

Roundup #10: An Indigenous Governing Council for Mexico

What would a campaign promoting large-scale, organized, autonomous, self-government look like? We're about to find out!!

Last October, the [National Indigenous Congress](#) (CNI) and the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) in Mexico launched an historic initiative: over 500 communities from 43 indigenous peoples across 25 Mexican states would hold an internal referendum to decide whether to form an anti-capitalist Indigenous Governing Council (CIG) for Mexico and name a spokesperson, an indigenous woman, who would run as an independent candidate for the Mexican presidency in 2018. In January of this year the results came in: not only would the CIG be formed and its indigenous spokeswoman run as a presidential candidate, but those hundreds of communities across the national territory would expel all major political parties from their towns, refuse all government "aid" programs, operate on the CNI and the EZLN's seven principles of Rule by Obeying,* and organize the (self)government, healthcare, education, and defense of indigenous and non-indigenous communities across Mexico.

While the CNI took care to note that their struggle "*is not for power, which we do not seek,*" but rather a call to "*organize to put a stop to this destruction and strengthen our resistances and rebellions,*" mainstream media around the world immediately either congratulated or condemned the CNI and the EZLN for giving up their insistence on autonomous organization and joining "the electoral sphere," as can be seen in these examples from [El Pais](#), the [New York Times](#), and even this initial [Telesur](#) report. As we are about to learn, these assessments couldn't be further off the mark.

This week, the newly formed Indigenous Governing Council and its spokeswoman Maria de Patricia Martínez will launch a national tour, starting in Zapatista territory in Chiapas, and we at The Workshop will be there to report their words and activities back to you. In anticipation of those monumental events, we are providing a series of articles by the CNI/EZLN and their key interlocutors (translated here in both English and Spanish) that help explain the context for and direction of this initiative. These readings lay the groundwork for understanding next week's launch of what is by any measure an unprecedented effort to expand autonomy and self-government to communities, neighborhoods, and cities across Mexico and beyond.

[Communiques from the EZLN and CNI Regarding this New Initiative](#)

CNI/EZLN: [May the Earth Tremble at its Core \[español\]](#)

The original proposal for the Indigenous Governing Council and CNI presidential candidate, published October of 2016. *“...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.”* —National Indigenous Congress and the EZLN

CNI/EZLN: [And the Earth Trembled! A report from the Epicenter \[español\]](#):

The communique announcing the results of the referendum on January 1, 2017, in which the CNI bases agree to form the Indigenous Governing Council, to name a spokeswoman as 2018 presidential candidate, and *“...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.”*

CNI/EZLN: [The Time Has Come \[español\]](#):

The CNI and EZLN’s words during the May 2017 inauguration of the Indigenous Governing Council and its spokeswoman, Maria de Jesús Patricio Martínez, a Nahuatl indigenous woman from Tuxpan, Jalisco, and their 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.”*

CNI: [Indigenous Governing Council Oath of Office](#)

The brief but profound words of the newly constituted Indigenous Governing Council and their spokesperson, Maria de Jesús Patricio Martínez, at the historic moment of their swearing in under the seven principles of rule by obeying, pledging their commitment to struggle for their peoples and to never give up, never give in, and never sell out. [[See it here on video](#), the oath of office begins at 1:27:40]

Some Background On The History and Recent Trajectory of the National Indigenous Congress and the EZLN

Carlos Gonzalez (CNI): [The National Indigenous Congress: A Space of Encounter and Unity \[español\]](#)

An important article detailing the electoral versus autonomous strains of indigenous organization in Mexico. The long-term, deep-rooted, community-based organizing process undertaken by the CNI is a very distant reality from the tokenism and clientelism that

characterize the history of indigenous containment in Mexico. The CNI, created in 1996 as a result of the convergence of indigenous peoples all over the country after the Zapatista uprising of 1994, is the first nationally organized and representative indigenous body fully independent of state and party forces and wholly committed to the establishment of autonomy and self-governance in practice.

Alvaro Reyes: [Zapatismo: Other Geographies Circa “The End of the World” \[español\]](#)

In order to truly comprehend this initiative and how the practices of autonomy and self-organization went from a form of survival for indigenous peoples (throughout 500 years of colonization) to what may be the only viable and tangible proposal for a path forward for Mexico as a whole amidst unprecedented social and institutional breakdown, we turn to the Zapatistas' own struggle and analysis. This piece traces the Zapatista analysis over two decades of struggle in order to contextualize their analysis of contemporary systemic crisis and their consequent road map for struggle. This article is particularly useful in helping us to understand that, in terms of the violent consequences of contemporary global capital, Mexico is not just our neighbor, but also our emerging present and future.

Political Commentary on the Indigenous Governing Council Initiative and their Independent Candidate for President

Carlos Fazio: [The Indigenous Council, Marichuy, and 2018 \[español\]](#)

Lucid commentary providing an understanding of the CIG and 2018 candidacy beyond the tired debates between participation and rejection of the electoral system in favor of a structural analysis of the crisis of the system and its institutions. *“The Indigenous Council embodies a project of democratic, horizontal, assembly-based organization in which everyone 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 [...] The problem, then, is not to vote or not; the problem is capitalism.”*

Gilberto Lopez y Rivas: [Seven Reasons to support the proposal from the CNI and the EZLN \[español\]](#)

“The candidacy of an indigenous woman goes beyond a politics of quotas and feminist positions that don't take into account the triple oppression that indigenous women have suffered and the cultural specificity within which they demand full rights. It is situated as a clear response to the reigning patriarchy, a gender politics of a new breed, whose origins can be found in the EZLN's Revolutionary Law for Women...[it] takes up as its own the reindications of all the exploited, oppressed and discriminated people on earth, regardless of their ethno-national origins and cultural characteristics. It is not an essentialist or ethnicist proposal. Its addressees are all the peoples of Mexico, including that of the

majority nationality. *It is that world in which we all fit.*” See here also for Radio Zapatista’s brief [interview in Spanish with López y Rivas](#).

Letter from the Kurdish Women’s Movement [español]

The move toward expansion and consolidation of autonomous self-governing community structures has resonated with people in struggle around the globe who have heralded the role of the candidate and recognized the massive and unique collective effort she represents, as in this letter which stands as a demonstration of solidarity in struggle from below and an historic document in itself: *“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.”* The letter is signed with their slogan *Jin Jiyan Azadî* (Women, Life, Freedom!)

*Seven Principles of Rule by Obeying:

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