

The so-called "cold war" between Capitalism and Socialism has been redefined. Instead of a conflict between "East and West," it now appears as a problem of North versus South. Today, the military impositions and economic proposals expressed in the concept of a "New World Order" do no more than fortify policies of oppression against Indigenous nations and territories.

For the Indigenous peoples, the oppression that began with the western invasion, and which has just completed its 502nd year, still continues as more threats loom over the horizon. International agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) are nothing more than new legal instruments which serve to increase transnational companies' power to exploit natural and human resources without regard for Indigenous territories. It should not be forgotten that a large portion of these natural resources, such as biodiversity, petroleum, timber, minerals, etc. are found within Indigenous territories. For their part, the nation-states still largely refuse to recognize Indian territory and continue to dispose of it as they will, most recently, by ceding it to national and transnational companies within the new Neoliberal programs.

Governments and parliaments continue to make decisions for the oppressed majorities. Constitutional changes, new Agrarian laws, privatization of basic services, etc. are legal instruments, created without consulting the Indigenous organizations, in the name of "democracy." The Indigenous people demand participation in all decisions directly affecting Indigenous nations, territories, and cultural systems, and reject the assimilationist policies of the nation-state.

Without entering into an in-depth analysis of the concept of democracy imposed by the Western nation-state on the Indigenous nations with cosmic-spiritual-territorial bases, we have tried in this journal to present an (admittedly incomplete) picture of Indigenous participation in national elections.

The diverse experiences illustrated here demonstrate that Indian organizations offer new possibilities to renovate the nation-state. They also reveal the need for autonomous political positions and the formation of coalitions under equal conditions. Of course, not all of the Indigenous experiences have been positive. However, many of these, both good and bad, provide lessons from which we can learn in order to reformulate our future strategies.

Indigenous participation in the nation-states' electoral processes is only one aspect of the different strategies we need to pursue. Access to parliaments gives us more power to propose and pressure for the adoption and appropriate implementation of progressive international agreements such as the International Labor Organization's Convention 169, which is currently only recognized by seven governments. Other international agreements such as the UN Declaration on the Principles and Rights of Indigenous peoples require further pressure from the Indigenous organizations to the U.N. bodies in order to obtain an international convention signed by the colonial governments, recognizing the rights of Indigenous Peoples and not just a Declaration without implementing measures.

We believe that it is imperative for the Indigenous movement to work in coordinated fashion at the continental and world level to produce joint proposals for appropriately adopting and furthering the scope of these international legal instruments. We have to remember that, although the legal instruments are available, they need to be ratified by nation-states, but also, in some cases, those legal instruments need to be taken further, according to Indigenous organizations' understanding of such matters. Otherwise, these instruments will remain in the hands of nation-states without Indigenous input.

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