dos. Floated on the world market, the price of coffee fell like a stone.[7] Wider structural changes also occurred in the name of opening Mexico up to the free market. 1992 saw the infamous amendment of Article 27 of the Constitution. Previously sacred truths were being questioned by the PRI: the amended Article now permitted the sale of communal lands to anyone who wanted to buy from anyone who could be persuaded (or forced) to sell. The countryside had been opened up to competition, strengthening the hand of the finca-owners and international capital. On top of this, NAFTA, which Salinas saw as his crowning achievement, would soon come into play. How would the Indians' small corn or coffee crops compete with modern US agribusiness? The answer was that they wouldn't.

In tandem with these factors which pointed to further immiseration, the campesinos of eastern Chiapas had not experienced a reduction in the state-sponsored repression that had been directed against them. The sigh of relief that had accompanied the end of General Castellanos's murderous governorship of the state (1982–88) quickly became a groan when his successor, Patrocinio Gonzalez began jailing peasant leaders and bumping off journalists The Guardias Blancas were roaming the countryside with impunity and the new forestry police were shooting at anyone they caught chopping down trees. Under these extreme circumstances, traditional independent peasant organisations such as CIOAC and the Association of Regional Independent Campesinos (ARIC), which had been set up by Maoists in the '70s were unable to hold their members. The stable cyclical world of the Indian village was being consumed by crisis. Colombus Day, October 1992 saw ten thousand indigenous marching through the streets of San Cristobal.

[7] Although not intimately tied-in with the neo-liberal project,1989 also saw the state logging company of COLFALSA impose a total logging ban in Chiapas,so depriving the Indians of a vital source of fuel.Naturally tree-cutting continued illegally,but the creation of a new armed police force to enforce the ban meant another layer of repression for the indigenous people.

A Commune in Chiapas?

Mexico and the Zapatista rebellion

Aufheben

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the contradiction is between a local and international capital that is compelled to make ever more of Chiapas barren in order to accumulate and international capital in the form of biotech multinationals who need to preserve the ecosystem.[6] Oil is predictably winning and the natural resources of Chiapas are being slowly eroded.

What is important is that for the local rancheros and latifundistas (who need only relatively small amounts of labour-power), for the oil companies and biotech corporations, the indigenous population of eastern Chiapas is now, almost absolutely, surplus to requirements. Those who were displaced from the west now discover it would be better not to have existed at all. This absolute neglect is reflected in the levels of alcoholism in many Indian communities, and the malnutrition and high infant mortality in the eastern highlands. The Mexican obsession with death, a cultural inheritance from ancient times and which was given new themes and images by the introduction of grim Catholic culture, has been renewed by the Zapatistas' frequent references to mortality.

The sparks of rebellion

The specific causes of the armed uprising of the Chiapan Indians are easy enough to trace. While the indigenous population had been excluded from the PRI welfare state, aside from a layer of PRIista caciques, they had benefited from the subsidies that had traditionally supported Mexican agriculture. From 1988, these subsidies and protections were reduced, dismantled or abolished by the new neoliberal PRI. So, for example, 1989 saw the abolition of INMECAFE, the state agency designed to purchase and set coffee prices, a crucial crop for the Indian eji-

[6] Farmers and ranchers are being driven into making the environment relatively barren,in terms of creating a monoculture,oil companies to make the environment absolutely barren in their destructive quest for petroleum.

don their villages to rising flood waters. Further dam construction is planned, much of it targeted at the Zapatista stronghold of Las Canadas (the Canyons), a region of Los Altos.

The importance of hydroelectricity pales in comparison with the discovery of oil, however. The deposits in the north-east of the state are part of the Gulf of Mexico field that produces 81% of Mexico's crude export. But new deposits have also been found in the east, just north of the Guatemalan border (the so-called Ocosingo field), bang in the middle of Zapatista territory. Most of this new oil is not yet being pumped, but exploratory wells have been drilled both by PEMEX, the national oil company, and international oil interests. This sort of hit-and-miss drilling requires a lot of land; consequently the latifundistas and rancheros come into conflict with the international capital that views them as backward. A less developed industry, but potentially of great importance to the region, is biotechnology. Chiapas's diverse ecosystems are a paradise for those seeking to launch a new round of accumulation based on patented genetic technology. Already several companies have begun bioprospecting in the state. But this is an exploitation that will be based on the preservation of the jungles, rather than their destruction.

We can see a new pattern of accumulation developing in Chiapas. Previously a backwater of non-innovatory local capital, the region has now acquired a strategic importance to sections of both national and international capital. However, the contradiction is not so much between new modes of accumulation and old, although tensions certainly exist, as some have argued:[5] a farmer may need to grab more land to keep his agribusiness growing, but he would surely be more than happy to hand over a drilling concession for a generous fee. Rather

[5] See for example 'Chiapas and the Global Restructuring of capital' by Ana Esther Cecana and Andreas Barreda in Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico,eds. John Holloway and Eloina Perez,Pluto Press,1999.

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at in more detail below, had a high Marxist component in the mid-1970s: some priests refused sacraments to those who opposed Linea Proletaria; in turn the Maoists raised the banner of the indigenous church. Consequently the self-activity of the campesinos had to pass through two layers of mediation — or one of highly-integrated opposites — before it could assert itself in any way.

The land pressure was increased yet further in 1978 when Lopez Portillo announced the creation of the Montes Azul Biosphere — 38,000 hectares in the heart of the Lacandon. Forty communities and ejidos were removed from this UN-protected ecosystem. The frequent land occupations by campesino groups, sometimes led by the CIOAC (Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Campesinos, Communist Party dominated and still influential today), were usually met with military expulsion. In 1980 the army massacred fifty Tojolabal Indians who had occupied a finca (large farm) forty miles from Comitan. This was the pattern for the '80s: the army and the police combining with the Guardias Blancas to suppress land takeovers and murder peasant leaders.

New patterns of accumulation

If the 1970s saw an upsurge in class struggle, it also saw the arrival of new national and international patterns of accumulation. The farmers and ranchers nowadays sit more or less uncomfortably with the new industries that wish to exploit Chiapas's abundant natural wealth, and which are often diametrically opposed to their interests. New dams were built in this period to provide electricity for petrochemical plants in Tabasco and Veracruz: Chiapas is Mexico's largest producer of hydroelectricity, though half of its homes have no power. Dam construction has provided sporadic employment for some parts of the indigenous population, while others have had to aban-

1970s — eviction and resistance in the Lacandon

By the early '70s, with the migration to the Lacandon unstemmed and living conditions becoming unbearable, revolt was in the air. In 1972 President Echeverria sought to ease the pressure cooker by officially redistributing land, believing this would also create a new class of Indian latifundistas. 645,000 hectares were to be given to sixty-six Indian heads-of-family;[3] the rest ordered to leave. There was immediate resistance to the evictions — and an influx of young activists into the region, Los Altos in particular. Many were students who had turned to Guevarist or Maoist ideology after their exile from Mexico City in 1968, now espousing an all-out guerilla war for which they were little prepared. An example was the Maoist group Linea Proletaria who sent brigades from Torreon and Monterrey after being invited to Chiapas by local liberation theology priests such as Bishop Samuel Ruiz.

With this mish-mash of Leninist activity, it is difficult to discover the autonomous content of the struggle against eviction from the Lacandon.[4]To muddy the water still further, it is plain that the vanguardists and the liberation theologists were not in competition for the hearts and minds of the campesinos, as some have suggested. Liberation theology, which we shall look

[3] Accustomed to production for consumption on small plots, these families suddenly found themselves the legal owners of immense tracts of land.he government fully expected them to transform themselves into professional farmers and bastions of private property.The families however,hitherto members of the 'different world' of the peasntry were completely unable to make this qualitative jump.Instead they sold concessions to logging companies and self-destructed on a diet of TV and alcohol .

[4] One action that appears completely unmediated took place in San Andres Larrainzar in 1973,where 22 years later,peace talks between The EZLN and the PRI would be held:Tzotil Indians attacked the homes of landowners, threatening to machete them to death unless they abandoned their farms and ranches-which they did in double quick time.

Since the occupation of January 1994, many have projected their hopes onto this 'exotic' struggle against 'neo-liberalism'. We examine the nature of the Zapatista uprising by moving beyond the bluster of the EZLN communiqués, on which so many base their analysis.

Not proletarian, yet not entirely peasant, the Zapatistas' political ideas are riven with contradictions. We reject the academics' argument of Zapatismo's centrality as the new revolutionary subject, just as we reject the assertions of the 'ultra-left' that because the Zapatistas do not have a communist programme they are simply complicit with capital. We see the Zapatistas as a moment in the struggle to replace the reified community of capital with the real human community. Their battle for land against the rancheros and latifundistas reminds us of capital's (permanent) transitions rather than its apparent permanence.

We have not previously felt moved to comment on the Zapatista uprising, not because we have had no interest, but because we distrusted the way in which so many were quick to project their hopes onto this 'exotic' struggle. Everyone from anarchists to Marxist-Leninists, indigenous people's freaks to social democrats, primitivists to 'Third World' developmentalists — all seemed able to see what they wanted in the struggle in Chiapas.

Subcommandante Marcos, the shrewd EZLN (Ejercito Zapatista de Nacional Liberacion) spokesman, maximised the attractiveness and impact of the Zapatistas on progressive opinion by maintaining a conscious ambiguity around their politics. For us, however, his demagogic appeals to 'liberty! justice! democracy!' were something with which we had little affinity. It was apparent that making sense of the uprising would require an understanding of what the Indians were doing on the ground, distinct both from the way their spokespeople chose to portray the struggle, and from the way in which this repre-

sentation was taken up to fulfil the needs of political actors in very different situations.

Two currents have attempted to go beyond the cheerleading for the Zapatistas to provide a more theoretical grasp of this movement. 'Autonomist Marxism', now largely based in academia, has embraced the Chiapas revolt, seeing it as central to a new recomposition of the world working class. On the other hand a much more critical response can be found in a number of 'ultra left'[1] inspired articles. As both tendencies favour autonomous class struggle and oppose traditional leftist ideas, why such different conclusions on the rebellion?

On one level we can see it as a matter of a different theoretical approach. While the autonomists focus on the movement of struggle, thinking in terms of a generalisation of Zapatismo, the 'ultra left' look more to the content of Zapatista politics — their programme — the limits of which they identify in the democratic and nationalist framework into which the Indians' struggle has been projected.[2] At the same time, while the autonomists wish to move with the mood of solidarity and inspiration the uprising has created, the 'ultra left' are disturbed by the way that identification with the EZLN is functioning, which has similarities to the role of anti-imperialist and Third Worldist ideology in the past. Support for existing struggle can become an ideological identification which represses criticism.

[1] Here we use the term as a convenient if problematic label for a political area,an area with which we have an affinity.As we sais in Aufheben 6 Fnt.2 .36 those who leftists dismiss as 'ultra-left' would argue that it is simply they are communist and their opponents are not.However as communism is not a particular interpretation of the world held by some people,but a real social movement, we will not go down the path of attaching the approval-label 'communist' or 'revolutionary' to the small set of individuals and groups with whom one considers oneself in close enough theoretical agreement.

[2] For an interesting discussion of the difference between autonomist and (left-)communist or situationist approaches,see the Introductions to Technoskeptic and the Bordiga Archive at Antagonism

Their paying off of local caciques is perfectly in character for this underdeveloped form of accumulation. Caciques are rather like charros in that they can deliver some of the basic demands of the campesino and mediate his needs. They are usually older men who are involved in local commercial activities and have a reputation as fixers, usually with some access to local state funds. Many are PRIistas, most are corrupt and violent and all believe they 'serve the people'. In fact they serve to demobilise and suppress rural struggle and are invaluable to the landowners. Caciquismo itself has often been a focus for struggle, with predictably unsuccessful results.

The migratory flow of land refugees in Chiapas has been eastwards, as coffee growers expanded their plantations in the fertile Soconusco region of the state. In 1954 the landless, particularly Chol Indians, began arriving in the Lacandon. The trickle soon became a flood: Indians from Oaxaca made homeless by government dams, from Veracruz, evicted by Guardias Blancas, mestizo farmers from Guerrero and Michoacan. Much like the US border, the Lacandon was becoming a safety valve for the poverty and dispossession agricapitalist expansion was creating. The party-state saw this, recognised its value, and granted a number of land titles through government decree in 1957 and 1961. But the stampede into the Lacandon and consequent deforestation meant there was not enough land to go around, and what there was quickly became sterile. Those who had reckoned on avoiding proletarianisation by refusing to go to the cities now found they had to survive by selling their labour-power wherever they could and eking out some sort of existence on a tiny patch of barren land.

The pattern of accumulation was, and to a large extent still is, based on expansive land holdings rather than developing the forces of production per se. Coffee, bananas and other tropical fruit are grown for export; cattle-raising is another source of profit for the rural Chiapan bourgeoisie. Crop-growing requires only seasonal labour-power, and cattle-rearing generally requires very little at all. Accumulation in these dominant industries has come not from improving productivity (though agricultural techniques have obviously improved over the years), rather it has come from extending the land available on which to grow or graze cattle. Chiapan landowners have, as a result, a reputation for being among the most violent in Mexico. Their business has literally been that of forcing people off fertile land. Because the landowners are mestizo (mixed blood) or ladino and those they are expropriating are invariably indigenous, the rural bourgeoisie are deeply racist — an important point to bear in mind when discussing the validity of some Zapatista ideas. Through this violent racism, the hacendados and latifundistas have been able to utterly dominate those Indians that have been allowed to remain as wage labourers or debt-peons. Whether this is by forcing employees to buy from the hacienda shop, raping their wives or daughters, or executing natives who try to organise, racism has buttressed the power of the landowner and served to nail the price of labour-power to the floor: it has greased the circuits of accumulation for decades. Backward Chiapan capital does not even have to worry about the costs of the reproduction of labour, as these have always been borne by the family unit in the impoverished local village. Depending on their size (large-scale agribusiness or medium-sized commercial growers) the landowner's capital may flow to the cities to be invested, often in speculative ventures. A large part of their profits also goes on conspicuous consumption, the flaunting of which further reinforces the rural hierarchy.

However, criticism of struggle does not have to lead to an ideological turn against it.

Our interest in the struggle in Mexico is how it expresses the universal movement towards the supersession of the capitalist mode of production. One needs to avoid acting as judge of every manifestation of this universal movement, dismissing those manifestations which don't measure up, while at the same time avoiding uncritical prostration before such expressions. The real movement must always be open, self-critical, prepared to identify limits to its present practice, and to overcome them. Here it is understood that communism 'is not an ideal to which reality must accommodate itself.' Our task is to understand, and to be consciously part of something which already truly exists — the real movement that seeks to abolish the existing conditions.

Introduction: The Mexican context

In past issues of Aufheben we have examined the retreat by the international bourgeoisie from the use of social democracy as a form of mediating class struggle, and asked whether it may reappear from future class struggle. So far we have focused our attention on Europe and North America. The retreat from social democracy is not confined to these areas, however. Class struggle in Mexico has been distorted for decades by a particularly durable strain of social democracy, personified by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, the Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI).

Social democracy is everywhere in retreat in Mexico. But the recent nine-month strike by students of the Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) over tuition fees and the electricity workers' successful campaign against privatisation of the power grid are both indications of a new climate of resistance to the waves of economic rationalisation. Marching together in Mexico City demanding the release of political prisoners, they have formulated the beginnings of an alternative to so-called 'neoliberalism'[1] — an alternative, it must be said, that as yet

[1] Opponents of 'neo-liberalism' or 'globalisation' all too often identify capitalism with rampant multinationals and US dominated trade organizations.Tending to complain about the subordination of the national economy and the undermining of democratic institutions they end up appealing to the state to tame the economy-failing to recognize those same democratic states consciously participated in the creation of the structures of the global economy.Opposing 'neo-liberalism' can easily lead back to supporting social democracy. Neoliberal ideology itself,as aggressively expounded by the

Part 3: A Commune in Chiapas?

Traditional accumulation and social structure

With its mountainous highlands and jungles, Chiapas can feel more a part of Central America than Mexico. The Distrito Federal of Mexico City, even San Cristobal, can seem a million miles away: unconnected and unimportant. Until the 1970s capital accumulation followed a stable and relatively backward model, necessitated by the geographical inaccessibility and remoteness of this state, and made viable by the rich lands. The Revolution barely reached Chiapas, and the latifundias were never broken up, although an echo can be heard in the contemporaneous slave revolts in the logging camps of the Lacandon.[1] Similarly the Cardenas reforms had little effect in the 1930s. Some land was redistributed, but it was all of poor quality, 'so steep the campesinos had to tie themselves to trees to plough, while the rancheros continued to hold great swathes in the rolling valleys.'[2]

[1] The 'Jungle' novels of B. Traven ,particularly The Rebellion of the Hanged (Allison and Busby) are excellent for an historical understanding of Chiapas in this period.

[2] Rebellion from the Roots by John Ross,Common Courage Press,1995,p.70.This book of left journalism is the best narrative account of the opening months of the Zapatista struggle in 1994 and provides a useful background to Mexican politics, especially the corruption of the PRI.

favours.[5] The question for the PRI became: how successful could it be at maintaining its traditional network of influence and power, a network born out of a corrupt and state-led economy, in the face of the new competitiveness the free market demanded. With the PRI unable to solve this problem, a problem which undermined their own social base, Mexico could open up to all sorts of possibilities.

[5] A good example of the way in which privitisation policies have undermined the PRI's social base is on the railways.Since the selling off of the rail network and subsequent redundancies and pay cuts,the PRI-controlled railworkers's union has lost more than 70% of its members.As a result the Charros have found their funds slashed and their influence eroded.

appears unable to move beyond the crushing weight of social democracy that is the heritage of the Mexican working class.

If anything in the recent history of class struggle in this gigantic country is able to look practically beyond social democracy, to the possibility of the constitution of human community over the reified community of capital, it is the struggle of the Zapatista Indians of Chiapas.

A brief chronology[2]

The Zapatistas first came to the attention of Mexico, and the world, when they occupied the Chiapan towns of San Cristobal de las Casas, Las Margaritas, Altamirano and Ocosingo on January 1st 1994, the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was due to begin operation. After destroying civil records and reading out their proclamation of revolt from the balcony of the Town Hall, the EZLN laid siege to the nearby military base of Rancho Nuevo, capturing weapons and releasing prisoners from the region's jails. The Mexican army responded savagely. The Zapatista army was dislodged relatively easily from the towns (although there was quite a fight in Ocosingo) and air force bombers followed the retreating indigenous soldiers back into the highlands, Los Altos. January 10th saw a half-million strong demonstration for peace in Mexico City.

bourgeois of Britain,America and latterly Mexico is an expression of the increased global mobility of finance capital,which was utilized to outflank the class struggles of the 1970's and has been used since in capital's attempts to avoid areas of working class strength.

[2] The best source of day-to-day news of the ongoing situation is the Chiapas website,at www.eco.utexas.edu. The Irish Mexico support group,which has a continuous presence in the Zapatista village of Diez de abril,also has an excellent website.We would encourage any readers who have the time and the money to visit Chiapas themselves.Chiapaslink have made several trips and can give good advice;they can be contacted at PO Box 79,82 Colston street,Bristol BS1 5BB,UK.

Within days the President, Carlos Salinas, unnerved by the sympathetic attention the Indians were receiving and the jitters of the stock market, which had lost 6.2% of its value since the uprising had begun, called a halt to the bombings and summary executions. February and March saw peace negotiations take place in San Cristobal, at which time the popular image of the rebel Indian dressed in black, wearing a ski-mask and toting a gun became an archetype. This period also saw the beginning of the Mexican media's love affair with Subcommandante Marcos, the apparent spokesman of the EZLN.

Despite visible headway, the differences between the ladino (European blood) politicians and the indigenous peasant were irreconcilable. The PRI wished to limit the negotiations, and therefore the uprising itself, to the status of a 'local difficulty.' The Indians wanted to intervene politically on a much broader scale. Once the negotiations had ended, the EZLN representatives took the proposals back to the village assemblies of the Zapatista heartlands where, after three months of discussion, they were massively rejected. A return to war, however, was little more than suicide.

To overcome this bind, the Zapatistas decided to call a National Democratic Convention (CND) in their jungle base of the Lacandon. Coming weeks before the Presidential election, which is held every six years in Mexico, the CND would be an opportunity to bring all the anti-PRI elements of 'civil society' together to discuss strategy. But if the Convention was a success in terms of the numbers attending, and therefore a timely morale-booster for the besieged Indians, nothing concrete came of it. Defined only by their hatred of the PRI, these disparate groups could agree on nothing: the inspiration they took from the struggle of the Indians did not translate into a common political project.[3] With the routine re-election of

[3] The many reformist elements of the CND were unable to make even a policy decision to vote for the main left opposition group,the PRD (Partido

forseen, is surely proof that they never intended to engineer more than an simple adjustment in the balance of payments. Rather what we see is a crisis of confidence in the Mexican bourgeoisies' ability to manage accumulation on the part of global finance capital.

There is no doubt, however, that the recession has vigorously restructured sectors of the Mexican economy. The competitive edge that the devaluation gave to Mexican exports has been sustained. Oil, once such a key export, now accounts for only 10% of the country's export base. It is this export-led recovery that the capitalist class see as the fruit of the restructuring that has been taking place since the late 1980s, and which superficially appears to be as a result of NAFTA. For the working class, real wages have still not reached their pre-devaluation levels. More wage cuts and job insecurity is on the way as the privatisation bandwagon judders on and the old social contract is further destroyed.

The swift economic recovery from 1995 showed how successfully the PRI had reinvented itself as a party of neoliberal economics. They did not attempted to spend their way out of trouble, as they have done in the past. Instead they inflicted the harshest of free market medicines on the population. By stealing their policies, the PRI seemingly marginalised the PAN. Two related contradictions now beset the PRI however. The first was that with the opening up of Mexico to trade liberalisation, and the subsequent deluge of American commodities, the PRI could no longer bang the ideological drum of economic nationalism with any coherence. This may not have been a problem: the Mexican bourgeoisie have decades of practice at appearing to be masters of their own fate while having huge sections of their economy subordinated to the interests of American capital.

The second contradiction was more serious. By so dramatically reducing the size of the state sector, the party-state inevitably curtailed its own ability to dispense patronage and do

class. Seven banks collapsed and needed rescuing by the government. The true cost of this bailout only became apparent in 1999 — $93bn, nearly 20% of GDP! This debt, which is accruing 18% yearly interest, and which the PRI has hidden from public accounts, falls due in 2003. Unless it is restructured soon, the Mexican capitalist class may find themselves in trouble yet again.

The response of the working class to this austerity package was determined by the depth of the recession that followed. Unlike 1987, the CTM refused to sign an economic pact with the government and business. Consequently there was no official policy of wage restraint during this crucial time. But the refusal to endorse austerity was hardly in response to a militant working class movement within the CTM tent. Rather it was because, their social base undermined by privatisation, the CTM now found itself in much stiffer competition with independent unions and was compelled to posture a little more credibly. Neither, however, were the independent unions arenas of militant anti-austerity. Shocked by the scale of the 1995 recession — one million out of work, another four million working less than fifteen hours a week — the working class was unable to move beyond the fragmentation wrought by the economy and which the trade union form accepts. Furthermore, the PRIs targeted anti-poverty programme PRONASOL, which had come into being as a result of the 1988 election shock, offset some of the very worst effects of the recession.

Some fantasise that the devaluation was a punitive measure directed at the working class lest they become overly-inspired by the Chiapas rebellion; others that Zedillo deliberately elected to expose the economy to crisis and therefore force a period of capitalist restructuring. Neither position is tenable: by December 1994 the Zapatistas' initial impact had evaporated and the uprising was militarily contained — indeed the PRI had secured a new incumbent in the Presidential Palace. And the depth of the recession, which the PRI could not have

the PRI candidate, Ernesto Zedillo, later that month, the EZLN went into crisis and stayed quiet at the national level for a number of months.

Throughout 1994–95 though, the Indians of eastern Chiapas were seizing more and more land (over 1,500 properties representing more than 90,000 hectares were taken in the period up to June 1995), evicting landowners and organising their new villages into autonomous municipalities. Protected from the violence of the landowner's private armies, the Guardias Blancas (White Guards) and other assorted goons by the implied threat of EZLN guns, these municipalities, of which there are currently thirty-two, were growing ever larger and threatened to encroach upon the vital oil fields of north-east Chiapas. Meanwhile the army tightened its cordon, building new roads and bases.

December 1994 saw the EZLN break through the blockade and surround the Mexican army, before disappearing into the countryside. In Mexico City, investment flooded out of the stock market after Zedillo was forced to devalue the peso dramatically, an action as traditional for the PRI as their routine polling victories. In February 1995 the army launched a new offensive with much destruction of villages and crops. Demonstrations were immediate in Mexico City. Now the slogan was not 'Peace in Chiapas' but 'We are all Zapatistas'. Once again the army quickly called off their bludgeoning.

Later that year new peace talks began in the Zapatista town of San Andres Larrainzar. The PRI would discuss only indigenous issues, and refused to countenance any Zapatista criticism of Mexico's new neoliberal economics. Although an Accord on Indigenous Rights and Cultures was signed, which the Zapatistas still view as a great victory, the PRI has since refused to implement it anywhere. This Accord was intended to

Revolucionario Democratico),although many groups and individuals who attended inevitably did so.

be the first of five, but it was by now clear that the PRI were using the peace talks to buy time in which to further militarise eastern Chiapas. The EZLN cancelled the discussions.

July 1996, with the peace process still ostensibly going forward, saw the 'First Intercontinental Gathering for Humanity and against Neoliberalism' (Encuentro). Four thousand delegates from many different countries attended this inaugural conference in the Lacandon jungle. Two have been held since, in Spain and Brazil. Summer '96 also saw the appearance of a new guerilla group, the Ejercito Popular Revolucionario (EPR) which attacked the army in its home state of Guerrero. The EZLN refused to develop links with the EPR, accusing them of reproducing a particular type of vanguard model of armed struggle which is sometimes called foquismo in Latin America. The last couple of years has, however, seen a split in the EPR, from which the EPR-I (EPR-Indigenous) has emerged. This group has based itself on the Zapatista model and some links have been developed with the EZLN. However, recently the structure of the EPR-I has been affected by the capture and imprisonment of some of its leaders by the state.

Unable to reach any accommodation with the PRI yet unable to restart their war, the EZLN continue to find themselves at an impasse. The creation of the FZLN (Frente Zapatista de Nacional Liberacion) during 1996 was an attempt to provide a political forum outside Chiapas for 'civil society'. Set up by the Zapatistas, they themselves have refused to join, claiming that they might dominate proceedings. Subsequently the FZLN has been riven by the ideological ambitions of the Mexico City left, and is commonly considered a failure.

Since then the Zapatistas have fallen back upon nationwide publicity drives. These have the dual role of keeping their struggle and the militarisation of eastern Chiapas in the public eye, while simultaneously building solidarity networks as they reach out across Mexico. September 1997 saw 1,111 Zapatistas, one from each autonomous village, march from

The Tequila Effect and Beyond

With cheap American commodities just over the border, Mexico is adept at sucking in goods from abroad, leading to periodic crises in the balance of payments which have usually been solved by devaluing the peso. The peso was overvalued in 1994 — but everyone assumed the PRI had sufficient foreign currency reserves to protect it. In fact these reserves had fallen from $33bn in February to only $2.5bn in December, money which had been used to cover the yawning balance of payments deficit. Such a dramatic erosion also shows just how quickly the relatively protected Mexican market was opened up by NAFTA. On the 20th of December, the new Zedillo administration announced a one-off devaluation of 15%. Panicked foreign investors scrambled to get out of both pesos and Mexico. The PRI used the last of its foreign currency reserves to bolster the peso, but two days later it was forced to float the currency on the markets, where it dropped 40% against the dollar.

With the dollar such an important factor in Mexico — companies and the government generally having their loans denominated in dollars — the devaluation now meant the debt burden in the economy had risen massively. International debt default seemed once again to be on the cards. And what was being called the Tequila Effect could spread — for Latin America, only recently recovered from the years of international finance isolation that had resulted from the 1982 default, this would be nothing short of catastrophic. Despite the isolationists in Washington, a $50bn rescue package was put together by the US and IMF, specifically to service short-term debt. In March 1995 the PRI announced an austerity programme that included a 10% cut in government spending, increased VAT, fuel and electricity price rises and imposed credit restraints.

Meanwhile, with interest rates soaring at 120%, many businesses and mortgage-owners were unable to keep up their repayments, despite a new government subsidy for the middle

help groups, groups that make up part of what the Zapatistas call 'civil society'.[4]

A more dissipated, but nevertheless important response to the austerity programme was the Presidential election of 1988. Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, a renegade PRI politician, stood against the PRI — and 'won'. Soon afterwards he formed the PRD, now the 'official' left opposition in Mexico. The PRD is very much old school PRI: for state intervention, increased welfare, a measure of land redistribution, against GATT and NAFTA. Prior to 1988, the PRI had only to manage electoral fraud on a gubernatorial level. The Cardenas challenge was so unexpected and so overwhelming that the party-state panicked and fixed the results in the crudest possible manner. Mexico City was immediately alive with anti-PRI demonstrations. The TV screens showing the polling percentages had simply gone blank for hours, and mountains of votes marked for Cardenas were found piled on the Distrito Federal's rubbish tips or floating down Mexico's waterways.

Elections in Mexico often carry such a heavy coercive element that they can be a world away from the pure bourgeois individuality of elections in the West. PRIistas are usually present in gangs around the ballot boxes, and refusal to vote the right way could mean losing a job, having your child barred from school or simply being given a beaten. Thus a refusal to vote PRI is not taken lightly, and is much more likely to occur after discussions and agreement with friends and neighbours. This need to come together collectively immediately and paradoxically raises the possibility of a world beyond democracy.

[4] A good example is neighborhood of Tepito ,as described in 'The uses of an Earthquake' by Harry Cleaver,again in Midnight Notes No.9.

Chiapas to Mexico City, picking up supporters along the way. March 1999 saw La Consulta: 5000 male and female Zapatistas visited every municipality in Mexico in order to hold a ballot on indigenous rights and the military build-up in Chiapas.

Despite the blockade, the Mexican army is unable to break the power of the autonomous municipalities. This is partly because the measures needed to achieve this would result in eastern Chiapas becoming a charnel house, and the PRI has been unwilling to court that sort of international attention. The army for their part are reluctant. The generals know their troops come largely from Mexico's urban slums and have no real quarrel with the Zapatistas. A prolonged and vicious attack could quickly bring insubordination and mutiny into the picture. Indeed, according to one officer who has since fled to the US, around a hundred Mexican soldiers deserted in the opening weeks of the Chiapas war. Instead, the army have taken to training paramilitaries, for which they afterwards claim no responsibility. The group Mascara Rojo (Red Mask) carried out the Acteal massacre of December 1997, the single worst atrocity yet in this struggle, in which 45 EZLN sympathisers, including women and children, were gunned down. Naturally the PRI then use such moments to justify sending yet more troops into the area — in order to 'control the paramilitaries'. Even so, the army has occasionally been let off the leash: April to June 1998 saw attacks on the autonomous municipalities of Flores Magon, Tierra y Libertad and San Juan de Libertad. As a result of these and other incursions, the number of refugees in Chiapas is now over 20,000.

1999 saw better prospects. In September hundreds of UNAM strikers travelled to Chiapas for meetings with the EZ. Desperate to stop the two sides meeting, the army and police pulled out all the stops on the dirt roads leading to the autonomous communities, though a few got through. The UNAM occupation in Mexico City was smashed by an enormous dawn raid in February 2000 and hundreds of students incarcerated on lu-

dicrous terrorism charges. The UNAM strike, the largest student movement since 1968, could have all sorts of effects on Mexico's class struggle. No doubt some students will be recuperated by the state but further contestation seems inevitable for many. The independent electricity workers union has also sent delegations to eastern Chiapas. In their fight against privatisation of the electricity grid they have formed a National Forum which has been joined by over two hundred independent union sections and other social organisations. The electristas appear to have won their battle, though the threat has been lifted partly because privatisation remains unpopular and 2000 is an election year. Rationalisation in the electricity industry could easily be resurrected by the bourgeoisie in 2001 or 2002. The soil in which these struggles are rooted is still fertile. As the Zapatista supporters in San Cristobal say 'Nobody in Mexico knows what will happen next.'

The present article is an attempt to analyse the nature of the Zapatista uprising by moving beyond the bluster of the EZLN communiques, on which so many base their analysis of the EZLN. First however, we must examine the roots of the modern state — the Mexican Revolution.

(Many of these union leaders had come to prominence through the struggles of the 1970s). Restraint in wage demands and price controls on consumer goods was agreed. The Pact was nothing less than an attempt to preserve the social fabric so that restructuring could go ahead unfettered. But its very existence raised the possibility of its being wrecked by a new proletarian offensive.

Unfortunately the terrain of struggle had changed. While the struggle for autonomy in the 1970s had ended at the time of the oil boom, capital was now in a much less expansive position. If the crisis of accumulation was to be solved restructuring was essential. The offensive anti-charro struggles of the working class now became purely defensive and economic. As plants were closed or privatised, workers made redundant or had their wages lowered, the struggle oriented itself around sectional bread-and-butter issues, which engendered fragmentation. Better-paid CTM workers were still relatively protected, and the 1970s generation of charros were consequently in a much more credible position to mediate struggle. And if the situation became desperate, there was always the allure of the US border for the desperate proletarian.

Two moments from the 1980s indicate, however, that overt class antagonism had not vanished from the Mexican landscape. The first is to be found in the weeks following the devastation caused by the 1985 Mexico City earthquake. With the government paralysed, the residents of Mexico City's barrios formed themselves, initially, into rescue and medical teams, and shortly thereafter into community groups. These groups both rebuilt houses and prevented the incursions of landlords, many of whom wished to use the earthquake as an excuse to evict their tenants and rebuild the neighbourhoods with middle class housing at middle class prices. From these autonomous working class formations came a network of self-

predicated on future oil revenue. However, the price of oil dropped sharply after 1979. Coupled with rising interest rates that pushed the external debt ever higher, Mexico in 1982 was unable to keep to its scheduled repayments. By then, the nation owed $92.4 billion, the third largest international debt after the US and Brazil. In August of that year, Mexico triggered the international debt crisis by declaring a moratorium on its repayments. In so doing it brought the international banking system to the edge of collapse. Western banks were soon refusing loans of any kind to the whole of Latin America which was consequently plunged into a decade-long recession.

In a desperate attempt to stem the haemorrhaging of capital, the then-President Lopez Portillo in almost his final act nationalised the banks. In so doing he followed firmly in the tradition of PRI economic nationalists who blame foreign, and especially US, capital of bleeding their country dry. In fact the bank nationalisation was the last time the economic nationalist card was be played with any real content.

The Lost Decade

1982–1992 is sometimes called the Lost Decade in Mexico. The story is a familiar one: having to go to the IMF for money to keep the economy afloat, the PRI found themselves obliged to roll the state back from the arena of capital. This meant bringing the budget deficit under control, removing state subsidies to industry and agriculture, and lowering wages in order to stem the runaway inflation which had been fuelled by the oil mirage. State enterprises were privatised by the fistful, usually offloaded at below market value to PRI cronies. And 1986 saw Mexico finally joining GATT after years of protectionism: many companies went bankrupt as a result.

In December 1987 the Economic Solidarity Pact was signed by representatives of government, the unions and business.

Part 1: The Roots of the Modern State

The Revolution is the touchstone of Mexican politics. The period saw the Mexican state begin its transformation from an oligarchical-landowners' government to the one-party corporatist model which survived for so long. The Revolution is also crucial to understanding the peculiar social base from which the Mexican state is constructed, with its formal recuperation of worker and peasant organisations, and its need to regularly embark upon sprees of revolutionary rhetoric. The revolution was driven forward by the peasants' attack on the latifundias, or large estates, the dominant mode of accumulation in Mexico at the time. Despite subsequent industrialization, the latifundias have persisted — even grown — and have remained a locus of class struggle ever since, most recently in Chiapas. To grasp the importance of land struggles in Mexico we need to understand how the latifundias operate, and how they plug into the cycles of national accumulation.[1]

[1] Much of this section has been taken from The Mexican Revolution (London,1983) by the orthodox Marxist Adolpho Gilly.Gilly's line is of course that the working class would have chosen the right side of the revolution if they had been mature enough to develop a Leninist Party in 1915.But the book's strength,apart from its empirical data,is the emphasis on the uncompromising nature of the peasant war.It is influential,having been reprinted twenty-seven times in Latin America since 1971.

The latifundias

The Porfiriato, the administration of Porfirio Diaz, ruled Mexico from 1876 to 1910. Its social base was the latifundistas, the large landowners, and it was their class interests that were transmitted through the government. The rapid industrialisation that Mexico was undergoing at the turn of the twentieth century was confined to tiny areas of the country, and the industrial bourgeoisie as a class were too weak to make much political headway in the Porfiriato. The large estates originated from the fallout of the Reform War, which had ended in 1867. The victorious Liberal wing of the oligarchy intended to create a limited system of small landholdings that would be constructed mainly from confiscated Church property and the expropriated communal land of Indians. But almost as soon as these smallholdings came into existence they were aggressively acquired by a new breed of landowner (the latifundista), the smallholder generally being unable to exist solely on his land. These smallholders became either poorly-paid day-labourers (i.e. seasonally employed) or debt-peons, little more than slaves. In the southern and central areas of Mexico, the latifundistas further expanded their property by violently evicting peasants (campesinos) from their ejidos (communal production units). This process produced continual class conflict in the countryside. The expansion of the latifundia property-form penetrated the countryside only to the extent that the local populace could be suppressed. Faced with widespread resistance, the landowners organised the Guardias Blancas (White Guards, usually campesinos-turned-bandit, in turn recruited back to the Side of Order). The fact that these brutal paramilitary groups have been a constant part of rural life ever since indicates that the peasants have never admitted defeat in the land war, and the landowners know it.

tique of wage-labour, there can be no doubt that the mid '70s strike movement increased both the self-confidence of the Mexican working class, and the sense of their being an antagonistic class, the opposition to, and negation of, the bourgeoisie.

The movement reached its height in 1976. The radical electricians' union, who had brought together new unions, urban squatter groups, and peasant organisations to form the 'National Front of Labour, Peasant and Popular Insurgency', now called a national strike. The administration responded by sending the army to occupy every electrical installation in Mexico. This was only the most visible of the many acts of repression which pushed the new labour militancy into defeat.

The state also responded with massive social spending. Foreign investment, however, was flooding out of Mexico. Moreover, state expenditure on unproductive industries staffed by rebellious workers was never going to solve the crisis of accumulation. Then an unexpected and propitious discovery gave the bourgeoisie room to manoeuvre — oil.

Oil boom — and bust

As a result of the oil boom, the economy was growing at around 8% by the end of the 1970s. Not only had the discovery of new petroleum deposits pulled Mexico out of the recession that had begun in 1973, the growth and concomitant wage rises had served to head off the snowballing class struggle.

The oil still in the ground off the Yucatan peninsula and in Chiapas was used as collateral for huge loans from abroad. Western banks, stuffed with surplus petrodollars as a result of the OPEC oil price hike eagerly lent out these vast sums to Mexico and many other 'Third World' nations. The loans were used to cover both the trade and the budget deficits.

The bourgeoisie assumed the price of oil would continue to rise, as it had done since 1973: the extent of their loans was

The early 1970s — economic crisis

And there was a new problem. The economic boom stemming from the industrialisation process and the PRI employment protection racket, which had partly offset the traditional role of the reserve army, meant the nationalised industries were severely overmanned and inefficient, and run by an entrenched working class accustomed to relatively high wages.

They say that when America sneezes, Mexico catches a cold. Now mired in its own crisis of accumulation, America in the early 1970s was taking Mexico down with it. As capital increasingly freed itself from national boundaries, transforming itself into highly mobile finance capital, investment flooded away from the industrial heartlands of both North America and Mexico to the Pacific Rim economies.

The recession gave the bourgeoisie less scope for conceding the above-inflation wage rises that had headed off trouble in the past. As a result the negotiating position of the charros was considerably weakened. With the ideals — and repression — of the student movement fresh, the working class, particularly from 1973, began a series of strikes, go-slows and demonstrations. Just like 1959, their demands were over wages and the removal of corrupt union leaders: a struggle for autonomy that raised the possibility of going beyond the trade union form as such. The movement organised new unions outside the CTM and formed currents of resistance within it.[3] The fact that the workers had often to physically fight the charros and their goons, who sometimes used the tools of disappearance and assassination, meant that the CTM could easily and visibly be identified as the enemy. While few workers seem to have used this as an opportunity from which to develop a cri-

[3] For an account of the debateof the 1980s on whether to stay inside the CTM or form a new organization,from the perspective of day-to-day struggle,see 'Las Costurersa' (women textile workers) in Midnight Notes No.9,May 1998.

The latifundias, which were usually centred on a lavish, European-style hacienda, were the wellspring of surplus extraction in the economy. Sugar, coffee, cotton, India rubber: exported abroad, as well as serving the needs of the internal market, these were the sources of wealth for the landowning classes. And if the international trade cycle contracted, the latifundia could easily withdraw into limited, or even subsistence, production. The cost of the reproduction of labour fell always on the villages outside the property and never on the hacienda. While the elasticity of this form of accumulation accounts for its longevity, it was in many ways backward. The commodification of labour-power and money relations had spread to an extent throughout the agricultural sector, but were by no means universal. On many haciendas the landowners paid their workers in produce, or forced them to purchase from an employer's shop. Via this payment in kind campesinos usually ended up in debt, which tended to rise at a greater rate than the peasant was able to pay it off. As a result of this dependency, the campesino became a peon, tied forever to the hacienda. The fact that debts were passed on from father to son only helped to preserve this distorted form of value extraction. If a campesino attempted to escape, the Guardias Blancas would follow.

Zapatismo and the Ayala Plan

By 1911, revolt was breaking out in the north and centre of Mexico, triggered by the corruption of the Porfiriato and the violence of the landowners. In the countryside, the peasant uprising took the form of land seizures. It is the scale of the attack on the latifundias that is the defining characteristic of the Mexican Revolution. With the absence of fully-developed wage-relations, exploitation was more immediate: the campesinos were able to personally identify their class enemies and exact

violent revenge. The Zapatista movement was the highpoint of these years. The campesinos of Morelos and Puebla constructed not only a revolutionary army, they also produced, in the Ayala Plan, a coherent political programme that asserted their needs against those of capital. The Ayala Plan spelled out in detail the Zapatista programme of land redistribution: broadly, expropriation of private land for public utility, dispossessed individuals and communities, with a guarantee of protection for small landholdings. The Plan was both a codification of what was already happening and a fillip to further land takeovers. Landlords, Mexican and foreign, were fleeing in their thousands.

With the landowners chased out of Morelos, the Zapatistas attempted to place limits on the future possibility of petty-bourgeois accumulation. One example is the proposal for agricultural banks, a confused attempt, but an attempt nevertheless, to temper the power of money in favour of social needs. Of course, had the land redistribution project been allowed to thrive with the continuation of money relations as a whole, a new generation of landowners would eventually have developed from the ranks of the revolutionary peasants. In the Ayala Plan we find a communist tendency towards communal land; at the same time a very uncommunist tolerance of small farmers, perfectly in keeping with what Teodor Shanin calls the 'different world' of the peasantry,[2] and which we shall examine later.

The end of the Morelos Commune

If the Zapatistas had, at least in the short term, resolved the contradiction of their class position by favouring the communal over the incipient bourgeois, in shared land rather than

[2] For our analysis of the peasantry as a class we have primarily used The awkward Class by T.Shanin,Oxford University Press,1972,and Community and Communism in Russia by Jaques Camatte.

Mexico's '68

By the late 60s the inability of the PRI to reform and democratise itself was apparent to many sections of society, and was a major contributing factor to the student revolt of 1968. These students were bent on giving cardiac therapy to the cadaver of the Revolution — determined to rejuvenate the egalitarianism of the 1917 Constitution. The movement, in its concentrated phase of July — October became radicalised through its many violent confrontations with the state. Their numbers were swollen by pissed-off proletarians angry at the spectacle and expenditure of the imminent Olympic Games. Ten days before the Games were due to open, around five hundred students were killed and 2,500 wounded in the Tlatelolco massacre. The army attack, which has been marked every year since by demonstrations, finally blew the lid off the PRI's claims to revolutionary legitimacy. It also damaged the party-state in more concrete ways: traditionally unconcerned about using clubs and bullets against workers and peasants, the PRI now found itself shooting down middle class students — its the natural constituency for reproduction.

Many students, though, were brought back 'within budget' after a time in prison. Those who had moved beyond a critique of the PRI to a wider critique of capitalism were forced out of Mexico City to towns and cities that carried less personal risk. For those being actively pursued by the state, this meant disappearing into Mexico's vast hinterlands. There is a direct lineage from the Tlateloloco massacre to the many guerilla groups that appeared in the rural margins in the early 1970s. Tainted by the militarist ideology of Che or Mao, these were all smashed with the help of the CIA by 1975.

However, for the 'pillars of society', those sections of the population incorporated into the party-state, the costs of the reproduction of labour were paid, after a fashion — by the 'PRI welfare state'. It is difficult to quantify, but the far-reaching web of the PRI guaranteedan existence for those sections of society it needed to perpetuate itself. Whether it be official (wage rises) or unofficial (backhanders, protection or the elimination of a rival), it all had to be paid for. The corruption of the PRI welfare state has certainly retarded the efficiency of Mexican industry, prompting many members of the bourgeoisie to defect to the PAN (National Action Party), the pro-business Catholic party set up in the 1930s to oppose the Cardenist reforms.

The 1959 Movements

1958–59 saw a sustained offensive by the proletariat over both wage levels and the control of union charros.[2] It is difficult to know to what extent working class self-activity was mediated; certainly the railwaymen's, electricians' and teachers' strikes were led by the Communist Party, and all the ideological drag of Stalinism was present. Dissident Marxist leaders were also prominent, but presumably their beliefs were variations on a theme. However, the fact that the Communist Party was proscribed from 1946 to 1977 meant that following them led to an immediate challenge to the law of the land: the 1959 movements led frequently to violent confrontation with the state.

Capital also reacted to 1959. Wary of the working class's proven power over the railways, much investment now shifted into air freight and automobile production to begin a new round of accumulation — and struggle.

[2] The best account of this we can find in English is in chapter 20 of Mexico,Biography of Power by Enrique Krauze (HarperCollins 1998).

private property, they were unable to resolve a further contradiction, and one which led ultimately to the smashing of their stronghold, the Morelos Commune, by the reconstituted power of the state. While the revolutionary campesino was (almost literally) everywhere, they were unable as a class to move beyond their localist perspective. The Ayala Plan was the most sophisticated attempt to intervene on a national level — yet it talked about the land and nothing else. Unlike the revolutionary proletariat, separated forever from the means of production, they did not see the need to transcend their class, and with it all classes. The revolutionary working class needs to talk about everything in its attempts to generalise its struggles; the peasantry believes it needs only to talk about the land. The campesinos of this period had struggled around their needs, had largely succeeded, and now found themselves unable to develop further.

The revolutionary peasants who in December 1914 occupied Mexico City were undoubtedly one of the highest expressions of class struggle in the world at that time. The workers of Europe were drowning in their own blood and the Russian Revolution was still three years away. By contrast, the whole of Mexico was at the peasants' feet. The national power of the bourgeoisie was smashed and its survivors had retreated to the eastern port of Veracruz. Yet it was at precisely this moment that the traditional peasant deference, which is rooted in the contradictory nature of peasant existence and the cultural baggage that accompanies it, asserted itself. Refusing a political solution from within themselves, and trusting that military strength alone would prevail, they inadvertently left the door open to a weak but reconstituting state power. This inability to find a wider social perspective is at least something the present day Zapatistas, with all their limitations, have been obliged to overcome, while many of their campesino brothers and sisters in the west of Chiapas are still unable to make the jump from atomised deference to communal organisation.

The preamble to the Ayala Plan had ruled out any compromises with the bourgeois leader Madero and other 'dictatorial associates.' Yet the Zapatistas were chronically unable to see beyond their own backyard. This blindness to the threat of the state was the highest contradiction of the exemplary peasant movement of the Mexican Revolution.

The working class

Individually, many miners, railwaymen and textile workers joined the peasant Northern Division, which had entered into a de facto alliance with the Zapatista Southern Liberation Army. As a class, however, and despite a huge strike wave in 1906 , they remained quiet until 1915.

The peasant armies which had occupied Mexico City had failed to inspire working class support, or indeed relate to them in any way. As a result, in exchange for union concessions from the revolutionary bourgeoisie, the reformist federation of unions, the Casa del Obrera Mundial (COM) agreed to form 'Red Battalions' to fight the Northern Division and the Zapatisatas. Although this decision did not go unopposed — the electricians' union refused to abide by the pact — the Red Battalions fought alongside what were known as the Constitutionalist armies throughout 1915. Yet only a year later the working class was paying the price for this complicity. The new bourgeoisie, having beaten off the threat from the peasants, no longer needed the unions. COM headquarters was stormed by troops and unionists across the country arrested. The following year, 1916 , the first general strike in Mexican history was crushed. Despite this, however, the power of the organised working class remained formidable.

America's foreign-bound surplus value; now it flooded over the border as a result of the post-war boom.

By the 1960s, Mexico had been enjoying its economic 'miracle' for some time. GDP had risen on average 6–7% annually. Profit flowed into state coffers, paying for an unofficial welfare state of sorts. However social inequality was reaching new extremes. By 1969 the proportion of national income going to the poorest half of the population was only 15%. In rural areas, as agricultural mechanisation increased and productive land was concentrated, the number of un- or underemployed was going up. Some, seeking to refuse proletarianisation, moved away from the agricultural heartlands and attempted to chip out a living from barely cultivatable land — this being the option many Chiapan Indians took; many moved to the cities to join the reserve army and effectively kept factory and workshop wages down; some became migrant workers following the harvests through Morelos, Oaxaca, San Luis Potosi and Veracruz. Still others crossed the border into the US.[1]

In the towns and cities even the organised industrial proletariat suffered from low wages. While they were relatively well off compared to those in small workshops or the unemployed, struggling to survive in any way that they could, their wages were a fraction of their US counterparts'. Their union organisation militated for higher wages, yet this was offset by the absolute corruption of the charros (union bureaucrats), who would often swipe their members' dues. More than anything being in a strong union meant a guarantee of a job, a buttress against unemployment.

[1] Until 1964 the bracero programme allowed Mexicans to enter the US for seasonal agriculture work.Once there they were invariably treated as slaves and unwittingly kept the American worker's wages down.The border has long served as a safety valve for the discontent of Mexico's proles and peasants,a valve that both US and Mexican bourgeoisies are more than happy to keep open,whatever their rhetoric.

bourgeoisie as a whole accepted the necessity of state intervention. Even more crucially, any revolutionary movement from below could be mediated through the now-reliable CTM or the new CNC (National Campesino Confederation). As part of the party-state, these organisations could deliver certain concessions, defuse proletarian and peasant anger through nationalist channels and turn a blind eye to repression if it was needed. The state had solved the crisis it had been mired in since the fall of the Porfiriato, and it has followed the same model until very recently: one party guaranteeing social democracy (peace between the officially-recognised antagonistic classes). Unlike the west, it has not needed the shield of formal bourgeois democracy to do so.

The Economy after 1940

The American Fordist model of accumulation, whereby increased productivity pays for higher wages, which in turn boosts demand, could not be followed in Mexico. The native bourgeoisie was too weak to innovate and had always relied on America for heavy industrial investment. The agricultural sector still lagged far behind that of America. While US capital may not consciously have wanted to keep Mexico underdeveloped, it saw it generally as fit only for natural resource and labour-power exploitation.

Mexico did, though, industrialise rapidly after 1940. The model was state-led capitalism with its own Mexican peculiarities. Investment in infrastructure was the province of the state. Petroleum, rail and communications sectors were all under state control, and the state generally carried out economic development which the private sector thought too risky. The resources of the state were augmented by huge foreign investment. Mexico has always been a natural first stop for

The 1917 Constitution

Just like the Revolution, the 1917 Constitution is a vital touchstone in Mexican life, a document that came into existence as a result of prolonged struggle, and is still held in high regard today by many sections of the working class and peasantry. The bourgeoisie clearly intended the new set of state rules to be a signal that the years of chaos and civil war were over and a new cycle of accumulation could begin.

Knowing the erosion of the gains of the Revolution would only be tolerated to a degree by the peasants and the working class, the new bourgeoisie institutionalised itself as the revolutionary party-state, marginalising competing currents within its own class by mobilising popular opinion. It is the evolution of this party-state that accounts for the lack of parliamentary democracy in Mexico, and explains the concentration of power in the hands of one man, the President. Despite many knocks this specific formation of the bourgeoisie has survived — just — the twentieth century.

In the advanced capitalist countries, the illusion of alternatives through democracy is at the centre of the reproduction and expansion of the capitalist mode of production. Democracy mediates between competing interests within the ruling class, while at the same time countering tendencies towards corruption in the relation between state and capital. In Mexico, there is a hole where this mediation might exist — a hole that is instead plugged by the extraordinary way in which workers' and peasants' organisations have been formally co-opted by the state.

Part 2: The Changing Face of the Institutional Revolution

Radical social democracy to the rescue

It was not until 1931 that labour's representatives were fully incorporated into the state. This acceptance of the working class as the working class, as a potentially antagonistic class who must be brought into the fold to neutralise their revolutionary impulses, is the basis of the social democracy the Mexican bourgeoisie utilised for decades. (As late as 1988, President Salinas could still trumpet the 'indestructible pact between the Revolutionary government and the working class.')

With its proximity to, and integration with, US capital, Mexico was profoundly affected by the Wall Street Crash. By 1934 the bourgeoisie had comprehensively failed to restore stable class relations for the accumulation of capital. Exacerbated by the Depression and the militant recomposition of both the peasantry and the proletariat, revolutionary change from below was once more on the agenda. If American capital-in-general was now reluctantly going along with the New Deal, the solution to the crisis in Mexico had to be far more radical. Most individual Mexican capitals recognised the objectively higher level of class struggle. The nightmare of 1914 haunted them more than ever. As such the Mexican ruling class's radical solution to the crisis opened up the possibility of fostering a movement that would not go home when it was told to, that could develop in its own direction and rupture forever the fabric of bourgeois society.

This radicalised form of social democracy came through the conduit of Lazaro Cardenas, President from 1934–40. His first and most important task was to sign a pact with the new CGOCM (Confederation of Workers and Peasants). By 1935 half of all Mexico's organised workers were in CGOCM and strikes were going through the roof. Cardenas immediately recognised the right to strike, poured money into CGOCM patronage and shifted the sympathy of the state's labour relations boards away from the employer and towards the working class as represented by the unions. In 1936 CGOCM was renamed the CTM (Confederation of Mexican Workers) and recognised as the official national labour movement. The highpoint of the radical social democratic project came in 1938, with Cardenas's nationalisation of the largely US-owned oil industry. Cardenas manipulated the enthusiasm for this measure to generate a spirit of 'national unity', which he then used to crush the insurgent workers' movement.

It was not only the cities the radical party-state had to attend to in order to prevent social revolution breaking out. The countryside had ignited and sustained the Revolution, and could do so again. Cardenas's solution was a massive redistribution of land the like of which social democracy in Mexico has not been compelled to repeat. Naturally only the worst land was parcelled out — the property and interests of the hacendados left intact. While the Cardenas reforms appeared impressive, they not only preserved social relations in the rural areas, they bolstered and expanded commodity relations by creating a new class of small landowners. For the vast majority a small patch was unsustainable and seasonal wage-labour unavoidable. The ultimate result of the land reforms was marginalisation for the many, a new network of small competitive farming for some, and the consolidation of the lumbering latifundias.

In fact Cardenas had mobilised the working class in part to discipline those recalcitrant sections of the bourgeoisie who needed to be saved from themselves. After 1940 the

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Later they tore down the statue of local conquistadore Diego de Mazariegos. Many in the demonstration were already Zapatistas. The Indians of Los Altos, Las Canadas and La Selva were flooding into the ranks of the EZLN. But where had the EZ come from? And who exactly was organising it?

Formation of the EZLN[8]

The egalitarian nature of indigenous communal life has been widely overstated. Desperate to dispel the dead weight of Leninism, many have talked up the importance of Indian tradition. Isolated, impoverished, long distorted by caciques, by corrupt PRIistas, hotbeds of patriarchy and alcohol-fuelled domestic violence, the indigenous communal life is considerably less than perfect. But there is a moment of truth: communal ejidos are the norm, important decisions are chewed over for hours on end by everyone, plays and poetry keep the history of resistance alive. What is new about the Zapatista communities is the energetic manner in which they have become political and overcome some of the worst aspects of village tradition. Importantly this has enabled the Zapatistas to move beyond the crippling localism that has been characteristic of other peasant struggles.

As we have already explained, one mediation the campesinos have gone through (and still go through) enroute to becoming Zapatistas, is the influence of the Catholic

[8] We have taken the details in this section from Rebellion in Chiapas:An Historical Reader by John Womack jnr (The New Press,New York,1999).Womack is the author of Zapata and the Mexican Revolution which was published in 1969 and which,together with Gilly,is the standard work on that period.He has been very well-informed about the Mexican left for years and the detail he gives in Rebellion in Chiapas is incredible.In particular has has destroyed the image Marcos has tried so hard to portray of indigenous Indians forcing urban leftists to abandon their ideology in the years before the uprising took place.His book should come to be seen as a standard work on the EZLN,and is a must read for all Zapatista supporters.

church and liberation theology in particular. Whether critical or celebratory, accounts of the Zapatistas have generally neglected this reactionary influence on the development of the class struggle in Chiapas. The extent to which the autonomous communities are infected with religious sentiment is not always appreciated. Every village has a church, usually the most skilfully constructed building in the community, and which is sometimes the only place for miles that has electricity, while the Zapatistas themselves invariably live in ill-lit shacks. There is a high interpenetration of religion and politics: the lay catechist who preaches is often the local EZLN rep, and Masses have a tendency to dissolve into long political meetings — or the other way around. It would be fair to say that while liberation theology has contributed to the combativity of the Chiapan Indians it has also played its part in retarding the theoretical efforts of the Zapatista struggle.

The phenomenon has been present in Chiapas in a concentrated form since at least 1974, when Samuel Ruiz (the 'Red Bishop', a figure much hated by the latifundistas and rancheros) organised a 'Congress of Indian Peoples' in San Cristobal. Shocked into action by the anger displayed at the Congress, Ruiz not only stepped up the church's militant crusading in the villages, he also, as we have seen, invited Maoist cadre into the area. The mid- to late-1970s witnessed a period of co-operation between the party of the church and the church of the party. In fact the 1970s saw the highpoint of Catholicism's flirtation with Marxism. Confronted with military dictatorships across almost the whole of Latin America, many Catholics believed, for example that: 'The class struggle is a fact and neutrality in the question is not possible' or 'To participate in the class struggle…leads to a classless society without owners or dispossessed, without oppressor and oppressed.'[9]Liberation theology even had its own Che —

[9] A Theology of Liberation by Gustavo Guterriez,1971,is the key text.

the body of Camillo Torres, Colombian priest-turned-guerilla fighter.

The contradictions abound: believing in a classless society, catechists are unable to break with a church whose very essence is hierarchy and authority. (In its turn Rome is keen to keep them on side — in an excommunicated liberation theology it perceives the possibility of its own dissolution.) By continually encouraging the revolt of 'the poor' in the city and the country, yet unable to break through the miasma of Catholicism, the liberation theologists actively impede the development of the conscious category of proletariat, whose realisation and self-abolition is the only real solution to the impoverishment of their flock.

By the mid-1980s, with swathes of Latin America undergoing a transition to democracy, notably in Brazil, the highpoint of radical liberation theology was over. The Sandinista defeat in 1990 and the end of the civil war in El Salvador further moderated the influence of Marxism. In Chiapas, however, with the situation in the highlands deteriorating, the liberation theologists wielded greater infuence than ever before. As Jacques Camatte says, 'Religion allows a human demonstration against capital because God is a human product (i.e. something that appears to exist outside the prevailing mode of production). Thanks to him, man can still save his being from the evil embrace of capital.'[10] When Marcos says 'We want liberation —

[10] Communism and Community in Russia by Jacques Camatte.Of course,out of context this quote from Camatte sounds too abstract.Every religon must in fact reflect the material and social relations and thus the prevailing mode of production (religon is not 'God' but what you have to do for God).As such,religions normally discourage opposition to these prevailing social relations.Of course any religious text or tradition born in a past mode of production is at odds with capitalism.In order to remain a religious authority within bourgeoisie society and,in the same time,retain the Bible and its whole tradition,the Catholic Church emptied them of their original content.Of course a 'free' reading or interpretation of its tradition can highlight elements that can be used to justify rebellion-and this reading can have

but not the theology', we should not be fooled. The Zapatistas are as devout a lot as one is ever likely to meet.

However, it was not just that the Church was acting as a political force — it was also acting as a conduit for Mexican leftists who could not otherwise gain access to the Indians of Chiapas. Ruiz found these leftists useful in the organising work he had committed his diocese to. In the 1970s, the arrangement was that the priests would handle pastoral work while the Maoists handled the political organising. This backfired on him badly in 1980 when Linea Proletaria mounted a coup and replaced the catechist leaders in the key peasant unions.

It took two years for Ruiz and his priests to regain the initiative. He turned to another group of leftists to help him — but unbeknown to him this group was an advance party of the Che Guevara-inspired Fuerzas de Nacional Liberacion (Forces of National Liberation, FLN). By the time Linea Proletaria was leaving Chiapas in 1983, the FLN, taking advantage of its successes in organising with the Church, was upping its activity significantly. The FLN High Command had secretly visited the canyons, with a view to developing an army which they already had a name for — the EZLN. With them came a young captain, Marcos.

From 1991 the FLN made real progress in recruiting beyond its core cadre of Indian militants. While they had may have followed the foco model of the Cuba experience, which emphasises the military struggle over the social, they recognised the need to participate in grassroots organisations — a lesson they may have learnt from the innovative left-Maoist aspects of Linea Proletaria. However, they had avoided falling into a tendency that Linea Proletaria had succumbed to: drifting away

authority above all if this is backed by some priests.But the contradiction inherent in this use religon appears when the supporters of the Theology of Liberation collide with the high authorities within the Church (the main theorist of the Theology of Liberation, L.Boff, was deprived of his official powers-'suspended a divinis').

from militant land occupations and battles with employers and towards co-operation with PRI agencies over credit lines, marketing facilities and productivity increases. The importance of differentiating between these strategies became more pronounced as the massive anti-poverty programme PRONASOL rolled into Chiapas in the early 1990s. With it rolled some of the old Linea Proletaria cadre, now part of Salinas's retinue. An alliance between the PRONASOL government workers and the Church, now long aware of the FLNs commitment to armed struggle, aimed to divert the Indians' anger into avenues of government recuperation. But with the economic situation for the Indians now so desperate, the FLN was able to outflank this move by creating a new militant body, the ANCIEZ, the Emiliano Zapata Independent National Peasant Alliance, an embryonic Zapatista army under whose banner the militant Indians began the work of reorganising their communities. They even managed to get some PRONASOL funds on the sly for weapons.

All these elements — the FLN, the priests, the communal Indian traditions, each with their own internal contradictions, were lenses through which the coming-into-being of the EZLN was focused. The necessary first step of this militant reorganisation was the suppression within the communities of anti-Zapatista elements, usually caciques out to enrich themselves or PRIistas who could act as levers of coercion or as spies. This process must have developed in quite different ways according to the prevailing conditions. In some places there was a blanket conversion to Zapatismo and the villagers could afford to be relatively open, at least with each other, about their organisation. Individual PRIistas would be easy to isolate and exclude. Other villages might have an even mix of Zapatistas and PRIistas, or complete PRI dominance. In the latter case many rebellious campesinos were simply forced out and constructed a community elsewhere. Even today when large chunks of Chiapas are controlled by the EZLN, one can often find a Zapatista village

next to a PRI village, with all the suspicion and antagonism that that implies. The PRI web is torn but far from brushed away: the fear of informers means that on the margins of EZLN territory, clandestinity is still very much the name of the game. The expulsion where possible of PRIistas opened up a space for the Zapatistas, a space where a process of rebuilding could begin. Simultaneous to the clandestine reconstitution of the villages the insurgent army began to coalesce in the highlands around 1992–93.

Until September 1993, Marcos and the Indian cadres were following orders from the High Command of the FLN in Mexico City, though he has since made every effort to hide it. In that month, realizing the FLN units in other Mexican states were barely existent, let alone able to lead an armed revolution, he refused their request to send finances out of Chiapas. It seems to be at this time that the ideological break with the FLN occurred, though it was not fully confirmed until the failure of the January 1994 uprising. The Clandestine Committee for Indigenous Revolution (CCRI) which had been created in January 1993 and which was made up of veteran Indian cadre now pushed for war. However, on this one crucial point, the village assemblies found consensus impossible. According to Womack: '[The] assemblies groaned for consensus for the armed way, but it would not come… In the Zapatista canyons the majority ruled…where communities voted for war, the EZLN tolerated no dissent or pacifism: the minorities had to leave.'[11]

From its FLN origins, then, we know that the army itself could be a sufficient form for the hierarchical organisation of the struggle. A political cadre could operate within the army to transmit the line of the organisation and its leadership to both combatants and non-combatants. Leninism, as a 'hierarchic organisation of ideology' (Debord), does not require an obvious party form; it is enough that a cadre of militants ex-

[11] Womack, op cit.,p.43

the CTM had boasted of its intention to call a general strike should the PANista win — a boast which fell away hours after the result was declared. Already there are signs of a rapprochement with the new regime. Fox, for his part, will need the union bureaucrats if he is to forge ahead with the programme of rationalisation. The flashpoint could well be the energy sector. The international finance markets demand this bastion of union power be privatised — but any move towards it will be hugely divisive. Fox will surely need to set up his own version of PRONASOL to offset the increasing class polarity in Mexican society, and he will need to do something fast about the debt millstone from the 1995 bank bailout.

For the Mexican proletariat, the battle lines are now much more clearly drawn.

ist with a leadership — perhaps a hidden leadership — giving them political direction. We know that the FLN grew in Chiapas by recruiting and training an Indian cadre who then played a key role in the Zapatista decision to go to war. But this was not a vanguard 'parachuted in from the outside'. Apart from Marcos, and possibly a few others, it was composed of Indians who joined because it seemed to meet their needs. Specifically, it unified Indians of different languages and allowed them to act collectively against their exploiters.

But if the EZLN has at its origin the hierarchy and mediation that is inherent in the Che Guevara version of Leninism, there is no doubt that the political certainties that accompanied this model were destroyed following the failure of January 1994. The rupture that took place between September 1993 and February 1994 meant the EZLN and the cadre form was thrown into crisis. On the one hand the EZLN had clearly failed in their attempt to launch a credible military offensive, and had become besieged and isolated. Yet on the other hand, the outpouring of public support for the Zapatistas must have caused the CCRI-GC (General Command) and the Indian cadres to re-examine their ideas. Out of this crisis came a commitment to a vague form of left reformism, utilising ideas such as civil society. Desperate to survive, the EZLN has usually pitched for the lowest, and least controversial, common denominator in its organising efforts and communiques — anti-PRI. However, the other long-term effect of the uprising and its failure has been a high level of confusion and disorientation. Periodically the organisation has been able to unite around certain initiatives, such as the Encuentros. Yet given the extremely difficult conditions they live under, the Zapatistas have displayed a tremendous level of courage and initiative. It is the self-activity of the Indians, above all else, that defines this struggle.

Zapatista organisation

The scale of the uprising is the first thing that strikes the visitor to eastern Chiapas. There are over 1,100 rebel communities, each with 300–400 people, usually young. These villages, some of which have been built since 1994, are federated into thirty-two autonomous municipalities. The civil decision-making process is fluid: local decisions are made locally, important policy or project decisions made on a wider, but not always municipal, level. Municipally, delegates from each village come together in the assembly halls that are almost as common as churches. These meetings are extremely long-winded by European standards, sometimes going on for two or three days until something like consensus is reached. This ability to reach consensus is aided by the vitality of the traditional decision-making process and which recognises the pressing demands of life under siege. The remoteness of the Indians' lives from regular wage labour, and the communal nature of farming which in any case is labour-intensive only seasonally, enables the Zapatistas to carve out large portions of time for meetings and organising.

The civil level is completed by the five Aguascalientes which are dotted around Zapatista territory. Named after the original Aguascalientes (where the CND was held) which was destroyed by the Mexican army in 1995, in turn named after the Aguascalientes Military Convention of 1914, these cultural centres are a conglomeration of schoolhouses, assembly halls, metalworking shops, sleeping quarters, storage huts, etc. It is to the Aguascalientes that the Zapatistas come for their most important political meetings, dances, and endless basketball tournaments. They have also been used at various times as EZLN barracks.

The EZLN encampments, being obvious targets, are away from the communities, hidden from the constant overflight of army helicopters or air force bombers. The local EZLN detach-

and the working class. What future now for the PRI? With command over such large resources they are far from finished. But the splits were evident from the very first morning of defeat. There could now be an official divorce between the dinosaur wing and the technocrats. The dinosaurs, desperate to recapture their traditional constituency may veer headlong back into old-fashioned social democracy — an unpalatable alliance with the PRD could be on the cards. Meanwhile the technocrats, who side naturally with the PAN, will wish to see their party reinvented along Western lines. A split with the social democrats would be in their interests, so long as the left-wing do not take too much of the organisation with them. Alternatively, a clear split could fail to emerge and the whole party could collapse in on itself. Whatever happens, it will be messy and protracted.

In Chiapas, the PRI have also lost their hold on the governorship, and there is a new PRD governor. Will the new PANista President, or the PRDista governor pull the troops out? It seems unlikely, though there may be a minor peace initiative. The fact that there has been the democratic change the EZLN has long called for, but that nothing will change, may now begin to shake the uncritical attitudes of the Zapatistas towards the concept of democracy. At the same time, after nearly seven years of military seige, the communities may wish to grab any olive branch that is offered them. But even in the unlikely event of an accommodation with the state, the Chiapan bourgeoisie will never forgive them.

The PAN victory has set the US bourgeoisie cock-a-hoop, naively believing that Mexico has voted for a unadulterated regime of 'neoliberalism'. For us, the Fox triumph raises several questions. How will the working class, no longer subjected to the ideological weight of The Revolution, react to the next wave of restructuring? Could campaigns such as that waged by the electristas grow in size and dynamism in the future without the hegemonic influence of the PRI? Before the election,

Postscript: September 2000: Mexico and the Fall of the PRI

After seventy-one years the PRI has lost the Presidency and with it national power in Mexico. Despite getting up to all their old tricks in the run-up to the July 2nd poll — the Michoacan governor was caught plotting to divert state funds into election bribes, and in the state of Quintana Roo the PRI were even giving away free washing-machines — and despite the fact that the much heralded independent Federal Electoral Institute was controlled by the party-state, Vicente Fox, the leader of the PAN received 43% of the vote. The shock came in the PRI conceding defeat so swiftly. This time around, they lacked the political stomach for arranging the vast fraud needed to switch defeat to victory.

Why did the PRI lose? The simple answer is corruption. After so many years of institutionalised venality the electorate finally found a sturdy enough opposition bandwagon upon which to jump. On a broader level, it is now apparent just how far the PRI's traditional networks of power were undermined by the economic restructuring — and particularly the privatisations — of the 1980s and 90s. Their irony is that, having propelled Mexico out of its old economic protectionism, they themselves have not survived the transition. Just as the Porfiriato was compelled eventually to assault its own social base in the years before the Revolution, so the PRI through its economic reforms has attacked its social base — the peasants

ments send representatives to the various CCRIs, which in turn sends delegates to the CCRI General Command, which consists of around 70–80 members, and is based in the Lacandon area surrounding the Aguascalientes of La Realidad.

The hierarchy that exists in the EZ is almost certainly part of the legacy the FLN has left the Indians. Commandante, Subcommandante, Major, Captain: the chain of command appears to reproduce that of the state's armed wing perfectly. Naturally, there will have been tendencies within the CCRI-GC that both ossify and loosen command, but a relaxation could be more likely in recent years as the EZLN has been militarily quiet since its initial flurry of activity. With the indigenous war on hold, work in the communities has taken precedence, and the damage militarisation can do to a social movement reduced. The EZ, however, is still the arena where the young wish to prove themselves. Since 1994 a new generation of combatientes (EZ soldiers) has come of age, and it would be interesting to know how many have made it into the CCRI-GC — or whether they now dominate it. Unfortunately this information is not available to us.

One further aspect that differentiates the EZ from an army of the state, aside from its relatively informal command structure, is the apparent absence of both punishment and insubordination. Joining up is not compulsory, though all seventeen year-old men and women are encouraged to participate. Many seem to want to join the militias earlier. The Zapatista army has after all come ultimately from the material needs and insurrectionary desire of the Chiapan Indians. As such becoming a combatiente is seen to be not only in an Indian's self interest, it is also an escape from agricultural drudgery and early marriage into a world of excitement and possibility. The EZ may not appear as a burden to the young, rather to join it could be to embark upon a process of individual and communal self-expression. If we wish to believe Marcos, and some may not, it is also a space for limited, but hitherto unthinkable, sexual

experimentation, free from the judgmental gaze of the village elders.

The relationship of the EZLN to the autonomous communities after 1994 appears to be characterised by the slogans: 'Commanding obeying' and 'Everything for everyone, nothing for ourselves'. The former is really nothing more than an indigenous take on the practice of recallable delegates. As such it follows firmly in the traditions of soviets and workers' councils — though of course it is double-edged: if the commanders obey, they also command. The latter slogan is an assurance that that the EZLN, or the CCRI-GC, will not enrich itself at the expense of the communities, nor will it transform itself into a new layer of caciquismo. The villages are not the bases of support for the guerrilla army, as was the case in neighbouring Guatemala, rather the EZLN appears to be the base of support for the self-organised village. Because there are not nearly enough resources to go around, any material enrichment on the part of the EZ, or sections of the EZ, would instantly raise suspicions of PRI influence. But in fact the Zapatista army is not saying 'we will take only that share to which we are entitled', they are saying 'we will take less than our share.' In impoverished eastern Chiapas this amounts to a little more than posturing. The same obsession with death we noted earlier also leads into a language of sacrifice.

The dialectic of 'commanding obeying' can best be seen at work in the devising and implementation of the various Revolutionary Laws of the EZLN. The Laws themselves are mired in leftist bourgeois language — 'The Rights and Obligations of the Peoples in Struggle', 'The Rights and Obligations of the Revolutionary Armed Forces' — and often in reformist content, such as the Revolutionary Agrarian Law, which we shall look at later. Once again we see the influence of the structures of Marxism-Leninism. But they represent also a sophisticated attempt by the campesinos to begin solving their own problems. The army, being everywhere, was the only body that could

may be marginal but we cannot deny them their revolutionary subjectivity.

Instead we see the Zapatistas as a moment in the struggle to replace the reified community of capital with the real human community. Their battle for land against the rancheros and latifundistas reminds us of aspects of capital's violent stage of primitive accumulation, which, for billions, still continues — reminds us, in other words, of capital's (permanent) transitions rather than its apparent permanence.

In their exclusion of caciques, PRIistas and alcohol we see a rejection of the state as it affects them, and in the new confidence of the armed Indians we see its replacement with self-organisation. A crucial part of this self-definition is their refusal to lay down their guns, following in the best tradition of the original Zapatistas, and their refusal to allow state forces into their areas. By so doing they have avoided the possibility of recuperation by the PRI — the fate of so many worker, peasant and student struggles in twentieth century Mexico.

Moreover the racism which has done so much to bond this organised expression of class struggle has not been transformed into Indian nationalism, unlike the Black Power movements of 1970s America. Instead we see communication with Mexico and the rest of the world. The visiting delegations of striking UNAM students and electristas, the Consulta and the Encuentros — all are attempts to generalise their experience of struggle. In these moments of generalisation, in the self-activity of the autonomous municipalities, we perceive the beginnings of a new world within the old.

Conclusion

The EZLN has at its heart the confrontation between Indian traditions of rebellion and self-organisation, the influence of the militant Church, and the Guevarist-inspired model of guerilla war against the state. This model, in its most successful phase of the early 1990s, fused with, but was not overcome by, the Indian tradition. The failure of the January 1994 uprising forced the EZLN to change its ideas and to an extent challenged its very organisational forms. Out of the crisis came both a commitment to a gradualist democratic change for Mexico and a deep confusion as to the future for the autonomous municipalities. The uprising had however expelled the influence of the PRI and hacendados from many areas of Los Altos, and the Zapatista villages set about reclaiming land and reorganising their communities with enthusiasm. It is likely that a cadre still exists in the highlands, though they are not separate from, but rather a part of, the communities in struggle. The cadre role, however informal, along with that of specialised negotiators and mediators, is part of Zapatismo — roles which would obviously be overcome in a more radical social movement.

The Zapatistas are on the margins of a highly industrialised nation. Not proletarian, yet not entirely peasant, their political ideas are riven with contradictions. We reject the academics' argument of Zapatismo's centrality as the new revolutionary subject, just as we reject the assertions of the 'ultra-left' that because the Zapatistas do not have a communist programme they are simply complicit with capital. However we are keen not to fall into the orthodox Marxist trap of dismissing this struggle as an unimportant peasant uprising. The Zapatistas

implement their new world with any degree of consistency.[12] The Laws, devised after endless debate and discussion, in themselves (i.e. aside from their content) are an attempt by the Indians to endow their struggle with a sense of permanence, a way of saying 'we are not going back.' Naturally they are mediations, but they are at least mediations which have enabled the Zapatista struggle to move beyond visceral class antagonism into self-organisation — a coherence not seen in the Mexican countryside since the days of the Ayala Plan.

Any description of Zapatista organisation must include an account of the effect of the uprising on the status of indigenous women. Before Zapatismo the conditions women lived in were dreadful: sexual abuse was rife through rape or early forced marriage, domestic violence was high, giving birth to large families ruined a woman's body and gave them a heavy responsibility for social reproduction through household chores. Moreover they were expected to reduce their food intake so that the husband and children could eat sufficiently, though even this was unable to staunch the high rates of infant mortality. In short they were virtual slaves in their own villages.

The uprising has not liberated them, as it has not liberated any other Indian, from a world of want. What it has done is given them an opportunity to break beyond the atomisation of the village to form a developing unity based on the rich variety of their needs. The space for women's organisation has not opened up because of the rebellion, instead the women's demands have been imposed on the men in a collective and conscious attempt to expand the sphere of their own autonomy. This has only added to diversity of Zapatismo.

Some have argued that 'women's integration into military structures remains the surest way to defuse the subversive po-

[12] The Ez as a standing army is relatively small-combatientes are sent back home once their training and exercises are over,ready to be mobilized should the need arise.The full fighting strength of the EZ is probably around 17,000

tential of their choice to break with the past.'[13] We would disagree. The women see their subversive potential not as women, but as Zapatista women. That entails expanding their autonomy both within the village (for example, in co-ops of various kinds) and embarking on a project of solidarity with the men in the army. They are both against and with the men; primarily they are for themselves, a project which they see as being realised in the organic and relatively informal structures of the EZLN. And in response to the state's militarisation of Chiapas they have expressed themselves through simultaneously taking up arms and developing their own quasi-military structures. Armed with staffs that are almost as tall as themselves, they have trained themselves to fight police incursions into their municipalities, often with babies on their backs. All this is done with high efficiency and usually masked up, faces covered with the red palliacates that are a Zapatista emblem.

Aside from taking up arms, perhaps the single most subversive act they have undertaken is the banning of alcohol, which is used by the Chiapan landowners and ranchers as an out-and-out weapon of social control. Alcohol sales on tick tend to cause unpayable debt through the employer's shop, and the community in its alienation and powerlessness turns in on itself through domestic violence. The effect in Indian communities has been devastating, similar to that experienced on the reservations of North America. With the landowners gone, the indigenous women immediately enforced a ban that is universal in Zapatista territory. Many villages have a tiny one-person jail or secure hut where the occasional drunkard returning from Ocosingo or Altamirano can be imprisoned for a night or so. The ban, developed from the immediate concerns of the women, also forced the men into a new respect which in turn opened the way for further self-defined projects — for example

[13] Deneuve & Reeve, Behind the Balaclavas of South-East Mexico, discussed in more detail below.

For the worldwide proletariat, though, racism is not a defining characteristic, though it is an important one for millions. The defining condition is rather that of having nothing to sell but one's labour-power. Dignity as the Zapatistas mean it is impossible to translate to all parts of the world, though those sections of the world working class who experience virulent racism may get a lot out of it. If dignity was translated universally, with radical content by a rebellious proletariat, it could be all too easily recuperable by capital. Acquistion of new commodities and rights could be turned into a counterfeit dignity not only negating the impulse to revolt, but turning it to capital's advantage — a similar process to that which has happened in many impoverished black areas in the US.

To be fair to Holloway, he does acknowledge that 'the uprising would be strengthened if it were made explicit that exploitation is systematic to the systematic negation of dignity.' But nothing is made explicit in that part of the Zapatista programme which deals with life beyond the autonomous municipalities. Those academics who intently study the language of the uprising do so only because there is so little consistent content. The amorphous 'programme for Mexico' is either reformist or naively open to reformist manipulation. The real process is the reorganisation of the Indians' lives and communities. It is Zapatismo's revolutionary practice within Chiapas that is the real inspiration for the rebel against capitalism.

pole around which to organise has hampered the development of a conscious movement against the capitalist mode of production. But with their concept of 'dignity' the Zapatistas may have filled a gap in the market. By generalising it, Holloway believes 'dignity' could become a workable idea around which to organise against the daily indignities of life under capital.

The problem he tries hard to avoid is the abstract nature of 'dignity' once it is universalised. By attempting to generalise it, he is rupturing it from the place where it makes sense — rural Chiapas, where it acquires such a powerful resonance. There is no doubt that for the Indians dignidad is a crucial concept — one that has been generated both naturally and consciously from their struggles against the landowners and ranchers. It has been endowed with a radical content that has led the campesinos into becoming Zapatistas, into constructing their autonomous municipalities, in whose self-activity the negation of capital resides. But dignity is only so powerful because of the conditions against which it has rebelled — many of which do not apply to vast swathes of the world's working class.

We would argue that it is impossible to understand the concept of dignity in Chiapas without understanding the racism the Indians have been subjected to for decades. As we have already noted, the Zapatista movement is to all intents and purposes completely indigenous. Non-Indian campesinos in the state, while often political, have been unable to achieve a similar militant unity. Capital has accumulated in eastern Chiapas by exploiting a workforce made docile by venomous racism. The distorted forms of value extraction known as debt-peonage have not disappeared from this backward state, nor has the murder of Indian leaders, the rape of Indian women or the predations of Guardia Blanca scum. It is against this systematic racism as much as the hand-to-mouth existence that the Indians are rebelling. And it is why there is a resonance between the communiques of the EZLN and the literature of the American civil rights movement.

organising women's marches against state militarisation in the tourist town of San Cristobal.

The women's situation is not developing all one way. Pregnant combatientes must return to their villages where they may be subject to isolation, although the father of the child must accompany her; those who have never left will almost always be illiterate, unable to speak any Spanish, and continue to bear the burden of childcare. In many villages women are still excluded from meetings. Nevertheless the tendency is towards free determination as part of the developing social whole, towards rebelde mujeres (rebel women) rather than subservient ones.

Lastly, the military situation in Chiapas demands a brief mention. The federated Zapatista areas are surrounded and interpenetrated with hundreds of army checkpoints and bases. The militarisation is immense: 70,000 troops, one third of the entire Mexican army, armed with the best weapons American anti-narco money can buy. PRI- and landowner-sponsored paramilitaries, of which there are seven different varieties roam the countryside, ratcheting up the tension. This patchwork of conflict is further confused by the waves of refugees that have occasionally been created by army occupations of Zapatista municipalities, or those with EZ sympathies who have been expelled from PRI villages. In Chiapas the armed wing of capital is everywhere visible.

Having described the basic outline of the Zapatista set-up, we shall now turn to the ideas of the uprising. In attempting to move beyond the cheerleading or the hostility this social movement has prompted, we shall deal with, in turn, the ideas of the 'ultra-left' and the academic autonomists. The 'ultra-left' tend to see the Zapatista as a desperate guerrilla fighter manipulated by hidden leaders; the academics see the Indian reasserting his or her labour against predatory global capital. These views of Zapatismo as a simple, monolithic body can result in the suppression of contradiction. But the uprising is a living, evolv-

ing thing, within and against capital, and as such is riven with contradiction. Before we go any further we must examine the specific class character of the rebel Indian, from where some of these contradictions arise.

The class position of the Zapatista Indian

The class position of the Zapatista Indian is, as we shall argue, more peasant than proletarian. Before substantiating this point, we must step back briefly and derive an understanding of the nature and function of the peasantry. Traditional Marxism explains the peasantry with the same analytical tools it uses to explain class polarisation in urban societies. It is perfectly suited to the rapid movement and social change that takes place in cities during industrialisation, but it can lead some to a simplistic idea of class relations in the countryside, where many pre-capitalist forms survive and where stability rather than change can be the defining ethos. Just as capitalism in the cities bases itself on constantly revolutionising the means of production, some orthodox Marxists see in the countryside a mirrored process whereby greater numbers of peasants are excluded from the land, while a much smaller number manage to transform themselves into professional farmers with larger landholdings. With this programmatic approach it is easy to believe in the possibility of stirring up class war within the village itself. Thus for Lenin it was simply a matter of encouraging the poor peasants to rebel against the rich peasants. These poor peasants, increasingly separated from the means of production, would discover their natural allies in the proletariat, while the affluent peasants with access to land and market networks would side with the bourgeoisie. The urban formula of class struggle was simply transposed onto the countryside.

What will civil society talk about? How will it act? The bottom line is that these civil society groups have only come into being because of their 'little project', which are expressions of their own varied class interests and locations. To ask these groups to unite is to ask the impossible. There can be no common autonomisation for civil society as a genuinely revolutionary subject. There can only be the burying of working class interests in favour of those of the middle class, or an imposition by the working class of its rich and varied needs — which in effect would mean the destruction of civil society. What is disappointing is that people like John Holloway have supported this idea of civil society as the engine for revolutionary change when all it really is is a popular front, and a weak one at that, as the 1994 National Democratic Convention demonstrated. But then it is easy to see possibility in the EZLN programme.[22] Their remoteness from the towns and cities of Mexico encourages romanticism, and talking with only the vaguest of categories and most evocative of words, they really can be all things to all men. Except of course the men from the PRI.

Dignity

Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico concludes with Holloway's treatment of the Zapatista concept of dignity. Marxism, he argues, has developed a number of terms to describe capital's domination over the producers of wealth, but has not developed a corresponding language to describe the dialectical movement of working class liberation, with the exception of 'self-valorisation' (itself a not unproblematic reversal of a central capitalist category). This lack of a positive

[22] The combination of a pluralist programme which defends diversity,traditional and quasi-mystical Mayan Indians and the image of the masked-up guerillas is the reason the UK direct action scene has found the Zapatista struggle so irresistible.

as 'that unstated coalition of opposition rank-and-file, urban slum-dwellers, independent campesino organisations and disaffected union sections, ultra-left students, liberal intellectuals, peaceniks, beatniks, rockeros, punks, streetgangs and even a few turncoat PRIistas, all of whose red lights go on at once whenever there is serious mischief afoot in the land.' We would also add human rights and environmental groups to the mix.

The point is not that, amongst these groups constantly networking with each other, the working class elements are encouraged to subsume their needs to a middle class agenda — on the contrary, they are encouraged to strengthen their 'autonomy', just as everyone is. Instead it is that with heterogeneity being everything in civil society, the working class organisations are encouraged to view themselves as only one part of the patchwork. They are both relatively important and relatively unimportant. Any attempt to impose their needs as a class, or a fraction of a class, would simply be seen as bad manners and detrimental to the 'common struggle', which until very recently has been ridding Mexico of the PRI. In reality it is only the existence of the PRI that has kept these disparate groups on anything like the same wavelength. And it is the PRI with their hooks so deep into the labour movement that isolates and encourages the breakaway unions to seek these cross-class alliances, which in turn dilute the possibility of real working class autonomisation. The PRI has been both the bulwark of unity and the reason for its weakness.

The Zapatistas have pinned their hopes for change on civil society, though. They talk of opening up democratic spaces for discussion and beg everyone that 'in addition to their own little project they should open their horizon to a national project linked with what is happening.' The 'opening up of space for discussion' is understandable, given the omnipresence of the party-state. But the Zapatistas seem to have spent hardly a thought on what will happen once that space has been opened.

There is, of course, truth in this analysis. Capitalism, to the extent to which it can penetrate, and thereby alter, traditional peasant society, does create class polarisation. But the Soviet experience of War Communism, NEP and particularly collectivisation, shows not an increasingly class-ridden and socially volatile peasant community; instead it shows the high level of internal stability and resistance to outside influence: not so much an example of poor peasant and political commissar vs. rich peasant, as rich and poor peasant vs. political commissar.

The problem with the orthodoxy is that it overestimates the ability of capital to break down traditional peasant structures. The process of agricultural revolution may have happened in western Europe and north America, but in many parts of the world, such as Mexico, the peasant village has remained stubbornly impervious to capitalist development. So while agribusiness is characterised by wage-labour and new farming techniques, peasant production has at its heart unspecialised production for consumption, family labour, an absence of accounting, etc. In place of the relentless drive for profit, peasant life is one of isolation and immutability where births, marriages and the seasons hold more importance than crop yield or rational business planning.

The political implications of this conservative stability are twofold. The first is that peasant uprisings are almost always a reaction to an external crisis which threatens the peace of the village, rather than as a result of internal class antagonisms. The many crises in the history of the Mexican campesino has meant this class has been an especially combative one: the sudden arrival of primitive accumulation (the Conquest), the genocide by sword and disease, the rule from Spain, the violent expansion of the latifundias under the Porfiriato are all examples. The second implication is that within the peasant uprising the binding aspect of tradition enables small private farmers and those with communal landholdings (though the difference is not always clear cut: one can merge into the other at different

times of the year or at times of family change) to live happily together in revolt — the Ayala Plan is a case in point. The principal point of attack which the orthodoxy identifies is often the most resistant to change.

What, then, is the nature of the class position of the Zapatista Indian today? We described earlier the uneven development of capitalism in Chiapas. The Indians have experience of wage-labour that might include: working on ranches, seasonal work on a finca (where an employer's shop system might operate, or debt-peonage be dominant), or fully-integrated wage-labour on dam construction, or at the oil operations of the north-east. All this work is either seasonal or temporary — when it is over the campesino must return to the village to scratch out a living from the soil. For men, just about the only form of permanent work is being employed by the repressive arms of the PRI or the landowners. For the women, handicrafts (including Zapatista dolls) to sell in the markets of San Cristobal or outside Mayan ruins is a possible form of income. This is a strictly peasant activity: their stall is a patch of ground and the level of poverty offsets any petty-bourgeois trade content this activity might contain. Overall the Indian women have never been integrated into the wage-labour system, though they may have some contact with the commodity economy, and the men have only been partly and temporarily integrated. They represent a section of the population which capital has not fully proletarianised because it has no need of their labour-power. In fact, as we mentioned earlier, it would be better for capital if these people did not exist at all.

Neither has their limited contact with the wages system been a definitive experience for the Chiapanecos. On the contrary they have retreated further into the margins of Mexican geography in their attempt to preserve their traditional communities. Their productive lives are determined by the land and the consumption needs of their family and village; their social lives by the traditions of the village; their

bility of developing an atomised individuality, has bolstered the communal aspect, and so the revolutionary practice of the campesinos. However, while we do not agree with the central thesis of the academics, it is still worth taking a quick look at their treatment of the most important EZLN ideas.

The refusal to take power and civil society

In rejecting the classical model of guerilla war since the uprising, and through measures such as the ban on members of the EZLN holding public posts, the 'refusal to take power', either through Leninist or reformist means, has been identified as a major contribution to post-cold war revolutionary practice. The academics see it as a final rejection of the state, of an end to the conquering of political power in order to impose one view of the world over all others. But the academics have ignored one thing: the Zapatistas have taken power — in the areas where they have been able to. They have forced landlords to flee — and killed some — torn down their houses, expelled caciques and PRIistas. In the autonomous municipalities, the power of the PRI is smashed, replaced by campesino self-activity, protected by campesino guns. If that is not taking power (or 'reabsorbing state power'), then what is?

It is true however that the EZLN of today does not wish to storm the Presidential Palace in Mexico City (which, given its size, is an impossibility). They do not seek to impose their views on other struggles, as is clear from their refusal to dominate Encuentros or the FZLN. But clearly they have a vision of change beyond their corner of Chiapas. How, then, will this change come about?

The EZLNs answer is through 'civil society', the multitude of small, often middle class and single-issue groups who exist in opposition to, and outside the budget of, the PRI. John Ross in Rebellion from the Roots characterises civil society

[Holloway has thrown] the baby out with the bathwater. If we reduce the concept of class to a general human contradiction present in every person between alienation and non-alienation, between creativity and its subordination to the markets, between humanity and the negation of humanity, then the class concept loses all meaning.'[21]

Classes do constitute themselves, and the class struggle is fought, not only internally, but in real concrete situations between identifiable social groups in streets, offices, factories, the countryside, all the time. Unfortunately the academics have spent little time examining these very real characteristics (that would for them be mere 'sociology'), and their arguments have a somewhat fantastic feel.

As we have already argued, we do not accept the global centrality of the struggle in Chiapas, although we do not deny the importance of certain industries in that region to international capital. We see the Zapatistas rather as an inspirational moment of class struggle on the peripheries. In fact it is their geographical remoteness which, through the relative impossi-

[21] Open letter to John Holloway .We would add that it seems that we are not dealing with a merely theoretical issue here,but one related to the position of academic Marxist.They are tempted to use 'operaismo' (Italian autonomists) ideas of the 'social factory' ,in which all areas of life become work for capital,to suppress the contradictions of their middle class role and redefine themselves as working class.But there is a problem here.There is a contradiction in their desire validate themselves as intellectual workers while on the other hand wishing to claim status for the product of this work as a non-alienated contribution to the movement of labour against capital.Indeed, perhaps the attraction of Marcos to many of the academic autonomist Marxists is that he,a fellow left intellectual,seems to be actually doing for the peasants of South-East Mexico, what they,the academics, claim to be able to do for the whole of the world working class, i.e. articulate and communicate the meaning of their struggle.The social division between mental and manual labour is the basis of class society; it must be overcome.The university is the supreme expression of this division; it is the artificial intelligence of the social factory.We are not saying that nothing useful comes from the academic Marxists,but simply that their social position affects what they write.

thinking is generally social rather than economic — they are part of the 'different world' of the peasant. They have been unable to avoid wage-labour altogether — its influence has been important to the Zapatistas' ability to look beyond their immediate locality. But the overall class position of the Zapatista, his or her culture and beliefs, is that of the peasant. We could perhaps best define this class location as that of a semi-proletarian peasantry. Indeed one could argue that the uprising itself has, with its obsession for Mayan tradition, reinforced the peasant aspect over the proletarian.

It is only with this category of semi-proletarian peasant that we can understand the contradictions at the heart of the individual Zapatista and the practice of the EZLN itself. Guerrilla fighter or Mayan Indian? Communal farmer or politico? Both and neither. The 'ultra-left' groups, mistaking the Zapatistas for proles, condemn them for falling into the traps of twentieth century working class insurrection. The academics also mistake them for fully-integrated wage-slaves, and therefore representative of a new recomposition of labour against 'neoliberalism'. But the Chiapan Indians are not central to the expansion of capital; they are extremely marginal to it. Consequently they are not in an advantageous position to develop a critique of capital. Their only possibility is to reassert human community over a system that would rather see them dead.

The 'ultra-left'[14]: Mao and Marcos

Sylvie Deneuve and Charles Reeve's article 'Behind the Balaclavas of south-east Mexico' is without doubt the most hostile reaction to the Indian uprising in Chiapas. Reacting against the romanticisation of the Zapatistas, they wish to assert the proletarian aspects of the struggle over the more important peasant and Indian aspects which we have already examined. They perceive in the rebellion and the forms it has taken nothing more than one further example of deadening Leninism grafting its structures onto autonomous class struggle. Oscillating between contempt for the Indians' traditional subservience and an ungrounded belief in their immanent ability to launch into an unmediated orbit of pure revolution, Deneuve and Reeve give a schematic account of how they believe the class struggle in Chiapas has developed and been derailed. For them, the strong base assemblies of the Zapatista municipalities merely serve to protect those leaders who 'must never be seen': 'the Zapatista army is…only one part of The Organisation — it is its visible part.'

They account for the lack of an obvious Party line and the absence of Marxist vocabulary in general by arguing that, since the collapse of the state capitalist bloc, vanguardist organisa-

[14] Because it takes the most provocative relentlessly unsympathetic stance,we wil deal largely here with Behind the Balaclavas of South-East Mexico by Sylvie Deneuve and Charles Reeve,Ab Irato,Paris 1996 (available from BM Chronos,London WC1N 3XX,£1.50).Two other texts we have in mind are 'Mexico is not Chiapas,Nor is the Revolt in Chiapas Only a Mexican Affair' by Katerina (TPTG) in (Common Sense No.22,Winter 1997);and 'Unmasking the Zapatistas' in Wildcat No.18,Summer 1996.Though we use the term 'ultra-left' the writers differ; TPTG are more situationist-influenced,Deneuve and Reeve more council-communists,while Wildcat (UK — or should it be US — not Wildcat Germany) like to emphasize their'hard' anti-democratic credentials.On the Zapatistas ,Katerina's is by far the most poitive of these three.However,TPTG's position towards the Zapatistas seems to have hardened, judging by their recent review of the book version of the Deneuve and Reeve piece.

The strangest aspect of their ideas is that while the academics wish to hold the Zapatistas up as working class militants, they fight shy of engaging in any analysis of the specific class nature of the uprising. This is bad enough when it leads to the class position of the Indians being identified incorrectly. For example, we find arguments that Zapatismo is 'not a peasant movement …[but] 'a recomposition of the world of labour…its experience is not that of a relatively isolated and marginal social group, but belongs fully to these processes of recomposition and probably represents their highest form of expression to date.'[20]

Things deteriorate further when John Holloway denies the possibility of identifying the class position of any social group or individual anywhere — class becomes a concept without a definition! His position is that the antagonism between human creativity and alienated work which runs through every individual cannot ultimately be extended into identifiable class formations which struggle with each other: 'Since classes are constituted through the antagonism between work and its alienation, and since this antagonism is constantly changing, it follows that classes cannot be defined.'

Naturally we agree with Holloway on this existence of the internal conflict between human creative activity and alienated exploitation, just as we agree that the reified categories of capital, such as wage-labour, which are constituted from class struggle, are open to constant contestation. On one level, capital is reproduced from our own activity every hour of every day. But at the same time we necessarily confront these reified categories as objective reality. As Wildcat (Germany) say, in a good critique of Holloway's reasoning 'in attempting to oppose the objectivist, definitional and classificatory concept of class,

[20] 'Zapatismo: Recomposition of Labour,Radical Democracy and Revolutionary Project' by Luis Lorenzano in Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution (op. cit.)

go is anybody's guess. They may easily fall apart, given the diverse nature of the participants and the generally abstract nature of opposition to 'neoliberalism'. But in the future context of an upsurge in class struggle in Latin America they could have something valuable to contribute. One influence they certainly have had is on the 'anti-capitalist' movement.

The Academics[19]

The Zapatistas have certainly been a great inspiration to some — thanks to their struggle a section of academia, at least in Mexico City and the University of Texas, has reproduced and extended itself. Like the 'ultra-left' groups, the academics have failed to ground their analyses adequately in the material conditions of Chiapas. The academics, however, have swung the other way — overpraising the EZLN by seeing in them a microcosm of resistance to international capital. By betting on the centrality of Chiapas, they have constructed a bizarre model which views the Zapatistas as representatives of the international working class. Against the cynicism of the 'ultra-left', they are so overjoyed that something — anything — is happening they have jumped through theoretical hoops to prove Zapatismo the new revolutionary subject par excellence. From this they have then extrapolated various ideas of the EZLN as of potentially universal importance for a twenty-first century recomposition of labour against capital.

[19] Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution In Mexico, edited by John Holloway and Eloina Perez (Pluto Press, 1998) is the most thoroughgoing attempt to develop ideas about he Chiapas uprising in English and whose arguments we deal chiefly with here.See also Towards the New Commons:Working class strategies and the Zapatistas by Monty Neill, with George Caffentzis and Johhny Machete (and various articles in recent editions of Capital and Class.In Mexico, the Spanish language journal Chiapas is an ongoing academic project dedicated to exploring various aspects of the rebellion.

tions have had to revise their expectations downwards — implying that the forms of Leninism are intact, hidden, waiting for the historic moment. But the problem Deneuve and Reeve have is that they are simply in possession of insufficient information on which to base their analysis. 'Behind the Balaclavas' consequently talks a great deal about the organisation of politics, or the politics of organisation, and very little about actual situations in Chiapas. They themselves admit they have found it difficult to get concrete information.

As a result, we find just about every aspect of the Indians' struggle misrepresented: the land occupations are not about land, only revenge; the womens' struggle is sidelined into the army and has no other expression; the FZLN dominates civil society outside Chiapas; the EZLN is made up of 'young people, marginal, modern, multilingual…their profile has little to do with the isolated Indian that some imagine.' And so on and so forth. Deneuve and Reeve's class analysis is inadequate, and they supplement it with a sketch of the manner in which Leninism has in the past manipulated peasant movements. It is really this refusal to even look for anything new in this struggle that is the most infuriating aspect of 'Behind the Balaclavas'.

'Behind the Balaclavas' does, however, point to an important problem which supporters of the Zapatistas are unable to perceive: the way in which the EZLN commanders, and Marcos in particular, are mediators, specialised leaders and negotiators apart from the mass of the rebel Indians. The question then is: to what extent have these roles been forced on them by material conditions and the necessity of survival, and to what extent have they grown from the hierarchical organisational forms that were imported with the FLN?

Ultimately we cannot give a definitive answer to this. We have already traced the history of the FLN's involvement in the highlands of Chiapas. The role of representation which Leninist formations seek has certainly been one defining factor in the development of the rebellion. However, what is

crucial, with the Zapatistas, as with other social movements, is that we cannot simply contrast good movements/class struggles to bad representations/mediations of those struggles — especially when the representative forms are generated from within. Such a move would falsely suggest that the inspiring acts of class struggle — liberation of prisoners from jail, land occupations, etc. — would have happened without the mediating and representative forms of the EZLN.[15] In fact, arguably the Chiapas uprising would not have reached the heights it did without the vanguardist form it took. This is an expression of the limits of their particular situation: a more generalized and proletarian movement, to achieve its goals, could not accept the relations of mediation and representation that the Indian peasants do.

Yet the legacy of the FLN's vanguard model has undoubtedly fused with the rebellious and autonomous energies of the Indians, and this organisational form itself was thrown into crisis, firstly by the break with the national FLN, and shortly afterwards by the failure of the January 1994 uprising. The negative aspects of these forms, for example the hierarchy of the army, have since contributed to the creation of a specialised layer of EZLN negotiators. Equally the military situation in Chiapas has compelled the Indians to talk, not continually, but occasionally, to the structures of power in order to survive. This exercise, which both sides know is a charade, is only one side of the mediation coin: that of simple publicity. In a very real way, the autonomous municipalities are better protected when they have a high public profile. The Zapatistas, playing on the natural drama of their impact and ideas were initially very successful at this. Latterly, and predictably, they have been less so as other events take centre stage for the nation's media. This sort of media use is certainly manipulative but tactically it has achieved a measure of success. One unfortunate result is that

[15] Antagonism, op. cit.

We need to bear in mind two things. The first is the experience of the Mexican Revolution. If there is one qualitative and positive difference between the Zapatistas of then and the Zapatistas of now, it is that the latter, with their limited experience of wage-labour and the influence of the FLN, have managed to break away from the myopic localism of peasant struggle. Their desire to intervene in national life is preferable to a refusal to look beyond the boundaries of their own home province or state.

Secondly, the 'ultra-left' articles we are examining were all written before the EZLN developed their project of the Encuentro, the international meetings 'for humanity and against neoliberalism.' Essentially we believe the Zapatistas have transcended their localism and have developed important tendencies towards internationalism, though in an important sense, and one which is part of the leftist aspect of their heritage, they are still retarded by a nationalist perspective. There have been three Encuentros so far, in Chiapas, Spain and Brazil, forums where activists and those engaged in struggle gather from around the world to discuss what is on their minds. By all accounts these meetings have been confused and confusing: the focus is on networking and heterogeneity rather than organising and developing a unity-through-difference. Indeed it could be said in some ways that the Encuentros mirror the cross-class nature of civil society, which we deal with below.[18]But the Zapatistas, at first recognising their need for international solidarity, particularly foreign peace observers to mitigate the worst offences of the Mexican army, have given birth to a living, evolving internationalism. This is all the more remarkable given that many of them have a very shaky grasp of world geography. Where the Encuentros will

[18] The best account is the 'Report from the Second Encounter for Humanity and against Neo-liberalism' by Massimo de Angelis in Capital and Class No.65,though don't bother with the dreadful academic waffle in the introduction.

This is simply not true. The Zapatistas have never entered into any formal alliance with any fraction of Mexico's political class. They flirted briefly with the PRD back in 1994, and, as far as we know, they have not repeated the exercise as a result of their experience. Indeed, one of the EZs revolutionary laws forbids its members from holding any sort of public post. Of course laws can be changed. But if the Zapatistas' aim is to ally themselves with nationalist sections of the bourgeoisie they are being uncharacteristically incompetent about it.

It would, however, be foolish to deny the patriotic elements of the Zapatista struggle. The national anthem is sung in the communities, though not as often as the Zapatista anthem, and the flag is occasionally paraded about, all of which makes any self-respecting revolutionary cringe with embarrassment. The flag is a clue to the quixotic nature of the Zapatista's 'nationalism.' The red, white and green of the Mexican flag are also the colours of the PRI, who have had until recently the exclusive rights to use it politically. Yet the rebel Indians are hardly displaying the flag as a sign of support for the regime that is pointing guns at them. So it must mean something else. The issue is hardly clarified by the EZ's communiques, which are as confusing as ever. There we can find statements that speak both of 'the importance of the patria (homeland)' and of 'a world without frontiers or borders.' As Wildcat say in 'Unmasking the Zapatistas', this is called having your cake and eating it.

The answer lies surely in a closer examination of the material conditions of this struggle. The Zapatistas are, as we noted earlier, to all intents and purposes one hundred per cent indigenous. Tzeltals, Tzotzils, Chols, Mams, Zoques and Tojolabals are the composition of the uprising. Many of the men do not speak Spanish and almost none of the women do. The Mexican state has neglected or murdered them for decades. Yet they are communicating with Mexico, people with whom they do not share a common ancestry.

the media-friendly members of the EZLN have sometimes had to portray themselves as victims, rather than militants.

The other side of this mediation of the uprising is a genuine need to communicate with other sections of national and international society which are engaging in struggle of one sort or another. Wanting a different society but knowing that they alone cannot create it, the Zapatistas feel the need to reach beyond the blockade, to exchange ideas and construct networks of solidarity. While this sometimes uses media channels, it does not exclude direct communication. That is why we prefer to emphasise the visits of workers' and students' delegations, the solidarity tours of European football teams, and the marches and Consultas which radiate from the autonomous municipalities, over the presentational gloss of Marcos.

As for Marcos himself — one of two or three ladinos amongst tens of thousands of pure blood Indians — he is an expression of the contradictions within Zapatismo. Needing to communicate at the level of media following the January 1994 failure, the movement has found itself the consummate communicator. Possibly Marcos's position has been undermined by the failure and subsequently he has undergone a transformation from FLN political and military leader to EZLN media darling. As such he has filled an immediate need of the struggle. But it is the bourgeois press, needing a handle on the story, which has endowed him with an air of romantic authority. Many anarchists, unthinking as ever, have played along, and the number of intellectuals and activists who visit Chiapas ostensibly to research the living conditions but whose wet dream is to meet Marcos is revealing.

The forces of production

Is the uprising 'the final episode of the slow and peculiar integration of this peripheral region by Mexican capital' as

Deneuve and Reeve would have us believe? The Zapatistas are dirt poor farmers with barely any resources. Quite how they could have any effect on the forces of production in Chiapas is difficult to see. In fact, being part of the 'different world' of the peasantry, and by refusing to die, they are obstacles to development, rather than bearers of it. We return to our central argument: capital may have as its essence self-expanding value and the consequent proletarianisation of the population, but the experience of capitalism in the 'Third World' is as uneven development. The idea that capital seeks to develop all areas to a uniform standard is mechanical: some places, for reasons of geography, climate, class and social structure can only be exploited to a degree. Unable to always develop the periphery, capital turns inwards and embarks on a new cycle of intensive accumulation.

Mexican and latterly international capital has already integrated Chiapas as productively as it is able: first through the latifundias and ranches, subsequently through oil. The new irony the 'ultra-left' have neglected is that the specific and important capital of biotechnology wishes to retard the development of productive forces in Chiapas.

There are two ways in which we can make sense of the productive forces argument. The first is that, through the army, the EZ itself has revolutionised social relations in the villages. Breaking down the gender barrier, releasing the energy and confidence of the young; its need for centralised organisation compels previously isolated villages to communicate and work together. Through its need to impose itself on the outside world it is certainly a modernising influence. But the EZ is not connected to land production. The villages and municipalities are left to do what they will with the occupied lands: the EZ has not encouraged new crops for market, new seed varieties or irrigation projects. The ejidos and reclaimed lands are still very much dedicated to subsistence farming.

But despite their inability to produce a meaningful surplus, and coming as they do from the 'different world' of the peasantry, perhaps the Zapatistas are still a proto-embryonic landowning class through their tolerance, in the Revolutionary Agrarian Law, of smallholdings? This Law allows private holdings of up to a hundred hectares of poor quality land, or fifty of good quality land, which is a fair bit of space. It is almost identical to the Ayala Plan which was discussed at the beginning of this article, and many of those same arguments apply.[16] We would of course like to see the elimination of all small property relations. But if we are looking for the seeds of the new world in the old, we must look for the tendencies towards communism. Marx commented on the agrarian commune: 'Its innate dualism allows an alternative: either its property element will prevail over the collective one, or the latter over the former. It all depends on the historical environment.'[17] In the autonomous municipalities of Chiapas private holdings are rare, the collective prevails.

Nationalism

The ultra-leftists' strongest charge against the Zapatistas is that they are nationalists: the Zapatista project is nothing more than a retreat from the rigours of the global market into the old certainties of national social democracy, this time around redeemed by the absence of the PRI. To facilitate this, the 'ultra-leftists' imply, they are seeking alliances with sections of the national political class, manoeuvring themselves into ever more advantageous positions from which to take power.

[16] Indeed, when the EZLN entered into peace talks in Febuary 1994 they demanded not the restitution of Article 27,but the nationwide implementation of the Ayala Plan,much to the derision of the PRI

[17] Marx cited in Camatte op. cit.