

Update on Chiapas

August 6-9, the National Democratic Convention (CND), organized by the EZLN in Aguascalientes, Chiapas, emerged as one of the most significant political gatherings in modern Mexican history. Six thousand delegates from all over Mexico attended. The central theme was the "transition to democracy." Several local, regional and national Indigenous organizations participated (see article below). Most were not entirely satisfied with either the CND's structure or results, but have chosen to continue participating.

October 8, the Zapatista National Liberation Army broke off negotiations with the government, stating that the Salinas administration was not acting in good faith, and was preparing a military assault. The EZLN also claimed to have mined the roads leading to their territory.

October 10, peace mediator, Bishop Samuel Ruiz expressed "grave" concern regarding the tensions in the state, and called on both sides to maintain the cease-fire and return to the negotiating table.

October 12, the CND reconvened in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas. With the support of thousands of local Indigenous supporters, the CND then symbolically and peacefully took over the town. The convention declared itself in permanent session, stating that a civil insurgency is necessary in order to topple the PRI from power. The CND also called for nation-wide mobilization on Nov. 5, to prevent President-elect Ernesto Zedillo from taking office.



Photo: Carlos Contreras

The EZLN has maintained a presence in Chiapas's principal city, San Cristobal de las Casas: mini Zapatistas for sale.

Six Principles for a New Mexican State

The following article is based on a proposal titled "Six Principles and Six Proposals" written by the Independent Indian Peoples Front (FIPI)

and the Committee for the Support and Defense of Indian Rights (CADDIAC). After extensive consultations with Indigenous organizations, FIPI con-

tributed this document to the working roundtables established at the National Democratic Convention. Although written for Mexico, the analysis could apply

to the other Latin American states who conceive themselves to be mestizo.

I. An end to the "Mestizo-cratic" state

In Mexico, ethnic homogeneity was considered a necessary precondition in the creation of the nation-state, and in consolidation of a market economy. Indigenous peoples have therefore been subject to hostile policies, ranging from physical extermination to "Indigenista" strategies whose aim has been to assimilate us. As a result, we have not had, as Indigenous peoples, a dignified place in Mexican society. Not only has our right to exist as a collective entity been denied, but also our rights as a peoples. Today, we continue living under a neocolonial oppression promoted by the State and perpetuated by mestizo people who ben-

efit from this situation. They, in turn, believe themselves to be the synthesis of the Mexican people, the embodiment of the nation, and to have created a State in their image and likeness; that is to say, a "mestizo-cratic" State. Thus, by the light of contemporary morality, the position of the Mexican State and the mestizo peoples is illegitimate: both are based upon the displacement and the abrogation of the rights of Indigenous peoples, and upon excluding us from collective participation in the nation and the state, which has bound us in a neocolonial relationship.

II. Revise the constitution to serve as the foundation for a new, democratic, multi-national, and popular state

The constitution is a key source of the

problems we face, and thus must be modified. It was modified in 1992 in a way that was both limited and has not been enforced. Additions to Article Four recognize the plurality of the Mexican nation, but this plurality is not reflected in the State, which should be structured in order to reflect this fact.

This problem is compounded by the fact that Indigenous rights are located under Article Four, which guarantees individual freedoms, rather than within the constitution's principal articles (articles 39, 40, and 41, which have to do with sovereignty and the forms of government, and articles 115 to 122, which establish the basis for our federal structure). The location of our rights under Article Four signifies the government's refusal to recognize our collective rights as distinct peoples, recognizing only our

Photo: Carlos Contreras



Looking toward the National Democratic Convention.

individual rights. This is a fundamental and significant difference, as it is not the same thing at all to recognize that Mexico is a multiethnic nation as it is to recognize that Mexico is a multinational state. This is why the central project is to divest the constitution of its "mestizo-crac" cast.

III. Building a new federalism on the basis of a new understanding of territory

The ideal of federalism—for which thousands of citizens, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have struggled—has not been realized in our country. From the very beginnings of the Republic, the Mexican people agreed to constitute a federation; however, in practice our government has been centralist, subject to an overly powerful presidency and to the domination of the State by one party, leading in effect to a dictatorship. In order to fulfill the precepts of federalism, it is necessary to redefine the notion that through federation we shall "unify our diversity". Although this is a valid concept, it does not acknowledge nor include the continued presence of distinctive peoples within a federation.

Thus indigenous peoples are left out of the federal structure of our country. Some of the worst consequences of this exclusion are found in the territorial reorganizations which decisively and negatively impacted the social organization of the original peoples of this land. From that moment to the present, Indigenous territories have been continuously divided. The federalist policies did not take into account the preexisting territories nor acknowledge them as a basis for a re-organization. Instead, they were deeply genocidal, placing Indigenous regions under the tutelage of the "Indigenista" arm of the government. Today the few remaining Indigenous territories face new threats. The land redistribution that took place throughout the country based on an ejido concept of occupancy, instead of on a communitarian basis, has greatly

affected the territorial rights of Indigenous peoples. In many cases, the ejido continues to function in a destructive and assimilationist manner in Indigenous territories. The new reforms to Article 27 constitute a final blow towards the dismemberment of Indigenous territories.

IV. Democracy for Indigenous peoples: only within the context of a democratic nation

Justice will prevail for indigenous peoples only if there is democracy in the rest of the country. And democracy can exist only if governments are created that are respectful of diversity and able to share power, not only with different political parties but also with different ethnic groups. As Indigenous peoples we have often been denied the vote and been prevented both from choosing our own legitimate representatives as well as from exercising our right to represent others. As Indigenous peoples, we add our voices to the national clamor for democracy, yet we add that no democracy will be a true democracy if it does not resolve the anti-democratic relationship between Indigenous people and the power of the state, as exemplified in our ability to participate and be represented in the structures of government.

V. Towards a new covenant between Mexicans

The road towards democracy must necessarily take us through a process of democratizing the relationships between Indians and non-Indians. It is urgent that as Mexicans we reach a new national accord, a new social covenant that is based on a new ethic of tolerance and respect towards diversity and plurality that will allow us to live together in peace. But this pact cannot rest only upon individual efforts or moral values; we believe that it must be affirmed by our Constitution. The State must address this covenant by creating the foundation for a democratic relationship between the State itself and the Mexican people; between

the state and the Indigenous peoples; between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples; between the federation and the elements thereof; between the capital and the provinces; between the provinces and the Indigenous regions, etc.

VI. A transitional government: towards a multinational state

It is not possible in this day and age to defend an ethnocentric nation-state. As we seek to give power to the people, we are led to question the legitimacy of the mestizo population being the sole holders of that power. The need for a transitional government means that we need to create a new national model that is no longer an ethnocentric nation-state, but instead a multi-national state. The creation of a truly multi-national state implies the acknowledgment of the free self-determination of Indigenous peoples, and the embodiment of those rights through the creation of autonomous regions.

Six Proposals

Included within the six proposals are:

- 1) the constitutional recognition of Indigenous autonomy through the formation of "Autonomous Pluriethnic Regions";
- 2) an addition to Article 42, and
- 3) to Article 43 of a section guaranteeing the existence of the Autonomous Indigenous Regions;
- 4) reforms to Article 115 to acknowledge the Autonomous Indigenous Regions (referred to as Pluriethnic Regions) as fundamental elements of the political and administrative structure of the country;
- 5) modifications to Article 73 and
- 6) modifications to Articles 52, 53, 54, 55, and 56, which refer to political participation, in order to redraw electoral districts in Indigenous regions. In this way, a sixth district will be drawn to provide for election of Indigenous congressmen and guarantee the presence of six Indigenous senators. 🐾