

International Trade and Neoliberal Globalism

Towards re-peripheralisation in Australia,
Canada and Mexico?

**Edited by Paul Bowles, Ray Broomhill,
Teresa Gutiérrez-Haces and Stephen
McBride**

discussion of the potential for industrial policy to play a dynamic and constructive role in less developed nations within the current context of the global economy, see Cypher (2007), Rodrik (2004) and Shapiro (2006).

- 11 See, for example, a work which partially breaks rank with the neoliberal orthodoxy by René Villarreal, who has been associated with past neoliberal governments (Villarreal 2004). Although doubts have been expressed and alternatives broached to the current economic model, the margins of manoeuvre are now limited: in late 2006, in the context of a highly disputed presidential election, the rightist party, PAN, assumed power with a very strong 'free market'/neoliberal orientation that will complicate any attempts to resolve the existing crisis of development strategy which is the current legacy of the labour export model analyzed in this chapter.
- 12 In November of 2006 the Mexican Government decreed that the juridical difference between the maquila and disguised maquila sectors would cease to exist. In 2007 all formerly maquila firms and all firms operating under special provisions as temporary importers of inputs (the disguised maquilas) will be registered under the same decree known as the '*Decreto para el Fomento de la Industria Manufacturera, Maquiladora y de Servicios de Exportación*'. Henceforth, the combined areas, maquila + disguised maquila, will be known as the IMMEX sector, and at the official level the term maquiladora will no longer be used (Saldaña 2006: 19).
- 13 In actuality the situation is even more restrictive given that 78 per cent of maquila activity remains along the US frontier where a considerable portion of workers' consumption is diverted into the US economy, further undermining whatever potential multiplier effects might be anticipated through rising wage payments.
- 14 The estimated 'jobs deficit' in Mexico (jobs created - jobs needed to employ school dropouts + high school graduates + university graduates) stated on an annual basis has been estimated at 500,000 per year, on average, from 1988 to 2003 (Dussel Peters 2006a: 75).

10 Contesting neoliberal globalism in Mexico

Challenges for the political and the social left

Gerardo Otero

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the sociopolitical forces contesting neoliberal globalism in Mexico. To what extent are they likely to transcend or significantly modify Mexico's current political economic power structures? In particular, to what extent are these forces capable of, and likely to, challenge the neoliberal model that is now dominant in Mexico? As outlined in the previous chapter, the existing North American Free Trade Agreement with Canada and the USA (NAFTA) may be seen as the culmination of a series of state policies geared to introduce neoliberalism in Mexico. From an economy focused primarily on its internal market, with heavy doses of trade protectionism, state subsidies and state regulation, the reforms introduced in the mid-1980s by pro-neoliberal governments were geared to liberalise the economy, open it to foreign trade and investment, eliminate subsidies, privatise state firms and introduce a range of other neoliberal policies. The socioeconomic impact of the neoliberal reforms has been profound (Dussel Peters 2001; 2004), and has provoked contestation from both civil society and the political left. Both the political and the social left are critical of the increasing influence of neoliberal globalism and of the hegemonic influence of US corporations over the Mexican economy. Similarly, both regard NAFTA as having had a disastrous effect on Mexico's economy. However, in spite of the influence of the USA in promoting neoliberal globalism, it is domestic anti-democratic and pro-neoliberal forces that are seen by Mexico's progressive groups as the main obstacle to any alternative paradigm. In opposing neoliberal globalism, the social left is more radical than the political left. It is sceptical of political parties and the political class at large and focuses primarily on mobilisation within civil society. This chapter will look at the alternative responses of these two strands of the left, the one acting within the political institutions of government, and the other centred in civil society utilising social movement strategies to challenge neoliberal globalism.

The chapter begins by outlining the crisis of hegemony set off by Mexico's national elections in 2006 and the resistance movement launched by supporters

of the left-of-centre coalition's candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (hereafter referred to as AMLO). This is followed by a discussion outlining several of Gramsci's key concepts that theoretically frames the rest of the argument. The following section then describes the development of Mexico's Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) since its armed uprising in 1994. A central question raised in this discussion is: are these two movements mutually exclusive or is there any possibility for convergence? The answer to this question holds the key to the prospects for successful contestation of neoliberal globalism in Mexico. The concluding section addresses the main challenges confronting the social and political left.¹

2006: a missed opportunity

While both Australia and Canada have liberal democracies with parliamentary systems inherited from the United Kingdom, Mexico has an authoritarian presidential system, formally based on US-type republican democracy. The 2000 election was supposed to have put Mexico on a democratic transition to a liberal democracy after 71 years of uninterrupted rule by a single dominant party, the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional* or Institutional Revolutionary Party). In the 2000 elections, many citizens on the left voted for Vicente Fox, the right-of-centre PAN's (*Partido Acción Nacional* or National Action Party) candidate. Their belief was that removing the PRI from the presidency would initiate a democratic transition (Chand 2001; Otero 2004a). However, the hopes of those seeking a democratic transition were quickly dashed by the continuing authoritarian neoliberal policy approach of the Fox regime and many then looked to the 2006 election to provide another opportunity for democratic reform through the election of the progressive candidate AMLO.

Mexico's potential to successfully contest and transcend neoliberal globalism was at its peak during the 2006 presidential electoral process. Political developments in Mexico historically have been limited or conditioned by its proximity to the USA. Since 2001, however, the USA has been largely distracted from its Latin American concerns with its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; the conjuncture was thus particularly well suited for popular democratic forces to advance their cause. But this election failed to produce a progressive alternative. Had the result favoured AMLO, as expected by most polls, a social democratic alternative at the very least would have ensued. The left regarded the election as tainted and largely fraudulent. AMLO led most opinion polls by 5–10 percentage points from 2004, even up to the week before the 2 July 2006 elections. He had been the most popular head of Mexico City's government since 2000. It took major 'irregularities' that amount to an electoral fraud to keep the right-of-centre PAN in power, officially claiming less than 37 per cent of the vote, and a mere 0.56 per cent difference with AMLO. If relations between the electoral-political left and the social left had been stronger, it may have been harder for the state to engineer the fraud.²

Mexico's 2006 presidential elections also seemed to be an exceptionally appropriate time for it to join several other Latin American nations in contesting neoliberal globalism. The countries around MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela; and associate members Bolivia, Peru and Chile), in particular, are moving in the direction of an economic community that goes beyond simply adopting common external tariffs and facilitating the free flow of commodities and investments, as in NAFTA. More similar to the European Union, at least in goals, MERCOSUR also allows the free flow of labour and is entertaining the possibility of institutional mechanisms that could well support a form of progressive internationalist nationalism³ with the potential to challenge US-promoted neoliberal globalism.

The argument presented here is that since the 2006 election Mexico has experienced a crisis of hegemony that could lead either to a hardened and repressive right-wing regime or to deeper democracy emerging from a convergence of the social and the political left around a popular democratic programme. A middle-of-the road possibility is that the rightist parties, PAN and the PRI, will manage to implement progressive welfare-state policies, taking over some of the left's banners and offsetting to some extent two decades of neoliberal reform in an attempt to quell and co-opt leftist opposition. The resulting regime would continue to be a 'democracy of elites' (Semo 1996), but one that could condemn the political left to *de facto* irrelevance in formal political life. Continued mobilisation would remain a latent possibility if rightist populist reformism were not sufficiently significant. Unfortunately, however, the most likely scenario during the presidency of Felipe Calderón (2006–12) is a hardened rightist regime that will strengthen the repressive forces of the state and establish an alliance with the PRI, not to engage in populist reformism but to deepen the neoliberal globalist agenda. Nevertheless, the fraudulent nature of the 2006 election set off a crisis of hegemony for neoliberal globalism whose final outcome is hard to predict.

Civil society and the state: a crisis of hegemony?

In order to explain Mexico's 2006 crisis of hegemony, I will draw upon several concepts elaborated by Antonio Gramsci (1971). Gramsci had both a narrow and an expanded definition of the state. The 'expanded state' refers to the articulation of civil society, the realm of hegemony or consent, 'political society', the realm of domination and violence (legitimate or not). Thus, political society is what Gramsci regarded as the state in its strict or narrow sense. It is understood in a manner similar to Max Weber's (1958) definition of the state as the institution which holds the legitimate monopoly of the use of physical violence over a given territory. And yet, Gramsci's main development of, and departure from, Weber's political sociology lies in his view that the deepening of democracy involves a much greater

focus on consensus or hegemony than on domination or violence. The primary realm for building hegemony and a counter-hegemonic project, again, is civil society. The fact that, prior to Mexico's 2006 elections, Vicente Fox's administration (2000–6) increasingly resorted to violence⁴ was an early indication of a hegemonic crisis in Mexico. The 'intellectual and moral leadership', that is to say the hegemony of the ruling class, was no longer sufficient to sustain political legitimacy.

One might say that violence was used against social and political actors that were on the margins of political and civil society, so that hegemony *per se* was not really being contested. But the 2 July 2006 elections brought this interpretation into question. There emerged a widespread belief that the elections were rigged, and this led to challenges for the entire dominant political class. On one hand, the Fox administration lost its claim to legitimacy over the use of violence, and it did not even respect the legal-rational basis of elections. On the other, the electoral-political left found that the very basis on which it conducts its activities was shaky. In the 1988 presidential elections, the left-of-centre coalition's candidate, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, is widely believed to have won but was deprived of his victory by the authoritarian PRI regime (Chand 2001; Otero 1996). The question in 2006 once again became: does it make any sense for the left to engage in electoral politics when Mexico has an elite democracy that will not allow the left to reach office in 'certain, fair, legal, equitable and transparent elections'? These are the principles enshrined in the Mexican constitution and which electoral institutions are mandated to guarantee. Before further exploring this question, let us first turn to what constitutes a crisis of hegemony.

According to Gramsci, an organic crisis is produced when classes become detached from their traditional parties and the situation becomes ripe for charismatic politicians to emerge. This is a crisis of the ruling class's hegemony, which occurs either 'because the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of the broad masses' (war, for example), or 'because huge masses (especially of peasants and petit bourgeois intellectuals) have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which taken together, albeit not organically formulated, add up to a revolution' (Gramsci 1971: 210).

An organic crisis is also called a 'crisis of authority' or a general crisis of the state. The solution via a charismatic leader results from the immaturity of the progressive forces, which prevents them from posing an alternative solution: neither conservatives nor progressives have the strength for victory. Hence a mediating force such as Caesarism must emerge. This is a situation in which the main contending forces balance each other in a catastrophic manner and a third force must step in to control the situation. This third force could be either a charismatic leader or the bureaucracy controlled by the petit bourgeoisie (Gramsci 1971: 210–15). Caesarism can be either

progressive, as with Napoleon in France, or reactionary as with Napoleon III or Mussolini in Italy. It should be noted that Gramsci proposed the notion of Caesarism as a polemical-ideological formula, not as a canon for interpretation.

In Mexico's contemporary situation, we can adapt Gramsci's analysis in the following way: we could say that the masses are being forced to accept the PAN's Felipe Calderón as president, even though there is much evidence that the elections were considerably less than 'certain, legal, fair, equitable and transparent'. One could argue that AMLO banked on his charisma to keep the anti-fraud mobilisation going, and that this is not positive for the long term development of progressive forces, which would be much better off with a parliamentary republic rather than a strong charismatic and populist leader. But given that AMLO is one of the two poles in the electoral conflict, even if his leadership has a charismatic style, it is highly unlikely that he will end up leading the country, at least in the short term. Caesarism in Mexico has come from the state bureaucracy, solidified by the PRI–PAN alliance in Congress. Furthermore, Felipe Calderón has resorted to the military to strengthen the state's monopoly on violence by launching an all-out war against drug traffickers. However, the jury is still out whether this war can be won by the state (*The Economist*, 2007).

The trouble with the political crisis in Mexico lies in the numbers. According to the official count, neither presidential candidate reached even 37 per cent of the vote. Therefore, Calderón's supporters may well try to carry on if they can get away with it. If, however, his supporters in Congress deem that the organic crisis is untenable, they could decide to remove him from office and appoint an interim president to call a new electoral process. Calderón's stepping down would trigger the same result. This is what AMLO's coalition is now seeking: an interim presidency that calls for a new electoral process. If this were achieved without an alliance with the Zapatistas, the political left will most likely abandon its social mobilisation and get back to its old habits in political society, perhaps with a more radical social programme of government. But if Calderón's imposition succeeds, then it becomes more likely that AMLO's coalition will seek an alliance with the social left in order to sustain its mobilisation.

Challenges for Mexico's electoral-political left

Mexico's legendary political stability for the better part of the twentieth century came about after the pacification of revolutionary factions in 1929. These factions became centred on a single political party (the PRI) that dominated political life until 2000. In the early 1970s, the state virtually eliminated the armed guerrilla movements that had emerged as a sequel to the repressed student and popular movement of 1968. This domination by the PRI, however, was first shaken in 1976 when the main 'loyal opposition' party, PAN, was incapable of nominating a presidential candidate because

of internal strife. The only electoral opposition was offered by the then-proscribed Mexican Communist Party, which nonetheless received about 800,000 votes. By 1979, the state started a slow process of electoral reform from above to avert a legitimacy crisis. It began by authorizing leftist parties to enter electoral politics. However, it would take the 1994 EZLN's armed insurrection for more significant electoral reforms to be introduced. In 1996, an independent, citizen-run Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) was established. Previously, elections were organised and controlled by the Ministry of Government or Interior (*Gobernación*). Along with a series of other electoral reforms, this change made it possible for the PAN to win the presidential race in 2000. A few years earlier, Mexico City was given the right to elect its mayor, a right that had been taken away in the 1920s. In 1997, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who was robbed of his triumph in the 1988 presidential elections, won this race and became the first elected mayor of Mexico City in almost a century.

During the first three years of the Fox administration, most observers thought that Mexico had finally entered a democratic transition (Otero 2004a). Doubts about this belief started in 2003 with the renewal of the IFE's nine citizen councillors, led until then by its widely acclaimed first independent president, José Woldenberg. The nine new 'citizen' counsellors of IFE were selected only by PRI and PAN members of Congress, completely disregarding the objections of the PRD. Most councillors were selected behind the scenes by Elba Esther Gordillo, the powerful and long-time leader of the teachers' union and at the time also leader of the PRI deputies in the lower chamber of Congress. This imposition of councillors would eventually haunt the 2006 electoral process.

Even before the elections, there were several critical illegal acts that tainted the process (Esquivel and Villamil 2007: 16–22). During and after the elections, IFE made a series of communication errors which lend themselves to the widespread belief that an electoral fraud had occurred on 2 July. The only hope was for the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judicial Power (TEPJF for its Spanish acronym) to fix the situation. The left coalition presented proof that nearly 900,000 false votes were added to the balloting boxes for Calderón and 722,326 were illegally eliminated. The official difference between the two candidates was about 244,000 (Sheinbaum and Imaz 2007). The TEPJF could have ordered a vote recount and, ultimately, nullify the elections. But it ordered a vote recount for only a little over 9 per cent of the balloting boxes, setting off a tremendous amount of uncertainty in the entire institutional process. After the limited recount, which found a considerable amount of irregularities (open boxes, boxes without seals, etc.), the TEPJF decided that, although there had been irregularities and the president and the *Centro Coordinador Empresarial* (Entrepreneurial Coordinating Centre) acted illegally, these factors had not significantly modified the final results. According to some opinion polls, however, 46 per cent still believed that the elections were fraudulent.

In view of this situation, AMLO's discourse became increasingly radical. From having promised that he would accept TEPJF's determination, he later announced that the only result he would accept was recognition of his electoral triumph. He called for a series of mobilisations in Mexico City's main square, the Zócalo, one of which gathered over 1 million people. Eventually, coalition sympathizers took control of Mexico City's main traffic artery, El Paseo de la Reforma, and set up camps for about two months until just before 16 September, when the Army was supposed to hold its traditional Independence Day parade. On 1 September, when Vicente Fox was supposed to deliver his last state-of-the-nation address in Congress, all of the coalition's deputies took over the podium and prevented him from coming to the front. Fox then left the precinct and delivered his speech on national TV.

On the evening of 16 September, the coalition held the National Democratic Convention (CND) with participants from all over the country. One of the main questions put to the convention was whether to name AMLO 'leader of the civil and peaceful resistance movement', or Mexico's 'legitimate president'. The masses were fairly clear in choosing the latter option. The next decision was whether AMLO would take over as legitimate president on 1 December, the same day as Felipe Calderón, the official president-elect, or on 20 November, the Day of the Revolution (of 1910–20). People voted for the latter date, so as to be free on 1 December to prevent Calderón from taking over as president, something the coalition vowed to do. As 'legitimate president', AMLO was supposed to be based in Mexico City's Zócalo, but his presidency was also supposed to be itinerant, visiting many communities around the country. The next session of the CND was scheduled to start on 21 March 2007, on the day of Benito Juárez's birthday.⁵ The problem with the convention's 'general assemblies', first on 16 September 2006 and again on 25 March 2007, is that it was too large a gathering to be considered deliberative and too small to be representative of the nation (Cameron 2006). Decisions were made by a show of hands, but there was no chance to discuss their implications.

After the first assembly of the CND, there have been some voices on the left that have distanced themselves from the coalition's radical stance and programme. By 2007 it was clear that the political left had expanded its political activity well beyond the realm of electoral politics and adopted a mobilisation strategy in civil society.⁶ For its part, the EZLN reinitiated the Other Campaign in mid September 2006, and made several declarations about the fraudulent character of the elections. Yet, it did not show any signs of seeking an alliance with the left parties' coalition. However, neither did the left parties pursue an alliance with the EZLN. The question thus becomes: under what circumstances and with what programme might an alliance of the social left and the political left be obtained? I turn to this question in my concluding remarks but first it is necessary to review the

circumstances that led to the development of the social left as a powerful alternative force in Mexico.

EZLN: from class struggle to Indian movement and back

The Zapatista movement, together with the Atenco and the Oaxaca People's Assembly (APPO) social movements, make up the most active parts of Mexico's social left. These groups have been against directly engaging in the formal electoral process from the outset. The EZLN captured international attention on 1 January 1994, when it launched an armed uprising in the south-eastern state of Chiapas. Deliberately executed on the day that NAFTA went into effect, the insurrection was a statement against the savage neoliberal policies that were threatening the survival of indigenous peasants throughout the region. The participants in the insurrection (overwhelmingly Mayan peasants who depended on land and agriculture for their livelihood) explained their uprising as being primarily anti-neoliberal and class based. State intervention had been so systematically exploitative and oppressive towards Indian peasants in Chiapas that their only resort was to form an oppositional class organisation. Having exhausted all legal means of redressing its grievances, the EZLN had no way out but to rebel, as it stated in the First Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle:

To prevent the continuation of the above [exploitation, exclusion, etc.], and as our last hope, after having tried to utilize all legal means based on our Constitution, we go to our Constitution, to apply Article 39, which says: 'National Sovereignty essentially and originally resides in the people. All political power emanates from the people and its purpose is to help the people. The people have, at all times, the inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government'. (EZLN 1994)

Only after 12 days of armed struggle in 1994, and under tremendous national and international pressure for a peaceful response to the uprising, did the government propose an armistice and initiate peace talks. The first government proposal to address the EZLN's demands was rejected by the Zapatista base communities in June 1994, after a long process of democratic consultation and decision-making. In early August 1994, before the national presidential elections, the EZLN managed to assemble more than 6,000 representatives from forces of the left and other democratic civil society organisations at the National Democratic Convention.

Nevertheless, the ruling PRI still won the presidency – albeit by the narrowest majority in its 65-year history. New President Ernesto Zedillo started his term with a pro-peace discourse. Yet, less than three months later he launched a military offensive to capture the EZLN's leadership in February 1995. Instead of confronting the army, the EZLN withdrew into the jungle with more than 22,000 people from its base communities. In the meantime,

the army ransacked the empty homes of indigenous peasants. Although such state aggression generated divisions, and a few turned to the state for assistance, the core of the Zapatista base communities remained firmly in support of the EZLN. The state intervention against indigenous peasants strengthened their determination to remain an oppositional force. Later in 1995, 38 municipalities in Chiapas were declared 'rebel municipalities' by the EZLN and its constituents. In these areas, autonomy and self-government were put into practice (Van der Haar 2001).

In March 1995, the Mexican Congress passed a law of Accord and Pacification, which granted amnesty to the EZLN leadership so that it could negotiate a peaceful settlement. From then on, the government followed a two-pronged policy. On one hand, it pledged to negotiate with the EZLN on issues of indigenous rights and culture, democracy and state reform, economic and land issues, and women's rights. On the other, it began to sponsor the formation of a series of paramilitary groups, some of which were formed by local ruling-class members of the PRI (Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas 1998; Human Rights Watch 1997).

On February 16 1996, the government and the EZLN's representatives reached the first peace accords on indigenous rights and culture in San Andrés. Part of the Constitution and a number of state and federal laws would have to be modified in order to enable the implementation of these accords. In view of the fact that no advancement was taking place to implement the San Andrés Accords, the EZLN suspended talks on the other issues. By November 1996, the Congressional Commission for Harmony and Pacification (*Comisión para la Concordia y la Pacificación*, COCOPA) had elaborated a proposal to implement the Accords. The COCOPA decided that both parties, the Mexican government and the EZLN, had to either agree to the entire package or reject it. After a brief consultation period with its support bases, the EZLN accepted COCOPA's proposal, even though it was below its expectations. President Zedillo, however, requested a 15-day period to 'study' the proposal and then made a counterproposal, thus derailing the negotiation process (Hernández Navarro and Vera Herrera 1998). In summary, Zedillo's administration granted a concession (the San Andrés Accords) on which it later reneged, and became primarily repressive in character. It was at this point, 1996, that the EZLN transformed itself into an Indian movement, thus becoming rather isolated in Chiapas.

The EZLN undoubtedly played a role in the victory of Vicente Fox on July of 2000, however. Several factors contributed to this event, including the continuous thickening of civil society after the student movement of 1968 (Fox 1996), the struggle of democratic teachers and electricity workers, the peasant movement of the 1970s and 1980s, and the organisational upsurge in the aftermath of Mexico City's earthquake of 1985 (Foweraker and Craig 1990). Yet, a critical factor also was the EZLN's struggle outside of the political system which prompted the political parties to introduce

sufficient electoral reforms to make it viable for an opposition party to win the elections.

Upon taking office in December 2000, President Vicente Fox encountered a political and legislative impasse that had been in place since the end of 1996, aggravated by a war of low intensity against the Zapatista base communities since 1995. Although one of Fox's first acts of government was to send the COCOPA legislative proposal to Congress, he thereafter pursued an ambiguous policy toward the EZLN. For its part, the EZLN responded with the announcement on 2 December 2000 that 24 of its representatives would travel to Mexico City in February 2001 to address the Congress in support of that legal initiative (Marcos 2000). The EZLN announced three conditions for the reinstatement of negotiations with the newly elected government: the withdrawal of seven military positions from Zapatista base communities (out of more than 50), the release of presumed Zapatista sympathisers from jail, and the passage of the San Andrés Accords legislation.

Initially, Fox partially fulfilled these conditions. He withdrew four military positions and released 20 political prisoners (out of more than 90). Fox seemed to believe that the insurrection would disappear because the PRI no longer held the presidency. However, the underlying economic, social and political power structures in Mexico remained unchanged. The corporatist mechanisms for political control remained, the mass media for ideological manipulation had been reinforced and many technocrats from the previous two administrations were still in government (Garrido 2001: 25–9; see Otero 2004a for an assessment of 20 years of neoliberalism in Mexico in various sectors).

Perhaps the main difficulty for Fox and Congress in fulfilling the Zapatista demands was the economic interests that would have had to be forgone to grant autonomy to Indian communities. According to Héctor Díaz Polanco, Fox wanted to force the EZLN into a peace without change. Part of the obstacle to real change is the *Plan Puebla-Panamá*, a megaproject that intends to appropriate natural resources in the Zapatista regions, commodify indigenous communities and utilise its inhabitants as a source of labour power (cited in Correa 2001: 22; see also Carlsen 2004). For Díaz-Polanco, the San Andrés Accords 'would have the effect of turning these indigenous peoples (*pueblos indios*) into [social] actors that could become obstacles in these [economic] projects' (cited in Correa 2001: 22).

Fox's ambiguous approach to addressing the Chiapas conflict came to the fore after the arrival of the EZLN leadership to Mexico City in March 2001. Once the debate began in Congress on whether or not to allow the EZLN leadership to have a plenary hearing, it emerged that the staunchest opponents to granting this hearing were members of Fox's own party. The hard-liners of both PRI and PAN did not want to offer Zapatistas the right to address the plenary of Congress but should only address a commission of 10 members from each chamber. Only when the Zapatistas threatened to return to Chiapas to search for 'new ways' of advancing their cause did Fox withdraw

three additional military positions and, by a thin margin, Congress voted to grant a plenary hearing to the EZLN leadership. The tight vote anticipated that passing the law (which entailed a constitutional change) would be very hard, as it requires a two-thirds majority in the federal congress and a majority of state legislatures. Nevertheless, four indigenous representatives of the EZLN gave their speeches in the historical hearing on 29 March 2001, marking the first time that Indians spoke at the highest tribune in the nation (Thompson and Weiner 2001; Comandanta 2006).

By mid-2001, the federal Congress had passed a watered-down version of the San Andrés Accords that did not satisfy the EZLN. Failing to grant autonomy to Indian peoples and to consider them subjects of public rights had perpetuated the commodification of Indian labour power, their lands and territories, leaving them vulnerable to capitalist development and exploitation without any say on the matter (Harvey 2002). After almost two years in silence as a protest against this legislation, the EZLN support bases launched a massive demonstration, taking over the highland city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, on 1 January 2003. More than 20,000 indigenous men, women and children, many with machetes in hand, filled the central plaza for more than three hours, during which seven EZLN commanders spoke to the masses (Bellinghausen 2003). In August of that year, the EZLN moved on to unilaterally implement the San Andrés Accords within its territory of influence. It organised five regions around *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* (Good Government Councils) with rotating authorities. Intended to become intermediary governance structures between municipalities and the state, these councils have also functioned as democratic leadership training grounds.

The paradox of the EZLN then is that although its insurrection was launched with class grievances at the forefront, it then became isolated for over a decade as a regional indigenous movement in Chiapas. As of June of 2005, however, the EZLN launched the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle, in which it called for anti-capitalist mobilisation of all the subordinate groups and classes in Mexico. One feature of this call is that it heavily critiqued all electoral political parties, including the left-of-centre Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) and AMLO, its presidential candidate for the 2006 elections. Rather than playing the politics of 'those on top', the EZLN called instead for strengthening civil society organisation against neoliberalism and the capitalist state 'from below and on the left'. To promote this approach, the EZLN launched the Other Campaign in this declaration.

EZLN's focus on civil society and Indian demands

The most novel contrast to the Leninist and vanguardist trend in Latin American guerrilla organisations, as well as to that of political parties, has been represented by the EZLN's focus on civil society (Harvey 1998;

Gilbreth and Otero 2001; Díaz-Polanco and Sánchez 2003). Unlike all previous guerrilla movements, the EZLN does not seek state power directly. Rather it is counting on the subordinate sections of 'civil society' to get organised and force upon the state a peaceful solution to the military conflict. From its first public communiqué in January of 1994, the EZLN revealed itself as an institutional actor. While it branded the government of Carlos Salinas as illegitimate and the product of electoral fraud, it nevertheless called on the other two powers, the legislative and the judiciary, to do what they must to get rid of the usurper. As mentioned above, this communiqué also invoked Article 39 of the Mexican Constitution to proclaim EZLN's legitimate right to rebel (EZLN 1994). After seeing the tremendous mobilisation of civil society organisations to stop the conflict, however, the EZLN decided to change its armed strategy. Another critical change occurred soon after the uprising in relation to the EZLN's demands. Although the vast majority of its constituency was made up of indigenous communities in Chiapas, the EZLN's initial grievances were typically class-based demands, summed up as: 'work, land, housing, food, healthcare, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace' (EZLN 1994). Eventual dialogue with a multiplicity of indigenous organisations led the EZLN to place the struggle for indigenous rights and culture at the forefront of its demands.

The EZLN's focus on reinvigorating civil society *vis-à-vis* the state, however, was not without precedent. In fact, most popular movements in Mexico during the 1970s and 1980s had a different goal from that of political parties. Rather than challenge state power directly in political society, they wanted to strengthen the organisational capacity of subordinate groups and classes within civil society to struggle for their rights. While doing so, most movements were very jealous to preserve their independence from the state and their autonomy from other political organisations (Moguel *et al.* 1992; Foweraker and Craig 1990; Hellman 1994; Otero 1999). Hence, all of these organisations may be appropriately called the 'social left' to the extent that a core part of their political practice is based on an arm's-length relation with political parties and the state (Castañeda 1993).

The EZLN's rebellion and eventual social mobilisation of subordinate groups and classes have fortified this trend of consolidating civil society as the means to achieve a democratic transition in Mexico. Its novelty consists in having added the 'war of movements' (direct military confrontation against the state in the narrow sense) to the 'war of positions' (struggles in the cultural and moral realm of civil society) that had been developed by previous social movements as a strategy to promote a democratic transition. The hope was, however, that promoting a democratic transition would surely make a further 'war of movements' unnecessary. It might be argued that Mexico's initial transition to electoral democracy in 2000 was chiefly due to the pressure exerted from outside of the political system by the EZLN, which compelled political parties to legislate enough significant changes in electoral

rules to have an opposition party win the presidency. Prior to the EZLN's uprising, political parties, overwhelmed by the ruling PRI, usually passed electoral legislation that kept the authoritarian nature of the system virtually intact. One might say that, prior to 1994, electoral legislation changed primarily to modernise the authoritarian system, but not to allow for fair and equitable democratic competition (Chand 2001; Otero 1995).

The Other Campaign and the *Congreso Nacional Indígena*

By 2005, the EZLN had focused on consolidating its organisation in Chiapas through the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno*. The third meeting of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI), spurred on by the EZLN, had taken place in March 2001, during the 'Zapatour' that took the EZLN leadership to its hearing in Congress. The Zapatistas had retreated from their initial class struggle into a regional Indian struggle for about a decade. Not only did they consolidate the role of EZLN and allied organisations but they also began to experiment with the exercise of government at the lowest, village, municipal and regional levels.

The Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle in 2005 was the coming out of the Zapatistas' isolation in their own region. They now set out to articulate a broad mobilisation of subordinate groups and classes around an anti-capitalist and leftist programme. A sequel to the Sixth Declaration was the EZLN's launching of the Other Campaign, which was to run parallel to the electoral campaigns orchestrated by the formal political parties leading to the 2 July 2006 presidential elections. During several months, Subcomandante Marcos 'campaigned' in most states of Mexico until 4 May 2006. On this and the previous day, the Atenco community suffered tremendous repression from the Federal Preventive Police force after some flower vendors had resisted an attempted eviction from their lands by corporate developers. At this point, Marcos stopped the Other Campaign (González García 2006) and continued propagating the much more radical class message of the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. Although it initially appeared likely that indigenous leaders at the CNI would distance themselves from Marcos' more radical discourse, this proved not to be so.⁷

Two important questions emerged from the CNI that have significance for the role of the Mexican social left in the struggle against neoliberal globalism. First, what do the Indian peoples that did participate in this meeting have in common, and what distinguishes them from those that did not participate? A possible hypothesis is that participants were those with the greatest amount of grievances and conflicts, but they could also be those with the greatest levels of organisation; and that the others are those that have, one way or another, 'acquiesced' with or been co-opted by the state and/or transnational corporations or national enterprises. Second, how well or poorly has the second group fared with co-optation and possible assimilation?

These are empirical questions worth pursuing in future research. What should be clear from this discussion, though, is that Zapatista Indian communities now have a much greater awareness about their major threats, and that the only way to confront them successfully is by allying themselves with other subordinate groups and classes. They are asking for nothing short of rewriting Mexico's constitution so that indigenous rights are raised to the appropriate level. Can struggles of the social left converge with those of the political left? The answer to this question depends to a great extent on the way in which Mexico's present crisis of hegemony is resolved. As will be seen, though, the larger national-level peasant movement is also including the demand for a new constitution that comprises, among other principles, the rights of indigenous peoples to autonomy.

Conclusion: a crisis of hegemony and its way out

Which way are things likely to go in Mexico? After the events of 2006 and their sequel, we can only sketch out some possible scenarios, but cannot clearly anticipate which is the most viable. Although one can agree with Ilán Semo (2006) that the most desirable outcome is a parliamentary republic, AMLO's role is not necessarily a bad thing for Mexico's left, at least to the extent that he promotes the people's self organisation and conforms to the criteria of democratic leadership (Otero 2004b; Dussel Peters 2007). Perhaps the greatest challenge for AMLO is to develop an ability for self-criticism. If he displays a degree of humility his popularity could increase and his calls for organisation bear greater fruit.

In fact, AMLO has already invoked two examples of the people's self-organisation: the APPO struggle in Oaxaca to oust its governor, which started before the elections in 2006; and the Zapatista Good Government Councils. He invoked these examples to reaffirm the possibility of sustaining a parallel government to that of Felipe Calderón. Raising these examples probably indicates that AMLO is willing, and perhaps considering, an alliance with these popular movements. There is, of course, the question of whether these movements, especially the Zapatistas, would accept. At times Marcos has expressed a belief that a more rightist government will radicalise the social left, while a more reformist one will promote an illusion that things may be worked out within capitalism. From my perspective, however, a social democratic alternative at the very least makes repression more unlikely: fewer lives would be lost and more freedoms could be enjoyed for organizing. If social democracy in government is accompanied by greater social organisation and mobilisation of the social and political left, the result could be not only a deeper democratisation, but also significant reformist advancement in social welfare and greater autonomy and independence in Mexico's political and economic relationship with the USA.

Programmatically, two salient issues were proposed by AMLO in one of the discussion meetings of the CND. First, he proposed the transformation

of public life in Mexico. 'Without this', he said, 'we can achieve nothing. We require a radical and profound renewal of public life that encompasses all fields: economic, social, political, cultural and spiritual'. Second, AMLO argued that the left must protect the people and the nation's heritage including the oil industry; otherwise there will be left only debris.⁸

Linking these proposals with other discussions in the CND, we can identify several key issues that need to be addressed by the left in Mexico. First, energy production must remain in the public sphere. Second, the oil industry in particular is critical to Mexico and needs to be defended against neoliberal impetus for privatisation. Third, Mexico must resist NAFTA's watering down of the labour protections afforded in its labour legislation. Fourth, agriculture is a critical sector that needs to be defended, and indeed redeveloped, especially through a renegotiation of NAFTA's agriculture chapter. Finally, democratic access to Mexico's resources needs to be guaranteed at a constitutional level, especially the right to water and the right to food.

Certainly, the left is united in opposition to privatisation of Mexico's energy resources. Participants at the CND expressed a common concern: energy production must remain in the public sphere, as it would be incompatible with the public good to transfer it to private firms, with their priority for profit maximizing. Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela have provided a model by demonstrating great popular resistance to defend their natural resources. In particular, state ownership of PEMEX is seen as essential since oil could be a crucial social-development tool (*La Jornada* 2007). Similarly, the left will also continue to resist privatizing the two electricity-producing companies, which happen to have one of the few independent and combative unions in Mexico: the *Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas*. Along with other independent unions, affiliated to the *Unión de Trabajadores de México*, the left will resist watering down the labour protections afforded in Mexico's legendary labour legislation, originally contained in the 1917 constitution, and one of the most progressive in the world at the time. Neoliberals want to introduce flexibility and, among other things, moving from payment by the day to hourly rates, eliminating seniority rights, privatizing pension plans, etc.

Another critical sector to be defended and indeed recovered is agriculture. The key slogan in this regard is: *sin maíz no hay país* ('without corn there is no country'). According to NAFTA's regulations, all remaining protections for maize, beans, milk and sugar were lifted as of 1 January 2008. Unlike other agricultural crops that were protected only during the first seven years of NAFTA, these goods were considered more 'basic' and had a 14 year phase-off period. Still, agriculture has been so battered by free trade that Mexico is now highly dependent on the importation of several grains from the USA, where their farmers are typically protected to the tune of billions of dollars per year (Bartra 2004). While agriculture produced about 7 per cent of GNP in 1990, its contribution was only 3.4 per cent by 2006. Nevertheless, agriculture absorbs 16 per cent of the economically active population and 36 per cent of total population. Mexico's countryside has

lost over 3 million people who have migrated to cities and the USA since 2000 looking for a better life. But xenophobic and racist US politicians are pushing for building a wall along the US–Mexico border. Clearly, they are at odds with businesses that require cheap labour offered only by migrants. By supporting agriculture, Mexicans would no longer have to seek refuge in international migration.

The starting point to advance toward a new agriculture programme is the renegotiation of NAFTA's agricultural chapter. The second step is an emergency programme to promote maize production. The third immediate measure is to combat privilege and monopoly in the agrifood sector. The fourth is to introduce a moratorium on transgenic corn. Fifth is the urgent approval of three legislative initiatives: (a) the establishment of a constitutional right to food, (b) legislation on planning for food and nutritional sovereignty and security and (c) legislation to establish a permanent mechanism to manage corn and beans (and their derivatives) imports and exports. Sixth is a series of measures against the federal government's inefficiency and lack of transparency in its rural programmes. Seventh is the elimination of the repression of peasant movements and organisations.

A radical transformation of power is under way throughout South America. Left governments in various countries are pursuing strategies that could be taken up by the left in Mexico. One of the most radical proposals is to oppose not only the continuation of NAFTA but also the advancement of the US-backed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and instead move toward Latin American regional integration. The main leader of this initiative is Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez, who is reviving the ideas of nineteenth-century liberator Simón Bolívar. His dream was to build a single Latin American state as a counter-force to the rising US empire. Venezuela joined Mercosur in 2006, and has been actively leading the construction of an anti-imperialist block in the south. Two crucial ideas are to build an independent TV channel for the Americas and to create a Bank of the South. If these initiatives were to materialise, they could be a significant basis to promote clear alternative paradigms to neoliberal globalism, both in culture and in actual economic development projects that are not tied to either US corporations or to the usual neoliberal global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank. Although international trade as such will not be shunned, the key is that it will be subordinated to the social and political goals of an organised and democratic civil society. Perhaps it is this vision that potentially can unite the political and the social left in Mexico.

Notes

- 1 Besides having monitored the EZLN's development since its inception in 1994, research for this chapter has been based on a three-month stay in Mexico over the Summer of 2006, with close monitoring of the electoral process and its aftermath, participation in the fourth meeting of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI)

- in early May of 2006, another three-month stay in early 2007 including participation in the National Democratic Convention of 21–5 March, 2007, and several interviews with key Mexican intellectuals.
- 2 Some observers in the political left directly blame Subcomandante Marcos for its electoral loss. Marcos is the spokesperson of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN). He counters by saying that, at most, his criticisms of the political left subtracted about 15,000 votes – the number of people that subscribe to the Other Campaign launched by the EZLN in 2005. This amounts to about 5 per cent of the difference in votes between Calderón and AMLO.
- 3 See Gordon Laxer's chapter in this volume for a definition of this term.
- 4 Violence was exercised against miners on strike, Indian peasants defending their land in Atenco, and the *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* (Popular Assembly of Oaxaca's Peoples or APPO) seeking to oust the repressive PRI governor of Oaxaca state.
- 5 Benito Juárez was the liberal president who expelled the French Empire from Mexico in 1867 and is AMLO's inspiration.
- 6 But at least one of the PRD's internal currents, *Nueva Izquierda* (New Left), disagrees. Led by former Senator Jesús Ortega, this current happens to be the hegemonic one inside the PRD. In line with its social democratic instincts, it would rather negotiate with the ruling parties and stay in the political game rather than become isolated in a mobilisation strategy.
- 7 Author's field notes, 5–6 May 2006.
- 8 Speech by Andrés Manuel López Obrador on 23 March 2007, at the National Democratic Convention's meeting on *El campo es primero* (The Countryside First).