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Rebellion in Chiapas: rural reforms and popular struggle

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The armed uprising by between 3000 and 4000 Indians in Chiapas on 1 January 1994 took virtually everyone by surprise.[1] Even people familiar with the region were astonished by the scale of the rebellion and the remarkably sophisticated organisation which had evidently been prepared over several years. The tactics of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) differed from the *foco* strategies of earlier guerrilla movements in Mexico and Latin America. Unlike its precursors, the EZLN is not a small band of rebels hoping to attract support by rising up in arms. This movement already had a mass base when it made its appearance.

The origins and significance of the uprising have been debated by many analysts and it clearly represents a watershed in modern Mexican history. This paper discusses its rural dimension. It attempts to show how policies to modernise the economy and a series of rural reforms have had a negative impact for most *campesinos* in Chiapas, particularly in the Selva and Altos regions.

The rebellion is unlike previous guerrilla struggles in Latin America in that it does not aspire by itself to seize state power and lead the masses in social revolution. In its declaration of war on the federal army and government, the Zapatistas called on all Mexicans to participate in whatever way they can—not necessarily with arms—in a broad movement for 'jobs, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace'. Its political discourse is therefore extremely modern in comparison to Sendero Luminoso and earlier guerrilla organisations. Rather than engage in a 'war of movement' to destroy the state, the EZLN represents more of a 'war of position' aimed at shifting the balance of forces in favour of popular and democratic movements, thereby isolating and ultimately defeating anti-democratic tendencies within the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), the state and the rest of society. Its stated political objectives are to make government accountable to the people and to achieve effective representation for all Mexicans, particularly the indigenous population. It justified the uprising in terms of the lack of conditions for free and democratic elections, calling on the legislative and judicial branches of government to depose the president, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, and install a transitional government to organise fair elections. The rebellion was also directed against the economic model implemented by Salinas. The seizure of seven towns on 1 January 1994 was timed to coincide with the entry into effect of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). One of the first EZLN communiqués stated that NAFTA 'is a death certificate for the Indian peoples of Mexico, who are dispensable for the government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari'. The EZLN also called for the redistribution of *latifundios* (large private

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estates) and the repeal of reforms carried out in 1992 to Article 27 of the Constitution (the statutes governing land tenure).

The paper is divided into three main sections. The first discusses the effects of agricultural modernisation and institutional reforms in Chiapas. It begins by emphasising the constraints faced by the social sector and, by way of contrast, notes the expansion of private sector commercial agriculture after 1982.[2] Attention is then given to the effects of institutional reforms in the coffee and maize sectors. The Salinas government's Solidaridad programme is then examined in the light of the problems facing the social sector in Chiapas.

The second section discusses the effects of the modifications to land tenure and agrarian codes which were approved by Congress in December 1991 and February 1992—a process widely known as 'ejido reform'. It describes the recent history of limited land distribution in Chiapas and the repression suffered by legal *campesino* organisations. This contributed to the generally negative reception of the ejido reform, particularly in the Selva region. The content and implications for Chiapas of the changes to Article 27 are discussed with this backdrop in mind. Although the measurable, direct effects of the ejido reform may not be seen for many years, the effects on *campesino* expectations have had no greater expression than the rebellion itself. In particular the legislated end of land reform was interpreted as the final break in the government's commitment to the rural poor. The loss of hope in acceding to a piece of land contributed to the radicalisation of thousands of Indians in eastern Chiapas.

The third section describes the process of *campesino* organising in the Selva since the early 1970s, with the goal of explaining why the EZLN was able to attract support in this particular region. The failure of successive governments to provide economic support and political space for representative *campesino* organisations is seen to have contributed to a weakening of legalistic strategies and the radicalisation of discontent. These findings differ from the argument put forward by Warman who claims that the rebellion was implanted from outside by political activists pursuing their own agenda.[3] The analysis presented here is closer to that of Hernández and local *campesino* leaders.[4] One of the interviews given by the EZLN *subcomandante* Marcos also reveals the desperation caused by the authorities' constant rejection of popular demands and proposals.[5]

The paper concludes by discussing two broader processes set in motion by the Zapatista uprising. These refer to the mobilisation of significant sectors of Mexican civil society in support of political democratisation and the resurgence of militant *campesino* activism in the form of large-scale land invasions.

Modernisation and institutional reforms

The rural social sector in Chiapas

Any analysis of the implications of the rural reforms for *campesino* agriculture must begin with an understanding of the conditions of the social sector. Table 1 provides a general panorama for the state of Chiapas, using official data from 1988.[6] From these data we can gain a picture of the relatively poor level of

TABLE 1
The social sector in Chiapas in 1988

Number of *ejidos* and *comunidades agrarias* (CA)		1 714
Number of *ejidatarios* and *comuneros*		193 515
Land surface in social sector (hectares)		3 130 892
Share of total land area in Chiapas		41.4%
Land use in the social sector	hectares	% of sector
agriculture	1 278 147	40.8
forestry	700 381	22.4
pasture	923 182	29.5
other uses	229 182	7.3
rain-fed area	1 225 831	95.9
irrigated area	52 316	4.1
Principal crop cultivated	No of *ejidos* and CAs	
maize	1264	
coffee	349	
sugar cane	19	
soy beans	16	
beans	8	
green vegetables	8	
rice	3	
Inputs in the social sector	No of *ejidos* and CAs	% of sector
farm installations	495	28.9
tractors	318	18.6
agroindustry equipment	206	12.0
credit	951	55.5
public services	1390	81.1

The number of *ejidos* and *comunidades agrarias* in Chiapas increased by 358 in 1989–92, to 2072 (PROCEDE, op cit, p 10).
Source: INEGI. 1991

development of *ejidos* and *comunidades agrarias* in Chiapas. Virtually all the sector is dedicated to rain-fed agriculture. If we calculate that each of the almost 200 000 *ejidatarios* or *comuneros* has five or six dependents, the population we are referring to is over one million persons, occupying a little over three million hectares of land, of which only 40.8% is classified as good for agricultural use. Maize is clearly the principal crop for most *ejidos* and *comunidades agrarias*, followed by coffee. However, the figures do not indicate the combination of crops within each *ejido*. Survey data for 1990 also revealed that 44.6% of *ejidatarios* possessed between 0.1 and 4.0 hectares and 42% had plots between 4.1 and 10.0 hectares.[7] In the Altos region, the average plot size is two hectares.

In terms of opportunities to convert to new cash crops, it should be noted that the 16 *ejidos* which produced soy beans were all located in the more developed Soconusco region. Ten per cent of *ejidos* in the Soconusco also had access to irrigation. Regarding the limited use of inputs, we can add that the category of 'public services' tends to present a somewhat distorted picture of reality. This rubric includes electricity, drinking water, paved and unpaved roads. The fact that three-quarters of the *ejidos* reported that they had unpaved roads (1224) hardly constitutes access to public services. A more accurate indication is given

by the low proportion which had paved roads (10%). Installation of electricity and drinking water was said to benefit 50% and 35% of *ejidos*, respectively.

According to the 1988 survey 62.5% of the rural social sector in Mexico received credit in 1988. In Chiapas the figure was given as 55.5%. The regions with the lowest proportion of credit were the Altos and the Selva (30% and 38% respectively). However, the validity of these figures is contradicted by other sources. More recent data show that, at a national level, during the period 1985–89 only 22.2% of *ejidatarios* and *comuneros* had access to credit each year, falling to 16.3% in 1990. In fact, between 1985 and 1990 62% of producers in the social sector had no access whatsoever to agricultural credit.[8] In Chiapas the number of producers with credit for planting fell from an annual average of 20.4% in 1985–89 to 12.7% in 1990, while only 5.7% of producers received credit for machinery in 1985–90. Similarly, the Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC) claimed that in 1987 only 43% of *ejidos* in Mexico received credit.[9] Moreover, the Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Información (INEGI) survey gives us no indication of the amount of credit each *ejido* or *comunidad agraria* were said to have received.

At the same time that productivity of basic grains was declining, the growth of private sector commercial agriculture boomed in Chiapas. Although starting from a lower base, between 1982 and 1987 the land area dedicated to new cash crops of soy beans, peanuts, sorghum and tobacco grew by 51.4%, 64.5%, 146.8% and 194.9%, respectively. Production of these four crops grew by 150.8%, 244.1%, 144.8% and 261.2% in the same period. The more traditional export crops also continued to expand. Banana production increased by over 25%, while output of cacao and sugar cane doubled. In 1982–87 the volume of meat production also increased by over 400%, reflecting the support which ranchers found in the state government.[10]

The modernisation policies were continued by governor Patrocinio González Garrido (1989–93). In 1989 his government ordered the privatisation of two state-owned enterprises, the Chiapas Forestry Corporation (CORFO) and the Pujiltic sugar mill.[11] The *Plan de Gobierno 1989–94* was also designed to promote export agriculture through improvements to port facilities at Puerto Madero and continued support for producers of sorghum, peanuts, soy beans and safflower. The most significant reforms of this period, however, concerned the two main crops produced by *campesinos* in Chiapas: coffee and maize.

Restructuring the coffee sector

For many years small coffee growers sold their crop to a state agency, the Instituto Nacional Mexicano del Café (INMECAFE). INMECAFE was established in 1958 to carry out research and provide technical support. As part of Echeverría's strategy to modernise small-scale production and increase the state's presence in regional markets, the functions of INMECAFE were expanded in 1973. It was given a central role in organising and financing coffee production, as well as guaranteeing the purchase and export of the harvest. By the end of the 1970s it had managed to displace several important intermediaries and purchased half the domestic supply. In Chiapas, this conjuncture allowed for the emergence of new

TABLE 2
Distribution of coffee producers by plot size Chiapas and Mexico

Plot size (hectares)	*Chiapas*	*Mexico*
up to 2	48 762	194 538
2–5	18 248	64 377
5–10	5 102	17 881
10–20	1 202	4 291
20–50	208	808
50–100	104	246
over 100	116	178
Total	73 742	282 319

Source: INMECAFE, 1992

producer cooperatives and Uniones de Ejidos (UE) in both the Altos and Selva regions.

With the economic crisis of the 1980s the position of INMECAFE declined. Its share of the market fell from 44% in 1982–83 to just 9.6% in 1987–88.[12] Like many of the state agencies in this period, it suffered from internal inefficiencies, corruption and mismanagement. By 1988 INMECAFE had an accumulated debt of some US$90 million.

The response of the Salinas government in 1989 was to begin the process of privatisation. INMECAFE immediately withdrew from purchasing and marketing and reduced its provision of technical assistance. Although the reform was originally designed to include the producer organisations in the transfer of infrastructure, the plan lacked the necessary political will and much of the infrastructure lay idle or passed into private ownership.

In 1988 there were 194 000 coffee growers in Mexico, cultivating over 560 000 hectares in 12 states. The skewed nature of production units in this sector is well-known. Some 71% of growers have plots of less than two hectares. Another 20.6% have areas of between two and five hectares, while just 2% have over 10 hectares.[13]

Chiapas, Mexico's principal coffee producing state, presents a similar pattern. Here 73 742 growers occupy 228 264 hectares of land. Over 90% of producers have less than five hectares, while 116 private owners possess 12% of the area under coffee cultivation (Table 2). In the Selva region, of the almost 17 000 producers, 93% have plots of less than two hectares.[14]

In June 1989 the International Coffee Organization failed to agree on production quotas, causing the world price to fall by 50%. In the ensuing period the Mexican government did not support efforts by other Latin American countries to reestablish a quota system and increase the price paid to producers. Another consequence of Salinas's macroeconomic reforms which hurt coffee producers was the overvalued peso. Potential export earnings which might have offset lower world prices were lost as a result. Between December 1987 and December 1993 domestic inflation increased by 89.3% while the exchange rate increased by under 50%. As a result, the cost of inputs rose faster than the principal source

of income. In addition, in the absence of INMECAFE, marketing costs had to be absorbed by the producers themselves, or alternatively through the reappearance of unregulated private intermediaries, known as 'coyotes'.[15]

Following the 1989 crisis it took over three years of negotiations and mobilisations by producer groups before the government agreed to an emergency support programme. With less income and the simultaneous reduction of credit, thousands of growers were unable to invest in their crop. Both productivity and total output in the social sector fell by around 35% between 1989 and 1993. On average, small producers suffered a 70% drop in income in the same period.[16] Most producers were caught in a cycle of debt and poverty. Unable to repay loans because of the fall in prices and income, they became ineligible for new loans. The accumulation of debts in this sector reached around $270 million by the end of 1993. In these conditions thousands of small growers in Chiapas abandoned production in 1989–93.

Basic grains and trade liberalisation

Another of the institutional reforms concerned the restructuring of state intervention in support of basic grain production and marketing. As with coffee, Chiapas is Mexico's largest maize producing state. The reform process began with the onset of the debt crisis in 1982. Under the administration of Miguel de la Madrid, governmental subsidies to the agricultural sector decreased on average by 13% annually, after having increased by 12.5% per year during the 1970s. Maize producers faced higher input costs and declining access to credit. By 1987 the Banco Nacional de Crédito Rural (Banrural) provided credit for only 37% of the area under maize cultivation and 43% in the case of beans. In contrast it financed 52% of the land area dedicated to soy beans and 49% of sorghum cultivation.[17] Peso devaluation made inputs more costly, but producers were partly protected by the guaranteed prices which more-or-less increased in line with inflation in 1983–86.[18]

This situation began to deteriorate with the signing of the Pacto para la Estabilidad y el Crecimiento Económico (PECE) in December 1987.[19] The Pacto was primarily designed to control inflation which reached almost 200% in 1987. The various renewals of the Pacto have been aimed at controlling wages and prices, as well as limiting further devaluation of the peso. Although inflation was brought down to under 20% by 1991, the agricultural sector suffered disproportionately. The real value of guaranteed maize prices fell behind the rate of increase in input costs. As a result, the proportion of maize producers operating at a loss jumped from 43% in 1987 to 65% in 1988.[20]

In Chiapas, the withdrawal of state support had a negative effect not only on output and productivity but also on the environment. In the Selva region many *campesinos*, unable to capitalise their production, continued to clear forested land for subsistence needs. Tropical soils are notoriously unsuited for sustainable agriculture once the biomass has been destroyed. The land may be good for just three or four crops before it is turned into pasture for grazing and the process of deforestation begins anew. Thus, although the land area in Chiapas dedicated to maize increased by 20.6% between 1982 and 1987 (from 600 374 to 795 053

hectares), output of this crop in the same period fell by 19.6% (from 1.5 million to 1.25 million metric tons). The same trend was observed for beans. Land area increased by 10% but output dropped by 18%. Coffee displayed a slight increase in output but this is probably explained by the performance of the large plantations.[21]

The Salinas administration accelerated these trends with a series of institutional reforms in 1989. These reforms were also closely related to the World Bank's prescriptions for Mexican agriculture. The Bank conditioned the disbursement of new structural adjustment loans to a radical overhaul of the agricultural sector, recommending the privatisation of state-owned enterprises and the gradual elimination of price supports and other input subsidies.[22]

On the positive side the reforms dealt a blow to corrupt functionaries and inefficient operating procedures. The new discourse of consensus-building, or *concertacïon*, was initially welcomed by *campesino* organisations who had been complaining about bureaucratic delays and political manipulation for many years. However, the reforms were not accompanied by the type of financial and marketing support required to reactivate the rural economy. Instead, in most cases, they appeared simply as a means to abandon small-scale producers, all within the discourse of shared responsibilities and *concertacïon*.[23] As a result, although *campesinos* were generally glad to see the disappearance in 1989 of the notoriously corrupt Aseguradora Nacional Agŕicola y Ganadera (ANAGSA), it also left many without crop insurance. In the same year the Banrural stopped all lending to producers in default. This decision particularly affected those maize producers who until the Pacto had managed to maintain the productivity levels of the previous decade. New credit provided through the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (PRONASOL, later known as Solidaridad) covered only half the production costs in this sector.

The transition to the free market in rural Mexico was governed by macroeconomic decision-making far removed from the realities of the *campesinos*. By the end of 1989 it was clear that the future of the agricultural sector would be subordinated to the economic goals of the Salinas administration: the reduction of inflation via wage and price controls, privatisation of state enterprises and trade liberalisation. After 1989 only maize and beans continued to receive a guaranteed price. For other grains, such as sorghum, soy beans, rice, barley, wheat and safflower, guaranteed prices were replaced with a new scheme whereby prices were fixed through negotiations between the government, producers and buyers. However, the new scheme was implemented at the same time that import licenses were removed. This had catastrophic effects for many *ejidatarios*. In 1990, for example, thousands of soy bean and sorghum producers were unable to sell their crop thanks to the sudden inflow of cheaper grains from the USA. Campesinos in Sonora, Guanajuato and Tamaulipas protested by seizing government warehouses and blocking highways. In the case of sorghum, the final price which producers received was 20% lower than what had been agreed through the new scheme. Many switched back to maize production as all grain prices were depressed by the availability of cheap imports. This phenomenon extended to the entire agricultural sector.

The relative protection of maize and beans production was finally

subordinated to the imperatives of free trade. Despite opposition from all national campesino organisations, the two crops were included in the negotiations leading to the NAFTA. Recognising maize and beans as 'sensitive crops' in the new free trade area, NAFTA provides for a 15-year phase-out of tariffs and import quotas. The rationale for NAFTA is that each country and region should produce goods and services in which they have comparative advantages. This argument implied that over two million small producers in Mexico could not continue to survive as maize producers. Average yields in Mexico are 1.7 metric tons per hectare, compared to 6.9 metric tons in the USA. Disparities in terms of technological development, subsidies, infrastructure and climatological factors also place Mexican producers at a great disadvantage.[24] These points were obviously not lost on the Zapatistas who timed their rebellion to coincide with the entry into effect of NAFTA.

In determining how many maize producers would lose from free trade, the crucial issue became the fixing of new pricing mechanisms. Under NAFTA the Mexican government decided that guaranteed prices would have to be phased out, allowing the international price gradually to take its place. After several months of debate, in October 1993 Salinas announced the Programa Nacional de Apoyos Directos al Campo (PROCAMPO), described by the Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos (SARH) as 'a new support program for the Mexican farm sector'.[25]

PROCAMPO and pricing policy for maize

What were the main objectives of PROCAMPO and what implications did they represent for maize producers in Chiapas? Under PROCAMPO over 3.3 million producers of seven crops were made eligible for direct payments to be made on a per hectare basis.[26] All those who had planted one of these crops during the period between December 1990 and December 1993 and who had been included in a national directory compiled by SARH during 1993 could request payment of 330 new pesos (equivalent to $103) for each hectare cultivated during the Autumn–Winter crop cycle of 1993–94. The payments were due to be made at harvest time in March 1994. One of the distinguishing features of PROCAMPO is that it included 2.2 million farmers who produce solely for their own family's subsistence needs and had been isolated from official support, especially credit.

At first sight it would appear that campesinos in the Altos and Selva regions stand to gain from this new subsidy. These are maize deficit areas and the lowering of maize prices should theoretically lead to a reduction of hunger, especially in the Altos where yields can be as low as 0.5 metric tons per hectare. The most negatively affected groups instead appear to be small and medium-sized *ejidos* in the Frailesca and Centro regions who depend on maize sales for a significant part of their income. This is not an insignificant sector. The proportion of total maize output in Chiapas which is sold on the market is twice as high as that consumed by the family unit. According to the SARH–CEPAL survey, 67% of maize production within the social sector of Chiapas is sold on the market, while 33% goes to household consumption.[27] NAFTA and lower maize

prices will therefore have a direct effect on thousands of producers that until 1994 depended on the guaranteed price.

In the case of poorer producers in the Altos and Selva, the potentially positive effects of falling prices may be cancelled out by political factors. In many remote districts local *caciques* exercise monopolistic control over transportation and marketing. Prices in Ocosingo or Altamirano may not come to reflect international prices at all if local merchants regulate the amount of maize available for purchase and at what price. In the absence of governmental regulation one possible alternative is to help grassroots organisations develop their own food purchasing and distribution cooperatives, but this would require the type of political decision that has traditionally been lacking in Chiapas.

For its part, the PROCAMPO subsidy is generally seen as a palliative in the Altos and Selva. The payments are simply used for any of several urgent necessities, such as obtaining food, clothing or medical attention rather than providing a stimulus for production. In this way the subsidy tends to find its way back into the hands of the local merchants and private intermediaries, who in turn control prices and distribution of basic goods. In sum, the changes in maize pricing policy may turn out to benefit merchants more than rural producers or consumers.

In the area of conflict the phasing out of guaranteed prices was seen as another indication of declining government support for *ejido* agriculture rather than representing a positive step to reduce food prices for consumers. Further research is necessary to determine the precise impact of these changes as the tariffs on maize imports are phased out. The results may also determine the level of political support for the government and its rural reforms if the problem of hunger is seen to be improving or deteriorating under the new rules.

Solidaridad and Political Control

The rural reforms were accompanied by the further expansion of Solidaridad, which was established by Salinas in December 1988 (and called originally PRONASOL) and became incorporated within the Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (SEDESOL) in 1992. Although Chiapas received more funds from Solidaridad than any other state, several observers noted that the resources were insufficient to ameliorate extensive and increasing poverty. A central limitation was that support for the production and marketing needs of the social sector was not given sufficient emphasis within the programme.

According to official figures, over 50% of the population suffers from malnutrition, one of the highest rates in the country. The state's illiteracy rate (30%) is three times higher than the national average, while the proportion of children who do not complete primary school is 62%, compared to 21% nationally. Overcrowded housing conditions affect around 80% of homes in the municipalities of Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las Margaritas. Other services are equally lacking (see Table 3).

Solidaridad expenditure in Chiapas grew by 130% in 1989–90, 50% in 1990–91, 20% in 1991–92 and a further 1% in 1992–93. Most of the funding was designed to improve social welfare and public works, with only 12% going

TABLE 3
Indices of poverty in Chiapas

	Percentage of homes without		
	electricity	*drinking water*	*drainage*
Mexico	12.5	20.6	36.4
Chiapas	33.1	41.6	58.8
Ocosingo	67.9	49.2	60.2
Altamirano	75.0	48.8	43.7
Las Margaritas	66.4	72.7	38.5

Sources: Data for Mexico and Chiapas are from INEGI, 1992. Data for Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las Margaritas are drawn from the Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO), as cited in *La Jornada*, 3 January 1994l, p 11.

to support productive activities. This is especially important if we consider the impact of the rural reforms referred to above. In fact, according to the Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Cafetaleras (CNOC) the amount of credit which coffee growers received from Solidaridad in 1993 was 13% less than in 1988 when INMECAFE was still operating.[28] Landlessness and unemployment, especially among the young, have not been cushioned by Solidaridad. Under the programme, each project has a low investment ceiling, allowing the government to reach a larger population with small projects but reducing their overall social impact. Proponents of a new anti-poverty programme argue that larger projects, co-managed with representative local and regional social organisations, should instead be designed to attack the structural roots of poverty rather than its symptoms. Such a strategy would also bolster *campesino* organisations as counterweights to local elites. The Chiapas rebellion lends weight to this position by demonstrating both the limitations of Solidaridad itself and the need for a political opening to the benefit of *campesino* organisations in the state.

Although Chiapas ranks first in the number of local solidarity committees (8824 or 8.26% of the national total), according to Moguel the figure is misleading since it includes any type of group which has received funds from the programme.[29] Most of these (7474) participate in basic infrastructure and social welfare projects (Dignified Schools, Municipal Funds and Children in Solidaridad). These tend either to have a short time-span between the disbursement of funds until the end of the project, or—as in the case of Municipal Funds—to be tightly controlled by the local political bosses, or *caciques*. One of the factors which contributed to divisions and unrest within indigenous communities was precisely the manipulation of Solidaridad funds by municipal presidents loyal to the PRI and the state governor.

This manipulation was promoted by governor Patrocinio González Garrido. For example, one of the programmes designed to support subsistence farmers was the Credit on Demand scheme (Crédito a la Palabra).[30] This involved the disbursement of interest-free loans on an individual basis (principally to maize and beans producers) which, when paid back, were meant to be recycled in the form of new loans and investment in community welfare projects. Chiapas had the distinction of being the state with the highest loan repayment rate. In 1992,

88% of loans were repaid and over 70% had been recovered in 1993. However, the supposed benefits were not distributed equitably. Although loan repayment was highest in the Altos and Selva regions, the share of the state's 'crédito a la solidaridad' which these regions received fell between 1990 and 1993 from 23% to 16% and from 17% to 6% respectively.

Part of the explanation for this paradox was the governor's political control of the programme. In other parts of Mexico the repayment of Solidaridad loans was used to generate new sources of financing for community projects. In Chiapas, by contrast, the governor created a state-level fund directly under his control. The disbursement of credit in this way favoured political allies in the PRI and CNC, strengthening the control exercised by municipal presidents and marginalising independent organisations. A state-level Ministry of Community Participation, staffed by loyal PRI and CNC leaders, was set up in early 1992 in an effort to institutionalise these arrangements.

The governor also dismissed officials who attempted to support local independent organisations. For example, in 1990 the regional director of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) in Las Margaritas was forced to resign after assisting the Uniŕon de Ejidos de la Selva in its efforts to gain Solidaridad funding to purchase a coffee processing plant from INMECAFE. Then in March 1992 three top INI officials in Chiapas were arrested: the state director and the regional director and treasurer for the Tzeltal area. They were accused of corruption in the use of funds to support small-scale livestock activities in Ocosingo and Chiĺon. Local *campesino* leaders came out in their defence, arguing that their only crime was to have supported the projects of independent groups. Although they were later released none could return to their previous posts.[31]

Solidaridad as a whole was not such a threat to Gonźalez Garrido as he had feared. Yet his political aims compounded the programme's own limitations and contributed to the anger which would be directed by the EZLN against municipal presidents. One of the immediate repercussions of the uprising was the resignation of the state delegate of SEDESOL in January 1994. The new interim governor, Javier Lópe z Moreno also announced his intention to meet municipal authorities to investigate the misuse of Solidaridad funds. During the first week of February 1994 several town halls were occupied by campesino groups calling for the dismissal of municipal presidents.[32]

Ejido reform and the agrarian question in chiapas

The most disputed of Salinas's rural reforms was the decision to modify Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution. This article enshrined the central gains of the Zapatistas in the 1910–17 Revolution and laid the basis for agrarian reform over the next 70 years. By 1991 there were a total of 29 951 *ejidos* and *comunidades agrarias* in Mexico, representing half the country's land surface and 3.5 million families, or 20 million people, equivalent to a quarter of the country's population.[33] Before considering the precise nature of the reforms and how they were perceived in Chiapas it is important to understand the centrality of agrarian struggles in shaping *campesino* consciousness in the state.

Land reform, campesino *struggles and repression, 1982–1993*

Land reform in Mexico followed different patterns according to local and regional factors. In Chiapas political resistance to redistribution originated in the pacts made between local elites and the post-revolutionary governments of the centre. During 1914–1920 lowland ranchers and estate owners organised a successful counter-revolution and one of their leaders, Tiburcio Fernández Ruiz, became governor in 1920.[34] He decreed that individual private owners would be allowed to keep up to 8000 hectares of land.[35] Major changes were not seen until the Cárdenas presidency (1934–40) but even then the new beneficiaries received generally marginal land of low productivity or became a captive labour market for large coffee plantations.[36] Outside of this exceptional conjuncture, agrarian reform in Chiapas was never based on the actual redistribution of private holdings but on colonisation of unused forested areas in the Selva region.[37]

During the 1970s and 1980s an increase in land invasions was met with violent repression but the government was also forced to purchase land from large owners for the purpose of redistribution.[38] As in other states with high indigenous populations, in Chiapas land reform was forced back onto the political agenda in the early 1980s by the persistence of new *campesino* organisations. It would be false to say that land reform was avoided in the 1980s. A redistribution programme was in fact effective in providing over 80 000 hectares of land for over 9000 *campesinos*. However, the way in which it was implemented created more conflicts than it solved.

In 1984 the state government of Absalón Castellanos Domínguez signed agreements with the federal Agrarian Reform Minister to implement a plan to resolve land disputes in Chiapas. The plan, known as the Programa de Rehabilitación Agraria (PRA), was designed to purchase land which belonged to private owners but which had been occupied by peasants whose claims for distribution had not been resolved by the Secretaria de Reforma Agraria (SRA). These lands would then be officially given *ejido* status.

The areas chosen for 'rehabilitation' were obviously those with the greatest number of land invasions. Since these tended to be led by the independent organisations, the official CNC feared they would be strengthened and began to dispute ownership of the same lands, even carrying out its own land invasions in PRA-targeted zones. One of the most important areas for the PRA was Simojovel on the northern edge of the Altos region. Since the mid-1970s former workers on coffee plantations had been organised by supporters of the Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos (CIOAC). By 1981 the CIOAC had built an important base of support and organised strikes on over 40 plantations in demand of improved working conditions, wages and respect for labour rights. When no solutions were given, the CIOAC began to press instead for the redistribution of the *fincas* into *ejidos*.[38] With the PRA's announcement, land which was in possession of CIOAC supporters and awaiting regularisation was then invaded by CNC supporters. Violent conflicts between the two groups became inevitable and continued well into the following administration.

The PRA targeted 41 municipalities (over a third of the state's total) grouped in six zones (the northern part of Los Altos, Fronteriza, Centro, Costa,

Frailesca and the Selva). The four municipalities that saw most redistribution were, as the programme intended, those with a recent history of land conflicts: Simojovel and Bochil in the northern Altos, Ocosingo in the Selva and Venustiano Carranza in the Centro region. However, the independent organisations in each area did not receive the share of land which corresponded to their demands or their size. In Simojovel and Bochil the CIOAC received title to 16 *ejidos*, compared to 30 for the CNC. In Ocosingo 17 *ejidos* were distributed among *campesinos* without affiliation but promoted by the CNC, compared to only one for the largest independent group in the area, the Uniĭon de Uniones Ejidales y Grupos Campesinos Solidarios de Chiapas (UU). In Venustiano Carranza the Organizacĭon Campesina Emiliano Zapata (OCEZ) did not receive any land at all under the PRA. Rather than solve disputes the PRA had the effect of transforming conflicts between *campesinos* and landowners into conflicts between independent organisations and the CNC.[40]

The principal beneficiaries of the PRA were the landowners and some agrarian reform officials. On the one hand, the former received payment for land which they had resigned themselves to losing anyway. In the process the conflict for them had been defused as different groups of *campesinos* now battled with each other over land ownership. On the other, the programme provided opportunities for corruption and personal enrichment. Landowners invented 'land invasions' on their property, appealing to the state government to purchase the disputed land. Some officials colluded by paying out 'compensation' for lands which were never to be distributed and, as part of the corruption, retained some of the money for themselves. The programme was suspended in the summer of 1985, less than a year after it had begun, when the federal government ordered an investigation. In order to show that the PRA was still necessary the state government began to evict members of the UU from allegedly disputed lands in Ocosingo. In August 1985 four communities were evicted by state police, leading to protests and a march by over 2000 Tzeltal Indians to Tuxtla Gutĭerrez. The UU was able to uphold its argument that the communities in question already had legal documents. However, the PRA did return in 1985 and continued until its $100 million budget expired in 1987.

Land petitioners also came up against increasing repression. State police and local CNC groups were involved in numerous attacks on members of independent organisations. In October 1984 nine OCEZ members were killed in an ambush by CNC supporters in Venustiano Carranza. In the following year two demonstrations by CIOAC and OCEZ were violently broken up by state police. The CIOAC also blamed CNC members for the murder of one of their lawyers, Andulio Gálvez, at the command of Ernesto Castellanos, brother of the state governor, in August 1985. Nor were CNC leaders who opposed the government treated any differently. In May 1986, Germán Jiménez, a former PRI deputy and CNC leader, was arrested and imprisoned for his part in protests by thousands of maize producers demanding higher crop prices. Finally, in December 1987 seven people were killed when Security Police broke up demonstrations by OCEZ and CIOAC peasants at the municipal palaces of Simojovel and La Independencia. At the same time police ransacked a house in Comitán used by Maryknoll nuns who had allegedly

supported the protests. Evictions of alleged land invaders increased as the administration drew to a close.

The Castellanos Domínguez government also helped protect private landowners from possible expropriation by issuing more *certificados de inafectabilidad* (documents of inaffectability) than all the previous state governors combined. The main beneficiaries were the private ranchers who were issued with 4714 certificates, equivalent to 95% of the total number distributed in the state since 1934. By the end of this administration at least 70% of the area used by cattle ranchers was legally beyond the reach of agrarian reform.[41]

When a new governor took office in December 1988 many hoped that a more conciliatory approach would replace the repression. In his electoral campaign Patrocinio González Garrido echoed the *salinista* discourse of consensus-building. However, the first three months of his administration saw the assassination of several members of independent organisations, including two of the principal *campesino* leaders in the state: Sebastián Pérez Núñez of the CIOAC and Arturo Albores Velasco of the OCEZ. González Garrido denied government involvement but human rights activists criticised the impunity of these and other actions. Nevertheless, the governor was forced to address the agrarian question.

In 1989 seven cases were targeted for negotiated solutions. These involved the return of communal lands in Venustiano Carranza, Nicolás Ruiz and Villa Corzo, and the titling of *ejido* land in El Carrizal (Ocosingo), San Sebastián Bachajón (Chilón), Unión Calera (Arriaga) and San Juan Chamula. Although these cases were partially resolved, there were another 547 cases still awaiting resolution in 1989, representing 22 598 land claimants.[42] Furthermore, although the governor had to deal with independent organisations in resolving these cases, once the agreements had been made no further opening was offered. On the contrary, as land conflicts continued to occur throughout the state, the governor reverted to the traditionally repressive tactics of his predecessors.

For example, several settlements in the municipality of Chiapa de Corzo were destroyed by state police and landowners on two separate occasions in April 1990 and April 1991. Members of the OCEZ claimed that the disputed lands were in fact covered by a presidential resolution in their favour. In June 1990 six people were injured when private gunmen shot at a crowd of over 100 cane producers who were demanding full payment for cane delivered to the Pujiltic sugar mill. In July of the same year women from the highland settlement of San Felipe Ecatepec staged a hunger strike in Mexico City's Zócalo to demand a hearing with the President. They protested against the repression of their organisation, the Coordinadora Nacional de Pueblos Indígenas (CNPI) at the hands of the state government. In October 1990 two members of OCEZ were injured when unknown assailants opened fire on a peaceful march from Venustiano Carranza to Tuxtla Gutiérrez.[48]

In July 1991 a protest march by 300 Indians from the Selva Lacandona was broken up by police in Palenque using clubs and tear gas grenades. Seven leaders were arrested and forced to sign confessions linking them to Central American guerrillas and drug trafficking. They were protesting at the illegal confiscation of timber by state police and the corruption of municipal authorities.[44] Finally, in September 1991 the parish priest of Simojovel, Joel Padrón,

was arrested on charges of robbery, damage to property and provocations. The roots of what became a political conflict between the state government and the local Catholic Church were to be found in the type of conflicts generated by the PRA. *Campesinos* belonging to a CNC group claimed that members of the CIOAC had evicted them from their land with the help of Joel Padrón. The state government attempted to condition the release of Padrón to a series of commitments from the Bishop of San Cristóbal, Mgr Samuel Ruiz García, to order the eviction of alleged land invasions and declare his opposition to actions against private property. Ruiz was also requested to drop charges against police for the illegal detention of Joel Padrón and to order Padrón to leave Chiapas once released.[45] Although these conditions were not accepted and charges against Padrón were eventually dropped, they were a clear indication of the governor's openness to the demands of ranchers and landowners. They also reaffirmed the central role of Samuel Ruiz, the Diocese of San Cristóbal and the Centro de Derechos Humanos 'Fray Bartolomé de las Casas' in defending indigenous rights.

Political pressure against the Church increased in 1993. In March of that year two soldiers were killed in the Tzotzil community of San Isidro El Ocotal in Los Altos. Members of the community feared that the clandestine use of local timber would be discovered by the army and the two soldiers were mistakenly identified as foresty agents.[46] The Centro de Derechos Humanos 'Fray Bartolomé de las Casas' denounced the killings but also denounced the abuse of human rights carried out by soldiers in the arrest of 13 suspects who were allegedly subjected to torture. Police returned to the community on two further occasions in April and May 1993 and carried out further illegal arrests and beatings. The original 13 were eventually released without charges being brought against them.[47] During the rest of 1993 political pressure against the Diocese of San Cristóbal increased, culminating in the efforts of the Papal representative to remove Samuel Ruiz from his position in Chiapas. The outbreak of the rebellion frustrated this move as Ruiz became a key mediator in negotiations between the EZLN and the government.

The ejido *reform and potential effects in Chiapas*

The reforms to Article 27 of the Constitution were proposed in November 1991 and adopted just two months later. They were followed in late February 1992 by the passage of a new Agrarian Law to establish the new regulatory framework for the social sector. For the government the modifications were seen as necessary steps to attract private investment in agriculture and increase productivity and welfare. Four of the main changes embodied in the new Agrarian Law were the following:

1. Ejidatarios were given the legal right to purchase, sell, rent or use as collateral the individual plots and communal lands which make up the *ejido*.
2. Private companies were allowed to purchase land in accordance with the legal limits ascribed to different crops. At a maximum, a company with at

least 25 individual share-holders could purchase holdings of up to 25 times the size of the individually permitted limit.
3. The reforms also allowed for new associations between capitalists and *ejidatarios*, the latter providing land as 'T' shares in joint ventures.
4. In line with the reform's intention of guaranteeing security for private property, the sections of Article 27 which allowed for *campesinos* to petition for land redistribution were deleted from the new law.

The debate surrounding the *ejido* reform raised several concerns. First, it was feared that the sale of *ejido* plots could lead to a reconcentration of land. Although the new law expressly forbids *latifundios* in Mexico, it also potentially allows for private companies of at least 25 individuals to own farms of up to 2500 hectares of irrigated land, 5000 hectares in the case of rain-fed areas, 10 000 hectares of good quality pasture land or 20 000 hectares of forested land. A company made up of 25 ranchers could also feasibly own an area equivalent to 12 500 hectares. In order for *ejido* land to be made available for private ownership, however, the assembly of *ejido* members must approve the measure by a two-thirds majority. Some commentators noted that the traditional control and manipulation of assemblies by *ejido* authorities could lead to forced votes in favour of privatisation.[48] In Chiapas the potential for land reconcentration is given by the politically powerful ranchers' associations, representing over 12 000 *ganaderos* organised in 60 local associations. Ranchers applauded the reforms to Article 27, arguing that greater security in land tenure would attract foreign investors wishing to create new meat processing plants in the region. The competition for land with indigenous *campesinos* should be understood in this context.[49]

Second, the use of land as collateral or in association with private investors involved the risk of farm foreclosures and loss of land rights. The effective exclusion of much of the social sector from traditional sources of credit could influence the decisions of ejidatarios in putting up land as collateral. Women were placed at most risk since the male head of the household could unilaterally decide how to dispose of what was family patrimony. The only special right which women received was the first option to buy the *ejido* land which their spouses decided to sell. In Chiapas it is possible that wealthier *ejidatarios* might concentrate land within communities as a result of foreclosures.

Finally, it was feared that most of the unresolved land petitions (known as the *rezago agrario*) would simply be rejected. The government's claim that there was no more land to be distributed was contested by several organisations. Some called for an investigation into private holdings which allegedly exceeded the legal limits, before decreeing the end to land redistribution. It is significant that this demand was taken up by the campesino movement in Chiapas and reasserted in light of the Zapatista rebellion.[50] In fact, rather than providing for the immediate expropriation and redistribution of excess holdings, the new law gave private owners one year to sell off excess property.[51] The end of land reform in Chiapas and other states also cancelled out the hope of a piece of land for thousands of *campesinos*. In this respect, we should distinguish between effects

which are directly measurable in terms of land purchases, etc and those which operate more at the level of expectations, hopes and fears. It seems clear that the end of land reform constituted a symbolic break with the past but one which offered no guarantees of improvement for the future.

The ejido *reform in Chiapas*

As in most areas of rural Mexico, the immediate response to Salinas's announcement of *ejido* reform was one of fear and confusion. Information about the precise nature of the reforms was scarce and the immediate problems facing *ejidatarios* were increasing debts, falling prices for their crops and the lack of credit. However, two demonstrations against the reforms were held in December 1991 and January 1992. The first was led by the OCEZ in Venustiano Carranza, the second by the Asociación Rural de Interés Colectivo Unión de Uniones (ARIC) in Ocosingo. The members of the ARIC also made a formal commitment not to sell *ejido* land.

The Diocese of San Cristóbal also invited different organisations to reflect on the reforms at a special workshop held in January 1992. The workshop concluded that the *ejido* reform was part of the government's general strategy in favour of private capital; the spirit of the original law had been broken as the public interest was subordinated to individual interests; that the reconcentration of land in few hands was likely; and that it reflected the objectives of the proposed NAFTA. In political, economic and cultural terms the workshop saw only a deterioration of existing conditions. A more specific fear referred to the deepening of divisions within communities as village *caciques* moved to buy up land from poorer neighbours.[52]

The direct effects of *ejido* reform were only gradually emerging by the end of 1993. According to officials of the Registro Agrario Nacional (RAN) only 100 of the state's 2072 *ejidos* had requested the assistance of the government's certification programme PROCEDE.[53] The main problem with the reform concerned the lack of solution to a backlog of land petitions (the *rezago agrario*). Although in 1992 the state government announced that it would purchase land in order to deal with the *rezago*, the programme did not advance. *Campesino* leaders blamed the delays on bureaucratic inefficiency, the reluctance of private owners to sell and collusion between functionaries and landowners.

In the Selva region the lack of definitive titles is a major problem for many communities. Not only does the lack of legal definition increase the possibility of eviction by landowners or other *campesino* groups, it also restricts access to credit. This obstacle hindered those *ejidos* which began to devote more land area to livestock in the 1980s.[54] The lack of secure titles further weakened the social organisations located in the area of rebellion.

The ARIC Unión de Uniones was particularly affected. During 1992 its leaders proposed several measures to deal with the agrarian problem. In addition to its existing legal petitions, the ARIC offered to buy land and asked for the redistribution of private estates which had been declared bankrupt. None of these proposals was taken up by the state government. For the president of the ARIC, the reason was a familiar one: 'the agrarian authorities are friends of the

landowners. They carry out their studies and reject our petitions. In this past year we have got nowhere. The landowners are refusing to sell and the Agraria says the ranchers all have documents protecting themselves from expropriation. This is the case in Patihuitz, Avellanal and La Estrella.[55] It is no coincidence that the EZLN has been able to recruit campesinos in precisely these sub-regions of the Selva.

Grassroots organising and *campesino* radicalism

The EZLN was able to gain support from thousands of Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Zoque, Chol and Tojolobal Indians in the Altos and Selva regions. It was not a movement implanted from outside but the most recent expression of popular organising and resistance to elite manipulation, government indifference and police brutality. It drew support from *campesinos* who had participated over several years in legal organisations which sought to defend land rights and obtain more favourable terms for marketing their coffee. It was the denial of political space to these organisations which allowed for the armed option to gain acceptance.

Colonisation and social organisation in the Selva

The largest base of support for the EZLN came from indigenous communities located in the Selva region. Many of these had been established over a period of 40 years of colonisation. The flow of migrants to the Selva began in the 1930s but increased rapidly after 1950. Colonisation was encouraged as a means to avoid affecting the interests of private owners in other parts of Chiapas. By 1970 an estimated 100 000 migrants had settled in the region, principally Tzeltal, Chol and Tojolobal Indians. These were former plantation workers from the northern and eastern highlands or campesinos who had lost land as a result of the encroachments of local elites.[56] The population of Ocosingo, the region's largest municipality, more than doubled between 1950 and 1970, doubled again in 1970–80 and grew by another 56% in 1980–90.[57]

As a result of colonisation the area controlled by large estates declined, while the *ejido* sector increased its presence. Between 1930 and 1991 over 1.3 million hectares were distributed among 25 000 campesinos in Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las Margaritas.[58] Ranchers continued to dominate the region's economy, however, since they controlled the best pasture lands, most of the cattle and capital. With the crisis in coffee production many of the *ejidos* also turned to raising livestock in association with private ranchers. In 1990 a survey of 3500 *campesino* families in the region found that 60% of land had been converted to pasture, 30% was used for maize and beans and only 10% was dedicated to coffee.[59] Many *campesinos* came to depend on ranchers for temporary work on estates, to clear new areas of pasture land or enter into cooperative associations.[60] However, as with coffee, livestock also proved to be vulnerable to the economic reforms, trade liberalisation and cheaper imports. In addition, between 1980 and 1990 demographic growth in this region exceeded that for the state as a whole. Whereas the average annual rate for Chiapas in this period was 4.4%,

the rate for Ocosingo was 5.6% and for Las Margaritas 7.4%. Altamirano registered a slightly lower rate of 3.4%.[61]

The first institutions to organise the colonists in the Selva Lacandona were religious bodies. From the 1940s Protestant missionaries associated with the Summer Institute of Linguistics were invited by the government to assist in the acculturation of the region's indigenous population.[62] Traditional cultural practices were discouraged, while individual effort and conversion to new crops were promoted. Government support for Protestant sects continued in subsequent decades as it attempted to limit the influence of Catholic priests and liberation theology. The region's population which considered itself Protestant increased from less than 5% in 1960 to 25% in 1990.[63]

Catholic missionaries began to work in the Selva in the late 1960s, but adopted a different approach to that of their Protestant counterparts. Their priests and catechists sought to rescue and restore the centrality of indigenous traditions and practices and fostered the formation of local cooperatives. This approach reflected the 'preferential option for the poor' which the Diocese of San Cristóbal had begun to promote at the time of the Medellín Council of Latin American Bishops in 1968. Mgr Samuel Ruiz, Bishop of the Diocese since 1960, participated in the Medellín conference and became an important proponent of an autochthonous, popular Church.

Before Medellín the Diocese had already begun to adapt its own structures, creating special teams of priests assigned to regions inhabited by the four largest indigenous groups (Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Chol and Tojolobal) and two predominantly mestizo areas in the centre and border regions. This reorganisation proved to be important when, in 1971, the state government requested that the Church organise an Indian Congress to commemorate the quincentenary of the death of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas. Preparation for the Congress involved the formation of community-level groups to elaborate their specific complaints, demands and proposals around the four main issues of land tenure, marketing, education and health. The Church invited students and professors to assist catechists in providing courses in agrarian law, economics, Mexican history and agronomy. Out of this process a new generation of indigenous community leaders emerged with a different perspective on the causes of poverty and injustice. Whereas conflicts had previously been understood in terms of personal relations, the participants in the Congress began to see the broader structural forces at work.

The Congress was held in San Cristóbal de las Casas in October 1974. Present were 587 Tzeltal delegates, 330 Tzotziles, 152 Tojolobales and 161 Choles, representing 327 communities.[64] On agrarian matters, delegates demanded the titling of *ejido* and communal land and denounced encroachment by ranchers. Plantation workers, newly aware of their labour rights, demanded respect for the provisions of the Federal Labor Code such as the minimum wage. Others called for greater access to markets, complaining how local intermediaries controlled credit, prices and transportation. Delegates also demanded education in their own languages and the defence of indigenous cultures. Finally, poor sanitation and the lack of medical services and clinics outside the main towns were denounced as responsible for high indices of disease and infant mortality, which was estimated at 42 deaths per 1000 births in 1970.[65]

Maoism in the Selva

The Congress proved to be a catalyst for grassroots organising in the Altos and Selva. Its impact was felt most in the Selva region. This was probably because of the weaker presence of governmental institutions outside the central highlands. In the central part of the Altos the INI, CNC and PRI had succeeded in undermining traditional forms of indigenous organisation and in extending vertical and clientelistic lines of control.[66] In the more peripheral and dispersed settlements of the Selva, the Catholic priests and catechists were able to build support for more autonomous forms of representation. This is important in understanding the process of popular organisation in the Selva. The origins are more social than institutional. Organisation followed an intense period of political learning, achieved through a shared social and religious identification. Consequently, when the government began to promote the formation of Uniones de Ejidos (UE) in Chiapas, the new UEs which emerged in the Selva were not controlled by interests loyal to the PRI but by the delegates who had participated in the Indian Congress.[67] In this respect, the three most important cases were the UE 'Quiptic Ta Lecubtecel' (United by our Strength) in Tzeltal (Ocosingo), UE Tierra y Libertad and UE Lucha Campesina (Las Margaritas), each of which were 'formed' by the SRA in 1976.

The largest of these was the UE Quiptic which represented 18 communities located in the Valley of San Quintín, Ocosingo. Among the advisers which the Church had invited to help prepare for the Indian Congress were activists from the Maoist group, Unión del Pueblo (UP). These advisers were important in bringing to the attention of Quiptic members the possible threat of eviction facing 26 communities in the region. This was the result of a presidential resolution issued in March 1972 which gave sole land rights for over 660 000 hectares to just 66 *lacandon* families. However, the designated Comunidad Lacandona included at least 3000 Tzeltal and Chol families who had settled in the area with government approval in the previous decades. Behind the decree was an agreement between the representatives of the *lacandon* Indians and the state-owned forestry company which allowed for the latter to exploit 35 000 cubic metres of mahogany and cedar for a period of 10 years. The UP advisers began to warn of possible evictions in 1973 and this issue contributed to the decision to form the UE Quiptic.

Other advisers arrived in 1977 to organise the struggle against the land evictions. They also belonged to a Maoist political current known as Política Popular (PP) and arrived after hearing of an armed clash at Nueva Providencia, one of the threatened *ejidos*, in July 1977. The conflict had arisen when the local *cacique* kidnapped the son of an *ejidatario* who had begun to participate in the Quiptic. When the authorities failed to reply to appeals for his release a group of several hundred *ejidatarios* armed with machetes and rifles attacked the house where the boy was being kept. In the shoot-out seven police officers were killed, the *cacique* was taken prisoner and the boy freed. Groups of *campesinos* closed down nearby landing strips to avoid repression.[68]

Política Popular has its roots in the 1968 student movement and its principal leader was Adolfo Oribe Berlinguer, an economics professor at the Universidad

Nacional Autónoma de México (the national university). In November 1968 Oribe wrote a pamphlet entitled 'Hacia una política popular' (Towards a Politics of the People), which criticised the traditional left in Mexico for its lack of insertion among the masses. Seeking to apply the Maoist 'mass line' to Mexico in a non-violent struggle for socialism, brigades of students went out to poor urban neighbourhoods and *ejidos* to build bases of popular power at the grassroots. The most significant advances were made in the northern cities of Monterrey, Torreón and Chihuahua and among *ejidatarios* in La Laguna and Nayarit. In 1976 the PP joined with other groups, including Unión del Pueblo, to become known as Línea Proletaria (LP), which also developed an important presence in national unions of teachers, telephone workers and metalworkers. The arrival of LP activists in Chiapas was therefore part of a broad movement to build new forms of popular organisation in Mexico. It should be explained that they did not promote armed struggle. In fact, one of their central strategic decisions, the 'política de dos caras' (politics of two faces), was to avoid confrontations with the state, earning the criticism of many on the Left who concluded that LP was *gobiernista*.

The 'norteños' from LP were not immediately accepted by the indigenous southern leaders who had the support of the Church. Sensing that the advisers were attempting to displace them as leaders they refused to cooperate and forced them to withdraw at the end of 1978. The advisers complained that the Church gave too much power to the same leaders who had been delegates at the 1974 Congress, creating a new clique rather than fostering grassroots participation. Some of the methods which the advisers tried to introduce undermined the centralisation of decision making. One was to revive a traditional element of indigenous democracy, the division of community assemblies into 'small assemblies' or *asambleas chicas*. These were each made up of six or seven people who discussed problems or proposals which were then forwarded to the community assembly. A second strategy was to create horizontal links between the members of each community, rather than simply between the leaders or delegates. Drawing on their Maoist training they promoted contacts and exchanges between different communities at a grassroots level. Through a method known as 'de las masas a las masas', commissions were sent to inform other communities of the threat of eviction from their land. This was painstaking work, involving treks of several days to reach distant settlements.

Despite the divisions between outside advisers and local leaders, the UE Quiptic continued to grow. In March 1978 a group of 800 *campesinos* blocked further construction of a perimetre road which was designed to delineate the Comunidad Lacandona. From that moment the organisation expanded rapidly as *ejidos* to the north and east of Ocosingo also joined in the struggle to defend their land rights.

In 1979 the advisers were able to reincorporate themselves in the UE Quiptic. This was thanks to their promotion of a state-wide movement to improve the terms of coffee marketing for *campesino* producers. Two main problems were identified: the high cost of transporting coffee was absorbed by the producer and INMECAFE delayed paying producers for their crop. During 1979 several coffee growers' organisations, including the UE Quiptic, pressed INMECAFE to respond.

A partial solution was achieved in November 1979 when an accord was signed in which INMECAFE agreed to pay 50% and 100% of air and ground transport costs, respectively.

The convergence around coffee marketing culminated in the formation in September 1980 of the Unión de Uniones Ejidales y Grupos Campesinos Solidarios de Chiapas (UU). The UU brought together the three Uniones de Ejidos which had been formed in 1976 and other smaller producer groups from the Altos, Selva and Fronteriza regions. This was the first and largest independent *campesino* organisation in Chiapas, representing 12 000 mainly indigenous families from 180 communities in 11 municipalities.[69]

The state government of Juan Sabines unsuccessfully attempted to coopt the leaders of the new organisation. However, internal differences between advisers split the UU into two camps in 1983. The Quiptic leaders accused Adolfo Oribe of attempting to rush through approval of the creation of a Credit Union for the UU and of bypassing internal democratic procedures. The Quiptic and two other Uniones de Ejidos pulled out of this alliance and, keeping the name Unión de Uniones, continued to work together until they formed a third-level organisation in March 1988: the ARIC Unión de Uniones. The smaller groups from the Altos and Fronteriza regions operated the Unión de Crédito Pajal Ya'Kac'Tic in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

For the UE Quiptic, participation in the UU had helped it to defend the land rights of the 26 communities still threatened with eviction. In October 1981 the UU led a march of 3000 of its members to Tuxtla Gutiérrez to demand the suspension of eviction orders. The lack of guaranteed *ejido* titles continued to undermine the efforts of the UE Quiptic to promote economic projects. This contrasted with the Pajal Credit Union which expanded its operations rapidly from 1982 until the collapse in coffee prices in 1989.

Politically, the institutionalist strategy favoured by the ARIC was increasingly seen as ineffective. Economically, the coffee sector was in crisis and ARIC had failed to develop a viable alternative in this region. The 1989 forestry ban removed another source of income. The turn to small-scale ranching demanded less labour and the fall in meat prices undercut even this activity. Finally, most of the energies of the ARIC were spent in agrarian litigation. Although the titles of the 26 *ejidos* in the Comunidad Lacandona were finally issued in January 1989, the delay had taken its toll on the members. Furthermore, there were many other land petitions awaiting solutions.

Despite deteriorating economic and social conditions, *campesino* organisations demonstrated their capacity to respond to crises on several occasions, suggesting the cohesive strength of inter-community relations gradually built up over a period of 20 years. For example, in response to the evictions of four *ejidos* on 11 August 1985, 12 000 *campesinos* demonstrated in Ocosingo just two days later. Three days later 2500 protesters had marched to Tuxtla Gutiérrez. The ability of the ARIC to carry out its own census and put forward plans for regional development is also evidence of the level of social organisation in the area.[70]

There are many other sources of *campesino* radicalism in Chiapas. Between 1976 and 1989 the Tzotzil community of Venustiano Carranza fought a bitter struggle to recuperate over 3000 hectares of prime land from local ranchers.

Although the community had been issued in 1965 with a presidential resolution in its favour, ranchers deployed their own gunmen to evict *campesinos* from the disputed land. Twenty-five members of the community were killed between 1965 and 1985, while many others were imprisoned. In 1980 the community joined the Coordinadora Nacional Plan de Ayala (CNPA), a network of *campesino* and indigenous groups whose main demands were for land and an end to repression. In 1982 it joined with other local organisations to form the Organización Campesina Emiliano Zapata (OCEZ). At the end of the 1980s the OCEZ split into two factions. The group in Venustiano Carranza had left the CNPA and begun to work with a rival organisation, the Frente Nacional Democrático Popular (FNDP). Both factions of the OCEZ displayed mistrust of all political parties and electoral struggles, distancing themselves from opposition left parties whom they regarded as reformist. The news of revolutionary movements in Central America was much more influential than in the case of the Unión de Uniones. The OCEZ leaders in Carranza also tended to prefer more visible public acts of protest than negotiations, bringing it into several violent confrontations with state police. As noted in the above discussion on agrarian struggles in the 1980s, the OCEZ and the CIOAC represented strong independent voices in the defence of *campesino* rights. During the early 1990s this type of radicalism was accompanied by the mobilisation of new groups around the assertion of ethnicity.

Until 1992 events in Chiapas had largely escaped national attention. However that began to change with a march of 400 Indians from Palenque to Mexico City in early 1992. The catalyst was another violent eviction by state police, this time of members of the Comité de Defensa de la Libertad Indígena (CDLI) who had gathered in Palenque on 28 December 1991. Their protest was to draw attention to the corruption of municipal presidents, the imposition of village authorities (*agentes municipales*), the failure of the government to carry out promised public works, the lack of solution to the *rezago agrario* and their opposition to the reforms to Article 27. Over 100 were arrested and several people were beaten and tortured. The government used a 1989 reform to the state Penal Code in breaking up the demonstration. Articles 129 to 135 of this code classified participation in unarmed mass protests as threats to public order which were liable to punishments of two to four years' imprisonment.

The 'Xi'Nich' march left Palenque on 7 March 1992 and arrived in the capital six weeks later.[71] In the meantime it received national coverage in the independent press and solidarity from communities in Tabasco, Veracruz, Puebla and the state of Mexico. Its impact on national consciousness was to display the repressive nature of the state government in Chiapas. It also coincided with a growing awareness of the condition of indigenous peoples in the country.[72] Nevertheless, although Xi'Nich was able to gain promises of solutions from federal agencies, by the end of 1992 several of the demands had not been met. The state's Penal Code was not reformed; no police officers were ever brought to trial for alleged human rights abuses; and municipal presidents continued to impose *agentes municipales*. There were still 30 arrest orders out against CDLI members and new public works had not begun.

It was in this context that a new organisation was formed in the Selva and

Altos regions. In late 1989 the Alianza Campesina Independiente Emiliano Zapata (ACIEZ) emerged in Altamirano, Ocosingo, San Cristóbal, Sabanilla and Salto de Agua. In early 1992 it changed its name to ANCIEZ by adding 'Nacional' to its title, claiming member organisations in six central and northern states. However, it was clearly strongest in Chiapas and had extended its base of support in just two years among Tzotzil, Tzeltal and Chol communities in the highland municipalities of El Bosque, Larrainzar, Chenalhó, Chanal, Huixtán, Oxchuc, Tila and Tumbalá. The lack of solution to the economic and agrarian demands in the Cañadas of Ocosingo contributed to the radicalisation of young campesinos by the ANCIEZ and their eventual support for the armed uprising. The size of this movement was revealed by the march in San Cristóbal on 12 October 1992 to commemorate 500 years of indigenous resistance. Roughly half the 10 000 Indians who participated were members of ANCIEZ. During the march the statue of Diego de Mazariegos, the Spanish conqueror and founder of Ciudad Real, was pulled down. Then in early 1993 ANCIEZ went underground, presumably to begin training for the armed rebellion. The clash with a federal army column in Ocosingo in May 1993 was the first clear sign of guerrilla activity, although the state government insisted that there were no guerrillas in Chiapas.

Conclusions

The rebellion in Chiapas is not reducible solely to local political conditions. It is a popular response to a series of rural reforms decided without the participation of representative *campesino* organisations. In short it is a rebellion against a new global strategy of accumulation and against *salinismo* as a political discourse. Historically, it is part of a cycle of rural rebellions which have periodically revealed the crisis of legitimation of the Mexican state. Furthermore, the Zapatistas set in motion two important processes of political struggle. On the one hand, the solidarity expressed by many pro-democracy movements provided the key to their convergence in the National Democratic Convention. On the other, within Chiapas thousands of *campesinos* began to recuperate land through direct action and force the issue of agrarian reform back onto the political agenda.

EZLN and the mobilisation of civil society

The impact of the Chiapas uprising was clearly felt at both the local and national levels. This was inevitable given the broad nature of the rebels' demands but defied the government's belief that the problems of Chiapas could be treated separately from national issues. This constituted the major political difference between the two sides when they met in late February in talks held at the Cathedral of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Although the government's Peace Commissioner, Manuel Camacho, offered solutions to concrete social demands, the larger question of national democratic reform was excluded from the agenda. When *subcomandante* Marcos recognised that there were issues which 'go beyond the negotiating table of San Cristóbal', he was not giving up the quest

for broader changes but demonstrating an awareness of the need to build a larger pro-democracy force in the country.

The important role played by a variety of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) during the talks helped to deepen the Zapatistas' appreciation of civil society as their most effective ally in the struggle for a peaceful solution. Civil society, then, would come to provide the bridge between the local and the national. As the rebels returned to the Selva to deliberate over the government's proposals, they sent out a clear message: 'Do not leave us alone'. This call took on a new urgency in the aftermath of the assassination of PRI's presidential candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio, on March 23 1994, which the Zapatistas interpreted as a sign that hard-liners within the government had taken the upper hand in reaction to the possibility of reforms favourable to the EZLN and the political opposition.

The mobilisation of support groups such as the University students' Caravana de Caravanas and the national coalition of NGOs, Espacio Civil para la Democracia (ESPAZ), demonstrated the clear links to be established between Chiapas and national political reform. This became even more apparent when, in mid-June, the EZLN rejected the government's proposals and instead decided to deepen the dialogue with civil society. At the time of the 'no' vote most commentators focused on the possible consequences for finding a peaceful solution in Chiapas and paid less attention to the Zapatistas' call for a National Democratic Convention (CND). Little by little, however, the idea of a citizens' assembly to unite the numerous opposition movements and groups began to catch on. An organising committee was set up and began to work intensively over the next six weeks to assure the success of the convention.

In Chiapas the State Assembly of the Chiapanecan People was born as a loose coalition of citizens' groups, *campesino* organisations, democratic union currents and NGOs. Over 60 groups were represented at its first state convention in early July 1994. The convention supported the EZLN's call for a transitional government, a new Constituent Assembly and a new federal constitution. The new coalition held a second convention two weeks later to prepare proposals of Chiapas delegates to the CND presented 6–9 August 1994 at an *ejido* in Zapatista territory symbolically named Aguascalientes after the revolutionary convention of the forces of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa in 1914.

Democratic conventions were held in several other states during July and delegates were elected. On 6 August 1994 over 6000 delegates, invited intellectuals and observers descended on San Cristóbal de las Casas to begin deliberations in five mini-conventions on the need for a transitional government, the adoption of peaceful strategies to achieve democracy, an alternative national project, the organisation of a new Constituent Assembly and the elaboration of a new national constitution. With this number of people it was impossible to reach more than general agreements in support of the EZLN. The major point of debate concerned the role of electoral participation in bringing about change in Mexico. Some groups on the extreme left argued that only mass mobilisation (possibly including armed insurgency), and not the elections, could dislodge the PRI from power. However, the debate was constrained by the sheer number of delegates and the desire of the convention organisers to approve a common

platform. As the EZLN had itself encouraged participation in the elections and in defense of the vote, the extreme left groups were at a clear disadvantage. However, in the light of the reports of electoral fraud in Chiapas in the August 1994 elections, the issue will remain a point of controversy and the abstentionist position may have been strengthened.

The ensuing journey from San Cristóbal to Aguascalientes in the Selva Lacandona and the reaffirmation of unity behind the Zapatistas' demands served to demonstrate to the government and other sectors of society that the EZLN was indeed not alone, but that there now existed a political force capable of carrying the banners of democracy and justice. The EZLN displayed a great deal of political maturity by declaring that it would 'step to one side' while it gave the newly constituted CND the opportunity to apply peaceful pressure for political change. In a major speech, *subcomandante* Marcos allayed fears of an imminent armed uprising following the national elections and instead called on the peaceful civic and popular movement 'to defeat us', to make armed action unnecessary.[73]

The victory for the PRI candidate Ernesto Zedillo in the presidential race poses new problems for achieving peace and justice in Chiapas. While many observers declared that the election day was relatively free from fraud, it was also clear that the PRI campaign benefited disproportionately from the use of public funds and media time. Hundreds of irregularities were also reported on election day, particularly the lack of sufficient ballot papers at special voting booths, the 'shaving' of voters' names from voting lists and the violation of secrecy. However, most analysts agreed that the final outcome was not significantly affected by these cases. This means that Zedillo appears to command a stronger position than that enjoyed by Salinas in 1988.

Nevertheless, there are several unknown factors which will condition the new government's response to the CND and EZLN. These include the political abilities of Zedillo himself, his relationship to the reformist and hard-line sectors of the PRI, and the perception of the need for further democratic reform. Clearly there are several areas where the PRI still maintains an unfair advantage in electoral competition and, if Zedillo were to conclude that electoral reform had gone as far as it should, then he would be risking a backlash from the opposition, particularly the PRD. It should be remembered that if meaningful political participation of the opposition continues to be frustrated, then the armed option may recruit more supporters, especially among the economically disenfranchised youth. This is even more evident in the case of Chiapas. The governorship race on August 21 was won by the PRI candidate, Eduardo Robledo Rincón in the midst of widespread protests of fraud and violent clashes in Tuxtla Gutiérrez. The official result gave Robledo 50.4% of the vote, compared to 34.9% for Amado Avendaño Figueroa, candidate of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), and 9.2% for Cesáreo Hernández of the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN). The PRD claimed that Avendaño had in fact won and called for civic protests to prevent Robledo from taking office in December 1994. PRD supporters could point to several disturbing incidents during the election campaign, including the head-on crash of an unlicensed trailer into Avendaño's car just three weeks before election day. Although the candidate escaped with his

life, three members of his campaign team were killed in what the PRD believed to be a premeditated attack. The police investigation concluded that the crash was an accident and arrested the suspected driver. Following the elections another PRD leader was killed in the town of Jaltenango, near the Guatemalan border.

PRD and PAN representatives also accused the electoral authorities of altering the voting results during the transit of the ballot papers and the documented results from the individual polling stations to the offices of the State Electoral Commission.[74] The EZLN issued a strong statement condemning the fraud and called on Robledo not to assume office in order to avoid a potential 'blood-bath'.

These incidents and the general bias of the electoral process in Chiapas do not bode well for achieving a peaceful solution to the armed rebellion. They also occurred in a context of increasing belligerence on the part of *campesino* organisations which began to take the law into their own hands during the first half of 1994. Yet they may also overshadow the agrarian issue and the sectoral demands discussed below. A renewal of violence in late 1994 could quickly drag many of the relevant actors under the feet of bloody civil war. It is in the hope that this does not occur that the following considerations on the agrarian question are made. These reflections should reveal the need for political dialogue in reducing the current political polarisation in the state.

The resurgence of the campesino *movement in Chiapas*

One of the general problems which the rebellion revealed is the apparent incapacity of the government to implement the *ejido* reform. This is particularly evident in the area controlled by the EZLN but is also the case in other areas of Chiapas where *campesino* organisations took advantage of the political conjuncture to occupy privately owned lands for which they had been petitioning without success for several years. The revival of these organisations has been remarkable if we consider the level of disarticulation which prevailed before the Zapatista rebellion. It has also questioned the viability of legal changes which lack consensus and, for the case of Chiapas, raises doubts concerning the government's proposed Ley de Justicia Agraria.

The precise impact of *ejido* reform in Chiapas has been discussed from many angles. For some the land conflicts in the state are so deep-rooted and complex that it would be unfair to attribute the blame to a new law which has not yet had time to be implemented. They would add that one of the central aims of the new legal framework is precisely to provide solutions to the backlog of land petitions and to clarify internal disputes and conflicts over boundaries between *ejidos* and neighbouring properties. According to the logic of this argument, with time, institutional efficiency and a measure of good will from all sides, these conflicts can be solved and the land tenure situation will become transparent and accepted as just.

There may be some truth to this in some parts of the country. Even in Chiapas several *ejidos* have turned to PROCEDE in order to clarify once and for all the rights of each individual *ejidatario*. According to data provided by the state delegate of RAN, by the end of June 1994 in Chiapas, 78 of 2072 *ejidos* and

comunidades agrarias had completed the certification process. PROCEDE personnel had issued 9601 individual land titles, 7258 titles for individual dwelling areas (*solares urbanos*) and 1656 certificates for use of common lands.

However, almost all these *ejidos* are located in the least conflictive areas which are also the most integrated into the dominant culture and economy (Costa and Centro). For obvious reasons PROCEDE has not advanced in the Selva Lacandona, nor in Los Altos, where there is strong resistance thanks to a high degree of suspicion regarding the government's true objectives. In addition, we can say that the *ejido* reform has not had the desired effect in terms of promoting private investment. In Chiapas only one *sociedad mercantil* has been formed, and this is made up completely of private owners in the relatively developed Frailesca area. Similarly, there have been no joint ventures (*asociaciones en participación*) registered between *ejidatarios* and investors. It should also be noted that none of those *ejidos* which have completed the certification process have taken the decision to sell *ejido* land. In each case the overriding concern was with regularisation of individual holdings within the *ejido*.

If the stated goals of the *ejido* reform are not yet in evidence, the negative impact of declaring an end to land distribution is still being felt. We noted earlier how this helped detonate the Zapatista rebellion and how it was received amid the political confrontations generated by unresolved land disputes. During 1994 the pressure for land distribution in Chiapas continued to defy the new legislation and, because of its centrality to the political crisis in the state (and, by extension, the country), revealed the need for solutions which are not contemplated in the current legal and institutional framework. The clearest illustration of this lack of acceptance of neoliberal legality is the 'illegal' occupation of over 50 000 hectares of private property in almost every area of the state.

The impact of ejido *reform in Chiapas: land seizures and* campesino *rebellion*

The EZLN uprising made people aware of the unequal distribution of land in Chiapas and the size of the state's backlog of unresolved land petitions. At the time that the reforms to Article 27 came into effect this *rezago agrario* included 3483 land petitions and 164 presidential resolutions. This represented 27% of the total backlog in the entire country. However, according to official figures, by the end of June 1994, 94% of the *rezago* in Chiapas had been resolved.[75] Some 46% of the petitions were approved, compared to 54% which were rejected on the grounds of the unavailability of private land for redistribution or other impediments.

By July 1994 then, there were 989 cases still pending. These included 125 land petitions, 12 presidential resolutions, 435 petitions which had been sent to the Supreme Agrarian Tribunal for a final decision and 417 technical matters such as the drawing up of maps and documentation.[76] Although these figures paint a relatively successful picture, many *campesinos* complain that in fact the backlog has only been solved on paper and not in practice. Furthermore, during the first five months of 1994, those groups whose land petitions had been rejected presented 249 new claims. The difference now was that they were made in a very different context to that which prevailed in 1992 and 1993.

As mentioned above, one of the effects of the EZLN uprising was the resurgence of independent *campesino* movements across the state. The formation of CEOIC in late January 1994 marked the starting point of a period of *campesino* mobilisation involving at least 8000 land claimants belonging to 11 organisations. During the first six months of the year some 340 private farms representing over 50 000 hectares were seized. In several cases the occupations led to violent confrontations and a CEOIC leader, Mariano López, was assassinated in March in Simojovel.

Given the already tense political situation created by the Zapatista rebellion, the state government called on the leaders of CEOIC and the landowners' associations to find negotiated solutions. On 14 April 1994 the governor signed an agreement with both sides, promising to investigate case by case the claims of each group, while offering not to order the eviction of those farms taken before that date. For their part, the CEOIC leaders agreed not to promote further land invasions. The government also offered landowners a monthly compensation of 45 new pesos ($13) per hectare of land which they claimed as invaded. This measure obviously benefited larger landowners. For example, a holding of 300 hectares would be compensated for the sum of $3900 per month as long as the invasions persisted.

The 14 April agreement did not hold. Ranchers accused CEOIC of continuing to carry out land invasions and in early July signed a new agreement with the state governor which threatened the imminent eviction of all the land seizures in the state. The fact that the government only proceeded to evict four farms was not only a source of irritation for the ranchers' associations, but more importantly an indication of the impossibility of removing thousands of *campesino* families by force in a political context which called for extreme caution. At the same time, the CEOIC leaders claimed that the state government and the ranchers were responsible for breaking the 14 April accord, citing the eviction of several farms in the municipality of Teopisca in May, the arrest and imprisonment of Enrique Pérez López, a *campesino* leader and human rights activist in Comitán, and the failure of the government to provide solutions to the claims presented since 1 January 1994.[77]

The main obstacle to achieving a solution is the reluctance of landowners to sell. By the end of July there were only 89 owners who had declared their willingness to sell their properties. This would benefit 2350 *campesinos* with 11 910 hectares.[78] However, only 11 of these cases had been settled. In addition, there were 249 other farms (occupied by some 6000 *campesinos*) where the owners were unwilling to sell. In these cases the government offered to find other areas which could be settled by the land claimants, but if relocation was rejected then they would simply be evicted. This appears to repeat the same policies which contributed to the eventual unrest in the Selva Lacandona.

The CEOIC argued, in contrast, that if the private owners were unwilling to sell then the government should use its legal right to expropriate the land for the purpose of redistribution. The modifications to Article 27 did not delete the right of the nation to expropriate land 'for the purpose of public benefit'. This measure is often used to allow PEMEX to drill for oil or the Federal Electricity Company to construct a hydroelectricity dam. According to CEOIC, the *campesinos*, who in

fact had often lost their rights to *ejido* land as a result of expropriation for these types of projects, should now benefit from the expropriation of holdings which they had been petitioning through the legal channels for many years.[79]

The negative response of the state government to the request for expropriation was predictable. In negotiations with CEOIC representatives in June, it claimed that the argument for expropriation was unfounded since 'the decision to respect private property and the will of private owners is not open to negotiation'. Illustrating a central ambiguity in agrarian legislation, the government added that 'the constitutional order does not allow for exceptions'. It concluded that expropriation is not the only way to solve land disputes and promised to search for alternative means. By completely rejecting this option the government revealed not only a lack of political will to affect the interests of the landowners, but also a naive belief in the efficacy of other solutions such as the relocation of petitioning groups or support for productive projects in existing *ejidos*. The size of the problem is given by simply comparing the area which has been occupied (50 000 hectares) with the area which has been offered for sale (11 910 hectares). According to one CEOIC leader, the government set a ceiling of 20 000 hectares to solve the demand for land in Chiapas and its real objective was to begin evicting *campesinos* from occupied farms after the 21 August elections.

It should be noted, however, that not all members of CEOIC adopted the same position. A clear division has existed from its inception between the independent radical organisations which call for expropriation and other moderate or PRI-affiliated groups which have adopted different strategies. Among the latter, the three largest organisations are Solidaridad Campesina Magisterial (SOCAMA), the CNC and the ARIC Uniόn de Uniones. Each of these criticised the CIOAC, OCEZ–CNPA, Xi'Nich and other radical groups for attempting to claim leadership of CEOIC and pursuing confrontational strategies which lacked consensus.

This division became particularly apparent after 14 April during negotiations to resolve each organisation's land claims. For example, SOCAMA elaborated an independent proposal which gained the government's approval in July. Under this plan, the federal and state governments would provide SOCAMA with 20 million new pesos for the purpose of obtaining a credit fund with 50 million pesos from the regional office of Banrural. This fund would be used to purchase the land which SOCAMA members were claiming and the credit would be paid back with the subsidies received from PROCAMPO over a period to be established by each individual *campesino*. Part of the interest on the credit would be covered by the interest generated by the initial 20 million peso guarantee and SOCAMA would request additional support from SEDESOL to make up the difference. Once the credit is paid back and the land fully paid for, the 20 million pesos would be used to support productive projects among the members. In the meantime SEDESOL agreed to provide infrastructure and interest-free credit. These measures were seen as necessary to include those *campesinos* whose land claims had been turned down. One of SOCAMA's principal leaders, Manuel Hernández Gόmez, explained that this approach was more likely to succeed than simply polarising the issue between expropriation or maintaining the status quo.[80] The positive response which the proposal received from the state government was seen by the radical wing of CEOIC as evidence of favouritism and an abdication of the

commitment to the struggle for land in the future. SOCAMA had negotiated independently of CEOIC and, in keeping with the reformed Article 27, agreed not to press for further land distribution once current claims had been settled. In addition, the use of the PROCAMPO subsidies to purchase land was criticised as a diversion from their intended use, namely to support basic grain production.

In the case of the CNC the strategy was less innovative and more opportunistic. While CNC groups invaded land as much as CIOAC or OCEZ–CNPA, it also accused the radical groups of politicising CEOIC and supporting the opposition PRD candidacy for the governorship. Of the 89 properties to be purchased for redistribution, the CNC was to receive 17, compared to 46 for the CIOAC. However, the actual land area involved is not so different: 2902 hectares for CNC and 3565 hectares for CIOAC.[89] The CNC has therefore been able to use the strength represented by CEOIC but has participated less in its political struggles with the state government and has tended to avoid confrontations over policy reform.

Finally, ARIC–Unión de Uniones became an important part of the government's attempt to limit the radicalising effects of the EZLN in Chiapas. Large amounts of new resources for productive projects and infrastructure have been provided since the uprising. The effectiveness of this strategy has not been entirely successful for either the government or ARIC. It appears that *campesino* support for EZLN has not declined as a result of new government programmes, while the increasing moderation of the ARIC leadership led to a split in July 1994 as several member organisations established a parallel leadership more clearly identified with the EZLN and the goals of the CND. One of the reasons for the split was the decision of the ARIC president to accept the PRI candidacy for federal deputy in the electoral district of Ocosingo. His supporters recognised that the members should have been consulted more fully, but it is doubtful that the candidacy would have been approved.

The divisions within CEOIC may increase in the aftermath of the August 1994 elections as the new government provides financial and political incentives to isolate radical groups by rewarding more moderate or compliant organisations. We can expect the PRI to use traditional divide-and-rule tactics in its broader effort to weaken support for the EZLN and in the continuing struggle to impose the new agrarian legislation. It will attempt to gather support for a new state-level agrarian law which is clearly biased against further land redistribution. The 'Law of Agrarian Justice and Promotion of Rural Development in Chiapas', which by September 1994 was awaiting approval by the state legislature, was designed as the official response to one of the Zapatistas' demands regarding the need for land reform in Chiapas. However, the draft text does not add anything substantially different from what is already contained in the federal Agrarian Law of 1992. Although, if passed, the state law would allow *campesino* organisations to denounce the existence of *latifundio* holdings and would oblige the government to investigate such cases, in reality it is highly unlikely that any *latifundios* would be detected because of the practice of sub-dividing estates among family members and name-lenders. At the same time, as with the federal legislation, landowners who are found to be in possession of properties exceeding the legal limits would be given the right to sell off the indicated properties

within the space of one year. There is no mention of the legal right of the state to expropriate such extensions for the purpose of land distribution. Instead the focus of the government's proposal is on modernising production and increasing efficiency.

Serious problems may therefore arise if the state-level legislation is passed. Although more moderate groups might support the new measures, there is a clear lack of consensus among a significant part of the affected population. The fact that it was drawn up hastily without proper consultation is also a source of tension. In this regard the radical wing of CEOIC proposed the re-opening of consultations with all *campesino* organisations in the state and that the new law be elaborated on the basis of the proposals put forward in grassroots assemblies.

A different problem facing CEOIC is the less than complete support it enjoys among national *campesino* organisations which are struggling to find ways to insert themselves into the new political economy of free trade. Only a minority of these would make the issue of land tenure the articulating principle for any national mobilisation for policy reform. It appears unlikely that the right to petition for land will ever be reintroduced into Article 27, particularly following the PRI's victory on 21 August. One of the central tasks for the broad array of *campesino* movements, then, is the formulation of new proposals to deal with the social, environmental, political and economic problems generated by NAFTA and globalisation. In short, there needs to be a vision for the future not a nostalgia for the past if anything is to change. The goal of the CND is precisely to articulate such a vision along peaceful and constructive lines.

It is here that *campesino* organisations have a positive role to play in finding solutions to the current crisis. Increasing the belligerent tone of their actions will only harden the elite opposition to reform in Chiapas and the situation could easily degenerate into armed conflict with Central American-style death-squad killings. But the first steps have to be taken by the government, Eduardo Robledo and Ernesto Zedillo. The opposition has to be shown convincing evidence of the authorities' willingness to recognise electoral fraud in Chiapas and correct the irregularities. There has to be a willingness to open up the political system and provide meaningful channels for political participation. If this does not happen many of the people who voted for Amado Avendaño (almost 350 000 according to official figures and probably many more) will rightly conclude that they have no stake in the political system and make their choices accordingly. Let us hope that the lessons of 1 January 1994 have been learned and that politics triumphs over war.

Notes

[1] This is a shorter version of an article published in *Transformation of Rural Mexico* No 5, La Jolla, CA: Center for US–Mexican Studies, University of California, 1994.

[2] The social sector in rural Mexico refers to lands which were redistributed under the agrarian reform programme mandated by Article 27 after the 1910–17 Revolution. This sector is comprised of *ejidos* and *comunidades agrarias*, comprised of *ejidatarios* and *comuneros*, respectively. The former refer to lands which the state redistributed through the break-up of private holdings or through the colonisation of unused

'national lands'. The latter refer to lands historically held by indigenous communities, as well as to communities established through petitions to recuperate areas lost to encroachment by private owners.

[3] A Warman, 'Chiapas hoy', *La Jornada*, 16 January 1994, pp 1–15.

[4] L Hernandez, 'El cafe y la guerra', *La Jornada*, 30 January 1994, pp 1, 48.

[5] *La Jornada*, 6 February 1994.

[6] Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografia e Informática (INEGI), *Atlas ejidal del Estado de Chiapas. Encuesta nacional agropecuaria ejidal*, 1988, Aguascalientes: INEGI, 1991.

[7] Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos and Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (SARH–CEPAL), *Primer informe nacional sobre tipología de productores del sector social*, Mexico City: Subsecretaría de Política Sectorial y Concertación/SARH, mimeo. (Forthcoming as 'Productores del sector social rural en México', *Transformation of Rural Mexico, No 1*, La Jolla, CA: Center for US–Mexican Studies, University of California.)

[8] Ibid, p 19.

[9] Equipo Pueblo/Instituto Maya 'Desde Chihuahua hasta Chiapas …' Mexico City: Equipo Pueblo, 1988, p 49.

[10] G Thompson, R M del Carmen García Aguilar & M Castillo Huerta, *Crecimiento y desarrollo económico en Chiapas, 1982–1988*. Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas, 1988.

[11] The mill was sold for about US$14 million (42 000 million old pesos) to the Empresa Operadora Gijalva, a company that processes coffee and sugar. The Pujiltic sale caused discontent among cane growers who had been arguing for the transfer of the mill to their ownership.

[12] L Hernández, 'Nadando con los tiburones: la experiencia de la Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Cafetaleras', *Cuadernos Agrarios* 1 (Nueva Epoca) 1991, pp 52–75.

[13] Ibid, p 52.

[14] Hernandez, 'El cafe y la guerra'.

[15] Ibid.

[16] *La Jornada*, 23 January 1994, p 47.

[17] R Robles, 'El campo y el pacto', *El Cotidiano*, 23 1988, pp 65–72.

[18] C Hewitt de Alcántara *Economic Restructuring and Rural Subsistence in Mexico: Maize and the Crisis of the 1980s*, Discussion Paper 31, Geneva: UNRISD, 1992, pp 10–12.

[19] The PECE was originally named the Pacto de Solidaridad Económica.

[20] Hewitt de Alcántara, *Economic Restructuring and Rural Subsistence in Mexico*, p 13.

[21] Thompson *et al, Crecimiento y desarolls económics en Chiapas*, pp 225–230.

[22] R Robles & J Moguel, 'Agricultura y proyecto neoliberal', *El Cotidiano* 34 1990, pp 3–12.

[23] One piece of anecdotal evidence is the remark made by a *campesino* leader following a meeting with Banrural officials in Durango in Autumn 1991. 'It's funny', he said, 'before we didn't know each other but there was always some money. Now we can talk face to face, but there is nothing!'. The *campesinos* were requesting a loan to finance marketing of maize and beans. Banrural was in the process of pulling out of Durango.

[24] J Calva, *Probables efectos de un Tratado de Libre Comercio en el campo*, Mexico City: Fontamara, 1992.

[25] Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos (SARH), 'PROCAMPO: a new support program for the Mexican farm sector', mimeo, Mexico City: SARH, 1993.

[26] These were maize, beans, sorghum, soy beans, rice, wheat and cotton.

[27] SARH–CEPAL, Primer informe nacional sobre tipología de productores del sector social, p 92.

[28] A Cano, 'Lo más delgado del hilo: Pronasol en Chiapas', *Reforma*, 23 January 1994, pp 3–7. The CNOC emerged as an independent response to the collapse in the international price in 1989, although it has antecedents in the early 1980s (J Moguel, 'La lucha por la apropiación de la vida social en la economía cafetalera: la experiencia de la CNOC 1990–91', in J Moguel, C Botey & L Hernandez (eds), *Autonomía y Nuevos Sujetos Sociales en el Desarrollo Rural*, Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores and Centro de Estudios Históricos del Agrarismo en México, 1992, pp 98–118.) By the end of 1993 it represented almost 60 000 small producers from seven states, including some 20 000 growers from Chiapas. Most of its member organisations were independent of the PRI and other political parties. According to its own census compiled in December 1993, in Chiapas there were 40 local organisations participating in CNOC.

[29] J Moguel, 'Chiapas y el Pronasol', *La Jornada del Campo*, supplement of *La Jornada*, 25 January 1994, pp 7–8.

[30] Information contained in this section is drawn from Cans, 'Lo mas delgado del hils'. In Chiapas the programme was renamed 'Credits a la Solidaridad' by Gonzalez Garrido.

[31] *La Jornada*, 21 March 1991, p 13.

[32] The announcement in August 1993 of a further $55 million for social projects in the border region of Chiapas obviously came too late to forestall the rebellion. Solidaridad moneys were also allegedly used for such non-priority works as the construction of hundreds of basketball courts, a sumptuous convention centre in Tuxtla Gutiérrez and the refurbishment of central parks and town halls. See S Hughes, 'You can't eat basketball courts', *El Financiero International*, 24–30 January 1994, p 15.

[33] Programa de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales y Titulación de Solares Urbanos (PROCEDE), *Documento guía*, Mexico City: Procuraduría Agraria, 1993, p 10.
[34] T Benjamin, *A Rich Land, a Poor People: Politics and Society in Modern Chiapas*, Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1989, pp 95–143.
[35] Article 1 of the Ley Agraria del Estado de Chiapas of 1921 stipulated that 'The term latifundio refers to all properties which exceed 8000 hectares, held by an individual person *or by a company [sociedad] that has the legal capacity to acquire ownership*' (emphasis added). It is ironic that in 1994 a group of 25 individuals associated in a *sociedad mercantil* can own up to 10 000 hectares of good quality pasture land without being considered *latifundistas*, at least by the law.
[36] A García de León, *Resistencia y utopía*, 2 vols, Mexico City: Era, 1985.
[37] E Reyes Ramos, *El reparto de tierras y la política agraria en Chiapas, 1914–1988*, Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and Centro de Investigaciones Humanísticas de Mesoamérica y del Estado de Chiapas, 1992, p 62.
[38] L M Fernández Ortiz & M Tarrío García, *Ganadería y estructura agraria en Chiapas*, Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Xochimilco, 1983; pp 140–151; Benjamin, *A Rich Land, a Poor People*, pp 223–243; and N Harvey, 'Peasant strategies and corporatism in Chiapas', in J Foweraker & A Craig (eds), *Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1990.
[39] J L Pontigo Sánchez, 'Dinámica social y movimientos campesinos en Simojovel y Huitiupán, Chiapas', unpublished thesis in economics, Area of Social Sciences, Autonomous University of Chiapas, 1985.
[40] Reyes Ramos, *El reparto de tierras y la política agraria en Chiapas*, pp 113–118.
[41] Ibid, p 119.
[42] Secretaría de la Reforma Agraria (SAR), 'Acciones agrarias', Subdelegación de concertación agraria en zonas indígenas, mimeo, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, 1989.
[43] Horizontes, *Boletín del Centro de Derechos Humanos 'Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas'*, 2, November 1990, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Horizontes, *Boletín del Centro de Derechos Humanos 'Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas'*, 3, March 1991, San Cristóbal de Las Casas; and Horizontes, *Boletín del Centro de Derechos Humanos 'Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas'*, 4–5, September 1991, San Cristóbal de Las Casas.
[44] N Harvey, 'Conservación a costa de la miseria', *Campo Uno*, supplement of *Uno Más Uno*, 1 and 8 June 1992.
[45] A Aguilar Zinser, 'Todo en Chiapas es Centroamérica', *El Financiero*, 21 October 1991, p 56.
[46] Despite a 1989 ban on exploitation of forestry resources in Chiapas, this activity has continued because of the lack of adequate alternative sources of income. Moreover, the ban has led to several conflicts with the police and army. The July 1991 protests in the Selva, referred to above, originated in application of the 1989 decree.
[47] Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, *Civilians at Risk: Military and Police Abuses in the Mexican Countryside*, North America Project Special Report 6, New York: World Policy Institute, 1993, pp 10–16.
[48] J Moguel, 'Reforma constitucional y luchas agrarias en el marco de la transición salinista', in J Moguel *et al*, p 273.
[49] *El Financiero*, 10 June 1993, p 46.
[50] *La Jornada*, 1 February 1994, p 5.
[51] Moguel, 'Reforma constitucional y luchas agrarias en el marco de la transición', p 271.
[52] Taller de San Cristóbal, 'Reformas al artículo 27 constitucional', unpublished workshop proceedings, San Cristóbal de las Casas, 1992.
[53] Interview, Registraris Agraris Nacional, Mexico City, January 1994.
[54] X Leyva Solano & G Ascencio Franco, 'Apuntes para el estudio de la ganaderización en la Selva Lacandona', in *Anuario de Cultura e Investigación 1992*, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas: Instituto Chiapaneco de Cultura, 1993, p 274.
[55] Interview, January 1993.
[56] L E F Ramos Hernández, 'La colonización campesina en la selva lacandona (análisis y perspectivas)', unpublished thesis, Mexico City: Instituto Politécnico Nacional, 1978, p 26.
[57] G Ascencio Franco & X Leyva Solano, 'Los municipios de la Selva Chiapaneca. Colonización y dinámica agropecuaria', in *Anuario de cultura e investigación 1991*, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas: Instituto Chiapaneco de Cultura, 1992, pp 192–194.
[58] Ibid, p 217.
[59] Ibid, pp 192–194.
[60] Leyva Solano & Ascenio Franco, 'Apuntes para el estudio de la ganaderización en la Selva Lacandona', p 273.
[61] Ascencio Franco & Leyva Solano, 'Los municipios de la Selva Chiapaneca', p 204.
[62] S Dichtl, *Cae una estrella: Desarrollo y destrucción de la Selva Lacandona*, Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1987, p 45.
[63] Ascencio Franco & Leyva Solano, 'Los municipios de la Selva Chiapaneca', p 211.
[64] F Mestries, 'Testimonios del Congreso Indígena de San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Octubre de 1974', in J

Moguel (ed), *Historia de la Cuestïon Agraria Mexicana*, vol 9, part 2, Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores and Centro de Estudios Históricos del Agrarismo en México, 1990, p 473.

[65] Ibid; and J Morales Bermúdez, 'El Congreso Indıgena de Chiapas: un testimonio', in *Anuario de cultura e investigacïon 1991*, Tuxtla Gutïerrez, Chiapas: Instituto Chiapaneco de Cultura, 1992, pp 242–370.

[66] R Wasserstrom, *Class and Society in Central Chiapas*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983, p 178; and J Rus, 'The "Comunidad Revolucionaria Institucional": the subversion of native government in highland Chiapas, 1936–1968', in G Joseph & D Nugent (eds), *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming.

[67] Uniones de Ejidos are second-level organisations which unite two or more ejidos as productive units. During the Echeverría presidency (1970–76), the government promoted the formation of UES as a way to increase productivity in the social sector. Under new legislation preferential credit was to be channelled to those *ejidos* which joined together in second-level organisations. On the limitations of this strategy, see J Moguel & P López Sierra, 'Polıtica agraria y modernizacïon capitalista', in J Moguel (ed).

[68] Interview with adviser to UE Quiptic, October 1987.

[69] N Harvey, 'La Unïon de Uniones de Chiapas y los retos polıticos del desarrollo de base', in Moguel *et al.* These were Ocosingo, Las Margaritas, Tila, Sabanilla, Huitiupán, El Bosque, Larrainzar, Yajalón, Comitán, Frontera Comalapa and Motozintla.

[70] Ascencio Franco & Leyva Solano, 'Los municipios de la Selva Chiapaneco', pp 239–241.

[71] 'Xi'nich' is the Chol word for ants. One of the leaders of the march explained how the government had tried to stamp out the Palenque demonstration but had only succeeded in disturbing an ant's nest.

[72] A Cepeda Neri, 'Chiapas: la lucha por los derechos humanos', *La Jornada*, 21 April 1992, p 5; F Reyes Heroles, 'Esa verguenza nacional', *La Jornada*, 22 April 1992, p 19; and H Bellinghausen, 'Xi'Nich y la cultura de la victoria', *La Jornada*, 27 April 1992, p 26.

[73] *La Jornada*, 10 August 1994.

[74] *Proceso*, 29 August 1994, p 18.

[75] *La Jornada*, 14 July 1994, p 16.

[76] SRA 'Programa de abatimiento del rezago agrario. Estado de Chiapas', Tuxtla Gutïerrez; Subsecretaría de Asuntos Agrarios, 1994.

[77] Interviews with three leaders of CEOIC, Tuxtla Gutïerrez, July 1994.

[78] SRA, 'Programa de abatamiento del rezago agrario'.

[79] Interviews with CEOIC leaders, Ocosingo, July 1994.

[80] Interview, Mexico City, July 1994.

[81] SRA, 'Programa de abatamiento del regazo agrario'.