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Contentious Politics in North America

National Protest and Transnational Collaboration under Continental Integration

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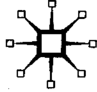

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Contesting Neoliberal Globalism and NAFTA in Rural Mexico: From State Corporatism to the Political-Cultural Formation of the Peasantry?*

Armando Bartra and Gerardo Otero

Throughout most of the twentieth century, Mexico's political system was variously described as an authoritarian, one-party-dominant, or semi-democratic regime. Three features of this system stood out and accounted for Mexico's legendary political stability and solid domination by the ruling party. First, this party had dominated Mexican politics since its foundation in 1929, even though it changed its name twice: from the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR – National Revolutionary Party), to the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM – Party of the Mexican Revolution) in 1936, and then to the current name of Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI – Institutionalized Revolutionary Party) in 1946. The PRI finally lost the presidency in 2000, but continues to be a major force in Congress and holds most state governorships. Second, the corporatist nature of the state had been under construction since the Mexican Revolution, which lasted for almost a decade, from 1910 to 1920, and in which one million people died in combat. State corporatism meant that subordinate groups and classes became organized, but their organizations had to be acknowledged and legitimized by the state, a feature that continues after 2000. In fact, the formation of organizations was often initiated and encouraged by the state, as was the case with the Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC – National Peasant Confederation), the major peasant organization. The form of legitimacy preferred by the state was that the organizations became affiliate members of the ruling PRI, but other organizations were also allowed to exist, as long as their loyalty to the state was not in doubt

(Bartra 1985; Samstad 2002; Mackinlay and Otero 2004). Third, state corporatism clearly involved an authoritarian and top-down relationship between the state and mass organizations, and yet it also involved some form of reciprocity by which its constituents received something in exchange for their loyalty to the state (González Casanova 1983; Hellman 1994; Cornelius 2000).

By 1982 the economic basis for state corporatism had been eroded considerably, however, which coincided with the indebtedness crisis set off that year by Mexico's defaulting on the payment of its foreign debt. Since the 1930s, Mexico had engaged in a major agrarian reform by which half of its agricultural, forestry, and livestock-grazing land was placed in the hands of *ejidos* or agrarian communities, the two forms of land tenure created by Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution, one of the principal legal achievements of the revolution. It could be argued that the agrarian reform was the main pay-off to the peasantry for its participation in the revolution and its eventual loyalty to the PRI-state. Shortly after the 1982 debt crisis, though, the state launched a process of economic liberalization that shook the very foundations of state corporatism and inward-looking development that had been sought for the previous five decades (Bartra 1992, 2003c; Hernández Navarro 1992, 1994; Otero 1999). Economic liberalization—or neoliberalism, as it is popularly known—was triggered partly as a way to address the indebtedness crisis, but it was also ardently advocated by the most organized fractions of Mexico's capitalist class (Valdés Ugalde 1996) and the technocrats who controlled the state (Centeno 1994). With the collapse of the economic foundations for state corporatism, the question emerged as to whether the peasantry and other subordinate groups and classes would become politically formed or constituted. Could these groups form a vigorous part of civil society to contest the authoritarian state and push for their demands while retaining their independence from the state and their autonomy from political parties?

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and analyze how the peasantry in Mexico has contested neoliberal globalism and its attendant policies. By neoliberal globalism we mean the ideology, as discussed in great detail in McBride's chapter in this book, behind the economic liberalization policies geared toward opening Mexico's economy to international trade and investment, the privatization of formerly state-run firms, the elimination of most state subsidies, the downsizing of many social policies, and so on. While these policies began in the mid-1980s, they were consolidated with Mexico's joining of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which came into force

at the start of 1994. Therefore, our analysis focuses on the 1982–2008 period, a time of great tumult for what Cadena-Roa in the next chapter in this book describes as Mexico's fluid social movement sector. It begins at the time when the Mexican state had reached a climatic point in its corporatist relations with most social classes and groups in society, and covers the electoral democratic transition that started in 2000, when an opposition candidate from the right-of-center Partido Acción Nacional (PAN – National Action Party) won the presidential elections. This transition was interrupted in 2006 by the highly inequitable presidential election, in which the PAN prevented the left-of-centre candidate from the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD – Party of the Democratic Revolution) from winning (Otero 2008). Furthermore, the PAN itself has attempted to rebuild or appropriate the organizations of subordinate groups to remake state corporatism (Mackinlay and Otero 2004; Singelmann 2004).

The first section discusses how several peasant organizations have sought their independence from the state and autonomy from political parties, in an attempt to dismantle the PRI-state corporatism and to struggle for both their economic and political interests in the realm of civil society. The second section discusses the death and resurrection of agrarian organizations that struggled for self-management and the democratic control of the productive process. The third section discusses the emergence of a broad peasant mobilization – Movimiento '*¡El Campo no Aguanta Más!*' (MCAM – 'The Countryside Can Take no More'). This movement was launched eight years after the start of NAFTA, demanding a renegotiation of its agricultural chapter. Finally, the conclusion raises the question as to whether the trajectory of peasant mobilization leads to a great class convergence movement, one that includes indigenous and mestizo peasants. If this convergence were to take place, then we could speak of the political-cultural formation of the peasantry as a class.

Autonomous peasant organizations negotiate with the state

The end of 1988 marked the highest point of civic insurgency that threatened to eject the PRI from Los Pinos (the national presidential house, equivalent to the US White House). Ten peasant and Indian organizations signed the Convenio de Acción Unitaria (CAU – Unitary Action Agreement) which articulated agrarian demands for land, for reviving agricultural production in the countryside, and the cultural

and territorial demands of Indian peoples (Flores Felix 1992, 1995, 1998; García, Leyva and Burgete 1998). Their agreement was signed in the context of a 'First National Agrarian Encounter'. Held on 27–28 November, it represented a truly historical encounter for it encompassed first-generation neo-Zapatista organizations like the Coordinadora Nacional 'Plan de Ayala' (CNPA – 'Plan de Ayala' National Coordinator), organizations for economic struggle like the Unión Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas (UNORCA – National Union of Autonomous Regional Peasant Organizations), and ethnic convergence groupings like Congreso Nacional de Pueblos Indígenas (CNPI – National Indian Peoples Council). The struggles for independence, for autonomy, and for self-determination were interwoven.

This mobilization was short-lived. Forty days later, on 6 January 1989, the new President Carlos Salinas inaugurated his illegitimate government (fraught with widespread claims of electoral fraud) by making a call to constitute the Congreso Agrario Permanente (CAP – Permanent Agrarian Congress). The call was made on the 70th anniversary of revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata's death, as if to put the last nail in his coffin. The corporatist organizations were quick to join this call, including the CNC, the Central Campesina Independiente (CCI – Independent Peasant Central), the Consejo Agrarista Mexicano (CAM – Mexican Agrarianist Council) and the Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México 'Jacinto López (UGOCM-JL – Jacinto López General Union of Workers and Peasants), all of them affiliate members of the ruling PRI. Surprisingly, however, most of the affiliates of the independent CAU also signed on to the new CAP. Only three organizations abstained from joining and saved face: CNPA, the Frente Democrático Campesino de Chihuahua (FDCCH – Chihuahua Democratic Peasant Front), and CNPI. CAP became the space for interlocution among organized peasants and the federal executive power. The ignominious backdrop to this massive cooptation of peasant organizations was the Pacto de Ocampo, signed at the initiative of President Luis Echeverría (1970–1976) in 1976, and the short-lived National Peasant Alliance created by President Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988) in 1983.

With the formation of CAP by presidential decree the Mexican government was once again imposing organizational forms on society. This led to the breakdown of the incipient articulation of independent, non-official agrarian political tendencies because CAU was dispersed after being deserted by the majority of member organizations shortly after its birth.

Although Salinas took power in the midst of electoral fraud, illegitimacy, and discredit, once in power his voice became that of the 'boss', of irresistible command, assuming that any state favors depended on obedience. In this case, the acquiescence of virtually the entire peasant leadership to instructions from Los Pinos had the gravest consequences: at that specific juncture, it signified that they condoned the recent electoral fraud and turned their back on the defeated candidate, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, whose campaign had been supported by many of the peasant organizations. Strategically, this move became the first step in the cooperation between the agrarian leadership and the government, geared toward a rural turn of great proportions: a 'reform of the agrarian reform' which would culminate with the legislative changes enacted on Article 27 of the Constitution in 1992 and the implementation of NAFTA in 1994.

Opposition to the Salinista project was headed by the National Peasant Resistance Movement, Monarca, constituted by 12 non-corporatist organizations that signed the Plan of Anenecuilco on 28 December 1991 (Monarca 1991, 1992). This plan defended social ownership of the land, now threatened by the imminent constitutional changes to the Agrarian Legislation, but it also rejected the 'neoliberal policy which intends, after leading us to ruin, to make us compete (in a disadvantageous situation) with the Free Trade Agreement' (Paré 1991). During the first months of 1992, this coalition changed its name, which in Spanish sounded like royalty – Monarch – to a more appropriate one: Consejo de Organización Agrarias (COA – Agrarian Organizations Coalition). The COA led several protest actions which culminated with a national mobilization on 10 April 1991.

While insurgent peasants showed their opposition on streets and roads, the counter-reform advanced inexorably in the buzzing rooms of Los Pinos. Top-level negotiations were being held with the leadership of CNC and independent organizations like UNORCA, trying to reduce the most regressive aspects of the constitutional legal initiative and to correct the insufficiency of agricultural state policies: since the mid-1980s, most subsidies, rural credit, and rural-development state agencies had disappeared (UNORCA 1992). Salinas was extremely interested in bringing the peasant leadership on board in his project. He knew that all that is bought with money is ultimately cheap, so he accepted their demands as long as the essence of his counter-reform was not compromised. Thus, on 14 November 1991, the presidency published its 'Ten Items for Freedom and Justice in the Countryside', a promise of progressive changes in rural policy that promised a plentiful allocation

of resources, including funds for the most restless agrarianists to acquire lands for their land-solicitor constituencies. Therefore, Salinas' offer was an expensive but thinly veiled bribe.

Under these conditions, the legal initiative to reform Article 27 of the constitution, which suppresses the right of peasants to receive any further land re-distribution and opens the door to the privatization of *ejido* and communal lands, was approved by legislators of the PRI and the PAN. Only the recently constituted PRD, a convergence of the socialist left and a nationalist and democratic splinter from the PRI, opposed the new Agrarian Law. Since its birth in 1989, the PRD had been linked with the progressive peasantry of Cardenista tradition, such as that in La Laguna (Otero 1999), and promoted an agrarian convergence movement organization called the Unión Campesina Democrática (UCD – Democratic Peasant Union). The UCD was supported, with some hesitation, by the Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos (CIOAC – Independent Agricultural Workers and Peasants Central), CNPA, and other independent organizations which sympathized with its political position but not with its corporatist affiliation to a political party, even an opposition party.

The peasant organizations which questioned the rural counter-reform were labeled by the media as 'intolerant and conservative' and as linked with the PRD, itself labeled 'the party of violence'. In contrast, the right wing was delighted: a PAN Deputy (a member of the lower chamber of Congress) was brimming with pleasure when he asserted that the Salinas Agrarian Law initiative was a cultural triumph of National Action (Canabal Cristiani 1991, 1992).

Hurt by the weakening of the independents, the COA disappeared in 1993. Subsequently, the decisive debates about the countryside's future developed between the federal executive and the increasingly tamed CAP and CNC. The greatest issue was no longer the constitutional reform – which had already been approved in early 1992 – but NAFTA, an asymmetric trade agreement which, many argue, sacrifices national production in the name of globalization, and thus resulted in the socio-economic exclusion of millions of 'redundant' Mexicans (Pechlaner and Otero 2008). NAFTA threatened agriculture and its first victims were the peasants. The problem was that the opponents to signing a trade deal on these terms – parties like the PRD and peasant organizations like CNPA and CIOAC – were outside of the game, and the negotiation was taking place in the terrain of those who take globalization and trade opening for granted.

Just as the changes to Article 27 of the constitution had been approved – with modest resistance and acquiescent acclamation from co-opted organizations – NAFTA was signed by Congress in 1992, well ahead of the US Congress, which passed it in November 1993. The technocrats headed by Salinas had not only promoted their neoliberal project successfully, but they also broke down peasant resistance and disarticulated the incipient encounter between the rural 'independents' (from the state) and the 'autonomous' (from political parties) organizations.[1] This had been a promising convergence that had also coincided with the powerful 'Cardenista' civic insurgency that emerged after the electoral fraud of 1988. Instead of this rapprochement with the Left, the 'autonomous' organizations opted for forming a pact with Salinas and an alliance with the official CNC, while the 'independents' became isolated and were attacked in the media. Thus, in early 1992, at the time that the stubborn COA organizations held meetings in the auditorium of the combative Mexican Electricians Union, the CNC, UNORCA, the Unión General Obrera, Campesina y Popular (UGOCP – Popular Worker Peasant General Union), Asamblea Nacional de la Alianza Campesina del Noroeste (Alcano – North-Western Peasant Alliance), and others met in the Oaxtepec resort (in the state of Oaxaca) to constitute what came to be known as the 'New Peasant Movement' (Bartra 2003a).

The reality is that the only winner in this political dance was the reformist current of the CNC led by Hugo Andrés Araujo, a founding member of UNORCA, an organization that had intended to promote its traditional tenets of autonomous self-management within the rank-and-file of corporatist, official organizations. Supported by CNC's Sector of Economic Organizations, Araujo's group promoted a series of national encounters of organized growers, with attendance of about 700 productive associations and the participation of UNORCA, UGOCP and Alcano. They held numerous meetings whose central theme was the 'new alliance' between peasants and the state. In the Oaxtepec encounter, they formally launched the call to join what they called the 'New Peasant Movement'. By its third meeting, held in August, Araujo had reached CNC's Executive Committee.

Beyond the personal trajectories of formerly left intellectuals and peasant leaders such as Hugo Araujo and Gustavo Gordillo, who ended up collaborating with the Salinas government, we are interested in explaining the organizational trajectory of an important current in the agrarian movement (Gordillo 1988, 1990). In particular, UNORCA, which had been founded by Araujo among others, had an extensive and

combative history in agrarian struggles. It fought for both independence from the state and autonomy from political parties. Ironically, however, it ended up in an alliance with the government of Carlos Salinas, which was not only considered illegitimate by most serious observers, but which was also the promoter of radically anti-peasant policies as evidenced by the changes in Article 27 and his support for NAFTA.

The Salinas agrarian counter-reform seduced, divided, and co-opted the rural leadership not only through bribes, but, more importantly, through the illusory promise of emancipation via free trade and the mirage of entrepreneurialism that often accompanies 'self-management' rhetoric. The peasant leadership became convinced that, once it freed itself from state bondage, the social sector of agricultural production (that is, small and middle peasant farmers) would strengthen its economic position operating within the sphere of the free market, thus achieving sustainable welfare and social justice for their constituency. What the technocrats in power viewed as privatization, deregulation, and the cancellation of government supports, the self-managing current viewed as opportunities for small producers to emancipate themselves through competitiveness. In their struggle to fight off state tutelage, the peasants thought that the market was their ally.

Gustavo Gordillo formulated this 'self-managing current' most lucidly in his 1988 book. For him, the reconstitution of the *ejido* must involve peasant control over the production process. In turn, this requires that peasants develop economic organizations geared toward blocking the leakage of economic surplus in the various markets, for instance by organizing cooperatives to purchase farm inputs, and cooperatives to sell farm products. At the same time that such economic organizations fight over economic surplus, they must fight to acquire spaces of policy decision-making in government agencies. These dual processes allow peasants to establish an articulation between political and economic democracy, at the same time that they create a space for the exercise and further development of peasant power.

It remains to be seen if peasants are capable of successfully negotiating a higher share of the economic surplus, within the existing market structure and a 'national' state that works for 'the enemy' (that is, private corporations). Furthermore, it is important to ask what will happen to peasants when, deprived of the minimum conditions for productivity, they fail to produce an economic surplus to be negotiated with. While important, these questions are now mute, for what really failed in the early 1990s was not the economic emancipation or 'self management' model posited by Gordillo, but the political route chosen to promote

it: establishing a bond with the government precisely at the time that government technocrats were promoting the most transparent version of neoliberal reform. Thus, the 'New Alliance' between peasants and the state did not go beyond capturing spaces in the rural corporatist organizations and occupying some middle-ranking government posts. Instead of achieving a peasant-style Paris Commune, or as Gordillo put it in his book's title, an 'assault of heaven', we witnessed an imprudent and frustrated 'assault of the state'.

The failed bet ended up in tragedy, because peasant autonomism of the 1980s had been a broad, progressive, and innovative movement that developed remarkable rural strategies. The economic and social 'appropriation' formula, that some of the organizations linked to UNORCA promoted, was a milestone in the Mexican people's struggle to free itself from the intrusive Leviathan (Otero 1999). When the self-managing ship became the state's ally, an unsustainable and multilayered contradiction emerged: leaders whose *bête noire* had been the state, political parties and politics were transformed into peons of the Salinas government, allies of the PRI, and players in the CNC. This autonomist current, convinced that the bureaucracy should withdraw from the countryside, saw its main leaders join the state bureaucracy. From Maoists who were critics of presidentialism, they became the technocratic intimate friends of the president. From their 'mass line' (a Maoist strand in Mexico), which was supposed to take its cues from the grass roots, they ended up betting on top-level negotiations. Their 'popular politics' (a famous slogan of this Maoists current) came to be conducted at the rooms of power in Los Pinos. Thinking that they were joining the 'New Peasant Movement', these popular organizations became instead party to the last episode of agrarian clientelism in Mexico's twentieth century.

Establishing an alliance with the state to construct autonomy in the market, precisely at the time when it is eagerly seeking to get rid of the peasants, required that peasants find allies in the market in the midst of a wavering state bureaucracy. These allies were capitalist entrepreneurs. This new association of private capitalists and peasants, to be promoted by the state, was first encountered in the 1981 Ley de Fomento Agropecuario (LFA – Law of Agricultural and Livestock Associations in Participation), but found no practical application. By the 1990s, this new association was promoted by the pro-peasant Undersecretary of Planning in the Secretariat of Agriculture under the Salinas government, headed by Gustavo Gordillo. The pilot project, named 'Vaquerías', was an association between Promotora Agropecuaria GAMESA, a large industrial firm based in Monterrey, and *ejidatarios* of the state of Nuevo León (Garza, Elena and Gonzaga 1992). Though begun in 1990, it had already failed by 1992 despite the fact that it received government subsidies and that the state favored the experiment with all means necessary. Hence the contradiction of the autonomists: their discourse was predicated on the mirage that privatization was socialization. The association between peasants and capitalists subsidized by the state was supposed to foment the dissociation between peasants and the state. The problem was that capital privatized the subsidies that should have been geared to end subsidies and the entire model collapsed. The leadership on peasant policies entrusted to the former advisor of combative peasant organizations, Gustavo Gordillo, was replaced by the orthodox neoliberal Luis Téllez Kuenzler, the undersecretary of Planning. In fact, Gustavo Gordillo's role in the state became, rather, explicitly that of helping advance the political control of the peasantry, while Téllez Kuenzler designed agricultural policy from a strictly technocratic perspective.[2]

The technocrats' goal was not the 'New Alliance' between peasants and the state but exclusionary modernization; a transformation without a severe demographic rural purge that liberates the country of three to four million surplus peasant families. For this to happen, the essential thing to do was not to amputate the Constitution, but to launch a new agricultural policy geared to promoting the dismantling of the 'non-competitive' sectors, basically the cereal-producing sector, which encompasses most of the peasants. Prior initiatives toward this end came earlier, including the 1981 LFA and Mexico's joining the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986. This iniquitous market opening and the abandonment of support and regulation policies eventually led to NAFTA. For Mexico, this trade deal has involved the express renunciation of its food and labor sovereignty and anticipates the death of peasant agriculture and the inexorable rural exodus of the millennium's end (Bartra 2004; Pechlaner and Otero 2008).

Death and resurrection of the self-managing peasant movement

The reforms meant to achieve peasant autonomy in the 1992 Agrarian Law, designed by UNORCA at the end of the 1980s, were clearly progressive in that they sought to expand the economic, social, and political attributions of peasant organizations. Their Achilles heel was their chosen means to promote autonomy: an alliance with rural corporatism and the 'modernizing' currents of the government. This was a strategically mistaken bet, given that the neoliberal modernizers were anti-peasant,

even if the new productive organizations became enveloped in the 'social sector of production', structured in 'enterprises'. In tactical terms, it was a clumsy bet that put the peasants in the hands of systemic anti-corporatism, precisely when organizational insurgency was becoming civic insurgency.

In this difficult juncture, those peasant organizations, like UCD, that became organically affiliated with the civic insurgency (which in turn became a political party), were to reproduce from the opposition an anachronistic corporatism. In this form of corporatism, the peasant organization's interests became subordinated to the political interests of the party. The majority strand of the peasant movement, framed in the New Peasant Movement, lost its credibility at a fast pace: while there was a transitory flow of stàte resources based on the new forms of state corporatism, it soon became clear that the doors to a successful entry of the 'free market' were closed for most peasants. The notion that an alliance with private capital could be a successful substitute for state support of the peasantry under neoliberal conditions was illusory. After reducing most peasants to indigence, the Salinas government offered the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (Pronasol – National Solidarity Program), pitched as a 'participatory', social assistance program. In contrast to old corporatist practices, which channeled much state support to the peasantry via the peasant organizations affiliated to the ruling PRI, Pronasol channeled its funds directly to peasant groups expressly organized for this purpose. This form of direct neocorporatism, linking the president with grass-roots groups, turned the committees negotiating public funds into a new and ephemeral social constituency. This was the way in which the populist technocrats compensated for the withering of the traditional but costly and economically inefficient corporatism of the PRI (Otero 1996b; Bartra 2003a).

Some of the peasants most affected by the market opening in the 1980s, and especially after 1994, were producers of maize, wheat, sorghum, soy, rice, beans, and cotton (Bartra 2004). These were crops characterized by a high level of peasant production, whose profitability was negatively affected by imports, most often from heavily subsidized competitors in the United States. One example of organizational breakdown in grains is the Jacinto López Asociación Rural de Interés Colectivo (ARIC – Collective Interest Rural Association), whose members produced wheat, soy, and maize in the irrigated valleys of Yaqui and Mayo. This ARIC, which had been an exemplar of a successful autonomous peasant organization, ran a credit union, an insurance fund, a marketing branch, a flour mill, a machinery center, and other enterprises (Gordillo 1988; Otero 1989, 1999). From 1993 to 1996, the formerly powerful peasant corporation progressively lost its assets to creditors until it finally went bankrupt. Only a few scattered enterprises with a few peasant groups survived the debacle.

Peasant agroexporters fared no better despite their alleged 'comparative advantages' as assumed by the technocrats. Thus, consolidated organizations like the Ejido Coffee Growers Union of the Costa Grande of the state of Guerrero failed just as smaller producers had. The *ejido* had established a credit union and a marketing cooperative, had organized maize producers and managed a popular distribution center, and, in the early 1990s, had installed an agroindustrial organization to process dry coffee and other agricultural products. After their collapse, only a few peasant enterprises survived, each one on its own, along with isolated organic coffee producers (Paz Paredes 1995; Martinez Torres 2004).

During the first half of the 1990s, rural organizations were in the thick of the crisis. Already overwhelmed, they still had to absorb the punishment until 1995, the year which combined the first 12 months of NAFTA and the consequences of the economic crisis detonated by the peso devaluation in December of 1994. With skyrocketing interest rates, the abysmal peso devaluation, and uncontrolled cost inflation, the government responded with a heterodox emergency plan which included price controls. This context became fertile soil for the re-emergence of the peasant movement. Initially, small producer organizations from Jalisco, Sinaloa and Guerrero and networks such as the Asociación Mexicana de Uniones de Crédito del Sector Social (AMUCSS – Mexican Associations of the Social Sector Credit) met in early 1995, alarmed by the risk that the surplus-producing peasants would not be able to plant during the impending spring–summer cycle. By April, representatives of 120 organizations from 20 states of the country had a meeting in Mexico City, in which they agreed to the following demands: a new agricultural policy that would reactivate the sector; the renegotiation of import quotas provided for in NAFTA, especially those for basic grains; subsidies for cereals, at least the equivalent of those provided by Mexico's trade partners; market regulation; loans at affordable interest rates with realistic guarantees; and other demands.

By May of 1995, peasants from all over the country marched on streets and roads, took over public offices, installed sit-ins, and symbolically spilled on the sidewalks tons of grain whose prices had collapsed. The most intensive mobilizations were held in Jalisco, Guanajuato, Nayarit, Sinaloa, Sonora, Puebla, and Morelos. They were encouraged

not only by militants of national organizations like UNORCA, the Coalición de Organizaciones Democráticas Urbanas y Campesinas (CODUC – Urban and Peasant Democratic Organizations Coalition), CIOAC, and El Barzón, but also by regional groupings and some CNC groups. The 1995 mobilization yielded some successes, such as the interest payment suspension and an increase for regional crop prices, but nothing in the way of a change of strategy, an issue that the government would not even discuss.

Several lessons were learned by the peasant mobilization of 1995. The platform defined in April, however, pointed toward a deep change in the country's neoliberal direction. The movement became the first broad and national expression indicating that peasants no longer wanted to march toward the abyss created by wholesale economic liberalization. Furthermore, the forces promoting this movement constituted a broad and plural alliance which included both independent and corporatist organizations. They even had the support of some entrepreneurial sectors that had been affected by indiscriminate trade opening and deregulation. But the most important thing is that this movement led to a coordination at the economic-sector level of cereal-producing regional organizations. This led to the formation of the Asociación Nacional de Empresas Comercializadoras de Productores del Campo (ANEC – National Association of Countryside Marketing Enterprises), constituted in July 1995 by 100 regional organizations from 21 states of the republic. This association began to work at the end of the year, promoting direct marketing mechanisms. It also sought the transfer to peasant organizations of the infrastructure of the formerly state-run Conasupo (Almacenes Nacionales de Depósito S.A. and Bodegas Rurales Conasupo S.A.), which the government was privatizing. In other words, when the state wanted to simply dismantle or privatize state agencies, the peasant organization posited itself as an alternative to run them. By the start of the new millennium, ANEC had an organizational and marketing presence in 19 states, in which 220 local organizations and 16 regional and state networks operated. It had marketing enterprises, training services, peasant organization consulting, management and promotion, maize industrial processing, and the manufacture and sale of tortillas. At the end of 2002 and beginning of 2003, ANEC was one of the promoters of the greatest peasant mobilization in decades, MCAM. This movement broadened and deepened the spirit of the 1995 mobilization (Bartra 2003c).

Coffee producers underwent an organizational process parallel to that of cereal growers, but one that had started somewhat earlier. With a predominantly export crop, their crisis had started in 1988, when the World Coffee Organization (WCO) suspended its economic agreements and functioning. The WCO had regulated coffee prices and fixed export quotas for decades. At the national level, in 1989, the state dismantled the Instituto Mexicano del Café (Inmecafé – Mexican Coffee Institute), which not only granted export certification and permits, but since the 1960s had also intervened decisively in financing, storage, industrialization, and marketing of this peasant crop. Thus, since the 1970s, regional organizations of coffee growers had struggled together against the failures and deviations of Inmecafé. In 1989 they founded the Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Cafetaleras (CNOC – National Coordinator of Coffee Growers' Organizations). Initially, CNOC was the meeting ground of other growers affiliated to CIOAC, UNORCA, and other organizations with a national-level presence. With about 25 organizations in six states of the republic, CNOC became the government's inescapable interlocutor with whom a 'soft landing' had to be agreed for the deregulation process already underway. CNOC promoted the creation of a marketing company, a trademark of roasted coffee, and, in 1994, a dollar-denominated loan that became a big blow with the December peso devaluation. Alianza Café, a new government program, was not really a development plan. It did manage, nonetheless, to get the corporatist regional organizations into the patron-client networks of state subsidies, while those that were independently constituted took advantage of the ephemeral price bonanza in the mid-1990s to consolidate their export strategies.

By the end of the 1990s, however, world coffee prices dropped again and local and state organizations that had been barely scraping by took it upon themselves to reactivate CNOC. This organization had the necessary national presence to struggle for a true state policy on coffee. This time coffee growers affiliated to CIOAC, and even those in the corporatist CNC affiliated to its Unión Nacional de Productores del Café (UNPC – National Coffee Producers' Union), joined in. Along with medium- and large-size growers they constituted the Coffee Growers' Organizations National Forum in 1997 to represent the interests of primary producers before industrial buyers. Finally, in March of 2000, peasant coffee growers engaged in a national mobilization that took about 2500 producers (mostly from Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Puebla) to Mexico City. With the favorable political opportunity of imminent presidential elections at stake, they managed to agree on an emergency coffee program with the government.

Thus, CNOC coffee growers reproduced the course followed by cereal farmers, finally organized in ANEC. Their mobilizations sought alliances with official, corporatist organizations and with capitalist farmers, in the understanding that the effects of anti-agrarian policy did not make affiliation or size distinctions. At the end of 2002, CNOC was among the organizations promoting MCAM, the great national convergence of peasant and farmer groups.

The trend to constitute national-level organizations on the basis of their specific crops was not only present for cereal and coffee growers. Forestry communities also created the Red Mexicana de Organizaciones Campesinas Forestales (Red Mocaf – Mexican Network of Peasant Forestry Organizations), in 1994. With the same logic, another national-level coalition around loan services was AMUCSS, established in 1992. The organic nature of the peasant crisis became clearly expressed in the fact that of the 32 Credit Unions that initially constituted this organization, only 18 were in operation and most of those were practically bankrupt by 1995.

The networks organized according to their specialization in a productive or service area were, in most cases, UNORCA splinters. They were regional organizations that came together at the national level along their specific sector interests. Like UNORCA, the specialized networks adopted the organizational form of 'coordinators', a model that was first promoted by CNPA (CNPA 1982, 2003). This was a front organization which emerged at the end of the 1970s as the mobilization linkage among dozens of regional organizations that struggled for land and operated with a collegiate directorate. The CNPA respected the autonomy of affiliate organizations and promoted horizontal exchanges among their grass roots, which marked a radical distinction from the vertical, hierarchic, and centralized paradigm of trade organizations introduced by the post-revolutionary state. These corporatist organizations were geared to facilitating the political control of their constituencies and their operation as transmission belts of governmental directives (Mackinlay and Otero 2004). In fact, the only active independent peasant organization that carries the name of 'Central' is one of the oldest: CIOAC, founded in 1975 as such.

In contrast to multi-sector coordinating organizations, which became multidimensional in establishing diverse regional networks and had a more or less integral perspective, sectoral-convergence organizations around a given product or function were specialized and this facilitated a greater technical development. Theoretically, national-level organizations that converged on the defense of producers of certain crops or providers of certain services might promote a greater plurality. This fact represented another contrast with multifunctional coordinators, which united their members by ideology and project. Generally, however, national-level, sector-based organizations united those that were ideologically similar, so that representation of a sector involved the confluence of diverse groupings. Such is the case of the Coffee Forum, for example, constituted by CNOC, but also by CIOAC and UNPC among others.

Just as the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN – Zapatista National Liberation Army) and the Congreso Nacional Indígena (CNI – National Indigenous Congress) are at the forefront of Indianist struggle (Bartra 2003b; Bartra and Otero 2005), the main organizational emblem of the Mestizo rural movement of the 1990s was El Barzón (this organization's name comes from a widely known popular song that alludes to unpayable debts). This was a reactive, multiclass, and plural convergence unleashed by rich farmers and testifying to the gravity of the rural crisis and the extent of how exclusionary it became: even well-off farmers could not cope in the neoliberal context (Mestries 1997; González 2004). In August 1993, El Barzón took over Guadalajara's main square with 110 tractors from the south and the coastal regions of the state of Jalisco. The 'Guadalajara takeover' by well-off farmers lasted 52 long days. They were proud and hard-working entrepreneurs that a few years back could almost touch the sky and were now de-capitalized and heavily indebted. Their demands included increased support for the countryside, a halt to agricultural imports and debt renegotiation. Some of them were CNC members; others were affiliated to the National Confederation of Small Rural Property Owners and others to the National Livestock Grazers Confederation. Some belonged to the PRI, others to the PAN, the PRD or even the Mexican Democratic Party of religious and right-wing origins.

The El Barzón State Federation of Agricultural Producers was constituted in September 1993 and Jalisco farmers were not the only ones who joined. Similar initiatives emerged in the states of Chihuahua, Sonora, Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, and Guanajuato. By November, a National Confederation was formed which, as a result of the rupture between the Jalisco and Zacatecas factions in August of 1994, resulted in another grouping with representation from 14 states: The National Union of Agricultural, Commercial and Industrial Producers and Service Providers, 'El Barzón'.

El Barzón brought together northern and western Mestizos and ranchers who had been hit hard by indiscriminate trade opening and the

financial crisis. They came out to supplement a declining peasant mobilization almost at the same time that southeastern indigenous communities in Chiapas made the dramatic announcement of their presence with an armed insurrection.

On 6 December 1994, El Barzón marched from Queretaro to Mexico City demanding a debt-moratorium law; the rebel tractors entered the capital for the first time. In 1996 the agrarian section of El Barzón held a congress with 5000 delegates from 25 of 32 states of the republic. It brought together maize growers from Mexico State and Guerrero, bean growers from Zacatecas, sorghum growers from central Mexico, avocado producers from Michoacán, pineapple producers from Oaxaca, citrus producers from Veracruz, and many others. Large entrepreneurs and medium-sized ranchers and peasants gathered, all of them financial victims of the dramatic changes in Banrural, the government's rural development bank, at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Through spectacular actions, El Barzón achieved, among other things, the suspension of farm seizures by the banks, devolution of their goods, and subsidized electrical energy. But its demands were soon expanded to include food sovereignty and the declaration of an agricultural and livestock emergency. Promoting a National Front for the Defense of the Countryside, it launched joint mobilizations with CIOAC, CNPA, UCD, UGOCP, the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores Agrícolas (UNTA – Agricultural Workers National Union), CODUC and in 2002 El Barzón became one of the first organizations to join MCAM's mobilizations.

Rising from the ashes: MCAM, or the countryside can take no more! movement

One hundred thousand voices sung in unison 'The countryside can take no more!' in Mexico City's historical center. Most of them were peasants who once again put the rural movement on the front pages on 31 January 2003. This was not the first march. In early December of 2002 over 3000 small farmers marched for several days to public offices, to the Lower Chamber of Congress and the US Embassy in Mexico City. By mid-December El Barzón horse riders forcefully entered the legislative palace of San Lázaro. Their demands were summed up in six proposals. The central demand was a moratorium on NAFTA's agricultural provisions; the rural movement also demanded more fiscal resources and better public policies, security, food innocuousness and quality, and the recognition of the rights and culture of indigenous peoples. This platform was sustained by 12 dissimilar organizations that had been allied since November 2002: CIOAC, CNPA, FDCCH, UNORCA, CNOC, Red Mocaf, AMUCSS, ANEC, CODUC, Oaxaca State Coordinator of Coffee Producers, CEPCO, the Community Forestry Union of National Organizations, UNOFOC, and the Frente Nacional de Defensa del Campo Mexicano (FNDCM – National Mexican Countryside Defense Front).

In the short term, the movement responded to three issues: First, according to NAFTA, on 1 January 2003 the remaining agricultural tariffs would be eliminated for all agricultural and livestock products except for maize, beans, sugar, and powdered milk. Second, the new US Farm Bill of 2002 increased subsidies for US farmers by about 80 percent. Finally, President Vicente Fox's proposed budget for 2003 reduced the share for rural Mexico by 7 percent in real terms. By December 2002 the lower chamber of Congress granted an additional 13 billion pesos in resources for the countryside, but did nothing about NAFTA. By January, then, mobilization was renewed by the symbolic takeover of the International Bridge of Ciudad Juárez, connecting Mexico with El Paso, Texas. Demonstrations were held in several states and the movement's leadership launched a hunger strike in Mexico City. By then peasant organizations like El Barzón and UNTA had joined the struggle, while even the corporatist CAP flirted with the 12 allied groups. In parallel, agreements were being reached with working class forces like the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT – National Workers' Union) and public support at large was being called upon in diverse forums.

After sustained mobilization for three months, a National Agreement for the Countryside was finally reached with the government on 27 April 2003. The agreement publicly recognized the rural crisis and the need for a new state policy. Specifically, it recognized the need to exclude white corn and beans from NAFTA and, while this was being negotiated with the trade partners, to unilaterally control imports. It established the urgency of a multiyear law for agricultural planning to promote food self-sufficiency, as well as deep institutional and normative reforms of state agencies and programs. For the short term, the agreement assigned an additional three million pesos to the countryside (a mere US$273 thousand) and a commission was constituted to monitor the implementation of the agreement which was to operate for the following five months.

Was this the beginning of a historical turn for the countryside? That depends on the movement's capacity to monitor the few agreements and continue the struggle for the many unaccomplished demands.

The most outstanding aspect of MCAM, however, is that it represented nothing less than the political-cultural constitution of the Mexican peasantry as a class. If we define class not merely as a structural position in production relations but as a process by which men and women

articulate a common identity as the result of common experiences, then the 2002–2003 winter mobilization in Mexico was a great step toward building a peasant-class identity and its political constitution. This was precisely the feat achieved by the organizations that made up the MCAM: to gather groups with agrarianist roots, such as CIOAC, and others with a productively oriented tradition, such as UNORCA; to assemble under the same umbrella the always poor that militate in CNPA and the new poor lined up in El Barzón; to combine the knowledge of commercial cereal growers of ANEC with the financial acumen of AMUCSS, with the forestry and environmental insight of Red Mocaf, and with CNOC's expertise in organic crops and fair-trade markets. With such a critical mass it was not hard to carry to this convergence even with the official CAP members, or even to cohabit with the rheumatic brontosaur that is the CNC. It was not even too complicated to integrate a common platform, the Peasant Plan for the Twenty-First Century, and to work as a bloc in the multilateral negotiation with the government.

This was a class convergence, with a class program, and a class negotiation. These achievements were reached not because the organizations were intransigent but because they were comprehensive; not because they were fierce but because they were inclusive. As well, the achievements were reached because they were deep, radical, and went to the bottom of things. At this bottom is the inhospitable and predatory model adopted by the neoliberal technocrats in the 1980s. What unites Mexican peasants today, the very condition of the possibility for their convergence, is the economic, social, and political exclusion shared by all workers of rural origin. Therefore, the winter mobilization constituted the slow but blunt peasant response to the agrocide started 15 years earlier. MCAM is the heir and prolongation of broad convergence organizations such as CAU, Monarca, and COA, which aborted at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s thanks to the clientelistic artfulness of Carlos Salinas.

While MCAM's struggle was clearly focused on national-level politics, it also paid attention to global resistance. Thus, it displayed outstanding participation in the protest against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Cancún in 2003, demanding that food be taken out of the WTO's reach. UNORCA was a major organizer of this protest, as the Mexican arm of the world network Vía Campesina. The question remains whether MCAM has managed to encompass a substantial majority of the peasantry in its midst, and whether its focus on negotiating with the state has been successful.

Conclusions: Has the peasantry achieved its political-cultural formation?

As we have argued elsewhere (Bartra and Otero 2005), the missing piece of the peasant puzzle in MCAM has been the Indian-movement organizations. To be sure, indigenous producers' organizations were clearly linked to MCAM, as they have always been to any broad-based rural struggle. But, again, these were the economic-corporate organizations of direct producers. The national-level organizations that have struggled specifically for the rights and culture of indigenous peoples as such, namely the EZLN and CNI, were absent from this struggle. It could be that they were still digesting their legislative setback of 2001, when the Mexican Congress passed considerably watered-down indigenous legislation that did not satisfy their core demands around indigenous autonomy (Harvey 2002; Otero and Jugenitz 2003; Otero 2004a). An alternative and more plausible explanation is that the national-level indigenous organizations have a longer-term perspective than MCAM, on one hand, and, on the other, that indigenous organizations focus their struggle on different parts of the state. Let us explain these differences, as they will allow us to answer the question of whether the Mexican peasantry has achieved political-cultural formation as a class.

From our foregoing discussion, it should be clear that a central component of peasant struggles generally regards the preservation of their independence from the state and their autonomy from political parties. Independence from the state is critical for organizations to sustain their struggles with a focus on peasant interests, rather than becoming co-opted by the state. In the latter outcome, while the organization may still be able to receive some concessions from the state, the main dynamics in the peasant–state relationship become peasant subordination and political loyalty to the state. Co-optation, then, amounts to a bourgeois-hegemonic political outcome. An organization that remains independent, by contrast, can both extract favorable state policies and retain organizational independence. This is a critical component for any group, community, or class to become constituted as a political-cultural actor. In turn, such a political-cultural actor can develop the strength and mobilization to promote popular-democratic policies to be implemented by the state (Otero 1999, 2004a).

Organizational autonomy from political parties has also been a central concern in Mexico since the 1970s, given that most parties tended to subordinate the struggles of each and all of the mass organizations affiliated or identified with them to the overall political goals of the

party. Depending on each party's degree of internal democracy (if any), its overall political goals may have been determined primarily by its leaders but rarely by its rank and file, including the members of peasant organizations. Furthermore, the leaders of mass organizations have traditionally been co-opted by political parties, by accepting party or government positions. This dynamic has deprived their organizations and grass-roots constituencies of adequate representation vis-à-vis the state and other institutions, which sets them up for organizational co-optation.

The co-optation dynamic has been so prominent in Mexican politics that even the MCAM, that seemed so vigorous, ended up fragmented by 2004, only two years after its emergence. One of the key explanations for this fragmentation is that various leaders of the constituting regional organizations ended up giving in to small state concessions, as they felt they had to 'deliver' concrete gains to their constituencies (Celis Callejas 2005). But such short-term, economic-corporate gains have two main kinds of results: on one hand, the long-term demobilization of the group that becomes co-opted; on the other, the fragmentation of a national-level organization that could potentially encompass the entire peasant class.

The fact that national-level indigenous organizations have a longer-term perspective than MCAM is highlighted by the fact that their struggle also has a different kind of focus. Apart from the economic-corporate struggles of local and regional indigenous organizations, which have indeed been present in national peasant mobilization, those with a national coverage have focused most prominently on issues of autonomy and indigenous rights and culture (Díaz-Polanco 1992, 1997; Díaz-Polanco and López Rivas 1994; Díaz Polanco and Sánchez 2003; Bartra and Otero 2005). Furthermore, while this struggle must be won in the institutions of political society, or the state in strict sense, this does not have to be achieved directly or by becoming co-opted. In fact, since the 1994 EZLN uprising, the focus of indigenous mobilization has been civil society: they attempt to consolidate civil society so that those who rule 'govern by obeying' (*mandar obedeciendo*).

Considering that the EZLN has received the support of most indigenous peoples in Mexico, most recently for its Sixth Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle (CCRI-EZLN 2005) and for 'the other campaign', we can assume that they also agree with the main locus of its struggle, civil society. The EZLN has said repeatedly that it is not struggling for state power. Rather, it focuses on strengthening civil society to counteract the overbearing power of the state. As Alain Touraine has put it, the future

challenge for the EZLN is immense: to reject the possibility both of local isolation and of dilution into a great political party, while trying to turn the indigenous movement into a force for the renovation of Mexican democracy (cited in Martinez and Mergier 2001: 34). By focusing on 'the other campaign', which consists of consolidating a broad-based social movement of subordinate groups and classes, the Zapatistas are trying to ensure that any politician or political party that gains office will become accountable to society. In fact, the 'other campaign' is not only about building a coalition of the peasantry as a class, but a coalition that brings together all of the exploited and oppressed people in Mexico. The question remains of what kind of bridges will be necessary to build between this kind of perspective and that of the majority of popular organizations, used to focusing on political society and the politics of patronage and clientelism. How can the indigenous movement's focus on civil society be articulated to those that are concerned with and hopeful for getting better politicians elected to office?

Judging by what happened in the 2006 electoral conjuncture, one can say that the indigenous movement failed to establish such articulation. By choosing to stay on the sidelines of the political process, while the social left focused on civil society and the types of coalition-building detailed in Massicotte's chapter, the political left was weakened and incapable of resisting the fraudulent electoral process. The PAN remained entrenched in power while hardening its neoliberal positions.

On 31 January 2008, the peasant movement still managed to gather about 200,000 demonstrators in Mexico City, in protest against NAFTA's 14th-year provision to liberalize the last remaining commodities: maize, beans, sugar, and powdered milk. Whether this mobilization was the last gasp of a dying peasant movement, many of whose members have migrated North, or the beginning of a new awakening remains to be seen.

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