

Campesino and Indigenous Social Organizations Facing Democratic Transition in Mexico, 1938–2006

by

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The relations between Mexican campesino and indigenous organizations, on the one hand, and political parties and the state, on the other, have been characterized by a shift associated with the crisis of corporatist representation and the transition to democracy from a “political” to a “social-political” or a “social” approach. In the political framework, organizations are subordinated to political parties, whereas in the social-political framework both organizations and political parties enjoy autonomy of action and in the social framework only the action of organized civil society is the bearer of change. During the period of transition to democracy, organizations of the first two frameworks chose to formulate their demands and activities within the representative democratic system, while those of the third framework pursued the design of a new society and disavowed the existing political system. While the latter do not lack for arguments in support of their rejection of party politics, they fail to take into account that their survival depends on the existence of a democratic system, and their dismissal of opportunities to create institutions within the system brings them into conflict with other progressive forces.

Keywords: Social organizations, Corporatism, Political transition, Political parties

In this essay we analyze the relations established between Mexican campesino and indigenous organizations, on the one hand, and political parties and the state, on the other. In the past this relationship took place in institutional settings where the participation and representation of social organizations were largely controlled by the state through its official party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party—PRI). It was a typical case of “state corporatism,” in the phrase of Phillippe Schmitter (1974). During the 1990s, as part of the transition to democracy, new social organizations gained relevance, inaugurating new forms of social and political participation. Some of these had emerged in earlier decades as part of the struggle against state corporatism, while others were formed in the 1990s in reaction to economic reforms and to the democratic transition itself.

While it was difficult for social organizations to escape government political control in the state-corporatist era, they later developed some level of organizational independence and political autonomy versus the state. Seeking new channels of negotiation and participation for the expression of their

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demands, they began to develop various forms of political expression and novel alliances in the national Congress and to entrust their political representation to political parties. This organizing process reached its climax in late 2002 with the important social movement *El Campo No Aguanta Más*, which questioned the neoliberal model applied to the countryside.

Some years before, as a result of the indigenous uprising led by the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation—EZLN) in December 1994, a new strategy arose at the opposite end of the spectrum that rejected any and all relationships with political parties, considering them too invested in the pursuit of power within the dominant system to change the system's structures of domination. Unlike that of the revolutionary organizations of yesteryear, which considered the seizure of power as the only route to societal change, the new strategy consisted of building an "antipower" to transform the country—if not the world—through organized civil society, without attempting to overthrow the economically dominant groups as a precondition for social transformation. It sought to dissolve power through the exercise of new forms of organization and new everyday social practices (Holloway, 2002). The most representative organization of this sort is undoubtedly the EZLN itself, although there are many less well-known local and regional organizations in the same vein.

To analyze these various modes of organization and strategies of social and political struggle, we make use of Manuel Antonio Garretón's concept of "societal framework" (*matriz de sociedad*), which is derived from the relationship between social organizations, political parties, and the state in a given society. This concept invokes the relationship between the state, the "system of representation," defined as "the moment of aggregation of general and political demands" from social actors, and the socioeconomic and cultural base of those actors (Garretón, 2002: 9). Adapting this model to the Mexican case, we propose the existence of three organizational frameworks that occurred in distinct stages of national political life, culminating in the current stage of representative democracy.

In the first framework, which we call the *political*, social organizations focus their strategies and actions on the political realm and develop them through political parties. They see their goal of social change as realizable only through existing parties. In the case of PRI corporatism, in which the official party was the principal conduit of communication between social organizations and the state, this model included the state itself. In this framework some social organizations may be tied to political parties that are not in power, but the process of participation, representation, and negotiation is the same.

The second framework, which developed in the context of the democratic transition, is *social-political*, and here the existence of social organizations depends upon their own power and initiative while their political projection occurs in alliance with political parties but with varying degrees of independence from the political realm. In this stage, participation and representation are in the hands of the social organization, while political negotiation with the state is shared with political parties.

Lastly, in the *social* framework, social organizations restrict their scope of action to civil society and reject any relationship with political parties and the established political system. In this stage, participation, representation, and

negotiation are in the hands of the organizations themselves through the exercise of direct democracy.

Organizations in the political and social-political frameworks are by nature more visible than those in the social framework, since their linkage with political parties gives them a presence and influence at the regional and national levels. They interact with state institutions at the municipal, state, and federal levels and through the three branches of government (executive, legislative, and judicial). Those in the social framework, in contrast, usually limit their scope of action to the local and regional level, and they achieve greater visibility when they launch a campaign in support of significant economic, political, or social changes such as the March for Indigenous Dignity of 2001 and the Other Campaign of 2006, both called by the EZLN.

Even when it is possible to locate social organizations predominantly in one or another framework, they can change their relationships with parties and with the political-institutional system according to the situation, in effect joining another framework. This permeability is especially pronounced for organizations in the social-political framework, precisely because of its location between the conceptual poles.

In the following pages we analyze the evolution of Mexican rural society—which during the state-corporatist era was very much in the political framework—toward a more complex situation with the development of the social-political and social frameworks during the era of democratic transition. We divide the analysis into three periods: PRI domination, from 1938 to 1988; democratic transition, from 1988 to 2000; and, since 2000, a democratic political system with routine changes of the party in power. These two latter periods coincide with structural economic reforms and the struggle of indigenous and campesino organizations to modify the neoliberal policies that—in Mexico as in much of Latin America—accompanied transitions from authoritarian to democratic rule.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS DURING THE AGE OF PRI CORPORATISM, 1938–1988

The Mexican political system presided over by the PRI lasted as long as it did because of its effective political subordination of the popular classes, based on an economically, socially, and politically interventionist state and a dominant ideology of “revolutionary nationalism” that fostered political cohesion despite inherent class conflict. The model of the state as benefactor, able to represent the general interests of the nation while offering progress and well-being to the subaltern classes, was laid out in the 1917 Constitution and bolstered during the Lázaro Cárdenas administration (1934–1940); this model gave private enterprise acceptable levels of accumulation and guaranteed relative social peace in Mexico in the 1940s and subsequent decades against a Latin American backdrop of great social and political instability.

During this period social organizations linked to the official party, grouped into worker, campesino, and popular “sectors,” became “transmission lines” for government directives issued through the PRI (Garrido, 1984). These regional or national organizations developed strongly centralized mechanisms to

control popular representation and to negotiate with the state. The overall solidity of the regime was based upon a complex network of clientelist relationships through which the government granted privileges to certain economic groups and attended to selected popular demands on the basis of loyalty to the government and to the official party. State resources were distributed through organizations close to (and sometimes affiliated with) the PRI, and even opposition leaders were prone to co-optation. When this was not effective, the state resorted to violent repression of dissident groups and their leaders, but while repression was part of the regime's strategy for blocking the development of a democratic political system it was never its defining element.

In synthesis, the Mexican model of state corporatism was characterized by the state's creation of spaces for social representation and negotiation but also by clientelism, corruption, repression, and a façade of representative democracy (Mackinlay and Otero, 2004). The specific weights of these components varied considerably over the decades, but overall we can say (following the distinction made by Linz, 2000 [1970]) that the Mexican regime was authoritarian but not totalitarian and permitted limited dissent, considering it functional to the system.

CAMPESINO ORGANIZATIONS

The most important campesino organization during the PRI period was the Confederación Nacional Campesina (National Peasant Confederation—CNC), founded in 1938, during the Cárdenas administration. The CNC was composed largely of *ejitadarios*, beneficiaries of the social-property agrarian reform whose lands were removed from the capitalist market (Pérez Castañeda, 2002). This campesino *central* (so-called because of the concentration of decision-making power in the leadership) maintained a virtual organizational monopoly over Mexico's rural poor during the first 30 years of its existence, since it controlled access to land and to development funding. Through its hegemonic control over the governance of *ejidos* and rural communities, the CNC built an effective territorial structure of electoral mobilization and political control. It was firmly ensconced in the political framework, the Ministry of Agrarian Reform and other state agencies largely controlling its internal workings while its external projection was controlled by the PRI (Mackinlay, 1996).

From the 1940s on, other organizations began to challenge the CNC for control in specific regions: the Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México (General Union of Workers and Campesinos—UGOCM), founded in 1949, the Central Campesino Independiente (Independent Campesino Central—CCI), founded in 1963, and the Consejo Agrarista Mexicano (Mexican Agrarian Council—CAM), founded in 1970. These organizations were created out of independent social mobilizations of considerable importance and initially sought to exist on the margins of the corporatist state, but they were eventually co-opted by the government and ended up as obedient appendages of the official party (C. de Grammont, 1989).

The mid-1960s saw the beginnings of a profitability crisis in the campesino economy due in large part to post-Cárdenas policies that privileged capitalist

agriculture and relegated campesino production of staples like corn and beans to secondary importance. This crisis coincided with other factors such as the decline in the price of synthetic fibers, which drove down the price of competing natural products (cotton and henequen) that were important generators of rural income and employment. The end of the *bracero* agreement with the United States, which had permitted the legal migration of millions of rural workers, and the gradual elimination of agricultural lands susceptible of being distributed by the agrarian reform were further contributors to the rural crisis.

During the 1970s and early 1980s many parts of the country saw an unusual surge in rural mobilizations and land invasions led by unemployed farm workers and landless campesinos whose demands could not be channeled by the slow and bureaucratic official processes that had been the norm since the 1940s (Bartra, 1985). The official centrals found it harder to exercise political control and contain manifestations of discontent, and competing organizations developed under the ideological influences of Maoism and Guevarism. Several regional organizations, under the slogan "Today We Fight for Land and Tomorrow for Power," sought a new approach that would permit them to maintain their autonomy in dealing with the state. In 1979 they formed a "network," the Coordinadora Nacional Plan de Ayala (Plan de Ayala National Coordination—CNPA), named for Emiliano Zapata's agrarian manifesto of the revolutionary period. The CNPA defined itself as a grouping of independent organizations, thus emphasizing its desire to avoid co-optation by the corporatist regime. Its member organizations adopted a radical posture on the struggle for land that produced a state response of repression resulting in deaths and imprisonments that weakened them through the 1980s, although some member organizations were able to regroup (Flores, Paré, and Sarmiento, 1988; Robles and Moguel, 1990).

To relieve the rural crisis the administrations of Luis Echeverría (1970–1976) and José López Portillo (1976–1982) increased state investment in agriculture and tried to revitalize the campesino economy through the creation of new enterprises run by small producers, part of the "social sector" of the agrarian economy. A new type of political control emerged on the basis of these new structures, which existed alongside traditional ones (Rello, 1986). Some of these enterprises were created by the CNC and some by the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, but others were created by Maoist militants known as the "Mass Line," which advocated self-management for all entities of the social sector. In 1985 they formed the Unión Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas Autónomas (National Union of Autonomous Regional Campesino Organizations—UNORCA); they were "autonomous" in the sense that, unlike wholly independent organizations, they did not object in principle to working with the government or even with the PRI as long as they were not prevented from creating enterprises and organizations to represent their followers (Fox and Gordillo, 1991).

The genuine autonomy of UNORCA with respect to the state and the PRI is a matter of debate, since some of its militants were linked to state institutions (Pérez Castañeda, 2003), but it is clear that its member organizations did pursue self-management and "the appropriation of campesino surplus" by campesinos themselves as the programmatic base and unifying principle of

their campaigns (UNORCA, 1989). While some leaders did have ties to the PRI, others were linked to the Partido Mexicano de los Trabajadores (Mexican Workers' Party—PMT) and other leftist parties. UNORCA was an organization of the social-political framework, without the subordination that characterized those of the political framework. It is often difficult to establish clear boundaries between the frameworks, since some organizations affiliated with the "political" CNC were social-political but belonged to the CNC to gain access to the state apparatus and to development funding. There were also organizations that did not belong to the CNC but did belong to the PRI itself, such as Antorcha Campesina (Campesino Torch—AC), founded in 1975, and the Alianza Campesina del Noroeste (Campesino Alliance of the Northwest—ALCANO), founded in 1985, while the Movimiento Nacional de los 400 Pueblos (Four Hundred Towns National Movement—MN400P), founded in 1974, belonged to neither the CNC nor to the PRI but was for many years allied with both.

During the second half of the 1980s UNORCA became the axis of numerous organizations, both independent and CNC-related. Its principal demand, backed by mobilizations, was the increase in minimum guaranteed prices for basic crops (including corn, wheat, beans, sorghum, soybeans, rice, and oats) set by the Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares (CONASUPO), the giant quasi-state body that regulated the market for staples. UNORCA also led important campaigns to secure campesino access to land (Encinas et al., 1995: 4). The consolidation of campesino organizations outside of traditional corporatist relationships occurred in the context of the beginnings of the transition to democracy symbolized by the political reform of 1979 that permitted the creation of new political parties. The strengthening of these organizations went hand in hand with the weakening of state corporatism as a model of social representation, a process hastened by its marked authoritarianism, its generalized corruption, and its excessive concentration of decision-making power in the hands of a few.

Other important social organizations of the era included the Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos (Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Campesinos—CIOAC), founded in 1975 as a fragment of the CCI but later identified with the Mexican Communist Party. The CIOAC called itself an independent organization, but with the strengthening of its campesino enterprises it opted in the early 1990s to follow in the footsteps of UNORCA and deal "autonomously" with the state. Other organizations of this sort included the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores Agrícolas (National Union of Agricultural Workers—UNTA), founded in 1978, the Coalición de Organizaciones Democráticas, Urbanas y Campesinas (Coalition of Democratic, Urban, and Campesino Organizations—CODUC), founded in 1986, the Central Campesina Cardenista (Cardenist Campesino Central—CCC), founded in 1988, and the Unión General Obrera, Campesina y Popular (General Workers', Campesino, and Popular Union—UGOCP), founded in 1986. The first three were originally linked to the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (Socialist Workers' Party—PST), but internal disputes and the dissolution of the party gave them an independent dynamic; the UGOCP was formed by activists from various leftist currents, and all four belonged to the social-political framework as defined above.

While social-political organizations had achieved considerable relevance by the late 1980s, the CNC managed to preserve a considerably high level of political control over the rural population because of its close ties to the PRI, which gave it a unique ability to access state programs and funding, and the genuine allegiance it commanded from the rural Mexicans who received land and social benefits through its activities (Mackinlay, 1996). The framework we are calling the “political” was able to maintain its hegemonic position through the end of the 1980s.

INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Mexico’s agrarian reform was uninterested in restitution or confirmation of the ancestral rights of indigenous communities to land and water. These communities received land in the form of ejidos, a new organizational form created out of the division of large estates (Mackinlay, 1991). This was part of the assimilationist policy of the Mexican postrevolutionary state, which sought to integrate indigenous groups into a mestizo national culture. Indigenous groups were obliged to deal with campesino centrals to solve their land problems, and this contributed to the fragmentation of their territories and of their ethnic identity, since their rights as indigenous people were not specifically recognized (López Bárcenas, 2004).

Regional indigenous organizations developed in various parts of the country only in the 1970s. Many were created by the national government itself, while others were created by activists and by nongovernmental organizations that defended indigenous rights. These new organizations made specifically indigenous rather than generically campesino demands about rural issues, culture (bilingual and bicultural education and the protection of traditional practices), labor (working conditions and just wages for rural migrant workers), politics (promotion of indigenous participation in ejidos and municipalities), and human rights (Mejía and Sarmiento, 1987). In the early 1980s various indigenous organizations, both official and unofficial, created the Coordinadora Nacional de Pueblos Indígenas (National Coordinator of Indigenous Peoples—CNPI), allied with the CNPA, which had shown a concern for the indigenous question and supported indigenous campaigns (Harvey, 2000). And toward the end of the decade, with the growth of the Frente Independiente de Pueblos Indios (Independent Indigenous Peoples’ Front—FIPI), the indigenous movement began to take on a distinct identity, with a proposal for regional identity modeled on the Sandinista autonomy plan for the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua (Ruiz, 1994).

SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS OF THE ERA OF NEOLIBERAL REFORMS AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION, 1988–2000

STRUCTURAL CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON CAMPESINO ORGANIZATIONS

In December 1988 the PRI’s candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari assumed the presidency amidst serious doubts as to the legitimacy of his electoral victory. In search of alliances, Salinas promoted the creation of the Congreso

Agrario Permanente (Permanent Agrarian Congress—CAP) in 1989 with organizations of both the political and the social-political framework. For the first time, a PRI regime accepted non-PRI-affiliated organizations, including some associated with opposition parties, as valid interlocuters; for this reason some writers consider the initiative “neocorporatist” (Bartra, 1991; Rojas, 1998). At the very least, the CAP did serve to revitalize the state’s corporatist control.

The creation of the CAP was made possible by the close relationship that Salinas had established with leaders and intellectuals from UNORCA, who worked with his presidential campaign and then were put in charge of the CNC with the task of restructuring it along the lines of the autonomous organizations. Other allies were named to important posts in the Ministry of Agriculture, with the mandate to strengthen campesino enterprises and to transfer some state enterprises to them in the context of privatization. The CAP was thus able to group together most of the country’s national-level campesino organizations, both those of a CNC-style “officialist” nature (CCI, CAM, UGOCM, MN400P) and those of the “autonomist” or “independent” variety (UNORCA, CIOAC, CODUC, UGOCP, CCC, ALCANO, UNTA) (Moguel, Botey, and Hernández, 1992).

The results, however, were not what the organizations expected. The state enterprises ceded to campesino organizations were generally of lesser importance, while the private sector ended up with the more strategic and profitable ones (de la Fuente and Mackinlay, 1994). Campesinos did receive financial support for new production, but only on a small scale. Although the government used UNORCA’s leadership to set up this funding mechanism, it still privileged the CNC, which continued to receive the larger share of state resources (Mackinlay, 1996).

In 1991, after the Salinas administration had consolidated its control and legitimacy, it introduced (without consulting the CAP) the most extensive legal modifications to the agrarian system since the Constitution of 1917. The reforms to Article 27 and then in 1992–1993 to the body of agrarian legislation put an end to the distribution of lands, privatized rural social property, and incorporated land and natural resources (including forests, fisheries, mining, and water) into the capitalist market (Mackinlay and de la Fuente, 1996). These legal reforms, along with the elimination of most guaranteed minimum prices for grains and other staples and the privatization of rural state enterprises, laid the bases for the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and the United States (C. de Grammont, 1995a; 1995b; González, 2004 [1994]).

Trade liberalization and other neoliberal policies impacted not only small campesino producers but also many farming and ranching enterprises that had prospered because of tariff protection and other policies in place since the 1940s. During the process of neoliberal restructuring many enterprises founded during the era of the “welfare state” disappeared or were greatly diminished in importance.¹ Almost all analysts agree that campesino and smaller commercial enterprises geared toward the domestic market were the big losers under NAFTA. The treaty’s path to complete elimination of tariffs covered even products of great traditional importance such as corn and beans, although these and a few other products enjoyed an extended 15-year process

of gradual tariff reduction. Although many observers warned that the treaty would be harmful to most rural producers, it was approved without significant campesino opposition thanks to the state's renewed corporatist control through the CAP.

As a result of their failure to stop changes in the land law and their inability to exempt traditional products from NAFTA's trade liberalization, the organizations that made up the CAP entered a period of profound crisis during the second half of the Salinas years (1991–1994). Salinas's successor, Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000), only strengthened the neoliberal grip on economic policy, while the sudden peso devaluation of December 1994 meant that fewer state resources were available for rural development.

The Zedillo administration began an important process of administrative decentralization, including the transfer of funds to state governments that, although necessary, ended up further marginalizing social organizations that had negotiated with the national government as state governors favored their local allies (AMUCSS et al., 1998; 1999). Something similar occurred with anti-poverty programs as the government stopped dealing with social organizations (which, ironically, it considered too "corporatist") in favor of direct outreach to individuals and groups at the local level (Hernández, 1994). The CAP lost all of its political relevance even as it continued to exist as a bureaucratic apparatus funded by the government in implicit exchange for not mobilizing its member organizations against government policies.

During the 1990s the Mexican state redefined its rural alliances in terms of organizations' support for policies that favored large-scale agricultural and agroindustrial enterprises. These policies harmed not only campesino producers but also the small and medium-sized enterprises that had been a bulwark of the PRI regime and were now encountering serious obstacles to getting loans or other elements necessary for their survival (C. de Grammont, 2001). Along with this change came the rise of the Consejo Nacional Agropecuario (National Agricultural Council—CNA), the representative of the largest producers and processors, to a position of dominant influence.

NEW ACTORS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE POLITICAL GAME

During this period a new generation of organizations arose not in the context of the welfare state but rather under the shadow of privatization and the crisis brought on by the neoliberal model. For instance, the Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Cafetaleras (National Coordinator of Coffee-Growers' Organizations—CNOC) was founded in 1989 by small producers (both indigenous and nonindigenous) as a result of the collapse of international coffee prices and the dismantling of the state enterprise Instituto Mexicano del Café (Mexican Coffee Institute—INMECAFE); on the state level, the Coordinadora Estatal de Productores Cafetaleros de Oaxaca (Oaxaca State Coordinator of Coffee Producers—CEPCO) was founded in 1990 by largely indigenous producers of that state and became a pioneer in the marketing of organic coffee beans, while the Frente Democrático Campesino de Chihuahua (Campesino Democratic Front of Chihuahua—FDC) was founded in 1993 by small and medium-sized producers impacted by the elimination of price

guarantees. El Barzón, also founded in 1993, was created with the specific goal of defending heavily indebted small cultivators. These organizations and others in many states and specific sectors were outside the official control of the state through the CAP.

In mid-1993, amidst the first signs of the viability crisis brought on by neoliberal reforms in the countryside, El Barzón spearheaded a protest movement composed of producers who had depended upon domestic market and the benefits of tariff protection and state funding. This new social movement understood the possibilities of the democratic transition and focused its efforts on the national Congress, where it promoted a bill to resolve bad debts, and the Supreme Court, where it filed legal challenges to bank privatization and the treatment of delinquent payments. During the rest of the 1990s El Barzón became the most important protagonist in the struggles of rural producers (C. de Grammont, 2001).

During these years new organizations were created by campesino enterprises in specific sectors, such as the Asociación Mexicana de Uniones de Crédito del Sector Social (Mexican Association of Social-Sector Credit Unions—AMUCSS), founded in 1992, which promoted grassroots credit and savings programs; the Asociación Nacional de Empresas Comercializadoras Campesinas (National Association of Campesino Commercial Enterprises—ANEC), founded in 1995, dedicated to the marketing of grains and oil crops; and the Unión Nacional de Organizaciones de Forestería Comunal (National Union of Communal Forestry Organizations—UNOFOC), founded in 1993, and the Red Mexicana de Organismos Campesinos Forestales (Mexican Network of Campesino Forestry Organizations—Red MOCAF), founded in 1994. These organizations, along with the CNOC, launched a media campaign in 1997–1999 against neoliberal reforms and the precarious situation they created for small and medium-sized producers, both individual and collective (e.g., ejidos). For three years they proposed an alternative rural development budget to the Congress; the CAP did not support their efforts, and only one of its component organizations, UNORCA, did so for two of the three years (AMUCSS et al., 1998; 1999).

With the opening of a new “parliamentary” front, El Barzón and allied groups used demonstrations as well as lobbying to convey their demands. This strategy culminated in large rallies in Mexico City and other cities on April 10, 2000, the anniversary of the killing of Emiliano Zapata. El Barzón, the Unión Campesina Democrática (Campesino Democratic Union—UCD), the Asociación Nacional de Ganaderos Lecheros (National Association of Dairyfarmers), and other rural organizations also formed the Frente Nacional en Defensa del Campo Mexicano (National Front in Defense of the Mexican Countryside—FNDCM) (Mackinlay, 2004).

The development of an increasingly pluralistic political system opened the door for a wider range of social actors to establish new relationships with political parties with the goal of influencing decision making at all levels, from municipalities to state legislatures and then to the national Congress. A group of social-political organizations advocated a shift from social and economic mobilization to an approach that included direct participation in party politics; its leaders began to negotiate for space (and positions) in political parties and to participate in election campaigns at all three levels. At the same time

these organizations emphasized the defense of their autonomy versus the state and political parties and the freedom of individual members to vote according to their preferences.

Since the conservative Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party—PAN) was seen by campesino organizations as a leading supporter of neoliberalism, it was the leftist Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution—PRD) that won the allegiance of most campesino leaders during the late 1990s. While the majority of UNORCA's leaders (who were traditionally close to the PRI) shifted to the PRD and to the Partido del Trabajo (Labor Party—PT), the CNPA's leadership largely favored the PT while El Barzón (which initially had militants in the PRI as well as the PAN) favored the PRD, as did the UCD, which had been identified with that party from its origins. While the leaders of several other organizations (CCC, CODUC, UNTA) also began to participate in PRD activities, the CIOAC's leaders moved away from that party in favor of new political options such as México Posible (C. de Grammont, 2001; Ramírez Cuevas, 2003: 6–7).

This emphasis on party politics by the leaders of social organizations distanced them from the everyday management of those organizations, and the temporary strengthening of their political influence was accompanied by a longer-term weakening of their internal structure and organizational capacity. In the official sector there were some minor ruptures with the PRI such as the departure of MN400P from the CAP and the decision by some members of ALCANO to align themselves with the PRD, but most organizations maintained their affiliation with the governing party. Party discipline was, however, harder to maintain in a context of democratization, and even in Congress some campesino legislators from the PRI voted with opposition parties on rural issues (Mackinlay, 2004: 332).

THE INDIGENOUS MOVEMENT AND THE RISE OF THE EZLN IN THE 1990s

The launching in the mid-1980s of the preparatory commission for the 1992 quinqucentenary of the "Encounter of Two Worlds" was not only the occasion for new reflections on the indigenous question but also an impulse toward new organizing by indigenous peoples that included conferences, mobilizations, marches, demonstrations, and the formulation of new demands. Sometimes even commemorative events turned into protests against the forgetting of the past and against current discrimination.

In Mexico as in most countries of Latin America, neither the Constitution nor the law fully recognized indigenous people as a constitutive part of the national state. In 1992 the Salinas administration introduced a reform to Article 4 of the Constitution recognizing the "pluricultural composition [of the Mexican nation] founded originally upon its indigenous peoples" (DOF, 1992). This was, however, a purely symbolic statement without concrete effects and without any statutory implementation (Pérez Ruiz, 2000). After the 1992 anniversary, indigenous mobilization declined until the EZLN came on the scene in Chiapas on New Year's Day 1994.

The EZLN was born as a guerrilla movement that sought to overthrow the government through armed struggle, but it soon became a social movement

in opposition to neoliberalism and in support of indigenous rights and well-being. With the passage of the amnesty law to pacify Chiapas later in 1994, the EZLN became an even wider social movement that acted openly within civil society even as its military wing continued clandestinely. The Zapatistas revitalized the national indigenous movement both organizationally, along the model developed in Chiapas to defend their sympathizers against the government offensive, and programmatically, via the meetings they organized about the concept of indigenous autonomy.

It was the autonomy question that soon provoked disagreement in the indigenous movement, between the *Asamblea Nacional Plural por la Autonomía* (Plural National Assembly for Autonomy—ANIPA) and the *Congreso Nacional Indígena* (National Indigenous Congress—CNI), both founded shortly after the EZLN's appearance. While the ANIPA advocated regional autonomy, the CNI adopted the EZLN's more radical idea of municipal and community autonomy. In organizational terms, the ANIPA embraced a more centralized model while the CNI was more a space for coordination and discussion along the lines of the CNPA and UNORCA in the 1980s. It was the difference between a front and a network "devoid of social or political hierarchy" (López Bárcenas, 2004: 45).

In 1996, after long negotiations, the EZLN and a representative of the Zedillo administration signed the San Andrés Larráinzar Agreement, which recognized indigenous autonomy. The agreement was codified by the Indigenous Rights and Culture Law drafted by the *Comisión de la Concordia y la Pacificación* (Commission for Concord and Pacification—COCOPA), a multiparty commission of the lower house of Congress, but the government then declined to submit the bill for legislative approval.

Initially the EZLN showed interest in the electoral arena as part of its overall strategy, even supporting the PRD's candidate in the Chiapas gubernatorial elections of 1994, but the following year it rejected party politics and decided not to participate in elections in the territories where it exercised control or influence (Viqueira and Sonnleitner, 2000). The government's abandonment of the COCOPA bill deepened the EZLN's estrangement from institutional politics. The EZLN (and the CNI, with which it was allied) thereby eschewed the social-political framework in favor of a purely, even archetypically, social one. Its alternative proposal was to construct autonomy through community and municipal self-government via direct democracy, outside the realms of party politics and the state's administrative structure. During the Zedillo years neo-Zapatistas created *de facto* autonomous municipalities throughout the country whose leaders were directly elected by base-level supporters and functioned as a kind of parallel authority.

With the consolidation of the EZLN, other social organizations that had traditionally distrusted electoral politics acquired an ideological basis for their functioning at the margins of the political system, but some indigenous organizations disagreed with this point of view and continued to operate within the electoral process at various levels. This was the case with the ANIPA, a social-political organization whose more moderate autonomy project was acceptable to the government and that agreed to participate in the Vicente Fox administration elected in 2000.

CAMPESINO ORGANIZATIONS IN THE DEMOCRATIC ERA (2000 TO THE PRESENT)

The defeat of the PRI in 2000 and Fox's victory as the PAN candidate marked the start of a new era in Mexico's political history not only because of the arrival of a new governing party after 70 years of PRI monopoly but also (and more important) because the new multiparty environment implied a clear reduction of the quasi-absolute powers of the presidency. The new model was that of a "delimited" presidency, without some of the powers and attributions it had previously enjoyed (Merino, 2003). At the same time, the electorate established a three-way tie in the legislature between the PAN, the PRI, and the PRD, which required alliances in order to accomplish anything. This tie was ratified in the 2003 mid-term elections for part of the lower house of Congress and in the presidential elections of 2006.

The PRI's departure from power provoked significant changes in the party, especially given the lack of a presidential figure that could function as referee and maximum authority at all levels. There were bitter internal struggles for control of its various organizations and factions, even as some campesino members departed for the PAN, PRD, and other parties. But despite it all, the CNC held its place as the most important campesino organization because of its territorial coverage, its local presence, and the support of the PRI governors who were still in power in more than half of Mexico's states. In its new opposition role the CNC adopted a critical posture toward the Fox administration's economic policies and toward NAFTA, which it had unconditionally supported under the previous two PRI administrations.

The CNC began to break with old practices, permitting—for the first time in its history—the reelection of its national leader, whose term was only three years. This change in the statutes provoked the departure of a small group of dissident members. In its new declaration of principles the CNC ratified its collective allegiance to the PRI, although it declared itself autonomous "in everything having to do with the specific interests of campesinos" (CNC, 2001: 13). There were similar tensions in other organizations, though with varying outcomes. The Confederación Nacional de Propietarios Rurales (National Confederation of Rural Property Owners—CNPR), for example, abolished the requirement that members belong to a political party, while the Consejo Nacional de Sociedades y Unidades con Campesinos y Colonos (National Council of Societies and Units with Campesinos and Colonos—CONSUC) attempted to create a party of its own. In the absence of a PRI president, and especially in states where the governor was not from that party, there have been more base-level initiatives and more diverse party alliances, to the point that we can speak of a transition from the political to a more social-political framework.

The EZLN took advantage of the democratizing moment in March 2001, when it organized a march to Mexico City to demand the passage of the COCOPA bill, which had been blocked since 1996. A bus caravan throughout the country, whose stops became the setting of large-scale popular meetings and demonstrations in sympathy with the Zapatistas, focused the country's attention once more on indigenous concerns. One of the culminating points of this March for Indigenous Dignity was the third congress of the CNI in Nurío

(Michoacán), with the participation of 3,400 delegates representing 41 of Mexico's 56 indigenous groups (EZLN, 2001).

Once the caravan reached Mexico City, the national Congress had no choice but to receive the EZLN's leadership and hear its demands. Shortly after their historic speeches (with their faces covered, per Zapatista practice), the leaders returned to Chiapas. The lower house approved the COCOPA bill, but the Senate—on the PAN's initiative but supported by the other two parties—made significant changes. While the law as approved recognized some indigenous demands, it imposed substantial restrictions on the exercise of autonomy. The law was rejected by the EZLN, the CNI, the PRD's own national executive committee, and leftist groups in general, creating a new impasse not just for the autonomy issue but for the EZLN's integration into national political life.

On the campesino side the Ministry of Agriculture, in keeping with the Fox administration's promise to eliminate PRI corporatism, withdrew financial support from the CAP's member organizations and established an even more exclusive line of communication with the CNA and other organizations of an agroindustrial character such as the Fundación Mexicana de Desarrollo Rural (Mexican Foundation for Rural Development—FMDR). The government also relegated the traditional PRI-affiliated groupings of small and medium-sized rural enterprises such as the CNPR and the once-powerful Confederación Nacional Ganadera (National Cattlemen's Confederation—CNG) to a secondary position.

In 2001 the CAP organized protests by its members against the government's decision to fight inflation by permitting the importation of staple products such as corn, beans, and soybeans beyond the levels agreed to under NAFTA; the Ministry of Agriculture restored funding to the CAP's organizations to pacify them but made no changes in its economic policies. It also accepted the CAP once more as a valid interlocutor for rural producers (Hernández, 2001). This partial reversal did not slow the intense mobilization that had been brewing outside of the CAP since 2000 and had manifested itself in increasingly frequent takeovers of government offices, blockages of highways, and demonstrations at customs posts on the Mexico–United States border. By this point the new organizations that had developed outside of the CAP had become more representative and better able to mobilize support. The government's steadfast refusal to honor the claims of rural producers impacted by free trade and the impending total removal of state controls for agricultural products on January 1, 2004, provoked the creation of the most important new grouping of organizations since the 1970s and 1980s.

On November 2, 2002, 12 organizations² published a manifesto in the Mexican press entitled "The Mexican Countryside Can Take No More," and it attracted much attention. A month later, the same organizations announced a series of mobilizations, joined by El Barzón and UNTA, whose success led to the calling of an important campesino march in Mexico City on January 31, 2003. For its part the CNC attempted direct negotiations with the government but ended up joining the march, along with the CAP. Shortly after the march the lower house of Congress approved a major increase in rural funding. It is noteworthy that this social movement, which came to be known as the *Movimiento El Campo No Aguanta Más* (The Countryside Can Take No More Movement—MCNAM) after the original manifesto, solicited support from the

EZLN and the CNI but did not get it, even though it incorporated into its demands the fulfillment of the San Andrés Larráinzar Agreement.

The intense mobilizations in the capital city and elsewhere in the country and their extensive media coverage focused the attention of Mexican society on the crisis of rural life, just as the EZLN uprising had brought attention to the indigenous question. The government was obliged to hear the demands of the countryside. To reduce the political pressure on the government, throughout February 2003 the Ministry of Agriculture organized roundtables called the “Dialogue for a National Accord on Rural Policy,” which attracted over 2,000 submissions from rural organizations of all sorts, public officials, and academics. The process culminated on April 28 with the signing of the *Acuerdo Nacional para el Campo* (National Accord for the Countryside—ANC) (Cuadernos Agrarios, 2003). This imprecise and sometimes confusing document committed the government, among other things, to a “wide-ranging evaluation of the impacts” of NAFTA, with the goal of justifying an eventual revision of the treaty; the passage of a national law on agricultural planning and food security; a change in the operation of government programs to make them more accessible to campesinos; a reversal of the emphasis on aid to more privileged producers; and an increase in the budget for the rural sector. The accord also covered revisions to the land laws and the establishment of a land bank to resolve long-standing agrarian conflicts, and other social programs (SAGARPA, 2003).

Although all of the organizations noted the limitations of what was included in the accords, some decided to sign while others that had participated in the negotiations (UNORCA, FDC, and UNOFOC) did not. Although the organizations had resolved that disagreements about whether to sign the agreement would not impact the unity of the movement, in October 2003 the CNC and the CAP agreed to changes in the supervisory mechanisms of the accords that strengthened the hand of the government, and as a result UNORCA left the CAP while CODUC and UNTA divided over the changes. These disputes split the movement into two blocs, one that sought overall changes to agrarian policy and to the development model and another (identified with the CNC and its allies within the CAP) that sought the resolution of individual demands, the increase of certain subsidies and price supports, and a renewed role as interlocutor of the government.

The Ministry of Agriculture naturally sought to reinforce the bloc that was more inclined to cooperate with the government, and it directed resources to new campesino organizations linked to the PAN that that party had begun to build in states that it governed with an eye to the presidential elections of 2006. This support quickly strengthened some organizations, such as the *Unión Integradora de Organizaciones Solidarias y de Economía Social* (Integrating Union of Solidary and Social Economic Organizations—UNIMOS), known as the “blue CNC” after the PAN’s party color (*Proceso*, June 25, 2006). These organizations have received little scholarly attention, but their essentially clientelist orientation places them squarely in the political framework—a model that PAN as a longtime opposition party ostensibly sought to leave behind.

With the new relevance of party politics many skilled advisers had abandoned social organizations for party work, leaving these organizations less

able to participate effectively in the National Accord's follow-up negotiations and allocation of resources. The Ministry of Agriculture put obstacles in the way of the MCNAM's access to promised funding, arguing that it was necessary to establish clear rules to guarantee the effective operation of projects and to avoid the abuses of the old "discretionary" use of public funds—and, to be sure, many organizations did keep deficient books and permitted irregularities in project management. But the government clearly was interested in channeling resources to its new allies while restricting support for organizations with more far-ranging demands. After months of disappointment and conflict the MCNAM was dissolved, generating a process of political and strategic reevaluation in the Mexican campesino movement that continues to this day.

During the 2006 election campaign the EZLN maintained the line of criticism of political parties and elections announced in the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle in October 2005. In January 2006 the EZLN's neo-Zapatista allies launched what they called the Other Campaign, which sought to organize popular groups behind an alternative platform that rejected electoral politics and the capitalist system. Somewhat surprisingly, the campaign was especially virulent toward the PRD and its candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the most leftist of the three major-party candidates, calling him a *salinista* (follower of the PRI's former president Carlos Salinas), and its call for abstention undoubtedly cost López Obrador vital support. Meanwhile, some UGOCM and UNORCA leaders joined the PAN campaign, while one CODUC leader joined a nascent "Alternativa Socialdemócrata y Campesina."

CONCLUSIONS

Through the period under review we can distinguish three organizational frameworks in the Mexican countryside. The political framework corresponds to the period of state corporatism that sought to absorb the majority of organizations and to marginalize any that rejected the PRI's monopoly on power. The social-political and social frameworks emerged with corporatism's crisis of representation (although still within a welfare-state idiom) with the development of "independent" and "autonomist" currents within the campesino and indigenous movements. During the 1990s, a period of globalization and of democratic transition, organizations of the first two frameworks chose to formulate their demands and organizing activities within the representative democratic system, while those of the third framework pursued the design of a new society and disavowed the existing political system.

Whereas in other countries, notably Canada and the United States, rural organizations were able to organize in order to influence the negotiation of trade agreements, in Mexico the corporatist system was able to neutralize them until after NAFTA and other significant legislation was in place. Only nine years later, with the ruin of many important sectors of rural production and with further democratization, did concerted rural opposition emerge. Initially the Fox administration sought to remove "corporatist" social organizations from the political scene, but after encountering resistance it reestablished channels of negotiation and made significant concessions. However,

the organizations that had joined forces to negotiate the National Accord for the Countryside were unable to take advantage of the moment, and disputes within the MCNAM made it possible for the government to retake the initiative, renege on agreements, and face subsequent elections with the benefit of a divided and demoralized campesino movement. This division was about real differences in goals and strategies, but it was also a simple power struggle about who should enjoy the privileged position of interlocutor with the government—especially since even today there are organizations with power concentrated in a few and opaque financial dealings. (This happens much less among organizations in the social framework, whose rejection of state institutions and party politics cuts them off from public resources.)

While some organizations in the political framework are in transition to a social-political model in an effort to adapt to the new reality of multiparty politics, existing social-political organizations are facing the need to deepen internal democracy and become more accountable. They must also combat electoral opportunism, which threatens to ignore the interests of their members in favor of the personal interests of the leadership. As for organizations in the social framework, while they do not lack for arguments in support of their rejection of party politics, they fail to take into account that their very existence depends on the existence of a democratic system, with all of its imperfections. Their dismissal of important (if not always immediate) opportunities for creating institutions within the democratic-representative system brings them into conflict with other progressive forces. The past few years have evidenced not just differences but a genuine chasm between social-political and purely social organizations—not just simple disagreements between fraternal organizations but a political rupture that democracy itself makes it difficult to repair.

NOTES

1. This was the fate of the Confederación Nacional de la Pequeña Propiedad (National Confederation of Smallholders—CNPP), a PRI affiliate that was the political organ of private cultivators, which after the reforms was renamed the Confederación Nacional de Propietarios Rurales (National Confederation of Rural Property Owners—CNPR); the Confederación Nacional Ganadera (National Cattlemen's Confederation—CNG), a bulwark of PRI corporatism in the ranching sector, lost its organizational monopoly (Pérez Espejo, 1997). The previously powerful Confederación Nacional de Productores de Hortalizas (National Confederation of Vegetable Producers—CNPH) was dissolved after its sector was deregulated (González, 2004 [1994]; C. de Grammont, 1995a; Mackinlay, 2004).

2. AMUCSS, ANEC, CIOAC, CEPSCO, CODUC, CNOC, CNPA, FDC, FNDCM, Red MOCAF, UNOFOC, and UNORCA.

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