

Peace in Chiapas: The Curse of Sisyphus?

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Sisyphus was condemned to push a huge boulder to the top of a hill. When, after enormous effort, he was finally on the verge of completing his task, the boulder slipped away from him and rolled back down to the bottom. Sisyphus had to start all over again, without ever seeing his efforts bear fruit. In analyzing this myth, existentialist philosopher Albert Camus proposed one solution: we had to imagine Sisyphus happy at this task. After the March for Dignity, it seemed that the Zapatistas were on the verge of winning an important victory. But near the culmination of the long process, Congress frustrated their efforts by refusing to truly recognize indigenous rights. All the progress was undone. Now, in the age of globalized critiques, perhaps a better solution would be for Sisyphus to find new forms of resistance and new ways to break the curse.

"We're closer to peace"

In early April, the Catalan Manuel Castells, author of *The Information Age* gave the Julio Cortázar lecture in Guadalajara. He argued that the Zapatista movement is one of the most innovative in the world today because it combines an affirmation of identity, a savvy media strategy and the ability to form alliances with diverse groups outside of its identity. For these reasons, the movement has much to teach us. It has not only become an important actor within the country, but has an impact on social action in the rest of the world as well. Castells predicted that the cultural and political forms of action tried out by the Zapatistas would be used elsewhere too.

After the March for Dignity, the Zapatistas returned to the jungle. They held 80 public events during that march, engaging in an intense outreach campaign with public opinion and, most important, forging closer ties to the rest of the Mexican people. The march was an important peaceful action. It proved that this was an army that did not use arms or carry out terrorist acts, but rather spoke, communicated, sought to convince and win over through words. Comandante Tacho summed up the march's achievements by noting that their hopes after it ended were higher than when they began their fight, and that they were happy to find that thousands of indigenous people were with them. "We can see that we're closer to peace." Marcos emphasized a different issue in summarizing the march's achievements: "Now people won't be ashamed to be indigenous." After the march, the responsibility for peace lay in Congress hands.

The European Parliament urged Mexico's Congress to approve the bill on indigenous rights and culture drafted by its pluralist Peace and Harmony Commission (COCOPA). And on April 4, Mexico's Government Secretary Santiago Creel met with civil society organizations—including Human Rights Watch—in Washington and promised that COCOPA's bill would be approved shortly. He said that the government was proceeding to free the Zapatista prisoners under its jurisdiction, and working to free those under the authority of state governments. COCOPA analyzed the situation of Zapatista prisoners in Querétaro and Tabasco, and traveled there to resolve the remaining problems on site. COCOPA also lobbied for the bill it had drafted, which is the one President Fox sent to the Senate. The Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) announced that it would not only support the bill, but also introduce some legal clarifications to improve it.

Everything seemed to indicate that peace was just around the corner. In the second half of April, the army withdrew from the last two military posts occupied in Chiapas: Guadalupe Tepeyac and Río

Euseba. The Commissioner for Peace in Chiapas, Luis H. Alvarez, and the EZLN's official representative, Fernando Yáñez, witnessed the withdrawal. They agreed that the communities would determine the projects to be implemented by the Social Development Department in the places the military had occupied.

Nonetheless, although many civil society groups urged Congress to approve the law the President sent, some spoke out against it. In March, big business representatives ran an ad demanding that the legislators not approve COCOPA's bill, and in April members of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the former state party, and ranchers from Chiapas reiterated that demand.

Misinformation and prejudice

The PRI legislators, using ex-President Zedillo's frequent trick, announced that they would make no substantial changes to the law but merely revise some legal details. Once people saw where these revisions were heading, however, they realized that the very core of the law would be mutilated. A majority of PRI and ruling National Action Party (PAN) legislators were acting on misinformation and prejudice. Some of the most important confusions had to do with the terms "peoples" and "territory," seen by members of the PRI and PAN as closely linked to land ownership. Specialists on the issue tried to explain the terms.

The concept of an "indigenous people" as a subject of the right to self-determination and autonomy does not refer to specific forms of land ownership, but rather to ethnic identity. The concept has been defined in International Labor Organization Convention 169 as well as COCOPA's bill. The members of an original people may be community members with common ownership of the land, small landowners or even landless and still be indigenous. The concept of "indigenous community" is likewise not associated with any particular form of land ownership. In some communities, the dominant form of property has been communal, in others small privately owned parcels, and in yet others diverse forms of land ownership coexist side by side. Community members do not necessarily have planting land. Women, young people, new residents and others are considered part of the community whether or not they own land. The same is true of many migrants who live and work outside the community but continue to fulfill their community responsibilities. Specialists in the field explained that "indigenous people" and "community" are not the same thing. Many members of an indigenous people may live in communities, but others live in cities and even in the United States without ceasing to be indigenous. Indigenous peoples cannot be reduced to the communities in which some of their members live.

Other issues also came into the debate: collective rights, language and education. Language and its discursive model constitute the organizing nucleus and symbolic reference point of ethnic identity. Only recognition of a people's collective right to create and control its educational institutions, and to expand its language and normative systems to the spheres of prestige and power—public administration, justice, the media and education within their territories—can satisfy that people's collective need for cultural reproduction as an expression of its linguistic and educational autonomy. All of this is required for the construction of a multicultural Mexico.

A bitter day of mourning

Despite the many explanations and clarifications offered, the racial prejudice deeply rooted in most legislators muddled the discussion even before the legislative debate began.

On April 21, the PRI presented its own indigenous legislation. Two days later, PAN senator Diego Fernández de Cevallos explained that "positive" additions, deletions and revisions had been made to COCOPA's bill, going beyond the original proposal in many respects. The PAN and PRI justified their significant changes to COCOPA's text as a way to prevent later conflicts. On April 25, the Senate unanimously approved the altered indigenous law. The PRD bench voted in favor of it in general, pleased to have established the right to autonomy and free self-determination, which the PRI and PAN had staunchly opposed. Later events would show, however, that this favorable vote was a tactical mistake.

On April 28, the majority of the House of Representatives approved the text sent by the Senate without changing so much as a comma. The law was passed by an alliance of the PRI, the PAN and the Green Party, while the PRD, the Labor Party, four PRI representatives from Oaxaca and an independent PRI representative voted against. The PRD representatives described it as a bitter day for Mexico and a day of mourning for the ten million indigenous Mexicans.

COCOPA's bill substantially altered

The new law, which has a very different structure from the bill proposed by COCOPA, is known as the Bartlett-Fernández de Cevallos Law for the PRI and PAN senators behind the new draft. The same Salinas and Zedillo teams responsible for reforming article 27 of the Constitution in a way detrimental to small farmers and blocking COCOPA's initiative in 1996 advised Bartlett.

The new law is deceptive because, while verbally recognizing the Mexican state as multicultural, it does not change the political and legal structure accordingly. For example, it acknowledges the right of a people to autonomy, but does not give this right a territorial expression. It also does not define the mechanisms through which autonomy may be exercised, referring only to communities, while COCOPA's bill emphasized that indigenous peoples are the subjects of rights and that communities form part of an indigenous people. The law cut the paragraph in COCOPA's bill that stated: "Indigenous peoples' self-determination will be respected in each of the spheres and levels in which they exercise their autonomy; this may include one or more indigenous communities, in accord with the particular specific circumstances of each state." According to this definition, indigenous peoples have the right to exercise their autonomy in the economic, political, social and legal spheres at all levels, from the community to the municipality to the region. By eliminating it, Congress effectively annulled the mechanisms to make autonomy possible and effective.

In COCOPA's proposal, consciousness of indigenous identity was the basic criterion for determining who would be eligible for the legislation on indigenous rights and culture. The approved law undermines the essence of that proposal, however. In reality, it only enunciates rights rather than recognizes them, relegating their establishment to secondary laws or state constitutions. Now the authorities have the discretion to determine when an indigenous people exists.

For these reasons, the approved legislation is not only insufficient but also contrary to the interests of indigenous peoples. Leaving it up to the states to define the characteristics of indigenous autonomy and mechanisms for exercising autonomy in itself annuls the rights of indigenous peoples to free self-determination and establishes a system contrary to that agreed upon in the San Andrés Accords. It limits a right that should by nature be established in the Constitution.

Another of the serious problems with the new law is that it omits the term "territory" and replaces it

with "places," thus robbing indigenous peoples of the physical space in which to exercise autonomy. It does not recognize their constitutional right of collective access to the use and enjoyment of the natural resources found in their lands and territories. It is left as a mere right of preference, limited by the forms and norms of property and land ownership already established in the Constitution and by the rights already acquired in indigenous territories by third parties (generally through illegal means). On this point, the law Congress approved is even more regressive than the PRI's bill, which stipulated that indigenous peoples have the right of access to the use and enjoyment of the natural resources in their lands. This time, the opinions of the lawyers and big landowners in the PRI and PAN held sway, and the word "collective" and the concept of "territory" were cut from the law.

Thus, the new law ignores ILO Convention 169, which establishes that indigenous peoples' rights to their property and to the possession, use, administration and conservation of their natural resources shall be recognized, and that when these resources belong to the nation, consultation forms must be agreed upon for their exploitation. By failing to recognize the right of indigenous peoples and communities to collective use and enjoyment of the natural resources in their lands and territories and by limiting their right to use and administrate them, the law ignores an issue vital to the very existence of indigenous peoples and to the exercise of their rights.

Not subjects of decision but objects of protection

COCOPA's bill stated that indigenous communities are to be considered entities "of public right," but the new law, following Zedillo's proposal, considers them to be "of public interest." The difference between these two terms is enormous. As subjects of public right, indigenous peoples have a place within the organizational structure of the state. As entities of public interest, however, they are objects of state protection. The change in concept robs them of the real possibility of exercising the right to autonomy, which they supposedly have a state-protected right to do. Since the new law considers them objects in need of state protection rather than autonomous decision-making subjects, it includes a series of measures, congruent with the simulation of autonomy, that reproduce the authoritarian and paternalistic charitable policies already being imposed on the indigenous communities.

With respect to the right to association, the law backpedals even from Zedillo's proposal, since it eliminates the possibility of associating on a regional level. Association is limited to the municipal sphere, which prevents peoples that have been split apart by municipal boundaries from reestablishing themselves. Even the possibility of redrawing municipal boundaries in the territories where indigenous peoples are located was omitted. The law also does not allow indigenous peoples to elect their authorities, only representatives to town hall meetings. Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination in each of the spheres and levels in which they should be able to exercise their autonomy was thus not guaranteed. And with respect to redrawing electoral districts to encourage indigenous participation, the law does not state that the location of the indigenous peoples must be taken into account, as proposed in both COCOPA's and Zedillo's bills, but only that this should be done "when feasible." As this is a transitory article with no established dates for putting it into effect, it may never be applied.

Huge steps backwards

The law omits the judicial branch's obligation to validate resolutions issued by indigenous peoples' authorities. Rights apparently recognized at a constitutional level are subordinated to the discretion of lesser authorities. No substantive rights in the area of education are recognized, with full responsibility

for guaranteeing education left to the state. Thus, the new law does not recognize cultural differences. Another point agreed to at San Andrés was that indigenous peoples would have their own communications media, but the new law merely states that this must accommodate to the legislation already in effect in this area, leaving indigenous peoples to compete with the big communications consortiums on extremely unequal terms. And to top it all off, the new law establishes as a specific right of indigenous peoples something that is in fact an obligation of all Mexicans, to conserve the environment.

Immediately after Congress passed the law, it was reported that several states with indigenous populations already have legislation that is more progressive. The approved law falls far short of indigenous rights laws in Oaxaca, Chihuahua, Nayarit, Veracruz, Campeche and other states, which do speak of territories and the right to association, and recognize the communities' legal status and right to collective access to their natural resources.

When PRD representatives pointed out that the Zapatistas would not accept the new law, the heads of the PRI and PAN benches responded disdainfully that this would be the executive branch's problem, not theirs. But that is not quite true. Since the law involves constitutional reforms and thus must be approved by the majority of state congresses, the debate extends to the states as well. In fact, it touches the whole nation.

Zapatistas: Total rejection, resistance and rebellion

The Zapatistas responded immediately to the new law, declaring that it impedes the exercise of indigenous rights. They rejected it and broke off talks they had begun with Fox's government, arguing that the law was offensive to indigenous peoples and that its approval had closed the door to talks and peace. They added that the new legislation does not begin to respond to the demands of Mexico's indigenous peoples, the Indigenous National Council, the EZLN or the national and international civil society that had mobilized around it. The law betrays the San Andrés Accords both in spirit and on specific issues and contradicts COCOPA's bill on the most important points: autonomy and self-determination, indigenous peoples as subjects of political right, land and territories, use and enjoyment of natural resources, election of municipal authorities and the right to regional association, among others.

To the Zapatistas, the law confirmed that indigenous peoples would continue to be treated as objects of charity and disdain. They felt that the name it truly deserves is the "constitutional recognition of the rights and culture of landowners and racists." They saw the law as a way of sabotaging the incipient rapprochement between the federal government and the EZLN, as it betrayed hopes for a negotiated settlement to the war in Chiapas and revealed the political class's utter failure to respond to people's demands. The new law does not resolve a single one of the causes that had led to the Zapatista uprising, and by invalidating the dialogue and negotiation process gives the various armed groups in Mexico reason to keep their arms.

Resisting derision

Marcos announced that, given this new situation, the Zapatistas would remain in clandestinity, resistance and rebellion, although they could already see what was coming: an extensive campaign to present the Zapatistas as intransigent, a stepping up of military and police pressure and the reactivation

of paramilitary groups. The Zapatistas called on civil society to demand that the Mexican government reconsider the legislative mockery.

The Indigenous National Congress (CNI) opposed the recently approved legislation for all the same reasons. Its members lamented that they were not understood despite all they had done to make themselves understood. The majority of senators and representatives wanted things to remain the same. On May 1, the CNI issued a statement (see last issue of *envío*) denouncing that the powerful had once again used indigenous peoples' words and sentiments to mock and deride them. They described the new law as regressive since it fails to recognize the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples established in the Constitution itself and in international conventions, pacts and treaties signed by Mexico. They announced that they would refuse to be mocked by the few who hold power and had kidnapped Congress. Meanwhile, the guerrilla group ERPI called on indigenous peoples to establish new autonomous municipalities.

Fox: First applause, then distance

President Fox's first response to the Senate unanimously approving a text significantly changed from the bill he had sent and a majority of PAN and PRI representatives approving that text in the House was to praise the legislative branch for approving an indigenous law. He described the law as one more step towards definitive peace accords, a step that would allow rapid progress to be made in the development of peoples and communities.

The President was still celebrating when he learned that the indigenous people had rejected the law. At that point, he asked the Indigenous National Congress not to demonstrate but to talk. When the Zapatistas, interpreting his praise as a bad sign, broke off their talks with the government, Fox called an emergency meeting of his Cabinet members who had formed a Chiapas group. In the wake of the group's discussions, the government agreed that the law needed to go deeper into issues such as autonomy and self-determination, recognition of indigenous communities as subjects of public right and natural resource use. At the same time, it began to emphasize that approval of the law was the legislature's responsibility, and that the executive branch had fulfilled all of its own commitments.

The President's indigenous affairs representative, indigenous businesswoman Xóchitl Gálvez, criticized the new law the most cogently. She said it was not what she would have wanted, and attributed the votes cast by the senators and the majority of representatives to a profound lack of understanding of autochthonous peoples. Other government bodies like the National Indigenous Institute accused the legislators of being afraid to recognize indigenous autonomy. Officials in this institute presented a carefully prepared comparative study showing that the new law differed significantly from COCOPA's proposal and the San Andrés Accords.

Tension returns to Chiapas

The government's Peace Commissioner, Luis H. Alvarez, agreed that the law should be reformed, and asked the EZLN to reflect on its decision to suspend contact with the government. Without demonstrating it, and against textual evidence, he denied that the approved law was closer to the PRI's bill than to COCOPA's.

The governor of Chiapas strongly criticized the new law, arguing that it does not address indigenous demands or contribute to peace. He described it as "retrograde" and a "product of the triumph of

conservative groups," accusing the legislators of overlooking the erosion of the Mexican army and the impoverishing of the indigenous peoples. Since the governor had been a member of COCOPA when the bill was drafted, he knew very well that the legislature had left important elements of it aside. He explained that Congress had failed to include three essential sets of issues from the San Andrés Accords: those aimed at establishing a new relationship between indigenous peoples and the nation; those aimed at eradicating the attitudes and practices, both in everyday life and in the public sphere, that create subordination and inequality; and those that enable the rights and guarantees related to use and enjoyment of territory and communal political self-management established in ILO Convention 169. He feared it would be difficult to solve the conflict in Chiapas any time soon: if the legal situation was problematic, the political situation was even more so. And this was in fact the case; tension returned to Chiapas and the army again increased its patrols.

PAN and PRI: Conflicts and struggles

The majority of senators insisted that the law had taken up the San Andrés Accords. The PAN argued that the law's positive aspects were not being valued and lamented the negative reactions. The head of the PAN bench in the Senate, Fernández de Cevallos, angrily warned both President Fox and his spokespeople to respect Congress, while himself disrespectfully describing Xóchitl Gálvez's advisers as "louse-ridden" hicks who use "knapsacks in place of briefcases," and declaring that he had not legislated to please a guerrilla movement. On May 9, the PAN leadership called together state leaders and heads of the PAN benches in the state congresses to marshal support for the law. They explained that the law had turned out as it had to protect the rights of "third parties."

The PRI continued its traditional two-faced pretense. While publicly announcing that it had laid down no lines for the party's local legislators to follow, it quietly instructed them to support the law.

The PRI representatives in Oaxaca's state legislature announced that they would vote against the law, and were backed by the PRI governor, who described the changes to the bill as racist in treating indigenous peoples and communities as minors. He insisted that a mutilated law must not be allowed to stand. Oaxaca's PRI representatives did not stop at declaring what they would do in their state, but also called on colleagues in other states to oppose the constitutional reforms on indigenous matters because they represented a step back compared to local legislation and put peaceful coexistence at risk. Nonetheless, several PRI benches let it be known that they would follow the lines laid down by the national leadership and approve the law in their states.

PRD: Veto the law

In the PRD, one senator continued to defend the law, but others had to admit its shortcomings. They justified their yeas vote in the Senate by arguing that the law also represented some progress, and that, realistically, was the most that could have been obtained given the correlation of forces in the Senate. Among its positive aspects, they pointed to the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights.

The PRD representatives to the House criticized their party's senators, however. Given the inadequate constitutional reform on indigenous rights and culture reflected in the approved law, the party leadership announced that it would introduce a measure to reform article 115 of the Constitution to allow indigenous peoples to organize beyond municipal boundaries. The PRD described the changes made to the original bill as legal but not legitimate and called on the President to veto the law and on state legislatures to reject it. Later, it revived COCOPA's proposal, presenting it as its own to

Congress's permanent commission May 16. The PRD pledged to the Indigenous National Congress that it would push for a national debate on the indigenous law.

The differences among the parties broke the unity within COCOPA, weakening the commission that had been playing such an important role. The COCOPA president for May, a Labor Party representative, described the new law as "stillborn" and a "precursor to war" and called on President Fox to veto it.

The bishops speak

The president of the Mexican Bishops Conference said that the EZLN should be realistic and democratic and accept the approved indigenous rights law. Bishop Arizmendi, Samuel Ruiz's successor in Chiapas, declared that Congress could not please everyone and that the Zapatistas should respect the law. But the bishop of the indigenous Tarahumara region spoke to Fox on April 30, saying that the people involved in pastoral work in his diocese were deeply concerned about the substantial changes that had been made to the bill. Based on their experience accompanying indigenous peoples, they saw the law as a major step backward in the recognition of indigenous peoples' fundamental rights. He asked the President to veto the law and consult the indigenous peoples themselves to find out what they see as appropriate constitutional reforms.

"Congress is flirting with war"

Indigenous rights specialists accused the legislators of refusing to recognize the country's multicultural reality and hiding behind a myth of national homogeneity, as though nothing were happening in society. The reform left the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights half done. Although the law recognized autonomy in words, it denied it through state tutelage. They lamented that peace in Chiapas had not been a priority for the legislators, who acted on behalf of private property, not of people. They criticized Congress for leaving out important issues that the government had recognized and even defended at an international level, and the parties for turning their backs on the country's true social movement.

A group of anthropologists made their opinions known through media spreads demonstrating how COCOPA's initiative had been substantially modified, and warned that the approved law did not respond to much less guarantee indigenous peoples' fundamental needs and expectations. Several commentators agreed and worried that the war in Chiapas was entering a new phase of uncertainty because of the attempt to impose a reform that differed significantly from the agreements reached at San Andrés. They lamented the fact that the legislators saw indigenous peoples not as subjects of rights and of their own destiny but rather as objects of charitable state policies.

The EZLN and other armed groups had been given a bad sign: there was no point in negotiating or reaching agreements with the government. Congress's actions had effectively blocked the path of dialogue and justified the actions of those who opted for armed struggle. Commentators accused Congress of "flirting with war," of wanting to defend its own autonomy so defiantly that it paid no attention to indigenous people's demand for autonomy. They warned the legislators that while they had the right to legislate, the people had the right to be governed by just laws.

Incomplete, imprecise and unacceptable

The Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center described the law as an obstacle to peace for refusing to recognize the various rights of indigenous peoples that had already been accepted by the parties to the conflict, and for limiting the rights already recognized in the San Andrés Accords. The approved law fell back on the old concept of an integrationist state to the detriment of indigenous peoples. The Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center declared that indigenous people had been converted into "hostages of negotiations." In a study, it showed that the approved law was incomplete, imprecise and unacceptable since it diluted or left out already existing rights and paid more attention to business interests than the interests of indigenous peoples.

On May 11, an Indigenous Summit held in Panama titled the Millennium Conference rejected the law passed in Mexico since it had not taken up the indigenous people's demands. They deemed it "discriminatory" for giving others the power to decide the fate of indigenous peoples and called on President Fox to send COCOPA's bill back to Congress.

Paradoxical praise

At the end of May, indigenous people marched in Chiapas against the law, which they felt was aimed at closing their mouths and their consciences. They recalled that many years of government programs had not contributed to the indigenous communities' true development and announced that they would continue to mobilize. In Querétaro, 30 social organizations with indigenous participation demanded that local legislators not approve the indigenous law, and in Durango, PRD members demonstrated against it. Working with indigenous organizations, unions and civic organizations, they set up a Citizen's Congress in the capital to defend COCOPA's bill and demanded that the state legislatures reject the law approved by Congress.

Paradoxically, although an indigenous law has been approved, no praise whatever is coming from indigenous people. Those pleased with its results are the powers behind the Puebla-Panama Plan. These include big landowners and ranchers who have stolen indigenous lands and are thrilled to see that indigenous people have no legal basis to demand them back, the most conservative groups that still treat indigenous people with disdain and the Church elite linked to economic and political powers. The law has been rejected by indigenous rights specialists, indigenous lawyers and indigenous peoples from all corners of the country.

Concession, not recognition

It cannot be denied that the new law concedes some rights to indigenous peoples. The problem lies in the way it does so. As explained by respected indigenous affairs specialist Luis Villoro, the new law is framed within the homogenous legal political structure of a nation-state that for centuries has blocked indigenous peoples' development as free peoples with their own identity. Many legislators failed to understand that the issue is not to *concede* rights within a mestizo idea of a nation, but rather to *recognize* the right of different peoples to define, with each other, a new idea of nation. The legislators argued that they were defending national unity, but forgot that a plural state cannot maintain its unity when one people imposes its idea of nation on the others. Unity must be the result of an agreement among the diverse peoples that make up the state. The legislators did not understand— whether out of ignorance or prejudice—that a multicultural state requires a different structure than a homogenous one.

Global reality in the 21st century requires both a pluralistic array of autonomous arenas of power, subordinated to the powers of the state but not to each other, and a corresponding plurality of legal systems in a diversity of territories.

What Congress created was a law that proclaims the existence of indigenous peoples, but does not grant them a specific place in the structure of the rule of law. It does not recognize their territories, but rather the "places they occupy." It does not allow them to reestablish themselves through the union of municipalities with indigenous majorities, as provided for in COCOPA's bill. Perhaps the crowning evidence of bad faith is that the law includes a series of state obligations that must be fulfilled for anything to happen, as well as the false idea that indigenous people will only escape from marginalization with the help of mestizos. The law clearly reflects a fear of what will happen if indigenous peoples make their own decisions.

Reflecting polarization

The new law also revealed Mexico's increasing polarization. Business interests prevail in the government, but some members are open to the demands for democracy from those from below. Meanwhile, civil society is divided between the few who have become increasingly wealthy from the neoliberal policies and the majority who resist those policies. If COCOPA's initiative had prospered, a place would have been made for the country's most exploited and marginalized people, its indigenous peoples, to express their rights. The conservative line maintained by the old PRI and the new PAN, whose projects are quite similar, kept this from happening. Inside the PRD, a party apparatus distanced from people's demands squared off against minds that are more open. At times, the PRD's prevailing actions have shown it to be a card-carrying member of a political class that can't see beyond its own nose, but the party's mid-level leaders and rank and file criticized the actions of the senatorial elite and forced them to reconsider their positions.

The struggle goes on

The country's economic and political power, so concentrated in such few hands, celebrated the trick of changing things in such a way that everything remains the same as a great triumph. Although their disdain for the country's most marginalized people was blatantly displayed, the indigenous people responded to the affront with dignity. They refused to accept pretenses or crumbs and will continue to fight for recognition of their rights. They know they have lost a political battle, but also know that they are right and will persevere, will continue their struggle. Those sectors of civil society sensitive to the rights of a multicultural citizenry will also prepare to keep fighting. The pluralist community is a recent, fragile acquisition of humanity. It has not yet been legally recognized in Mexico, but there are growing numbers of people who want to build it, are not getting discouraged and refuse to be condemned to a fruitless effort.