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Mexico

The wind from the southeast

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Seven years ago, the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas began. On Sunday March 10th they concluded their march "for indigenous dignity" in Mexico City, where they are to open negotiations with the government of the new president, Vicente Fox.

[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/subcomandante_marcos-2.jpg] Subcomandante Marcos leaves Mexico City

On February 24, 2000 the delegation of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), composed of 19 comandantes, four sub-comandantes and sub-comandante Marcos set off on the "march for indigenous dignity" - the most significant social mobilization in the modern history of our country. Tens of thousands of Mexicans lined the roads, the squares and the streets to welcome and salute the Zapatistas, symbols of rebellion in a country whose history is full of acts of rebellion.

The Zapatistas have engaged in a dialogue with the other indigenous peoples of Mexico, with the workers and peasants, and above all, with the youth who are the heart and soul of these mobilizations. It is all the more important given that during the recent elections the immense majority of youth voted for the new president, Vicente Fox. The media have been astonished by the success of the march, as have the layer of pro-state organic intellectuals who had told us incessantly that the Zapatista phenomenon was in serious decline.

They failed to see that in the course of the last seven years the EZLN has drawn very close links with that part of Mexico which does not feel itself to be represented by the traditional political system or which, while supporting a political party, in particular the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), understood the process of political participation as something which goes further than representative democracy.

Two legitimacies confront each other in Mexico today: that of Vicente Fox, who has succeed in profiting from the social discontent produced by 70 years of domination of the single party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), and who wishes to oversee the constitution of a new ruling "political class", where the bourgeoisie not only rules but also governs; and the legitimacy of the EZLN and the indigenous peoples in struggle, the only sector never domesticated by the old Mexican political regime.

After having vainly attempted initially to throw some spanners in the wheels, the government now claims now to support the rising wave of mobilization in the hope of profiting from it. The EZLN represents the only political force that can tell Fox that he enjoys no credibility among the indigenous peoples and that the Zapatistas are the most resolute adversaries of his Puebla-Panama plan.

The confrontation of these two legitimacies is beginning to affect the social climate. Employers, some of whom have made declarations favourable to the recognition of indigenous rights, are very concerned with the development of this march, which crystallizes the unity of Mexico's poor - official statistics estimate them at 71 million, out of a total population of 100 million - and dangerously threatens the stability of the nation.

The goal of the Zapatista march is to gain the constitutional recognition of the rights of the 15 million Mexicans who form the indigenous peoples. While they have constituted the material and spiritual base which allowed the foundation of the Republic, they have never been considered as bearers of rights, nor recognized in their culture, their forms of social organization, their specific jurisdictions, or their languages; in a word, they have never seen their right to autonomy recognized and this has been the political cause of the some 200 uprisings which have marked the history of the indigenous peoples of this country.

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The success of this march shows also that the ideas of the left remain capable of gaining mass social support, on the condition that they remain independent of the regime and its mechanisms of control. The defeat suffered by the Mexican left until the appearance of the EZLN stems from the way in which the regime has succeeded, through a generalized corruption, of emptying the plebeian and emancipatory discourse of socialism of all legitimacy. It is not for nothing that the Zapatistas stress that it was the privatisation of agriculture carried out by Salinas de Gortari, with the support of a good part of the Mexican left, which played a key role in the decision to organize the uprising of January 1994.

It can be said without exaggeration that the future of the country and the left is at stake in this massive mobilization of the poor of Mexico. Beyond it remains to analyse the importance of this march at the level of the living forces of the left on the international scale.