

# Our voice

**T**he uprising of poverty-stricken Indian peasants at the beginning of the year has had domestic and international repercussions. All eyes were to have been turned to NAFTA, then coming into effect; instead they focused on the armed rebellion of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN).

The campesinos of Chiapas, who since the time of the Spanish Conquest have suffered pillage, abuse, neglect and death, took the name of the peasant hero Emiliano Zapata, who rose up in arms in 1910 in the state of Morelos under the slogans "Land and Freedom" and "Bread for All." The demands which led to that revolution remain unfulfilled; while there has been significant progress in Mexico, it has not spread throughout the nation.

At the beginning there was an effort to crush the armed revolt in Chiapas through force. Armed clashes and aerial bombings shook public opinion not only in Mexico but throughout the world. Fortunately a ceasefire was declared and peace negotiations begun. In eight days of talks, 34 demands were put forward, with point-by-point answers to each. It is noteworthy that this dialogue was achieved in such a short period of time.

If a lasting peace is obtained in Chiapas this will establish an enviable example for other countries torn by internal struggles, which unfortunately have not won a negotiated peace



after decades of effort. Extermination of one's enemy is impossible.

Key among the demands is reform of electoral laws—those in force caused conflicts in the 1988 national elections as well as in state elections in San Luis Potosí, Guanajuato, Michoacán and Yucatán; the abolition of the Chiapas penal code, which allowed landowners and local government authorities to grind down the poor peasants; reforms to Article 27 of the constitution, the application of which has led to poor peasants being dispossessed of their community (ejido) lands; bilingual education, so Indians may speak Spanish as well as their mother tongues; and respect for Indians' age-old, special democratic forms of government, without breaking the pact achieved on the federal level.

At the end of the talks the different ethnic groups' representatives returned home to consult their communities and obtain their approval of the points discussed with the Mexican government.

In one of his many communiqués, subcomandante (EZLN Deputy Commander) Marcos stated:

"We ask everything for all, nothing for ourselves."

The striking concentration of wealth among groups which have benefited from the economics of privatization, contrasting with the extreme poverty in which many Mexicans live, makes it necessary to correct current policies. What our country needs are better forms of redistributing wealth, fundamentally jobs and education, so we may all enjoy a decent life.

At the end of last year a political analyst sent us a series of reflections on the situation of the country, raising the question whether Mexico should continue along the political and economic path taken. The particular merit of Miguel A.

Ortega's article is that, anticipating events, it pointed out problems that make up the background to the Chiapas revolt.

Voices of Mexico will be following the development of these important events; yet even now one can state that New Year's 1994 changed the country. Attention is now focused on how to achieve progress that will benefit everyone.

"There is no progress without social justice, just as there can be no social justice without progress"—this axiom is gaining new force again today.

In the electoral field, José Francisco Ruiz Massieu has contributed an in-depth analysis of the Chilean case. He leads us to think about the sort of "padlocks" a regime can impose to limit the transition to democracy, as Pinochet did when he realized the international community was intent on isolating him and he sought to hold on to power through the most various sorts of legal reforms.

Five months before the presidential elections, Mexico has experienced a serious blow against democracy. Luis Donaldo Colosio, presidential candidate of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), was assassinated. This unexpected and brutal tragedy has transformed the country's political landscape. More than ever we need serenity from political parties and the public in general, in order to achieve peaceful elections.

We hope light will be shed on this useless crime, and that in these difficult moments we will achieve national unity to continue on our path of progress through dialogue, negotiation, peace and stability. And that the enemies of democracy will be overcome by the power of civil society. ✕

Hugo B. Margáin  
Editorial Director.