabric—what allows us to recognize ourselves as peoples, nations, tribes, barrios, neighborhoods, and families—in order to keep us isolated and alone in our desolation as they consolidate the appropriation of entire territories in the mountains, valleys, coasts, and cities.

This is the destruction that we have not only denounced but confronted for the past 20 years and which in a large part of the country is evolving into open war carried out by criminal corporations which act in shameless complicity with all branches of the bad government and with all of the political parties and institutions. Together they constitute the power of above and provoke revulsion in millions of Mexicans in the countryside and the city.

In the midst of this revulsion they continue to tell us to vote for them, to believe in the power from above, to let them continue to design and impose our destiny.

On that path we see only an expanding war, a horizon of death and destruction for our lands, our families, and our lives, and the absolute certainty that this will only get worse—much worse—for everyone.

OUR WAGER

We reiterate that only through resistance and rebellion have we found possible paths by which we can continue to live and through which we find not only a way to survive the war of money against humanity and against our Mother Earth, but also the path to our rebirth along with that of every seed we sow and every dream and every hope that now materializes across large regions in autonomous forms of security, communication, and self-government for the protection and defense of our territories. In this regard there is no other path than the one walked below. Above we have no path; that path is theirs and we are mere obstacles.

These sole alternative paths, born in the struggle of our peoples, are found in the indigenous geographies throughout all of our Mexico and which together make up the National Indigenous Congress. We have decided not to wait for the inevitable disaster brought by the capitalist hitmen that govern us, but to go on the offensive and convert our hope into an

Indigenous Governing Council for Mexico which stakes its claim on life from below and to the anticapitalist left, which is secular, and which responds to the seven principles of Rule by Obeying as our moral pledge.

No demand of our peoples, no determination and exercise of autonomy, no hope made into reality has ever corresponded to the electoral ways and times that the powerful call "democracy". Given that, we intend not only to wrest back from them our destiny which they have stolen and spoiled, but also to dismantle the rotten power that is killing our peoples and our mother earth. For that task, the only cracks we have found that have liberated consciences and territories, giving comfort and hope, are resistance and rebellion.

By agreement of this constitutive assembly of the Indigenous Governing Council [CIG when abbreviated in Spanish], we have decided to name as spokesperson our compañera María de Jesús Patricio Martínez of the Nahuatl people, whose name we will seek to place on the electoral ballot for the Mexican presidency in 2018 and who will be the carrier of the word of the peoples who make up the CIG, which in turn is highly representative of the indigenous geography of our country.

So then, we do not seek to administer power; we want to dismantle it from within the cracks from which we know we are able.

OUR CALL

We trust in the dignity and honesty of those who struggle: teachers, students, campesinos, workers, and day laborers, and we want to deepen the cracks that each of them has forged, dismantling power from above from the smallest level to the largest. We want to make so many cracks that they become our honest and anticapitalist government.

We call on the thousands of Mexicans who have stopped counting their dead and disappeared and who, with grief and suffering, have raised their fists and risked their own lives to charge forward without fear of the size of the enemy, and have seen that there are indeed paths but that they have been hidden by corruption, repression, disrespect, and exploitation.

We call on those who believe in themselves, who believe in the compañero at their side, who believe in their history and their future: we call on them to not be afraid to do something new, as this is the only path that gives us certainty in the steps we take.

Our call is to organize ourselves in every corner of the country, to gather the necessary elements for the Indigenous Governing Council and our spokeswoman to be registered as an independent candidate for the presidency of this country and, yes, to crash the party of

those above which is based on our death and make it our own, based on dignity, organization, and the construction of a new country and a new world.

We convoke all sectors of society to be attentive to the steps decided and defined by the Indigenous Governing Council, through our spokeswoman, to not give in, to not sell out, and to neither stray nor tire from the task of carving the arrow that will carry the offensive of all of the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, organized or not, straight toward the true enemy.

From CIDECI-UNITIERRA, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas

May 28, 2017

For the Full Reconstitution of Our Peoples

Never Again a Mexico Without Us

National Indigenous Congress

Zapatista Army for National Liberation

Alvaro Reyes: Zapatismo: Other Geographies Circa the “End of the World”

Originally Published by [Society and Space](#).



Introduction: the walking dead

As daylight broke across the Southeastern Mexican state of Chiapas on 21 December 2012, news cameras fixated on the throngs of tourists that had overtaken the state to witness the ‘end of the world’ purportedly predicted by the ancient Maya. Yet in the cities of Altamirano, Palenque, Las Margaritas, Ocosingo, and San Cristóbal de las Casas reports began to emerge of unusual activity: groups of indigenous people constructing makeshift wood stages atop the back of pickup trucks. Hours later 45 000 masked members of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), all of them Chol, Tzeltal, Mam, Tojolobal, Zoque, and Tzotzil Mayan indigenous peoples, descended on these city centers in perfectly ordered columns. Bystanders stood incredulously in front of the improvised stages waiting for the masked Mayans to make a statement of some sort, but the Zapatistas marched by the thousands across the stages in chilling silence with their left fists in the air. In a matter of hours, the Zapatista contingent had left the city centers in the same silence and with the same much-commented-upon discipline with which they had arrived, leaving many wondering what this—the largest march in the history of Chiapas and the largest mobilization of Zapatistas ever seen—was all about. Late that evening, an equally cryptic five-line message appeared on the EZLN’s website. Signed by *Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos* for the General Command of the EZLN, it read:

“ To Whom It May Concern: Did you hear that?

That is the sound of your world crumbling.

That is the sound of our world resurging.

The day that was day was night.

And night shall be the day that will be day” (EZLN, 2012a, my translation).

In a communiqué a few days later, the Zapatistas would further aid us in unraveling the mystery surrounding their actions of 21 December 2012, stating that what others had mistaken for prophecy (that is, ‘the end of the world’), they had set out to make promise (that is, ending *this* world) (EZLN, 2012b).

Amazingly, just months before their massive ‘End of the World’ march, the EZLN had been declared all but dead by a number of sectors of Mexican society. In this paper I will attempt to fill a lacuna in Anglophone academic discourse by offering a comprehensive analysis of the events surrounding both the ‘death’ and ‘resurgence’ of the EZLN. The paper is divided into two major sections. The first, titled “The death of the EZLN? Or the death of Mexico?” begins with an examination of the way in which, after an explicitly ‘anticapitalist’ reorientation of its political strategy in the early to mid-2000s, the EZLN became radically isolated from the ‘progressive’ and institutional left in Mexican society and was effectively declared dead by the Mexican government. In order to understand the epochal societal shifts that made the EZLN’s strategic reorientation necessary, I examine the contemporary decomposition of Mexico that began with the evisceration of communal land tenure and Article 27 of the Mexican constitution, opening it to the destructive dynamics of neoliberal reterritorialization. Having laid out the end of the social contract that had made ‘the people of Mexico’ a reality, I end this first section by outlining the contemporary growth of legal exceptionality in Mexico and of political rule through the terror that now engulfs the country with the full complicity of the entire Mexican political class. In the second major section of this paper, “Life after death: how the EZLN proposes to build postcapitalism”, I develop three major points through a close reading of Zapatista texts and a firsthand account of contemporary Zapatista political institutions. First, I show that the EZLN, through a systematic analysis of the structural crisis of capitalism, both foresaw and explained the situation that now grips Mexico and increasingly, according to the Zapatistas, the rest of the world. Second, I analyze the way that the EZLN, by adding new dimensions to the ‘geometry’ of political struggle, is able to conceptualize a ‘world’ in the here and now beyond that of neoliberal capitalism, potentially freeing political thought and action far beyond Chiapas from the mutually reinforcing dead ends of either reviving neoliberal capitalism or falling into apocalyptic despair. Finally, through a brief personal narrative of my own experience in 2013 as a student of what the Zapatistas termed their ‘Little School’, I examine the ways in which the Zapatistas’ political strategy, based on the construction of

alternative institutionality, has been intimately tied to the practices of building what they call 'another geography'. This construction of new nonseparatist territorial practices has today been taken up by other organizations across Mexico and increasingly overlaps and contradicts the territories of neoliberal calculation and destruction. I argue that these Zapatista 'other geographies' might serve as concrete examples of a viable anticapitalist spatial strategy and therefore must be taken far more seriously than they have been by the left generally and critical geography more specifically.

Section I: the death of the EZLN? Or the death of Mexico?

A Chronicle of a death foretold

The EZLN is today still most widely known for its 1 January 1994 uprising against the Mexican government. Those twelve days of armed action turned out to be one of the first volleys in what would become a generalized region-wide wave of resistance against the ever-deepening consolidation of an incredibly unstable and brutal neoliberal project in Latin America (Reyes, 2012). The EZLN's uprising soon gave way to negotiations with the Mexican government and the then ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)—negotiations that from the very beginning centered on the EZLN's demand for the reintroduction of the *de jure* protection of collective land tenure that had been eviscerated as a condition of Mexico's entry into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Through these negotiations the EZLN's struggle became a central rallying point for a wide panoply of opponents of neoliberal 'reform' in Mexico, from radical unions to debtors' organizations, from indigenous and peasant organizations to the progressive elements of Mexico's 'left of center' Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD).

In order to achieve this, the Zapatistas chose to develop (at least publicly) a discursive strategy centered on the voice and image of Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos. In formulations that suggestively parallel Ernesto Laclau's (1996) analysis regarding the political centrality of the "empty signifier", the Zapatistas describe their discursive strategy as an attempt to construct the figure of 'Marcos' as a placeholder for the desires of the widest swath of Mexican society possible. As the EZLN notes, at that time there was a 'Marcos' for every occasion and every political persuasion (EZLN, 2014a). Mexican society took up this figure as their own, as could be evidenced by the highly popular refrain of "*Todos somos Marcos*". This was a phrase that had the virtue of illustrating precisely the political potential of the empty signifier, in that in Spanish it simultaneously denotes this figure's power to unite ("We are all Marcos") and premises that space of unity on radical social dispersal ("Marcos is all of us"). The Zapatistas hoped, then, that through this empty

signifier an extremely fragmented Mexican 'civil society' might unite against the common neoliberal enemy embodied by the PRI. The figure of 'Marcos' was thus the placeholder for the 'counter-hegemony of the diverse' (page 402) that would seek not so much to impose 'a revolution' as to coordinate the forces inside and outside of the state in order to build a space of egalitarian articulation (Rabasa, 1997). This would be a 'radical democracy' (page 418) where the direction and purpose of that future revolution might be disputed by Mexican 'civil society' (Rabasa, 1997). Importantly, through this discursive strategy, the EZLN's influence at the time was such that, as the Mexican analyst Luis Hernández Navarro (2013) reminds us, its uprising and subsequent opposition was the single largest (but not the only) reason for the eventual fall of the PRI's seventy-year dictatorship.

Salinas de Gortari and his PRI successors, for their part, eschewed serious negotiation with the EZLN and sought instead to isolate the EZLN through a counterinsurgency plan detailed in the Mexican Secretary of Defense's *Plan de Campaña Chiapas 94* that included the formation of paramilitary organizations in Zapatista-influenced regions, as well as the targeted use of government subsidies to divide Zapatista communities.(1)

In 2001, with the PRI out of presidential office for the first time in seventy years, the Zapatistas took their initiative for Constitutional Reforms on Indigenous Rights and Culture across Mexico in what they termed 'The march of the color of the earth'. Millions of Mexicans, with representatives from fifty-six of Mexico's indigenous peoples and more than a few internationals, came out in an overwhelming show of support for this new initiative. The march culminated on 11 March 2001, with over a million Zapatista supporters filling Mexico City's enormous *Zócalo*. The magnitude of support for the event generated widespread expectation that at least some versions of the Zapatistas' proposed reforms would be approved by the Mexican legislature and signed by then President Vicente Fox. Despite widespread support for their initiative, the Zapatistas' efforts at constitutional reform met with utter failure as all three major political parties in the Mexican senate—the right-wing National Action Party (PAN), the center-right PRI, and, most surprisingly, the institutional 'left' represented by the PRD—joined together to oppose the EZLN's constitutional reforms. Thus, after years of (at least outwardly) crafting a national counterhegemonic project, what had been the Zapatistas' discursive strategy up until that point reached an obvious dead end. Many analysts believed at the time that the EZLN would simply return to Chiapas and limit its activities to its communities of influence while leaving questions of national political power to others. More specifically, much of the 'progressive' left in Mexico imagined that the EZLN would support the growing strength of the electoral left embodied in the PRD—a party that many in Mexico imagined would come to power in direct parallel to the rise of counterhegemonic 'progressive governments' throughout the rest of Latin America. Much to their dismay, the EZLN instead released the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle on 25 June 2005, explicitly severing all ties to the entire Mexican political class. Most surprisingly, it definitively and harshly distanced itself from

the presidential campaign of the PRD's Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), noting that it could not and would not partake in the 'change' that the electoral left imagined he embodied. The EZLN reasoned that the PRD had explicitly worked to defeat the Zapatistas' initiative on constitutional reforms, that PRD officials (the great majority of them ex-PRI operatives) had partaken in counterinsurgent actions against the Zapatistas, and most importantly, that the PRD and AMLO had explicitly made their peace with the international neoliberal order (EZLN, 2005a). AMLO had praised the PAN's Vicente Fox for having achieved what he termed 'macroeconomic equilibrium' (specifically referring to the neoliberal axioms of reduced deficit spending and low inflation) for Mexico. AMLO vowed to maintain that 'equilibrium' and asserted that "State action does not suffocate the [private] initiative of civil society" (Petrich, 2011). Thanks to documents obtained by Wikileaks, we know such statements had their desired effect, if only with the US embassy in Mexico. In an aptly titled cable, "AMLO: Apocalypse Not", US ambassador Tony Garza concluded that AMLO was "putting the correct pieces into place" and that among its proposed cabinet members, "none of them are radicals." In fact, subsequent US embassy cables go on to speculate that much of AMLO's 'populism' was simply 'campaign rhetoric', and that when faced with proposals emanating from within left sectors of Mexico's political class, the embassy reassured Washington, "We don't think AMLO will support these more radical ideas" (Petrich, 2011, page 2).

Yet the Zapatistas did not read the PRD's political betrayal as an attack solely on them, nor as the result of the personal failings of AMLO. As would later become evident, they saw their predicament as a clear sign of the arrival of a new objective political situation in Mexico as a whole. On the basis of what they had learned over previous years, they stated, "we rose up against a national power only to realize that that power no longer exists ... what exists is a global power that produces uneven dominations in different locations, what we are up against is finance capital and speculation" (*Zapatista* 1999). This realization, then, required a new strategic outlook for Zapatismo, one whose tone was captured by Subcomandante Marcos when he stated, "we no longer make the distinctions we once made [among the Mexican political class], between those who are bad and those who are better. No, they are all the same" (Castellanos, 2008, page 54).

As a direct contestation to the political class, the Zapatistas set out in 2006 on what they called 'the other campaign'. This was neither an initiative for any of the existing presidential candidates nor a call for abstention. Rather, it was a campaign to highlight the need to build an explicitly anticapitalist organization across Mexico that would in effect create what they called 'another politics' and thus act as a counterforce to the alliance of the political class and capitalism. The Zapatistas predicted that many of their former supporters would quickly turn on them and staunchly defend the presidential candidacy of AMLO and electoralism more generally. In fact, they were so certain of this outcome that they wrote a preemptive '(non)farewell' letter addressed to 'civil society' attempting to explain their

position and, in a sense, publicly foretelling their impending death (EZLN, 2005b). Their intuition proved correct: Mexico's institutional left was flabbergasted, and reactions to the EZLN's new initiatives were swift and often vicious. The isolation of the EZLN from the institutional left would only become more severe when, after what was almost certainly electoral fraud during the 2006 presidential election (Díaz-Polanco, 2012)—the mechanics of which were detailed and roundly denounced by Subcomandante Marcos live on radio the day after the election(2)—some on the electoral left went so far as to tie the EZLN's critique to AMLO defeat (Rodríguez Araujo, 2006). Subsequently, coverage of the EZLN and EZLN communiqués all but disappeared from Mexico's 'progressive' press. From that point on, it was not uncommon to encounter among the institutional left and its progressive allies (especially in Mexico City), the idea that "the EZLN no longer exist[ed]." (3)

Upon assuming the presidency in December of 2006, Felipe Calderón of the right-wing PAN quickly seized upon the EZLN's political isolation. Calderón designated a long-time PAN operative, the nonindigenous Luis H Álvarez, as Director of the Office of Indigenous Development. Álvarez by his own account spent much of his initial years in this post trying to mount what he termed a 'peaceful' counterinsurgency strategy in Chiapas. Álvarez's strategy in effect served as an intensification of the counterinsurgency strategy Plan Chiapas 94. By directing federal subsidies toward Zapatista communities that would agree to leave the organization (and thereby abandon its policy of not accepting government money), Álvarez hoped to pull the EZLN base away from its leadership, a strategy that by 2012 Álvarez claimed had been a resounding success.

With the release of Álvarez's book *Indigenous Heart: Struggle and Hope of the Original Peoples of Mexico* in June 2012, the narrative of the supposed demise of the EZLN that circulated within the political class reached its peak (only a few months before the Zapatistas' thunderous reappearance on 21 December 2012). The book release became a celebration and a funeral of sorts, organized in order to show the Mexican nation the body of the defunct EZLN via live stream. Both Calderón and an ecstatic Álvarez openly reveled in the disappearance of the EZLN and personally took credit for resolving what they called the 'indigenous problem' in Chiapas. If the EZLN had, as Álvarez and Calderón claimed, in effect been killed off, the body of EZLN spokesperson and military strategist Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos stood in for the EZLN as a whole. According to Álvarez, reading aloud from his book, as Marcos languished in the throes of terminal lung cancer, he had, unbeknownst to the rest of the EZLN, approached the Mexican government for medical help that would save him. According to another story, circulated by the Al Jazeera News Network, Subcomandante Marcos was about to suffer what must certainly be the only fate worse than death for a Latin American guerrilla leader: he had accepted an offer to leave the EZLN and live out his life as a professor in a small town in upstate New York (Arsenault, 2011).(4)

In sum, for Mexico's traditional political class, its 'progressive' left, and many of their would-be international supporters, as of mid-2012 the Zapatistas and their spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos were as good as dead.

B. Neoliberal reterritorialization: the death of Mexico?

From the late 1980s to 2000 the PRI, still operating as a de facto state party, attempted to implement a series of structural reforms to privatize electricity, education, collectively held lands, and the national oil industry and thus erode the mechanisms of redistribution that had been established by the postrevolutionary constitution of 1917. This initial set of reforms was touted by the PRI, and more specifically by Carlos Salinas de Gortari, as the dawn of a bright new neoliberal era for Mexico.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, under the advisement of the World Bank and in preparation for the upcoming NAFTA, the burgeoning neoliberal establishment in Mexico viewed the collective forms of land tenure as *the* key impediment to foreign direct investment and 'economic growth'.⁽⁵⁾ These forms of inalienable, imprescriptible, and nontransferrable land tenure—*ejidos* and *bienes comunales*—had been protected by Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution. Article 27 had also granted agrarian communities rights over common-use lands and their resources, making all natural resources found in the subsoil property of the nation. Through changes to Article 27 that opened communal land to rent, sale, and use as collateral to obtain commercial credit, and through state programs such as PROCEDE⁽⁶⁾ providing economic subsidies in exchange for the individual 'certification' of collective lands (the first step in a process that it was hoped would end in private titles), the PRI took direct aim at what they viewed as the least 'income-yielding' sector of the Mexican economy.

If we take up the legal theorist Carl Schmitt's (2003) lesson that all political ideas imply a particular spatial order and vice versa, there is no single piece of legislation in postrevolutionary Mexico that embodies this precept as obviously as Article 27 of the Mexican constitution. The territorial reordering implied in attacks on *ejidal* and communal land that were frequently discussed in terms of simple 'economic' expediency were in fact nothing short of a direct attack on the postrevolutionary political status quo that had tenuously reigned in Mexico since 1917.

Postrevolutionary Mexico's capitalist fractions had hoped to contain the threat of radical forces such as those of Emiliano Zapata's *Ejército Libertador del Sur* by creating a territorial order that would provide the material and symbolic suture between capitalist economic growth, the institutions of state mediation, and the majority of the Mexican people understood as peasant laborers. They did this by placing the *ejido* (and the productive labor therein) at the very center of the postrevolutionary juridical order. In effect, I think we must

understand Article 27 as the space and juridical ground upon which the constitutional entity of 'the Mexican people' found its material existence beyond that of an abstract existential entity, beyond that of an 'identity'. Article 27 contained the specific spatial ordering in which 'the people' (be they capitalists or Zapatistas) could (co)exist in a clearly hierarchical but (potentially) redistributionist truce.

In this way, Mexico prefigured in an agricultural context what Antonio Negri calls the 'constitutions of labor' formed in the factory-centered societies of Europe and the United States after the Second World War. In these societies, labor (in the case of Mexico, agrarian labor) is recognized as both the basis of social valorization and "the source of institutional and constitutional structures" (Negri, 1994).(7) Importantly, then, when all three major political parties struck down the EZLN's initiative to revive Article 27 through the Constitutional Reforms on Indigenous Rights and Culture, this was not due solely to the fact that the Mexican political class desired to exclude the indigenous peoples of Mexico from 'the Mexican people'. It was also due to the far more novel situation in which the Mexican political class, through its complete abandonment of the territorial ordering implied in Article 27, was now willing to openly acknowledge that the breakdown of the postrevolutionary mediational state was in fact irreversible. The actions of the political class were alerting all of Mexico (although few outside of the EZLN seemed to notice) to the fact that the death of 'the Mexican people' had already taken place, and that no one can be included or excluded from something that no longer exists.

C. Terror as strategy

By the mid-2000s, and despite enormous efforts such as PROCEDE and cuts to agricultural subsidies, it became clear that the great majority of collective landholders in Mexico refused to give up their collective titles, preferring even to rent out their land in order to generate income rather than modify its collective character (de Ita, 2006). This led actors within the World Bank, the ever-interventionist community of US military analysts, and the Mexican political class to assert that before further neoliberal reforms could succeed, the longstanding efforts to dismantle collective land tenure would have to be redoubled (Bessi and Navarro, 2014; World Bank, 2001).

At the very moment when the Mexican state was reinforcing its efforts to cut back social programs for, and mediational presence in, agricultural communities, an increasingly unprotected workforce was coming into contact with the transnational drug economy. That burgeoning economy not only sought to use Mexico as a transportation corridor for South American cocaine headed for the US, but also looked to amass the land, workforce, and transportation infrastructure necessary to make Mexico the fastest growing producer and supplier of heroin and methamphetamines for US consumption (Watt and Zepeda, 2012, pages 76-83). Thus, the reterritorialization implicit in the changes to Article 27 abutted

and abetted the territorial reorganization required by the increasing competition for land, transportation routes, and profits within the illicit drug trade.

Although competition for the high-yielding speculative profits of this illicit trade are bound to involve heightened levels of violence, many today believe that Calderón's policy response to the growth of the drug trade—the rollout of a full-blown 'war on drugs'—did not arise from the existence or nature of the drug trade itself. As the academic and military affairs analyst Carlos Fazio hypothesizes, Calderón, in conjunction with the US State Department, circulated the notion that the illicit drug trade amounted to a 'narco-insurgency', a rogue 'parallel state' in the making. This narrative, Fazio believes, served to propagate the idea that the widespread militarization of Mexican society was absolutely necessary in order to neutralize the threat from what Calderón called a burgeoning 'internal enemy' (Fazio, 2013). The danger posed by this 'internal enemy' in turn justified the nullification of constitutional measures that prohibited the Mexican military from fulfilling domestic police functions, as well as the implicit cancellation of civil liberties and due process this would imply on a daily basis in the country's streets. For Fazio (2013, pages 371-406) then, this 'war' would necessarily amount to nothing less than the de facto imposition of a 'state of exception' in which as Giorgio Agamben (2005) explains, the application of the norm is suspended, "while the law remains in force" (page 31).

Notably, after Calderón's declaration of a war on drugs and the consolidation of a state of exception, the drug trade in Mexico actually flourished. Consider, for example, the fact that between 2006 and 2012 the production of heroin and marijuana grew and the production of methamphetamines absolutely exploded, while at the same time fewer poppy fields and marijuana plants were destroyed and seizures of cocaine went down. Consequently, six years after Calderón's war on drugs began, Mexico had become the single largest point of production and transportation for the illicit drug trade in the Americas (Hernández, 2013a).

If the growing state of exception seemed to leave the drug trade untouched, it did result in what *Le Monde* called "the most deadly conflict on the planet in the last few years": between 80 000 and 150 000 dead, approximately 30 000 more disappeared, and some 1.5 million people forcibly displaced (Hernández, 2013a, pages 9-13). As Melissa Wright has pointed out, rather than provoking outrage, these grim statistics seemed to have become the very foundation of the Mexican state's new efforts at legitimation. That is, given its inability to provide the redistributive benefits of past decades, the new Mexican state began to redefine social progress by shifting from a discourse of national development to that of national 'security'. Within this new discourse of security, the Mexican state now functions under the assumption that all those killed in drug-related violence should be presumed elements of the 'narco-insurgency'. Therefore, the worse these drug-related statistics become, the greater the proof that the Mexican state has fulfilled its duty to protect the population from this growing internal threat (Wright, 2011, pages 285-298).

Given this apparent shift from the discourse of development to that of security, Fazio and the Mexican sociologist Raquel Gutierrez (among others) believe it is a mistake to simply discount the Mexican state's war on drugs as a failure. These analysts believe that in addition to providing the basis for a new form of state legitimation, this 'war' is best understood as a direct response to the antineoliberal resistance that immediately preceded the war on drugs. It is important to remember that the package of neoliberal reforms from the late 1980s onwards was met with an uncoordinated yet unprecedented wave of resistance across Mexico (Gilly et al, 2006). Although this is rarely acknowledged, this wave of antineoliberal resistance or 'generalized social insubordination' to neoliberalism proved to be the determining political factor in Mexico for years to come, just as in the rest of Latin America (Gutierrez Aguilar, 2005; Reyes, 2012). In fact, these scholars argue that the actions of the Mexican political class in the last two decades can be understood only when viewed as a counteroffensive to this resistance. More specifically, these analysts claim that the purpose of this war on drugs was to neutralize these struggles in three very specific ways. First, the inordinate amount of violence this 'war' unleashed allowed the Mexican political class to conjoin politics and terror—to practice politics *as* terror—which in turn created a sense of fear and social isolation among Mexico's residents and undermined the web of alternative socialities that had subtended antineoliberal resistance (Fazio, 2013, pages 377–380). Second, the social fragmentation produced by the generalization of fear in the war on drugs had the 'benefit' of breaking down Mexican society's capacity to come to a general understanding of what was actually taking place (of what was what, and who was who). As Gutierrez explains, this in turn opened the possibility that instead of the political 'cooptation' that had characterized the counterinsurgency practices of the PRI dictatorship, today's counterinsurgency (sans redistributionary mechanisms) might instead consist of sowing 'confusion' so that the very reasons for struggle are irretrievably lost, even to social movements themselves (Brighenti, 2013). Finally, on the ground across Mexico, the war on drugs allowed for coordinated action of state and paramilitary forces—under the orders of the political class, drug cartels, and transnational corporations—against community-level resistance (Lopez y Rivas, 2014). As a perfect illustration of Gutierrez's point regarding the political deployment of confusion, these forces are often presented to the public by state officials and the media as grassroots community movements that have arisen against the power of drug cartels.

Given the effects of these strategies, the political class now felt prepared to square the macabre circle of neoliberal policy in Mexico. In December 2012, after twelve years of absence, the PRI, through Enrique Peña Nieto, returned to the presidency. In what has been referred to as a 'lightning' strategy, and counting on the weakening of antineoliberal resistance, Peña Nieto once again presented the longstanding proposals for the privatization of oil, education, and health care, the further evisceration of protection of collective land tenure, the elimination of the progressive elements of the federal tax code, and the deregulation of labor law. Amidst the giddiness of a reactivated neoliberal offensive (as well

as an unmentioned 25 000 drug- war-related deaths during his first year in office), *TIME* magazine concluded Peña Nieto and this package of reforms were poised to 'save Mexico' (Crowley and Mascareñas, 2014). This time around, and unlike in the mid-1990s, the Mexican political class as a whole stood shoulder to shoulder with the core of PRI policy. In fact, within weeks of the PRI's return to the presidency, all three major political parties (PAN, PRI, and PRD) signed the 'national pact for Mexico'. The 'national pact' was an outline agreement of how these parties would cooperate in the Mexican legislature and senate to finally achieve the neoliberal reforms that had been slowed by the resistance of the past decades. For many, the PRD's participation in Peña Nieto's neoliberal 'pact' made it painfully clear where the left's electoralist strategy in Mexico had led: in the words of PRD founder Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, the PRD and the electoral left in Mexico as a whole had over the last two decades "accomplished everything [they had] set out to oppose" (Villamil, 2013, page 32).

Importantly then, the Mexico that the EZLN marched 'back' into on 21 December 2012 was not the same country. Rather, the tendencies toward national decomposition pointed out long ago by the EZLN had clearly taken a devastating toll on Mexican society. As became clear to the rest of the world through the much-publicized case of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero (Gibler, 2015), the consequences of this social disintegration have been grave: the death of 'the Mexican people', the generalization of terror, the weakening of antineoliberal resistance, a fully complicit institutional left, and tens of thousands of dead and disappeared. Given this context, it is no exaggeration to suggest that, in its rush to bury the Zapatistas, the 'progressive' left neglected to ask itself if throughout those same years it was not Mexico itself that was slowly dying.

Section II: life after death: how the EZLN proposes to build postcapitalism

A. The world that is crumbling

Despite the disastrous role of the electoral left in both legislating and legitimating neoliberalism in Mexico, as biting summarized by Muñoz Ledo above, there exist few systemic accounts (that is, accounts that move beyond personalist narratives of 'greed' and 'betrayal') that offer us a comprehensive explanatory framework for the contemporary decomposition of Mexico and the changing structural role of the state and political class within that decomposition. Lacking this systemic account, a number of theorists have turned their attention to the Zapatistas' break with the Mexican political class and their attempts at

building 'another politics', and concluded that these amount to nothing more than a sectarian 'antipolitical' drift that has led to the 'failure' of Zapatista initiatives and to their increasing political irrelevance (Almeyra, 2014; Mondonesi, 2014; Wilson, 2014). It should be noted here that these supposed EZLN shortcomings are often explained in terms of the personal failings (that is, the intransigence, sectarianism, and envy) of its (former) spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos (Almeyra, 2014; Rodriguez Araujo, 2008).

Yet, in sharp contrast to these analyses, after the failure of their initiative on constitutional reforms, the Zapatistas set out on an extensive evaluation of contemporary capitalism that in many ways foresaw the destructive dynamics that today grip Mexico and, increasingly, the rest of the world. In order to examine the Zapatistas' account of these dynamics, we might first ask what it is that they meant in their 21 December 2012 message that 'your world' is 'crumbling'. Examination of the Zapatistas' extensive literature on this topic makes evident that for them, the world that is crumbling is that of capitalism. In their description of the crumbling of this world, the Zapatistas ask us to imagine capitalism as a building of sorts. In the past, those on top of this world would add floors to the building—what Marx would have referred to as the expanding 'self-valorization of value' (Marx, 1976), or what is often erroneously referred to as 'growth'. This is a process made possible through the exploitation, dispossession, repression, and disvalorization of those below—what the EZLN refers to as 'the four wheels of capitalism' (EZLN, 2013). This allowed those on top to further distinguish themselves, while creating the possibility (however remote) that those below (at least those willing to give in to the social relations of the value form) might move up a floor (most often through redistributive state action).

Today, as the Zapatistas explain, within neoliberal globalization the four wheels of capitalism continue on with a vengeance, but have come unhinged from the capitalist motor that previously drove the construction of new floors (EZLN, 2013). Absent the capacity to build new floors (to rise on the back of the expansion of the self-valorization of value), those on the top of the capitalist world building have little choice but to systematically turn to 'speculation' (that is, the attempt to stay on top through profitability minus value expansion) (EZLN, 2014a). According to the Zapatistas, these 'speculative' attempts of those at the top to maintain their elevated positions can only come at the cost of the short-sighted and disastrous demolition of the floors and building foundations below them (EZLN, 2013). Consequently, the social relations, territories, and institutions dependent on the expansive dynamic of the self-valorization of value—perhaps most importantly, the state—are completely refunctionalized. From this perspective, political spaces (that is, those spaces between state and civil society), which previously served as sites for mediation, deliberation, and representation, today are reduced to guaranteeing immediate corporate profitability. Lacking the material with which to mediate social conflict (that is, growing self-valorizing value) that in previous eras might have allowed for redistribution and some dialectic of demand and reform, the state now becomes the central machine for demolition, for

unilateral dispossession and repression (the cause of the dynamics of ‘exceptionality’ highlighted by Fazio above). Thus, the Zapatistas claim that the era in which capital and the state could uphold even a semblance of peace and stability is over (EZLN, 2014a).

Given this refunctionalization of the state, the problem for Mexico under the “reign of speculation” (that is, neoliberal globalization), according to the Zapatistas, is not “that the political system has links to organized crime, to narcotrafficking, to attacks, aggressions, rapes, beatings, imprisonments, disappearances, and murders”, but rather “that all of this today constitutes its essence” (EZLN, 2014b, no page number). The Italian journalist Roberto Saviano offers a strikingly parallel insight in his 2013 foreword to Anabel Hernández’s *Narcoland*. Saviano notes that too often the cataclysmic violence that Mexico faces has been minimized and misunderstood by attributing it to a “mafia that has transformed itself into a [transnational] capitalist enterprise”, effectively coopting the Mexican state. For Saviano, however (as well as for the Zapatistas), this perspective entirely misses the point that in the era of speculation “[transnational] capitalism has transformed itself into a mafia”, effectively creating a world in which political economy and criminal economy are but one and the same (Hernández, 2013b, pages viii–x). According to the Zapatistas, then, the problem is not that states have disappeared but rather that they have been entirely remade as nodes of a single global network of contemporary ‘mafia capitalism’ [what the EZLN calls ‘the empire of money’].

I think we must understand three important points that follow from this Zapatista analysis. First, in sharp contrast to the analysis suggested in 2009 by the (now defunct) US Joint Forces Command (Debusmann, 2009), the Zapatistas in no way believe that Mexico is—or is on the verge of becoming—a ‘failed state’. For them Mexico is, rather, a paradigmatic example of a ‘successful’ contemporary capitalist ‘(non)national state’, with all the death, fragmentation, and destruction this entails (EZLN, 2005a). Second, the political class and the institutional left cannot simply stand above the refunctionalization of the state. Rather, if we assume that the left has historically had some relation to the egalitarian but that even the minimally redistributive mechanisms of the state have disappeared, there can by definition be no state-based left today. These positions, which the Zapatistas refer to as “above and to the left”, are simply attempts to enact what for them in today’s world is an “impossible geometry” (EZLN, 2005a, no page number). It would be far more accurate, they claim, to speak of the existence within state politics of a far-right, a right, and a moderate-right, all of which during the electoral cycle fight to appear under the banner of the ‘center’ (EZLN, 2005a). This helps us to understand why it is that (far beyond personal failings) those within the institutional left are constantly reduced to offering themselves as better managers of the very same demolition of the institutions and social relations required by contemporary capital [thus AMLO’s insistence on the need to maintain “macroeconomic equilibrium”] (EZLN, 2005a, no page number). Beyond Mexico, this analysis might also help us to understand how it is that counterhegemonic projects in the rest of Latin America—so

admired by the progressive left in Mexico—shifted from the construction of ‘socialism for the 21st century’ only a decade ago to propounding ‘Andean-Amazonian capitalism’ today, or from the idea of building ‘oil sovereignty’ via the ‘Bolivarian Revolution’ to pleading for the securitization of oil debts in the offices of Goldman Sachs (Rathbone and Schipani, 2014; Svampa and Stefanoni, 2007). Third, given the crumbling of the world above, there arises the necessity of rebuilding politics from outside of the state apparatus (what the Zapatistas call ‘another politics’). This necessity rises to the level of an unprecedented urgency given that the destructive and runaway character of contemporary capitalism, as described by the Zapatistas, presents the very real possibility that, as Mexican society can intuit from the experience of the last two decades, the entire building of capitalism itself may collapse, taking the conditions for social and biological life on Planet Earth along with it (EZLN, 2013).

B. The politics of changing worlds

As should be clear by now, the Zapatistas’ post-2001 conjunctural analysis of contemporary capitalism led them to conclude that the world up above was in fact crumbling and that, as they stated, “there is nothing that can be done up there” (EZLN, 2005a). They carefully avoided, however, promoting either some form of paralysis (that is, nothing can be done) or some form of automatism (that is, capitalism will disappear of its own accord). Rather, they insisted that even as the expansion of capitalist valorization was no longer a possibility, without concerted collective action the processes of exploitation, dispossession, repression, and disvalorization could continue indefinitely. Yet, if the Zapatistas believe that a politics ‘above and to the left’ is today an ‘impossible geometry’, the question still remains as to where in the social diagram they think their idea of ‘another politics’ might arise.

In order to understand the Zapatistas’ answer to this question, we must begin by highlighting their insistence, much like that of Karl Marx in his (1976) ‘idyllic proceedings’, that capitalism was not born of commodity production. Rather, as they state, “capitalism was born of the blood of our [indigenous] peoples and the millions of our brothers and sisters who died during the European invasion” (EZLN, 2014c). From its beginning, then, capitalism was made possible by that ‘dispossession’, ‘plunder’, and ‘invasion’ called ‘the conquest of the Americas’. This attempted conquest, the Zapatistas claim, initiated a ‘war of extermination’ against indigenous peoples that has lasted for more than 520 years, and has been characterized by “massacres, jail, death and more death” (National Indigenous Congress and EZLN, 2014, no page number). Thus, for the Zapatistas, capitalism has always been a two-sided affair: on one side the processes, institutions, and subjects associated with the expansion of the self-valorization of value (that is, the ‘world up above’); and on the other, a foundational and ever-present exceptionality, a permanent state of war, directed at the non-European ‘originary peoples’ of the world. By identifying this ‘global apartheid’ (EZLN, 2013) as the ever-present condition for the production of capitalist value, the

Zapatistas are able to see that although firmly *within* the world of capitalism, not all social subjects are *of* that world. By recovering this unique structural position (and note that this is not an identity or culture) of the ‘damned of the earth’ (Rodriguez Lascano, 2013) within capitalist modernity, the EZLN is able to further identify that below the network of transnational corporations, armies, and states that comprise the world of capitalist valorization, there exists a web of distinct social relations and structures of value that have been created by the always already walking dead subjects of capitalist modernity. Here, then, the Zapatistas are able to add coordinates to our contemporary ‘political geometry’: there is the dominant world of capitalist valorization ‘up above’, but there are simultaneously many worlds, immanent to the first, down below.

Having identified these new coordinates of above and below, the Zapatistas do not simply throw away the distinction between left and right. According to them, today these dualistic evaluations must be further complexified: everything must be examined within a quadrangular grid consisting simultaneously of left and right as well as above and below. On a conceptual level, this grid allows the Zapatistas to avoid falling into a series of traps latent within these more dualistic frameworks. First, by identifying both sides of the moving contradiction that is capitalism—that of capitalist valorization and that of a genocidal disvalorization—they avoid the trap of furthering the life of the former at the expense of those subject to the latter (that is, they avoid falling into the complicity of those above and to the left with racialized colonial and imperial projects). Second, as the world above crumbles and consequently expels large masses of people from its realm, this perspective opens the horizon of a politics beyond that of the attempted stabilization of that world (that is, the ‘impossible geometry’ of today’s institutional left). Third, the Zapatistas are able to recognize that there are many projects that would simply like to harness these other worlds below in order to gain entrance into the world above (that is, projects that might attempt to draw a bridge between the world below and the one above and to the right). Finally, from this perspective the Zapatistas can resist the temptation of believing that one can simply hide in the worlds below, as if it was possible to forget that the existence of the world above necessitates the destruction of these other worlds. This allows them to recognize as a mere chimera any strategy from below that presents itself as ‘beyond left and right’, thus seeking to jump over the necessity of ending capitalism (strategies that the Zapatistas might very well categorize as ‘below and to the right’).

Given this analysis, the Zapatistas conclude that only a politics ‘below and to the left’ might open the way beyond either apocalyptic despair or social democratic illusion. If for the Zapatistas the counterhegemonic strategy ‘above and to the left’ of ‘changing governments’ has been nullified by the neoliberal onslaught, their new political geometry helps clarify that politics today must be one of ‘changing worlds’ (EZLN, 2013). Concretely, instead of simply presuming the exteriority of the worlds below [as has been the depoliticizing tendency of the US-based academic discourse that goes by the name of ‘the decolonial’, see Rivera

Cusicanqui (2012)], the Zapatistas propose that the politics of changing worlds requires the harnessing of the structures of value and social relations that are present below for the construction of organizational forces that would make possible the definitive exteriorization of those worlds from the world of capitalism.

C. Other geographies: the Zapatista construction of new territorialities

On 5 August 2013, a matter of months after the EZLN's 'End of the World' march, I boarded an open-back three-ton truck headed toward Zapatista territory as one of some 7000 students who would attend the Zapatistas' 'Little School' over the next six months. Each student of the Little School was sent to one of the five zones of Zapatista territory and assigned a family and a 'guardian' responsible for our care and education. We were then further distributed among the forty autonomous municipalities and finally into the hundreds of Zapatista communities that constitute each of these municipalities. The Little School itself deserves far more analysis and attention than I can provide here; I will limit myself to a very preliminary description of what the Zapatistas shared through this event, with the specific goal of providing elements to better grasp the strategy the EZLN has followed given its analysis of contemporary capitalism as laid out above.

As we arrived at the Little School, each student was handed a packet of four Zapatista textbooks titled *Autonomous Government I and II*, *Women's Participation*, and *Autonomous Resistance*. These were not a series of directives from organizational leadership, but rather accounts from hundreds of community members from each Zapatista zone explaining their daily experiences of building another politics. These textbooks served not just as primers for students to learn the history of building self-government in each zone, but as an introduction to Zapatista areas of work that we would witness in person: education, healthcare, traditional medicine, and collective productive projects, the latter serving as the primary source of income at a local level. Each day we were methodically introduced to the schools, clinics, women's collectives, and fields where each of these work areas were carried out, and many students were able to sit in on local assemblies convoked in each community to plan our lessons. We then continued our education with zone-level courses where our Zapatista teachers detailed how each area of work we had witnessed was coordinated between the local communities (commissions), the municipal level (autonomous councils), and the zone (Good Government Councils). Here we also learned about municipal-level communal radio and video projects and, at the most expansive scale, zone-wide agroecological projects and commercial trade. All of this took place, at least in part, on the hundreds of thousands of acres of land recuperated by the EZLN in the 1994 uprising.

Through the Little School, what became apparent even in this brief glimpse into the intricacies of Zapatista autonomous institutional life was that the EZLN had for a long time followed what in the language of traditional Maoism we might call 'a two-legged strategy'.

If the Zapatistas had publicly attempted to help weld together a national counterhegemonic project through the empty signifier of 'Marcos' they had also, since the founding of their autonomous municipalities in late 1994, expended enormous energy on the parallel strategy of building 'dual power'—the creation of a set of institutions that stand as a direct alternative to the existing institutions of the state (Lenin, 1964).(8) It seems that once the EZLN had concluded that the crumbling of the world above had obliterated the already tenuous tie between the counterhegemonic and the antisystemic— thus making the building of a project below and to the left an immediate necessity—its public discursive strategy became superfluous (something that might help explain why, on 25 May 2014, the figure of 'Marcos' was officially declared 'dead' by the very man behind that figure, now appearing in perfect health under the name of *Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano*). Hence its previously internal work, now solidified by two decades of experience, was brought to the fore as a concrete existing example of a strategic anticapitalist alternative for the left as whole.

Yet, even the Leninist concept of 'dual power' or the parallel Maoist strategy of 'building red bases' ultimately proves inadequate to describe the Zapatista strategy. Both these ideas leave open the possibility that, even as their alternative institutions build mechanisms for the contestation of power, they depend on (and ultimately seek) the same single social substance of power as that of the state. In other words, from the ambivalence inherent in these concepts it might appear that the Zapatistas have attempted to construct a demarcated subterritory "within the territorial logic of power commanded by the Mexican state" (Harvey, 2010, page 252). However, from the Zapatista's perspective, 'the territorial logic' of the Mexican state (the territory of the Mexican nation-state) no longer exists as such. The EZLN is acutely aware that in the latest wave of reterritorialization, Mexico's formerly 'national' territory (like its spaces of institutional mediation) has been fragmented into hundreds of pieces, each subordinated to the needs of multinational corporations, drug cartels, and local political mafias (that is, the needs of contemporary capitalism). This is the territorial consequence of the formation of what the Zapatistas refer to as a capitalist "non-nation state" (EZLN, 2005a), reflecting a process of fragmentation that is in their eyes irreversible.

Furthermore, for the Zapatistas, the entire purpose of the respatialization of struggle that we witnessed as students of the Little School—what they refer to as the construction of 'another geography'—is to break (with) the logic of power of the state. As they say, "we think if we conceptualize a change in the premise of power, the problem of power, starting from the fact that we don't want to take it, that could produce another kind of politics and another kind of political actor, other human beings that do politics differently than the politicians we have today across the political spectrum" (EZLN, 1997, page 69).

In the Zapatista project, then, 'territory' does not refer to the relations of a preexisting given subject to a given demarcated spatial extension as is imagined in the dominant

conceptions of state territory (Brighenti, 2010). Rather, the Zapatistas take on the construction of new communities, municipalities, and zones—and the nonstate forms of government associated with each—as mechanisms for the production of this new subject of politics. In this practice, territory is not some “neutral carrier” of a single substance of power, but rather “the material inscription of social relations” that can be radically transformed in order to create another power (Brighenti, 2010, page 57). We might best characterize the Zapatista strategy, then, as the construction of another structure of relation between a newly produced collective subject and space—a new ‘territoriality’ (Raffestin and Butler, 2012). This allows the Zapatistas to grow their idea and practice of territory quite literally side-by-side (in the same communities) with the overlapping and contradictory territories of neoliberal calculation and destruction. From this perspective we can understand why it is that the Zapatistas see their territory not as a lever with which to enter this world, but rather as a strategy in the here and now to exit it.

Finally, as Alain Badiou (2008) has noted, the affirmative project of Zapatismo (theorized here as the building ‘other geographies’ that will sustain the new political subject) has allowed the Zapatistas to avoid imagining the process of exiting this world as a civil war—a violent and cataclysmic clash between worlds. Given their affirmative project, the military elements of Zapatismo have been steadily subordinated to the role of defending their political innovations. The importance of this shift should not be underestimated when, given the disappearance of its mediational capacity, the state seems to want nothing more than the militarization of political conflict, a medium it understands and easily dominates.

Conclusion: create two, three, many other geographies

As the decomposition of the world above reaches new heights, and far from the cameras that previously fixated on ‘Marcos’, the Zapatistas’ strategy of building ‘other geographies’ has grown in influence—from the construction of the autonomous municipalities of Cherán and Santa María de Ostula (Michoacan) to the reconsolidation of Mexico’s National Indigenous Congress; from the recent declaration of twenty-two autonomous municipalities in the state of Guerrero to the explicitly Zapatista-inspired ‘democratic confederalism’ of today’s Kurdish movement.

It is important to note that, despite the inspirational perseverance of the EZLN, the long-term temporal framework implicit in the Zapatistas’ current political strategy renders unwarranted any conclusions about its ultimate success or failure. Yet the EZLN has undeniably added strategic coordinates to our contemporary ‘political geometry’, offering a distinct path to a global left that has tended to oscillate wildly and with little success

between counterhegemony (verticalization) and spontaneity (horizontalism) in its effort to 'change governments'. That is, our era has been marked on the one hand by the counterhegemonic strategies of either rebuilding sovereignty over the national territory or working within the 'nonspaces' of transnational capital, and on the other hand by the spontaneist practices of protest, occupation, and the establishment of temporary autonomous zones. But in none of these left-wing strategies does the possibility of an innovative territorial production actually appear, as all are ultimately attempts to occupy, reproduce, or at best redistribute the given territory. If, as Claude Raffestin claims, "the production of territories by means of territories is the operation of the creation and recreation of values" (Raffestin and Butler, 2012, page 131), how is it then that through the acceptance of the given territory these strategies will somehow overcome the values of capitalism? It is in this context that the singular contribution of the Zapatistas' efforts might best be appreciated. For them, it is only through the long and arduous process of enacting the explicitly antiseparatist yet simultaneously territorial strategy of building other geographies that a rather different left might today 'change worlds', abandoning capitalist value and in effect 'ending this world'. Although some within the left (in Mexico and globally) will find the Zapatistas' strategy an uncomfortable impediment to their counterhegemonic aspirations, and others may sincerely disagree with their analysis, it behooves no one to do so by simply wishing them dead. We must instead open the discussion, as they clearly have, of what it actually means to be on the left today.

Endnotes

(1) For leaked excerpts of the counterinsurgency plan against the EZLN in 1994, see Carlos Marin (1998).

(2) XENK Radio 620, "Política de Banqueta", Transcription here: <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2006/07/05/radio-insurgente-en-el-df-donde-se-da-informacion-sobre-las-elecciones-del-2-de-julio/>

(3) For just one first-hand account of the thesis of the EZLN's disappearance within Mexico's 'progressive' intellectual circles, see Raul Zibechi (2012).

(4) Even the Anglophone academic world was not untouched by the perception of the EZLN as a spent force. Take, for example, the widely circulated words of David Harvey, who, even half a decade after the Zapatistas' break with the Mexican political class, concluded (with thinly veiled disappointment) that the Zapatistas had given up on political revolution and instead decided to "remain a movement within the state" (2010, page 252).

(5) For a good summary of Article 27's provisions for the protection of common land tenure, see Ana de Ita (2006, page 149).

(6) The most important of these programs was PROCEDE (Certification Program for Ejidal Rights and Titling of Parcels). For an analysis of PROCEDE and its relation to the evisceration of Article 27, see de Ita (2006).

(7) For a similar argument regarding Article 27 of the Mexican constitution, see Gareth Williams (2011, pages 158-165).

(8) For a more detailed description of the Zapatista's alternative institutions, see Reyes and Kaufman (2012).

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Carlos Fazio: The Indigenous Council, Marichuy, and 2018

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In pre-electoral times and in the shadow of state fraud in the recent gubernatorial elections in Coahuila and the State of Mexico, the clock of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) and the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) marks the hour of the peoples in resistance: the hour of anticapitalist struggle, below and to the left, as a way to continue to build life which becomes word, learning, and collective agreements in the face of so much death, repression, and dispossession of territory and resources; of such destruction and barbarity.

In order to dismantle from below the power imposed by those above, the constitutive assembly of the Indigenous Governing Council (CIG), held in April at the University of the Earth in San Cristóbal de la Casas, Chiapas, took the first steps towards strengthening the fabric of collective organization of nations, tribes, and originary peoples in rebellion at a national scale. This effort takes the form of a self-governing body constituted as a single council which is coordinated to represent all the struggles and resistances that oppose the capitalist privatizing offensive that has militarized and paramilitarized the territories where they live.

More than 1,252 representatives of indigenous peoples and communities and 230 delegates from the EZLN participated in the assembly, and as a show of their maturity and awareness of the necessity of unity, decided to create a council as a collective form of government, a form of direct democracy in which the peoples are the protagonist. The Indigenous Council embodies a project of democratic, horizontal, assembly-based organization in which everyone [*todas y todos*] discusses and decides; as differentiated, of course, from the empty shell of liberal representative democracy which these days in Mexico displays the exhaustion of the electoral path.

In the short and medium term, the council seeks to curb the counterinsurgent war of expansionist, criminal, and militarized capitalism and to preserve the life of the peoples in resistance in the face of the violent dispossession of lands, forests, water, communal resources, and all that which is threatened by the megaprojects of the owners of money.

Definitively, this is about the defense of a mode of living and being, of relating to mother earth, which is threatened by mining and hydrocarbon projects, by the big energy corporations in their hydraulic, wind, and solar modes, and by water privatization and new infrastructure projects in the so-called Special Economic Zones (ZEE). These, with their epicenter in the isthmus of Tehuantepec, will open a new phase of accumulation through neocolonial displacement and dispossession of territories where forms of communal and ejidal property survive.

By decision of the assembly, an indigenous Nahua woman, a traditional medic and herbalist, María de Jesús Patricio (Marichuy), who is 54 years old and from Tuxpan, Jalisco, will be the spokesperson of the Indigenous Governing Council and candidate for the presidency of the Republic.

According to the racist and classist perspective of some turncoats on the clientelist, electoralist, and parliamentarist left who think that indigenous people should not interrupt those spaces considered the exclusive domain of a political class cum mafia, the unity of the left can only be achieved by attaching oneself, in subaltern and apolitical fashion, to a political party. Those who would classify the indigenous initiative as divisive can rest easy:

you can't divide that which doesn't exist in the parliamentary realm. What's more, Marichuy will not tour the country in pursuit of votes, because the struggle of the CNI and the EZLN is not for power. They do not intend to compete with the parties and their politicians, but rather to put indignation, resistance, and rebellion on the ballot in 2018.

The spokespersonship of this woman, who is herself an important reference point in Tuxpan among both Nahuas and mestizos, will be dedicated to calling the indigenous peoples and civil society to organize themselves with autonomy to confront militarized capitalism without falling into electoralism, and to spur on an autonomy which has education, justice, and self-government as its axes. Her campaign will seek to denounce and make visible the pain and obscurity of the originary peoples, and to create and multiply dignified forms of resistance to the bad government—whose army and police are in bed with or accomplices of *narcoparamilitarism*— and its bosses, the owners of the large corporations who murder, disappear, enslave, dispossess, loot, destroy, and pollute in their predatory offensive.

The initiative of an independent candidacy, which has been discussed in the heart of 43 indigenous peoples and 523 communities in 25 states of the country since last October, derives from a collective thought process, from a historic practice of the indigenous peoples and nations which have used different strategies of struggle to ensure their continuity and autonomy.

At the margins of the dominant party-ocracy, those political subjects who have been made invisible and historically denied their capacity for decision-making, political action, and ideating an inclusive project, today push forward an alternative to the system of hegemonic representation which is delegitimized and in crisis. They seek to build a new, emancipatory horizon and to cement a power of those below and to the left with a candidacy that questions the monopoly on politics and societal representation by the professionals of the electoralist institutionalized parties.

They will attempt to deepen a national movement to confront non-violently the transnational capitalist class with its unjust structures of exploitation and domination. But at the same time, in the context of multiple forms of state violence bearing the seal of corruption, impunity and simulation as tools of the recolonization of territories, the proposal seeks to open a path to peace. The problem, then, is not to vote or not; the problem is capitalism. And faced with capital's culture of death, the path ahead is that of organized resistance.

Grace Lee Boggs: Naming the Enemy

This article was originally posted on the [Boggs Center's website](#).



A specter is haunting the American people- the specter of destruction by capitalism. In its limitless quest for profits capitalism has defiled our human relationships by turning them into money relationships. It has transformed Work from a precious human activity into Jobs which are done only for a paycheck and which have become increasingly meaningless and increasingly scarce as the profits from our labor are invested in increasingly complex machines. It has undermined the Family ties by which human beings down through the ages have absorbed naturally and normally the elementary standards of conduct and the sense of continuity with the human race which make us human. By encouraging us to value material things more than social ties, it has turned us into a society of selfish individualists and materialists, seeking to compensate for the spiritual emptiness of our lives by the endless pursuit of distractions. It has despoiled the Land, Waters and Air on which our lives depend.

Up to now, most Americans have been able to evade facing this destructiveness because it was primarily other peoples, other races, other cultures which were being destroyed. For the sake of westward expansion the Native Americans were massacred and their survivors driven into the world's first concentration camps. To clear the land and build the agricultural infrastructure necessary for industrial development, millions of Africans were enslaved and the ideology of racism created. Convinced that it was our destiny to rule the entire continent, Americans seized the Southwest from Mexico. When we came to the end of the American frontier, we reached out to Latin America and the Pacific. When capitalist expansion and centralization created the Great Depression, we got our economy moving again by producing for World War II. After the war we used our economic power and monopoly of nuclear weapons to protect capitalism in Europe from socialist revolution and to crush revolutionary struggles in the Third World by supporting and installing military dictatorships.

Ever since World War II it has been able to keep going only by producing weapons of destruction and by turning us into mindless consumers, unable to distinguish between our Needs and our Want, utilizing the mass media with the same cunning with which Hitler turned the German people into collaborators in their own destruction. New shiny cars and appliances have been pushed as sure ways to win love for ourselves. Women (and men) have been turned into sex objects. Credit cards have been promoted as badges of status.

As this brainwashing process has gained momentum over the last few decades, the moral and social fabric of our society has been steadily undermined. Our small towns and communities, in which neighborliness and character were more important than money, have been replaced by suburbs. Our judgment has been so distorted that we now consider "square" those who still value self-reliance and hard work, while we admire the "big spender." Banks and loan sharks, whom we once viewed with suspicion, we now consider our friends, while more and more we fear those closest to us, our families, co-workers, and neighbors. Crime, mental illness, drug addiction, alcoholism, teen-age pregnancy and venereal disease have reached near epidemic proportions because, instead of depending upon each other for company and comfort (as human beings have done down through the ages), we look to more colorful goods and new, more exciting experiences to make us feel good.

Pursuing private happiness in the form of material goods, we did not care that we were passing on these materialistic and individualistic values to our children. Instead of recognizing that we were breeding criminals by the supreme value we had put on material things, we tried to project the blame for crime onto others. We ignored the growing threat to our health from the Love Canals that were being created by the dumping of industrial waste in our waters and our earth. We closed our eyes to the degrading lives being lived by the millions whom capitalism had already cast onto the Welfare rolls, little dreaming that

the same fate was being prepared for us

But now the chickens have come home to roost. While we were collaborating with capitalism by accepting its dehumanizing values, capitalism itself was moving to a new stage, the stage of multinational capitalism. Big capitalists have been swallowing up smaller ones, creating giant corporations who buy and sell other giant corporations all over the world. A few hundred multi-national corporations now move capital and goods everywhere and anywhere, according to where they can make the most profit.

These multinational corporations have no loyalty to the United States or to any American community. They have no commitment to the reforms that Americans have won through hard struggle. Instead of giving more each year, they demand that we accept less or else.

If American workers do not accept wages and benefits competitive with those of Japanese or Mexican or Filipino workers, they do not hesitate to shut down a plant that has been the heart of the economic life of a city or region.. City workers and school teachers find that they are no longer needed; small businesses go bankrupt. So millions of workers, skilled and unskilled, blue collar and white collar, have already been laid off . Whole cities have been turned into wastelands by corporate takeovers and by runaway corporations. Yet our city and state officials, conservative or liberal, Democrat or Republican, white or black, continue to compete with one another to offer tax breaks and reduced worker benefits to these corporations, knowing full well they will pick up and leave when they can make more profit elsewhere.

Meanwhile, because American capitalism no longer dominates the world market, our government can no longer afford the reforms with which all administrations since the Great Depression have tried to make capitalism more palatable. So social and Welfare programs are being ruthlessly dismantled; unions are being busted or immobilized; the moral, environmental and civilized restraints on capitalist expansion which have been won only after decades of struggle are being abandoned.

That is why we must now make a second American revolution to rid ourselves of the capitalist values and institutions which have brought us to this state of powerlessness or suffer the same mutilation, the same destruction of our families and our communities, the same loss of national independence as over the years we have visited upon other peoples and other nations.

James Boggs: Towards a New Concept of Citizenship

This pamphlet was accessed from the [Boggs Center's website](#).



JACOB LAWRENCE. THE 1920'S...THE MIGRANTS ARRIVE AND CAST THEIR BALLOTS.
1974

This speech was selected, edited, and prepared for publication by Alternatives, Detroit based organization which no longer exists. They wrote the introduction, did most of the basic work involved, and have financed its publication.

Introduction

This pamphlet was originally a speech given by James Boggs to the graduate class in the School of Architecture at the University of Michigan on November 9, 1976. However, it is of interest to all of us concerned with the rapidly deteriorating quality of life in this country. A few questions can highlight this situation: why is it that we cannot safely walk the streets at night when we are supposedly the most "civilized" society in the world? Why do we often pay the price of leaving behind old friends and communities in order to advance to the next rung on the ladder of success? And why, in the age of mass media, do we remain ignorant of how the social and political decisions which affect our daily lives are made?

These contradictions have arisen out of our pursuit of individual economic interests to the exclusion of the public good. In order to reverse this trend, each of us must begin to question how our daily actions affect the larger community. We must also begin asking what kind of values we want these actions to represent. As we all know, America was founded by people who wanted to guide their own destiny and thereby became the modern world's first citizens.

This pamphlet shows how important citizenship is in beginning to correct the problems we are facing today. Unless we once again begin the process of self government, decisions will continue to be made at the expense of the public good which is, ultimately, at our expense. Reading this pamphlet is a step towards creating a new concept of citizenship.

TOWARDS A NEW CONCEPT OF CITIZENSHIP

Last year when I spoke to this class, I talked about how, in the pursuit of individual success, millions of Americans have chosen the road of getting ahead in the economic arena. Therefore, we have become a nation of individualists who believe that the further we get away from the communities or areas where we grew up, the more successful we are. In other words, the greater the distance we put between ourselves and other individuals from our past, the more we have achieved. Most Americans believe this even if it means that we have to move every two or three years and live and work among strangers most of our adult life; even though it means that we, and particularly those of us who are women, have no relatives or childhood friends on whom we can depend for babysitting and day-to-day advice; and even though it means that we cannot depend upon our neighbors or others in the community to help raise our children or in emergencies.

I went on to show how our tendency to evaluate ourselves and other people by the status that we have achieved in our so called progress on the ladder of success has now led to serious objective and subjective contradictions in our society. Our cities are mushrooming at the expense of the countryside; our economy is run by monstrous multinational corporations headed by executives and specialists who have no loyalty to this country or to any community. With every year, more and more of our old people and our young people especially the black, the uneducated and the unskilled are reduced to parasites. And we have become more afraid of one another than people used to be of wild animals. Each person has become a lonely individualist, narrowed down to a cog in a machine, with no individuality and no sense of citizenship. That is, we have no sense that our actions and decisions matter or that each of us has a responsibility for the whole society.

I explained that we are presently in this very dangerous situation because we have for so long believed that all our social and human problems could be solved by economic growth and advancing technology, and because we have left all the decisions with regard to our economy and the government to the professional politician. That is why we got trapped in the war in Vietnam, that is why we had Watergate, and that is why we are totally alienated from one another as human beings — even though, technologically, we are so advanced.

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

What has happened in recent weeks during the election campaign for the Presidency has made all of this much clearer. Last week, the American people participated in another sweepstakes or horse race in which we went to the polls or race track to cast lots for our next president. By a mere shift in a few votes in each state one man, Carter, won over another man, Ford, in a race which one man had to win and whose outcome had been predicted by pollsters before we even went to the polls. Now the analysts and the pollsters are writing hundreds of articles on why Carter won out over Ford. Yet the main question is not why Carter won over Ford but why millions of Americans continue to participate in this kind of sweepstakes every four years.

All of us witnessed the two conventions during the summer. We saw how a grand coalition of blacks, hardhats, women, project directors and labor leaders, representing the outsiders in this society came together and selected Carter to be the Democratic candidate because, out of all the Democratic horses, they felt he was the one who could win and therefore make it possible for them to get closer to the trough where the goodies of this society are distributed. On the other hand, we saw how the middle classes came together at the Republican convention and defeated the Reaganites who spoke for the big farmers, oil magnates, utilities, etc., because they felt Ford, as the incumbent who was closer to the center than Reagan, could win for the Republican Party.

In each group there were people who were antagonistic and competing with one another, but they put aside their differences long enough to draw up a party platform so that they could get to the main business—selecting a candidate who could win for the party. Therefore, after all the hullabaloo of drafting the party platform, this platform was never referred to again the day after the selection of the ticket, neither candidate ran on the party platform. Nor was the convention ever referred to again during the whole campaign, It is as if the convention had never taken place and as if the platform adopted by the convention had been put through a paper shredder. So now we know, or should know, that the convention and all the so-called debates on the party platform were just another spectacle, a show that had been put on to entertain the American mass audience and to provide some suspenseful “happenings” around which the commercials could be telecast.

The result is that today we have a new president, but no one in the country knows what he stands for or will advocate in government policy just as we never knew what Ford would do on any given issue when he was president. The president is only a personality who does not represent a body of political ideas and a party platform. He is an individual who will react to issues as they arise, wavering from one side to the other in making his decisions in accordance with how he and his staff estimate these decisions will help or hurt his chance for reelection. We did not elect a person representing a party to which he is accountable and which is accountable to him, a party which had developed a body of ideas and a program which we could discuss, take sides on, and help to implement. All we did was elect an individual who, we can be sure, will say the most popular thing at the right time and will avoid saying anything that will embarrass him or alienate too many sections of the population because this will endanger his reelection.

Thus, in essence, the presidential campaign was not a political campaign. It was not a campaign to make clear the mounting contradictions of this society and the choices we will have to make in order to resolve these contradictions. It did not give us any opportunity to develop ourselves politically through discussion and struggle over fundamental issues. All we did was go to the polls, the way that we might have gone to the racetrack, to vote for a personality. And now that the race is over, we have no role to play in making or in carrying out decisions.

In the meantime, while some people are speculating on who is going to get appointed to this and that post, and what the president will or will not do on this or that issue and while the sociologists are analyzing why and how people voted in order to provide the professional politicians with the data with which to figure out how to win the next elections, the system — that is the government, the economy and the society — is continuing on its not so merry way.

BUREAUCRACY AS USUAL

In Washington, the military industrial complex and the Welfare State are going ahead full steam. Military contracts are being negotiated and renegotiated, and the industries, which are dependent upon these contracts, are operating and tooling up in complete confidence that they will continue to be an integral part of the economy. The Housing, Education and Welfare bureaucracy, which administers billions of dollars in construction contracts and social services, are continuing to administer these billions of dollars. The network of building contracts and real estate operators and education and welfare bureaucrats are going about their business as usual, confident that their part of the system will continue without fundamental change.

The only difference is that one group of individuals at the top of this bureaucracy — Republicans — will be displaced by another group of individuals — Democrats. In other words, Democrats, and friends of these Democrats, will now have a good chance to replace Republicans in the well paying jobs that this bureaucracy controls from top to bottom, but nothing about government or the economy, what it does and how it works, will change. It will continue to be a Warfare and Welfare State because ever since the Depression of the 30's, it has been clear that the American economy would collapse if it were not for military production and for the billions of dollars handed out yearly in building contracts and various forms of benefits by the national government. The multinational corporations will continue to expand and the gulf between elite specialists and unskilled masses will continue to grow.

The main difference between Carter and Ford is that Carter will probably create more projects than Ford did because he has to placate the unions and the various minority groups who made his election possible. So, with Carter, the government and the system will become more of what it is already — a government and a system which is continually reducing more and more Americans to subjects and making a mockery of citizenship.

Now that the elections are over, most people are saying that they are sick of politics, just as when the pro football or pro basketball seasons are over they say that they are tired of football or basketball and are ready for another sport. This is because every year politics in this country has become like professional sports or a huge spectacle in which the voters are passive spectators at a multi-million dollar game between two teams, each competing to win so that the thousands of individuals who make up their staffs can control the big prize of hundreds of billions of dollars which, the government spends each year. Which team wins the presidency makes no more difference to the American government or the American economy than a new king or queen makes to the British government or British economy. One president may have a different style than the other. For example, Carter's style is obviously more activist than Ford's, just as Princess Margaret's style is more flamboyant than Queen Elizabeth's. But whichever one is in the White House, the military industrial complex and the Welfare state continue to go ahead at full steam. The only difference is that more blacks and members of minority groups will now be drawn into the career of politics to

become part of the apparatus of a half million professional elected politicians because electoral politics is one of the country's growth industries.

WHAT ARE OUR HUMAN NEEDS ?

Now if this analysis is accurate and it is an analysis which everyone can verify from their own experience what does it mean for the future? Does the future have to be just a continuation of the present or just more of the same? If so, are we ready to settle for a future in which each of us is constantly and increasingly being reduced to a subject or a cog in a machine? Are we ready to settle for a society in which each of us acquires more material things each year but is only a consumer and a contributor to the Gross National Product? Can we be satisfied that each of us can earn 10% more next year than this year? If so, how will we be able to judge when we have enough? Are we so greedy and arrogant that we are ready to say, as one of our leading tycoons said a century ago, "I will have enough only when I have it all and control it all. What is this "enough" which we consider so important?

I raise these questions because nowadays most Americans have completely lost sight of the most fundamental qualities of living which any society must treasure and struggle to enhance if that society is to long endure. It has never been difficult to mobilize people to struggle for material needs because people know very well when their bellies are empty or when they are freezing because they lack shelter and clothing. But it is much more difficult to mobilize people to struggle for human needs because human needs reflect spiritual hungers which are much more difficult to articulate and make clear to oneself, let alone to other people. For example, in order to be human, we need to feel that we can walk the streets without fearing each other, that we don't need to spend millions of dollars each year on police dogs and security locks and electronic gadgets to protect our homes and our personal possessions; that our security doesn't come from policemen or from police dogs but from the value and concern which each of us has for others because we value and cherish human beings more than we cherish material things and individual success.

In order to be human, we need to feel that we belong to a community where people of different ages and interests have grown to depend upon one another because over the years our personal lives and the life of the community have become interdependent. We need to feel that we can look to our neighbors for help in keeping the streets clean, in raising our children, in looking out for each other. In order to be human, we need to feel that the work we do is useful and that we are not only doing it for pay or profit but because it is socially necessary. That is, we are making things that people really need. In order to be human, we need to feel that we are in control of our lives. We need to believe that our decisions and actions make a difference in how we and our co-citizens live, and whether our community is one that we can be proud of and in how our country is run.

Up to a few years ago, all over the world and even in the United States where economic success and individual social mobility have been more highly valued than anywhere else, people did value their social relations more than they valued material things. We did feel that we belonged to communities- to rural communities in the South and Midwest, and to ethnic communities in the cities. We took pride in our work in the foundry, on the assembly line and elsewhere, even when this work was dirty and unskilled, because we thought that it was socially necessary and that it was helping to meet the real material needs of the people. We felt that our decisions and our actions and our struggles made a difference not only to our own lives but to the improvement of the whole country. So there was meaning to our economic struggles and political and & social struggles.

It is only since the technological explosion made possible by World War II that all this has begun to change.

Today, as a result of our modern technology, we are an expiring mobile society of consumers, buying the products as fast as they can be produced and made known to us by advertising. Instead of being people, we have become masses- individuals who believe that consumption and possession are what life is all about and therefore believe in ways that can easily be predicted by market researchers. The technology that we continue to develop is intervening with Nature itself with the result that we live in constant danger of the whole planet being destroyed. The atmosphere and vegetation, which we depend upon for our sustenance, is being fundamentally altered and even the chemistry of our bodies is being changed by such technological creations as the 'pill'.

Meanwhile, as the quality of life continues to decline and the dangers to our planet increase, the only solutions that we can think of are in the form of more technology.

Yet as the recent election campaign demonstrated, none of those who claim to be giving us political leadership thought these questions important enough to raise during the campaign. And most Americans continue to believe that some more of the same is what we need most. We have for so long been taught to believe that technology and economics or the creation and possession of more goods are the solution to all of our problems. Therefore, each of us continues to pursue this goal and to support those political leaders who promise more of the same.

Here at the university, where you might expect that there would be some fundamental rethinking on these profound questions, we find the same thing taking place. Our universities are each year turning out more and more students with all kinds of degrees and skills to fit into and expand the existing system. Meanwhile, as the universities grow bigger and bigger, the ability of the students to make socially responsible decisions continues to decline. Instead of wondering about the need to develop people who are able to govern this

country, the faculty and administration of the university continue to function in accordance with the pragmatic and utilitarian philosophy that if they equip students with the tools to earn a good living, they have done their job. Despite the fact that all around the university and on campus itself, all of the students are being reduced to cogs in the machine of American economic and technological advancement; each student continues to think only of his or her individual ambitions and not of the needs of the whole society. So there is no movement on the campuses which is making a fundamental challenge to this system and this philosophy.

WHAT KIND OF TECHNOLOGY DO WE NEED ?

The only difference between last year and this year is that the questions we raised last year have become more pressing and more obvious. This year we should know better than we did last year that we can't solve the problems of crime with more policemen and more locks, any more than we can build a sense of community with some new houses or shopping centers or Renaissance Centers. We can't solve the crisis of energy by the development of more technology because this new technology uses up as much energy in its production as it might save later and because there is only so much fossil fuel created by Nature. We can't solve the problems of pollution by building anti-pollution technology because the production of this new technology itself creates pollution. We can't resolve the question of national defense by producing more advanced types of bombs and bombers to kill more and more people more quickly because the people we seek to intimidate into submission by this technology are as capable of developing technology as we are. In other words, strange as it may seem to us today, the quality of life in our country cannot be fundamentally altered by more technology or more production. Technology does not and cannot substitute for the choices that we as human beings have to make as to what kind of society we want to live in and how much we are ready to struggle to bring that kind of society into being.

In fact, one of the main decisions that we have to make in this country is "what kind of technology should we develop?" and "do we really want to keep some of the technology that we have developed?" (e.g. the pill), or "should we repudiate the dictatorship of the technologically possible, which is the dictatorship under which we live today?" One of the most important things that we have to understand is that the technology which we have is not value free. It is a technology which has come out of a class society which has been more concerned with economic growth than it has been with human values and development, and which, therefore, has been producing more and more specialists and experts at the top even if this meant that more and more people at the bottom of the society and at the top of the age scale had no useful work to do, and even if it meant the destruction of communities and the countryside. In a recent article of the local newspaper, I read that the head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Michigan said that there are no great philosophers today, because all philosophers today are pragmatists. That the head of a

Philosophy Department of a great university could say this is a reflection of how little we in the United States understand about the role of philosophy in any society. What I think he was saying is that in the United States today we have accepted the philosophy of economic determinism. That is, we no longer believe in the capacity of human beings to determine the course of the society but instead accept the philosophy that human consciousness is determined by economic conditions. At the same time we in the United States also accept the philosophy of individualism. We have no idea of the power that is within us as human beings to struggle together to resolve contradictions that are in every society. We believe that the individual should strive to get ahead materially, regardless of what is happening to the society and to others in the society.

It was this philosophy which enabled people of the United States to go their own way for so many years pursuing economic development and material needs and wants even when they knew that this was taking place at the expense of blacks and other minorities. It was this philosophy which made it possible for us to go into Asia and into Latin America, supporting dictatorial regimes, regardless of how these regimes were trampling on the dignity of their peoples, as long as they gave us ready access to their raw materials and were ready to join in our cold war with communism.

It is this philosophy which enables our oil consortium to make deals with so many Arab rulers to exploit the oil resources even though they can see all around them that the people in these countries are like feudal subjects, without any role in making decisions as to what is going to happen to their national resources.

WE CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

What we are discovering is that this pragmatic philosophy is catching up with us. The joy ride which we were on, having things more or less our way, is coming to an end because of the standing up of the Third World and because of the limit of the world's natural resources. We face these new problems, which are the result of the solutions we made in the past. In resolving or negating the problems, however, those solutions created new contradictions — many of which serve as dehumanizing factors in our society— everything we are and have become is based on decisions we make and have made in the past. We live in a society that was created by the ideas and deeds of us as human beings. Our forefathers and foremothers, as we are doing now, made the choices and decisions that made us Americans and we must continue to do so as we struggle to become more human, human beings. Nothing can be the same any more. We are at a transition point In the whole world and in our own country, and yet, because we have not tried over the years to develop standards for our actions based upon human values, we today have no standards by which to make the decisions which have become so vital to our continuing existence. We can't decide what should be and what should not be because we have taken so many things for granted as our

due. We don't know what is criminal and what is not criminal, what is exploitative and what is not exploitative, what is racist and what is not racist, sexist or nonsexist. All we know is that life itself is becoming more insecure everyday even though we have more of the material things which we thought would provide us with security than any human beings ever had. We have more industry than any country in the world, and yet we have millions of unemployed who are completely outside these industries. We have more hospitals than any country in the world and yet we have millions of mentally deranged individuals, alcoholics, drug addicts, and chronically ill persons. We have more individual houses than all the world and yet we have millions living in dilapidated, unsanitary houses. We have more jails and detention institutions than any other country in the world and yet we still have millions outside these institutions committing anti-social acts, but we can't incarcerate them in these institutions because there is no room. We have more school buildings and learning institutions than any country in the world, and a larger percentage of our population attends these institutions than in any other country, yet we have millions of semi-literate Americans. And even those who have gone to these institutions only know something about their own little field and have no idea of how to think about the whole society.

When questions of this profundity are raised, most Americans resort to blaming our problems on the politicians or on the "system" They do this because Americans today think so much like victims. We find it easier to blame somebody else rather than to ask ourselves what is it that we have done or have not done to bring this situation into existence?

CHANGING OURSELVES FIRST

However, we can't just continue to shift the burden on to somebody else's shoulders expecting those people to change when they are the ones who benefit most by the situation.

What we must begin to do is what we find hardest to do—confront our own individualism and materialism, our own going along with the system which has made possible the strengthening and expansion of the system. When we are ready to do this, we will be ready to begin the struggle for the new theory and practice of citizenship which is so urgently needed in the United States today. Most Americans think citizenship is a question of where we are born or of going to the polls to vote for politicians. Few of us realize that this nation was founded by a great revolution which inaugurated an age of revolutions all over the world because it gave men and women a new concept of themselves as self-governing human beings, i.e. as citizens rather than subjects. Instead of looking to kings and bishops to make the difficult decisions which are necessary to the functioning of any society, as the masses in Europe and elsewhere were doing at the time, the men and women of America who made the American Revolution said that people could and should think for themselves and should and could accept responsibility for making social, economic and political decisions. Instead of looking at history as that which can be made only by elites, they

believed that people who are ready to work with their minds and hands could build a new world.

In other words, instead of being masses, who think of themselves as victims and only make demands on others, they were ready to make demands on themselves. Based on this new concept of citizenship and these new principles of the fundamental worth of every human being, they were able through revolutionary struggle to transform themselves into a people—i.e. human beings ready to unite with others to struggle for a better future for themselves and their children.

As you continue your schooling in order to acquire skills to get a job — and I am not suggesting that you quit this — I hope you will give serious thought to this question of the responsibilities of citizenship.

Today as a result of developments over the last two hundred years, the concrete questions which we face are completely different from and infinitely more complex than those faced by the men and women who made the first American Revolution. The coming American Revolution will not be made to complete the first revolution (as most radicals and liberals believe) but to answer new questions that have been created by the successes that we had in developing our economy of abundance and our incredible technology in the last two hundred years. But the fundamental choice remains the same: to believe in the inherent power of human beings to begin afresh, to put public good over private interest, and to become active participants in the ideological and practical struggles necessary to rid ourselves of an economic and political system that reduces us to subjects, so that as active citizens, together, we can create a better society for ourselves and our posterity.

This country is still in its infancy. The ancestors of the overwhelming majority of today's Americans were not among the few millions who founded this nation 200 years ago and established the political and social patterns which have brought us to our present crisis. The ancestors of today's blacks were here but they were excluded from participation in the political and social process even though their labors were building the infrastructure which made possible this country's rapid economic development. Thus the people now living in the United States have had no real experience of the great revolutionary struggles by which any great nation is created.

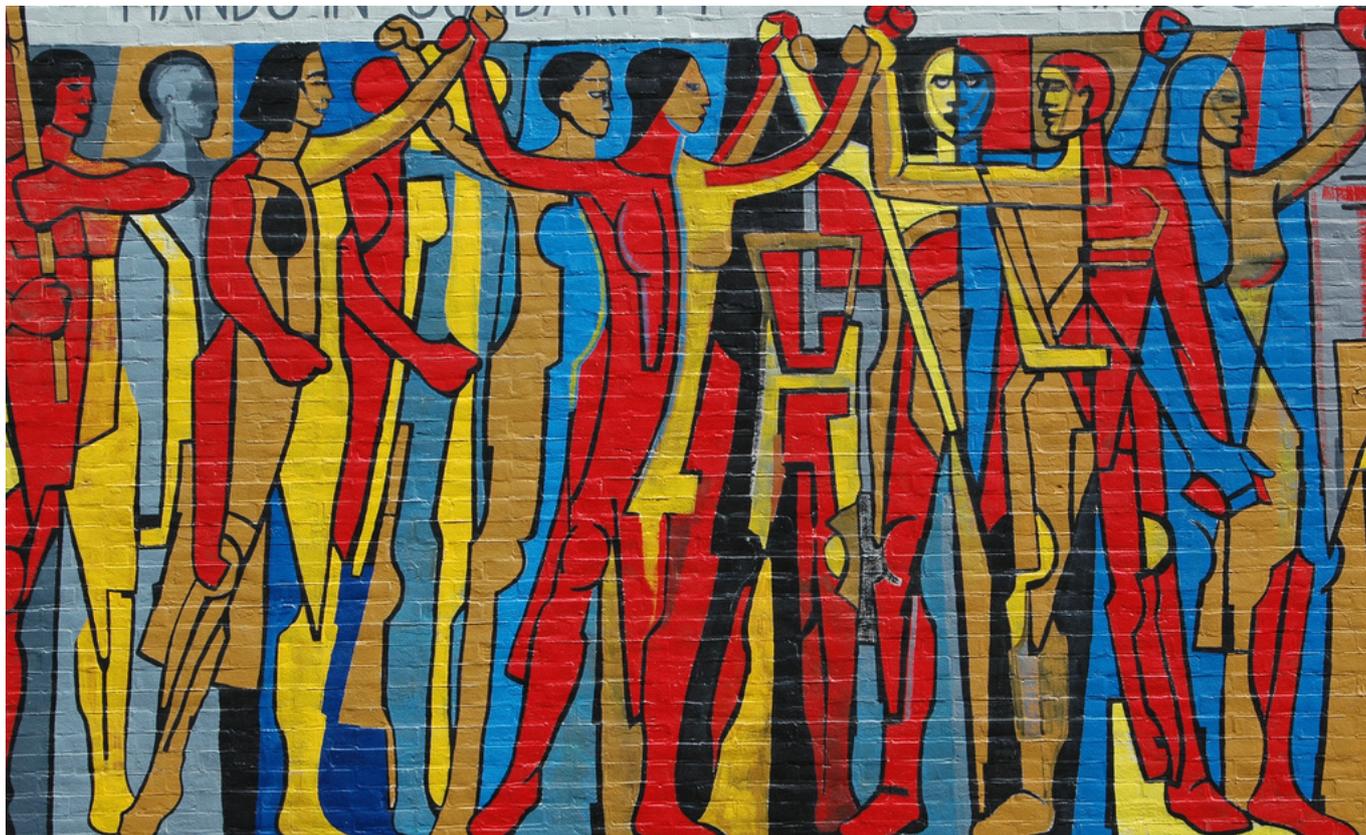
That political and humanizing experience still lies before us all!

About the Press

Paradigm Press was started by three individuals after completing a study of *Revolution and Evolution in the 20th Century* by James and Grace Boggs. As well as other writings by the Boggs and the Advocators, it was independently organized to actively support the building of what we see as a growing movement along the ideological direction of the Advocators. We feel that the growth of this movement and the continuing development of its ideas and practice will demand a more consistent and qualitative publication of Avocator literature. We also believe that there will be a greater demand for this literature simply in terms of quantity. In addition to meeting these needs, we hope that the press will help facilitate a more even development of the movement in other parts of the country relative to Detroit by making both the ideology as a whole and the process of its development more accessible. In a personal sense, we see the press as a way for us to go beyond the study of *Revolution and Evolution in the 20th Century*. The main thrust of our printing at the outset will be of Avocator literature beginning with a series of speeches by James and Grace Boggs. We intend however to also consider and publish writings of various kinds from other sources as well. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or suggestions. A list of available publications will be published in the near future.

James Boggs: Think Dialectically, Not Biologically

This speech was first given by Boggs at a Political Science Seminar in Atlanta University on February 17, 1974



DANIEL MANRIQUE ARIAS & CHICAGO PUBLIC ART GROUP. HANDS IN SOLIDARITY, HANDS IN FREEDOM. 1997

This is the first opportunity I have had to speak to an audience in Atlanta, a city which in the last few years has become the center for many tendencies in intellectual and political thinking by Blacks. Many black groups from all over the country have held conferences here, and in this process you have had an opportunity to evaluate the movement of the black indigenous forces which erupted in the 1960s and within a few years brought this whole country into its present state of social upheaval.

Here in the, South, which gave birth to the movement all over the country, we should be especially able to see the difference between the present movement and past movements. For although there have been many revolts and rebellions in other sections of the United States - revolts and rebellions which have led to some social and economic reforms - the present movement which started out in the South was unique. It was unique because at its inception it raised the human question in its most fundamental form. What is the appropriate relationship between human beings, between one man and another? The movement began as a quest for a higher form of human relationships between people, relations not yet shared and not even believed in by most people, but which those who launched the movement believed could or should be shared by people in the United States.

In raising the question of human relations so fundamentally, this movement touched every person in the United States, North and South, and for a period of time it seemed that the

country - despite the obvious divisions and opposition of many - would be lifted to a new level of human relationships. Instead, today, nearly twenty years after the movement began in the 1950s, we are experiencing the most dehumanized, blackmailing relationships between blacks and whites, and between blacks and blacks. In terms of material conditions, most blacks are much off than they were twenty years ago at the beginning of the black movement. But in terms of relations among ourselves as human beings, we are all worse off. This is the reality which we must be willing to face squarely.

I shall not attempt to review the many struggles and confrontations which created the movement. You know and have experienced these either directly or indirectly. What I want to emphasize instead is that this kind of struggle could only have been unleashed in the South. This is not just because the South was more racist or more impoverished - which it surely was. Rather it is because in the South the tradition of viewing blacks as inferior had been rationalized and given legitimacy by a philosophy. All over the country, the philosophy that one set of human beings is inferior to another on the basis of race was practiced. But in the South this philosophy was not only practiced; it was preached. Therefore the movement which was organized to struggle against racism in the South also had to develop a philosophy as the basis for struggle; the philosophy of the essential dignity of every human being, regardless of race, sex or national origin. That is why the movement began to draw everybody into it - either pro or con - because it put forward a philosophy with which everybody, regardless of race, color or sex, had to grapple.

In our lifetime we have also witnessed how no social upheaval in any one part of this country can be isolated indefinitely from social upheaval in the rest of this country. Therefore what started out in the South as a movement whose aim was chiefly to reform the South quickly spread all over the country. Everybody, oppressed and oppressor, was drawn into the confrontation.

But when everyone is drawn into a conflict which is as deeply rooted in the history of a society as racism is rooted in this society, there is no telling how far the struggle will have to go. You begin to open up contradictions which most people in the society have been evading or tolerating - for various reasons. Some because they benefit from them - as many do; others because they believe these are beyond their power to challenge or negate - as blacks used to think; and still others because they think that to confront these contradictions will create too much antagonism and upheaval.

Once the struggle began to extend out of the South, it became clear that every institution of this country, economic, social, political, cultural, was based upon keeping blacks at the bottom. The whole development of this country had been based upon treating blacks as scavengers, to take the leavings of whatever whites considered beneath them-whether these were jobs or houses, churches or whole neighborhoods. In this process of treating

blacks as scavengers, United States capitalism had been able to develop more rapidly than any other country in the world because it has had the wherewithal to exploit on a double basis. Not only was it able to exploit wage labor in production and the consumer in the market, as every capitalist society does. But when factories and machinery became obsolete for the exploitation of whites, capitalism could always use them for the exploitation of blacks. Used plants, used houses, used churches, used clothing, used anything and everything, could be recycled. After being discarded by whites, they could always be used or re-used, to exploit blacks both in production and consumption. Thus all whites in this country could get to the top faster because blacks were kept at the bottom.

In providing this opportunity for rapid upward mobility to whites, the system of American capitalism has developed very differently from other capitalisms. First of all, this country, from the very beginning, had to import labor, either by force or by promises. Secondly, every ethnic group which came to this country voluntarily came in order to get to the top as quickly as it could.- Therefore these groups closed their eyes to the obvious fact that they were able to rise as rapidly only because the indigenous labor force of the blacks was being excluded from the same opportunities. In this way the system of American racism - or the institutionalized exclusion of blacks from equal opportunity - was inseparably interconnected with American capitalism - or the system of upward mobility for special ethnic and special interest groups at the expense of others. Whites could not see this because they were the beneficiaries of the system.

The eruption of the black movement exposed the historical connection between racism and capitalism in the U.S.. and also made it clear that it is not possible to get rid of racism in this country without getting rid of American capitalism; any more than it was possible to carry on a struggle to reform the South without carrying on a struggle to change this entire nation. How is it possible to get rid of racism without getting rid of the method of thinking which has become ingrained in the American people as a result of the special historical development of this country, namely, that special groups should advance at the expense of others?

There is a very important dialectical principle here which every student of political science needs to understand. A struggle may start out with the aim of resolving one contradiction. But in the course of the struggle, if the contradiction which it sets out to negate is fundamental enough, the main contradiction may change; it may become enlarged or expanded. Struggle is social practice and when you engage in social practice, you gain new insights. -You find out that there was much more involved than you had originally perceived to be the case when you began your struggle. Therefore you are faced with the need to raise your level of understanding, your level of conceptual knowledge. If you do not raise your level of understanding as the struggle expands and develops. then what began as a progressive struggle can turn into its opposite.

When the struggle which began in the South exploded all over the country, the question of racism became no longer just a regional but a national question - a question of transforming this whole nation. It has been a national question ever since; national in the sense that it involves this whole country; and national also in the sense that it embraces all the aspects of this nation. We now face the question of the Second Reconstruction of the United States. What kind of nation should the United States be? What kind, of society should we build in the United States? On what kind of philosophy concerning relations between people should we base ourselves - because no movement can ever develop momentum without a philosophy.

Note that I used the word "we." I mean "we." The strength of the movement that began in the South stemmed from the fact that those who led and participated in it understood that blacks had to change this society - this country. They had many illusions about the possibilities of reforming this society, but at least they did not have the romantic and escapist notions about leaving this country to make the revolution in Africa which nationalists of today have. However, once the movement came North and the tremendous complexity of the struggle that would be necessary to transform this whole society began to dawn on blacks, all kinds of romantic and escapist notions began to develop within the black movement. These romantic and escapist notions are now crippling the minds of many of our black young people.

All kinds of black militants call themselves black revolutionists these days. But few of them have yet been willing to come face to face with the contradiction that, just as it has been on the backs of the black masses that this society has advanced economically at such tremendous speed, so it is only under the revolutionary political leadership of black people that this country will be able to get out of its contradictions. We are hesitant to face up to this truth because it is too challenging. We have the fears which always haunt the revolutionary social forces, the fear of not knowing whether we can win; the fear that if we set our sights too high we may provoke the enemy to counterattack; the lack of confidence in ourselves and in our ability to struggle to create a better society. This is not a fear that is unique to blacks. All revolutionary social forces have this fear as they come face to face with their real conditions of life and the growing realization that they must assume revolutionary responsibility for changing the whole society - so that their lives as well as those of others in this society can be fundamentally changed. Because the fear is so great, it becomes much easier to evade the tremendous challenge and responsibility for disciplined scientific thinking and disciplined political organization which are necessary to lead revolutionary struggles.

Confronted with this political challenge many of those who have been frustrated by the failure of the civil rights movement and the succeeding rebellions to solve all our problems have begun to put forward all kinds of fantastic ideas as to what we should now do. Some

say we should separate and return to Africa. Some say we should separate but remain here and try to build a new black capitalist economy from scratch inside the most advanced and powerful capitalist economy in the world. Some say we should join the Pan-African movement of the African people in Africa and build a military base in Africa from which we will eventually be able to attack the United States.

Others say we should just struggle for survival from day to day, doing whatever has to be done for survival. They have just given up struggling for anything at all and have turned to astrology or drugs or religion - in the old-time belief that some metaphysical force out there in the twilight zone will rescue us from our dilemma. And finally most black militants of the 1960s, even while they are still talking their nationalist rhetoric, have today just become a part of the system. They are doing their best to get to the top in one form or another, regardless of whom they have to step on to get there, just as every other ethnic group has always done in this country.

THE AMERICAN SYSTEM: INCORPORATION OF ETHNIC GROUPS

Those who have given a great deal to a particular struggle in the past always find it hard to realize that what began as a struggle for equal justice, equal representation or equal rights, can, precisely because it gains momentum, become just another factor in the development of the system. A system doesn't have any color. It is a way of social functioning which not only has institutions and structure but also has an ideology and the tendency to perpetuate itself. In the United States the capitalist system functions not only by exploitation of different groups but also by incorporation of successive ethnic groups into the system. This is the way that it has historically transformed what might become antagonistic social forces into non-antagonistic social forces. Already we have seen how American labor has been incorporated into the system in the wake of the militant labor struggles of the 1930s. Instead of being a threat to the system as it used to be, labor now helps the system to function. Labor keeps demanding more for itself in the way of more wages, pensions and other benefits and doesn't give a damn if this "more" is extracted out of the superexploitation of people in other parts of the world or passed on to the consumer. In this way the labor organizations which came out of the great social struggles of the 1930s and 1940s are today just mainstays of capitalism itself. They not only act as obstacles to its overthrow; they actively keep the system going.

The black movement is now running a parallel course. Gradually blacks are being incorporated into the structures, the institutions and the ideology of U.S. capitalism. This is happening because, in the wake of the black rebellions of the 1960s, the black movement has made no serious effort to repudiate the bourgeois method of thought on which U.S. capitalism is based which involves each individual or group just getting more for itself. It has made no serious effort to create a movement based on a more advanced method of

thinking and which aims to transform the whole of society for the benefit of the majority of the population.

It would be childish to blame U.S. capitalism for incorporating blacks into the system. In doing this, the system is only doing what it is supposed to do in order to maintain itself. In this respect U.S. capitalism is doing and has done very well. From the time of the Johnson administration tens of thousands of black militants, who might have become revolutionists, have been incorporated into various pacification programs. Scholarships were made available on a mass basis to blacks so that they could go to college and become part of that huge apparatus of social workers and teachers which keeps the system going. Now we have blacks in every sphere of capitalist society—junior executives of corporations, local and national politicians, mayors and judges, sheriffs and policemen. Blacks have acquired the same entourage of officials which every other ethnic group has. In this sense blacks have risen in the sliding scale of upward mobility just as the Kerner Commission proposed. They have not supplanted or replaced whites. But as whites have been elevated upwards, blacks have replaced them on the levels which they vacated. Hence today blacks are taking over the cities in the traditional pattern of other ethnic groups.

In the past, as we pointed out in *The City is The Black Man's Land*, this upward mobility in the politics of the city had stopped at blacks. But after the rebellions U.S. capitalism was ready to make this concession. just as it incorporated labor after the class struggles of the 30s, it has now incorporated blacks in the wake of the racial struggles of the 60s.

Today blacks are inheriting the old cities which are more poverty-stricken and crime-ridden than they have ever been. Technology has made it possible for capitalism not to depend on the city any more as the main base for its production facilities. So industry is abandoning the cities for the rural areas with the same ease that in the 19th century it abandoned the rural areas for the cities. It is in the rural areas that U.S. capitalism is developing the new technical industries, leaving behind the cities to be fought over by petty-bourgeois careerists, whites and blacks. These blacks and whites can't do anything to restore the cities which have become little more than urban reservations. All that is happening is that thousands of careerist blacks are getting plush jobs for themselves and living high on the hog. But the cities continue to deteriorate.

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN TWO ROADS

In *The American Revolution* I pointed out that there are two sides to every question -but only one side is right. There are many ways that we can look at what is happening in this country today. But in the end we are going to have to recognize that we now have only the choice between two roads for the movement - only two directions of thought and action.

Will the United States continue to be a society based on the bourgeois system of upward mobility, with each rebellious group becoming incorporated into the system through its careerist or opportunist members, while the mass at the bottom sinks deeper into despair? Or can we build a society in this country based upon social responsibility between individuals and between groups in which everyone tries to make decisions based on the interests of the whole rather than on the special interest of his or her ethnic group?

The black movement started out in the belief that racism was the only contradiction in this society and that if it could only win equal opportunity for blacks to advance in the system, blacks and whites would end up equal. In the course of two decades of struggle, i.e. in the course of social practice, it has become clear that racism is not the sole contradiction and that it is inseparable from the capitalist contradictions which arise from each group advancing at the expense of others and individuals within each group using the group to advance themselves..

The more nationalistic the black movement has become, the easier it has been for U.S. capitalism to incorporate blacks into the system. Not only has it been easy for the system to identify the individuals to be incorporated. But the more nationalistic blacks became, the more they began to fool themselves and allow themselves to be fooled by black opportunist leaders into believing that everything black is beautiful and everything non-black is ugly or worthless or a threat to blacks. More and more blacks began to think and insist that "all we care about are blacks - and the hell with everybody else." Thus step by step they have taken on the dehumanized ideology of U.S. capitalism.

Thus, in the course of only twenty years, both the integrationists, who only wanted to reform the system so that blacks could be included in capitalist exploitation, and the nationalists, who claimed to be against the system, have each gradually been brought into the system and are assuming responsibility for it and the chaos which has been created as a result of the system.

The nationalists ended up by going into the system because they made the mistake of thinking that nationalism in and of itself is a revolutionary ideology, when in fact nationalism is only a stage in the development of a struggle by an oppressed people. , It is the stage when all layers of an oppressed group - the petty-bourgeoisie, workers, peasants, farmers- come to the conclusion that they have shared a common oppression and have a common history.

In the United States nationalism was an inevitable stage in the development of black struggle because throughout the history of this country, blacks have been kept at the bottom of this society as blacks, i.e. on a racial basis. But ever since the black power movement erupted in the late 1960s, the question facing the black movement has been not

the past but the future. The question has become “What are we going to do about the future of this country, this society? What kind of society must we create here in this country for our children and our children’s children?”

In other words, from the time that the nationalist or black power stage erupted in this country, the need has been for blacks to develop a revolutionary ideology for this country. But instead of doing this, black militants began to look towards Africa and towards the past; in other words, to a world that they really couldn’t do anything about. Instead of grappling with the tremendous challenge of transforming the conditions and relations in this country, they began to idealize the past. Instead of examining the changes that would have to be made in this country - which would inevitably benefit not only blacks but everybody else in this country - they began to think of themselves as living in some metaphysical space totally separate and apart from everybody else and what was happening in this country. They began to insist that blacks in this country are Third World people. They refused to face the reality that black GIs were raping and massacring the people of Vietnam just like white GIs. Or that blacks are an integral part of that 5% of the world’s population living in the United States and using up 40% of the world’s energy resources for their big cars and their new appliances, just as whites are doing.

Unwilling to face their actual conditions of life inside this country and the challenge of bringing about fundamental changes in this country, blacks have drifted steadily into bourgeois methods of thinking and bourgeois practices. The result is that today blacks are no different from whites in seeking individual advancement based upon the capitalist principle that every individual can “make it” in the system, if only they are ready to use others to get there, exploiting even those closest to them in the most degrading ways, from the pimp on the street to the politician seeking office. Meanwhile, instead of confronting this growing criminal mentality among black people, black militants have been making excuses for it — thus helping this criminal mentality to become even more widespread among black children and youth.

Today, in the year 1974, blacks all over the country are bragging about how many black mayors have been elected, while practically every black who can get together a few hundred dollars is running for one office or another. In terms of numbers this looks like progress for black people. But in terms of grappling with the fundamental issues that confront this country and everyone inside it, including blacks, (crime, the energy crisis, the corruption at all levels of government) this rush of black politicians only means that more blacks are now caught up in the system of bourgeois politics. Just like white politicians they cannot raise any of the real questions which confront this country and force the American people and those who might elect them to office, i.e. their own constituents, to discuss and clarify their positions on them. If they did this, they might not get elected to office, which is their main aim. So black politicians are now making deals to please the most voters - just as white

politicians have been doing for the last hundred years. Thus the elevation of blacks into the system has weakened the black movement and the overall struggle for real change in this country - even tho on the surface it may seem to have strengthened it. In this sense, even if we took the process to the logical conclusion of electing a black president and vice-president, all it would mean would be trapping more blacks in the position of defending and projecting the practices and ideology of the system.

LEARNING FROM SOCIAL PRACTICE

There is no use wondering what might have happened differently. Now we must try to learn from what has happened. There is a good side to this. Now that blacks have been incorporated into the bourgeois practices of this country, the fundamental issue facing blacks is much clearer than it could possibly have been twenty years ago. It is easier for young people to see now that blacks, like everybody else in this country, now only have the choice between two roads

Either you can join those blacks who are now rushing in to defend and expand a system which is based upon the exploitation of the many for the benefit of a few. Or you can take the socialist direction which has as its aim to create a society based on advancing the many and all Mankind, above the interests of a few.

In making this choice, those who are ready to take responsibility for changing society in the direction of a socialist society can't start by taking a poll of the masses. Nor can they just wait for the masses to rebel and then rush in to become their spokesman, which is what most of the black militants of the 60s did.-,Like all masses the black masses are full of internal contradictions. They can only acquire the strength to fight against the external enemy by first struggling against their own internal contradictions and limitations. No potential revolutionary social force has ever become an actual revolutionary social force except through struggle to overcome its limitations and weaknesses.

Through past struggles blacks have rid themselves of physical fears standing in the way of struggles against oppression. This is the first obstacle which any oppressed group has to overcome - an obstacle which is usually overcome through mass rebellions. Now the great need is for blacks to rid themselves of the fear of theoretical and political struggles against their own limitations. This requires a different kind of courage and boldness. It also requires discipline and patience and a readiness to struggle to acquire an appreciation of the dialectical process by which development takes place.

Our first need now is to look critically at the past of the black movement of the 50s and 60s, not in order to blame black leaders for what they did not do or to dream about what might have been if somebody had done differently - but rather to prepare for the next stage of

struggle.

Black intellectuals especially must be ready to look very critically at how quick they were to accept the idea that there is such a thing as “black thought,” i.e. that thought is based on color or biology rather than on the creative use of the mind to analyze historical and social developments and to project new directions for an actual society. By accepting the idea that biology is the basis for thinking, black intellectuals have not only crippled their own minds but also the minds of millions of young people — until today few blacks know how to think historically or to make social judgments based on anything else but color. With every day the thinking among black youth becomes more anti-historical, more metaphysical and more superstitious and therefore more vulnerable to manipulation by unscrupulous demagogues and the mass media. The reality, the very sad reality today is that most of our young people have no basis for making decisions except their own momentary feelings, their own immediate

selfish interest or their desire not to be unpopular with their peers. Every day black youth are becoming more individualistic, more pleasure-seeking, more unable to tell the difference between correct and incorrect ideas and principles.

That is why the responsibility of black intellectuals, and especially those of you who are in the field of political science, is so great. You have the responsibility to acquire, to develop a method of thought that is based upon the historical developments and contradictions of this society in this country. You now have the tremendous advantage of the experiences of the last 20 years - both good and bad - to evaluate. In this sense you are very fortunate.

Not all black intellectuals are going to be ready to accept this responsibility. Many, perhaps most of them, will continue to be prisoners of bourgeois thought, i.e. they will be concerned only with advancing their own careers and the careers of their cronies, just as white intellectuals have been. More and more black politicians are going to win elections in the next few years; therefore it will seem to most of you foolish not to jump on their bandwagons or create a bandwagon of your own. But in thinking and acting this way, you will only become like so many black prime ministers in the West Indies and in the tiny African nations of our time - enjoying their own pomp and circumstance and begging whites to come to your city to spend their tourist dollars, so that you can entertain them with African dances as the native Americans entertain tourists with Indian dances.

My hope, however, is that some of you will be ready to accept the challenge I put to you - to be ready to struggle to think dialectically. That is, we must be ready to recognize that as reality changes, our ideas have to change so that we can project new, more advanced aspirations worth striving for. This is the only way to avoid becoming prisoners of ideas which were once progressive but have become reactionary, i.e. have been turned into their

opposite. The only struggles worth pursuing are those which advance the whole society and enable all human beings to evolve to a new and higher stage of their human potential.

Knowledge must move from perception to conception,; in other words, knowledge and struggle begin by perceiving your own reality. But it must have the aim of developing beyond what you yourself or your own group can perceive, to wider conceptions that are based upon the experiences of the whole history of Mankind. The only way that anyone can take this big step of moving beyond perception to conception is by recognizing and struggling against your own internal contradictions and weaknesses. Of these weaknesses, the most fundamental and most difficult to overcome, as a result of the specific history of United States society, is the tendency not to think at all but simply to react in terms of individual or ethnic self-interest.