

Chiapas Peace Is the Priority¹

Samuel Ruiz García*



Pedro Mera/Cuartoscuro

San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas.

The national situation is closely linked to the main international trends, not only in matters of the economy and culture, but now particularly with regard to political and military questions. The growing dependence of Mexico's model of development and democracy, now part of globalizing neoliberalism, has taken on

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new forms and criteria since the events of September 11, 2001.

The overall hegemony of the U.S. government and economy over the world has new weight, while the margins of national sovereignty for seek-

ing alternatives have been reduced. The demands for a new international order, the strengthening of international law and of multilateral institutions to guarantee justice and equilibrium have been overwhelmed by the new situation that puts everything in a new light.

Peace is once again, even more urgently and clearly, a worldwide priority. But, what kind of peace? Today, peace is also a polarized concept whose meaning is

* Former bishop of the San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, diocese.

disputed. While for some it is the imposition and control of one force and its project over others, in the logic of the world's peoples and the solution of structural injustice, peace is the establishment of conditions of equality that not only offers solutions to the effects and participants of conflicts, but resolves the roots of the problems.

For this reason, the growing links and articulation of civic movements from all nations that have advanced rapidly from the simple rejection of globalization to the creation of agendas and alternative proposals for all the fundamental problems are important. After several attempts, it has finally been possible to reactivate the dynamic of Latin American exchanges, among them, of course, the World Social Forum, the Continental Social Alliance, the struggle around the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the Puebla-Panama Plan, as well as the movement known as the "Cry of the Excluded" and the process of emancipation of the indigenous peoples.

Mexico is part of both these trends, globalizing dependence and the new alternative civic linkages and solidarity.

THE NATIONAL SITUATION

The new international situation also puts the democratic transition we are experiencing in a new light. There is greater understanding that it is not reduced to parties alternating in office, but is defined by the possibility of preserving our territorial and resource integrity, political independence and sovereignty over national alternatives.

This conception of democratic transition implies the need to make state policies more decisive so that they accelerate, strengthen and diversify democratic institutions and spaces with regard to human and social rights and the maturation of a real rule of law that would have repercussions in all areas of national life. In addition, the democratic transition and national security should be based on new structures and strategies for economic development that distribute both wealth and opportunities and resolve age-old imbalances and injustices.

It does not seem, then, that the expectations generated by long years of social struggles in Mexico can be satisfied by today's national political forces, which are very far from eliminating their lag behind society's expect-

tations and from assuming the tensions between international trends and local demands.

Again, peace has been an axis and fundamental indicator of these lags and tensions. 2001 was the year that offered the opportunity to link peace with the transition, the indigenous peoples with national development, the forms of popular struggle with a search for alternatives for political participation and tolerance. However, as we know, Congress did not understand this, and with the support of the political forces in most of the state legisla-

tures, approved a constitutional reform on indigenous rights and culture which was very far removed from the 1996 San Andrés Larráinzar Accords, which basically echoed the principles laid out in the International Labor Organization's Convention 169.² This indigenous reform approved by Congress was widely rejected by Mexico's indigenous organizations and peoples.

The overall solution lies in a reform of the state that would link peace, democracy, justice, human rights, national security and alternative development. The far-reaching reform which should no longer be put off is glaringly absent, but indicates a national situation that is no longer of merely temporary significance. The moment is strategically important; the dispute is about basics; the challenge is civic:

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we are dealing with different national projects.

THE SOCIAL AND CIVIC ACTORS

The social movements are also in crisis. More than immobility, there has been dispersion; more than a lack of proposals, there has been sectoralization; more than a lack of experience, there has been a lack of the ability to project outward and have an impact. Although there is a tendency toward creating an alternative national pro-

ject that would be the strategic reference point for orienting and linking the different actors and agendas of the social and civic movement, it still does not exist. That is the fundamental challenge, also for peace with justice and dignity.

It can also be said that since alternation in office, a vacuum and polarization have been created with regard to the crosscutting issues that are the glue for social action. That is why people are disconcerted about alternation in office and discouraged and radicalized about the transition and greater difficulties for achieving a common positioning. Given this, no civic or party actor has the ability to take the initiative, offer leadership or make proposals.

However, this is encouraging the emergence of a new generation of lead-

so that an alternative vision can mature, a vision that will not only be the sum of particular, local problems, but aim for a solid proposal for the reform of the state.

To summarize, we can say that 2001 marked the climax, the anticlimax and the reactivation of national civic mobilization. It was the climax because of the mobilization and profound awareness that stemmed from the Zapatista caravan to Mexico City; it was an anticlimax because of the implications of the indigenous amendment to the Constitution; and it was the reactivation of national civic mobilization due to a more radicalized resurgence of civic efforts and agendas, very far removed from governmental invitations to participate in local programs for the fight against poverty.

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ers and spaces for relating that in the medium term may be able to have a greater impact than up until now. These new spaces emerge on the basis of new links among organized civic sectors to social, popular, grassroots processes, particularly by groups that have been excluded and have lacked the means to express themselves and link up to a broader struggle of mobilization. In fact, given many of these organizations' radicalization and polarization, the new spaces must join the resistance agendas and dynamics to those of mobilization and proposals

THE SITUATION IN CHIAPAS

The first year of Governor Pablo Salazar Mendiguchía's administration is similar to that of Vicente Fox in that social sectors have become rapidly disenchanted, and the administration has not been able to deal with the substantive problems. Nevertheless, in the case of Chiapas, it is only fair to recognize that the new government's main challenge was to consolidate governability and establish the executive as a stable institutional force. Although peace was a watchword of

the campaign and the early days of the administration, its importance has dwindled during the year, something which does not contribute to creating favorable political conditions for re-initiating the peace process.

The army maintains its presence and activity; paramilitary groups have continued to act with impunity; and displaced communities continue to be alarmed. Some groups and communities have returned to their homes more because of their own decision than because objectively favorable conditions existed.

Polarization in Chiapas has been more dramatic than on a national level because it is related to concrete problems that explode in a context of violence and the lack of negotiations, in addition to the fact that the political parties are even further away from these demands and their representation or solution.

In short, Chiapas is experiencing a situation of polarization and deterioration, with greater governability, but without either the political or civil society required to reactivate the peace process. Disputes have a local platform and backing in society and nothing and no one are on the scene offering a short-term alternative. The Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) has been lost from view consolidating its bases for autonomy and resistance, while the diocese of San Cristóbal is limiting its action to the more strictly religious sphere, and the social organizations are speeding up their agendas and dialogue, although no force is coming to the fore capable of calling for and articulating substantive proposals.

In this framework, the efforts around the Puebla-Panama Plan, linking Chiapas with other regions of the country

and Central America, as well as the emergence of a new civic "Network for Peace," headquartered in San Cristóbal, are of note.

THE PEACE PROCESS

After the crisis caused by the 2001 indigenous law, neither the Fox administration nor the EZLN, the main parties to the conflict, has proposed any new peace or dialogue initiative, accusing each other of the responsibility for this. The fact is that the federal government bears more responsibility for Congress's erroneous action since it did not perform the necessary mediation for the legislature to under-

stand its co-responsibility in the peace process.

In its case, the EZLN is consolidating its strategy of resistance and municipal autonomy, with the particularity that now the rebel councils' dynamic of consolidating their capability to present alternatives, even in the areas of production and service provision, is more noticeable.

We can say that in technical terms, what we have is a formal impasse with real deterioration. Peace has been caught in the midst of other agendas and situations. It is no longer the independent variable. Neither is it any longer a mere problem of internal balance of forces since, as I said at the outset, it now seems to be considered

part of the new scenarios of national security and the "new war" that dominates the international stage. The outcome of 2002 seems by no means favorable or promising for peace. **MM**

NOTES

¹ Paper read at the seminar "Chiapas: Current Dilemmas of the Conflict and the Negotiations," organized by the Woodrow Wilson Center Latin American Program and the CISAN, October 30, 2002, in Mexico City.

² ILO Convention 169 recognizes the aspirations of indigenous and tribal peoples "to exercise control over their own institutions, ways of life and economic development and to maintain their identities, language and religions within the framework of the States in which they live," as long as they comply with the principles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. [Editor's Note.]