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power to impose its will. The question facing Mexico is whether other forces, ranging from the new independent union federations, to campesino organizations, to armed organizations like the EZLN and the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) see in this moment the same opportunity to strike against the PRI and assert their own demands. There lies the potential to build real power to the people from below—in the urban barrios, the countryside, in the factories and on the campuses. For this reason revolutionaries around the world need to be watching Mexico.

Perhaps most important among the independent forces is the National Indigenous Congress, a broad umbrella of indigenous organizations from all across Mexico who have called for an "uprising for peace" in the form of a national indigenous march on Mexico City in opposition to the government's moves on April 10, Emiliano Zapata's birthday. While the Zapatistas have inspired broad sectors of Mexican civil society to support their demands and to struggle for themselves, that inspiration has been most powerful among Mexico's 56 indigenous ethnic groups. For them the Zapatista uprising and the promises of indigenous autonomy raised by the San Andres Accords clearly represent something worth fighting for. And the indigenous have little to lose by fighting.

Mexico has appeared on the brink of a major showdown more than once in the past four years; each time a nation-wide confrontation has failed to materialize. But previously the government has offered some sort of concession. They have held out the hope that the demands of the excluded would be heard primarily in their willingness to negotiate with the EZLN. The powers that be no longer seem willing to tolerate the continued presence of the EZLN as a major player on the national political stage. The question now? When will the long-suffering audience—Mexico's downtrodden majority—demand to be part of the show themselves.



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Ministry deported Father Chanteau because "he has publicly expressed that the massacre of Actéal was a government plan to destroy the bases of support for the Zapatistas." Repeating an obvious truth is in this manner transformed into the crime of interfering in the internal political affairs of Mexico.

## Showdown?

It seems that the Mexican Government is preparing the ground for some sort of offensive against the EZLN. With its "peace initiatives" it is seeking to portray the Zapatistas as uncooperative. With its continued support for paramilitary operations it is trying to break the Zapatistas from their supporters. With its campaign against foreigners it is attempting to eliminate potential witnesses to whatever crimes it is planning. With its massive weapons purchases and elite military training in the US it is preparing for war. And with all these things rumors of war spread like pinkeye in preschool. Accusations that the Mexican Government is paving the way for war are coming from many quarters and many forces are in motion to resist that drive.

The fourth Congress of the left-wing Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) issued a strong condemnation of the government's moves and then called on "members of the armed forces to not become involved in an irresponsible strategy of confrontation between Mexicans promoted by the governing group and its allies and to comply with article 129 of the constitution." Article 129 explicitly states that in times of peace, the military should be confined to military bases outside of populated areas. With the PRD's direct appeal to the rank and file of the armed forces over the heads of the PRI (if only for the army to remain neutral) the struggle over the San Andres Accords becomes an open struggle for state power between the PRI and the PRD. On its own the PRD doesn't have the

Hansen's deportation began with his being kidnapped by unidentified Government agents; it included a stay in a shit-covered jail cell and ended with his being put on a flight to Miami despite a court order barring his deportation. Michel Henri Jean Chanteau, a French priest who had worked for 32 years in the municipality of Chenalhó, which includes the village of Actéal, was next. On March 12 Massimo Boldrini, an Italian photographer, was kidnapped by members of Los Chinchulines, a paramilitary organization, who handed him over to the regular Army before he was finally released. On March 16 three more international observers were ordered to leave the country: Jennifer Pasquarela of the US, Claudia Meyer of Switzerland, and Helen Kapolnek of Germany.

The Mexican Government has justified a number of the expulsions on the basis that the people in question were acting as human rights observers while carrying tourist visas. At the same time they have made the already difficult process of obtaining an FM-3 visa (the kind used by Non-Governmental Organizations) effectively impossible for anyone going to Chiapas. The Mexican Government is now demanding that applicants for FM-3 visas provide a detailed itinerary including the names of everyone they intend to interview. Such a requirement makes any serious human rights investigation impossible. The government has also announced that they will now only grant visas to Non-Governmental Organizations recognized by the United Nations, a tiny fraction of the groups that work in Chiapas.

The campaign against foreigners has two objectives. The first is to play on the racist belief that the indigenous people are incapable of creating a movement as effective as the EZLN and therefore must be being manipulated by somebody. The second, and more obvious, purpose is to clear Chiapas of the inconvenient witnesses who have been able to focus the world's attention on the struggle there and to expose the lies of the government. This was effectively admitted when the Interior



Talk of Peace… "If you want peace" the bumpersticker reads, "prepare for war." The Mexican corollary to this bit of backcountry wisdom seems to be "If you want war, make proposals for peace." March was a month of peace proposals in Mexico with three major "peace initiatives" following in rapid succession. The first was from the newly-appointed Governor of Chiapas, Roberto Albores Guillen of the PRI (the Revolutionary Institutional Party that has ruled Mexico for 70 years). The second was from the right-wing PAN (National Action Party). And the third came from President Ernesto Zedillo, also of the PRI.

In spite of all the hype, none of these plans has even the remotest chance to bring peace to Chiapas, where a government-sponsored "low-intensity war" continues to maim, kill, and terrorize indigenous peasants in spite of international outrage at the massacre of 45 unarmed people by government-sponsored paramilitaries in the village of Actéal on December 22, 1997. Instead, the "peace initiatives" all seem to have been carefully crafted for rejection by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN)—so that the government could portray the Zapatistas as "intransigent" and "unwilling to negotiate" and prepare for a military offensive against them.

After 12 days of fighting in Mexico's southernmost state of Chiapas in January 1994, the Zapatistas agreed to participate in negotiations with the Mexican government. All the while the EZLN express profound skepticism about the sincerity of the government's desire to resolve the social problems that were the cause of the Zapatista uprising. That skepticism has proven to be well founded. In February, 1995 the Mexican Army launched a military offensive against the Zapatistas and an unsuccessful manhunt for the EZLN's military leader and chief spokesman, Subcomandante Marcos. In spite of this treachery the Zapatistas returned to the negotiating table shortly after the government offensive. In February of 1996 the EZLN signed an agreement (the San Andres Accords) with the government for changes in the constitution and

federal laws that would establish a significant degree of autonomy for Mexico's indigenous communities in the areas of education, language rights, self-government and control of natural resources. Half a year later the government had done exactly nothing to carry out the changes called for in the San Andres Accords. The Zapatistas then announced that they were withdrawing from any further talks until the government implemented its side of the agreements.

In the intervening year and a half the government has claimed that the Zapatistas need to come back to the negotiating table to approve specific legal language required to implement the agreement, even though the Accords are quite explicit in their content and specific legal language has been proposed by the Commission for Conciliation and Peace (COCOPA)—(a multi-party body established by the government in 1994 for the purpose of negotiating with the Zapatistas). Broader and broader sectors of Mexican civil society have progressively become convinced that it is the government and not the Zapatistas who have been intransigent. The new "peace initiatives" are really just another attempt to turn this situation around and prepare the ground for another government offensive against the Zapatistas.

Governor Albores Guillen's "peace plan" is perhaps the most blatant in its disregard for what a real peace in Chiapas demands. Guillen was appointed Governor in January after the previous appointee, Julio Cesar Ruiz Ferro, was forced from office in the wake of the Actéal massacre. The Zapatistas have insisted from the first days of their uprising that they did not view their grievances as confined to the state of Chiapas and accordingly have insisted on negotiating only with the Federal Government. The two key elements of Albores Guillen's plan seem to be the carrot and the stick: a $3 billion investment package that would undoubtedly enrich Chiapas's already bloated economic elite, and the outright prohibition of marches and other forms of political protest. The proposal also calls for disarming



to triple again over the next year to roughly $47 million. These sales are on top of "excess" equipment that the Pentagon has provided to the Mexican military for free. Last year these transfers included, for example, 73 Huey helicopters which are likely to be very useful in counter-insurgency operations in Southern Mexico.

## Getting Rid of the Witnesses

The Mexican government has welcomed the flow of US intelligence officers, US-trained military personnel and US weapons. But toward US citizens and other foreigners in Chiapas who have contradicted official government accounts of events, its hostility is growing. Anti-foreigner agitation by the government is nothing new, but the most recent incidents have been particularly severe. On February 13, a white Mexican military helicopter landed in the strategic Zapatista community of La Realidad carrying Lola De la Vega, a TVAzteca reporter married to a PRI-affiliated Mexican Senator. The helicopter ripped the roof off the community's school and wounded two children. International observers who stay in La Realidad's international civilian peace encampment to monitor military actions against the Zapatistas and deter human rights violations confronted De la Vega and asked her to identify herself. Two days later on her news show "Hablemos Claro" (Straight Talk) Ms. De la Vega claimed that the foreigners were giving the Zapatistas orders. In the days and weeks following this incident the government carried out a series of high profile expulsions of foreigners from Chiapas and dramatically increased the level of repression against international observers.

Maria Darlington from North Carolina was among the first to be expelled. She was followed by Tom Hansen, former director of Pastors for Peace and Robert Schweitzer. Tom

grow … to a counter-insurgency force of 55,000 men under arms."

In 1996 Mexican troops began training at Fort Bragg. These troops are destined for placement in Mexico's Special Forces Airborne Group (GAFE). According to Special Warfare magazine out of Fort Bragg, a "particularly heavy emphasis is being placed on those forces that will be located in the states of Chiapas and Guerrero, where 'special airborne forces' will be set up."

According to the December 29, 1997 New York Times, 3000 Mexican soldiers will have been trained by the US military as of next fall. Of these, 328 officers are receiving special training so that they can "in turn train air-mobile special forces units" in Mexico. In addition to Fort Bragg and Fort Benning Mexican soldiers are getting trained at more than ten other military bases in the US according to the Spanish daily, El Pais. As Mexican law prohibits the training of whole military units outside of Mexico, so troops are taken from different units in Mexico and officially regrouped in special elite units only upon their return. Ninety Mexican military officials are also currently undergoing intensive training with the CIA under the pretext of forming a new anti-narcotics force.

In an ominous first step toward more direct US military involvement in Mexico, the School of the Americas has also begun training Mexican military officers in Mexico through the Personnel Exchange Program. According to a Defense Department report acquired by Nuevo Amanecer Press, 59 Mexican officers took the course in 1996. US Embassy officials have also acknowledged to the Mexican daily, La Jornada, that US "defense attachés" have made periodic and routine visits to "all parts of Mexico, including Chiapas."

Sales of US military equipment to Mexico has also increased dramatically. According to the March 15 La Jornada, government sales of US military equipment to Mexico increased by 600% last year to $28 million and commercial sales are expected



the right-wing paramilitary groups that the government has been arming and training since 1994, but includes no specifics on how this will happen and almost nobody seriously believes that the state government has any intention of actually making it happen. A related initiative by the Governor in which he promised to release Zapatista prisoners proved to be a farce when none of prisoners released turned out to be Zapatistas.

The PAN and Zedillo initiatives propose changes in the constitution on the questions of indigenous autonomy. They are basically gutted versions of the San Andres Accords. They formally recognize the rights of indigenous peoples to some sort of autonomy but do not include the most substantive expressions of that autonomy found in the San Andres Accords. The Zedillo initiative recognizes the right of indigenous people to the use of natural resources but not in the collective form agreed upon in the San Andres Accords. Similarly the provision for autonomous indigenous control of television and radio stations recognized in the San Andres Accords is rendered toothless by subordinating that control to the licensing authority of the Federal Government. The provision in the San Andres Accords for the bilingual education of indigenous children is stripped of the sections in the San Andres Accords that provide for its actual implementation.

If there had been no Zapatista uprising and no San Andres Accords the PAN and Zedillo initiatives would be small steps forward for the rights of indigenous peoples in Mexico. But understood in their larger political context they are actually an attack on the indigenous movement that was energized by the Zapatista uprising. By making unilateral proposals that modify the San Andres Accords the PRI and PAN are effectively abandoning the negotiating process begun in 1994 that produced the Accords. The PAN and Zedillo initiatives are more or less the same in terms of political content. If anything the PAN proposal is even emptier than Zedillo's. What is most significant about the PAN's initiative is that it effectively ends their par-

ticipation in COCOPA and ruptures the broad united front of opposition parties on both the left and right that has blocked the PRI's power in the lower House of Deputies. The PAN has basically handed the PRI the freedom to impose its solution on Chiapas without any effective legislative opposition.

## Acts of War

The true nature of the government's strategy is to be found not in their pious declarations for peace but in the daily waging of a dirty counter-insurgency war against the indigenous communities of Chiapas that are the Zapatistas' primary bases of support. The December 22 Actéal Massacre momentarily focused the world's attention on the Mexican government's use of paramilitary organizations against indigenous communities. That strategy has not changed in the months following the massacre. It has merely been supplemented with increasingly direct military action against the Zapatista communities by the Army and the police.

Every day continues to bring new reports of attacks on indigenous communities by either the Army, the state police, or the paramilitaries. On February 25, ten PRI members and 26 state police evicted 17 households from their lands around Agua Blanca Serrania that they had reinhabited in December after a previous eviction. On February 28 while Albores Guillen was announcing his "peace plan," four peasant Zapatista sympathizers, Vincente Lopez Alvarez, Abelardo Perez Alvarez, Felipe Molina Perez, and Andres Gomez Perez were wounded in an ambush by paramilitaries at the entrance of the town of Benito Juarez Simojovel. On March 3, 120 soldiers entered the community of Monteflores in the municipality of Las Margaritas and threatened the peasants who had occupied the lands in the vicinity. On March 10 a group of paramilitaries protected by the state police sacked and burned two houses in the community of Chimix in the municipality of Chenalhó. On March 14 Trinidad Cruz Perez, a Zapatista supporter from the town of Roberto Barrios, was macheted to death by members of the PRI. On March 15, soldiers and police officers fired shots in the air in Actéal, forcing women in the refugee camp there to flee. Later that night state police and paramilitaries fired shots in the air in the vicinity of Polho, where many of the survivors of the Actéal massacre still remain. And this is just a sampling of reported events from a two-week period.



## Increasing US Involvement

Through constant attacks on the indigenous communities that support the Zapatistas the Mexican government hopes to drive a wedge between the EZLN and their bases of support. Systematically instilling terror among indigenous Chiapanecans, particularly through the use of government-supported paramilitary gangs is a cornerstone in the very conscious strategy of low-intensity warfare. Strategies of opposing peoples' movements were cultivated by the US in Viet Nam based on the experiences of the British Army in Ireland, Africa and Asia. "counter-insurgency warfare" was put to the test in the 1980s in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala and is now taught to Latin American military personnel in the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia and in counter-insurgency training in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Fort Bragg is the home of the First and Second Battalions of the First Special Warfare Group and the Seventh Special Forces Group. The Seventh Special Warfare Group has a particularly illustrious career ranging by their own account from "advising the South Vietnamese Army in 1961," to having "drafted the initial plan for US Military trainers in El Salvador," and playing "a critical role in helping the Salvadoran military