

**THE ZAPATISTA MOVEMENT AND INDEPENDENT UNIONISM
IN MEXICO**

**“THE WIND FROM BELOW”: THE ZAPATISTA MOVEMENT
AND INDEPENDENT UNIONISM IN MEXICO**

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

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MASTER OF ARTS (2001)
(Anthropology)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: **“The Wind From Below”: The Zapatista Movement and Independent Unionism in Mexico.**

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NUMBER OF PAGES: **vii, 196**

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of what I term the “moment of coincidence” between the Zapatista movement and the independent labour movement in Mexico. The analysis presented here is a product of both research surrounding the Zapatista movement itself as well as six weeks of fieldwork conducted in Mexico City with members of the independent labour movement during July and August of 2000. The phenomenon which has emerged from my research and which I have called the “moment of coincidence” is both the central metaphor and analytical tool within this thesis. As I will argue throughout this work, the “moment of coincidence” exists as a point of intersection between diverse and multiple social movements, each with their own disparate agendas, yet each finding themselves somehow galvanized and united, albeit loosely, at a particular moment in time and by a particular event or series of events. In this case, I argue that it is the Zapatista movement that has served as the catalyst, inspiration, and imagination for this “moment of coincidence” among diverse social movements in Mexico. In turn, this “moment of coincidence” has led to profound challenges to the existing system of social, political, and economic relations in Mexico based as it is upon a radically democratic and inclusive politics. The purpose of this work is ultimately to attempt to illuminate some of the political and social possibilities which have and continue to emerge from this “moment of coincidence” and the alternatives they offer not only for politics of dissent or resistance, but for the envisioning of new social worlds.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis owes its existence to so many people. While it represents the culmination of my two years as a Master's student, it is also the product of the people whom I have lived with and learned from. I would like to take the time to briefly and inadequately thank them for all they have contributed to this work and continue to give to me, as much outside this academic endeavour as within it.

I want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Petra Rethmann, without whom I can honestly say this thesis would not have been written. For all the classes, personal conversations, motivation, and inspiration I want to express my deep gratitude. I would also like to extend my thanks to Dr. William Coleman for his insights and advice as a member of my committee and to Dr. Don Wells whose advice and assistance over the past two years have been invaluable in so many ways. Thanks needs to go to the Department of Anthropology at McMaster as a whole for all the support and encouragement I have received from faculty and staff alike as a student here. I would also like to thank Stelco for their graduate student bursary without which my fieldwork in Mexico City would not have been possible.

I would not have had this opportunity if it were not for my family and I would like to take a moment to thank them for their love, support, patience and inspiration over the years. In particular to my mother, Ingrid, my father, Kai, and my sister, Krista, thank you for showing me what it means to sacrifice, to care, to be dedicated and committed, and to dream

of something better.

I also need to thank my friends who have and continue to put up with me over the years. I wish I could thank everyone individually but I know you know who you are - more than anything else, thanks for giving me a life outside of work. I do, however, need to thank a few people in particular. To Peter Jebreen, Kristina Blyschak and Amanda White, I cannot imagine what this experience would have been like without you. To Chris Marley, more of a brother than a friend, thanks for challenging me to think critically about everything, for always being there and for keeping me sane in some of the most difficult circumstances - and always for the music. To Wendy Wong, thanks for your love and support. For helping me grow and for keeping me grounded - for always being a friend.

To my research partners in Mexico from the independent labour movement, thank you for sharing your thoughts with me and for expressing the hope that something more might come out of this than simply a thesis. To my research assistant, Lucy, thanks for working so hard for lousy pay. I must also thank Professor Alejandro Alvarez at the National Autonomous University of Mexico for his invaluable advice and assistance. To my *companeros* in Mexico City, Chris, Tom, and Brian, thanks simply for the opportunity to meet you all. And to the Casa de los Amigos, for keeping a roof over my head.

Finally, I would like to express my deep admiration for the Zapatistas themselves for showing the world what a dignified struggle for democracy, liberty, and justice looks like and to Subcomandante Marcos for his words which have given voice to the hope that we can make something better. Thanks for giving me something to believe in.

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*Everyone is dreaming in this country. Now it is time to wake up...
The Storm is here. From the clash of these two winds the storm will be born, its time has arrived. Now the wind from above rules, but the wind from below is coming...
The prophecy is here. When the storm calms, when rain and fire again leave the country in peace, the world will no longer be the world but something better.
- from "Chiapas: The Southeast in Two Winds" by Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos*

The first day of January in 1994 was a day of many firsts. It was the first day of the New Year. It was the first day of the North American Free Trade Agreement linking Canada, the United States, and Mexico. It was also the first day in which indigenous Mayan peasants in the far southeast of Mexico rose up and declared "Ya basta!", "enough is enough!", culminating 500 years of struggle against slavery, racism, oppression, and genocide in an uprising that would shake not only Mexico but the world and leave nothing the same as it had been. During the first hours of the new year, a guerrilla army of some 3000 indigenous peasants calling themselves the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) moved out of the canyons and jungles of the southern state of Chiapas and declared war upon the federal executive of the Mexican government and the Mexican armed forces. To this challenge, the Mexican state would first respond with brutal force only to find itself compelled to declare a cease-fire 12 days later under the weight of incredible public pressure. Since the 12th day of January, 1994, there have been no open confrontations between Zapatista guerrillas and the Mexican army, since that day the Zapatistas have dramatically reconfigured themselves from what initially appeared to be a typical guerrilla insurgency to a tremendously galvanizing

and dynamic socio-political force. On January 12, 1994, the armed insurgency initiated by the Zapatistas ended and the revolution truly began.

This thesis is an exploration not of the Zapatista uprising but rather of what I have termed the “moment of coincidence” between the Zapatista movement and Mexican civil society for which the Zapatistas have served as the catalyst, the inspiration, and the imagination. The phenomenon which has emerged from my research and which I have called the “moment of coincidence” is both the central metaphor and analytical tool within this thesis. As I will argue throughout this work, the “moment of coincidence” exists as a point of intersection between diverse and multiple social movements, each with their own disparate agendas, yet each finding themselves somehow galvanized and united, albeit loosely, at a particular moment in time and by a particular event or series of events. In this case, I argue that it is the Zapatista movement that has served as the catalyst for this “moment of coincidence” among diverse social movements in Mexico. The political and social possibilities embodied by this moment are, I believe, potentially tremendously emancipatory, radically democratic, decidedly plural and even antagonistic, and perhaps even truly revolutionary. The “moment of coincidence” is the central theme which will bind this thesis together and I will explore it with general reference to Mexican civil society at large, and the independent labour movement in Mexico City in particular as they intersect with the novelty and energy of the Zapatista movement. In addition, I pay considerable attention to four key concepts in this thesis, namely: human rights, citizenship, social justice, and democracy. While these categories are obviously extremely broad, they exemplify some of the most fundamental

conceptual changes which are occurring in Mexico today as people continue to rethink and rearticulate the world which they inhabit and their relationship to it and to each other. While the Zapatista uprising has not resulted in revolution as it has been traditionally conceptualized as the downfall of one regime and its replacement with a new socio-political system, the movement, and the “moment of coincidence” which I will argue it has generated, has forced people to explicitly consider what these concepts mean to them and what they should mean with respect to society.

In terms of structure, the form of this thesis is intended to reflect the dynamism and imagination of the Zapatista “moment”. The thesis is divided into two primary sections, the first which addresses the Zapatista movement and the second section which addresses the responses of Mexican civil society, and the labour movement in particular, to it. Within each section, I have sought to structure the narrative through the use of sub-headings, but I have avoided employing chapters in order to attempt to create a sense of the very fluidity which has made the Zapatistas and the social movements which have intersected with them so powerfully creative in their attempts to envision and articulate a better world since January 1, 1994.

The first section of this thesis addresses the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) both as an armed insurgent force and as a precursor to a nonviolent and broadly socio-political movement. While some attention will be paid to the Zapatista uprising itself, the Zapatista movement which emerged after the initial armed conflict is what truly demands the greatest focus within the context of this thesis. In accordance with this, I intend to first

explore the history and context within which the uprising must be understood. Following this, I will then proceed to an examination of the political and ideological foundations of the Zapatista movement in concert with an analysis of the structure of the movement and what this signifies in terms of the Zapatista impact upon other social movements in Mexico. The final section of the first part of this thesis will specifically address the notions of radical democracy and citizenship as theorized in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, notions which resonate powerfully within the discourse of the Zapatista movement and serve to illuminate the social and political significance of the Zapatistas themselves. While the focus of this thesis lies in the notion of intersection and my conceptualization of the Zapatista “moment of coincidence”, it is necessary to comprehend the Zapatista movement itself before one may appreciate the manner in which it is influencing other aspects of Mexican civil society.

The second part of this thesis focuses primarily upon an analysis of elements of the Mexican independent labour movement based in Mexico City with regard to the impact the Zapatista movement has had upon their own formations and articulations over the past seven years. Beyond this, the purpose of the second part of this work is to examine what I have termed the “Zapatista moment of coincidence” specifically as it relates to independent unionism in Mexico. This analysis is based upon six weeks of fieldwork in Mexico City which I undertook during the months of July and August 2000. During this time I spoke with members of the independent labour movement in Mexico City regarding the state of their own struggles as well as how they perceived their relationship with the Zapatista movement. My

research in Mexico primarily took the form of conducting eight in-depth interviews lasting from one to two hours with members of various independent unions and organizations affiliated with independent unionism in Mexico. In reflecting upon the conversations I had with labour activists during my time in Mexico, it is my hope to illuminate some of what I believe is happening on a much larger scale in the Mexican nation today as previously dormant sectors of the population are beginning to mobilize and agitate in concert with others in order to articulate a unifying “no” to the existing regime and to propose and discuss multiple and diverse visions of what a new world might look like.

Part One: “The Wind From Below”

“They Don’t Care That We Have Nothing, Absolutely Nothing”: Chiapas and the Zapatista Uprising

In order to appreciate the Zapatista uprising and understand why indigenous peasants would risk everything in order to begin an armed insurrection against the Mexican state, one must first look at the conditions in which the indigenous peoples of Chiapas live. One of the first documents of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation is *Chiapas: The Southeast in Two Winds, A Storm and a Prophecy* by the Zapatista military commander and spokesperson, Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos. In this narrative, which is written in the form of a morbid travel guide to the southern state of Chiapas, Marcos illuminates the realities of life in one of the poorest states in Mexico, he writes:

Chiapas loses blood through many veins: Through oil and gas ducts, electric lines, railways, through bank accounts, trucks, vans, boats and planes, through clandestine paths, gaps, and forest trails. This land continues to pay tribute to the imperialists: petroleum, electricity, cattle, money, coffee, banana, honey, corn, cacao, tobacco, sugar, soy, melon, sorghum, mamey, mango, tamarind, avocado, and Chiapaneco blood flows as a result of the thousand teeth sunk into the throat of the Mexican Southeast. These raw materials, thousands of millions of tons of them, flow to Mexican ports and railroads, air and truck transportation centers. From there they are sent to different parts of the world: The United States, Canada, Holland, Germany, Italy, Japan, but with the same fate - to feed imperialism. The fee that capitalism imposes on the Southeastern part of this country oozes, as it has since from the beginning, blood and mud (1992).

The realities of life in Chiapas are that it produces a great deal, both for Mexico and for trading partners around the world, but the lives of its inhabitants, particularly its indigenous

inhabitants, are not benefitted by this exchange. In fact, the more lucrative these resources become within a globalized market, the more marginalized the indigenous inhabitants of this state have become. Marcos continues his narrative by asking “what does the beast leave behind in exchange for all it takes away?”, and he responds to this in appalling fashion which is worth quoting in full:

[h]alf of [the rural inhabitants of Chiapas] don't have potable water and two-thirds have no sewage service. Ninety percent of the rural population pay little or no taxes. Communication in Chiapas is a grotesque joke for a state that produces petroleum, electricity, coffee, wood, and cattle for the hungry beast. Only two-thirds of the municipal seats have paved-road access. Twelve thousand communities have no other means of transport and communication than mountain trails...Education? The worst in the country. At the elementary school level, 72 out of every 100 children don't finish the first grade. More than half of the schools only offer up to a third grade education and half of the schools only have one teacher for all the courses offered. There are statistics, although they are kept secret of course, that show that many indigenous children are forced to drop out of school due to their families' need to incorporate them into the system of exploitation. In any indigenous community it is common to see children carrying corn and wood, cooking, or washing clothes during school hours...The health conditions of the people of Chiapas are a clear example of the capitalist imprint: One-and-a-half million people have no medical services at their disposal. There are 0.2 clinics for every 1000 inhabitants, one-fifth the national average. There are 0.3 hospital beds for every 1000 Chiapanecos, one-third the amount in the rest of Mexico. There is one operating room per 100 000 inhabitants, one-half of the amount in the rest of Mexico. There are 0.5 doctors and 0.4 nurses per 1000 people, one-half of the national average...the Southeast continues to export raw materials, just as it did 500 years ago. It continues to import capitalism's principal product: death and misery (Ibid).

While there may be those who would dismiss Subcomandante Marcos' narrative as nothing more than fiction for the sake of legitimizing armed insurrection, one need only take a cursory look at more recent social statistics to appreciate the depth of poverty to which many inhabitants of Chiapas are condemned. As a state, Chiapas has the highest concentration of

indigenous people and is one of the poorest regions of Mexico (Collier 1999: 16). In a state which accounts for 21% of Mexico's oil reserves, 47% of its natural gas, 35% of its coffee, 55% of its electricity, which is the nation's second-largest producer of beef and corn, poverty nevertheless remains a problem for more than 70% of the state's inhabitants (Veltmeyer 2000: 91-92). Furthermore, for the largely rural and indigenous population of Chiapas, 47% have no access to potable water, one-third of all households have no electricity, 59% lack basic sanitation facilities, and 75% of the population consume almost 700 calories less a day than the minimum established by the World Health Organization (Ibid: 92). Thus, it is abundantly clear that even from these basic statistics and Subcomandante Marcos' writings, Chiapas is a state beset by endemic poverty and systemic neglect. This is the setting which would set the stage for the emergence of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation and their declaration of war. However, before moving on to the emergence of the EZLN, it is first necessary to consider the structural and ideological supports which allowed Chiapas to be kept poor and forgotten for so long. It is necessary to turn to the history of Chiapas.

In order to understand why indigenous peasants would declare themselves to be in rebellion against elements of the Mexican state, it is not enough to merely appreciate the fact that Chiapas is a state beset by some of the worst living conditions in the Mexican nation. While statistical markers of deprivation are important, they only tell a part of the story. In order to appreciate the impetus behind the emergence of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, it is necessary to set these conditions against the backdrop of the expectations and reciprocal social and political obligations established by the Mexican Constitution of 1917.

The Mexican Constitution has been called “perhaps the most progressive constitution of its era” due to the fact that it calls for “fair elections, adequate wages and proper conditions for workers, land for peasants, and other reforms” (Collier 1999: 28). Following the Mexican Revolution, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), who would rule the country for over 70 years, employed a corporatist approach toward each of the various sectors of the Mexican nation, ensuring that they had “a role in sheltered national development as well as corresponding rewards” (Collier 1995: 10). During the 1930s, President Lazaro Cardenas undertook the project of redistributing land in Chiapas and while this process was by no means as complete or as rapid as the peasants of Chiapas wished, it did establish a powerful rationale for the maintenance of peasant loyalty to the state (Collier 1999: 31). As George Collier suggests, “[by] co-opting one group after another with land redistribution, the government ensured that the peasants’ primary loyalty would be to the state and not to their class” (Ibid: 32). This strategy also had benefits for the Mexican state beyond ensuring the loyalty of indigenous peasants as it allowed for Mexico to offset the crippling drop in demand for Mexico’s exports following the Great Depression with a project of import-substitution predicated on the cheap production of food by indigenous farmers (Ibid: 32). The government thus redistributed land from stagnant commercial farms to indigenous families who wished to farm it collectively (Ibid: 32). The low-cost of the *ejido* method of farming, as this collectivized approach to land ownership is known, allowed the prices of food to be kept low, thus allowing urban labour costs to be kept similarly low and new industry to grow (Ibid: 33). In addition to this, through their farming of the land, peasants were able to serve as a

domestic market for these industries (Ibid: 33). During this period, the government also went so far as to encourage peasants to retake land occupied by private estates and plantations, thus ensuring that the indigenous population of Chiapas would see landowners as their enemies and the government as their ally (Ibid: 34). Limited as they were, these policies and concessions were integral to the maintenance of both the loyalty of indigenous peasants to the state as well as the social peace which needed to be maintained in order to ensure national “progress”. However, these policies would not hold forever and as the ruling PRI sought to reconfigure Mexico’s economy in the neoliberal mode of “comparative advantage” toward “global commodity markets and international high finance” the previously existing social contract which had ensured a certain stability amongst various sectors within the Mexican state would crumble (Collier 1995: 10). It would only be once this ideology of a social contract and the reciprocal obligation between the state and the indigenous peasantry was revealed as a fraud that the Zapatista Army of National Liberation would be able to emerge and be seen by many as a justifiable response to an irresponsible and uncaring socio-political order.

While the indigenous of Chiapas have suffered in various ways almost constantly over the past 500 years, the conditions which gave birth to the Zapatista movement can be seen as originating a mere 50 years ago (Womack 1999: 13). It was in the 1950s and the 1960s when villages in Chiapas’ southeast region of Los Altos “were transformed from closed, internally bonded communities into broken, bourgeois-ridden, mistrustful bossdoms” (Ibid: 13). In 1951, the National Indigenous Institute (INI) moved into the area surrounding San

Cristobal de las Casas and set up a regional development programme for the Tzotzil and Tzeltal villages, however, what started out as an initiative run in good faith for the benefit of local indigenous communities was quickly co-opted by state political leaders and ladino (non-indigenous) elites from San Cristobal (Ibid: 13). The INI centre thus began to operate as a means of control for the ladino population over the indigenous and had disastrous effects upon the traditional processes of law, custom, prestige, and authority upon which the indigenous communities had relied for so long. By the 1970s, these indigenous communities surrounding San Cristobal had bilingual teachers from the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party as municipal presidents, presidents who would come to be described not in terms of Mayan tradition but who would rather earn the title “cacique”, or “boss”, a term drawn from national political culture and through their offices they imposed “‘unity’ on their new, broad jurisdiction” (Ibid: 13). Within this political context, the communities of Los Altos were also changing demographically. As medical services improved, death rates declined, but birth rates did not, so the communities found themselves faced with the serious problem of an increasing population and a stagnation of available resources (Ibid: 14). The “unity” of the communities was thus at a critical breaking point.

While the communities surrounding San Cristobal were only suffering through these radical changes in the 1950s, indigenous Chols, Tzotzils, Tzeltals, and Tojolabals in the highlands’ northern and eastern valleys and southern plains around the towns of Altamirano, Ocosingo, and Las Margaritas were living in new communities which were already radically different (Ibid: 14). For generations, these indigenous families had worked as indentured

labour on coffee, sugar and cattle fincas, or estates, and their allegiances were owed solely to one man: their landlord (Ibid: 14). However, with the reform of the agrarian law following the Mexican Revolution, these indigenous families found common cause with one another in order to try and achieve something they had previously thought impossible: to petition for and communally hold ejido land to farm (Ibid:14). The resistance faced by these indigenous communities from political bosses and landowners was “shrewd and vicious” but it also drew the communities together in a manner that insisted on tight-knit communities of common concern and collective action and articulated new forms of indigenous action in Chiapas:

organize a group of landless neighbours resolved to win. Find grantable land, anywhere in the vicinity. Occupy it, secure the perimeter, and declare a community. Fight if necessary. Petition and politick for recognition. Once recognized, petition and politick for an ejido. On receipt of the ejido, guard it as the founders’ joint trust. Let others win their own (Ibid: 15).

Unfortunately, by very virtue of the manner in which these ejidos were won, yet again the communities witnessed the rise of caciques who sought to maintain “unity” and establish links to local ladinos and the PRI (Ibid: 15). The process of population growth was demonstrated here as well as the communities around San Cristobal and soon there were too many people and not enough land (Ibid: 15). Thus, throughout Los Altos, challenges to community unity, greedy bosses, and an exploding population were leading young and landless indigenous to migrate to the east, into the canyons and then into the Lacandon Jungle.

Young indigenous pioneers made their way into the Jungle to claim ejido land that the government was eager to give away and to form communities of a radically different nature than they had left. Left to themselves with no concerns of caciques, the PRI, wealthy

landowners, or ladinos, these fledgeling indigenous communities found themselves free to choose the manner in which they wished to associate with one another, and often they chose to reject the distance so often imposed by difference and chose rather to embrace their difference as natural and normal (Ibid: 17). A new form of political organization emerged in these new jungle communities as well: faced with common concerns and bereft of their traditional leaders and traditional ranks of honour they chose to emphasise the importance of community and thus turned to the assembly where all people over the age of 16 would meet communally to reach consensus over all decisions which affected the community (Ibid: 18). Within this system of assemblies, it was, significantly, not the authorities that were seen as ruling the community, but the community that was seen as ruling the authorities (Ibid: 19).

Even as migration continued from established communities in the Los Altos region of Chiapas east to the Lacandon Jungle, other forces were being brought to bear upon the indigenous population of Chiapas that would push already impoverished communities towards rebellion. In fact, even as these very local political and social transformations were occurring, pressures of a profoundly macroeconomic nature were manifesting themselves throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Since 1938, the Mexican petroleum industry had existed as a nationalized resource to utilize in the service of internal needs (Collier 1995: 11). However, following the OPEC crisis in world petroleum prices in 1973, Mexico moved to export oil and in order to do so needed to borrow heavily from international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank (Ibid: 11). The resulting boom in construction and oil exploration had a dramatic impact upon agriculture which declined from 14% of the GDP in 1965 to

approximately 7% in 1980 (Ibid: 12). Furthermore, farmers sought to intensify production and reduce the costs of labour by shifting to “chemical inputs” which necessitated their dependency on credits and subsidies (Ibid: 12). Ultimately, the collapse of petroleum prices in 1982 left Mexico unable to service its \$96 billion debt and the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund responded by imposing structural adjustment programs upon Mexico (Ibid: 12). These “adjustment programs” entailed reductions in public spending, focusing both government and private resources on the payment of the external debt, and wage controls implemented to reduce inflation and increase the state’s “comparative advantage” and they would prove devastating for the agricultural sector in Chiapas (Saxe-Fernandez 1994: 330). In 1988 when Salinas de Gortari came to power, neoliberal reforms would be embraced whole-heartedly and the corporatist approach to governance would be completely abandoned in favour of the logic of free trade and fully open markets (Collier 1995: 12).

In terms of the impact of these so-called “reforms” for the indigenous peasants of Chiapas, there are several significant markers which require consideration. Compared to the living standards of the 1970s, the structural adjustments of the 1980s reduced real wages in Chiapas by a staggering 60% (Saxe-Fernandez 1994: 331). However, while the effects of this real reduction in wages and living standards is certainly appreciable through these statistics, it is once again far more significant when one contemplates these changes in relation to the social pact established following the Mexican Revolution. Even accepting the analysis that the Mexican Revolution was simply a reconsolidation of power in the hands of a new group of

social elites rather than a widespread social revolution and that even the reforms implemented only reached Chiapas in a limited manner, the impact of this new approach to social governance on the part of the Mexican government was devastating ideologically to the promise of a social contract that had maintained relative stability in Chiapas for so long. As John Saxe-Fernandez notes in his analysis of this situation, “it is not absolute poverty that is the main precipitant of internal war, but social perceptions regarding the discrepancy between the community’s value expectations and its value capabilities” (Ibid: 332). In essence, the groundwork for the Zapatista uprising is one laid on the foundation of the betrayal of the ideological foundations of the Mexican Revolution, the Constitution of 1917, and the social, economic, and political obligations which were believed to exist reciprocally between the state and the citizenry.

Between 1980 and 1990, due to the conflicts over land and power in the villages of Los Altos, migration to the Jungle continued to grow and the population increased from 120 000 to around 200 000 (Womack 1999: 20). As competition for land increased in the Jungle during the mid 80s, the governor of Chiapas announced his “Program of Agrarian Rehabilitation” which was meant to buy private land in troubled areas and grant it to landless peasants as ejido land, however, in every area this program was implemented to the benefit of pro-PRI communities (Ibid: 21). For communities that had been working their ejidos and defending their land without any official recognition, this programme was a source of rage, and assemblies began to arm men (Ibid: 21). Similarly, the national poverty-reduction programme known as “Solidarity” which was implemented by the Salinas government served

to concentrate wealth in the hands of those communities loyal to the PRI and to drive communities which were not seen as appropriately loyal even further into deprivation (Saxe-Fernandez 1994: 333). In addition to this, in 1989 the world price for coffee dropped dramatically and for small farmers in Chiapas, this was devastating (Womack 1999: 21). This crisis would be exacerbated due to the fact that Salinas, in meeting the requirements of NAFTA, rejected the International Coffee Agreement and refused to act in concert with other coffee producers and restrict the export of coffee in order to control its price internationally (Saxe-Fernandez 1994: 333). This systemic abandonment of many indigenous communities in Chiapas would have a profound impact upon their decision to join the Zapatista uprising in 1994.

In 1991, following on the heels of the already massive state disinvestment in many indigenous communities in Chiapas, word of President Carlos Salinas' plans to eliminate the constitutional article on agrarian reform and end the granting of ejidos spread to the indigenous communities in the Jungle (Womack 1999: 21). Historian John Womack reflects on the impact of this news upon the indigenous communities and his words are worth repeating at length:

myriad earnest and honest explanations of the plan - that hardly any land remained to give away, agrarian reform for the last 25 years had increasingly been only on paper, a trick on poor country people, a racket, existing ejidos could stay as they were or receive titles to their grant as their property, the central aim of the new reform was to undermine traditional national bosses and break local bossdoms, an antipoverty program would save the disentitled, and so on - made no difference. In this plan the poorest of the poor Chols, Tzotzils, Tzeltals, and Tojolabals heard the national government's final judgement on them: fend for yourselves (Ibid: 21).

Following this realization, the debate on NAFTA began and the indigenous farmers of Mexico's far southeast realized that their opportunity for a decent life within the context of their current circumstances was growing increasingly impossible (Ibid: 22). In light of the impact of the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s, indigenous condemnation of NAFTA should thus be seen not merely as a response to NAFTA itself, but to the larger impact of neoliberal policies in general. The end of agrarian reform on the part of the Salinas government which fundamentally modified Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution was significant not simply because it ended land redistribution in Chiapas but because it eliminated the "concept of 'social property', and left the ejidatarios and small farmers at the mercy of 'market forces'" (Saxe-Fernandez 1994: 334). Thus, the stage was set for the emergence of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation and their rebellion on the first day of January 1994. Bereft of any opportunity to find a life worth living within the framework of the existing system, some indigenous communities in Chiapas decided to join the EZLN as a response to their abandonment by the state and the breaking of a social contract which had existed between peasants and the state since the Mexican Revolution.

Within these circumstances of profound marginalization, exploitation, and disenfranchisement, the indigenous communities of Chiapas became prime sources for the emergence of the "new Mexican Revolution". Conceptually, several reasons for this are poignantly evoked by the post-colonial theorist Frantz Fanon as well as the Argentinean guerrilla leader Ernesto Che Guevara and offer significant insights with regard to the emergence of the EZLN. The reason I draw upon the thoughts of these two individuals in

particular extends beyond the fact that both are men who found themselves theorizing and acting within worlds which in many ways resemble the lived reality of Chiapas for indigenous Mayan peasants. For his part, Fanon wrote probingly about the consequences of colonialism for the psyche of the “native” as well as the imperative of casting off the chains of slavery and becoming the agent of one’s own emancipation. Furthermore, within his work the rural setting is treated as one of profound significance with regard to the generation of a decolonizing or “revolutionary” movement. In this sense, Fanon’s reflections provide compelling insight into the Chiapas rebellion and the crystallization of the revolutionary moment for rural inhabitants. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon discusses revolutionary violence in a rural context as he states:

it is clear that in the colonial countries the peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The starving peasant, outside the class system, is the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays. For him there is no compromise, no possible coming to terms; colonization and decolonization are simply a question of relative strength. The exploited man sees that his liberation implies the use of all means, and that of force first and foremost...[colonialism] is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence (1963: 61).

Fanon discusses this phenomenon with regard to the specific circumstances of decolonization and because of this his theorizations cannot be considered to be full explanations for the emergence of the EZLN. There is no “colonizer” that the Zapatistas are attempting to oust and the movement itself is imbued with strongly national sentiments, contrary to Fanon’s image of the “natives” attempting to resurrect their own society while putting an end to that of the colonizer’s. But as should be apparent by now, while Chiapas is not an official colony

of any imperialist power, the realities of life in the state bear a striking resemblance to the colonial condition. Furthermore, as the indigenous communities of Chiapas became increasingly peripheral to the agendas of the ruling Mexican elite, the realization that only drastic action would offer the opportunity to assert their basic right to a decent existence similarly acquired greater currency. In essence, while Fanon's analysis is rooted in circumstances far removed from Chiapas, the situation of profound disillusionment with the existing system, constant oppression, endemic racism, and a complete sense of abandonment which Fanon evokes in this passage is the same which characterizes Mexico's far southeast to this day. While this passage is by no means meant to explain the Zapatista uprising, it does help to illuminate the nature of the circumstances themselves which might drive people to rise up in arms. It was only once Mayan peasants in Chiapas came to the realization that there was no space for them left in the world created by the existing socio-economic and political structures in Mexico that they decided to engage in a radical struggle for their own existence.

As for the possible insights offered by Che Guevara with respect to the Zapatista uprising, Guevara's reflections upon the revolution and the rural setting in Latin America are of particular note not only because of his vocation but more importantly because of the position he himself occupies for the Zapatistas. In "Today, Eighty-Five Years Later, History Repeats Itself", a message from the EZLN given at the inaugural ceremony of the American Planning of the Intercontinental Meeting for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism, Subcomandante Marcos epitomizes the significance of Che Guevara for the Zapatistas by stating:

[t]hirty years ago, in 1966, after having been nowhere, a man readied memory and hope so that life would return to America. Back then, his nom de guerre was Ramon. In one of the many corners of the American reality, this man was remembering, and in his memories he brought to life all the men and women who lived and died for America's life. His name and his memory were buried by history's ever-present gravediggers. For some, his first name was Ernesto, his last name Guevara de la Serna. For us he was and is El Che...A citizen of the world, El Che recalls what we have known since the times of Spartacus, and which we often forget: the fight against injustice is a step that elevates humanity, which makes it better, which makes it more human...I have looked for some text to carry the opening words to this gathering. I have gone from Pablo Neruda to Julio Cortazar to Walt Whitman to Juan Rulfo. It was useless; time and again the image of El Che, dreaming in the school at La Higuera, claimed its place between my hands. All the way from Bolivia come those half-closed eyes and that ironical smile, recounting what had happened and promising what was to come. Did I say "dreaming"? Should I have said "dying"? For some he died, for others he fell asleep. Who is wrong? Thirty years ago, El Che was readying the transformation of the American Reality, and those in power prepared for its destruction. Twenty-nine years ago, those in power told us that history was over at the El Yuro mountain pass. They said that the possibility of a different, better reality, was destroyed. They said that rebellion was over. Is it over?...Crystal and mirror, the dream of a better America makes itself comfortable in the best place to dream, [the Zapatista community of] La Realidad. And the intellectual madmen, the authors of this delirium, the madmen who dared to dream our dream before us, are: Manuelita Saenz, Simon Bolivar, Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magon, Emiliano Zapata, and Ernesto El Che Guevara (1996a: 102-104).

Thus, I turn to the thoughts of Che Guevara regarding the significance of the rural in revolution not only because he operated in such conditions and according to such doctrines, but more importantly, because Ernesto Che Guevara is placed within a clear lineage by the Zapatistas themselves and is therefore invaluable in illuminating the struggle which is taking place almost four decades after his assassination.

In "Guerrilla Warfare: A Method", Ernesto Che Guevara discusses the very same theme as Frantz Fanon with regard to the reasons rural inhabitants may be considered to embody greater revolutionary potential than their urban counterparts. Guevara explains this

by stating:

[i]n our countries two circumstances are joined: underdeveloped industry and an agrarian system of feudal character. This is why no matter how hard the living conditions of the urban workers are, the rural population lives under even more horrible conditions of oppression and exploitation...Not counting the landlords who often live in the cities, this great mass earns its livelihood by working as peons on plantations earning miserable wages. Or they till the soil under conditions of exploitation no different than those of the Middle Ages. These circumstances determine in Latin America that the poor rural population constitutes a tremendous potential revolutionary force (1969: 144).

Clearly from the descriptions of Chiapas cited earlier, this passage evokes a reality present in the state more than thirty years after Guevara's death and offers a simple and compelling rationale for why the peasantry occupies a space of revolutionary potential in Latin America. When people are confronted not only by the constant fact of their own deprivation but with the knowledge that the existing regime offers them no meaningful hope of escape from these conditions, the revolutionary moment becomes increasingly viable. In *Guerrilla Warfare*, Che Guevara expands upon the possibilities for conducting a revolutionary struggle and the conditions necessary to give birth to such a struggle. While Guevara saw armed insurrection as capable of generating some of the conditions necessary for revolution, he also acknowledges that certain conditions must be present before the insurrection if the revolutionary vision is to have any hope of crystallizing. Primarily, Guevara asserts that "people must see clearly the futility of maintaining the fight for social goals within the framework of civil debate. When the forces of oppression come to maintain themselves in power against established law, peace is considered already broken" (1961: 8). As should be apparent from the description of the social, political, and economic realities present in

Chiapas, this passage describes in broad terms almost precisely the conditions which preceded the Zapatista uprising.

Within the circumstances which I have outlined above, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation would emerge from out of the poorest and most forgotten state in the Mexican nation. To be sure, there were many more factors involved in the formation of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation than I have mentioned, and scholars such as John Womack Jr. (1999), Neil Harvey (1998), and George Collier (1999) have all explored this process in greater detail. However, the central theme of this work is to engage the issue of how the Zapatista movement has affected Mexican civil society, particularly the independent labour movement, and thus much of this history is somewhat peripheral to this concern. What the history I have provided is meant to convey is something of a social contextualization against which to appreciate both the Zapatista uprising and the national response to it. It should be noted that while the uprising itself was most certainly a surprise to most Mexicans, it was also regarded by many as not only understandable but justified. In large part, the explanation for this reaction is encapsulated by graffiti which appeared throughout the country following the uprising which stated “Chiapas is Mexico” (Reding 1994: 20). The gross social inequalities and feelings of abandonment and betrayal which lay at the heart of the Zapatista rebellion exist not only within Chiapas or even Mexico’s south, but throughout the country.

While the conditions in Chiapas are markedly worse than elsewhere, it is important to appreciate that Chiapas is one of the poorest states within a nation beset by endemic poverty. As Andrew Reding states in his article “Chiapas is Mexico: The Imperative of

Political Reform”: “[t]hroughout the country, Mexicans are expressing dissatisfaction with economic policies that benefit a few, designed by an authoritarian leadership that has yet to deliver on the promise of ‘effective suffrage’ that was a rallying cry for the Mexican Revolution” (Ibid: 11). The problems which prevent meaningful social change in Chiapas are the same problems which prevent similar change in other parts of the Mexican nation. Such issues include electoral fraud; a massive gap between the rich and the poor of the nation; brutal repression by both the police and the military; the denial of basic and constitutionally-entrenched political rights; and the persistence of profoundly racist attitudes, all of which contribute to the popular sense that the established socio-political system offered no hope of any meaningful social reform (Ibid: 12). Even though the poor are the majority in Mexico, as they are throughout Latin America, possibilities for social emancipation through electoral politics have consistently been prevented through the careful use of the police and the armed forces to ensure “obedience” when necessary and the widespread employment of electoral fraud to ensure the “stability” of the existing power structure (Ibid: 19). While the recent election of Vicente Fox of the National Action Party (PAN) to the presidency which ended the PRI’s seven decade rule may seem to disprove this statement, these practices continue to enjoy widespread use at both the federal, state, and municipal levels in Mexico. The remarks of Andrew Reding concerning his evaluation of these twin modes of ensuring “stability” are particularly illuminating:

[w]ith few exceptions, Latin American armies are deployed as domestic police forces, entrusted with preserving “order” and “institutions”, code words for the status quo...[a] widespread misconception holds that Mexico is different: not since the

Revolution has the army overthrown a civilian government, a record unmatched anywhere else in Latin America. In fact, it has not had to. The PRI and its predecessors have ruled the country for 65 years. Whenever the armed forces have sensed any serious challenge to that rule, however, they have behaved like their Central and South American counterparts. In 1968, after students began to demand a greater measure of democracy, the army attacked a gathering in Mexico's Tlatelolco Square with tanks and automatic weapons. Hundreds were killed, hundreds more imprisoned. In the ensuing years, the army's brigadas blancas kidnapped suspected dissidents, hundreds of whom were never heard from again. And in the early 1970s, the armed forces crushed a peasant rebellion in the state of Guerrero with a scorched-earth policy that made little distinction between combatants and civilians (Ibid: 19).

Much like the rhetoric surrounding the Mexican Revolution, the notion that the Mexican army has not intervened in matters of governance and democracy is a similar myth. However, the armed forces, as mentioned previously, are only one side of the regime's political arsenal in the war to maintain "institutions" and "order" in the face of broad popular dissent:

[t]hat the army has not had to rely on these methods more regularly is a testament to the success of the second method of constraining democracy: electoral fraud...No dialect in the world has a richer vocabulary to describe electoral fraud than Mexican Spanish. From the ABCs of acarreo (the stacking of PRI events with persons trucked in with promises of free lunches or reminders of who gave them their jobs), brigadas volantes ("flying brigades" of policemen, soldiers, and party faithful that vote in one place, then are bused elsewhere to vote again), and fraude cibernetico (the use of computers to selectively purge opposition voters from the rolls and duplicate the registration of party stalwarts), to the z of zapatos (polling stations in which the PRI gets 100 percent of the vote), Mexico's "electoral engineers" are unexcelled in converting expressions of dissent into manifestations of overwhelming support for the country's leadership (Ibid: 19).

Thus, in light of these two pillars of the PRI regime's political power, it can clearly be seen that Chiapas is indeed Mexico in ways that extend far beyond mere rhetoric. Those who question the Zapatista uprising on the basis of its initial use of armed force need to consider the fundamental nature of the Mexican regime and the possibilities which existed at the time

for electoral reform. The response of Mexican civil society to the Zapatista uprising, a topic which will be addressed in the second part of this work, is therefore understandable only with the appreciation of the fact that the injustices perpetrated against the indigenous peasants of Chiapas were both a magnification and a mirror of the injustices which existed throughout Mexico at the time of the uprising.

“Today We Say Enough is Enough!”: The Zapatistas Declare War

Now that some social, political, and economic context has been provided both for the Zapatista uprising itself as well as the response of civil society, it is now time to move on to the ideological foundations of the Zapatista movement and the manner in which they serve as the central node upon which the Zapatista movement crystallized its “moment of coincidence” with other social movements. This section deals primarily with the five Zapatista *Declarations of the Lacandon Jungle*. While documents such as the San Andres Accords and events such as the Encounters for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism and the Zapatour caravan to Mexico City are of profound importance to the Zapatista movement, these five declarations serve as the central markers for the Zapatistas’ political and social agendas and convey the critical concepts which inform their dialogue with Mexican civil society.

In embarking upon the analysis of these key documents, it is important to realize that the core concept behind the Zapatista struggle over the past seven years is essentially reducible to one key notion: the word. While this statement may seem strange and perhaps even unsettling given the fact that the power of “the word” is something which has frequently been associated with the tremendous abuses perpetrated under the guise of Christianity,

particularly with respect to indigenous populations, in the context of the Zapatista movement “the word” represents something very different. While the Zapatista Army is indeed an armed insurgent force, the Zapatista movement has moved beyond these beginnings to become something much larger, much more diverse, and, ultimately, much more powerful. Through their emphasis upon dialogue and political space, the Zapatistas have rooted their struggle in the concept of engagement with other actors involved in challenging an oppressive and exploitive system. The basis for this engagement is, quite simply, the word. It is through the words of their spokesperson, Subcomandante Marcos, that the Zapatistas have been able to reach beyond the borders of their geographic locality to engage people in other parts of Mexico and around the world. It is through their emphasis upon communication and respectful dialogue that the Zapatistas have managed to articulate the possibility of a common struggle among so many diverse social actors. As Subcomandante Marcos explains in the Zapatista communique “The Word and the Silence”:

[w]hat matters is our eldest elders who received the word and the silence as a gift in order to know themselves and to touch the heart of the other. Speaking and listening is how true men and women learn to walk. It is the word that gives form to that walk that goes on inside of us. It is the word that is the bridge to cross to the other side. Silence is what Power offers our pain in order to make us small. When we are silenced, we remain very much alone. Speaking, we heal the pain. Speaking, we accompany one another. Power uses the word to impose his empire of silence. We use the word to renew ourselves. Power uses silence to hide his crimes. We use silence to listen to one another, to touch one another, to know one another. This is the weapon, brothers and sisters. We say, the word remains. We speak the word. We raise the word and with it break the silence of our people. We kill the silence by living the word. Let us leave Power alone in what the lie speaks and hushes. Let us join together in the word and the silence which liberate (1995: 84).

“The word”, in this sense, conveys the radically emancipatory possibilities embodied in the

act of speaking and listening to one another, it also conveys the fundamental and profoundly subversive power which resides in the capacity and willingness to communicate. Since the first days of 1994, the Zapatistas have not fired a single shot at the Mexican military, rather, they have engaged in some of the most innovative and creative actions in order to realize their own demands as well as to galvanize both national and international civil society in an attempt to create a broad front of resistance. In doing so, they have articulated a vision as unique as their struggle has been, and it is with their initial cry of “Ya basta!”, “enough!”, where I intend to begin.

The *First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* was one of the first Zapatista documents released to the Mexican people following the uprising on the first day of January in 1994. It is, in its most essential form, a declaration of war and a call to others to join the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in this struggle. The declaration begins with a historical contextualization of the uprising and an assertion of the legitimacy of the action:

[w]e are a product of 500 years of struggle: first against slavery, then during the War of Independence against Spain led by insurgents, then to avoid being absorbed by North American imperialism, then to promulgate our constitution and expel the French empire from our soil, and later the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz denied us the just application of the Reform laws and the people rebelled and leaders like Villa and Zapata emerged, poor men just like us. We have been denied the most elemental preparation so they can use us as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country. They don't care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads, no land, no work, no health care, no food nor education. Nor are we able to freely and democratically elect our political representatives, nor is there independence from foreigners, nor is there peace nor justice for ourselves and our children (EZLN 1993).

The EZLN through this assertion thus situate themselves squarely within both a national and

a historical context as an insurgency which is a response to the injustice of the existing political regime. This notion of the justice and legitimacy of the Zapatista uprising is echoed later in the declaration as the EZLN invokes Article 39 of the Mexican Constitution which states that “National Sovereignty essentially and originally resides in the people. All political power emanates from the people and its purpose is to help the people. The people have, at all times, the inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government” (Ibid). Thus, the uprising is located specifically and explicitly within the context of a higher justice that has been denied to the Mexican people as a result of the ruling political powers.

While the central purpose of the *First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* is ostensibly to declare war, it is important to be specific about whom the Zapatista Army of National Liberation is declaring war against. Significantly, the EZLN is careful throughout the declaration to distinguish who they perceive as their adversary. Specifically, they identify both the “Mexican federal army, the pillar of the Mexican dictatorship we suffer from, monopolized by a one-party system and led by Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the maximum and illegitimate federal executive that today holds power” (Ibid). It has been said that the Zapatistas declared war against the Mexican state, but this is most clearly not the case. The Zapatistas were very careful to identify those elements of the ruling regime they see as being primarily responsible for the suffering of the Mexican people. Furthermore, in describing themselves and their cause, the EZLN states that:

[w]e have the Mexican people on our side, we have the beloved tri-colored flag highly respected by our insurgent fighters. We use black and red in our uniform as our symbol of our working people on strike...we refuse any effort to disgrace our just

cause by accusing us of being drug traffickers, drug guerrillas, thieves, or other names that might be used by our enemies. Our struggle follows the constitution which is held high by its call for justice and equality (Ibid).

This passage warrants special attention primarily because it is here that one is able to see what the Zapatistas wish to identify themselves as and what they wish to distance themselves from. The assertion of an essential Mexican identity is obvious here, as is the patriotism implied therein by their reference to the venerated status of the “tri-colored” (Mexican) flag. Additionally, identification with urban labourers is affirmed here in concert with their denial of being a “narco-guerrilla” or foreign insurgents. The passage finishes with a reference to the Mexican Constitution and an implicit accusation that the ruling political powers have betrayed both it and the Mexican people. Taken as a whole, these assertions and denials serve to place the EZLN firmly within the space occupied not only by a higher justice and legitimacy, but one occupied by the Mexican people as well. This notion will prove extremely significant when I consider why the response of Mexican civil society, and the labour movement in particular, is articulated in the manner it is.

In concluding the *First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*, the EZLN makes a final appeal to the Mexican people and, perhaps most significantly, outlines their basic demands according to which their struggle is articulated. This approach of engaging directly with the Mexican population and grounding this engagement by evoking the most fundamental claims upon which the Zapatista struggle is based is a strategy which would serve to both profoundly appeal to and galvanize Mexican social movements over the course of the next 7 years. The declaration concludes with this final passage:

[t]o the people of Mexico: We, the men and women, full and free, are conscious that the war we have declared is our last resort, but also a just one. The dictators are applying an undeclared genocidal war against our people for many years. Therefore we ask for your participation, your decision to support this plan that struggles for work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace. We declare that we will not stop fighting until the basic demands of our people have been met by forming a government of our country that is free and democratic (Ibid).

There are several fundamental aspects of this final passage that merit closer attention. Firstly, this passage expresses the Zapatistas' desire to participate with the Mexican people in "forming a government of our country that is free and democratic". This expression serves to illuminate the dialogical nature of the Zapatista project in that they openly solicit the participation of the population. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that this participation is not necessarily rooted in armed insurrection. The mode of participation seems open to interpretation, and this is certainly something which would have a deep impact upon the relationship between the EZLN and other Mexican social movements. Additionally, the stated desire in this passage is not the seizure of power, the toppling of the state, or even the implementation of a socialist program, rather, it is the formation of "a government that is free and democratic". There is no agenda here that indicates any desire on the part of the Zapatistas to seize power or to implement their own regime. Quite simply, the Zapatistas call for a democratic opening in Mexico that will allow for the most basic needs, not only of the indigenous peoples but of the Mexican people in general, to be met. Within the context of the social and political conditions outlined previously, one can obviously appreciate the profoundly revolutionary nature of the Zapatista vision in the most fundamental sense. Rather

than proposing a set project, the *First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* is as much a call to participation and engagement as it is a call to arms. It is an invitation in the sense that it solicits the support and involvement of the Mexican people rather than assuming a leadership role for the EZLN itself and in doing so, it sets the stage for the radically democratic and emancipatory visions that would follow.

“The Mexican Awakening”: The Zapatista Struggle Evolves

In order to understand the nature and significance of the Declarations which follow, it is necessary first to comprehend what occurred following the first day of January 1994. The first day of the insurrection saw the Zapatista Army of National Liberation capture San Cristobal de Las Casas, Ocosingo, Las Margaritas, Altamirano, Chanal, Oxchuc, and Huixtan (Harvey 1998a: 6). However, the second day of the new year brought the weight of the Mexican armed forces down upon the 3000 or so poorly-armed guerrillas and forced the EZLN back into the canyons (Womack 1999: 43). With their *First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*, the Zapatistas had hoped to serve as the catalyst for a revolutionary moment in Mexico. As is clear from the declaration itself, the Zapatistas sought to encourage rebellion in other areas of the nation and bring about the defeat of both the Mexican army as well as the executive branch of the federal government. This never occurred; however, the EZLN succeeded in a drastically different manner which was completely unanticipated: “within a few days, amid stupefying confusion and bewildering denunciations right, left, and center, most Mexicans outside Chiapas formed two clear, simple opinions: they were for the poor Indians in Chiapas, and they were against war” (Ibid: 44). While I wish to examine the

response of “civil society” in the second part of this work, it is essential to realize that it was at this point that the Zapatista uprising became radically reconfigured in terms of its strategies and tactics as well as its goal. Rather than continuing to pursue an armed struggle in which they were clearly overmatched, the Zapatistas instead embarked on a new path to revolution: dialogue with civil society. It was at this juncture that the EZLN both agreed to negotiations with the government and Subcomandante Marcos severed all of the EZLN’s ties to its “parent organization”, the National Forces of Liberation, and consolidated control within the indigenous communities themselves through the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committees (Ibid: 44). Even more importantly, it was at this point that the Zapatista communiques fall under Marcos’ control and the style of writing shifts dramatically from the “revolutionary bureaucratese” of the first communiques to become, in the words of John Womack:

playful, sarcastic, poetic, arbitrary, funny, narcissistic, poignant, snide, allusive, Foucaultian, magically realistic, the perfect lingo for contemporary discourse and negotiation, not with a government or rival movements, but through the modern media with a modern public, the message being not war, or peace, or reconciliation, but endless, seductive argumentation (Ibid: 44).

Thus, it is here that one can see the Zapatista strategy shift to embrace the new terrain upon which the “war” would be fought: on the ground of ideology and public consciousness. It is at this point that the word truly becomes the most powerful weapon of the Zapatistas and it is with this in mind that I will now turn to examine the other core declarations of the Zapatista movement.

“Our Sovereignty Resides in Civil Society”: The Second Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle

The *Second Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* appeared in the Mexican independent daily newspaper *La Jornada* on June 10, 1994 following the collapse of the first round of negotiations between the government and the EZLN. As mentioned previously, the somewhat bureaucratic and rigid style of the first declaration is absent from this declaration which is instead characterized by significant literary flair and a powerful rhetorical argument. Perhaps even more importantly, it is in this declaration that the concept of “civil society” as it relates to the Zapatista movement emerges. The concept first appears in this document as the author, probably Marcos but identified only as the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee, outlines the events which have transpired since the first day of January 1994:

[t]he powers in Mexico ignored our just demand and permitted a massacre. However, this massacre only lasted 12 days. Another force, a force superior to any political or military power, imposed its will on the parties involved in the conflict. Civil society assumed the duty of preserving our country. It showed its disapproval of the massacre and it obliged us to dialogue with the government (EZLN 1994).

Significantly, it should be noted that not only does the concept of “civil society” first appear in this declaration, the declaration is in fact directed to those who comprise it. Within this context, the Zapatistas identify “civil society” as “our brothers and sisters in different non-governmental organizations, in campesino and Indigenous organizations, workers in cities and in the countryside, teachers and students, housewives and squatters, artists and intellectuals, members of independent political parties, Mexicans” (Ibid). The call made to this diverse group of people is the promise of the EZLN to maintain the cease-fire “in order to permit civil

society to organize in whatever forms they consider pertinent toward the goal of achieving a transition to democracy in our country” (Ibid). While the claim may be made that the EZLN was in no position to mount any significant military operation against the Mexican army or the government even if it had wanted to, this assertion is nonetheless extremely important once one considers that it essentially entails the subordination of the armed insurgency to the civilian population of the Mexican nation. Thus, the transition from the first declaration to the second is already quite apparent. Rather than overcoming the army and overthrowing the executive branch of the federal government, the EZLN here affirms its role as a catalyst, but refers to civil society as the primary and only legitimate agent of change in Mexico. In the name of “democracy, freedom, and justice” and in order to bring about the end of the “state party system”, a reference to the PRI regime, civil society is asked to take the initiative and mobilize peacefully in order to achieve social change.

Another profoundly significant concept which would become central to the Zapatista movement over the next seven years also emerges in the *Second Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* alongside “civil society” and is that of “free and democratic space for political struggle” (Ibid). This notion of “political space” is a powerful conceptualization which would become perhaps the single most overarching theme of the Zapatista movement in the years to follow. As the declaration states:

[w]e aren’t proposing a new world, but something preceding a new world: an antechamber looking into the new Mexico. In this sense, this revolution will not end in a new class, faction of a class, or group in power. It will end in a free and democratic space for political struggle. This free and democratic space will be born on the fetid cadaver of the state party system and the tradition of fixed presidential

succession (Ibid).

Rather than a fixed political strategy, the EZLN instead proposes with this document and this concept a possibility, an opening, an “antechamber” that provides the space both politically and socially for the Mexican people to be able to freely and democratically determine their future. As Marcos would later say, “war should only be to open up space in the political arena so that the people can really have a choice...[w]e want to create the political space, and we want the people to have the education and the political maturity to make good choices” (Benjamin 1995: 61). Thus, in an environment which is characterized by the monopolization of power and authority by a select few, the Zapatistas’ goal is to agitate for the formation of a space which would allow for choice and responsibility to be returned to the citizens of the Mexican nation themselves.

Yet this “space” the Zapatistas refer to is not a physical place, it is not an institution or set structure that may be implemented in order to establish public participation and the restoration of democracy to Mexicans, something which the Zapatistas acknowledge explicitly in denying a set political formation for the nation or the possibility of reform through electoral politics. This, then, raises the following question: how will this “space” be realized and what does it entail? In the *Second Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*, the response the EZLN offers in order to realize this political space is to extend an invitation to “civil society” to participate in a “National Democratic Convention” (EZLN 1994). This convention, as envisioned by the Zapatistas in their second declaration is expressed in the following manner:

we call for a sovereign and revolutionary National Democratic Convention from

which will come a transitional government and a new national law, a new constitution that will guarantee the legal fulfilment of the people's will. This sovereign revolutionary convention will be national in that all states of the federation will be represented. It will be plural in the sense that all patriotic sectors will be represented. It will be democratic in the way in which it will make decisions by national consultations. The Convention will be presided over, freely and voluntarily, by civilians, prestigious public figures, regardless of their political affiliation, race, religion, sex, or age (Ibid).

Thus, the convention is envisioned in this document in only the broadest and most abstract manner. This, undoubtedly, is intentional for a number of reasons. Firstly, because this document is a call to civil society to participate, not to be led by the Zapatistas. Secondly, because there probably remained several logistical aspects to be negotiated in terms of structure, attendance, and date. Finally, because embodied in this core notion of "political space" is ultimately the realization that while the Zapatistas may act as the impetus for the formation of such a space, they cannot realize it by themselves and it remains the prerogative of civil society itself to articulate the space they wish to occupy.

"Our Struggle is National": The Third Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle

One year after the Zapatista uprising began, the EZLN issued its *Third Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*. Following on the heels of another federal PRI victory which brought Ernesto Zedillo to the presidency, the Zapatistas issued this declaration as a response to what they saw as the failure of electoral politics to bring about meaningful change in the Mexican nation (EZLN 1995). In many ways, the *Third Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* is an extension of the declaration which preceded it. However, rather than calling for another National Democratic Convention, this declaration instead issues the call to "all social and

political forces of the country, to all honest Mexicans, to all those who struggle for the democratization of the national reality, to form a national liberation movement” (Ibid). The professed purpose of this movement, according to the general command of the EZLN, is to “struggle from a common accord, by all means, at all levels, for the installation of a transitional government, a new constitutional body, a new constitution, and the destruction of the system of the Party-State” (Ibid). Thus, the thrust of this declaration remains very much the same as that of the *Second Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* in that the aim is to generate a broad social front of opposition to the existing political regime. In order to appreciate the *Third Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* in terms of the vision the Zapatistas attempt to articulate through it, it is necessary to examine two specific aspects of this declaration which play particularly central roles. Firstly, it is of note that both of the first two Zapatista declarations avoided referring in explicit terms to the fundamentally indigenous nature of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation and its struggle (Womack 1999: 290). However, in the third declaration, the general command of the EZLN names their uprising as “the indigenous rebellion in Chiapas”, as well as stating that the intent of this uprising was to “call attention anew to the grave conditions of Mexican indigenous life” (1995). Yet while this emphasis on the indigenous aspect of the Zapatista movement is no doubt extremely significant, it also brings us to the second important aspect of note, namely, that this declaration also invokes strongly nationalist images as it develops its argument. In this document, the Zapatistas refer to an internal coup within the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party just prior to the federal elections which saw the chosen successor to the

presidency assassinated, an event which the EZLN characterizes in the following manner: “[i]ncapable of a civilized dialogue within its own party, the PRI bloodied the national soil. The shame of seeing the national colors usurped by the emblem of the PRI continues for all Mexicans” (Ibid). As the declaration progresses, the Zapatistas further declare the “Mexican flag, the justice system of the Nation, the Mexican Hymn, and the National Emblem” to be under the protection of the “resistance forces” and removed from the use of the federal government (Ibid). Even as they call for the overthrow of the president, the EZLN is extremely careful to situate itself as one of the true caretakers of the nation as opposed to the “grand gentlemen of power” who only seek to use the Mexican nation, its people, and its resources for their own ends. More importantly, in laying claim to these symbols of the Mexican nation, the Zapatistas clearly and unequivocally situate their struggle in the realm of the national as well as the local. The Zapatistas are therefore not only foregrounding the indigenous nature of their struggle, they are also reasserting the fundamentally national character of it as well.

Another theme strongly echoed in the third declaration is the notion of “civil society”, however, in this declaration, “civil society” is never referred to explicitly, rather, the EZLN approaches the concept from a different tangent. In making their call for a National Liberation Movement, the Zapatistas appeal to specific groups of the Mexican nation:

[w]e call upon the workers of the republic, the workers in the countryside and the cities, the neighbourhood residents, the teachers and the students of Mexico, the women of Mexico, the young people of the whole country, the honest artists and intellectuals, the responsible religious members, the community-based militants of the different political organizations, to take up the means and forms of struggle that they

consider possible and necessary, to struggle for the end of the Party-State system, incorporating themselves into the National Democratic Convention if they do not belong to a party, and to the National Liberation Movement if they are active in any of the political opposition forces (Ibid).

While this passage bears stylistic resemblance to a similar passage in the second declaration, the absence of the term “civil society” is noteworthy. As John Womack notes in his evaluation of this declaration, the probable reason for the absence of the term “civil society” is due to the fact that despite the best efforts of the Zapatistas, “civil society” had failed to mobilize effectively following the initial National Democratic Convention (1999: 290). For its part, the convention had indeed occurred in San Cristobal de Las Casas on August 6, 1994, drawing more than 5000 delegates from Mexican “civil society” who participated actively in working groups on the “transition to democracy”, the “inviability of the State-party”, “non-violent ways to democracy”, “elections, civil resistance, and defense of the will of the people”, and “formulation of a national project” (Ibid: 280). However, following this initial success, the convention languished without direction and was not an influence in the elections at either the federal or the state levels which occurred later that summer (Ibid: 281). Perhaps as a result of this inaction, the EZLN in their third declaration chose to call on specific actors to engage in diverse actions in order to bring about the fall of the “state-party” system and implement a transitional government. Having said this, it is essential to realize that while “civil society” does not appear as the single most important concept in this declaration, the Zapatistas nevertheless acknowledge the fundamental importance of diverse social actors in this struggle for national change. In fact, the absence of the term itself may indeed refer us to a certain

problematization of the notion itself, in much the same way that this notion is grappled with by contemporary theorists of democratic politics. By calling out to diverse groups of Mexican citizens to engage in civil action rather than calling out to “civil society” itself, the general command of the EZLN may be indirectly indicating the need for these groups of individuals to engage in the formation of this “civil society” themselves. Thus, rather than assuming the existence of such an entity, the *Third Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* instead assumes the possibility for the formation of such an association. The responsibility for the realization of “civil society” is thus ultimately left in the hands of those who would comprise it.

“The Zapatista Front of National Liberation”: The Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle

On January 1, 1996, fully two years after the Zapatista Army of National Liberation emerged from the mountains of the Mexican southeast, the general command of the EZLN released its *Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*. Historically, this declaration came at a particularly interesting time for the Zapatista movement in terms of its public currency and the EZLN most clearly sought to make use of this. In early 1995, the peso devaluation initiated by the new Zedillo government brought the Mexican economy crashing down and very nearly took the new president with it. In an attempt to revive its tarnished image, the government sought to achieve a display of competence by releasing the identities of the Zapatista command to the public and simultaneously issuing arrest warrants for their capture (Womack 1999: 295). 25 000 soldiers advanced into the Zapatista strongholds and occupied them, however, the result of this was far from what the Zedillo government had hoped (Ibid:

295). Rather than crushing the movement, it reinvigorated it and brought elements of both Mexican and international “civil society” into the picture once more (Ibid: 295). As a result of massive public pressure, the government once more moved towards negotiations with the Zapatistas. These negotiations began on April 20, 1995 in the town of San Andres Larrainzar and would continue, off and on, well into 1996 and involved discussion regarding indigenous rights, the first phase of a dialogue, negotiation, accord, and commitment process which was also supposed to address “Democracy and Justice...Political Liberties, and Women’s Rights” (Ibid: 297). It was during this period of dialogue with the government that the EZLN also sought to involve “civil society” in their struggle and to make the negotiations a truly national event. In accordance with this, the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee - General Command of the EZLN issued the *Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*.

The fourth Zapatista declaration is a document which is remarkable in many ways with respect to the other four declarations. Firstly, the declaration is marked by a stylistic flair for argument and poetics which has been attributed specifically to the writing of Subcomandante Marcos rather than the CRI-CG as a whole. Secondly, the document is the most “indigenous” of any of those to date, mentioning as it does not only the indigenous history of the Zapatista movement but naming explicitly each of the indigenous language groups in Mexico. Third, and perhaps most notably, this declaration signals a return to the *Second Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* in that it both revisits and dramatically expands upon the notion of “civil society”. While the declaration begins, in standard Zapatista fashion, with a brief review of the conflict up to the present date, the declaration proceeds to describe the new Zapatista

initiatives upon which they are currently focusing:

[a]n initiative for the international arena expresses itself in a call to carry out an intercontinental dialogue in opposition to neoliberalism. The other two initiatives are of a national character: the formation of civic committees of dialogue whose base is the discussion of the major national problems and which are the seeds of a non-partisan political force; and the construction of the new Aguascalientes as places for encounters between civil society and Zapatismo (EZLN 1996).

Thus, very concrete notions of dialogue are articulated within this declaration from the outset, setting the stage for the main thrust of the declaration itself. It is of considerable significance to note that since the first declaration, there has been an increasing tendency within each Zapatista document to call for the active participation of both national and international “civil society” to participate in the struggle for “[a] plural, tolerant, inclusive, democratic, just, free and new society” (Ibid). What was originally a call to arms has now, with the fourth declaration, become a call to dialogue and interaction through which this “new society” may begin to crystallize.

While the Zapatistas outline their current endeavours early in the fourth declaration, the true purpose of this document is not fully revealed until almost the end. It is at this point where the Zapatistas issue their third and most forceful call for the support of Mexican “civil society” in forming a broad social front of opposition:

we call upon all honest men and women to participate in the new national political force which is born today: the Zapatista Front of National Liberation. A civil and nonviolent organization, independent and democratic, Mexican and national, which struggles for democracy, liberty, and justice in Mexico. The Zapatista Front of National Liberation is born today, and we extend an invitation to participate in it to the factory workers of the Republic, to the laborers of the countryside and of the cities, to the indigenous peoples, to the colonos, to teachers and students, to the Mexican women, to young people across the country, to the honest artists and

intellectuals, to responsible priests and nuns, and to all the Mexican people who do not seek power, but rather democracy, liberty, and justice for ourselves and for our children (Ibid).

It is in this passage that the Zapatista conception of “civil society” is fully articulated. In the broadest sense possible, the Zapatistas call for all “honest Mexican men and women” to join in dialogue and struggle to achieve “democracy, liberty, and justice”. “Civil society” thus does not refer to any specific group of people or any political or social formation per se, rather, it includes the “Mexican people” in the widest sense and excludes only those who wish to achieve traditional political power or are otherwise tied to the “State-party” system.

Fundamentally, this conception of “civil society” is one which embraces all those who wish to join in the struggle for political and social change and who are not tied to the idea that electoral politics is the only avenue by which to realize this. Rather than establishing a specific political formation or indicating a specific group of organizations or individuals as comprising “civil society”, the concept instead articulates a space and a relationship for those who choose to participate in it. Most significantly, it is a space and a relationship which is voluntary, autonomous, and democratic. In this conceptualization, “civil society” has no particular form or agenda, rather, it is characterized by “the autonomy of the organizations constituting civil society, their independence from the State and their antagonism towards it” (Esteva 1999: 158). Furthermore, it should be noted that while this formulation of “civil society” may seem impossibly broad and amorphous, “[i]t is not constituted by masses: it is not a herd, but a multiplicity of diverse groups and organizations, formal or informal, of people who act together for a variety of purposes” (Ibid: 159). Thus, “civil society” is a space of liberation

and engagement for all those who wish to participate in it. While this understanding of “civil society” may seem extraordinarily undefined to some, it must be appreciated that this conceptualization in fact exemplifies the Zapatista notion of dialogue and engagement as it allows for and, in fact, necessitates multiplicity, divergence, and antagonism. In fact, within Zapatista discourse, it is this concept which possesses the capacity to truly generate the creativity and the impetus to envision and articulate radically new and emancipatory social relations.

The structure of the Zapatista Front of National Liberation is of particular interest as it relates to the concept of the “moment of coincidence” which I argue the Zapatistas catalysed with such effectiveness. In the fourth declaration, Subcomandante Marcos delves into considerable conceptual detail in order to express the relationship between the EZLN and the members of Mexican civil society who wish to struggle in common with them. Marcos’ prose is highly abstract and somewhat obscure if taken as a blueprint or a concrete frame of reference by which to structure a new social movement; however, if one considers the content of this declaration to be symbolic rather than literal, it becomes apparent that what the Zapatistas are describing is not a new structure or a new form of organization, but rather the very reconfiguring of the manner in which people relate to one another. The fourth declaration engages this issue at length, and it is worth noting the words concerning this in full in order to appreciate the importance of this relationship to Zapatismo:

[w]e invite national civil society, those without a party, the citizen and social movement, all Mexicans to construct this new political force. A new political force which will be national. A new political force based in the EZLN. A new political force

which forms part of a broad opposition movement, the National Liberation Movement, as a space for citizen political action where there may be a confluence with other political forces of the independent opposition, a space where popular wills may encounter and coordinate united actions with one another. A political force whose members do not exert nor aspire to hold elective positions or government offices in any of its levels. A political force which does not aspire to take power. A force which is not a political party. A political force which can organize the demands and proposals of those citizens and is willing to give direction through obedience. A political force which can organize a solution to the collective problems without the intervention of political parties and of the government. We do not need permission in order to be free. The role of the government is the prerogative of society and it is its right to exert that function. A political force which struggles against the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few and against the centralization of power. A political force whose members do not have any other privilege than the satisfaction of having fulfilled its commitment. A political force with local, state and regional organization which grows from the base, which is its social force. A political force given birth by the civic committees of dialogue. A political force which is called a front because it incorporates organizational efforts which are non-partisan, and has many levels of participation and many forms of struggle. A political force called Zapatista because it is born with the hope and the indigenous heart which, together with the EZLN, descended again from the Mexican mountains. A political force with a program of struggle with 13 points. Those contained in the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle and added throughout the past two years of insurgency. A political force which struggles against the State-Party system. A political force which struggles for a new constituency and a new constitution. A political force which does not struggle to take political power but for a democracy where those who govern, govern by obeying (EZLN 1996).

The vision offered by Marcos and the Zapatistas in this passage is one in which the concept of political "space", radical democratic positionings, and a highly egalitarian and emancipatory structure are combined in order to generate the possibility of achieving a new social order through radically new forms of social relations. It is essential to note that the socio-political front which the Zapatistas are proposing is one based in the concepts of Zapatismo, but which is by no means limited to them. The central notion here is that there must be a space for dialogue, difference, and accord if exploitive structures are to give way to more emancipatory

ones. In this case, civil society is envisioned as a partner to the EZLN rather than an addition to it, and the EZLN, rather than being a vanguard, in fact operates more as the impetus and drive for this civil movement, “the hope and indigenous heart which...descended again from the Mexican mountains”.

“This is the Hour of National Civil Society...”: The Fifth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle

The *Fifth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* was issued by the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee - General Command of the EZLN on July 19, 1998 and, in many ways, represents an amalgamation of many of the themes which had been developed through the four previous declarations. It should be noted, however, that this declaration was issued at a very particular point in time, a period following the failure of the Mexican government to implement the San Andres Accords on indigenous rights after they had been agreed upon through negotiations. It also followed on the heels of the Acteal massacre, in which 45 Tzotzil Indians were murdered by pro-PRI indigenous paramilitaries with the complicity of the Mexican armed forces and police, a fact that needs to be noted in order to understand the context and form of this final declaration which heavily emphasises the indigenous character of the EZLN and the first phase of its struggle.

The *Fifth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* begins as many of the others do with a brief synopsis of the events to date with regard to the Zapatista movement and the reaffirmation of the EZLN that the struggle continues. Following this, the CCRI-CG of the EZLN calls “all honest men and women to the struggle for the recognition of the rights of

Indian peoples and an end to the war of extermination” (EZLN 1998). In pursuit of this objective, the EZLN firsts calls upon the indigenous populations of Mexico to join in the struggle. Following this, the Zapatistas declare that “[t]his is the hour of National Civil Society and the independent political and social organizations” (Ibid). Once again, the Zapatistas reach out to the people of Mexico who are not complicit in the existing system of exploitation and extermination. Specifically, this declaration refers to this “hour” in the following manner:

[i]t is the hour of the campesinos, of the workers, of the teachers, of the students, of the professionals, of the committed priests and nuns, of the journalists, of the squatters, of the small shopkeepers, of the debtors, of the artists, of the intellectuals, of the disabled, of those who are HIV-positive, of the homosexuals, of the lesbians, of the men, of the women, of the children, of the young people, of the elderly, of the unions, of the cooperatives, of the campesino groups, of the political organizations, and of the social organizations (Ibid).

Thus, once more, “civil society” is referred to not in any exact or predetermined manner, but rather in the form of a broad spectrum of people who are unified only by their common concern for the fact that the political, social, and economic system as it exists presently, exploits and degrades them all in some respect. The EZLN continues this appeal by stating that:

[w]e call on them so that, together with us and the indigenous peoples, we may struggle against the war and for the recognition of indigenous rights, for the transition to democracy, for an economic model which serves the people and does not serve itself, for a tolerant and inclusive society, for respect for difference, and for a new country where peace with justice and dignity will be for everyone (Ibid).

What is significant about this passage is not that it embodies much of the same rhetoric which has been seen throughout the preceding declarations, but rather that the end of the war

against indigenous peoples and the recognition of indigenous rights are not seen as the final step of this struggle. The Zapatistas articulate quite plainly that “[t]his is the hour of the struggle for the rights of the indigenous peoples as a step towards democracy, liberty, and justice for all” (Ibid). In this context, the Zapatistas call for a “National Consultation concerning the legal initiative on indigenous rights of the Commission on Concordance and Pacification and for an end to the war of extermination” (Ibid). Here once again the Zapatistas actively call out for the participation and engagement of Mexican civil society in the articulation and realization of peace in pursuit of a new social, political, and economic reality. This process is founded upon the recognition of the “historical debt” owed to the indigenous peoples of Mexico, but it is important to acknowledge that this consultation is viewed only as the first step of the first stage of peace.

The *Fifth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* requires much less attention and analysis, in many ways, than do the preceding four declarations. This is primarily due to the fact that much of the conceptual foundation of this declaration has emerged from the groundwork laid by the ones which preceded it. One central concept which demands notice is the emphasis upon the notion of time. Throughout their struggle, time and temporality are an issue for the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. Whether it is the historical content of the declarations or the assertion that this is the “hour” within which civil society must act, there is a distinct sense of temporal awareness within Zapatismo. While many scholars have drawn connections between this and the Mayan conception of time, a remark which I believe to be of essential importance, I also believe that it is important to see these comments as a

conscious strategy on the part of Subcomandante Marcos and other Zapatista leaders to force an immediate engagement with Mexican civil society as well. Additionally, perhaps one of the most significant characteristics of the five declarations are that they represent a progression for the Zapatista movement as it changed through time. Through them, one can begin to appreciate precisely how an armed uprising transformed itself into a dynamic socio-political front of opposition. Through them, one can appreciate how an indigenous army of Mayan peasants were able to command attention on both the national and the international levels through their radically democratic and essentially fluid conceptualizations of social and political “space”. Through them, one can begin to understand that for this movement, “civil society”, “political power”, and even the “nation-state” are not merely institutions, abstract concepts, or even aggregates of people but rather spaces to be defined by those who wish to participate in their continual re-creation. Once again, I believe this notion of temporality to be reflected in the “moments of coincidence” which the Zapatistas succeeded in generating during the course of their movement. As time passed, situations changed, and dialogue began, the Zapatista movement reformulated itself as well. At no point has this movement remained static either in its structure, approaches, or vision. While certain essential points have maintained their importance, the Zapatistas have managed to impact upon the people of Mexico precisely because of the fact that they have sought to actively engage them, and oftentimes, this engagement has meant as much change for the Zapatistas as it has for the rest of society. Now that I have examined the declarations themselves, it is time to turn to the social and political possibilities, openings, positionalities, and challenges offered by them as

they relate to the Zapatistas' attempt to generate spaces for dialogue and power, "where those who rule, rule by obeying", within the Mexican nation.

The Zapatista Challenge: From Armed Insurgency to Networked Social Action

In the years since the Zapatista Army of National Liberation rose up on the first of January, 1994, much has been made of the fact that this movement has not only managed to survive but to remain a significant force at the national level. Clearly, this influence cannot be said to be attributable to the military potential of the EZLN as their forces never truly posed a threat to the Mexican army. However, as illustrated by the five *Declarations of the Lacandon Jungle*, bullets have long since ceased to be the weapon of the Zapatistas, instead, words, ideas and, most significantly, dialogue, have proven to be the most effective armaments. Unlike traditional guerrilla armies which seek to achieve power by overthrowing the existing regime (Guevara 1961), the Zapatistas' "rebellion was...revelatory rather than programmatic" (Harvey 1998a: 199). As Neil Harvey writes in his assessment of the Zapatista rebellion:

[r]ather than emerging with a preconceived plan for revolutionary change, the Zapatistas represented the antithesis of such a vanguard. The cry of *Ya basta!* was in fact a call for solidarity among all those Mexicans who had said "enough is enough". The precise nature of the demands could only result from a broader dialogue to which all those who recognized the need for change were invited...the EZLN also insisted on the centrality of democracy in articulating popular struggles against numerous forms of oppression. The EZLN looked beyond its own economic-corporate demands to the expansion of democratic political, social, and cultural practices in all spheres of Mexican life. Its strength therefore lay less with its own political and military resources and more in the changes that its presence affected in cultural understandings of democracy and citizenship (Ibid: 199).

Thus, the emphasis on "civil society" and democratic dialogue and engagement which began

with the *Second Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* is much less an appeal for accompaniment than it is an appeal to people who are essential partners in the struggle for social change. The Zapatistas have not survived either physically or politically through society's altruistic interest in them; instead, they have survived due to their engagement of the people of Mexico and, often, the world in an imaginative project not only of social reconstruction but of ideological and conceptual rebirth as well. The Zapatista struggle has thus not been for "authentic" democracy, justice, and liberty, but for a fundamental reenvisioning of what those very terms mean, a reenvisioning which ultimately can only occur within a process of dialogue and engagement.

While it is absolutely essential to appreciate the nuances of the Zapatista's ideological challenges to the existing regime, the first question that requires analysis is the nature of the struggle which the Zapatistas sought to articulate following the cessation of armed conflict on the 12th of January, 1994. How, exactly, were the Zapatistas able to engage anyone, let alone national and international "civil society", in a complex and undeniably sophisticated dialogue surrounding the meanings of concepts such as "democracy", "citizenship", "human rights", and "social justice"? The answer to this query lies at least in part in the concept of the network and what the RAND corporation christened, in its analysis of the EZLN, the "social netwar". As noted before, the Zapatistas' success in the facilitation of political and social possibilities in opposition to the existing regime cannot be attributed to the military capacity of the EZLN. While armed insurgency was no doubt instrumental in the generation of the attention the uprising initially received, its capacity to effect meaningful "revolution" was

clearly exhausted by the time the Mexican government declared a cease-fire twelve days into the conflict. After this initial period, the strength of the Zapatista movement would be drawn not from this tremendously limited military potential but rather from “the support they receive from individuals and associations that are explicitly not a part of the EZLN” (Schulz 1998: 591). In his analysis of the “network capacity” of the EZLN, Markus Schulz describes this phenomenon in the following manner: “[t]he term network capacity is intended to capture both the ‘indigenous organizational strength’ and the ability to activate ‘weak ties’ or forge new ties with entities outside the movement from where support and resources can be drawn” (Ibid: 591). Thus, the impact of the Zapatista movement cannot be understood simply in terms of the EZLN’s own capacities but, rather, within the context of the networks it has succeeded in operating within over the course of the past seven years. This trend is clearly visible within the five *Declarations of the Lacandon Jungle* as the Zapatistas move from a “declaration of war” to a progressively greater emphasis on forming networks of social action and dialogue with “civil society”.

In *The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico*, a report contracted by the United States military and produced by the RAND corporation, the authors argue that the Zapatistas’ form of struggle is best defined as a “netwar” which “refers to an emerging mode of conflict...at societal levels, involving measures short of traditional war, in which protagonists use network forms of organizational and related doctrines, strategies, and technologies attuned to the information age” (Arquilla et al. 1998: 9). In this organizational form, the “design is flat” and there is “is no single, central leadership, command, or headquarters - no precise heart or head

that can be targeted” (Ibid: 13). It should be noted here that it is necessary to clearly differentiate between the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, the armed insurgents themselves, and the Zapatista movement, a broadly-defined socio-political force made up of a tremendous diversity of actors. While the EZLN existed for more than 10 years before the uprising, the Zapatista movement would only emerge after the initial fighting had ceased and “civil society” began to engage in the conflict. While the EZLN itself is undoubtedly hierarchical in its structure as a military organization, the Zapatista movement, as will shortly be seen, is best appreciated as a radically non-hierarchical network. Prior to evaluating the Zapatista movement in light of this analytical stance, it is necessary to first appreciate the essence of the “network” form of organization itself.

In terms of offensive and defensive capacities, networks have particular advantages as compared to traditional hierarchical structures. In their offensive capabilities, “networks are known for being adaptable, flexible, and versatile vis-a-vis opportunities and challenges” and are most effective when engaging in what the authors of the RAND report label “swarming”:

[s]warming occurs when the dispersed nodes of a network of small (and perhaps some large) forces can converge on a target from multiple directions. The overall aim is *sustainable pulsing* - swarm networks must be able to coalesce rapidly and stealthily on a target, then disperse and redisperse, immediately ready to recombine for a new pulse (Ibid: 15).

Thus, organizations and individuals united within this network form are capable of engaging in action that emphasises their inherent autonomy and decision-making capabilities as well as acknowledging the fact that oftentimes each of these networked actors will possess distinct and

perhaps even divergent agendas. Not all elements of the network need be involved in each “pulse” but those that choose to engage do so of their own volition and approach targets from multiple positions. In terms of defensive potentials, networks are characterized as “redundant and diverse, making them robust and resilient in the face of adversity” (Ibid: 15). Thus, the network form is one in which actors can be seen as engaging in social and political action without acknowledging a single guiding movement or force to which they are beholden or which the movement as a whole would be crippled by if it were to be neutralized.

The underlying significance to these characteristics of the network is, of course, the fact that it becomes almost impossible to dismiss or delegitimize a struggle articulated in the form of a network precisely because the struggle has no single central ideology, demand, strategy, or subject. Voices are raised and actions engaged in from multiple positionalities rather than from within a single sector and in this sense the “movement” ceases to exist and instead becomes a plurality of movements unified only around moments of common struggle. While this approach may seem to lack the integrity embodied by fealty sworn to an overarching doctrine, it should also be recognized that this deficiency conveys an invulnerability to any single attack levelled against any specific aspect of the network itself. In the case of the Zapatista movement, when the Mexican government attempted to cast the Zapatista rebellion as a purely regional and ethnic issue in order to confine it geographically and politically, the explicit support of students, housewives, unionists, indigenous organizations, and many others exposed this ploy as a lie. Furthermore, while the Mexican government has gone to great lengths in its attempt to subvert the cultural and political

currency of the Zapatistas, they have not been able to wage a similar struggle against the other actors involved in the movement. If the Zapatista leadership is “illegitimate” because Subcomandante Marcos is mestizo rather than indigenous, is the National Indigenous Congress similarly illegitimate because it supports the demands of the Zapatistas? Are university students in Mexican urban centres illegitimate in their demands or their struggle when they demonstrate for their own goals and yet express their solidarity with the Zapatistas? These questions are reflective of the problems that “netwar” can pose because not only are diverse social actors engaging in common acts of support and struggle, often they are voicing their solidarity as extensions of their own struggles as well. Thus, urban labour unionists may carry Zapatista banners when they march through Mexico City, but the reason they cannot simply be disregarded is because the solidarity they are affirming is not one which seeks to affirm simple support, a solidarity which would state “we stand behind the Zapatistas”, but rather one seeks to invigorate others by affirming difference and commonality, a solidarity which instead states “we are all struggling and we stand with the Zapatistas”.

Participants engaged in a networked struggle do not simply disregard their own particular agendas, on the contrary, the very fact that they find commonality and coincidence between their struggles leads to their augmentation. The “struggle” as such thus emanates from a multiplicity of positionalities within society and in order to render it illegitimate or to neutralize it, one would have to somehow work to vilify or pacify each of the voices which takes up the call. Conceivably, the Zapatistas themselves could be somehow neutralized and

yet the struggle which they have served as the flagship for would continue in much the same manner as it exists today. Within the context of the network, no group or identity is subordinated to any other and this ultimately results in the articulation of struggles in very specific manners according to the agenda and position of each actor comprising the network.

In terms of this analytical conceptualization of “networks” and “netwar”, the Zapatista movement is perceived, in the gaze of the RAND analysts, as a product of an association of an impoverished and profoundly disillusioned indigenous social base with other “layers” including: revolutionary influence originating primarily in the National Forces of Liberation; “radical elements” of the Catholic Church active in Chiapas and preaching liberation theology; and issue and infrastructural oriented non-governmental organizations who had been active in Chiapas and other areas (Ibid: 25-42). Through these historical influences, what began as a guerrilla insurgency, or “war of the flea”, on January 1st, 1994, was able to transform itself via these pre-existing networks into a much more significant “war of the swarm” over the course of the following months (Ibid: 50). The notion of coincidence is here made manifest as it is only by virtue of the fact that these various “layers” of the Zapatista movement find themselves engaged in a common struggle that they are able to form a collective network. Significantly, it should be obvious that each of these “layers” undoubtedly carries their own agendas, tactics, and identities, characteristics which convey difference. However, this difference does not obstruct affinity or common struggle, rather, it diversifies and multiplies it. As people find themselves opposed to a certain set of circumstances of oppression and marginalization, their acknowledgement of the fact that others share these circumstances

expands and empowers their common struggle if these groups are willing to admit to the fundamental and undeniable importance of each group and each struggle within its own context. While it may seem strange to find coincidences existing between the Catholic church, urban revolutionaries, and disenfranchised indigenous peasants, the fact that a movement which bears the marks of each of these distinct heritages has now claimed a position of political and social preeminence in Mexican society is a testament to the capacity of such an approach to galvanize social change.

It is important to note that while the Zapatista “social netwar” has proven a formidable adversary for both the ruling Mexican elite and their foreign allies, this network form was by no means what the EZLN anticipated prior to their uprising. While the RAND analysts remark upon the military difficulties which encouraged a more “networked” approach within the EZLN itself, suffice it to say that the ultimate outcome of a bleak military situation was the rapid adaptation of a traditional, rural-based insurgency into a “social netwar”:

[w]ithin days [of the original insurrection], delegations were flowing into Mexico City and San Cristobal de las Casas, where links were established with local NGOs and EZLN representatives. Demonstrations, marches, and peace caravans were organized, not only in Mexico but even in front of Mexican consulates in the United States (Ibid: 50).

This response was due largely to the fact that there were pre-existing networks relating to issue-oriented concerns such as indigenous rights and infrastructure-building networks such as those concerned with operating e-mail lists or news groups in cyberspace which functioned primarily to keep people connected with one another. Human rights organizations, indigenous rights groups, and organizations which had emerged to represent the demands of campesinos

and other rural labourers all formed the most immediate level of the network for the Zapatistas, and they all preceded the EZLN, some of them by decades. This “layer” of the network would be augmented by the existence of information-technology based groups who would serve as the mode of dissemination for information concerning the Zapatista struggle nationally and internationally. Thus, the Zapatista “social netwar” is a phenomenon which is characterized by the profoundly local experiences out of which the Zapatistas themselves emerged as evidenced by the involvement of locally-based human rights, indigenous, and campesino organizations. In addition to this, however, the Zapatista movement also bears the imprint of participants drawn from the national and international community who serve as the conduit by which the struggle transcended its own “geographical”, “historical”, and “ethnic” specificities to not only be heard by others, but to connect with different and diverse struggles elsewhere.

It is of the utmost importance to note that while NGOs both from within as well as outside Mexico responded to the insurgency and to the Zapatista call for attention favourably, they did not subordinate their own agendas to that of the EZLN:

[w]ithin weeks, if not days, the conflict became less about “the EZLN” than about “the Zapatista movement” writ large, which...included a swarm of NGOs...Yet it had no formal organization, or headquarters, or leadership, or decision making body. The movement’s membership (assuming that it can be called that) was generally ad hoc and in flux; it could shift from issue to issue and from situation to situation, partly depending on which NGOs had representatives physically visiting the scene at the time, which NGOs were mobilizable from afar and how (including electronically), and what issues were involved (Ibid: 61).

The comment made in this passage regarding the shift from an emphasis on the “EZLN” to

the “Zapatista movement” in one of marked importance. While the EZLN would continue to function as a type of “enabler” within this context, it would be the Zapatista movement, comprised of a truly diverse array of national and international actors, which would truly continue the struggle 3000 armed insurgents began on the first day of 1994. While the impetus for action would often originate from an EZLN communique or action, the actions taken surrounding it and the dialogue generated by it would remain the exclusive province of those individuals and organizations aligned with the Zapatistas. It is in this sense that the Zapatista movement needs to be seen as a network rather than a totalizing or homogenizing structure.

One of the primary spaces within which this Zapatista networked movement needs to be recognized as operating is within that of ideology. While much has been made of the “information operations” conducted by individuals and organizations affiliated with the Zapatista movement via cyberspace, it is the effect that these “operations” had upon the conceptual and ideological landscape of the Mexican people that is the truly remarkable event. As noted in the RAND report, “[w]hile the Mexican army gradually regained control of much of the physical territory in Chiapas, the government never regained the kind of control it used to have over the ‘infosphere’” (Ibid: 68). In fact, this issue of conceptual or “epistemological” impact of netwar is one of the earliest and most striking points made by the RAND analysts as they contend that “[a] netwar actor may aim to confound people’s fundamental beliefs about the nature of their culture, society, and government, partly to foment fear but perhaps mainly to disorient people and unhinge their perceptions” (Ibid: 16). This comment, when

taken in light of the Zapatista declarations, is clearly descriptive of the attempts made by the EZLN to shake the consciousness of the Mexican people in order to pose the most fundamental challenge to the existing regime. While some authors contend that the EZLN's goals became "reformist" rather than "revolutionary" after the initial insurgency, I believe that a far more productive way to look at the change in strategy adopted by the EZLN was aimed, in the words of the RAND analysts, at creating a fundamental "epistemological" challenge to social and political reality both within Mexico as well as with respect to the global context. It is in this struggle over meaning and ways of meaning-making that the Zapatista movement would emerge as a preeminent force in the Mexican nation.

While it is certainly useful to acknowledge the networked capacity of the Zapatista movement as an integral element in the Zapatistas' survival, the most important aspect with respect to this capacity is that it reveals both the fundamental nature of the movement itself as well as what would ultimately prove to be the most challenging element of the movement for the ruling regime, namely, the Zapatistas' ability to generate engagement and dialogue with national and international civil society. For the Zapatistas, the only possibility for continued struggle following the first days of 1994 lay in the engagement of civil society. As Henry Veltmeyer remarks with regard to the actions of the Zapatistas following the cessation of armed hostilities between themselves and the army:

the Zapatistas have been actively engaged in a process designed not only to unify the indigenous movement but to connect it with organizations and social movements in other sectors and to build up a broad coalition of organizations and a popular mass of social forces, independent of the Partido Democratico Revolucionario (Revolutionary Democratic Party - PRD), in opposition to the government's

neoliberal project - a “force of forces based on the principles of nonexclusion, a constellation of struggles” (2000: 98).

Rather than attempting to assert the primacy of a certain ideological perspective or social agenda, the Zapatistas instead approached their struggle from the perspective of one voice among many. What is clear from each declaration following the initial declaration of war is that the Zapatistas not only wanted the participation of diverse social actors in this struggle for “democracy, liberty, and justice”, they required it in order for the struggle to continue.

Citing Jamison and Eyerman, Markus Schulz notes in his analysis of the Zapatista movement that “knowledge” is “the product of a series of social encounters, within movements, between movements and...between movements and their opponents” and therefore that this act of constructing knowledge must be seen not as “monadological” but as “dialogical” (1998: 592). Within the context of the Zapatista movement, this notion of meaning made through dialogue with necessary others is a theme which cannot be ignored in Zapatista discourse. In terms of the EZLN itself, all vital decisions are made not by a single general command or even by the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee, but through consultation with Zapatista base communities. It is from these communities which the legitimacy of the Zapatista movement springs and it is from these communities from which all authority emanates. In a similar vein, it is only through the multiplicity of movements and individuals involved and associated with the Zapatista movement coupled with the fact that each of these actors has its own voice and autonomy that the movement has generated the impact it has. Through this interaction and dialogue among the many “nodes” of this

movement, positions are formed, direction is established, and meaning is made.

The networks and linkages which have been characterized as possessing such primacy in the success of the Zapatista movement may seem to be largely conjecture, yet their existence and importance is borne out by a brief analysis of some of the more significant events which followed the 1994 uprising. This brief overview is intended only to illustrate the importance and efficacy of networked social action and these events and others will be examined in much greater detail in the second part of this work. In order to appreciate the significance of social linkages with regard to the Zapatista movement, one need look no further than the days immediately following the uprising. While the response of the Mexican military to the Zapatista uprising was immediate and brutal, massive demonstrations were mounted against this action as soon as the news became public (Ibid: 597). As Schulz explains, “[t]his quick mobilization was possible because Mexico’s rural and urban movements for democracy are not isolated from each other but linked through many personal and organizational ties” (Ibid: 597). Thus, as noted before, networks already existed that both allowed the public to become aware of the situation in Chiapas and to react to it on a massive scale. This public pressure forced the Mexican government to agree to negotiations with the EZLN, negotiations which ultimately resulted in a tentative agreement that was overwhelmingly rejected by the Zapatista communities (Ibid: 597). Following this, the EZLN called for the National Democratic Convention mentioned in the *Second Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* which drew approximately 6000 representatives from a diverse array of NGOs and over 700 journalists representing 400 national and international media to the

jungles of Chiapas in August of 1994 (Ibid: 598). The emphasis of this gathering was not only upon the possibility of democracy in Mexico but, more importantly, upon the potential to generate authentic and meaningful dialogue among a diverse group of social actors.

The next event of particular note occurred on February 9, 1995, when the government of Ernesto Zedillo announced a new offensive against the Zapatistas and revealed the identity of Marcos and other prominent Zapatista leaders to the public (Ibid: 599). Two days after this new offensive, massive protests began in Chiapas and throughout the country with people rallying around the slogan “we are all Marcos!” (Ibid: 599). Confronted by these massive demonstrations, President Zedillo had no choice but to call an end to his offensive a mere five days after it began; however, as significant as these actions are, what would follow next would prove to be even more of a network-building experience for the Zapatistas and their supporters.

One of the events which best exemplifies the ability and desire of the Zapatistas to generate a diverse and heterogenous response to the oppressive PRI regime began in the town of San Andres Larrainzar in Chiapas on April 20, 1995. At this time, negotiations began once more between the federal government and the EZLN (Ibid: 600). The first issue to be discussed at these negotiations was indigenous rights and culture, but this discussion was intended to be only the beginning of a comprehensive social reconfiguration:

[a]ccording to the procedural rules established for the dialogue in San Andres, under the guidance of the Law for Dialogue, Reconciliation, and a Just Peace in Chiapas, the two sides were to discuss a variety of issues separately until arriving at a mutually satisfactory agreement for each one. Thus, after signing an accord on Indigenous Rights and Culture, the EZLN and the government were supposed to discuss and

reach agreement on issues of Democracy and Justice, Social Welfare and Development, Women's Rights, Reconciliation in Chiapas, and - finally - the Cessation of Hostilities (Paulson 2001).

In coming to the negotiations, the EZLN insisted that its Tojolabal, Chol, Tzotzil, and Tzeltal representatives could not be expected to represent the interests of all Mexico's indigenous peoples and in order to address this problem the Zapatistas invited representatives of these diverse groups to the negotiations to participate themselves (Ibid). Under the rules of the dialogue, each side was allowed to invite unspecified numbers of "guests" and "advisors", and the EZLN took full advantage of this, sending out invitations to more than 300 people and organizations including "representatives of indigenous and campesino organizations from various regions of Mexico, intellectuals, anthropologists, lawyers, and leaders of popular organizations and social movements" (Ibid). In addition to these "guests" and "advisors", the EZLN also called for the holding of regional indigenous forums in November of 1995 in order to solicit opinions on the issues the Zapatistas were discussing with the government (Ibid).

The results of this call for participation are significant and worth repeating at length:

[f]rom the 3rd to the 9th of January, 1996, more than 500 representatives of 32 indigenous people and 178 indigenous organizations gathered in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, for the culmination of these forums and consultations: the National Indigenous Forum, presided over by twenty-four Zapatista commanders. After a week of workshops, assemblies, speeches, and discussions, the Forum reached consensus on a final document addressing the issues up for discussion in the Dialogue of San Andres. The EZLN had previously said that it would not only listen to the Forum's participants, but would accept and support its conclusions. The Zapatistas kept their promise, and inserted the resolutions of the Forum into their demands in the dialogue with the federal government (Ibid).

The first round of the dialogue concerning indigenous rights and culture resulted in a 39 page

accord agreed to by both the Zapatistas and the government which included “a requirement for national constitutional reforms which would legally establish a ‘new relationship between the State and the indigenous peoples’, including the recognition of indigenous rights and autonomy” (Ibid). Furthermore, the Accords laid out other mandatory changes to constitutional, federal, state, and local laws, specifically involving:

remunicipalization of indigenous regions of the country, the free determination of indigenous peoples, the promotion and protection of indigenous cultures and customs, the use of natural resources on indigenous lands, the promotion of bilingual and culturally-aware education in indigenous communities, and the right of indigenous women to hold positions of authority equal to men at all levels of government and in the development of their communities (Ibid).

Unfortunately, after this initial victory, the government not only decided that it had no intention of continuing the dialogue to cover the issues beyond the indigenous question but that it had no intention of even honouring the Accords as they stood. However, within the context of this discussion, the San Andres Accords and, more significantly, the process embarked upon in order to crystallize them, is a powerful example of how the Zapatistas were so successful in generating participation among diverse and multiple sectors of the Mexican nation.

In addition to the San Andres dialogue, perhaps one of the most significant “acts of engagement” carried out by the EZLN is embodied by the *Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*, when the Zapatistas call for the formation of the Zapatista Front of National Liberation. Membership in this front is articulated on the basis of the individual rather than organization and it is directed to civil society in general rather than any particular

sector of it (Navarro 1998: 163). The FZLN is actually comprised of Dialogue Committees across the Mexican nation, committees which operate according to the following principles:

[t]hey are self-regulated. Their main purpose is not to support the Zapatistas but to organize themselves as part of society, following the Zapatistas' principles and values: "to represent others, not to supplant them or take over", "to serve others, not to serve oneself", "to convince, not to impose", and "to demand that whoever 'governs' must obey the governed in their needs, their demands, their proposals and desires". Dialogue, as well as a willingness to listen to others, is basic (Ibid: 163).

Through these committees, the FZLN was formally founded on September 13, 1997 (Ibid: 163). What is, of course, most significant about this movement is that it exemplifies the principles of Zapatismo and of the Zapatista movement as they became further developed over time. The *Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* articulates a vision that involves the total engagement of all those who want to be involved in the project of envisioning a "new world", a vision that relies fundamentally upon not only the structure of networks but upon the most essential characteristics of them: autonomy and dialogue. While each individual or organization within this larger movement retains their autonomy as an independent actor possessing their own vision and position, the purpose of these structures is to exist as a forum for discussion and engagement among people so that they may bring new forms of social meaning into being through their interaction.

It is important to realize, however, that while networks of social actors existed prior to the Zapatista uprising in 1994, the massive social mobilizations which followed must be understood as fundamentally connected to the Zapatistas. While the capacity for networked social action is due largely to movements and individuals outside of the Zapatista constituency

itself, this network would not have been energized in the way it has had it not been for the Zapatista movement. This brings us back to the notion of “moments of coincidence”, which I believe are fundamentally connected with, but not reducible to, networked social action. These “moments” are grounded in a coincidence or correlation between the agendas of diverse social actors and realized through the form of the network in order to articulate social action; however, fundamental to these moments is a catalyst which serves to unify and galvanize previously atomized actors into a broad social front or movement. In this instance, the catalyst is the Zapatistas. In the case of the Zapatista movement, networks of social actors were mobilized around the EZLN and other non-violent aspects of the movement. This is not to say that the Zapatistas led social action or formed a vanguard for the new Mexican revolution, rather, that “[a]t the national level, the Zapatistas have constituted themselves as a critical reference point for a broader struggle to mobilize and unify the forces of popular resistance and opposition” (Veltmeyer 2000: 104). It is not that opposition movements had not existed in Mexico for decades, they most definitely have; instead, it is that the Zapatistas through their armed and ideological rebellion have facilitated the formation of a broad front of social opposition to domination at the local, national, and international levels. Through their radically democratic calls for dialogue between all sectors of Mexican civil society, the Zapatistas have served as the “node” of the network which has unified diverse and dispersed social actors by providing the forum and the language for engagement and interaction. Furthermore, through their own status as the “poorest of the poor”, the Zapatistas have served as the symbolic embodiment of the necessity to not only struggle against the currently-

existing regime but to envision a space beyond it.

“Democracy! Liberty! Justice!” and the Politics of “No”: The Zapatistas’ Ideological Revolution

The Zapatista movement in Mexico cannot be understood without an appreciation of the integral role of networks in the articulation of social action and the mobilization of such diverse and multiple social actors, however, this is only one part of the radical influence of the Zapatista movement upon Mexican civil society. The Zapatistas are significant within the history of Mexican guerrilla movements precisely because their revolutionary struggle is being waged not in the jungles of southern Mexico, but in the minds of people, in Mexico and around the world. Ideologically, the Zapatista movement has subverted the very conceptualizations upon which the ruling elite in Mexico had founded their power and authority. In this section, I will examine the ideological challenges the Zapatistas have generated over the course of the past seven years. These challenges are central to the struggle the Zapatistas have waged in an attempt to provide the possibility of articulating and crystallizing a new social and political space and, ultimately, a new world for the people of Mexico.

Throughout the five *Declarations of the Lacandon Jungle*, the Zapatistas continually reassert not only their nature as a fundamentally indigenous movement, but a Mexican one as well. While this has already been remarked upon, it is useful to take a moment to understand what ideological or conceptual challenges such a stance poses. It is essential to recall that the Zapatistas as a guerrilla army are one of *National Liberation*, thus their agenda

and their demands are not localized to the indigenous communities of Chiapas or even to the state itself, rather, they are profoundly national in nature. While some may interpret the rhetorical emphasis upon the “Mexicanness” of the Zapatistas as “petit-bourgeois nationalism and social democratic reformism”, Patrick Cuninghame and Carolina Ballesteros Corona assert that:

[these critics] have, however, failed to understand the EZLN’s concept of nationhood based on a network of autonomous communities rather than the historically centralised, hierarchical nation-state. Nor do they appreciate the originality of its strategy for revolutionary transformation to a post-capitalist society which is based not on a vanguardist seizure of the state and the commanding heights of the economy, let alone parliamentary reformism, but on an alliance with other grassroots social movements, including the *Colonos*, rural migrant squatters on the periphery of the main urban centers, the students, gay and women’s movements, and the independent unions of teachers, electrical and transport workers (1998: 16).

Thus, the Zapatista struggle is indeed a national one, but not in terms of an affirmation of the project of the “nation-state”. Once again, the notions of autonomy, network, and dialogue are quite clearly evident here and it is upon this foundation that Zapatismo as an ideology is constructed.

While there are a number of demands that the Zapatistas articulate through their declarations and communiques, it is of significance to note that three primary concepts are constant throughout these communications, namely: democracy, liberty, and justice. In order to appreciate the impact the Zapatistas have had upon public conceptualizations of these concepts, one must first understand what the Zapatistas themselves mean in referring to them. While the call for “democracy” clearly resonated with Mexicans who had been subject to single-party rule for the past seven decades, the Zapatista notion of “democracy” goes far

beyond electoral politics and effective suffrage. This is one of the most profound misunderstandings, whether intentional or not, by critics of the Zapatistas. Following the victory of Vicente Fox of the National Action Party in the presidential elections of July 2000, it was widely declared that the Zapatistas must have gotten what they wanted: the defeat of the PRI and the democratization of the political system. Such statements reveal far more about the detractors of the Zapatista movement than they do about the Zapatistas themselves. As noted before, the Zapatista conceptualization of democracy is rooted in the capacity of individuals to not only participate in a political system, but to determine the very nature of it. While an end to fraudulent electoral practices is certainly a useful first step, the Zapatista conceptualization of “democracy” rests upon “the application at all levels of society of the direct participatory democracy of the local assembly, involving collective and inclusive decision-making based on consensus rather than voting” (Ibid: 17). Fundamentally, democracy for the Zapatistas is “people’s power”, a phrase which conveys the essential notion that people themselves have the ultimate authority over the manner in which their lives should be lived. Gustavo Esteva reflects on this construction of “democracy” within Zapatista discourse in the following manner:

people’s power is but the translation of the Greek word for democracy, from *demos* - the people, the commons, and *kratos* - force, power, rule. For those who constitute ‘the people’, democracy is a matter of common sense: that ordinary people govern their own lives. It does not allude to a kind of government, but to a government end. It is not a collection of institutions, but an historical project. With the word of democracy, people are not alluding to present democracies, already existing or being established, but to the thing itself, to people’s power (1999: 154).

Thus, much like the concept of “civil society” as a space and a relationship rather than a

clearly defined amalgamation of groups or individuals, democracy is the embodiment of a certain type of relation between the people and the authority to determine the course and nature of their own lives.

The second concept which appears alongside the Zapatista call for “democracy” is “liberty”. While it may appear that “liberty” is a fairly self-evident concept, much like “democracy” it should not be assumed that it is as simple a notion as one might suppose. As Cuninghame and Corona remark in their analysis of this concept:

[f]or the Zapatistas, freedom means autonomy and self-determination and in the context of Chiapas, indigenous autonomy and self-determination within the confines of the Mexican national territory. This desire and need for autonomy implies the right to self-organise society according to the needs, customs and practices of the immediate local community, rather than submit to a form of government formerly imposed by the centralised nation-state and now by the global interests of neoliberal capital (1998: 17).

Thus, “liberty” or “freedom” does not simply imply absence of restrictions or limitations, but rather, the capacity to act according to one’s own needs. Similar to the conception of “democracy”, the Zapatista notion of “liberty” conveys a very autonomous sense of decision-making. Rather than expressing a freedom from something, this concept expresses the freedom to engage in action based upon the principle of self-determination and democratic decision-making processes. This notion is clearly reflected in the Zapatista emphasis upon “civil society” and democratic dialogue and engagement as these formations and interactions are only possible if people possess the freedom to engage in such associations. Furthermore, the concept of “liberty” here not only refers to the ability to engage in diverse social action and relationships, but to have the freedom to determine what form these acts and relationships

should take and what ends they should be directed towards. This point is exemplified by a comment made by Subcomandante Marcos during an interview with Medea Benjamin. In response to a question regarding whether the sacrifices made by the Zapatistas would be in vain if a right-wing political party were to come to power, Marcos replied “[w]e want to create the political space, and we want the people to have the education and the political maturity to make good choices” (Benjamin 1995: 61). Thus, conceptions of democracy, liberty, and political space are all fundamentally interconnected for the Zapatistas. Liberty is therefore characterized as the essential capacity for people to be able to freely choose for themselves what kind of life they want to live and the manner in which they wish to live it.

The third “cornerstone” concept of Zapatismo is that of “justice”. Once more, this concept is at once profoundly ambiguous in its broadness and deceiving in its apparent simplicity. Much like “democracy” and “liberty” this word conveys a very specific conception of what “justice” means for the Zapatista movement. Within the Zapatista movement, “justice” is:

synonymous with dignity and respect for indigenous cultures and ways of life, indeed for all ‘differences’ within Mexico, linking up with the demands of the women’s and gay movements. It also means an end to the impunity of the PRI regime, the punishment of its appalling human rights abuses and the endemic corruption of its ‘narco-political’ alliance with business, military and organized crime elites. Ultimately, justice for the EZLN means social and economic justice in a post-capitalist society (Cunninghame & Corona 1998: 17-18).

Thus, “justice” is not simply a demand for the just application of the law or even the reformation of the legal system but rather for a society within which dignity and respect are the primary standards according to which people are treated. The notion of respect for

difference is fundamental to Zapatismo and is clearly reflected in the communiqués and declarations and is a matter which will be dealt with shortly. In essence, the Zapatista conceptions of democracy, liberty, and justice rest upon a perspective which views the world as a place characterized by multiplicity and diversity, a perspective which in fact is brilliantly articulated by the Zapatista slogan “queremos un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos” - “we want a world which holds many worlds” (Navarro 1998: 162). For a society to be “just”, it must not only view difference as legitimate, but acknowledge that difference and radical multiplicity are essential characteristics of existence rather than notions to be merely tolerated.

In fact, the Zapatista emphasis on “equality” is another concept closely aligned with “justice” in that it is an explicit denial of any attempts to standardize or homogenize people. Rather than implying standardization, equality is instead the appreciation and respect for difference, the appreciation and respect for autonomy. Justice, as with equality, is a concept which resides not in the identification of people with a single notion of the “individual” or the “citizen” but in the recognition of the profound differences which exist among, between, and within people. In his examination of the Zapatista conception of equality, Gustavo Esteva articulates a number of points which apply equally to the Zapatista notion of justice:

[p]eople are not homogeneous and even less equals. They are heterogeneous and different. The illusion of equality, which now operates as a popular prejudice, became an ideal under specific historical circumstances, to struggle against power abuses and people's destitution. It now operates as a continual source of illegitimate privileges and inequality. The Zapatistas denounce the illusory character of this ideal, recognize personal and collective differences and claim people's power, for the end of privilege and license. They also affirm the assumption of the diversity of all peoples and cultures, whose interaction should occur on equal footing, that is, with no implicit or explicit assumption of the superiority of any culture over the others, in order to

establish the harmonious coexistence of the 'different' (1999: 157).

A just society thus does not seek to erase differences or create an environment of equality through structural or legalistic impositions. Instead, a society is just when it explicitly recognizes the differences inherent in people and yet disavows any hierarchy of difference. Once again, it is clear that this concept relates integrally to those of democracy and liberty. For all of these notions, respect for autonomy and difference remains the central concept. For the Zapatistas, a new society is only possible through the interaction, engagement, and dialogue of multiple and diverse members of that society with each other. Thus, difference is not only acknowledged but in fact a necessary and integral component for the visualization and articulation of a new world.

The final aspect of the Zapatista's ideological challenge which I would like to engage here is what some theorists have termed the "politics of 'no'". The politics of "no" are of central importance to both the Zapatista uprising and the movement which grew out of it. At its core, this form of politics emerges from the fact that the Zapatistas have continually asserted their disavowal of any aspirations to seize power. As seen throughout the Zapatista declarations, the seizure of power is explicitly and vehemently rejected by the Zapatistas throughout the course of their struggle. Even in calling for the formation of the FZLN, the Zapatistas assert that only individuals who do not seek or aspire to power are welcome within its ranks. Fernanda Navarro remarks on this unique perspective on power in the Zapatista struggle in the following manner:

Marcos has said that "the only virtue of Power is that, in the end, it inevitably

produces a revolution against itself". History has taught us that even in outstanding cases when tyranny or dictatorships were overthrown by revolutionary liberating forces, disillusionment sooner or later follows when we witness that the basic principles of justice and freedom, which led the struggle, begin to decay. It is as if there were some dominating traits inherent to power itself which gradually end up in a repetition, *resemblance*, or reproduction of - not an alternative to - the rigid, arbitrary governments which were overthrown (1998: 161).

When the Zapatistas say "no" to the seizure of power, what they are simultaneously accomplishing is an affirmation of the necessity of the political space which they refer to initially in the *Second Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*. Dialogue and engagement are only possible among members of a society who do not wish to dominate or rule over one another, so the Zapatista ideology must fundamentally reject the notion of the seizure of power.

There is another profoundly significant aspect to the "politics of 'no'" which must be addressed and which goes beyond the notion of power being incompatible with dialogue or democracy, liberty, and justice. This second aspect returns to the notion of networks and autonomy and is of central significance to understanding the politics of the Zapatista movement and the social revolution it aims to generate. In shouting "Ya basta!", "enough!", and in declaring "no" to the seizure of power, what the Zapatistas have done is to set the stage for the involvement of multiple groups and individuals to participate in their own ways and according to their own terms in a collective articulation of discontent. As opposed to attempting to subsume difference and multiplicity beneath an all-encompassing ideology, the Zapatistas have instead asserted their own struggle in all of its historical, geographical, and socio-political specificity. This is why each communique and declaration is signed "from the

mountains of the Mexican southeast” - it is an assertion of locality and particularity, of difference and heterogeneity. Similarly, the Zapatistas have encouraged others to articulate their own struggles in their own terms and according to their own histories. This formation is certainly evident when one considers the forms of networked social action which the Zapatistas engage in. Rather than articulating a single position or attempting to unite people beneath a single monolithic, hegemonic structure, the Zapatistas have instead sought to create space for the articulation of multiple visions and discourses. The only unifying factor is that people speak their own truths and assert their own struggles while simultaneously acknowledging the fundamental right of others to do so as well.

While it may seem strange to attribute such unifying strength to a politics rooted in denial, these politics play an essential role within what I have termed the Zapatista “moment of coincidence”. Gustavo Esteva notes with regard to the politics of “no” that this approach distinguishes itself by allowing “the new coalitions of discontents to affirm themselves in their own local spaces, while widening their social and political force to promote their localized views and interests” (1999: 161). Thus, the idea of autonomy is central to this ideological stance as groups and individuals are not only allowed but encouraged to express their particular agendas and interests. Rather than the standardization and homogenization that representative democratic governments espouse and exemplify the politics of “no” expresses multiplicity, dynamism, and difference. Esteva remarks eloquently on this point as he states:

[t]o say ‘no’ may be the most complete and vigorous way of affirmation. The unifying ‘no’, expressing a shared opposition, usually conveys multiple ‘yes’es: the affirmations of what all those sharing a rejection want. The organization around what people don’t

want, avoiding the condensation of their diverse affirmations, recognizes such plurality...Politicians and parties, in contrast, always in need of followers, find it impossible or ineffective to focus themselves on the 'no'. They continually look for affirmative proposals, defining homogenous and abstract ideals or wants (Ibid: 161).

The Zapatistas have been criticized by some for not possessing or expressing a concrete agenda or plan for the future of the Mexican nation. What those who make such criticisms fail to understand is that the Zapatistas do not espouse such a vision because such a project needs to be the product of dialogue and engagement among all members of the society. To do otherwise would be to betray the essence of the Zapatista struggle for political space, for "an antechamber looking onto a new world". Furthermore, what this position reflects is an acknowledgement of the tremendous complexity and diversity of the worlds which we inhabit:

[t]he motives of those opposing a dam, a nuclear plant or a political regime are usually highly diverse. Some would be protecting their life space, and some others would be pursuing general ideals. Rarely they can reach a consensus about what they want, about their aspirations, given the diversity of their affirmative proposals; but instead of homogenizing them, to define a common goal, they use that diversity to nourish and enrich their common articulation of a specific rejection (Ibid: 161).

Students, housewives, homosexuals, unionists, and indigenous peoples all have tremendously divergent visions of what society should be, a divergence which is as true within each group as it is between them. Seeking a single ideology or a common vision that includes the concerns and demands of each these groups would either be impossible or would result in a position of such a generic nature that it would be almost meaningless. By denying the seizure of power, by articulating their own concerns within their own socio-economic, historical, and indigenous circumstances, and by encouraging others to do the same, the Zapatistas have generated a "moment of coincidence" among a tremendous variety of groups and individuals

who all find themselves opposed to an oppressive and exploitive regime but for very different and distinct reasons. In this sense, by declaring “no”, the Zapatistas actually affirm a space and a relationship of fundamental inclusiveness, a space which is radically democratic, engaged, multiple, heterogeneous and even antagonistic.

“We Want a World That Holds Many Worlds”: Zapatismo, Antagonisms and Radical Democracy

In order to appreciate the “moment of coincidence” which I believe Mexican society has been experiencing over the past seven years, it is necessary to turn our attention to the conceptual dimensions of a social context which would allow such an event to occur. In order to understand the profoundly revolutionary and emancipatory vision of the Zapatistas, one must also understand what kinds of social relationships it posits. In order to appreciate the radical impact the Zapatistas have had upon Mexican society, one must understand how and why the Zapatistas have managed to energize and engage multiple and diverse social actors over the past seven years. In seeking the answers to these questions, the theoretical framework which I find to be most illuminating is that provided by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau in their work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. Neil Harvey provides an excellent overview of social movement theory as it relates to the Zapatista movement in his article “The Zapatistas, Radical Democratic Citizenship, and Women’s Struggles” (1998b), but for my purposes, I find the theory of Mouffe and Laclau to be most useful. In their work, Laclau and Mouffe engage the issue of precisely what manner of social relations, what vision of the “social” itself, will allow for a

truly democratic social reality. In this section, I will endeavour to address the particular elements of Laclau and Mouffe's arguments which pertain most directly to the Zapatista "moment of coincidence" and which shed the greatest light on the necessary conditions for a radically democratic social revolution.

In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe delve deeply into the possibilities for a new democratic politics and the conditions which are necessary for it to come into being. One of the most significant arguments which the authors make is that in order to understand the nature of a new and radical democratic practice, one must first be able to apprehend the nature of the "social" itself. Fundamentally, Laclau and Mouffe articulate a vision of the social in which there is no fixed meaning, no fundamental identities, no "sutured space". In other words, the social itself has no essential "reality", only that which is constituted by various "articulatory practices" and which draw together various elements in order to make meaning and thus construct the social. This concept is essential and it is worth quoting Mouffe and Laclau's analysis at length:

the multiformity of the social cannot be apprehended through a system of mediations, nor the 'social order' understood as an underlying principle. There is no sutured space peculiar to 'society', since the social itself has no essence. Three remarks are important here. First, the two conceptions imply different logics of the social: in the case of 'mediations', we are dealing with a system of logical transitions in which relations between objects are conceived as following a relation between concepts; in the second sense, we are dealing with contingent relations whose nature we have to determine. Secondly, in criticizing the conception of society as an ensemble united by necessary laws, we cannot simply bring out the non-necessary character of the *relations* among elements, for we would then retain the necessary character of the *identity* of the elements themselves. A conception which denies any essentialist approach to social relations, must also state the precarious character of every identity and the impossibility of fixing the sense of the 'elements' in any ultimate literality.

Thirdly, it is only in contrast to a discourse postulating their unity, that an ensemble of elements appears as fragmented or dispersed. Outside any discursive structure, it is obviously not possible to speak of fragmentation, nor even to specify elements. Yet, a discursive structure is not a merely 'cognitive' or 'contemplative' entity; it is an *articulatory practice* which constitutes and organizes social relations (1985: 96).

Thus, it is not that society is structured through a certain articulatory practice, rather, it is that society and all its attendant relations would not exist without such a practice. It is worth noting that Mouffe and Laclau draw an important distinction between the practice of articulation and that of the discourse that is produced through this practice. Articulation is the act of "establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" whereas discourse is "the structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice" (Ibid: 105). Thus, while articulation seeks to establish a social reality by way of discourse, the fact that articulation is an ongoing and fundamentally unlimited practice results in "the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity" (Ibid: 113). Because society is comprised of various "elements" that are given meaning and form through a discourse which, to a certain extent, "unifies" them, it is possible to apprehend our social worlds. Conversely, because this is the case, because social worlds are given form by means of a practice of articulation, they are never fully constituted and closed. The discourse which unifies elements within a social reality is never fully and finally set, therefore, relations between the elements change and the identities of the elements themselves may also shift. Furthermore, for this to be the case there can be no single underlying principle that either fixes or constitutes the social in any sense (Ibid: 111). In order to apprehend what Laclau and

Mouffe argue with regard to radical democratic politics, it is necessary to appreciate their conception of the social in this manner. In addition, in order to understand the Zapatista project, one must be able to envision the social in very much the same manner, a notion which I will explore shortly.

While Mouffe and Laclau argue persuasively for the fundamental openness of the social, they also assert that this openness and indeterminance permeates the formation of the category of the “subject” as well. Mouffe and Laclau argue that the same partial fixity which characterizes the social as a result of it being constituted through the practice of articulation as discourse manifests itself within the category of the subject as well. Thus, any appeals to set identities or fundamental characteristics is both misleading and misrepresentative of the nature of our social worlds. This assertion may be most easily understood in light of the fact that no identity or subject position forever maintains the same relations to other identities or positions. As manifested in the Zapatista movement, identities and social positionings are continually being renegotiated and contested. If this were not the case, the Zapatista challenge would rest upon a fundamental and immutable conception of the category of “Indigenous” which would entail particular and unalterable relations within a closed social space to other similarly unalterable identities. Because the social is constantly in flux through the process of articulation and because the “field of discursivity” that constitutes the formation of the social is never fully fixed or closed, subject positions are also necessarily involved in the same processes. Within the Zapatista movement, the project is not one of essentializing identity or position within society, rather, as can be seen through the Zapatista emphasis on dialogue, it

is one of explicit challenge and renegotiation. While many analysts have remarked upon the fundamentally indigenous nature of the Zapatista uprising, it must be realized that while the Zapatistas are indeed indigenous, there is no single point at which the movement has sought to crystallize that identity into a single set of attributes, aspirations, or social relations. While the Zapatistas have taken issue with the oppression and subjugation of indigenous peoples in Mexico, they have sought primarily to open spaces of political and social change rather than to assert the primacy of one vision of how society should work or how the indigenous peoples should be regarded. In doing so, they have acknowledged the fact that all identities, all positionings, draw their meaning through a particular discursive field. Through their calls for dialogue, engagement and interaction with diverse and multiple others, they have sought to rearticulate the discourse which has partially fixed Mexico as a place of oppression and subjugation for people of particular identities.

Now that I have briefly evaluated the cornerstones of Mouffe and Laclau's conceptualization of the social and the position of the subject within it, it is time to turn to issues which bear more directly upon the Zapatista struggle and the "moment of coincidence" which it has generated. In their work, Mouffe and Laclau engage a concept of primary concern, namely, "antagonism". This concept has a profound bearing upon my own analysis of the Zapatista movement and the challenges which it poses for the construction and understanding of the social worlds which we inhabit. The question that Mouffe and Laclau engage is: why does antagonism exist? They answer this by asserting that antagonism exists as the experience of the vanity of achieving any stable differences, it is characteristic of one's

inability to “be a full presence” for oneself (Ibid: 125). Mouffe and Laclau draw upon the example of a peasant being expelled from his/her land by a landowner to demonstrate this concept. In that the peasant cannot be a peasant because the landowner is expelling him/her from their land, antagonism exists (Ibid: 125). Similarly, the landowner’s own identity is by no means a “full presence” because this identity is also dependent upon the articulation of other identities, such as “peasant”, within the social context in order to exist. Because the social is not sutured or complete, all identities within it are consequently never “full positivities” either (Ibid: 125). If the social were complete, or possessed of a primary character or founding principle, antagonisms could not manifest themselves because every identity would be a fully positive subjectivity within the given discourse. There would be no room for antagonism because reality would be a complete whole and every identity within it would possess a specific and clearly defined relationship with other identities. In other words, antagonisms exist because of the failure of the social to form a closed system of meaning. Because meaning is mutable, negotiable, and contestable, and because identities are prevented from being fully themselves by virtue of the fact that the process of identification is overdetermined by other identities, antagonism exists. Thus, the Zapatista movement is involved antagonistically with the modern Mexican regime not because the regime is preventing the Zapatistas from being what they are “supposed to be” as some idealized and reified indigenous essence but rather because the identities and positions occupied by both the Zapatistas and their opponents are overdetermined by each other, by other identities, and by a social system in flux.

Extending from this conceptualization of antagonism, Laclau and Mouffe delve into an interesting and extremely important problematic, namely, if identities and social relations have no essential character, no fundamental fixity of meaning or form, how then may relations of oppression be conceptualized? To quote once more directly from Laclau and Mouffe:

if we can determine *a priori* the essence of a subject, every relation of subordination which denies it automatically becomes a relation of oppression. But if we reject this essentialist perspective, we need to differentiate ‘subordination’ from ‘oppression’ and explain the precise conditions in which subordination becomes oppressive. We shall understand by a *relation of subordination* that in which an agent is subjected to the decisions of another - an employee with respect to an employer, for example, or in certain forms of family organization the woman with respect to the man, and so on. We shall call *relations of oppression*, in contrast, those relations of subordination which have transformed themselves into sites of antagonisms. Finally, we shall call *relations of domination* the set of those relations of subordination which are considered as illegitimate from the perspective, or in the judgement, of a social agent external to them, and which, as a consequence, may or may not coincide with the relations of oppression actually existing in a determinate social formation (Ibid: 153-154).

The essential point here is that there is no relationship that is fundamentally or essentially a site of resistance or revolution. It is only once relations of subordination become interpellated through different discourses that relations which are seen as “normal” or “natural” in one instance become intolerable and unbearable in the next. Mouffe and Laclau draw their central thesis from this realization as they state that “it is only from the moment when the democratic discourse becomes available to articulate the different forms of subordination that the conditions will exist to make possible the struggle against different types of inequality” (Ibid: 154). With the two fundamental principles of this democratic discourse being “equality” and “liberty”, it is only necessary that this discourse become significant within any discursive field

for it to become the source of political struggle against forms of subordination (Ibid: 155). Because social systems are not closed and because the relations of subordination within them cannot be constructed as relations of pure differences, antagonism exists as does the possibility for the articulation of new fields of discursivity based upon the democratic imaginary. As can be seen in the Zapatista context, the movement is founded on precisely such a moment. Only once traditional, albeit worsening, relations of subordination both among indigenous peoples and between them and non-indigenous elites came to be seen in light of new formations of democratic thought and action - came to be reinterpreted within the field of a new discourse - did the idea of the Zapatista uprising become possible. This new imaginary is further borne out through the Zapatista communiques which continually stress the profoundly oppressive character of relations of subordination through appeals to justice, democracy, and liberty. Thus, the Zapatistas are challenging social reality through the use of new discourses which are capable of radically reconceptualizing relations within Mexican society which have traditionally been cast as simply subordinate as profoundly and unbearably oppressive. Not only does this approach explain the legitimacy and justness widely attributed to the Zapatista cause, it also explains a great deal about the radically democratic influences the movement has exerted on Mexican society at large.

There is also a second aspect concerning the emergence of antagonism that Mouffe and Laclau describe which is particularly relevant to the conditions which gave rise to the Zapatista uprising and the movement which emerged from it. While the emergence of a truly democratic discourse may allow for relations of subordination to be understood as relations

of oppression which in turn gives rise to antagonism, antagonism may also arise when “acquired rights are being called into question, or when social relations which had not been constructed under the form of subordination begin to be so under the impact of certain social transformations” (Ibid: 159). In terms of the Zapatistas’ own genesis, the breaking of the social contract established following the Mexican Revolution by the ruling PRI regime and the onslaught of neoliberalism clearly created this very circumstance within the Mexican nation. As certain sectors of the Mexican populace came to be treated as increasingly superfluous within the dominant discourses of neoliberal capitalism, development, and modernization, the institutional neglect which resulted from this precipitated the very circumstances which would provide the impetus not only for the Zapatista movement but for the Zapatista moment of coincidence as well. As Mouffe and Laclau state, “it is because it is negated by practices and discourses bearing new forms of inequality that a subject position can become the site of an antagonism” (Ibid: 159). Thus, the Salinas government’s reform of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution ending land redistribution is significant in understanding why the Zapatistas went to war not only because of its immediate social and economic consequences but because it fundamentally challenged the right of indigenous farmers to continue to be indigenous farmers. Similarly, neoliberal market reforms to the Mexican state must be seen in light of the fact that not only do they undermine the ability of lower and middle class Mexican citizens to live decently, but that they challenge the very right of Mexicans to be citizens, with all the reciprocal rights and responsibilities that that relationship entails. What Mouffe and Laclau point to in this discussion of antagonisms is that

while the immediate and material implications which give rise to antagonism are clearly significant, they are only significant insofar as they indicate that certain subject positions are facing new relations of inequality and subordination within emerging discourses.

While it is undeniably simplistic to attempt to understand either the Zapatista movement or this “moment of coincidence” which I am seeking to illustrate by resorting to arguments based primarily upon the role of capitalist relations, there are nevertheless some compelling points to be drawn from this conceptual field. Mouffe and Laclau make mention of this as they engage the theory of Michel Aglietta and what he has referred to as “the transition from an extensive to an intensive regime of accumulation” (Ibid: 160). This transition is characterized “by the spread of capitalist relations of production to the whole set of social relations, and the subordination of the latter to the logic of production for profit” (Ibid: 160). This transition has resulted in the destruction of previous forms of social relationships and their replacement with commodity relations determined by capitalism. While this is certainly not a new argument, it does provide some interesting and important insight into how neoliberal capitalist relations have impacted upon the social and why forms of “resistance” to this regime have been articulated in the manner that they have. Mouffe and Laclau argue that rather than reducing or “suturing” the social and bringing about the end of ideology, this expansion of capitalist relations to “increasingly numerous spheres” of the social has resulted in a multiplication of sites of struggle (Ibid: 161). Because there is virtually no aspect of our lives left free of the influence of relations of commodification, potential sites of antagonism are no longer limited to the worker-employer relation but rather extend to nearly

every aspect of our experience. If as a worker I experience the relations of commodification and subordination to the demands of capital in a certain way, as a student, citizen, community resident, family member, and man, I experience them in a multitude of other ways, each of which presents a novel basis upon which to formulate a struggle against relations of inequality and subordination. This point is especially significant with regard to Subcomandante Marcos' appeals to diverse "lists" of subject positions throughout the Zapatista communiques. What such lists signify is not only the inclusiveness of the Zapatista movement, but an acknowledgement of the fact that each of the people who identify themselves with such positions will experience relations of inequality and subordination differentially and that this diversity of experience needs to be articulated if a challenge to the existing regime is to be successful.

According to Laclau and Mouffe, the expansion of capitalist relations also needs to be seen as coupled with the increasing bureaucratization of social practices by the state if the emergence of new and diverse antagonisms is to be understood. As new forms of social vigilance and regulation emerge, areas which had previously been conceptualized as the domain of the "private" have become incorporated into that of the "public" (Ibid: 162). While the public/private dichotomy is a suspect argument at the best of times, this problematic serves to illustrate an important point with regard to the Zapatista movement. While it has been argued that neoliberalism and globalization have in fact reduced the efficacy of the state, a closer look at the circumstances of social relations around the globe challenge this rather facile assessment. In the case of Chiapas, neoliberalism has encouraged the state to operate

according to certain precepts which have profoundly reconfigured the social relationships or, more appropriately, the conceptualization of social relations within the Mexican state. Rather than reducing the role of the state, neoliberal capitalism and its proponents have agitated for access to land, resources, and labour in places like Chiapas. In accordance with this, the state has served to create conditions which will facilitate this exploitation. In the words of Subcomandante Marcos on behalf of the EZLN at the closing of the First Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism, “[c]ountries are obliged to erase their national borders for money to circulate, but to multiply their internal borders. Neoliberalism doesn’t turn many countries into one country; it turns each country into many countries” (1996b: 117). Land “reforms”, government institutionalization of indigenous, peasant, and worker organization and representation, public works monies, and even militarization of regions which refuse to comply with the discourse of neoliberal capitalism are all evidence not of the declining power of the state, but its capacity to act without the consent of large sectors of its citizenry in accordance with the agenda of the ruling elites. As Mouffe and Laclau would argue, this bureaucratization of social relations has served to illuminate both “the political character...of social relations, and the fact that these are always the result of modes of institution that give them their form and meaning” as well as the fact that “given the character of state intervention, this creation of ‘public spaces’ is carried out not in the form of a true democratization, but through the imposition of new forms of subordination” (1985: 162-163). In this light, it can be seen why the diverse strategies implemented by the governments of Salinas, Zedillo, and Fox aimed ostensibly at fostering social cohesion have

been interpreted in such a negative manner by the Zapatistas and other social movements within Mexico. Whether it be an attempt to reinforce development through the government cooptation of labour, the funnelling of money into social works programmes in the south of Mexico, or the militarization of states in which guerrillas are operating, these diverse acts are all interpreted along the lines of an attempt at state control of multiple arenas of social relations in pursuit of an agenda which entails radically new and dehumanizing relations of subordination and inequality. Combined with the fact that the “liberal-democratic” imaginary remains a potent ideology and, somewhat curiously, remains tied to the neoliberal capitalist discourse, these attempts at commodification and bureaucratization of social relations can only be perceived as attempts at entrenching a system of oppression in the service of a regime of exploitation and accumulation.

Now that I have explored the dynamics of how Mouffe and Laclau conceptualize the emergence of antagonisms within the context of the modern nation-state and neoliberal capitalist relations, it is time to return to the antagonisms themselves. Perhaps the most significant offering made by Mouffe and Laclau to this field of theorization are the possibilities they offer for alternatives to more traditional systems of struggle and resistance, possibilities which are startlingly evocative of those embodied by the Zapatista moment of coincidence. The central question within this field of inquiry can be essentially reduced to this: on what basis may a broad front of social opposition be constituted in order to challenge existing relations of inequality and to begin to envision alternatives? Mouffe and Laclau begin to answer this question by stating that “[a]ll the discussion on strategies for recomposition of

working-class unity, seen in perspective, is nothing other than the first act of a recognition - reluctant, it is true - of the plurality of the social, and the unsutured character of all political identity” (Ibid: 166). In order to begin to envision not only effective ways to engage in struggle but also to begin to articulate possible visions of alternatives to current social relations, we must first acknowledge the fact that there is no fundamental identity, no transcendental unity to be achieved among people based upon a single political identity. The failure of the North American trade union movement to recognize this fact has led to the marginalization of this movement as an effective arena for struggle against the diverse forms of subordination and inequality characteristic of neoliberal capitalist relations today. In order for struggle to be democratic and dynamic, it must be radically plural; that is, it must acknowledge the fact that not only is difference tolerable but fundamental. Mouffe and Laclau explain this notion of radical plurality brilliantly in the following manner:

[p]luralism is *radical* only to the extent that each term of this plurality of identities finds within itself the principle of its own validity, without this having to be sought in a transcendent or underlying positive ground for the hierarchy of meaning of them all and the source and guarantee of their legitimacy. And this radical pluralism is *democratic* to the extent that the autoconstitutivity of each one of its terms is the result of displacements of the egalitarian imaginary (Ibid: 167).

This principle of a radical and democratic pluralism is deeply embedded within the Zapatista movement and the moment of coincidence for which it has served as catalyst. There is no primary position within this moment, only a diverse, multiple, and radically heterogeneous amalgamation of individuals and organizations seeking to articulate a common “no” and a nearly infinite number of “yeses”. While the fundamental flaw of traditional criticisms of

capitalism has been to posit a unitary subject of history and a specific historical project which is not only identifiable but which necessarily dictates the direction of all struggle, the Zapatista moment of coincidence is founded upon the principle that such conceptualizations are not only impractical, but fundamentally unachievable and profoundly undesirable. The Zapatistas have always acknowledged the fact that their goals are specific to their own historical, political, and social context, but that they embrace the right of all people to struggle for what they find compelling within their own contexts. Thus, there is no privileged position, no predetermined direction for struggle, and no single point at which this moment of coincidence between people who are bound together by a common sense of dis-ease can be deligitimized.

It is essential in this discussion of the Zapatista movement and moment of coincidence to be explicit and forceful in our understanding of the central importance of what Mouffe and Laclau term “equivalence” and “pluralism” within their analysis. For the Zapatistas, it is not that they recognize the right of others to express their own agendas and engage in their own struggles, but rather, that it is undeniable and absolutely essential that they do so. No social change can come about from a single point in the social because such an occurrence would be founded upon the assumption that there are primary positions which are somehow privileged within a sutured social space, a theorization that Mouffe and Laclau have clearly deligitimized through their analysis of this concept. In offering a starting point for a rebirth of the Left, Mouffe and Laclau state:

a left alternative can *only* consist of the construction of a different system of equivalents, which establishes social division on a new basis. In the face of a project for the reconstruction of a hierarchic society, the alternative of the Left should consist

of locating itself fully in the field of the democratic revolution and expanding the chains of equivalents between the different struggles against oppression. *The task of the Left therefore cannot be to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy* (Ibid: 176).

This approach is precisely what has made the Zapatista movement such an unexpected success in terms of its ability to mobilize tremendously diverse sectors of national and international civil society. Rather than dismissing liberal-democratic ideology as a conceptual field fundamentally bound to capitalist modes of production and exploitation, the Zapatistas have instead contested conceptions of democracy, liberty, and justice and in doing so have reoriented the manner in which this discourse has been used to formulate and understand the social. Fundamentally, the Zapatistas have radically problematized the notions of democracy, liberty, and justice even as they have continually and vigorously reaffirmed their undeniable importance. In effect, this strategy has led not to debates about the “authentic” nature of any of these concepts, because the very notion of “authenticity” is itself only an illusion once one accepts the profound non-fixity of every reality, but rather to much more important discussions regarding what these things should mean and how they should structure the social. Thus, a discourse which has traditionally been used by elites to justify the inequalities and exploitation of capitalism and “the market” as a necessary stage of development has been reformulated and employed as a tool to critique the status quo. Rather than rejecting the notions of “democracy”, “freedom”, and “justice” as products and pillars of an exploitive and oppressive socio-economic system and thereby reducing the debate to a facile “us versus them” dichotomy, the Zapatistas have instead sought to challenge the legitimacy and authority

of a system of knowing the world which has allowed these notions to become tools for the maintenance of the power and prestige of a few at the cost of the many. The manner in which they have sought to challenge this system is even more significant because rather than attempting to topple the existing regime in order to raise up their own, the Zapatistas instead have asked the people of Mexico to consider the world in which they live, to think explicitly and critically about the nature of their lives and then to talk to each other about the possibility of building something better. In essence, this manoeuvre has not only illuminated the fundamental openness of the “discursive field” of the social, it also circumvents the possibility of the Zapatista struggle becoming reduced to a set of particularistic goals because it has solicited the involvement of everyone and thus engages all their particularistic goals. Even more importantly, what this debate has allowed for is not simply the delegitimization of a specific group of oppressors or even the “system” associated with them but for the reconsideration of the very manner in which people think about the world they inhabit. This is only possible precisely because the social is an unsutured field of discursivity and is thus open not only to contestation and resistance but to rearticulation and emancipation.

The notion of political space which the Zapatistas reflect upon so extensively throughout their discourse is also a notion which finds itself echoed within the theorization of Mouffe and Laclau. While the notion of an unsutured social space is essential to their conceptualizations of the possibilities for new and democratic social relations, they also emphasise that “[t]he multiplication of political spaces and the preventing of the concentration of power in one point are...preconditions of every truly democratic transformation of society”

(Ibid: 178). Thus, while struggling for economic justice against the exploitation of capitalist modes of production and accumulation within an increasingly neoliberalized context is both valid and important, it is also necessary to realize that there are a tremendous diversity of positions and spaces from which the struggle for a truly democratic society must be envisioned. This is to say that there is no privileged or necessarily primary position from which “revolution” will occur or originate. This is precisely because the field of discursivity which constitutes all social relations is one of over-determination and as elements are articulated together and thus determine the meaning of each other, sites of antagonism proliferate and diversify. In terms of what this signifies for those involved in the radical democratic struggle, the very acknowledgement of the fact that no position is privileged or primary implies “the dissolution of the autonomy of the spaces in which each of these struggles is constituted; not necessarily because any of them become subordinated to others, but because they have all become...equivalent symbols of a unique and indivisible struggle” (Ibid: 182). Thus, while each movement or individual articulates their own agenda, their own “yes”, the affirmation of a common “no”, of a commitment to a struggle which is profoundly cognizant of the multiple, heterogenous, and equivalent nature of the social whole results in a movement in which it is no longer possible to identify a central “node”, a privileged subject, or a historical project besides the unswerving commitment to a radical democratic vision. In essence, this is the Zapatista moment of coincidence, a moment of social and political convergence around an ideology which necessitates both the radical autonomy and integral unity of movements and individuals who stand opposed to relations of inequality and

subordination. More than this, this moment also implies a commitment to the possibility of envisioning new ways of articulating the social through an absolute affirmation of the concepts of democracy, dialogue, and autonomy. This notion is perhaps best summarized by Mouffe and Laclau in the following manner:

[b]etween the logic of complete identity and that of pure difference, the experience of democracy should consist of the recognition of the multiplicity of social logics along with the necessity of their articulation. But this articulation should be constantly re-created and renegotiated, and there is no final point at which a balance which will be definitively achieved (Ibid: 188).

Thus, while the struggle for a democratic and plural society is a necessary one if we wish to escape the relations of exploitation and subordination which are central to neoliberal capitalism, there is no “final point”, no historical project to be completed. Rather, just as the Zapatistas articulate the idea of an “antechamber” looking onto a new world, the process of social articulation is one which is and will always be in the process of occurring and while we may speak of goals and desires for this process, there is not, nor should there be, any destination to be reached, only the fundamental realization that vision and dialogue are all we have in our search for democracy, liberty, and justice.

Part Two: “The Storm is Here” - The Zapatista Moment of Coincidence

“Our Uniforms are Black and Red, Symbol of Our Working People on Strike”: The Significance of the Independent Labour Movement in Mexico

Before beginning to examine the discussions I had with independent labour activists in Mexico City during the summer of 2000, a necessary first step is to explain why I perceive labour to be one of the most significant and telling nodes within the Zapatista moment of coincidence. While part of the answer to this lies in the fact that the Zapatistas themselves have repeatedly emphasised the role of workers as vital partners in the struggle for social change, there is another aspect which I would like to examine more fully. As Richard Roman and Edur Velasco Arregui explain in their article “Zapatismo and the Workers Movement in Mexico at the End of the Century”, while Mexico is often seen as a predominately rural nation, “75 percent of the population lives in urban areas and 50 percent of those in rural areas live through the sale of their labor power” (1997: 98). In this sense, Mexico must be seen as a largely urbanized society, a nation which possesses a “large proletariat divided between individuals employed by a large variety of capitalist and small business enterprises in the so-called formal sector and a larger number working for themselves in the streets and backyard marginal operations of the so-called informal sector” (Veltmeyer 2000: 100). Thus, the “working class” is a significant proportion of the Mexican population and despite the fact that popular images of Mexico rest largely upon an imaginary rooted in the rural and the indigenous, the “urban realities” of Mexico should not be forgotten. Furthermore, as Roman

and Velasco Arregui argue, within the context of the Zapatista uprising, these urban sectors must be mobilized if any serious challenge to the existing socio-political and economic system is to be made.

While it is clear that the onslaught of neoliberal policies and practices served as one of the final triggers for the Zapatista rebellion and have impacted in a profoundly negative fashion upon Mexican small-scale farmers in general, it should also be noted that these same policies have dire implications for urban workers as well. In addition to the loss of approximately one million jobs following the devaluation of the peso in 1994 it has been estimated that “well over 50 percent of the working class is either un- or underemployed. Further, the vast majority of workers are remunerated at or below a level...that places them below officially drawn poverty lines” (Ibid: 100). However, the social abandonment of the urban working class has a much longer history than the current statistics would indicate. During the so-called “profit crisis” of the 1970s, owners around the world began a “fierce attack upon working class living standards as [they] sought to restore their profits” (Roman and Velasco Arregui 1997: 101). Similar to the circumstances faced by indigenous peasants at the same time, for the urban working class, this resulted in mass firings of workers, plant closings and relocations to “areas ‘free of restrictive labor contracts’”, and a general disavowal of the social contract which had sustained Mexican “development” since the Revolution and about which more will be said shortly (Ibid: 101). In order to achieve a sense of the “benefits” of neoliberal policy one need look no further than the fact that of the thirty-three million gainfully employed people in Mexico, seventeen million are minimum wage

earners (Ibid: 101). Furthermore, fifty million people, fully half of the Mexican population, in turn depend upon the income of these seventeen million minimum wage workers (Ibid: 101). These statistics trace the contours of the lived reality of the Mexican working class and clearly suggest that the neoliberal dream of development is one which has no room for those whose labour has given it form and profitability and upon whose backs it continues to exist.

In addition to the assault on wages and living standards for the working class, the distribution of wealth in Mexico is also radically skewed. While the aforementioned 50 million people subsisting at or around the minimum wage live on approximately \$36 billion, this needs to be considered in relation to the OECD estimate of the Mexican GNP in 1994 of \$371 billion (Ibid: 101). While 10 percent of all Mexican families have an income of at least \$100 000, “50 percent of the population finds itself immersed in profound misery, subsisting on a salary mass equal to 10 percent of the GNP” (Ibid: 102). As Roman and Velasco Arregui argue, it is this assault on the minimum wage and the decline in purchasing power on the part of the working class that is one of the most immediately revealing statistics when it comes to evaluating living conditions. This point is emphasised by the authors as they state that “[t]he minimum wage constitutes the floor of social rights and basic conditions of life and the possibilities for growth or decline in workers’ collective share of the social wealth” (Ibid: 102). Thus, it is not simply that wages are suffering due to neoliberal economic policies, but that the potential for people to achieve a better standard of living is actually degrading.

While the statistical indicators of life for the Mexican working class are startling enough in contrast to the prosperity and development which the proponents of neoliberalism

have assured the world of, this narrative takes on an entirely new meaning when seen from a historical perspective. The history of unionism in Mexico is a long, complicated, and dramatic one, however, for the purposes of this analysis a brief overview will suffice in order to provide the necessary contextualization. One of the most salient points to focus on with regard to this history is the emergence of official unionism in postrevolutionary Mexico. During the Mexican Revolution from 1910-1917, workers and peasants were instrumental in the success of the “revolutionary” forces and thus required that ruling elites operate in very particular manners in relation to them. While there were several concessions made by the government to the peasantry and the working classes, the significant aspect of this move was to incorporate these diverse groups into the larger project of “national development”. For workers, this meant incorporation into the post-revolutionary regime through “paternalistic and government-controlled labor relations, including government-dominated or official labor unions” (Ibid: 99).

While the mobilization of labour and other “mass actors” was necessary for the success of the revolution, it also presented the postrevolutionary elites with the dilemma of finding ways in which to “institutionalize opportunities for worker participation” that would be acceptable to the vision of the new regime (Middlebrook 1991: 3). In pursuing this goal, the new regime employed two primary strategies: first, a legal and administrative framework was developed in order to regulate labour participation and to centralize political power; second, the new regime sought to co-opt the labour movement through the forging of a political alliance with the leadership of the industrial labour movement (Ibid: 4-5). In

accordance with this second strategy, the Mexican Regional Labour Confederation (CROM) was founded in 1918 and signalled the emergence of “a pragmatic labor leadership committed to an alliance with progressive elements of the postrevolutionary political leadership” (Ibid: 5). The CROM quickly rose to prominence among organized labour in Mexico with the assistance of the first postrevolutionary governments and provided the new regime with important popular support as well as a framework for the control of labour participation (Ibid: 5). In return for their compliance with state-set agendas that necessitated low wages, no freedom of association, and no labour unrest, workers received certain assurances of job security and a share of the social wealth generated through their sacrifices (Roman and Velasco Arregui 1997: 99-100). The CROM’s privileged position could not outlast the assassination of their patron President Alvaro Obregon, however, and it would not be until 1936 when the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) was formed that yet another concerted attempt was made to institutionalize labour within the postrevolutionary framework (Middlebrook 1991: 6).

During this time, the government of President Lazaro Cardenas worked closely with the CTM by helping to unionize workers and to negotiate collective contracts with the CTM in turn providing Cardenas with political support for his “reform program, including an extensive agrarian reform, the nationalization of the petroleum industry and the national railways, and the transformation of the government into a mass-based organization” (Ibid: 6). The CTM’s early existence, however, was far from problem-free. Despite government support, the organization was plagued by internal differences, differences which in 1947

resulted in the formation of the rival Unitary Workers' Confederation (CUT), a move generated by the "activist leadership of the railroad workers' union, included telephone, electrical power generation, tramway, cement industry, and aviation workers" (Ibid: 6). This split reflected an increasingly apparent division between "pragmatic, often progovernment elements led by Fidel Velazquez, with their support in the CTM's heterogenous but numerically important state and regional federation affiliates, and more radical groups...based in powerful national industrial unions" (Ibid: 6). The CUT resented the CTM's increasing identification with the ruling party, their support of conservative government policy, and their attempts to hinder the autonomy of the national industrial unions and in 1948 joined with other opposition labour unions to form the Coalition of Worker and Peasant Organizations, an organization whose membership clearly posed a threat to the dominance of the CTM (Ibid: 7). However, this new organization not only posed a threat to the power of the CTM, but to the dominance of the ruling government of President Aleman as well (Ibid: 7). Seeing the Coalition of Worker and Peasant Organizations as a distinct and immediate threat to its own ability to institute conservative policy, the Aleman administration moved forcibly against the primary actor in this coalition, the Mexican Railroad Workers' Union (STFRM) by exploiting internal divisions that allowed the government to topple the union's radical leadership and then to impose a much more compliant one (Ibid: 7). This coup ultimately resulted in the STFRM actively supporting the ruling regime, breaking away from the CUT and disbanding the Coalition (Ibid: 7). In addition to this, this intervention on the part of the government into the labour movement would be repeated several times in the years that followed as radical

union leaders were deposed and then replaced by progovernment factions in the petroleum, mining-metalworking, and telephone workers' unions (Ibid: 7).

Following the subversion of this labour movement, the Aleman administration moved to protect its interests and to balance the power of the CTM by reincorporating dissident unions and also by "supporting the formation of the Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants (CROC) in 1952", an organization which was at once hostile to the CTM and supportive of the governing elite (Ibid: 7-8). The formation of the Labour Congress (CT) in 1966 served to unify the official labour movement beneath one banner which bound it even more tightly to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Ibid: 8). During the years which followed the 1910 Revolution, the social pact which existed between organized "official" labour and the ruling regime operated in a particularly significant fashion, one which Kevin Middlebrook eloquently illustrates in the following manner:

[p]ostrevolutionary governments have provided a range of financial and political subsidies to favored labor organizations, including material support for union activities and privileged access for progovernment labor leaders to elective positions through ties to the PRI. The labour movement has also received significant social and economic benefits, including government-subsidized housing, health care, and basic commodities and worker profit sharing. For its part, the state-subsidized labor movement has offered crucial backing for the established regime during political crises and, at least until the late 1980s, a reliable basis of mass support for the PRI and its candidates. The labor leadership's capacity to contain rank-and-file wage demands and block worker mobilization has also permitted government policy makers to control inflation during periods of economic instability. What must be stressed, however, is that the terms of this pact are highly unequal: the postrevolutionary state's unchallenged control over coercive force and its well-developed administrative capacity place the national political leadership in a position to define (and redefine) the terms of the alliance, while the labor movement's structural weaknesses (comparatively small worker concentrations per firm and low overall levels of unionization, with considerable variation among different sectors) and organizational

weaknesses (poorly developed representational structures in many enterprise-level unions), and factional divisions place labor in a generally subordinate role in decision making on wage levels, income policies, and economic development strategies - issues that directly affect workers (Ibid: 9).

Thus, a system which ostensibly existed for the purposes of “national development” in fact resulted in an effective and subtle framework by which ruling elites could maintain their control over subordinated groups and ultimately justify their position with reference to an overarching revolutionary vision.

Within this paternalistic “social contract” system, union leaders themselves were incorporated into the state bureaucracy. Through their positions, they could attain “power, privilege, and opportunities to enrich themselves” in return for which they “were expected to discipline their members” in accordance with the wishes of the ruling elites (Roman and Velasco Arregui 1997: 100). This project was, of course, a careful balance between appearing to represent workers and fight for their best interests while in fact only operating within predetermined boundaries established by the state. Velasco Arregui and Roman state this point with eloquence as they reflect that:

if the labor relations system was a framework that allowed official union bureaucrats to achieve power and privilege as part of the state-related elite, it was also a framework through which the discontent of union members could be contained by the achievement of wage gains or social benefits (such as housing or medical care) which came from the state and were controlled by these union bureaucrats (Ibid: 100).

Thus, a system founded upon the notion of a social contract, one which existed ostensibly for the benefit of the nation as a whole and the revolution in particular, this system had the ultimate effect of managing potential labour unrest and coopting an entire sector of the

population in the service of an agenda set by ruling elites. Official unionism in Mexico therefore needs to be regarded as a system based upon the principle of worker management rather than worker representation. However, as long as there were concessions being made, as long as there was even a limited commitment to a reciprocal obligation between the state and the working class, this system maintained its integrity. It would only be once this commitment was abandoned entirely by the state during the debt crisis of the 1970s and that the CTM and the CT failed to respond to the resulting assault on workers' rights in any meaningful manner that the social contract would lose its efficacy as ideology, that the bases of these official unions would come to see their leaders as tools in the service of national and transnational elites, and workers would begin to turn to independent action to achieve their goals.

While "official unionism" in Mexico is primarily represented by the still-powerful Confederacion de Trabajadores de Mexico (CTM), it is important to realize that there are independent streams to the union movement in Mexico that are gaining strength. Several of these independent organizations will be discussed in the following section in greater detail, but what is of significance here is that these organizations articulate their positions in terms which may seem tremendously radical to North American observers. It should not be inferred that the Zapatista movement was in any way responsible for the "radicalization" of the independent union movement in Mexico because this movement was already extremely political and active prior to the uprising. What I do wish to assert, however, is that it is the moment of coincidence between these two movements which created an explicit and

undeniable critical consciousness within Mexican society, a moment for which the Zapatista movement has served as the catalyst. As Roman and Velasco Arregui and Veltmeyer argue, the combination of an emerging and radicalized independent working class movement with an “explosive indigenous movement” represents the beginnings of a potentially tremendously powerful association for social change in Mexico (Veltmeyer 2000: 102). In order to further explore the efficacy of this concept of “moments of coincidence”, I believe it is now time to turn to my conversations with members of Mexico’s independent labour movement and to hear from them, and about the Zapatistas, in their own words.

In order to achieve a sense of perspective on the thoughts offered by the members of the independent labour movement in Mexico City whom I spoke to during my time there, it is of value to briefly review the organizations which they represent. While a considerable amount of time and space could and has been devoted to an analysis of the political and social significance of each of these groups as well as their positionings relative to one another, this is something which I will delve into only briefly at this time. The issue of greatest significance here is the difference between “official” unionism and “independent” unionism in Mexico. All of the individuals with whom I spoke situated themselves and the organizations which they represent firmly on the side of independent unionism and clearly opposed to official unionism. In all, I spoke at length with seven members of the independent labour movement in Mexico, a professor in the Department of Economics at the Autonomous University of Mexico who specializes in labour issues, and sat in at a meeting between students from North America representing the United Students Against Sweatshops and representatives of one of the most

influential independent labour organizations in Mexico City. It is from these contexts, and most importantly from the interviews I engaged in, that I draw the articulations and ideas which I intend to relate here. Finally, in order to safeguard the security and privacy of my research partners, I employ pseudonyms in place of the real names of each individual who offered to engage in this project with me.

The individuals with whom I spoke represented various organizations and it is important to mention them before considering the insights that were shared by these people with me. During my six week fieldwork period in Mexico City I spoke with: four members representing the cooperative, national coordination, and the Mexican Network of Action Against Free Trade sectors of el Frente Autentico del Trabajo (the Authentic Labour Front) commonly known as the FAT; one senior member from la Organizacion Revolucionaria del Trabajo (the Revolutionary Labour Organization) commonly known as the ORT; one member from la Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educacion (the National Council of Education Workers) commonly known as the CNTE; and one member from el Sindicato Mexicano del Electricistas (the Mexican Electrical Workers Union) commonly known as the SME. All these organizations are considered to be significant actors within the independent labour movement in Mexico and as I will demonstrate shortly, all are involved in issues outside of what North American observers might consider to be the traditional scope of labour movements. It is important to note, however, that while all of these organizations are identified with “independent” unionism in a broad sense, they each have their own orientations and agendas which do not always coincide. The FAT is a labour organization which,

according to its own description, groups individuals and organizations including “industrial workers, peasants and farm workers, agricultural and industrial cooperative members and neighbourhood community activists” in the pursuit of “justice, freedom, and democracy” and in order to improve the lives of its members in the community and in the workplace. The ORT is a political organization rather than a union which seeks to promote a radicalization of Mexican workers in terms of their social and political activity as well as concerning itself with the immediate conditions of work which face them in the current social and political context. The CNTE is an “independent” coordinating committee of the official Teachers’ union in Mexico, the SNTE, and which represents “the outgrowth of a grassroots movement rather than the creation of any particular political organization” (de la Garza Toledo 1991: 179). It is therefore more of an independent and dissident democratic movement within a national official union rather than an entirely separate entity unto itself. However, the members of the CNTE have been and continue to be among the most active participants of the independent labour movement in Mexico. Finally, the SME is a national independent electrical workers’ union which was among the first unions to declare independence from official unionism and which is now deeply involved in the struggle against the privatization of the national electrical industry. Their history of independence from the CTM and the size of their membership make them one of the most significant voices within the independent labour movement today. It is of use to keep these descriptions in mind as I discuss the Zapatista “moment of coincidence” as they often serve to provide the basis for understanding the different responses offered by the various independent unions.

“A Genuine Defense for the Workers’ Concerns”: Independent Labour in Mexico

In order to begin to appreciate the moment of coincidence which I assert the Zapatistas have generated since their uprising in January of 1994, it is first necessary to understand the role of independent unionism in Mexico. While some of these themes have been examined already, I believe the best demonstration of the importance of independent unionism can be gained through an examination of the comments made regarding this topic by my research partners. Rather than focusing upon the specific goals and strategies of the FAT, the CNTE, the ORT, or the SME, I have chosen instead to examine the social and political importance of independent unionism in Mexico as it relates to the traditional official unionism.

Within the context of each interview, one of the first questions I posed to my partners was “what is the social and political importance of independent unionism in Mexico?”. To this question, I received a variety of responses, but all revolved around the same central themes of autonomy, authentic defense of workers’ rights, democracy, and social and political responsibility. Significantly, it is at this fundamental level that the notion of “coincidence” begins as these concepts are very much echoed by the Zapatistas in their own struggle. In terms of the characteristics of “independent unionism”, writ large, it is necessary to turn to the words of my research partners in order to achieve a degree of illumination. Concerning the significance of independent unionism in Mexico, Alfredo, a professor of economics at the Autonomous University of Mexico, responded:

the structure of Mexican unionism is corporate, it’s strongly linked to the apparatuses

of the state and it does not respond to the interests of its members. In those conditions, independent unionism has been a driving factor for internal democracy, the defense of workers' interests, and the questioning of the public politics that have damaged the conditions of life and of work of the masses of wage-earners.

Alejandro, a senior member of the Frente Autentico del Trabajo, echoed this response by stating that independent unionism is "independent, democratic and autonomous. We are independent from the government, from the official political party, from all the political parties, from the private sector. We practice democracy in all the workers' organizations".

Pedro, a representative of the cooperative sector and the Mexican Network of Action Against Free Trade and a member of the FAT stated that independent unionism in Mexico is "very important because it represents the opportunity for a genuine defense for workers' concerns. We call it independent to distinguish it from the official unionism that has ties to the government party". Pedro also echoed Alfredo's and Alejandro's comments with regard to democracy when he remarked that "independent unionism has been fighting for the internal democratization of unions". Expanding upon this, Carlos, a member of the National Council of Education Workers, noted that there are three characteristics which distinguish independent unionism:

the first is the search for democracy, wherein large meetings or assemblies we talk about 'okay, what is it exactly that we want? Let's be clear on this' and we try for a democratic participatory process. The second is looking for better working conditions, more than anything better salaries, but it could be any condition. And the third characteristic is the politicization, more oriented towards the left, more than anything it's people who are more oriented towards socialism.

While this notion of union democratization and autonomy is clearly central to the project of independent unionism, Antonio, a senior member of the FAT, described the place of

independent unionism as one of profound importance within the struggle for a more just and equitable society, stating, “the independent unions have always been the stars in this struggle, their historical role has been extremely important, they have stopped workers from being oppressed or physically injured. They are the ones who stop violence”. Benedicto, a member of the Revolutionary Labour Organization, reflected that:

the independent unions, they are fighting for democracy, for independence from the political parties and for keeping the union leaders from reelecting themselves many times. Now with the neoliberal politics, they have to protect their collective contract, they have to stop the neoliberal industries from building a stop-point for the salaries and wages of workers, they have to stop that, and they also want to stop them from getting the constitution and the federal law reformed.

Finally, Cecilia, a representative of the cooperative sector for the FAT, perhaps summarized this amalgamation of the central themes characterizing the independent labour movement best when, speaking in regard to the goals of cooperative organizing and workers’ rights, she said: “what we are proposing won’t only affect us, it will also affect other sectors of the population, because we think, what we are proposing is solidarity, support, the freedom of association, the right to live, the right to work, and the right to be happy, even if this sounds a little too sweet”. Indeed, from these words it should be clear that it is not at all an act of fantasy to draw a connection between the goals of the Zapatista movement and those of independent unionism in Mexico. It is a connection which will become even more apparent upon further examination of the words offered by these Mexican labour activists.

Before proceeding to the more conceptual elements of my interviews with members of the Mexican independent labour movement, I would like to further examine the nature of

the differences between independent and official unionism as seen from the perspective of my research partners. Once again, the concepts examined here are profoundly significant not only in terms of the labour movement itself, but also within the context of the formation of linkages and alliances with other social movements. Furthermore, these differences between official and independent labour are of great importance in terms of understanding the Zapatista “moment of coincidence”.

Sketching out some of the broad contours of the differences between official and independent labour, Alejandro from the FAT explained simply that the key difference between the two forms of unionism is that “official unionism is controlled by the government and political parties. It doesn’t help the workers”. Pedro echoed the sentiments of Alejandro but also expanded upon this key difference in a manner which illustrates several of the earlier points examined in this work with regard to the history of the labour movement in Mexico:

official unionism is mainly tied to the party that has controlled the government for the last seventy years [the PRI]. It is a unionism that, in its time, worked to fortify the government structure that was necessary after the civil revolutionary process in Mexico, and the unions decided to support the fortification of the national government. But, little by little, they turned into agencies of control over the workers to limit their capacity for negotiation with companies and with that very government. Independent unionism is not a subordinate to the government party and it has been raising the demands of the workers on the matter of democracy of organization as well as the matter of the economy. There is a very strong gap in the living conditions of the workers in Mexico. The Mexican process of development has rested upon the overexploitation of workers. And independent unionism fights to improve the workers’ living conditions, and for the freedom of organization.

Thus, much in the same manner that the indigenous peasants of Chiapas were incorporated and then betrayed by the national project of development through agencies of the state, so too

were workers similarly coopted and then abandoned. The need for workers to represent themselves and to claim an autonomous and democratic social and political space is therefore a necessary first step in the struggle for a better life within the Mexican nation.

Carlos, member of the CNTE, articulated the role of official unionism and its position relative to independent labour in a much more direct manner by stating:

the essential difference is the process, the democratization, however, the second principal difference is how much they are influenced by the government. For example, the government will say to the charristas [official union leaders], 'we can only increase salaries about 20%', so the traitor goes to the union and says 'we demand a 20% raise' and then the government says 'okay, we'll give it to you, you've won', but it was really already decided ahead of time...And actually if the president or the government doesn't offer anything, they won't ask for anything. Ever. They are not trying to fight for the workers, they are just trying to keep the workers happy with the government.

This comment exemplifies the sentiment that the official unions serve very much the same purpose that the National Indigenous Institute serves within indigenous communities, namely, to maintain control over significant sectors of the population in an effort to meet the demands of particular agendas.

Samuel, a member of the Mexican Electrical Workers Union one of the largest and most influential independent unions in Mexico, articulated the primary differences between official and independent unionism in the following manner:

well, there are two main differences between independent and official unionism: one, a basic one, is democracy. The official unions, there is no democracy, the official unions are closed, the workers cannot participate in the election of leaders and they don't even have assemblies or a place to discuss what they need or what they want. On the other hand, independent unions have a very intense union life, they have direct elections of the leaders with a secret and free vote and they also have assemblies where they discuss whatever their problems are. A second difference is the defence

of the workers' rights. In the official ones, there's no such defence. The leaders and the bosses have pacts, have agreements in which the workers are not included, they are not asked or consulted in order to make these agreements. Independent unions ask the workers what it is that they need or they want and out of this discussion the leaders go and negotiate with the bosses.

Reflecting upon these various comments comparing official unionism in Mexico to its independent counterpart, it should be apparent that just as the Zapatista movement was born of a systemic disenfranchisement and marginalization of entire communities, so too is the independent union movement a response to the attempt to control and silence workers in the service of agendas of "development" and "neoliberalism". To recall Mouffe and Laclau, independent unionism can be seen as an emerging site of struggle in response to the antagonisms produced by both national and transnational elites through their efforts to subordinate entire sectors of the population to their own particularistic agendas. It should also be noted that many of the themes which have been discussed as fundamental to the Zapatista movement such as liberty, democracy, and justice are also emergent within the discourse of the independent labour movement as well. It is upon this foundation that I believe a "moment of coincidence" may be formed between movements which have traditionally been seen as drastically different.

“Democracy is Not a Reality in Mexico”: Envisioning Democracy in Mexico

It has frequently been argued that the primary significance of the Zapatista movement is epistemological in nature, that is, its greatest impact has been felt at the level of the manner in which people conceptualize the world around them. In attempting to understand the Zapatista “moment of coincidence”, it is necessary to look beyond similarities in structure and social and political positionalities which may exist between the Zapatistas and independent unions in Mexico and begin to explore the ways in which people think about the social worlds which surround them. With respect to my conversations with members of the independent labour movement in Mexico, we spoke specifically about the ways in which they were thinking about the concepts of democracy, citizenship, human rights, and social justice. This is significant not only because these concepts are of central importance to the Zapatista movement but also due to the fact that these concepts appear to embrace numerous issues which the independent unions are involved with as well. In this section of my work, it is my intention to explore some of the ways in which my research partners explained these concepts to me and the importance of these conceptualizations within the larger context of the Zapatista “moment of coincidence”. The concept with which I will begin this discussion is that of “democracy”.

While the Zapatistas make frequent appeals for the realization of a true democratic practice in Mexico, how the notion of “democracy” is being interpreted is somewhat less than clear. Alfredo from UNAM explained democracy in a somewhat formalized manner as he stated:

democracy is a form of government which seeks the greatest participation from society, but it has different expressions, in the election of national, state, or local representatives, as well as clear forms of vigilance and the possibility of demands without disrespect to established norms. Of course, it is based in norms, but these have to be universal, clear, precise, and fair.

Thus, there is a clear sense conveyed here that while democracy requires participation, it must be a participation that is rooted in fundamental notions of equity, fairness, and consistency. In a nation which has only recently seen what many have called a 71 year dictatorship come to an end, the concepts of participation and the possibility of making claims based upon clear and established norms are profoundly important.

From the perspective of the people with whom I spoke in the independent labour movement, the conception of democracy takes on specific characteristics of particular importance. As Alejandro from the FAT told me, democracy in his own view means “direct democracy” which he explained in the following manner:

in the Mexican system, there is parliamentary democracy, formal democracy, representative democracy. In independent unions, it is direct democracy. The base decides the life of the union. They pick their representatives. They decide how they are going to participate in the negotiation of collective contracts. They decide how they are going to use their money. In official unionism, the government decides on the representatives, they can do whatever they want.

Democracy here is thus equated with the full and direct participation of the “base” in union life as a response to the traditional control exercised by the government and official union bosses over workers. Much as the Zapatistas emphasise the fact that it is the base communities who ultimately hold all authority and that the “leaders” “govern by obeying”, so too do independent unions lay claim to the same participatory model of democracy. Carlos

from the CNTE explained that ultimately, “democracy is the power of the people, the power of the majority. But in terms of a labour union, it is that aspect of the meeting of the workers to decide for themselves and not just take direction from the leaders”.

Pedro from the FAT echoed and deepened the explanations offered by Alejandro and Carlos as he told to me that there are different “terms” of democracy that need to be appreciated:

democracy in political terms, democracy in economic terms and democracy in union terms. In political terms, well, it is the right for citizens to take part in the making of national decisions, to take part in the design of their fate as a nation, and in the government’s obligation to consult the citizens about government actions...In economic terms, economic democracy is intended as the right that workers have to take part in the property of business. Also, economic democracy is a concept that is tied to self-management, that our organization, the FAT, vindicates as a right for workers to take part in the property of companies. So, the economic democratization is the right that workers, and also citizens, have to improve their economic situation against the concentration that is being carried out in the hands of great capitals, and the union democracy is the right that workers have to control their union organizations so that their concerns are truly represented, and so they don’t become corrupt.

Democracy in this sense is fundamentally tied to the concept of “self-management” which allows people to maintain control over their various social and political spaces. It is also profoundly related to the notion that it is only through involvement, engagement, and participation that people can prevent their existences from being coopted in the interests of the elite. Needless to say, this understanding of democracy is powerfully reminiscent of that which the Zapatistas offer and embody. Antonio from the FAT responded to this in a manner which was powerfully evocative of the Zapatista notion of “governing by obeying” when he asserted:

it's my opinion that when we talk about democracy we are talking about workers making their own decisions and we have to understand that the unions are not the leaders but the workers and they are entitled to have their own opinions and make their own decisions. In this understanding that the unions are not the leaders but the workers, it gives the leaders the role of executors of the decision, the workers' say, and that is the main difference between independent unionism and official unionism, the role of the leaders.

It is of course essential to note that these conceptions of democracy within the independent union movement are not solely a product of the Zapatista movement, that these notions have in fact been in existence within the independent labour movement for some time. What is of even greater interest, however, is that fact that such parallel conceptions of democracy between the Zapatista movement and the independent labour movement represent the basis upon which linkages may be formed and "moments of coincidence" may be realized.

Democracy is more than simply a manifestation of "popular will" and as such it necessitates certain other fundamental freedoms. As Benedicto from the ORT related to me:

democracy is all about free choice, about discussion and about deciding people's destiny by themselves. So it has a lot to do with information. People cannot freely decide or choose something if they do not have all the information surrounding it so the first thing that should be done is to democratize the information. For the workers, democracy would mean that the unions are the workers, that they are the ones who should make the decisions, who should elect their representatives. So for workers that's what democracy means that they are the ones that are the unions and therefore they should make their own decisions so it's all about people having the right to decide by themselves their own destinies and to have the ability to make their own decisions and their own choices.

The assertion that people must have the ability to make free and informed choices is an essential one within the discourse surrounding the notion of democracy. Democracy in this sense is far from a procedural concept but rather has to do with who has the access and the

capacity to claim agency over their own lives.

During the conversations I had with members of the independent union movement regarding the concept of democracy, the fact that Vicente Fox, the presidential candidate from the right-wing National Action Party, had just recently ended the 71 year reign of the Institutional Revolutionary Party was a frequent topic of discussion. While many mainstream North American analysts heralded the victory of Fox over the PRI as a sign that Mexico had finally become truly “democratic”, this event was read very differently within the context of democracy by some of my research partners. Samuel from the SME reflected eloquently upon this point as he explained to me that:

there hasn't been a democratic life in our country, at least not for the last 71 years or so. The last 70 years of politics have meant only one political party in power and controlling most of the processes in the country, from elections in the unions to elections in the whole country or just in the state or for small charges, one single party has controlled everything for many years and the control of only one party, it has made life unequal for everyone, the control is everywhere and it doesn't allow democracy to be practised. Little by little, spaces have been opened by workers in independent unions and by democratic parties. And now a political party from the right wing has won the presidency, but that doesn't mean that there's democracy. They won because they had more resources, more money that allowed them to influence the people and to influence society...and that same thing happens inside the unions...they think it might buy the conscience of the worker so that the worker will vote for the corrupted leader even though the worker knows the leader is corrupted, he would rather vote for him than for someone who has nothing to offer him but speeches and promises, so democracy is still really far away for most of the people. Democracy is not a reality in Mexico...now the workers at the SME and other independent unions are trying to get democracy to fill the voids that exist right now in the political system, they are trying to get democracy into the open processes, not only for the workers but for the whole country and the whole people. Something that is good to remember, when you say workers you are talking about tonnes of people: working children, working women, old people that are retired, people that work inside the country or on the shores, in the sea, wherever, when we talk about workers we are talking about a tremendous number of people so that shows how strong they

are and how they will be able at some point to change this, to change all these problems.

Thus, democracy cannot simply be equated with the defeat of the 71 year old PRI regime nor even with electoral politics in general. Democracy is directly correlated here with people's ability to meaningfully affect the course of their own lives and to participate in the making of decisions that impact upon their lives. Democracy is therefore not simply a means of balancing the power of the elite but of fundamentally reconfiguring the manner in which society is structured and social reality is experienced. Cecilia from the FAT articulated this point forcefully in our conversation as she related her own vision of democracy:

it has to do with leading actors, the people who generate the money and the income, being able to make their own decisions in the country and that means workers, campesinos, students, women, you name it. These lead actors, they are the ones who generate the wealth and the money so they should be able to make the decisions and they should be free to organize and to group themselves however they want to do it and that also means that they should be able to have projects and ideas to make their own lives better and be allowed to realize them...they have to be able to self-govern and self-organize. Democracy also has to do with the freedom of association and the respect for diversity, the respect of whatever you believe or whatever religion you practice, your race, your sex, and well, at the end, these are the same principles that the cooperative movement is trying to promote.

Once again, it is clear that the conception of "democracy" here has little to do with the sphere of electoral politics and is rather conceptualized as a concept which resides in the realm of the immediate social and political realities of people. Democracy in this sense, as in that of the Zapatistas, is very much "people's power", the ability for individuals to envision and articulate meaningful ways in which to live their own lives without being constrained by the agendas of those who seek only to exploit and marginalize them.

***“Supposedly We’re All Citizens, We’re All Equal, but the Thing is We’re Not Equal”:
Envisioning Citizenship in Mexico***

As has been noted previously, the Zapatista Movement has consistently characterized itself as one which is fundamentally and undeniably rooted in the Mexican nation. From the very outset of their uprising, the EZLN made explicit and forceful claims to not only being indigenous but to being Mexican as well. Thus, even though they declared war upon branches of the government and the Mexican army, the Zapatistas nevertheless continued to self-identify as members of the Mexican nation, albeit a nation which has failed to live up to the dream of what it could have been. Implicit in the rhetoric employed by the Zapatistas in laying claim to their “Mexicanness” is the notion of what it means to occupy this subject position with respect to the nation. What are the obligations of an individual to his or her nation? What are the obligations of the nation-state to its inhabitants? These are questions which lie at the root of the Zapatista challenge as the movement seeks to forcefully remind Mexicans of the fact that the government of the Mexican state has abandoned them all and that a certain conception of reciprocal responsibility and obligation, a certain conception of “citizenship”, must be recovered in order for the current order of things to be set right. In this section, I reflect upon the considerations of my research partners in the independent labour movement as they spoke about the meaning and value of the concept of “citizenship”.

Once again, I choose to begin this discussion by relating the words of Alfredo from UNAM. Much like his description of democracy, Alfredo’s notion of citizenship is somewhat more formal than that of my other research partners, but I find it to be a useful starting point

in order to establish a broad frame of reference for what follows. In this regard, Alfredo explained citizenship in the following manner:

in the field of citizenship, we have centrally the right to be elected and to choose representatives and to dismiss them if they do not perform adequately, in addition, to demand respect for civil rights, such as the right of protest, of expression of ideas and association, the right to have religious or political beliefs without suffering discrimination or reprisals.

In this view, citizenship refers not only to procedural rights such as voting, but also to the concept of being able to function as an integral, distinct, and critical member of society without fear of censorship or reprisals. In other words, the role of the citizen is not one which should be limited to certain predetermined functions but rather which should embrace the notion that it is the citizens themselves who give life and purpose to the social worlds which they inhabit.

In the words of Pedro from the FAT, citizenship needs to be understood as a “republican concept” sharing an inherently complex relationship with the state:

that is to say, a civil society, no? A nonofficial society. I mean, all of the individuals that are not incorporated - let's say - into the state, or instruments of the state, right? Only they act as members of a national community, and the majority of the population organizes itself in nongovernmental organizations, primarily, or social organizations or civil organizations for the defense of their concerns as citizens, right? The citizen characteristic is a characteristic that is granted by the constitution, right? It is one's own right that is acquired naturally by being born in the country. And by being born in the country, one has constitutional rights...the state should be representative of the citizens' concerns, right? But the state tends to become an autonomous entity with its own interests, right? Facing the citizens. So we work as the FAT in the citizens' sector, in the citizen power.

In a country such as Mexico, the role of the citizen thus comes to be conceived of as one which is almost antagonistic to the state itself. When the interests of the ruling elite become

divorced from those they profess to represent and the apparatuses of the state become the tools of agendas which no longer reflect the interests of large sectors of the population, the notion of what it means to be a “citizen” thus becomes conceived of very differently . In this sense, the “citizen” themselves become a site not of defense for the status quo or the social reality as it exists within the boundaries of a particular nation-state, but rather a potential site for the recovery or reformulation of what the social should be but is not. This view is very evocative of the Zapatista emphasis upon the role of the Mexican people in rearticulating their social worlds in a manner which complies not with the demands of a distant and unconcerned elite but rather with the promises of their own traditions and the urgency of their own needs.

Significantly, the notion of citizenship was not one that was universally heralded by each of my research partners. Carlos from the CNTE problematized the notion of citizenship and alluded to its inherently illusory nature through his counterposition of the ideal of “citizenship” with the tremendous disparities inherent in daily life:

citizenship refers to the basic rights, social and political rights that someone has when they live in a certain country. In terms of what it means for unionism or workers, it's kind of a trick, it's a really tricky situation because supposedly we're all citizens, we're all equal, but the thing is we're not equal. For example, compare me to the president, the present president Zedillo or the future president Fox, if I want to promote my opinion or my idea, I don't have as many resources or access to the modes of communication that the president would, all I really have is my vote and I use that every three to six years, however, the president has all day, everyday, the access to money, the media, and the labour unions. Citizenship really refers to the individual and we have found that our power does not really lie in the individual but it lies in organizing, we act as a group of people. For example, like our companions, our brothers, in Chiapas.

From this perspective, citizenship is not a potential site of emancipation but rather a deceptive

position that belies the profound disparities in power, access, and resources that characterize lived reality on a day-to-day basis. As Carlos instead asserts, the only true capacity for change lies in organization, much as the Zapatistas have engaged in. Antonio from the FAT echoed these sentiments as he reflected upon the social reality which characterizes Mexico today by stating “if we check the different parts of society we can find poor innocents in jail, poor meaning that they don’t have money, and at the same time rich criminals that are out there enjoying their freedom and everything they have stolen from the people”. Thus, there are no guarantees, no safeguards to being a “citizen”, because this conception of a certain relationship everyone shares toward each other as well as to the government and the state is clearly merely a fantasy when contrasted with the lived reality of most Mexicans. It is not that the notion of “citizenship” is a negative one, but rather that this notion has no currency in reality that poses the problem.

For some of my research partners, the very notion of citizenship appeared to be enmeshed in a discourse that resulted in the profound subversion of the concept to the interests of a transnational neoliberal agenda. Benedicto from the ORT expanded further upon the problem with the conception of “citizenship” by stating:

well when we talk about citizenship before, a few years ago, about 20 years ago, no one was talking about citizenship, people were talking about classes, about socioeconomic classes. Now with neoliberal politics, the concept of citizenship came into our language or our vocabulary. But I think that it’s not a good concept because it’s not general, there are not only citizens, there are workers, there are farmers, there are campesinos, there are businessmen, rich businessmen, not so rich businessmen, so yes, we are all citizens but we are not all the same, we are not equal. That’s why I think it’s better to talk about classes. In political terms, the PRD which is supposed to be a left-wing party is talking about citizenship but we people who participate in

the PRD organization, we believe it would be better to talk about classes, because citizenship is not a truthful concept because the world we live in is not of equal citizens but of different classes of people.

In this sense, the concept of citizenship ceases to be one upon which to articulate a common bond to the nation or to base a struggle for greater opportunities or resources, instead it is a fiction which is seen as being somehow bound to the neoliberal project and thus complicit in the subordination of entire sectors of the population.

It should be noted, however, that citizenship is by no means universally regarded as a negative concept in the eyes of all the labour activists with whom I spoke. While there were indeed aspects of it which came under intense scrutiny for their perceived role in suppressing valid points of conflict and inequality, it is also a concept which is seen as fundamentally tied to what many Mexicans have been denied: political agency and control over their own lives.

In the words of Samuel from the SME:

well citizenship and democracy, they are related. When Porfirio Diaz was the president, well, more like a dictator, somebody asked him if he believed that the people, the Mexican people, were prepared for democracy and he answered "no". It has been a tradition to see the Mexican people as under-aged, as not ready for democracy, as not ready for the rights and the responsibilities that being a citizen means. So that has been the way that government treats people, as if they were children. Now the people, the Mexican people have grown since then, especially since 1968 when there was this huge student and social movement, not only here but in many parts of the world. Actually, I think that Mexico could be seen both before and after '68 because after the student movement the citizens grew, they began to fight for democracy and for their rights more intensely than before. The '68 movement made an explosion, sort of an emphatic explosion that came from the DF towards the rest of the country and even though it was a movement that had its ups and downs, at some points it was strong and at some points it was weak, and it kind of fluctuated between the two, in 1988 when Cardenas fought for the presidency the movement continued. The people, especially middle classes and lower classes started to fight for democracy again and Cardenas won the presidency but there was this electoral fraud

that served the government in order to calm down the people so, yeah, it's a fact that Cardenas won but the government was just trying to control people and that's why they didn't respect their decision. There has been since then a development in the political consciousness of the people that has allowed them to assume their responsibilities as a citizen and with that responsibility they are also capable of practising and demanding their rights, the right for education, the right for work, the right for a minimum wage or income, so this is a process, getting to be a mature citizen, not in age, but psychologically mature, it's a process, it's a difficult process.

As reflected in the words of Samuel, citizenship is a process by which people claim certain rights and responsibilities. As opposed to being merely a way in which to alienate us from our other roles, it is a means by which people may both lay claim to a responsibility for their own engagement of the state and other actors as well as to be able to make claims against a state that is no longer fulfilling its own obligations to its citizens. It is thus a certain embodiment of a reciprocal obligation between the state and the citizens who comprise it. Cecilia from the FAT engaged much the same conceptualization of citizenship as she remarked:

in the concept of citizenship there is not really a conscious visualization of the social problems, it's like there's no identity between the concept and what really happens, so it's not being conceived as a concept or as something that you should take on your own, that you should appropriate. It's something out there, and people are not really getting it for themselves. Citizenship is not about the working class, there's no unity between the working class and the concept of citizenship, I think that it should be really important, that it should be more important than it is now and that in an unconscious way, the concept of citizenship has promoted or caused a change in the country so in a few years, it should be much more important than it is now, but right now it's not something that we have, that we consciously know. The system itself has promoted individualism and competition between people so that it's stopping them from uniting with each other and that is stopping the citizenship from actually happening.

What is interesting is that despite the differences in terms of each person's respective view of the concept of citizenship, it is widely affirmed as a concept which is not fully present.

While some take a somewhat darker view of it as a potentially fragmenting and alienating concept, others see it is a unifying force which seeks to reaffirm the right of people within a certain social and political space to both take responsibility for that space and to assert their rights as equal participants in a common project. However, regardless of the sense in which it is understood, it not seen as fully present because the system itself is so deeply corrupted by inequality that “average” Mexicans are denied the most basic rights of participation and political and social responsibility.

“Human Rights Refer to the Right to Exist. Period.”: Envisioning Human Rights in Mexico

Without a doubt, one of the most compelling arguments marshalled by the Zapatistas in defense of their armed uprising was that they had absolutely no choice, that to die fighting for life was better than living waiting to die of curable illness. At its most fundamental level, the Zapatista argument is one which finds itself rooted in the discourse of human rights, those rights which concern themselves with the very fact of existence. When the Zapatistas asserted in their *First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* that Mexico’s transnational elites did not care that they “have nothing, absolutely nothing”, the Zapatistas were appealing to Mexicans and international onlookers alike to appreciate the fact that their rebellion was entrenched in the fundamental and undeniable fact of their severe deprivation of the basic necessities of life. Significantly, however, the Zapatistas were not appealing for aid, rather, they spoke of their struggle for “work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace”. These demands clearly fall within the familiar internationalized

discourse of human rights and just as the Zapatistas sought to force those who would witness their struggle to consider the notions of “democracy” and “citizenship”, so too did they seek to generate attention and discussion surrounding the nature of these demands as well. In this section, then, I will examine exactly what the concept of “human rights” means to my research partners as well as how they see independent unionism in Mexico engaging with such issues.

In attempting to explain the notion of “human rights” to me, Alfredo from UNAM stated that “human rights have to be seen essentially as the basic rights that each person enjoys: the inviolability of your home, the respect for your person and your property, freedom of movement and the freedom to work in whichever occupation you choose”. Within this broad framework of rights, it is clear that in this case, human rights refer to the essence of what each person should be able to take for granted within the society in which they live. In the Mexican context, these rights take on particular significance as all of these have been violated by the state at one point or another and to varying degrees. Significantly, it should be noted that such assertions of “human rights” often reflect ideals and abstractions rather than concrete formulations for specific laws and legal safeguards and that by examining these idealistic assertions, much can be gleaned both with regard to the current state of affairs as well as the embodied hopes for any future social worlds.

The notion of human rights presented an interesting conundrum for my research partners within the independent labour movement. In the words of Alejandro from the FAT, human rights include “the right to education, health, food, work, salary, women’s rights, general respect for women and children...against exploitation”. Pedro from the FAT

articulated a very similar range of rights when asked about this concept as well as some of the problems associated with them as he stated:

human rights, in an abstract view, are contemplated in laws, in principles, in documents, right? But, they aren't, in reality. Human rights are limited, very limited, and even more in a country where there is a lack of a democratic way of living. Today we have a new opportunity in order to affirm human rights, human rights that are very extensive. Children's right to education, women's rights to equal treatment, workers' rights not to be exploited, the people's right not to live in pollution, right? Rural labourers' right for natural resources not to be looted, the rights of indigenous peoples to develop themselves according to their customs, to their traditions. The right not to be beaten by police, the rights of prisoners not to be abused when they are in custody...they are human rights that have to be expressed in justice, no? Because human rights are something abstract and justice is something more concrete. So, we are implicated in the defense of human rights because it is an essential social component for us.

Thus, the notion presented here of what it means to have "human rights" is at once profoundly extensive and simultaneously unrealized. In Pedro's words, human rights embody the spirit of the law whereas justice is the manifestation of such ideals. Therefore, human rights themselves represent the abstraction of what is envisioned or desired for a social world that is not yet manifest. In much the same way as the Zapatistas' demands are a call to discussion and critical thought regarding the current state of the Mexican nation, so too is this reflection upon the meaning of human rights a call to envision superior alternatives to the status quo, alternatives which must ultimately be made real through the machinery of social justice.

The notion that human rights represent an abstraction or an ideal as opposed to the existent legal and political norms was clearly conveyed during my conversation with Carlos from the CNTE. When asked about the concept of "human rights", Carlos responded by

saying:

human rights refers to the right to exist. Period. There was a declaration of human rights during the French Revolution but up until 10 years ago, there really wasn't a whole lot of talk about human rights until there was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and that was 10 years ago...[also] referring to the Mexican Constitution, the third aspect of it is the right to free education from start to finish, wherever you finish and it also includes health, work, and a decent salary, but it's never really been fulfilled, it's never been honoured and so really the political fight the people are fighting now is really just that people respect what the constitution already says.

Once again, the perception that human rights, while undoubtedly important, do not really have any direct bearing upon the manner in which people experience their lives within the Mexican nation is reflected here. When even the rights enshrined in the constitution are disregarded by those in power, appeals to the UN Declaration of Human Rights seem somehow hopelessly naive by comparison.

For other individuals involved in the independent union movement in Mexico, "human rights" take on a much more labour-related meaning, much as the understandings of citizenship and democracy do. Antonio from the FAT contextualized his understanding of the notion of "human rights" by explaining it within the sphere of labour relations:

it is interesting to think that when workers are repressed or they are not allowed to express their preferences or when they are not allowed to express what they need or their demands, that it is not taken as a violation of human rights and we have been fighting so that it gets recognized as a violation of those rights because those are my elemental rights and I have the need to express what I want and I am supposed to be able to choose between unions. When [workers] have been in the need to alert the human rights commission that workers' rights have been violated, their human rights have been violated, those commissions won't even consider it as a valid complaint because they don't think that a violation of workers' rights are human rights...so whenever that happens, we demand that our labour laws and our penalties in our laws, they have to be observed, and the behaviour of every individual has to observe those

laws, it doesn't matter if they're workers or not and that's one of the main struggles. And so if people have to obey certain laws and certain behaviours, for the authorities they should observe them even more, they should be even more careful in observing those laws, but they don't, laws are permanently violated and not observed.

Apart from the obvious criticism regarding the lack of respect for the rights of workers in Mexico, this comment by Antonio also underscores the perception that there is a gross disjuncture between the abstracted spirit or ideal of the law, of the constitution, of human rights and its implementation at the level of everyday experience. While this can undoubtedly be said about a multitude of contexts around the world, what is significant here is that this discourse is only part of a larger narrative of abandonment, marginalization, and exploitation that I have previously examined with respect to the indigenous communities of southern Mexico but which is also powerfully manifested in the words of these members of the urban independent labour movement.

The conception of "human rights" as a category which is ideally emancipatory but pragmatically profoundly constrained and illusory is a theme which emerged time and again during the course of my conversations with my research partners. As Benedicto from the ORT articulated with respect to my question regarding the meaning of the concept of "human rights":

the concept of human rights has lately spread around the world. Now they talk about health and freedom and the right of life and all those kinds of human rights. In Mexico the demand for human rights has extended, there has been the creation of the ombudsman in Mexico to protect the human rights but interestingly enough, the right to work is not a human right. The right to having a decent or minimum salary, a wage, the right to have a job, a decent one, all the rights related to work are not considered human rights and that's one of the main struggles of the independent unions, the right to work is considered a human right. For example, with the Free Trade Agreement

between Canada, the States, and Mexico, the main subject there was how merchandise was to be traded between the three countries, they never talked about the rights the migrant workers should have in the States or elsewhere. So therefore, I consider that the human rights are incomplete as long as they don't consider the right to work a human right and I think that before we were complaining that we were exploited, but now we don't even have that, we don't even have the right to have a job and be exploited.

Again, the concept of "human rights" here is understood within the larger context of a general failure to acknowledge the rights of people within an increasingly globalized, neoliberal socio-political reality. It is not that human rights in and of themselves are somehow insufficient or lacking, but rather that the discourse of "human rights" exists within a climate of disregard for even the most rudimentary of rights. When even the rights which are supposedly enshrined at the highest levels of law are abused on a consistent basis, what currency does an internationalized and ambiguous discourse concerning "universal human rights" carry?

Rather than embodying revolutionary or emancipatory potentials, within the context of my conversations with my research partners, more often than not the notion of "human rights" seemed to exemplify the failure of the state to concern itself with the most basic needs of its citizens. As Cecilia from the FAT related to me:

human rights have been constantly and repeatedly violated. There are major economic differences between people, there's no access to education, women's rights are constantly violated, there's no equity, work conditions are not as good as they should be so most of the people in Mexico are barely living. So I think that human rights are not an important factor for the system, it's not something they really care about.

In addition to being a diagnostic tool for the corruption and abuse of power, however, the concept of human rights also represented for some of my research partners the opportunity to make new kinds of demands against the state and the ruling elite. In the words of Samuel

from the SME:

the concept of human rights has only recently been discussed, especially between the non-governmental organizations, and those organizations have been trying to educate and to make a conscience in people against torture and against brutality in the cops or political murders or political imprisonments and that has been going on since the '70s. It was a natural reaction to all the things that were happening in Chile and in all the South American military systems. But in Mexico the government was smart enough, in the '70s and even now, the government was smart enough not to need any armed police or any military police to control the people. In the late '80s the government created the CNDH which is the National Council for Human Rights and that was created during the Salinas government. And by doing that, the government took the concept of human rights and used it for their own sake, they took it away from the people and told them that they were not inventing it but they were trying to guarantee their human rights like it was their idea. Now the CNDH cannot act in work issues or electoral issues, so they are really restricted. They can write recommendations to government or to government offices or to particular people regarding torture, regarding physical abuse or even mental abuse but they cannot issue recommendations regarding work, specific work conditions or the elections, so they are really controlled by the government...the CNDH is not an independent organ or anything, it served the government so that they can violate human rights and have someone to justify it, so it's completely controlled by the government. Now there's a need to develop a human rights culture in Mexico for the sake of women, kids, old people, migrants, the religious minorities all over the country, there's a need to protect them and to protect their rights...so what we have, the CNDH, is not enough, we need to develop this culture in the immediate future, otherwise we won't be able to grow as a people and we won't be able to grow as citizens and the process of democracy will be stopped or at least it will be slowed down. Now citizenship and human rights are very related because human rights are not only my own rights, it talks about the rights of everyone, my rights, your rights, everyone's rights, so Marcos in Chiapas said the Zapatistas want a world for everyone, a world where everyone fits, where not only one person or one group has all the power or the control over the rest of them. So that's one of our main chores, it's one of our main assignments as people and as individuals too, the commitment to the human rights and the understanding that it's not only about my rights but everyone's rights, that I have to fight for someone else's rights in order to have some ally when I need someone to fight for me.

Thus, the generation of a new "culture" of human rights is seen by Samuel as an important step in the struggle to achieve more developed notions of citizenship and of democracy as

well. It also plays into the idea of a broad-based struggle against oppression and exploitation as well in that human rights necessitates not only the awareness of one's own needs, but the realization that such needs exist only alongside and in relation to the needs of others. Therefore, while the government has attempted to coopt the discourse of human rights through the creation of the CNDH as a means of legitimating their control and marginalization of large sectors of the population, the notion of human rights nevertheless still presents a unique formulation for the purpose of both articulating demands against the state as well as providing the basis for an inclusive movement which seeks to convey a broad range of demands rather than remaining limited to a narrowly-defined agenda.

“Because There is Progress, but Not for Everyone”: Envisioning Social Justice in Mexico

What does it mean to live in a society which may be considered “just”? This is a question which has occupied a position of profound importance for social and political theorists and philosophers over the years, yet it is also one which, perhaps obviously, continues to elude an answer. Attempts to define a “common good” or to maximize individual liberties in accordance with the belief that it is only through unfettered freedom that humanity will prosper have ultimately only generated more questions regarding the meaning of “social justice” than they have answered. As should be apparent by now, the Zapatista movement finds itself deeply embroiled in this discussion regarding the meaning of “social justice” and it has also provided several novel positions with regard to this ongoing debate. In order to understand the struggle of the Zapatistas, one must first understand the conditions which have given rise to their movement, conditions which are ultimately cast as fundamentally unjust and

therefore which entail a certain conception of what it would mean to live in a society free of such dehumanizing circumstances. For my research partners in the independent labour movement, social justice is a concept which occupies a place of primary concern for them as well. In this section, I will focus upon the visions of “social justice” which were related to me in the context of my conversations with my research partners. Just as with the concepts of “democracy”, “citizenship”, and “human rights”, it is my assertion that the conceptualization of “social justice” that will be related here functions as a fundamental nodal point for the moment of coincidence between the Zapatista movement and the independent labour movement in Mexico.

In a society characterized by gross disparities in wealth and opportunity, such as those which exist in Mexico, a concept such as “social justice” takes on very different and profoundly significant meanings. In many ways, this concept embodies the absolute basic standards to which a society should be expected to conform and thus is a tremendously important diagnostic tool when contemplating what a society lacks. In the words of Alfredo from UNAM, “social justice has to be seen as the right of every individual to use basic public goods: food, education, health, social security and housing”. This basic sentiment was also echoed by Alejandro from the FAT who stated that “in the first instance, it is the distribution of wealth...an equitable distribution for labour and for capital. A more equal distribution of services, health, social security, education, food”. Thus, from these comments, it should be apparent that “social justice” embodies the basic needs of people, needs which are expected to be not merely accommodated but of primary concern to the state. This is a point of

profound importance, because it is against such “basic” expectations as embodied by the concept of “social justice” that people measure their quality of life and their level of accord with the status quo. Whether the needs conveyed through such a concept are being met adequately or not is a focal point for determining how people not only view a given socio-economic system, but how willing they are to support or oppose it. In the case of indigenous peasants in Chiapas, “social justice” became a concept to rally around as the government and the local elites completely abandoned even the pretense of concern for the well-being of these communities. In the case of the urban labour movement, with the election to power of a government which is regarded as being even more right-wing and neo-liberal than its predecessor, “social justice” thus takes on an even more significant role as the independent unions and their members begin to see even their most basic rights stripped away from them in the service of interests that are not their own.

Significantly, just as the concepts of “democracy” and “citizenship” are seen as operating differentially depending upon an individual’s standing in society, “social justice” is perceived in much the same manner as a commodity which is more readily available to some than others. In the words of Pedro from the FAT:

well, [social justice] is also a concept that has to do with the aforementioned, with the concept of citizenship, right? Social justice is the opportunity to improve the living conditions, especially in the labour sectors, particularly of the workers, of the rural labourers and even more specific, of indigenous groups. In Mexico, there exists a separate social justice. There are sectors that have the benefit of social justice and there are sectors of the middle class and lower that do not have the benefit of social justice, particularly in matters such as the economy, and like the capacity to organize themselves in an independent manner, right?...There is a very strong inequality in terms of living conditions of the middle class and of the strata with the highest

income, compared to the extensive national population that has inferior living conditions. This is very evident. It is a country with many contrasts compared to what happens in more developed countries where it is more equal. In Mexico there are many contrasts. There are people who live very well, there are people who live well, and the majority of the population lives very poorly, no? They live poorly and very poorly. Within those, the sector of indigenous rural labourers is the one that lives the worst. So, there is social injustice, and this is one demand that we have in this organization, in the FAT. The demand for social justice in favour of the workers and in favour of the sectors that are being left behind from the benefits of progress, no? Because there is progress, but not for everyone. So, these inequalities create many problems, because it isn't only for moral and ethical reasons, which are also important. It is also for reasons of cohabitation and of governability.

Thus, from this comment "social justice" can be seen as not only a concept which exists differentially depending upon one's social position, but also as something which directly influences issues of "cohabitation and governability". If social justice does not exist for certain sectors of the population, what reason do these people have to continue to support the existing socio-economic and political system? One possible answer to this question can be found simply by looking south to Chiapas and at the Zapatista communities which have declared themselves "autonomous municipalities" within the Mexican nation. Social justice can thus be seen as a marker not only for social dis-ease among disenfranchised groups but also as the embodiment of the standards according to which people believe they should be allowed to live as members of a given society.

The concept of "social justice" is also one which carries with it a general conceptualization of what it means to live in a "just society". Apart from specific issues which are undeniably important, "social justice" also conveys the generalized essence of what a "just society" could be envisioned as. In my conversation with Carlos from the CNTE, he related

to me the following perspective on the issue of “social justice”:

the idea of social justice means that everyone should have what they deserve and what they need, however, the global system as well as the governmental system support the idea that workers should be well-fed and perhaps have enough money to have nice clothes and maybe a car one day, but that the rich keep getting richer because that's just the way it's always been and that's the way the world is. A society is not just or fair when the grand masses of people are poor and there are only a few rich people. For example, this is the case in the United States, Argentina, Mexico, Canada, although this large majority of people aren't dying of hunger, it's still not a fair situation or a just society.

The concept of “social justice” here is thus linked not to a particular demand but rather to the general notion of a fundamental imbalance in the socio-economic system which promotes a profoundly skewed distribution of wealth and encourages the “grand masses” to be content with basic necessities while the rich continue to accumulate. Furthermore, this comment seems to speak to the issue of social integrity and the continued support for a system, both national and global, which perpetuates the impoverishment of vast sectors of humanity. If a system only maintains its integrity so long as those who comprise it believe in it, then it should be clear that such sentiments belie a fundamental loss of faith in the willingness and capacity for the current socio-economic and political regime in Mexico to meet its obligations to its citizens.

The sentiment that Mexico's ruling elite have abandoned the Mexican people is one which is powerfully evoked in the comments related to me surrounding the notion of “social justice”. Just as democracy, citizenship, and human rights seemed to be more indicators of what was absent in society, so too is social justice an indicator of absence and of failure within the context of the Mexican nation. In the words of Benedicto from the ORT:

well the concept of social justice, it's an ambiguous concept. For the workers, the concept of social justice would mean to have the right to a job, to have the right to a decent income, to have a decent place to live, to have education, to have health, and with the past 18 years of neoliberal politics those rights are precisely the ones that have suffered the most. We're about to enter into the fourth neoliberal government and the ones that suffered the most are the workers, especially in these rights or in these demands so I don't think there's social justice at all.

Furthermore, while "social justice" is clearly an indicator of deprivation and of absence within the social context, it also entails the possibility for the realization of certain consequences for the state if attempts are not made to rectify these fundamental inequalities. As Samuel from the SME related to me during our conversation:

there's no social justice in Mexico. There is a profound, a deep social injustice in our country. In the last 18 years, the last 3 presidential periods, this social injustice has only deepened...the income in Mexico, the minimum salary a Mexican worker has, it's as low as the salaries in Korea or those really poor Asian nations. Most countries are above us in that matter. The rural environment has been devastated by the government and has translated into an enormous amount of migrants going to the United States and Canada...the governments from the PRI have devastated the country in many ways. The peso has been devalued several times, there are sexennial prices every time the president changes we have an economic crisis, the income of the workers has lost its power, it's not growing as it should. The country is now poorer than ever, the middle classes are no more, there are only poor and rich people so, yes, I think that the country is poorer every time I look...people are demanding change, and they want a new economic system, a new economic politics that allows the income to grow, that allows the people to invest, that allows education to remain free and to grow but they need to have their safety guaranteed, they need more services and more culture and they think that the new government [of Vicente Fox and the PAN] is going to make this change, but I don't think so, I don't think it's possible...this is a really important moment for the country, it's a moment that will define many things. Right now the government is trapped in between the international organizations such as the IMF and the people. If the government doesn't realize that they need and that their obligation is to the people and that they need to ignore the IMF for a bit, if the system doesn't change I'm afraid that the social peace might be broken, I think that there might be a generalized violence in the whole country. If the indigenous rights, if the workers' rights are not respected, if the government keeps on with the privatization of the electrical industry and of education, there might be a civil war. I don't wish for this

but I think if people realize that the only way to defend themselves and their lives is by going to war against the government, they will do it.

Cecilia from the FAT reinforced this sentiment when she stated to me that “as long as the capitalist and neoliberal system exists, there will be aggression and domination against some classes, so long as this system exists there won’t be quality in life, there won’t be peace, we will be in constant struggle to get what we need”. In light of these responses, rather than attempting to extract a specific list of demands that could be said to constitute “social justice” in Mexico, I believe it is vital to appreciate that these sentiments are expressions of absence, inequality, and instability. While it may seem extreme to postulate that such imbalances could result in civil war, it should also be noted that no one predicted the Zapatista uprising before it occurred either. What needs to be taken from this discussion is the understanding that there exist fundamental inequalities within the social, economic, and political realities for Mexicans, inequalities that have resulted in the perception that the current regime is either incapable or unwilling to acknowledge the most basic needs of its citizens. Furthermore, out of this awareness emerges not only a dissatisfaction with the status quo, but an unwillingness on the part of large sectors of the population to support it. It is within this new field of discursivity, to cite Mouffe and Laclau, that the potential emerges for a challenge to be marshalled against the existing regime from multiple positions and in accordance with multiple agendas while simultaneously asserting a common “no” to a system which no longer serves the needs or interests of those it purports to represent.

“We Have Lived in a Political System That Lacks Democracy and Rights”: The Significance of “Democracy”, “Citizenship”, “Human Rights”, and “Social Justice” in Mexico

While it is vital to appreciate how the concepts of “democracy”, “citizenship”, “human rights”, and “social justice” are perceived by the labour activists with whom I spoke in Mexico City in order to understand the “moment of coincidence” between independent unionism and the Zapatista movement, it is equally vital to understand what kind of significance these concepts possess. If, as has been argued, the real importance of the Zapatista movement is its impact upon the way in which people perceive their lifeworlds, in order to attempt to appreciate the significance of this movement for independent unionism one must first understand the worldviews which allow people to find meaning in the struggle and messages of the Zapatistas.

As I have argued in my examination of each of the concepts of “democracy”, “citizenship”, “human rights”, and “social justice”, the importance of these concepts should be understood not merely in terms of what they are conceptualized as, but how they are framed with respect to the absences and antagonisms they often serve as markers for. In the words of Pedro from the FAT, the four concepts we discussed are significant for independent unionism and for Mexicans in general for a number of reasons:

there is a spectrum, independent unionism is a more honest unionism, I mean, more legitimate, right? That is fighting for the authentic rights of the workers and for social justice, right? This is in very general terms. Now, in particular, there are organizations that are, let’s say, more legitimate, or more honest, right? Because there exists an unfortunate tradition of union corruption in Mexico. The union leaders are corrupted and they negotiate behind the workers’ backs, right? For the personal benefits of the union leader, no? And so, the rest of the workers don’t enjoy the benefits of the

negotiations, only the union leader and the group that is implicated with him. So, with independent unionism, there is a tradition of fighting for internal democracy so that the authentic rights of the workers are the ones that the leaders represent...[these concepts of democracy, citizenship, human rights, and social justice are important for Mexicans] because we have lived in a political system that lacks democracy and rights, and more and more, citizens are more mature, and this becomes increasingly interesting.

Thus, these concepts are not only important because they embody certain significant principles or values, but also because they are being articulated within the context of a system which is characterized by profound inequalities and antagonisms. It is precisely because of the fact that rights are denied to people, that democracy exists in appearance only, that the state is complicit in the exploitation of millions of its own citizens that these concepts are found to be meaningful.

The notion of antagonism is particularly useful in understanding the significance of the concepts of “democracy”, “citizenship”, “human rights”, and “social justice” in Mexico. As Mouffe and Laclau argue, antagonism exists when one is prevented from fully being what they are by someone or something else. In the case of Mexico, large sectors of the population find themselves prevented from fully being citizens or participants in a democratic project due to entrenched systems of privilege and power. It is in this circumstance that the four concepts which I have examined take on the efficacy that they do. In the words of Carlos from the CNTE:

the idea in labour unions is that we have democratization in our own process but that it not just stay within the union but that whole idea, that whole style of doing things be carried out into society at large. And then with citizenship, there's kind of a clash or a contradiction because the idea with unionism is that we work together as a group, in a collective way, and if we think of democracy in terms of a single vote, that

tends to reduce our power because it separates us into individuals, however, if we get together and we try to organize, we realize that we have a lot of things in common and therein lies our power. For the past 12 years, workers and labour unions have been working together so that the citizen's vote, the individual's vote be respected because historically there has been sort of a trick to voting, there have been threats with regard to voting and so we do try to support the idea of the vote both inside the union as well as outside of the union. However, we do feel that just a voting system, and voting in and out of officials is insufficient to resolve our problems in this country...Traditionally, labour unions have fought for social justice, for better salaries, for better working conditions because they have found that owners and governments have promoted or provoked marginalization. And historically it has been unions who have worked against this...historically, we are a pretty democratic society in general, we appreciate the idea of collective decision making. That's the idea, however, it's not perfect, for example in indigenous movements, in campesino movements, the labour movement, it's defective, but there's the intention, there's always the intention there of a collective decision-making process. In terms of citizenship, this is kind of a novel idea for us, it's kind of a new thing and in terms of human rights, that phrase is something new to us but we've always talked about the rights that we have according to our constitution although we haven't really used the phrase 'human rights'. Social justice is the permanent, long-lasting struggle in Mexico, this country. There have always been economic contrasts that there are more poor people than there are rich people, and there are large masses of poor and a few rich. And fortunately, we really haven't lost hope that we can achieve a better society with regard to this. For example, just to give you an idea of this contrast, in independent economic studies, it is affirmed that 80% of Mexico lives in poverty, and that 20% of Mexico is the middle class and the rich and out of that 20%, 5 million are rich.

What I believe is integral to these explanations is the understanding that the socio-economic and political system of the Mexican nation is one which is fundamentally flawed. While each of my research partners had their own sense of the meaning and importance of "democracy", "citizenship", "human rights", and "social justice" what was constant throughout their sentiments was the assertion that change is not only possible but absolutely necessary if drastic consequences are to be avoided. Thus, each of these four concepts ultimately may be seen as operating as markers of the fundamental and multiple absences and failures which

characterize lived reality for many Mexicans. It is in this context of a state which can no longer lay claim to even the veneer of legitimacy that the Zapatista movement has achieved the stature and significance it has.

“Euphoria. Joy. Hope. Green With Envy”: Initial Reactions to the Zapatista Uprising

Within this context of a socio-economic and political system which had come to be seen as essentially corrupt and grossly exploitive, I will now turn to the events which followed January 1, 1994, the first day of the Zapatista rebellion. In a climate where voices of opposition such as independent unions had been struggling for years against a system which appeared to offer less and less to most Mexicans in order to serve the interests of a few, the Zapatistas veritably exploded onto the national and international stage demanding “Democracy! Liberty! Justice!” not only for themselves, but for all Mexicans. The question, of course, was and continues to be, what kind of meaning does this movement have for Mexicans outside of the Lacandon Jungle in Chiapas? I posed the question of initial reactions to the Zapatista uprising on the parts of both independent unions as well as the Mexican people in general to my research partners and what I was told says much about the notion of the Zapatista “moment of coincidence”. The fact that the armed insurgency lasted a mere 12 days and that people are nevertheless still talking about the Zapatistas seven years after their uprising says much in itself about the significance of this movement. However, in order to truly understand the meanings generated by the EZLN and the Zapatista movement which would emerge from it, it is necessary to hear from the people who lived through these initial days of rebellion. From the perspective of labour activists who have been struggling for many

of the demands which the Zapatistas are also asserting, in what light was this movement initially seen?

The question of initial reactions to the Zapatista uprising is, like many of the issues I sought to discuss, one complicated by many different aspects. There is no single position on the part of independent unions towards the Zapatistas and this is not an attempt to define one. It should be noted, however, that there are some strong general tendencies that speak to the issue of “coincidence” which I will begin to examine in greater depth here. As for the responses themselves, I believe that these are best expressed in the words of my partners directly. In responding to this question, Alfredo from UNAM summarized the initial reaction of independent unions in the following manner:

formally, you could say that there were demonstrations of sympathy towards the struggle of the indigenous, but also there were calls in order to demand the government declare a cease-fire and for peaceful attention and negotiation on the demands that were said to be the cause of the uprising. Of course, between unions there were different expressions, some of which included public demonstrations of sympathy with the direction of the Zapatista movement.

Alejandro from the FAT reinforced these sentiments as he told me that the initial reaction on the part of many independent unions was “in the first instance, solidarity. Supporting the movement in Chiapas, demanding in the cities that the war stop, that the government stop the war. In diverse national and international forums for the protection of indigenous rights. Helping them with food and medicine”. Pedro from the FAT reflected on not only the sympathy with which the uprising was seen but also on the issue of what it allowed independent unionism to engage in as well:

in general, this event was received with a lot of sympathy, with a lot of support. Because in Mexico, the sector with the worst conditions of justice, of human rights, of the lack of citizens' rights, are traditionally indigenous sectors. Almost since the conquest, but in actuality, it continues to exist. So, for the majority of independent unions of democratic organizations, the defense of indigenous rights is a duty, it is principal, and the indigenous uprising was an opportunity to put indigenous rights on the national agenda. In Mexico, there is a very strong folklore tradition, right? The memory, our past, the Hispanic, the Aztecs, the pyramids; a person would have a sculpture in their house, something, right? But when it concerns indigenous rights, the situation is more complicated. So, this permitted the indigenous issue to be put on the agenda, to be put on the list of national priorities. Also, the platform with which the uprising presented itself was a very advanced platform. Politically very advanced, no? It wasn't, let's say, just an uprising. It was a questioning of the lack of indigenous rights and the general population. So, this process that we are witnessing today of political change, in part, we owe to the indigenous uprising of '94.

Thus, from these reactions it is clear that from the outset there was a profoundly significant level of sympathy and of appreciation for the Zapatista uprising, not necessarily because it represented a threat to the state itself, but because members of the independent labour movement understood the conditions in which the indigenous communities were living were even worse than their own and that fundamentally these two disparate movements were struggling for the same rights and for the same basic demands against a system which had long since turned its back on them all.

While there was a clear sense of sympathy and support for the Zapatista uprising among members of the independent labour movement in the early days of 1994, many of the sentiments expressed during those first days also conveyed more than a mere appreciation of the uprising and the reasons for it. According to Carlos from the CNTE, the initial reaction of many independent unionists to the Zapatistas was one of profound dimensions which he described to me as:

euphoria. Joy. Green with envy. It stimulated us, motivated us a lot. We were worried, especially at first because we knew the people would be killed and weren't so much worried about them because they were indigenous, that wasn't so much of our worry at first, we were worried about them because we knew that they were struggling and millions of Mexicans have wanted to do the very same thing before, which is to raise arms up against the system. They identified immediately with the Zapatista movement because they were asking for things, all kinds of things that many other Mexicans were asking for, for example: land, better salaries, health, democracy, justice, and the ousting of the PRI, everything that we've been working for and that we've always fought for they were fighting for too. And just to give you some dates about just how fast things happened, on January 1st of '94 was the first uprising and on January 13th of '94 there was a huge march here in Mexico City wherein 150 to 200 000 Mexicans participated in support of the Zapatista movement, and they were demanding that the Mexican army retreat and not react to or attack the Zapatistas even though the Zapatistas were the ones who, really, were the ones who declared war.

Through this comment, a clear indication can be seen of just how important the Zapatista uprising was initially seen to be by those who watched it unfold during the first days of January in 1994. Carlos further emphasised the significance of this reaction by explaining the time it took to organize this first mass demonstration of support:

organizing takes time, organizing a march takes a lot of time but on January 6th we had our very first meeting in support of the Zapatista movement [and many different groups participated] labour unions, human rights groups, religious organizations, universities, and civic or neighbourhood organizations. And the interesting part about this is nobody had any kind of relation with the Zapatistas before because their movement was a clandestine movement, however, within a period of a week, all these people had organized in support of them.

In light of this rapid mobilization on the part of independent labour and other social groups, the significance of the Zapatista movement upon the consciousness of those outside of Chiapas should clearly not be underestimated. The Zapatista cry of "Ya basta!", "enough!", found itself echoed by large sectors of the Mexican population, not in the form of

spontaneous armed uprisings nationwide, but in the form of tremendous social and political pressure which was brought immediately to bear upon the state and its agents.

In many ways, the significance of the Zapatista uprising was and continues to be the manner in which it so successfully exploded the myths of modernity and development constantly repeated by national and transnational elites even as the vast majority of the Mexican people continued to live in poverty. Once again, the epistemological challenges posed by the Zapatistas proved to be much more difficult to contain than their poorly-armed guerrillas. In the words of Antonio from the FAT, the Zapatista uprising had particular relevance for Mexicans when one considers that it began on the same day which NAFTA came into effect:

it shook the conscience of workers and society in general. It was an absolute surprise and the march that we had in January a few days after the uprising helped to stop the government from killing the people in a massacre. The Zapatista movement revealed that the speech of the government was focused on the economy and how Mexico was about to enter the First World, how Mexico was leaving behind the Third World situation it was in and it was entering the First World. Even if we agree or not with the form they did it in, the Zapatistas have shown us that the government was telling us one thing and something else was happening.

As Neil Harvey has stated, the Zapatista rebellion is best described as an event which is “revelatory rather than programmatic”, and this sentiment expressed by Antonio exemplifies this. Much as Mouffe and Laclau discuss the importance of new articulations of elements and how vastly different discourses may be articulated with respect to the same elements, the Zapatistas introduced a new way of conceiving the world and fundamentally challenged the dominant discourses of development and neoliberalism. It is not that people were not aware

of the fact that they were living in poverty and facing marginalization and exploitation on a daily basis before the Zapatista uprising, rather, the significance of this event needs to be appreciated as a moment which exposed truths and offered possibilities not previously thought of as credible.

The Zapatista uprising thus became a watershed event in Mexican history, not because it represented a change in government or brought about an end to subjugation and oppression, but because it fundamentally subverted the dominant discourses of progress and development that had been crumbling since the early 1980s but which had not yet completely collapsed. In addition to this, the Zapatistas offered an act of supreme defiance for the rest of the Mexican nation to draw from. Benedicto from the ORT reflected upon both these themes as he explained to me the initial reaction of independent unionism to the Zapatista uprising:

well at first our reaction was of astonishment, surprise, we didn't see that one coming. We didn't know anything about the Zapatistas, we didn't even know that they existed. And then after a few days, after the initial surprise there was also hope. It was the hope that somebody would fight against the government and against what they stand for. Carlos Salinas made us believe that everything was going fine and that the economic politics were going okay, but the reality was different from that. The truth is that it wasn't okay and the truth is that there are still people starving. Now the Zapatista uprising was kind of symbolic, the fight, the real fight with arms only lasted a few days, maybe a week or ten days, but it was a symbolic uprising of people saying "no, we don't buy it anymore", so it shook the country. Now the unions, the independent unions, not only agreed with the uprising and the political platform that they were using, they also sympathized with it. They even tried to create a coordination of workers that will fight with them and that will stand up with them, but it didn't work, it wasn't easy to organize that kind of coordination so it didn't work. Still, the unions were really important during the marches and during the protests against the army and against the government. The SME even sent workers to electrify the EZLN zone so they went to take their services out there to the jungle. So there was solidarity from the unions to the Zapatistas, it was solidarity that showed not only in the presence of people in marches but also in that they were also raising money to

send them so that they would have money and that they would have food or whatever they needed.

This comment reveals not only the revelatory nature of the Zapatista uprising and the symbolic impact of their 12 day war against the presidency and the army, but also the roots of the “moment of coincidence” between the independent unions and the Zapatistas. There is an acknowledgement, a fundamental recognition of the fact that not only do these different movements have a certain amount in common but that they share a common struggle. While it has been established that the Zapatistas have made a concerted attempt to reach out to various sectors of the Mexican population, this act has only been successful by virtue of the fact that these sectors have been responsive to such efforts. Rather than being seen as a violent, ethnic, and regional guerrilla movement, the Zapatistas were instead seen as brothers and sisters in a common struggle by members of the independent labour movement.

An undeniable sense of sympathy and solidarity characterized much of the initial reaction to the Zapatista uprising on the part of members of the independent labour movement. What is essential to note here is that this reaction of sympathy and solidarity was a reaction born of a mutual acknowledgement of suffering and subjugation. Samuel of the SME described his own perception of the reaction of independent labour activists to the Zapatista uprising in the following manner:

the first reaction when we saw the Zapatista uprising in '94 was surprise. It was amazing, it was unbelievable. In those days society was numbed by Carlos Salinas' promises of becoming part of the First World, of which this country was about to become, that was just around the corner. And all of a sudden, in the middle of that numbness, they have this uprising, this untraditional guerrilla, an army of poor people that rose up and we just couldn't believe it. There was no background for this, we

didn't even know they existed, actually these people, the indigenous people, seemed to have ceased to exist, we didn't know they were there. The brutality of the battles was really shocking to us, it was like having the Nicaragua guerrilla or the Salvadoran guerrilla right in your backyard so it was completely shocking. But those first days of 1994 from January 1 to January 12 were really contradictory days, we were not only surprised but we were having different feelings, opposite feelings, at the same time and that was expressed in the march of January 12, 1994, which stopped the war by the way, which stopped the confrontation between the federal army and the Zapatista army. Since that day, since that march, there has been an attempt to negotiate between the government and the Zapatistas and what the society and especially us, the independent unions, have seen is we have recognized the poverty and similar problems that the Zapatistas have, we have seen them in our houses. We have seen people die from perfectly curable diseases because they don't have the minimum health insurance, we have seen children that cannot even complete their elementary education, and we have seen people and families that don't even have a piece of land to work on. We reflect on that and we recognize our problems in their problems and that is what has generated this astounding response from the people and from independent unions. We have the same cause as them, independent unions have supported the Zapatistas all the way, we collect things - clothes, blankets, food, medicines, doctors, teachers - we collect things and people to take them to Chiapas to show our support and to help our brothers. So the role of the independent unions in the Zapatista movement has been really important. The SME has about 35 000 active members, 14 000 retired members, and we as a union had kind of a late reaction. The bases, most of the members accepted and embraced the cause of the Zapatistas but the leaders were not so sure of how they should react. About a year ago there was a beautiful encounter between the workers and the indigenous of the Zapatista army... From that encounter we have formed really strong bonds between their army and our union, solidarity has even grown from that day. We have sent fellow workers to give the Zapatistas the service of electricity, we do it on our own, we take the cables and the generators and everything they need and leave them there so that they can have electricity. And most of the independent unions have done things like this to show solidarity like the SITUAM, the independent union of the university workers, they have done this kind of thing, they have sent poets and artists so that they can teach people how to read and how to write and they paint murals and they read poetry to them, so they can have a little of what we do and what we have... the solidarity with the Zapatistas is not in question. There is not a single independent union that dares to question the solidarity or that dares to stop the support to the Zapatistas. Some years ago, Fidel Velazquez, the leader of the CTM, or the former head of the CTM, he's dead now, said that the PRI came to power with weapons and that's the only way they would leave it and that seems to be true, we all understand that, especially the Zapatistas, we all know that and the Zapatistas have

lots of political authority with us and much respect. They are our brothers.

The Zapatista struggle therefore needs to be understood as not merely embodying an important moment of resistance to an oppressive and exploitive regime, because this in and of itself is insufficient to explain the manifestations of sympathy and solidarity for the Zapatista movement. Instead, the Zapatista movement is best seen as one “node”, albeit one which is profoundly important, among many. As Samuel related to me, the reason the Zapatistas were so compelling is because members of the independent labour movement could see their struggle reflected in that of the Zapatistas. While there are indeed specificities to each movement which remain located within certain geographic or socio-economic spheres, the threads which bind them together are much more compelling and are embodied in the acts of mutual support and recognition and in the undeniable affirmations of solidarity with the struggles, not of the exoticized “other”, but of their brothers and sisters.

It is important to realize, however, that as galvanizing as the Zapatista uprising was for many members of the independent labour movement, it was nevertheless an armed insurgency whose explicitly stated goal was to defeat both the presidency and the Mexican army and to march on Mexico City itself. For many people, this call to rebellion was tremendously emancipatory, but for others, this declaration carried with it an equal or even greater measure of fear. For a nation whose history is rooted in revolution, few people revelled in the notion of civil war, and so even as the Zapatistas came to embody dignified struggle against overwhelming odds for many Mexicans, so too did they come to represent the threat of chaos and violence for others. Pedro from the FAT described this conflicted

situation to me in the following manner:

well, there was a little of everything, right? Because there were sectors of the population that were terrified, right?...that were afraid because, it was *that*, that the indigenous people rose up in arms, outside of their concepts, and also that the armed approach is not one that many people in Mexico share. Many people do not believe in the possibility of political transformation with an armed approach. Nonetheless, other people understood. Why did they arrive at such radical positions such as an armed uprising? Right? Because there has been a history of exploitation, of humiliation, of lack of rights with many indigenous people, and it turns out that the Zapatista movement has constituted an enormous voluntary network at the national level...Because of the sympathy that their uprising has, the legitimacy, the genuineness of their proposals and also how advanced their political proposals are. So in other words, it is not only about a struggle for indigenous rights, but they also have a very advanced political platform.

Thus, while people understood why the Zapatistas had done what they had, this understanding by no means necessarily translated into a willingness to engage in the same type of struggle even for those who felt discarded by the state as well. This is a particularly important point because it further reinforces the notion of the Zapatista “moment of coincidence” in that it is precisely because people continued to assert their struggles in their own ways rather than incorporating themselves into the Zapatista struggle that makes this moment one of coincidence rather than assimilation. As Carlos from the CNTE explained to me in regard to this question:

in general, the reaction was the same [as that of the independent unions], but there was also the fear that this would turn into civil war and so a lot of the movement in general was to let the Zapatistas be and not to react against them so that it would not turn into civil war...so the fear wasn't necessarily a fear of war or the fear that soldiers would be killed, it wasn't any kind of patriotic thing, it was more a fear that many campesinos would die and that the war would one day reach the cities. But the idea that the government would be defeated, that's not where the fear came from. Just to give you an example of what different people thought was happening, on the very same day that we had our march which was the 13th of January, in the morning before

the march, the president appeared on national television saying that he had given the order to the Mexican army that they back off and cease-fire so that kind of gives you the idea that the government knew what the reaction of the people would be, that it was a very positive reaction to the Zapatistas, for example, the mottos people used were “arriba Zapatistas”, “viva Marcos”, “down with the PRI”, they were not peaceful, pacific phrases that people were using and the government sensed or knew that even before the march happened.

What is most significant within all of this is the concept that the Zapatista uprising was by no means an event read in a singular manner by everyone, nor did the people who found themselves in solidarity with the Zapatistas necessarily embrace their methods or all of their goals. While this may seem axiomatic, it is an important issue to acknowledge particularly because it allows us to ask and engage the truly compelling questions of just how the Zapatistas managed to attract the attention they have and why they are seen as one element of a much larger movement rather than a revolutionary moment in and of themselves.

“They Built a New Way of Talking”: The Allure of the Zapatistas

One of the questions which I found to be particularly compelling with regard to the Zapatista movement rests upon the ability of the Zapatistas to generate attention and to galvanize others over the course of their seven year struggle. That the Zapatistas have managed to generate an astoundingly disproportionate amount of attention surrounding their movement given their resources, military or otherwise, is both impressive and confounding. Yet the question of why they have managed to capture national and international attention time and again has never been adequately answered. This was precisely the question I posed to my research partners in the independent labour movement: why did the Zapatista movement initially attract so much attention and is it still important today? The answers I

received are worth reflecting upon and shed much light upon the significance of the Zapatista movement as an integral part of a broad front of social opposition. By way of introduction to this discussion, it needs to be recalled that Mexico as a nation is no stranger to the figure of the guerrilla. Mexican history is rich with outlaws, bandits, and guerrillas, a tradition which continues to be significant today. Within this context, the Zapatistas are by no means the only guerrilla army active in Mexico right now, but they are undoubtedly the ones who have assumed the mantle of the inspiring anti-heroes of old. However, as should be apparent by now, there is much more to the Zapatistas and the movement which has emerged from their uprising than can be explained merely by gesturing to the Mexican history of romanticized outlaws. In order to examine why the Zapatistas attracted the attention they have and what their significance is today, it is time to turn once more to the reflections of my research partners in the independent labour movement.

Without a doubt, one of the most frequently noted characteristics of the Zapatistas and their spokesman, Subcomandante Marcos, is their flair for the dramatic. The notion that their initial uprising was in fact more theatre than a real attempt to overthrow the president is one which, while perhaps being somewhat of an oversimplification of events, nevertheless seems to hold more than a grain of truth. As Alfredo from UNAM told me, much of the initial attention generated by the Zapatistas was due to the fact that they exploited the events unfolding around them for maximum effect:

in the first instance, [the Zapatistas attracted so much attention] because they launched into the war precisely when the Free Trade Agreement entered into force, that was supposed to seal our entrance into the First World. Of course, it was also

because of the surprise factor. Thirdly, because the government and a close group of intellectuals insulted the leaders of the movement saying that they were not indigenous, nor campesinos, nor Mexicans. In the first public negotiation, [it was obvious that they] came from below. The moral authority of Zapatismo increased exponentially.

The timing of the uprising to coincide with NAFTA coming into force is thus seen as a critical element in reinforcing the fact that the Zapatistas perceive their struggle as not only one concerned with indigenous rights, but with issues of a national and even transnational scope. Furthermore, the fact that despite the best efforts of the government to delegitimize the Zapatista commanders as non-indigenous, foreign, and upper or middle class, it was obvious upon seeing them that not only were the Zapatistas undeniably “authentic”, but that they were among the poorest of the poor.

While the issue of timing and the authenticity of a “rebellion from below” were key factors in the Zapatistas’ capacity to command the attention of the nation and the world, another significant aspect in regard to this capacity is the issues which they sought to engage. As discussed before, the Zapatistas’ agenda is one that is undeniably comprehensive in its scope. Not only is the Zapatista movement engaged in the struggle for indigenous rights in Chiapas, it is engaged with myriad different issues facing Mexicans nationally and marginalized and exploited groups transnationally. In the words of Alejandro from the FAT, the Zapatistas were able to command the attention they did because of their ability to force the acknowledgement and the reconsideration of certain key issues:

firstly, [the Zapatista movement] was so important because it reconstructed all thoughts about liberty and freedom, all thoughts about democracy, all thoughts about social justice. They raised the problems of globalization, of commercial economics

and finance...the problem of globalization, business economics and finance and how that's been bad for Mexico. The problem of neoliberalism. The problem of NAFTA. The first of January 1994 was the first day of NAFTA. On every wall of public buildings in San Cristobal, in Las Margaritas, in Ocosingo, there was Zapatista graffiti.

In many ways, the uprising which began on the first of January, 1994 was seen as the breaking of certain silences and the shattering of particular mythologies that had allowed the dominance of the ruling party and its allies to go unquestioned for so long. As Cecilia from the FAT explained to me:

I think [the Zapatista uprising] opened people's eyes to the injustice that has been going on in Chiapas for over 500 years and especially for the last 50 years with the neoliberal politics and the repression the government has established there. So when the Zapatistas appeared, when they rose up with their weapons and their army and everything, it was something very different and very strange in this official control that the government had, so I think it broke with everything that was established before, it was something very radical...It's obvious to me that their struggle is absolutely valid, it's so obvious that it's shameful to even say it because their struggle is for life, for freedom, for the satisfaction of their needs and ultimately for dignity so their struggle is absolutely valid.

The uprising thus can be interpreted as the physical manifestation of a system which no longer even pretends to honour the social pact which had maintained the social and political fabric of Mexico by and large since the Revolution of 1917. For some, then, the attraction of the Zapatistas lies in the notion that they revealed the injustices of a system under which millions of Mexicans were suffering, that they forced an explicit consideration of what "democracy", "liberty", and "freedom" mean within the modern neoliberal state.

The issue of the "allure" or "attraction" of the Zapatistas provides particular insight into the notion of the "moment of coincidence" for which the Zapatista movement has served

as catalyst. For the Zapatistas to matter to Mexicans beyond representing a threat to the social peace, there had to be something about the movement which appealed to Mexicans, something with which they could identify or empathize. According to Carlos from the CNTE, the attention the Zapatistas received and continue to enjoy is attributable to three main points:

I think it's because they were armed. First of all it's because they were armed, Mexico does have a tradition of armed revolutionaries that the government has called "bandits" and those names, I'll list them off for you, are: Rio Frio, Zapata, Francisco Villa, and Vicente Guerrero. So the first was because they were poor, armed Mexicans. And the second is because the way they communicated was so intelligent that, for example, they said "we want democracy, we do not want a prolonged war and what we want really is a cease-fire and even though we don't agree with this government, if they want to negotiate with us, we will negotiate with them". And the third reason was because of the demands, that we identified very much with their demands.

Thus, not only can the attention the Zapatistas received be attributed to the fact that they were armed or that they existed within a tradition of "revolutionaries", but that they were "poor, armed Mexicans". The emphasis the Zapatista movement has placed upon the fact that they are in fact more Mexican than the ruling elites is not something which has transpired by accident. Additionally, the methods of communication and the platform of the movement are both elements which have appealed to a population which has found itself politically and economically exploited and marginalized for decades. By engaging people, the Zapatista movement has invoked the notion that it is the people themselves who should be able to determine the course of their own lives rather than foreign interests or a transnational ruling elite. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, is the assertion that many Mexicans identified with the demands of the Zapatistas. This may seem self-evident, but it is important to

emphasise that solidarity with the Zapatistas is not necessarily a reaction born of altruism but rather a fundamental acknowledgement of the fact that the problems faced by the Zapatistas which include poverty, disease, police and army brutality, political impotence, and growing social and economic marginalization are not unique to the communities of Chiapas but can be seen in places like Mexico City as well.

The notion that the realities evoked by the Zapatistas in explaining their reasons for rebellion are not limited to the far southeast of Mexico is an integral element in explaining the significance of the Zapatista movement for the rest of the nation. In the words of Samuel from the SME:

the Zapatistas reflected us in their particularities and we reflected them in our struggle and in our problems. Nonetheless, they were even worse, they were even poorer, and they had even worse problems than us and yet they demanded things not only for themselves but for workers and poor urban people. Seeing our brothers in such inhuman conditions, in such low conditions, shook us, and it shook us even more to see them fight so fearlessly and with such passion. I believe that [Subcomandante] Marcos played an incredibly important role in the way the Zapatistas influenced us. The way they communicate, the way they share their demands and their thoughts, it's the work of Marcos, he's responsible for that... Marcos and the EZ [Zapatista Army] in general, they built a new way of talking, a new speech that was fresh and radical and incisive and this new speech, this new way of talking, put us in front of the mirror and showed us this is what we are, we're not the First World, neoliberal politics are not the way, this is what we are, these are our problems. Enough of PRI, we need democracy, we need our human rights, we need to build our citizenship, we need social justice. The left-wing parties were not using these concepts very often and they were not even thinking of them as much as Marcos. So Marcos refreshed the way we saw these concepts and the way we saw each other.

The image of the mirror and the act of reflection are particularly vital elements here. While it is undoubtedly true that there exist differences between and within the urban population of Mexico and the countryside, between and within urban workers and campesinos, between and

within indigenous and non-indigenous communities, it is also important to acknowledge that these differences were seen as less important than the similarities they shared. Additionally, the fact that the Zapatistas actively sought to engage people from all walks of life and to assert respect for them and their rights alongside their own demands says much for the capacity of the Zapatista movement to acknowledge the realities which exist beyond its own. Furthermore, Samuel reflects here upon the revolutionary manner in which Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas have articulated their demands and have framed their struggle in terms of extraordinarily complex and inclusive political and philosophical notions of citizenship, democracy, human rights, and social justice, to name but a few. As Samuel states, this rearticulation of these notions has in many ways provided a new language by which to assert demands for rights and respect for all Mexicans. In the language of Mouffe and Laclau, through their struggle in all its myriad facets, the Zapatistas have rearticulated the elements which comprise lived reality for Mexicans and thus formulated a new discourse, a new way of thinking the world into being.

“People Have Begun to Think That the Destiny of the Zapatistas is Linked to the Destiny of the Whole Society”: The Zapatista Moment of Coincidence

At this point, I would like now to delve directly into the notion which I have called the Zapatista “moment of coincidence”. As stated before, the central concept within this notion is that the Zapatista movement in and of itself poses no more of a “revolutionary” challenge to the existing regime than any of the other guerrilla armies or social movements within the Mexican nation. However, what the Zapatista movement has succeeded in doing is serving as the catalyst for the activation of a broad front of social opposition to the existing socio-political and economic system. Rather than attempting to assert the primacy of their own struggle, the Zapatistas have engaged all Mexicans in a deliberate attempt to re-think the world around them. Furthermore, the Zapatistas’ ability to engage people and to serve as the catalyst for this broad front of social opposition has, in many ways, rested on a series of events and circumstances far beyond the Zapatistas’ control. As should be apparent by now with regard to independent unionism, these organizations have been struggling for democracy, human rights, and social justice for many years and have also been some of the most vocal and radical critics of the state and the ruling elite. The same may be said for many other social movements in Mexico which have sought over the years to challenge what many see as a system of entrenched poverty, oppression, and exploitation. The Zapatista uprising in 1994 and the movement which subsequently emerged from it entered the political and social scene at a particularly delicate time and provided the “spark” which lit an already existing fuse. Reflecting upon my conversations with my research partners in Mexico City, the Zapatistas

have provided a new language, a new vision not of what society should be, but rather of how to begin to visualize what it could be, and how people could struggle to make it so. They have facilitated dialogue, engagement, and critical reevaluation of the realities lived by Mexicans. They have insisted upon the autonomy and distinctiveness of the individuals and movements who seek to engage in a struggle for a better world. They have provided the cry of “Ya basta!”, “enough!”, declaring to Mexico and the world that the voices of the marginalized, the oppressed, the forgotten would not remain silent. They have insisted that their voices, their stories, and their goals were only one among many and that it was time to reclaim the space and the capacity, not only to be heard, but to listen to each other as well. This, then, is the Zapatista moment of coincidence which I wish to begin to illuminate and in order to do so, it is necessary to return to the words of my research partners in Mexico City.

The Zapatistas are clearly a movement which has managed to capture the attention of a nation and, frequently, the world over the past seven years. The question of how a movement which appears to be based in an identity which is rural and indigenous can come to matter so much to other sectors of the population is one which began to touch on the notion of “coincidence”, and it is one to which I was given several interesting responses. As Alejandro from the FAT told me:

the main impact [of the Zapatista movement] is upon the indigenous. In this country there are 10 million indigenous. The primary impact was upon the situation of misery, of poverty, the situation of marginalization of the indigenous, this was the first impact. But the messages, the ideas about liberty, democracy, social justice had a great impact on society...there is a very important question, the message of democracy, that people need to fight more for democracy, to participate in democracy.

Alfredo from UNAM echoed the sentiments of Alejandro in response to this same question as he reflected that:

without a doubt it is an essentially indigenous and basically rural movement, however in many of the most important cities of the country, there are core organizations of sympathizers, that work publicly and that defend the right of the indigenous to rebel. To the extent that it is perceived as a genuine protest, legitimate and very socially extensive, it can be said that it has impacted profoundly on Mexican society, especially among the youth, who do not perceive the political parties as trustworthy avenues for social and political participation.

From these sentiments, it can be seen then that the impact or importance of the Zapatista uprising and the Zapatista movement outside of their rural and indigenous bases is fundamentally within the arena of the social and political landscape of the Mexican nation. Within a context in which the socio-political system has come to be seen as fundamentally illegitimate, the Zapatistas have served as the point of inspiration and departure for people who are already dissatisfied with the status quo. Rather than storming the palace gates and bringing revolution to the Mexican people, the Zapatista movement instead embodies a point of intersection and of possibilities for the envisioning of a new social reality.

It is important to realize, however, that the moment of coincidence which I assert the Zapatistas have succeeded in generating rests upon much more than their ability to point to the gross inequities in the existing socio-political and economic regime. For the Zapatistas to be able to serve as the catalyst for a moment of coincidence, there must be a certain commonality upon which such a coincidence can rest. Carlos from the CNTE illustrated the notion of affinity between movements by relating the following anecdotes during our conversation:

in the year 1996, the president came on TV and said “we are going to reveal the identity of Marcos”, and that...if anyone was to figure out who he is, he was to be arrested and that there was going to be some way of tracking him and revealing his identity and so the cry of the people was “we are all Marcos” because he is fighting for what we all want, what we’re all fighting for so just arrest all of us...one of the communiques from Marcos was “we’re alone, the indigenous people have always fought alone, we’ve always done it by ourselves” and so the response of the people, the cry of the people became “you are not alone” and so it has been an interesting dialogue back and forth, that the people who are in the jungle are not alone, even though we’re not in the jungle with them.

It was not merely because the Zapatistas had captured the imagination or the attention of Mexicans that they were able to draw people to their struggle, rather, as these two anecdotes illustrate, it is because they have been able to make their struggle one of relation rather than exclusion. As Alejandro from the FAT remarked during our conversation, the only reason that the Zapatistas and movements such as that of independent unionism are able to work together or influence one another in any manner is because there is a fundamental similarity at the root of each of their struggles:

linkages are possible because the basic ideas of the Zapatistas and other social movements are essentially the same. They are all fighting for the right to life, the right to have a decent job, the right to health, women’s rights, children’s rights, democracy, the right of the workers to have their unions organized in the way they think is best for them. It is all a big coincidence. All those demands and basic ideas meet at some point and that’s what makes it possible for Zapatistas, unions, and political parties such as PRD to make these linkages, because they know essentially they are all fighting for the same thing...it’s not only that the basic ideas coincide but also that unions fight for freedom and democracy and social justice within the law, within what the law permits or allows them to do and the Zapatistas do it outside the law and above it so it’s like two different forces coming from different ways towards the same point, so they have an influence on each other and they also coincide.

Despite the fact that there are undoubtedly differences in the particular agendas of each social movement mentioned here, a common struggle can be envisioned and articulated precisely

because there exists the acknowledgement of both these differences along with fundamental coincidences. Samuel from the SME further asserted the affinity which exists between the independent labour movement and the Zapatistas by explaining the different forms of struggle they each engage in while setting these against the backdrop of a common social and political context:

we're trying to listen more to each other and that change has not been made from one day to another, it's a process of change. Most of the independent unions, for example, are now fighting for the San Andres Accords as well as for their own needs and demands so now we share demands. The Zapatistas fight for our needs and we fight for their needs. The content of our needs are changing, even though the form we fight, the strategies we have, haven't changed much. Because we all have our own forms of fighting, for example, the unions have strikes and marches and peaceful protests in the cities and things like that. We would never think of an armed uprising and the Zapatistas don't do this, they have other forms of fighting so the forms haven't changed a lot, we're trying to get closer to the Zapatistas and to any other social movement because we understand that we are a part of a whole, we know that we are part of the same struggle and it doesn't matter where we are located or what kind of movement we are in, we know that we are part of a whole, single fight.

Once again, not only can an acknowledgement of difference in approach and in the content of needs and demands be seen here, but an embracing of it. Furthermore, embodied by this remark is the sentiment that not only is alliance with other social movements desirable, it is in fact necessary because the magnitude of the quest for a just, equitable, and democratic society is one which extends beyond the particular agenda of any one movement or group and necessitates the acknowledgement and appreciation of disparate agendas, demands, and forms of struggle.

In addition to the appreciation of broad coincidences and commonalities in their struggles, the moment of coincidence between the Zapatista movement and independent

labour also exists on the basis of an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the needs and demands of the other. In the words of Carlos from the CNTE, the Zapatista struggle matters socially because “the primary issue really is ‘indigenismo’, indigenous rights, however, because [the Zapatistas] have spoken about better salaries, better health, liberty, and democracy, that’s where they are reaching other people, that’s where people are identifying with them”. Furthermore, as Alejandro from the FAT explained to me, the Zapatista movement matters to society and, specifically, to independent unionism for the following reasons:

well, at first because the demands that the Zapatistas had such as freedom, democracy, social justice, and peace have a strong coincidence with the demands and the struggle that independent unions have. In the second place, when the Zapatistas rose up on January 1, 1994, it revealed how NAFTA was an advance for globalization and neoliberal politics in Mexico and it made everyone aware that the only ones that weren’t getting benefits from it were the poor, the lower classes. Both things coincide with the goals of the union.

Thus, the Zapatista movement is significant because it coincides with the struggles of other already existing social movements within Mexico. In the words of Cecilia from the FAT, the Zapatista struggle is one which, for her, evokes the demands and the principles of the cooperative movement and thus both movements feed off the energy and strength of the other:

I have to remember the principles that we as cooperatives promote which are: freedom of association, the respect of human dignity, the right to work, the fair distribution of wealth, the right to education and health, we also want people to stop being exploited, we want the communities to be able to develop and self-administrate their production of what they need, we promote solidarity and compromise between individuals as well as groups and thinking of that, of course the struggle that the Zapatistas are engaged in is the same struggle.

It is important to recognize that the Zapatistas by no means represent the first instance of a struggle against neoliberal globalization, poverty, prejudice, or exploitation in Mexico, because other groups and movements have been engaged in these struggles for decades. Instead, the true importance of the Zapatista movement needs to be appreciated in light of both its revelatory and galvanizing capacities as well as the fact that their struggle is a shared and coincidental one. Benedicto from the ORT exemplified this aspect of the Zapatista movement as he explained the dimensions of independent unionism's support for the Zapatistas:

there's not a Zapatista string in the unions, there's not a clearly Zapatista group in the unions or a clearly Zapatista union. They sympathize but they are not out of the closet yet. So when [the independent unions] have their assemblies and their meetings, one of the things that they always discuss is the San Andres Accords, all the things that are not being discussed in San Andres they get discussed in the unions' assemblies. Three years ago, the national assembly of workers made a declaration in which they said they wanted the freedom to work, freedom to have the decision of how to organize, how to work, and how to make their own decisions. They wanted the freedom of choice and they also wanted the freedom to stand up for what they have created, and those three freedoms, or those three types of freedoms were the same things that the Zapatistas were asking for. The freedom to work, the freedom to choose, and the freedom to stand up for what they are and what they have created, and they came out with this motto that says "the country is not for sale", that is basically what they all want, not only the independent unions but also the Zapatistas, to keep the country for the people and not to sell it.

It is therefore not because the Zapatistas' demands are necessarily novel or unique in any definitive manner that they have succeeded in galvanizing people, rather, it is because of the manner in which their demands coincide with those of other social movements such as independent unionism that they have attracted others to their shared struggle.

The Zapatista movement in many ways represents a revitalization and a reorganization

of a social and political struggle which has been in existence long before the Zapatistas' New Year's Day rebellion. Contrary to the apparent hegemonic triumph of neoliberal capitalism and its associated so-called "democratic" institutions and practices, the Zapatista movement has provided the inspiration and the space to articulate new forms of age-old dissent. In the words of Benedicto from the ORT:

the sentiment of not wanting the country and the industries to be privatized, it obviously existed before the Zapatista uprising but the Zapatista uprising and their political platform has a strong relation with the unions and with what they want. Now the Zapatistas helped the workers to have more words and to have a new speech on how to say this. So if before the workers had said that they didn't want their industries to be privatized, now they had a new flag or a new way of saying it with the Zapatista uprising.

Thus, it is not that one movement has been coopted or subordinated by another, rather, it is that the Zapatista movement has provided a certain language of dissent, resistance, and imagination that has served to reinvigorate already existing social movements. At the same time, the notion of coincidence reaffirms its importance here because without a certain acknowledgement of dependence upon one another, neither the independent unions nor the Zapatistas could meaningfully draw upon the other. *Benedicto* explained this significant facet of the "moment of coincidence" to me when he stated that:

it's a coincidence [between the Zapatistas and independent unionism]. There is a complete coincidence with the workers. The Zapatistas have acknowledged that without the workers, their movement doesn't have the projection really and the unions have acknowledged that the indigenous sector is a really important one and that is a novelty for the unions that they have never considered in their struggle that the indigenous groups should be a part of it, so that's new for the unions, but it is a coincidence.

Thus, coincidence here is significant not only in the sense that it signifies the intersection of

movements where intersection is not required or in any way predetermined, but also in the manner which it entails a powerful recognition of affinity and similarity with respect to each movement's struggle with that of the other.

In response to a question regarding the impact of the Zapatista movement upon the goals, strategies, and tactics of independent unionism, Pedro from the FAT expanded upon the notion of coincidence and the role of the Zapatistas in a larger social struggle:

not directly [have the Zapatistas impacted upon independent unionism]; because it is not a movement that has been, let's say, nourished primarily by union obligations...And if in the fight for democracy, some of their platforms are coincidental, not so much that they come from there, I mean, Zapatismo isn't political avant-garde, it isn't our political avant-garde, it is our moral avant-garde possibly, and yes, many political references have also emanated from the Zapatista reflections. So if there is [a Zapatista influence], let's say, a correlation by coincidence, more than if they had influenced in a decisive manner, no? But there are coincidences, and the importance of the Zapatistas in their political discourse, well, let's say, it has allowed for the fortification of the union approach as well.

The notion of coincidence rather than one movement impacting upon or reshaping another is a powerful sentiment in this comment. Rather than seeing the Zapatista movement as a new socio-political vanguard or a revolutionary event in and of itself, it is necessary to appreciate the fact that the movement has only had the effect it has through its dialogue with and engagement of diverse movements and individuals, both within and outside of Mexico, and that these actors have maintained their autonomy and their disparate agendas rather than being subsumed into the Zapatista movement itself.

It is tempting to cast the Zapatista movement as one of singular and even revolutionary importance within Mexican history. What I wish to emphasise in this

examination of what I have termed the Zapatista “moment of coincidence” is that while the Zapatista struggle is one of momentous importance both for Mexico and the world, it is nonetheless no more momentous than the coincidences and linkages it has sought to form allow it to be. As Alejandro from the FAT told me during our first conversation, “the Zapatista movement is not something magical, it does not have all the presence in society...it is not the solution for all the social, political, and economic problems. It is just an important event, it is not the solution”. When I followed this comment by asking what the solution to these problems might be, Alejandro replied that neither the Zapatistas nor the government as represented by the newly-elected president Vicente Fox would bring the solution, rather, that “society, the workers, the women, the young, the students” would bring it. Alejandro stated at the time that he believed the government would pass into law the San Andres Accords on indigenous rights signed between the government of Ernesto Zedillo and the Zapatistas, but that this event in and of itself would mean very little:

yes, the government will sign the accords. But it is a law, and the political, social, and economic problems will not be solved by the law. The law is a reference, a law, but this is a problem of the land, a problem of production in the land, a problem of education, of food, of service, of health, of social security. This will not be solved only by the law...the people, society, unions, women, we have to keep supporting that and that is what will really change things.

It is then only through the articulation of a social struggle which resides ultimately in the actions and demands of “the people”, in the widest sense of the term, that change will occur. Rather than waiting to be rescued by legality or by the Zapatistas, society must take it upon itself to articulate and implement the solutions for its own problems.

However, what is integral to this vision of social justice is the notion that people struggle together to provide these solutions and here, once again, the Zapatista moment of coincidence displays its relevance. As Antonio from the FAT stated in relation to the significance of the Zapatista movement on a national level, “we see the Zapatista movement not only as an indigenous movement but also as a movement for the poor people...the poor class of the country...[the Zapatista movement is a] matter of poverty, it’s a matter of oppressed classes, it’s something that has been created by the globalization process and by the neoliberal politics in Mexico”. Seen in this light, the Zapatista movement is a marker not only of the injustices suffered by the indigenous peoples of Mexico since the time of the conquest, but also for the suffering endured by those exploited by the politics and economics of neoliberalism and globalization in Mexico today. They serve, in other words, as a symbol, symptom, and response to the neglect and abuse suffered by Mexicans throughout the nation. As Benedicto from the ORT explained to me, the Zapatistas signify much more than an indigenous problem within the Mexican context:

the Zapatistas kind of point to a political problem. They say that neoliberal politics are killing them as an indigenous group and as a part of society, that neoliberal politics have not only betrayed them, it has also hidden other parts of society, everyone. Because now that we don’t have enough jobs and the incomes are not enough, these problems have been caused by neoliberal politics in the whole society, not only the Zapatistas, but they kind of point toward the problem and that’s how people have begun to think that the destiny of the Zapatistas is linked to the destiny of the whole society.

Thus, the Zapatistas in many ways represent a point at which the neoliberal system of economics and politics is revealed as an oppressive and exploitive structure, one which has

been imposed upon people. As Cecilia from the FAT expressed to me during our conversation, the importance of the Zapatista movement resides in its capacity to expose certain realities and generate awareness within the context of a system that had become exceedingly adept at insulating itself from meaningful critique:

the Zapatistas have helped us redefine our class situation and our class issues. We are now able to see injustice, the lack of democracy, and the violation of human rights at its worst and that has helped us to rethink the role we have in this country and in this society and it has showed us that we should have a common goal and a common struggle if we want to solve these problems that are common to all of us.

Rather than embodying a solution or a blueprint according to which a popular struggle must be waged, the Zapatistas instead offer a moment of illumination for Mexicans who find themselves dispossessed of their agency as citizens within their own country.

Significantly, the Zapatistas contribute considerably more to the formation of a broad front of social opposition than merely serving as a marker for injustice and a moment of epiphany for other social movements and once again the notions of “dialogue” and “language” are particularly important here. Samuel from the SME, reflecting upon the contributions of the Zapatistas to the union movement specifically, stated to me that:

what the Zapatistas have given us is in some ways more than what the workers have given to the movement. For example, Zapatistas have opened new spaces in which we can express ourselves and in which we can discuss our problems such as the National Democratic Conventions that were organized by the Zapatistas so that people from the cities, from all over the country, went to their territory and talked and discussed and there were people from every social movement you could think of: political groups, unions, students, civil groups, people from many different movements were talking and discussing in the National Democratic Conventions...we try to join the movements because we know that that's the only guarantee we have for change, we know the political parties by themselves won't be able to change this and it doesn't matter if it's the PRI, the PAN, or the PRD, we know that by themselves they won't

be able to make this change, the change has to come from the bases, from the workers and from the people because we know we're the only ones that can change this.

Thus, there is the notion that the Zapatistas have opened up the political space for movements and individuals to join together in pursuit of a common goal, a space which was previously denied to them. Alejandro from the FAT spoke of similar contributions to the opening of political spaces for struggle on the part of the Zapatistas as he told me that:

the Zapatistas' fight has allowed spaces for democracy to open, it's not only the work of political parties that have motivated the changes in our political structure but also the influence of the Zapatistas. You can notice the influence in the democratic life of the citizen in that it has made them aware of the changes that can be done through voting and through asking the government to change...democracy is in the people, [the Zapatistas] have reminded people that government is for the people, of the people, and by the people, so the Zapatistas are an example of the fight that you have to give the government so that they remember that...there is one more important element, and that's the conception of democracy. In many countries, and especially here in Mexico, democracy has a political and ideological charge when it is a representative democracy. We have a congress and a senate that do all the discussion and that do all the work and that makes the law and makes all the decisions and people only participate through elections, but the Zapatistas think that this is a bourgeois democracy, a democracy for the rich people and they have a new idea, a different idea of democracy and that would be direct democracy where no one is to decide anything without asking the people. People would still elect a representative group of people but still they would not be able to make laws or to make any decisions without asking the people, without working for them and with them with consultations or with polls or whatever they would need to know what the people really want and need. So that's a new idea of democracy which the Zapatistas are keeping and which other movements such as unions and political parties, well, they share it so that's why they can link and have these alliances.

Thus, the Zapatista movement has not only deepened notions of democracy and its practice, but has also served to make it an explicit item of public discourse. In addition to this, the discussion they have succeeded in generating is seen as facilitating connection and engagement between diverse social and political movements involved in the struggle for social

change.

One of the most prevalent themes running through the conversations I had with my research partners in Mexico City with regard to the impact of the Zapatista movement was the assertion that while the Zapatistas were only a part of a much larger struggle, their movement had somehow managed to radically reconfigure or rearticulate the ideological landscape for many Mexicans. While this is obviously a topic which has been addressed through the analysis presented thus far, at this point I would like to turn to the remarks offered by my research partners with specific regard to the influence of the Zapatista movement upon the concepts of democracy, citizenship, human rights, and social justice. In order to begin to appreciate why an indigenous rebellion that lasted only 12 days has continued to matter to the Mexican nation and the world, it is necessary to comprehend that the real Zapatista revolution lies not in the fact that they offer an image of resistance, but rather that they offer the vision of possibility and of hope. In order for “change” to occur within any given social system, it is first necessary that people be able to conceive of the possibility of change and the landscape upon which it can occur. For decades, the ruling Mexican elite had successfully managed to assert their own vision of the social, political, and economic reality of Mexico and had thus succeeded in controlling the capacity for people to envision the possibility of viable alternatives within the given social order. The cry of “Ya basta!”, “enough is enough!”, which issued from the mouths of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation on the first day of January 1994 and which was echoed by the voices of the dispossessed and the disempowered of Mexico and the world following that day signalled

not only resistance to the dominance of the few over the many but, more importantly, a fundamental break in the dominant narrative which had bound the Mexican social reality for so long. As I have attempted to illuminate throughout this work, the Zapatistas have not sought to fashion a program for change or a new socio-political vision of a new order, instead, they compelled people to begin to imagine what a better world might look like and how they might arrive there. Through their acts of rebellion, engagement, resistance, and dialogue, the Zapatista movement has sought to generate a new way of thinking about the world and each person's place within it. In an effort to begin to appreciate this project, I would now like to return to the four concepts of democracy, citizenship, human rights, and social justice, and reflect upon the words of my research partners as they related to me the influence of the Zapatistas upon these aspects of the ideological landscape.

Over the past seven years, much has been made of the poetic, imaginative, and often fantastic communiqués of the Zapatistas, many of them bearing the distinctive style of the Zapatista spokesman Subcomandante Marcos. As remarked upon earlier in this work by Samuel from the SME, the Zapatistas have offered a new language, a new speech, that has allowed people to express dissent, resistance, and the hope for a better and alternative future to the one they have had imposed upon them. Yet behind this new language, this new speech, lies a conceptual field, a way of thinking about the world that needs to be appreciated. As Mouffe and Laclau argue, elements can come to be form radically different discourses depending upon the manner in which they are articulated. In this case, the Zapatista challenge reconfigured the manner in which people not only speak about the world, but the manner in

which they conceptualize it as well. In the words of Alfredo from UNAM, the Zapatistas' influence upon the ideological landscape can be understood in the following manner:

the most significant influence [of the Zapatista movement] has been to perceive with all clarity that democracy is not expended in electoral processes, that in the country there are citizens of first, second and third classes, that human rights are violated with excessive frequency in Mexico, in the countryside as well as in the city, and that it is the security agencies of the state and paramilitary groups who are primarily responsible. With respect to social justice, we have the paradox that the federal government has spent on highways, paths, and other infrastructure but not in order to improve the conditions of the communities, only in order to facilitate the movement of troops. And they offer attention to the problems of hunger, education, and health but in order to control, divide, and to corrupt the communities. The Zapatistas have been able to resist all these variants of what is known as "low intensity warfare".

This comment exemplifies the "revelatory" capacity of the Zapatista movement as Alfredo emphasises the notion that the Zapatistas have revealed the essence which lies behind the appearance of a modern, developing nation. To refer once more to Mouffe and Laclau, the Zapatista movement thus exposes the fact that the social is a non-sutured space and that the discourse which structures lived reality is only one possibility among many. In exposing the dominant myths of the Mexican regime, the Zapatistas thus open the way for a reconsideration of what the social is and for a rearticulation of what it might become.

The perception of the Zapatista movement as one which is somehow capable of exerting influence over spheres of the social which lie beyond its base as a rural and indigenous movement is something which is fundamentally entwined with the conceptual challenges posed by the movement. While Alejandro from the FAT remarked that the Zapatistas are not a "magical moment" in Mexican history, they do nevertheless appear to possess the capacity to reconfigure dominant notions of how social reality is perceived. Carlos

from the CNTE explained the significance of the Zapatista movement to the concepts of democracy, citizenship, human rights, and social justice in the following manner:

these ideas [of democracy, citizenship, human rights, and social justice], these concepts are nothing new to the Mexican people. However, Zapatismo has had the effect, definitely has had an impact in supporting and deepening these ideas in the society at large. I talked about Cardenismo before and I was referring to [presidential candidate for the PRD] Cuatemoc Cardenas, that in 1980 he tended to bring out in a public discourse, mostly the ideas of human rights, social justice, and democracy. And I think that the effect of Zapatismo is that it has broadened it to other classes, socioeconomic classes, that it refers now more to the material basic needs of the majority of Mexico, of the poor.

The sentiment of broadening the importance and applicability of notions such as democracy, citizenship, social justice, and human rights is particularly important in regard to the Zapatista struggle as they have sought to engage and galvanize Mexicans in order to reenvision new forms of social relations. This notion of broadening and reinforcing these four concepts for sectors of the Mexican population who have previously been excluded was also something reflected upon by Pedro from the FAT:

in reality, [the Zapatistas] initiated a process, let's say; they were an important part because the fight for Mexico's democratization is a very long battle. They were a very important ingredient, for organization and for social consciousness, due to the necessity for the democratization of the country. It is still pending, right? To resolve the Zapatista demands...So, they are influencing too, in a way, they are influencing the decisions that are generating change today...[the Zapatistas have had] a lot of impact. I mean, in reality, in principle, the indigenous rights, about indigenous rights. First of all, that all of these rights are discussed, right? On the indigenous level and dimension, they have a great importance because there is discrimination in Mexico...There is discrimination, marginalization of social groups. The Zapatista battle is very important in facing these principles; for indigenous rights first and foremost. But also for rights in general, right? The rights of minorities, or of the so-called minorities. For example, they vindicate the rights of women, the right of sexual minorities, right? Of workers also, of course. So they have influenced in putting these rights on the agenda.

In this sense, the Zapatista movement can once more be seen not only as revelatory, but as coincidental as well. It has succeeded in generating attention and dialogue surrounding a broad range of issues and it has also provided a significant reminder of the necessity of change. Thus, beyond any “concrete” influence the Zapatistas have exerted on the social and political landscape of the Mexican nation, they have undoubtedly succeeded in compelling a reconsideration of the manner in which this social and political landscape is conceptualized.

While I have argued that the Zapatista movement has operated as an element within a larger moment of coincidence with other individuals and social movements, I believe it is also important to recall the catalytic role the Zapatistas have occupied in the generation of this moment. While attempting to attribute to the Zapatista movement some inherently or exclusively revolutionary potential would be misleading and inaccurate, it would be equally wrong to dismiss the Zapatistas as one movement among many. The concept of revelation is something which runs strongly through the discourse of the Zapatistas and the character of their movement itself. In fact, it is this revelatory capacity which has served to spark the moment of coincidence which came into being following the first day of January in 1994. With respect to the concepts of democracy, citizenship, human rights, and social justice, the Zapatistas have succeeded not only in emphasising and engaging these topics, but also in making them explicit ideological cornerstones of visions of alternative social realities. As Benedicto from the ORT told me during our conversation, the Zapatistas’ influence upon these four concepts is something which cannot be ignored:

the Zapatista movement has brought to light all these concepts and it has made

evident for people that the fight for freedom, justice, work, health, education, all this is not only the problem of indigenous and not only the problem of Zapatistas but a problem for all of society. So yes, the influence has been big, they have made their struggle a struggle of the whole country and they have brought to attention these four concepts to the people in general, people who maybe wouldn't have started thinking about those concepts without the Zapatistas.

Once again, the sense of illumination is one which strongly imbues the perception of the influence of the Zapatista movement. While the concepts of democracy, citizenship, human rights, and social justice are hardly new to the Mexican people, the Zapatistas and their struggle have repositioned these concepts as issues of critical importance. More significantly, the ideological impact of the Zapatista movement can thus be understood as one which has fundamentally rearticulated the "elements" of the Mexican nation and profoundly undermined the dominant narratives of the national and transnational elites. Essentially, it is not that the Zapatista movement has somehow changed the social reality of Mexico or the lived experiences of its people, rather, it is that through their struggle and their insistence upon engagement and dialogue that the Zapatistas have allowed people to reconfigure the manner in which the social is understood and constructed. Rather than imposing an overhaul of the state and its associated systems and apparatuses, the Zapatistas have instead catalysed a shift in the ideological landscape which fundamentally underpins all explanations and assumptions by which people rationalize the way in which the world works and, in doing so, have thrown open the doors to an antechamber looking onto the new Mexico. It nevertheless remains up to each person whether or not they wish to step through.

The final dimension of the Zapatista moment of coincidence which I wish to examine

here resides in visions of the future. While there are undoubtedly linkages which characterize the relationship between independent unions and the Zapatista movement today, one of the final questions which I posed to my research partners was where they believed the future would take both movements. The responses which I received to this question were hopeful, uncertain, troubled, and imbued with a profound sense that even if the Zapatistas disappeared tomorrow, their legacy would not be easily forgotten. The notion of the future is, I believe, a critical aspect in evaluating the Zapatista moment of coincidence because not only does it reveal a considerable amount about the possible future dimensions of the relationship between the Zapatistas and independent unionism, it also conveys important perspectives on where this relationship stands now and what it has meant to each movement. Furthermore, conceptualizing the future in this manner also provides a powerful insight into what the Zapatista movement has meant to Mexico and how successful the Zapatistas have been in striving to open the necessary political space for social transformation to occur.

The question of the future is one which elicited responses from my research participants which in large part reflected the profoundly uncertain political climate of the time during which I conducted my research. While Vicente Fox and the National Action Party had just won the presidency and ousted the Institutional Revolutionary Party from its seven decade long reign, it remained to be seen what the new president and his party would mean for Mexico and its people. Furthermore, the election for governor had yet to be held in Chiapas where the PRI was facing yet another strong challenge from a candidate backed by both the PAN and the left of centre Democratic Revolutionary Party. In addition to all this,

the Zapatistas themselves had not spoken publicly since the July 2 elections, leaving many to wonder where their movement stood now that the PRI had been defeated at the national level. All these conditions also had profound implications for those involved in the independent labour movement as they sought to prepare for a future that seemed uncertain at best. It was within this climate that I posed my questions of “what is the future of the Zapatista movement?” and “what is the future of the relationship between the Zapatista movement and independent unionism?” to my research partners. The answers which I received to my query ran the gamut from pragmatic and cautious to visionary and celebratory. What is most telling about the responses I received to these questions is that no one questioned the bonds which had formed between these movements and no one disputed the future significance of the Zapatistas. While there were concerns expressed about the physical annihilation of the movement, the notion that Zapatismo had exerted a tremendous influence upon the conceptual landscape of Mexico lay at the heart of the assertion that the movement would continue to maintain an ideological presence even if every last guerrilla was caught or killed. Perhaps most significantly, the concept of the future and what it holds was a vehicle by which my research partners expressed, explicitly or not, their own visions of what the Zapatistas referred to in the *Second Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* as “an antechamber looking onto a new Mexico”. In conveying this, the future also speaks a great deal for the efficacy of the notion of “coincidence” and the possibilities and potentials it embodies.

In a climate of social, economic, and political uncertainty, questions regarding the future seemed to take on a unique significance for my research partners that they may not

have otherwise possessed. In many ways, the Zapatista movement which had emerged almost seven years earlier to shake the foundations of Mexico's seemingly untouchable PRI regime seemed to some to now occupy a position almost as precarious as that of the dethroned PRI itself. If change was possible electorally, what then did the future hold for a movement that professed to disavow these kind of politics? In the words of Alfredo from UNAM:

Zapatismo today is in the background, precisely because the important national changes have occurred in the electoral field and in the terrain of the relations between the political parties. But the national and international importance of Zapatismo is the necessity of tackling the problem of Chiapas with different criteria, they will return to put Chiapas in the centre of attention. The Zapatistas are prepared for that and I believe that we will see an important return of the mobilization of the masses, of course after that the federal government and the new government of Chiapas must demonstrate with deeds and actions that there are significant changes in the search for a solution to the conflict...The situation will not be simple, but we will see new mobilizations of the Zapatista bases. If that coincides with a wave of activism of independent unionism, I am certain that there will be public demonstrations, declarations and works of solidarity between both forces.

Political change is therefore seen as something which has perhaps partially reduced the immediacy of the Zapatista movement, but which by no means has rendered it an anachronism. Nevertheless, there is a sentiment reflected in this comment which evokes the precariousness and contingency of the future of the Zapatista movement. The continued significance of the Zapatistas relies not only upon their own capacity to mobilize their support bases, but also upon their ability to link with the struggle of other movements such as independent unionism. This, of course, relies in turn upon the capacity for independent unions to engage in a common struggle with the Zapatista movement, a capacity which is also challenged due to the contemporary realities of life in a neoliberal world. Pedro from the FAT

reflected upon the challenges and opportunities that the future holds, both for the Zapatistas and for the independent labour movement as he told me that:

the future is very uncertain. In Mexico and the world... We have a lot of hope in the political change that is currently taking place in Mexico, and we are hopeful that, for the first time, it will be possible to cross the threshold to a democratic way of life. We have not lived in a democratic world, no? Mexican democracy is a lie. There is no democracy. So everything is about to happen, and one of the most important things that is about to happen is rights for indigenous communities, right? So we are hopeful that it will be possible to build up democracy in Mexico and so far, we are hopeful that the problem, particularly in Chiapas, can be resolved. I mean, not definitively, because the issue is very complex. Because it isn't only about the rights of the indigenous people, but also the rights of the poor, the rights of workers, and in this world of free trade, of globalization, the differences are intensifying instead of becoming resolved... In other words, what future? Well, it is the future that we can all achieve, between all of us, not just the Zapatistas, right? Between all of us. Supporting their demands to live there in their territories, in harmony with the environment, too. So the issue is very complex, and the future is very uncertain... well, it is also very uncertain because there is a very strong debilitation of the unionism in the face of the great centres that are controlled by the government and the Party [the PRI]. We hope that between a process of debilitation and these official centres [of official unionism], independent unionism raises its capacity... we really hope that we will be able to find institutional channels in Mexico. With this political space that has opened, we hope more and more that we will find channels to resolve the problems that we have in an institutional way, right? And not have to waste ourselves in battle, in mobilizations, in lawsuits, in cases, because it is very wasteful. Now, if the government doesn't move forward, we will have to continue with that, in the battle, right? And the Zapatistas too, are going to continue with the battle. So we are going to find each other there, more and more. And we think that we have very strong coincidences in the battle for the democratization of the country, in which, the rights of the indigenous people is an essential aspect, right? So we are going to continue finding each other, in other words, we have a lot of coincidences... So, our future, and that of the Zapatista movement is one of meeting. It is of closeness. We aren't the same because we aren't indigenous; we are here, in the city. But we are with them in the battle for the democratization of the country.

Thus, it is clear that the future is plagued by as many uncertainties and challenges as it is possessed of a new-found hope and sense of possibility. There is political change in Mexico,

but what ultimate form such change will take is by no means certain. Furthermore, while the potential exists for the resolution of conflicts through “institutional” channels, the question of whether these channels will be accessible to movements like the Zapatistas or independent unionism also remains to be seen. Ultimately, however, this comment reflects most powerfully the sentiment of coincidence and solidarity which exists between independent unionism and the Zapatistas. While the future is riddled with uncertainty, it is also a place of “coincidence” and “meeting”, a place where the Zapatistas and independent labour will continue to struggle together toward common goals.

Not surprisingly, the predictions of what the future holds for the Zapatista movement and independent unionism depended to a great extent upon the manner in which the new federal government of Vicente Fox was perceived. In a climate where some analysts were hailing the beginning of true democracy in Mexico, many of my research partners were decidedly suspicious of the new regime. Benedicto from the ORT hypothesised that the Zapatistas would soon face a sort of ultimatum from the new government and that this would be a defining moment for the movement:

even though it's difficult to say what's going to happen to the Zapatistas, the fact is that the movement is there and it's not going to be easy to defeat. So probably, the government will attack the Zapatistas, not only in an armed way but first in a political way by sending an ultimatum to them saying that “we will solve the San Andres Agreements, we will solve those problems” and in exchange the Zapatistas will have to disarm, not to dissolve, but to disarm. Now that's a really complicated thing because Zapatismo is not only about the San Andres Accords, that's only the first stage of it, there would still be four other stages to solve and to discuss, so the Zapatistas would probably not accept laying down their weapons unless all the stages of the problem are solved. So the Zapatistas have become a permanent political platform, no matter what happens and no matter how soon the stages of the problem

are solved, they will always be a political platform and an important one...right now independent unions are having their own problems and their own fight, but they are still supporting the Zapatistas in every possible way. Right now, the conditions are getting together so that the independent unions can get stronger because there are many contradictions and many fights between the official unions, especially between the leaders of the Labour Congress and the UNT. So if the independent unions can take advantage of these contradictions and these fights and get stronger, they will become the only alternative, the only option, for thousands and thousands of workers and they will become an incredibly strong force and that will also build a stronger bridge between the Zapatistas and the unions if they manage to take advantage of these contradictions between the official unions there will not be a better platform and a better way of supporting the Zapatistas than getting the independent unions to be a strong force and the strong support the Zapatistas need will be given by the newly strengthened independent unions. So even though they are not working towards the Zapatistas their goals and their success will translate into more support for the Zapatistas.

Thus, the divergence between the two movements is emphasised here by Benedicto while at the same time the notion of movements operating in concert toward common goals and benefiting from the strength of the other is also reinforced. Interestingly, shortly after coming to office, Vicente Fox did almost exactly what Benedicto predicted, sending a severely modified version of the San Andres Accords to congress and insisting that the Zapatistas appreciate his gestures of withdrawing some of the federal troops, releasing political prisoners, and engaging the Zapatista Army in an attempt to return to negotiations. Lately, attempts on the part of the government to cast the Zapatistas as intransigent and unreasonable due to their condemnation of the approval of the modified San Andres Accords have articulated much the same sentiment that Benedicto predicted as it appears the government may indeed be positioning itself for a renewed and “legitimized” military action against the Zapatistas. More significant that the accuracy of his predictions in this regard, however, is

Benedicto's emphasis upon the notion that the independent labour movement remains in strong solidarity with the Zapatistas, but that their struggles may diverge for the time being as the independent unions attempt to boost their strength vis-a-vis the official labour unions. While coincidences continue to exist, the autonomy and distinctiveness of each struggle maintains its significance and both the Zapatistas and the independent unions must ultimately answer to their own particular agendas rather than subordinating them to a monolithic, all-encompassing ideology.

While many of my research partners spoke persuasively of the pragmatic aspects of the near future for independent unionism and the Zapatista movement, there were also reflections shared with me in regard to the question of the future that evoked much more imaginative and abstract conceptions of what might emerge between the Zapatistas and independent labour. Samuel from the SME spoke of the future of Zapatista-labour relations as a place of imagination, opportunity, and novelty, while prefacing these notions with an assessment of the immediate future of the Zapatistas and their legacy:

the Zapatista movement has left many teachings, many ideas that we have learned, there are many ideas that we have learned from them... Their teachings and their ideas won't die. Now we're worried about repression and about the hostilities that the government has maintained against the Zapatistas. We know that the government has considered killing them all, to allow a massacre and to kill them all, but the wound that would cause in the people would be really deep and it would compromise the social peace and it would also compromise the way the government is seen from the outside, that's why they haven't done it... The physical killing of the Zapatistas is possible but I don't think society will allow it... I think that the Zapatistas might be the seed for a superior social organism or a superior social organization, not only in quantity but in quality, it will be superior to any political party you can think of because it will join into a group many different sectors of people, not only workers but poor people and civic associations and student movements and all those kinds of

things. So that's what I think is going to happen with them, they will be the seed for a social organization that will be better than any political party that you can think of and in the matter of ideas, they will never die...the future of the independent unions and their relationship with the Zapatistas, we're betting that we will join forces and become an organization but we don't think it will be a social organization, it will be more of a political organization like a political party but not. It will group workers, the people, the Zapatistas, and every other part of the base of the people so we can fight against the neoliberal parties such as PRI and PAN and also against PRD, even though they say they are from the centre-left wing of politics they have neoliberal characteristics that are shown in some of their programs or in some of their positions. So we believe that if we get together with the Zapatistas and with the rest of the people this political organization that will be built from that will be a socialist one. We will try to organize the people from the bases so that we can rescue our country from neoliberal politics. We want to reconsider, rebuild, and rethink our relationship with other countries.

Thus, while the annihilation of the Zapatistas is a concern, the hope for the future here seems to considerably outweigh the threats posed by the government or the military. Most interestingly, Samuel remarks upon the notion of a new social organization that the Zapatistas, labour unions, and other sectors of civil society will form at some time to come. This sort of organization and relationship is one which the Zapatistas themselves allude to in their declarations and it is one which also seems to evoke the notion of coincidence once again. The notion that different individuals and organizations will have their disparate goals and agendas is clear, but the idea that there could exist some form of broad socio-political formation that they could all participate in to construct a new kind of social reality is even more pertinent to this vision.

In many ways, the Zapatista moment of coincidence is nowhere more obvious than when one considers the fact that the movement has come to matter to people far removed from the jungles of Chiapas. Rather than asserting solidarity out of a sense of altruism, diverse

groups and individuals have come to see their own struggles and suffering reflected in the Zapatista movement. In the words of Cecilia from the FAT:

I think that in the future there should be more respect for the Zapatista proposals and I think that the San Andres Agreements and the Zapatista demands should be taken into consideration and fulfilled, otherwise it's a struggle that we will continue, from every social movement we will always try to solve this, these demands and these problems that are common to all of us. Well, I think that if the government attends to the Zapatista demands and actually solves them, I think that a new panorama will be opening to all the social movements and it will give them hope and it will allow the social movements to ask for what they need and it will be a great thing if it actually happens, so we will see. I believe that the cooperatives and the indigenous groups are proposing the same thing. Self-administration, freedom, support in between communities, good respect to diversity and to independence, so it's mostly the same, they are the same principles.

The Zapatista movement is thus one which embodies the hopes and aspirations for many different movements throughout Mexico, not in the sense that they are fighting for everyone's interests, but that what they are fighting for coincides with the demands of a multiplicity of other groups and individuals. The future is thus a site of uncertainty, hope, caution, and struggle but it is also a place which represents coincidence and commonality while always recognizing the fundamental right to self-determination and autonomy. This, then, must be considered the fundamental legacy of the Zapatista movement: that while their struggle is rooted in the indigenous heart of the mountains of the Mexican southeast, there must not be one vision or one voice which defines the quest for a new and better world. Only through engagement, dialogue, and the profound respect for difference and autonomy may we begin to step into that space which looks onto not only a new Mexico, but a new world.

“Something Has Told Him That His Dream is That of Many, and He Goes to Find Them”: Conclusions and Coincidences

Through this work, I have attempted to illuminate what I have termed the Zapatista “moment of coincidence”, specifically as this phenomenon relates to the independent labour movement in Mexico City. As I have emphasised already, I use the notion of “coincidence” here not to cast the Zapatista movement in an accidental or random light but rather to emphasise the profound importance of intersection, affinity, and engagement in understanding the success of the Zapatistas and the movements and individuals who have struggled alongside them in an effort to envision meaningful and alternative social realities. Since the beginning of their uprising, the Zapatistas have continually disavowed any vanguardist role for themselves, choosing instead to emphasise the importance of revolution through dialogue and participation. Through their active engagement of movements such as that of independent unionism, the Zapatistas have succeeded in extending their influence far beyond the jungles and canyons of Chiapas. However, this coincidence is not due solely to the work of the Zapatistas themselves. Movements such as independent labour have been struggling for decades for many of the same issues that the Zapatistas have championed over the course of the past seven years. Furthermore, this moment of coincidence which I assert is one of the most significant aspects of the Zapatista movement is also due to the fact that the Zapatistas have impacted, more influentially than anywhere else, upon the ideological landscape of Mexico. Through their communiques, encounters, acts of resistance, and articulations of

alternatives, the Zapatistas have forced Mexicans to reconsider the world which they inhabit and the ways in which it could be reconfigured.

The influence exerted by the Zapatista movement upon movements like that of independent labour is also particularly compelling specifically because there are few, if any, direct linkages existing between the Zapatistas and other social movements. It is not as if the Zapatistas have attempted to infiltrate the ranks of other social movements with their own members in an effort to make converts out of them, instead, the Zapatistas have insisted upon the preeminence of the concepts of autonomy and specificity as it applies to the necessity of each person articulating their own struggle in their own manner. The only notion which supersedes these two cornerstones of Zapatismo is the belief that only through interaction and accompaniment may people effectively begin to realize change in the world around them. Thus, this moment of coincidence which has formed between the Zapatistas and the independent union movement is one which has emerged due to the essential fact that while both movements have their own particular agendas and forms of struggle, they find themselves bound together in opposition to a system which seeks to marginalize, exploit, and subordinate them both. Additionally, coincidence exists due to the discussion generated by the Zapatistas' ideological challenges surrounding concepts such as democracy, citizenship, human rights, and social justice. By basing the search for alternative visions of social, economic, and political realities upon a fundamental and incontrovertible acknowledgement of difference, autonomy, and the right to listen and to be listened to, the Zapatistas have constructed a space which is not a new world, but something which prefigures a new world.

Ultimately, there are no answers, no absolute visions or articulations to be taken from the moment of coincidence which has emerged between independent unionism and the Zapatista movement. There is no blueprint upon which to begin a reconstruction of society and neither is there a sense that such a blueprint is even desirable. The truly revolutionary aspect of the Zapatista movement lies not in the image of the armed guerrilla declaring war on the Mexican army and the executive branch of the federal government but in the notion that new and emancipatory social, political, and economic formations will emerge only as a product of a commitment to speaking and listening, to not simply ruling, but to ruling by obeying, and to a world which is capable of holding many worlds. The Zapatista movement has managed to catalyse a broad social front of opposition to the politics of exploitation, marginalization, and oppression by virtue of the fact that they see the disparate struggles being waged by others in Mexico and around the world not as merely useful sources of support for their own movement, but as struggles which are absolutely valid and of irreducible significance within each of their own contexts. In a similar manner, the Zapatista movement has come to be seen in much the same way by members of the independent labour movement. Rather than serving as a convenient symbol, the Zapatistas have instead come to occupy a place alongside the struggle of independent labour.

What will come of this moment of coincidence remains to be seen, however, what is clear is that regardless of what occurs in the future, the Zapatista cry of “Ya basta!”, “enough is enough!”, which issued from the mouths of faceless guerrillas on the first day of January in 1994 is one which has found a profound resonance within Mexico. As of this writing,

however, the Zapatista movement appears to be suffering an ebbing of their moment of coincidence. Following the “Zapatour” Caravan to Mexico City to lobby for the passage of the San Andres Accords, the government of President Vicente Fox passed into law a severely and unilaterally modified version of the original accords which Subcomandante Marcos decried as the “Constitutional Recognition of the Rights and Culture of Latifundists and Racists” (Subcomandante Marcos 2001). Furthermore, with the passing of this “indigenous rights law”, Marcos predicted that “we already know what’s coming: a great media campaign about the ‘Zapatista intransigence’, an increase in military and police pressure, reactivation of paramilitary troops, offensives, etcetera” (Ibid). Disturbingly, this depiction seems, so far, to be accurate. Since May of 2001, the Zapatistas have maintained their silence and once again observers of the movement are predicting its disappearance into oblivion. It could be that the Zapatista “moment of coincidence” is indeed coming to a close, that the tremendous challenge of constantly reinventing and reinvigorating their movement has proven too great and that other Mexicans have found too much else to worry about in their own lives. It could be that the Zapatista movement is ready to fade into history as yet another failed attempt at social revolution. It could be that the Zapatistas have served their purpose within a national scope in facilitating, along with movements such as independent labour, a political and social epiphany for which they are no longer necessary. Or perhaps we should listen more carefully to the words of Subcomandante Marcos before the Zapatistas fell silent: “know that it’s not over for us” (Ibid). Because while “Ya basta!” has come to signify the storm itself, the rain and the fire of Zapatista prophecy, the multitude and diversity of cries of dissent, it also

signifies a common refusal to succumb to oblivion and a shared affirmation of the necessity of finding something better.

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