Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation
Indigenous Autonomy and Revolutionary Resistance
July 1997

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The paradox that the indigenous movement and the EZLN encounter, because of their proposal of autonomy, is having been accused of seeking isolation and stimulating ethnic hatreds, when it is precisely the ruling class that has sought associations with international finance capital to put up for sale our natural resources, our factories, and our labor power to benefit a small group of the Mexican and international oligarchy.

Autonomy is not a panacea or a formula for solving every problem. It is the beginning of a path: the basis for a strategy of participation, of development, and of struggle against exploitation and marginalization. Autonomy could be the instrument to combat racism — never yet recognized as a huge problem in Mexican society — and above all to recognize a fundamental right of all people: the right to free self-determination.

On the eve of a new millennium, we meet once again, to look for the correct paths in the endless struggle to transform this society into a world of justice, of freedom, and of hope. Today, more than ever, in the presence of the possibility and the conditions for participating in a revolutionary process in Mexico, in the presence of the idea of changing the current forms of human community into new forms, more aware and therefore more egalitarian, and in the presence of the challenge of being ourselves part of this transformation, once again, for these reasons and many more, we allow ourselves to dream that utopia can be realized.

As a collective, Amor y Rabia has wanted to address the theme of Indigenous Autonomy, because we understand that in this time, as in other eras of history, it is the best model for organizing a movement of resistance and struggle that includes not only indigenous people, but also everyone who is convinced of the need to live in a different world.

Indigenous struggle and resistance is the daily and permanent will of the people to systematically preserve the unique aspects of the cultures with which they identify. This concept includes the refusal of domination and a refusal to conform to its imposition, in an attitude of creative defense of themselves, facing the invaders, and, of course, in the desire to be able to live freely themselves.

Indigenous Resistance

The indigenous people have developed a profound analysis of how to resolve the great problems that oppress them. The strategy of the Mexican state, to create economic and social programs, has clearly shown us over five centuries that their plans have never included indigenous participation. Rather, the indigenous people are misled by those same authorities into believing that the programs are in their best interests.

The innumerable discussions, reflections, and exchanges that have occurred around the country have concluded that the solution of these problems requires the establishment in Mexico of a regime of autonomy.

The current model of the state-centralized, exclusive, authoritarian, homogeneous and opposed to pluralismó shows us its inability to transcend its own contradictions (racism, repression, corruption, and drug trafficking, among others). Consequently the process of autonomy irreversibly becomes the strongest option for organizing a new society.

Since the National Indigenous Convention, suggested by the EZLN, one of the most important forums in which there is discussion about autonomy is the Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy (Asamblea Nacional Indigena Plural por la Autonomia (ANIPA)). The indigenous prospect is not a new project of exclusion, nor does it put itself on the margins of the great hopes of the non-indigenous people who desire freedom. On the contrary, their proposition is to enter for the first time into a truly dynamic relationship with all of non-indigenous society, resulting in a new society, more just and more humane. This is to say that we should examine the regions or zones composed of diverse socio-cultural groups and the possibility of living together in unity and diversity, under principles of equality and respect, which we can point to as instances of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic life. In this sense, the indigenous demand fully identifies with the aspirations we have as libertarians: a commitment to an integration of struggle and collective effort that includes the greatest possible ethnic diversity.

Elements of Autonomy

Now then, with respect to what form the indigenous autonomies should adopt, as well as considering the ethnic aspect, to try auton-

each time, that are not simply about resistance, but move closer to direct action.

Particularly in our experience, during the past year we have had direct contact with indigenous communities in rebellion thanks to the Anarchist Project of Southeastern Mexico (The Spirit of Magon Direct Solidarity Encampment). The creation of the direct solidarity encampment, the work of anti-authoritarian education in the school, the construction of community centers, and the giving of workshops in them, have all allowed us to come to understand, from the inside, the situation that the comrades in struggle are living.

Their organization, their work, their beliefs, their traditions, have made us realize that, despite the lacks and defects, indigenous communalism, without being a perfect state, nor with the population being in paradise, is in essence the location of the potential for the utopian organization of life.

The indigenous autonomies and the development of a political and social indigenous subject represent the liberatory alternative to the corporate structures of the system of the party-state, and the official policies of indigenous charity.

Autonomy Subverts the State

This is the essential conquest of those years that the government seeks to return to, because for it the existence and political actualization of subjects independent of its control and mediation is unacceptable. The EZLN, the National Indigenous Conference, and civil society constitute a challenge that threatens the survival and reproduction of the party system and the state. For this reason, the government is trying to consolidate a policy that guarantees, by beguiling other considerations, the stability and safeguarding of the system and the economic model currently in effect.

ment began to develop the shape that it has today. It was then, over the course of three days, that more than a hundred indigenous representatives met in the city of Matias Romero, Oaxaca, to seek the defense of their human rights and recognition of their collective rights, coinciding with mobilizations of other peoples of Latin American with similar demands.

From this moment, and until October 1992, there would be a series of meetings and conferences, under the umbrella of the campaign of 500 Years of Resistance, that served to systematize the lines of communication and to articulate platforms about the indigenous question. Then, in the ardor of the days of struggle, a continental network was started, and the formation of an ethnic consciousness was begun. They discussed equally the spiritual ideas of the tribes of the United States and Canada, as well as the radical indianism of the Bolivian Kataristas.

The struggles do not have a single organizing center, and their demands are diverse, differentiating themselves from the traditional mobilizations for land and the battle against poverty, in particular the struggles of the ‘70s and ‘80s on the left. The focus is now the recovery of ethnic identities and autonomy. Their members no longer thought of themselves as campesinos, but as indigenous.

Thus, as examples, in Sonora near the US border, one still feels the free breezes of the beginning of the century, in the Yaqui and Triqui areas that continue the rebel tradition, in denouncing and ending the slave practices that persist in private farms on the Pacific coast. In Oaxaca, the Frente Unico was formed in the Mazateca mountains to respond “to the indifference and lack of attention of the government.” These are the direct descendants of the Magonista struggle, reproducing in its essence the ideological heritage of ‘land and freedom.’ It is not only in these regions with a libertarian tradition that there are large scale movements: in Guerrero, the Mixtecos; in Jalisco, the Huicholes; in Michoacan, the Purepechas, among other ethnicities, are organizing actions that are stronger

omy from the territorial point of view is perhaps the most recurring demand we are aware of. Nearly 100 years ago, Ricardo Flores Magon used to say that communalism: ‘is the organized manifestation of the indigenous way of life; in other worlds, the basis of the survival and the struggle of the people to preserve their identity’ and that it was composed of four fundamental elements: (1) land; (2) representation; (3) work; (4) and communal benefit or welfare.

Basically the idea of this Mexican anarchist at the beginning of this century is the same as that held by indigenous representatives of our time, concerning the communal character that the territories must have and that is the foundation of the feeling that they belong to a place that is theirs collectively, but that can benefit each individual community member without fracturing its collective character. Further, that there are things used by the whole community, such as natural resources and public works (schools, hospitals, common stores, etc.).

The existence of a truly autonomous community would imply, to our understanding as a collective, a full recognition and exercise of the following faculties by the communities:

In the economic sphere:

- Control and determination of the use of communal land and natural resources.
- Planning and carrying out communal development projects.

In the political sphere:

- Electing and appointing representatives through their own mechanisms, without the intervention of political parties of any other authority.
- Making decisions in assembly that affect the public life of the community.

In the social and educational sphere:

- Developing, maintaining, and modifying the norms of collective life in the community, when there is the will to do so.
- Deciding on plans for education, as well as which teachers may come into the community.

However, to want the communities to decide their own rights, solely in terms of themselves alone, is to have the idea that the communities are completely formed, which perhaps — or in fact — is not true. In the discussions of indigenous autonomy, frequently the idea of the community is idealized, and it is spoken of as a small complete nucleus of humanity, in which there are neither rich nor poor. It would appear that the communities function completely independent of the market, and that if there are divisions, they are the product of external forces. From this perspective proceeds the idea to isolate the community from the elements that destroy it (political parties, religions, sects, and market mechanisms).

The communities of Mexico are very different from this. Not even before the conquest were they closed and self-sufficient systems, and that is even less the case today. Interchange with the society that surrounds them is their nature. The mechanisms of the market have penetrated them, and, as in all places where the market goes, it left behind the seeds of social and economic differences. Centuries of domination have converted their structure (formerly more flexible) into mechanisms of defense, of resistance.

Reconceiving Society

With regard to the question of resistance: for several years our differences with various indigenous organizations have been based on this: The resistance of the people is only that: resistance without

real possibilities of victory, if only because the world has as yet no model for more humane social relations. Resistance and liberation are two distinct goals, complementary, but not identical.

Resistance is not an ideal state in which we want to live; it is only a state of development of the forces that will make it possible to live how we want. If the objective of indigenous resistance is liberation, that gives it a double character: because it has the organizational base and the capacity to be able to imagine the future. We believe that beginning a movement for liberation without also reconceiving society is impossible.

Many organizations have based their work in goals of resistance, without having in mind the next step in the process of liberation.

The original logic of the indigenous utopia coincided with the discourse of the government, and the result has been a domesticated utopia — a comfortable and attractive solution for those who do not have time to imagine the future, but prefer an immediate exit from the present. Until now this has been the biggest success of the Mexican state in repressing politics: cutting off free imagination about our own future, discouraging thought and reflection, 'keeping it in the closet,' in other words: separating resistance from liberation. Fortunately, things have changed.

What we want to make understood is that we should not fall into the error of idealizing indigenous communities, while still recognizing their very real merits, and while making clear that despite centuries of attacks, there remains in indigenous communities a long tradition and a strong insistence on doing thing collectively. The communities that really exist are an irreducible and instructive fact for us. The most serious challenge made to neoliberalism in Mexico has come from the indigenous communities of Chiapas.

The Zapatista insurrection of 1994 catalyzed the development of a new indigenous movement, although this also had earlier roots. In its modern expression, as a series of ethno-political, agrarian, worker and civil organizations, the movement has existed for more than 20 years. It has been since September 1989 that the new move-