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CIPO: Oaxaca and Chiapas

Mark Becker

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This afternoon we met with Dolores Villalobo from the Consejo Indígena Popular de Oaxaca “Ricardo Flores Magón” (CIPO-RFM). She began the discussion with an explanation of who was Ricardo Flores Magón—an Indigenous person from Oaxaca who rose up against Porfirio Díaz in the Mexican Revolution. He was persecuted so fled into exile into the United States, but was imprisoned at Leavenworth where he was executed. Francisco Madero offered him the vice presidency, but Flores Magón said he preferred jail to his government that was not of the people and who did not represent the change for which they had fought. Dolores said that Flores Magón is largely a forgotten person, but they want to reclaim his name because he was an Indigenous person who never gave up on his ideals. CIPO-RFM is continuing his struggle.

CIPO-RFM was born in 1997 as an alliance of community organizations who opposed repression and fought for the rights of education, transportation, work, school, health, and other issues. They are rooted in a horizontal, assembly decision making model that rejects traditional political parties. They respect religious differences, rather than letting them divide the struggle. CIPO-RFM embraces ideas of autonomy, self determination, the rights to territory and

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natural resources, and the recuperation of cultures. Dolores was very critical of capitalism that has only served to underdevelop Indigenous communities. Electoral politics has also only proven to be an avenue for opportunists to gain power and wealth rather than working for the collective good.

Dolores indicated that CIPO-RFM shares a good deal of ideological affinity with the Zapatistas in Chiapas in terms of their struggles for respect, equality, real democracy, and territory. They also adhere to the Zapatistas' Sixth Declaration. They seek to join all communities together into a unified struggle to overcome the capitalist system and to achieve a better future. Dolores emphasized that there is not only one way to achieve these goals, and there is a need to adapt to meet a changing reality. Other examples like Evo Morales in Bolivia or Hugo Chavez in Venezuela might be appropriate for their contexts and for their realities, but people need to build their own future in Oaxaca—and they are doing it as they go along. Dolores pointed to structural problems and individual problems, and the need to work on both levels. We have to rethink and challenge how we face these problems.

The government treats Indigenous peoples as folkloric images rather than engaging the issues that they face. The San Andrés Accords was one example of how all political parties have rejected Indigenous demands. A problem with the capitalistic system is that it is based on resource extraction rather than helping people. We all have to do our own little bit to achieve a solution.