



NANCY DAVIES

**THE PEOPLE
DECIDE**

OAXACA'S POPULAR ASSEMBLY

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Preface

By Al Giordano

FOR FIVE MONTHS of 2006, from June 14 to November 25, Oaxaca City (and much of the southern Mexican state that bears the same name as its capital) was a “government-free zone.” This cultural and geographic pearl, cradle of the Zapotec and other ancient civilizations, was not governed from above, but rather self-governed by a popular assembly. In other words, the people managed their affairs without a bureaucracy or a state.

The state continued to exist, but in desperate exile: its hated and illegitimate governor, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, was in literal hiding—persona non grata in his own fiefdom—along with many of his machine’s local political bosses. The thuggish police forces that had long enforced the repressive regime remained out of uniform and in the shadows. They tried daily to reassert “authority” through remote-control terror: kidnappings of community leaders, torture, twenty-six assassinations, and more than five hundred arrests. But the capital, other cities and regions, and the roads that connect them were in the hands of those that work them. Oaxaca became a model for methods of supplanting an undemocratic government and a vision for what authentic democracy can be.

Once the populace had taken control of the capital, the Mexican national news media and international wire services discovered a ma-

for story—and proceeded to distort it beyond recognition. Breathless media reports flashed violent images and tales of the physical fight. Heavily armed state (and later, federal) police, in tandem with pro-government paramilitary squads, flailed haplessly but with extreme violence against the 153-day popular occupation. They could not govern, so they rioted instead. The commercial media portrayed these battles in the inverse: as if the self-governing public was the repressor and the clandestine state-in-exile the victim.

The daily news from Oaxaca during 2006 predictably read and sounded more like play-by-play sports coverage than the chronicle of a political struggle with historic consequences. Such sensationalism from the commercial media barely raises an eyebrow anymore. It is business as usual. Yet even much of the alternative press, sympathetic with the revolt, played a knee-jerk role. It had its eyes and cameras focused up above it on the scoreboard: the casualties on each side; the yards of turf held, lost, and regained in street battles; the weapons (bullets and canisters versus hand tools and bottle rockets); the instant replays of heroic and tragic moments “from the barricades.”

Lost in most reports were the reasons for the conflict: the legitimate grievances of a majority with such radical demands as freedom, justice, and democracy.

The daily scoreboard was compelling on its own, at least in terms of entertainment and media ratings, but it shed more heat than light. If not for Nancy Davies and a very few other authentic journalists, the story would have begun and ended as that: another vague conflict between “leftists” and “government” that surfaces from time to time in the national and international press, only to fade later into obscurity.

Some historians titled the occupation “the Oaxaca Commune,” harkening to fifty days in Paris in 1871 when French workers instituted their own government in that capital city. In fact, the Oaxaca occupation lasted more than three times as long as the Paris Commune, an amazing feat in an age when, according to the conventional wisdom, authentic revolutions are *passé* and no longer possible.

The unique history of Oaxaca in 2006 carries the answers to two

questions that are vital to change agents, community organizers, students of democracy, and revolutionaries everywhere:

1. What is it that occurred in Oaxaca to inspire everyday citizens to rise up and sustain a revolt against a repressive regime for so many months?
2. How and why did hundreds of thousands of Oaxaqueños risk so much—comfort, income, limb, and life—to sustain their occupation day after day, night after night?

Explosions of fighting spirit are regular occurrences in this world. Sustained ones are not. What occurred in Oaxaca was, and is, real news. That the occupation continued for five months makes its study the highest of priorities in every corner of Earth where an oppressed majority seeks to eliminate the impositions thrust upon it from above.

The true story of the Oaxaca revolt shows that public consciousness of a bad government is only one part of the equation for change. Oaxaca is not the only state in Mexico or on Earth where the people understand that the state is rotten and illegitimate, but it is the place that most recently displayed the grandest ability to confront and supplant it. The long list of grievances there against a brutal and undemocratic state, and the incendiary nature of the June 14 repression against peaceful protesters, was the sparkplug that deepened the revolt. That dawn invasion by 3,000 state and municipal police against 15,000 encamped protesters escalated a teachers' strike into a societal struggle to remove the despot that ordered the raid: Ulises Ruiz Ortiz.

When their tent city was torched, those 15,000 (or more) men, women, children, and elders (primarily schoolteachers, their family members, and allies from other social movements that had joined their protest) that had slept there on the cobblestone streets awoke under siege and ran for their lives. They fled the gunshots, the crushing blows of nightsticks, and the suffocating odor of teargas. Then came the point upon which history turned. They regrouped and, en masse, charged

back at the police, seized shields and clubs and weapons, took some as prisoner, and the cops ran for cover. The people retook the city square (the zocalo) and the rest of Oaxaca's historic center, and the state fell.

Police repression has provoked violent conflicts across the world and throughout history, but merely reactive protests tend to be short-lived (the Los Angeles riots of 1992—after a California court's acquittal of police officers that had brutalized the civilian Rodney King under the gaze of a video camera—peaked and ebbed within just five days). What occurred in Oaxaca in 2006 might have likewise become a brief blip on history's screen; the day the cops got their asses kicked and the state briefly lost control.

But in Oaxaca, the barricades spread farther and deeper, strengthened. The rebels didn't merely explode in spontaneous "days of rage" against tyranny. They carefully championed an alternative: self-organization. And this is the story that Nancy Davies—a resident of Oaxaca for the past eight years—tracked discreetly while hordes of reporters swarmed into the war zone chasing the wafting aroma of teargas to the next street skirmish. Instead of rushing off to the barricades (although her reporting also contains her eyewitness testimonies to what she saw, heard, smelled, and felt at those occupied intersections), she headed more frequently to and from the assembly hall. There, she chronicled the birth of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO, in its Spanish initials), and how it engaged in self-government, supplanting the state for all those months.

The answer to the question "How did the people sustain self-government and control a territory for such an extended period of time?" is found not just in the evil that it fought against but also in the good that it fought to defend: a more authentic democracy, closer to the people, than electoral politics under capitalism allows. The APPO itself was deemed worthy, by hundreds of thousands of working and poor people, to risk all to defend. From that came the heroic battles: among them the seizure of the state television and radio stations in August and the November military defeat of the federal police that had stormed the campus of the Autonomous University of Benito Juárez of Oaxaca (UABJO,

in its Spanish initials). Those moments now live in legend—they are related forcefully in Davies's prose and elsewhere—but they are mere leaves of the greater tree of self-government by popular assembly that defined 2006 in Oaxaca, and will continue to surprise a nation and the world in 2007 and beyond.

By looking below, and carefully listening to what the participants in this history were saying, Nancy Davies got the big story that the pack-journalists missed, and made a lasting impact that will help the Oaxaca revolt of 2006 be better understood, replicated and improved upon for years to come.

As this book—which collects and adds to those chronicles that Davies posted on Narco News (www.narconews.com)—heads to press, I asked Davies if she would go on tour in English-speaking countries, as authors often do, to lecture at bookstores and universities and such. Many authors write books precisely to be able to collect such fees and laurels. Davies politely declined, saying that she felt it more important to remain in Oaxaca and continue reporting the ongoing story.

With that—her deeds—Davies is not just telling us, but also showing us, that this book tells a story that, despite what you might read or hear in the commercial media, has only just begun.





May 25

THE DESPERATE GOVERNMENT IN OAXACA

OAXACA IS A perfect example of a place where those in power see the collapse of order—their order. The violence escalates more in line with their fear than with ours. When they start beating up photographers and shoving around elderly women, they must be frantic.

This week of May 22, two more police attacks occurred in Oaxaca. One involved beating and kicking a reporter from the daily newspaper *Noticias de Oaxaca* as he was photographing a demonstration on Plaza de la Danza, where one enters the municipal offices. The demonstration was a civic protest against excessive traffic, noise, and dirt. The residents had repeatedly sought relief from the governor, but with no response.

Today, May 25, the same residents marched again, this time in protest of the aggression of the municipal police against the reporters and photographers, and in particular against the photographer Carlos Román Velasco, from *Noticias*. According to one complainant from the protest group, elderly women were roughed up on in the plaza, as were the reporters.

So now the municipal government is violating the civil and human rights of old women, which I must say I personally resent.

THE SECOND OF this week's attacks came with bullets, fired over the heads of teachers in their encampment in the zocalo, the city's central square. Section 22 of the national teachers' union has mounted a temporary encampment like this one every year that the zocalo has been available, that is to say, not under renovation by the government. The encampment is presently causing an effective blockage of traffic in the center of the city, in addition to generating garbage and the pervasive stench of sweat and piss. This year the striking teachers have many tents, large and small, of pretty high quality; they clearly are equipped to live in the zocalo and side streets indefinitely. In previous years, the union settled with the government within a few days. This is the first time I remember seeing canvas and nylon apartments. Tempers are running high because of the traffic blockage and unseemly aromas. I suppose that's why the cops are shooting off their guns.

On May 25 another march took place, moving from Llano Park (also under renovation) toward the zocalo. Since all the streets are blocked, I'm not sure where the demonstrators went—they had a truck and a van, which could not penetrate the blocked streets. The march condemned violence against women. In Oaxaca, forty women have died in 2006 after domestic violence. However, the march also condemned the Atenco rapes and violence by police, who, if they are not themselves attacking, are ignoring women's rights while someone else attacks. The march carried a banner condemning the Oaxaca government of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz for allowing violence with impunity.

And today is only Friday.

For those who did not take seriously the "call to witness" the repression in Oaxaca by e-mailing or writing travel agents and Mexican officials, perhaps it is time to ask again: Is Oaxaca safe and/or suitable for tourism? Is this where you want to spend your summer vacation?

ADDENDUM, MAY 29, 2006: Al Giordano's stories are so energizing and uplifting that I want to add a note about the teachers' strike. God bless Section 22. Something lovely has happened.

THOSE OF US who have lived in Oaxaca for more than three years recall the vibrancy of the pre-renovation zocalo. The little naked kids were bathed in buckets of cold water and screeched while their mothers, from the town of Loxicha, maintained their encampment. Vendors strolled continuously with all manner of pesky offerings for innocent tourists: the zocalo stood as the center of a spinning hub. It was indeed spinning, and as the marches, the banners screaming ASSASSIN! in scarlet paint, and the encampments increased, the governing rulers, first José Murat and then Ruiz (and we don't even mention the municipal mayor Jesús Ángel because he's merely a pudgy puppet whose surname is so rarely heard in Oaxaca that at the moment I can't remember what it is)—the two governors in succession—devised a plan to cleanse the place. With support from the restaurant and tourism agency owners, the Loxicha women were seduced into taking their laundry off the bushes and moving to a building equipped with beds for their children several blocks away; the renovations closed the zocalo down; the vendors were sent off to the government-donated indigenous vendor's zoo on another side street; and to cap it off, the state government palace was emptied and turned into a museum.

Thus we saw the cleansing of the zocalo, a place one now might not desire to visit more than, say, downtown Cincinnati.

And so, you ask, what am I cheering for? The teachers' strike. Somehow, in the mass of tents and bodies, a certain order has appeared, spaces have opened, and in that small, orderly space the vendors have returned. You can buy plastic bags of watermelon, grapefruit, or mango. You can buy drinks concocted from almonds, rice, or fruit and laddled from buckets into plastic cups. The cotton skirts and embroidered blouses, the *rebozos*, the jewelry, the stenciled T-shirts—available once again, and among this bounty they're selling balloons and plastic toys for the kids.

So, what I want to know, Governor Ruiz, is how has this come about? The shops are all empty. The restaurants are filled with vacant tables. The nice new flowers you planted at public expense are wilting, and scarcely a tourist is in sight. But the encampments, the banners, the

signs, all blaze ASSASSINS! And yes, the banished vendors have all returned, while on the northwest corner of the zocalo three young fellows are playing their drums.

I know it won't last. The banners will come down, and the garbage trucks will sanitize the area once again. But jeez it's nice. The people united will never be defeated, and sitting among the sprawled and dozing teachers I could only smile and smile and smile.

June 12

STANDOFF CONTINUES AS OAXACA TEACHERS' STRIKE ENTERS FOURTH WEEK

Teachers Soliciting Signatures to Impeach Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz in a Struggle Between Civil Society and the PRI

THE STRIKE BY Section 22 of the National Education Workers Union (SNTE, in its Spanish initials, the national teachers union) enters its fourth week in a standoff that seems no closer to resolution. Section 22 vows to increase pressure on Ulises Ruiz Ortiz by continuing the invasions or blockades of government property such as PEMEX distribution terminals, the Chamber of Deputies, the state attorney general's office, the Huitzo collection tollbooth on the Oaxaca–Mexico City highway, the Institute of State Public Education for Oaxaca, the Secretary of Finance office, and the so-called public works such as the renovation of Llano Park and the Fountain of Seven Regions and the widening of Fortín Road.

Furthermore, teachers are now soliciting citizen signatures to depose state Governor Ulises Ruiz. At the corner of Independencia and Porfirio Díaz streets on Sunday, June 11, two young teachers and a professor were requesting that passersby sign on.

During the second Section 22 megamarch of June 7, one hundred thousand marchers hollered, "Ruiz is going to fall! Ruiz is going to fall!" The marchers carried signs depicting the governor as a snake, a rat, a pig, or a donkey. On the front upper face of the main entrance of the former government palace (now renovated as a museum), an

enormous canvas has been suspended, colored with spray paint, and depicting Ruiz with his pants down sitting on one side of a toilet bowl (Fox is on the other) expelling the whole rottenness that smothers the state of Oaxaca.

The June 7 megamarch ended at the recently renovated Plaza de la Danza, where the crowd staged a mock trial. At the end, the crowd voted to impeach Ruiz. "The testimony and documents presented against the present governor are unquestionable, and for those facts he is found guilty of serious violations of the federal and local constitutions for which the political judgment in terms of article 110 of the federal constitution is against Ulises Ruiz."

He's out! "*Ya cayó, ya cayó, Ulises ya cayó, ya cayó, ya cayó, Ulises ya cayó,*" screamed everyone present.

"He is also found guilty of heading a government which is authoritarian, violent, and repressive of social movements." More shouting and thumbs-down gestures.

Ruiz responded by withdrawing his offer of 60 million pesos (about six million US dollars) for the requested salary reorganization and, starting May 29, withholding salaries for the teachers who are on strike.

Section 22 has asked the Federal Education Secretariat to mediate, although thus far there has been no response. Nor is there any sign of the Federal Preventive Police (PFP, by its initials in Spanish) that Ruiz supposedly summoned from Mexico City.

Meanwhile, PAN (the National Action Party), whose presidential candidate is Felipe Calderón, demanded sanctions against Ruiz for violating the Pact of Neutrality prior to the July 2 presidential election. Voting signs go up and are ripped down daily. Priístas (supporters of PRI, the Institutional Revolutionary Party) are not only digging up or casting down the cultural heritage sites to rake in a percentage of the public funds to donate to their party's presidential candidate, Roberto Madrazo, but they are going town to town giving advance goodies for votes. Somebody told me the entire population of one town received free washing machines—the atmosphere is that condemnatory. Regard-

less of fact or rumor, the people are voicing their hatred of Ruiz.

"ULISES RUIZ LIVES in Mexico City, so why should he care about Oaxaca?" Gloria Rosales Castro told me. She is the wife of one of the teachers, visiting her husband on Sunday, June 11, in the zocalo with their three children. Gloria remarked on how difficult the lack of water, bathrooms, and cooking facilities are for the teachers sleeping in the camp.

Since the strike is so lengthy, the teachers are also asking citizens to bring food, like rice, beans, and oil, to show their solidarity.

"Ruiz wants to privatize education," Gloria averred. "He gives nothing to the poor communities where the children go to school in shacks, and the parents have to pay for books, supplies, and even furniture." The encampment has effectively killed all the recent plantings Ruiz put out to beautify the renovated zocalo, and she called out a caution to her kids who were jumping around in the dirt. "He doesn't care about Oaxaca. He steals, he spends money on useless things, and doesn't take care of necessities or poverty." Oaxaca is one of the poorest states, second only to Chiapas.

Section 22 strikers are supported by the PRD (Democratic Revolution Party); and by groups from the isthmus such as the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus (UCIZONI); by eighty-three municipal presidents who happen to be teachers; by the Independent Triqui Movement (MULTI), which supports the Zapatistas' Other Campaign and whose members carried their machetes first into the state legislature and then to the state police base, where supposedly the PFP (the Federal Preventive Police) were stationed; by adherents to the Organization for the Promotion of National Unity Against Neoliberalism (PUNCN); and by the Front of Democratic Unions and Organizations of Oaxaca (FSODO), which strung up the banner across the front of the Museum of Diversity, known before the recent renovations as the Government Palace. The Crespo Street residents, knocked around recently by the police when they tried to enter the city offices last week, have enrolled as supporters, and so have the families living

on Fortin Hill. Although the construction work to widen the Fortin Hill Road had absolutely nothing to do with it (according to government officials), a giant crevice abruptly opened up in the side of the hill, causing the temporary displacement of residents of eighty homes.

Section 22 teachers ripped out all the recently installed parking meters in the historic center, as they claim that Ruiz has taken over public space for private purposes.

IN A PRESS conference that he offered after officiating at Sunday mass in the cathedral, the bishop of the Catholic Church in Oaxaca said that the marches indicate a serious problem of social health, because behind them there are injustice, illegality, corruption, and politicization. He highlighted that the injustices, the illegality, the corruption, and the impunity will never be defeated, neither with force nor by violence, but only with honesty, justice, and truth. The government reiteration of a desire to have dialogue seems to be sheer rhetoric, but the church is on the side of the people.

What is really going on?

Ruiz is a friend of Madrazo: fact. The PRI is a dying institution: fact. The PAN and the PRD are both against the PRI: fact. The largest segment of the population (the not rich and not neoliberal) resents and fears Ruiz: fact. The presidential election is only two weeks away: fact. The public, the striking teachers, and the newspapers name the PRI as responsible for ongoing assassinations in the small towns: fact. The modern offices of *Noticias de Oaxaca*, the daily paper shut down by Ruiz with a fake workers' strike, are still occupied after a year with no resolution in view, and *Noticias*, publishing from a new site, doesn't forget it. If it can say something bad about Ruiz, it does.

Scattered among the teachers' tents on the newly paved zocalo walkways, the vendor stalls of clothes, CDs, jewelry, food, and even rugs resemble the Christmas fairs of the past—before Ruiz banned them. The previously empty restaurants facing the zocalo seem to have finally decided to take advantage of the presence of the teachers. Some of these places, with the excitement of the World Cup soccer games on

every television, try to attract them and the scarce visitors who remain in the city, with offers of beers, snacks, and cheap cakes. At the store where liquors and beer are sold, a signboard announces the sale of six beers for 50 pesos (US\$4.50).

How is Oaxaca to survive another twenty days? And after the election, then what will happen?

June 14

THE CENTER OF THE CITY LOOKS LIKE A WAR ZONE

Scenes of Chaos in Downtown Oaxaca City as Striking Teachers Defend Themselves from Police Attack

THE CENTER OF the city looks like a war zone. On the tourist promenade, broken glass and broken bricks and stones are strewn everywhere. Torn and crumpled tents lie destroyed, flattened in every street, along with personal belongings, trash, and burned objects.

The teachers have regrouped. According to Enrique Pineda Ríos, a physical education teacher sitting with a group of five men armed with sticks on Porfirio Diaz, about two blocks north of the zocalo, about 80 percent of the zocalo has been reoccupied by the teachers.

Pineda Ríos told me that three teachers and one of their children were killed by the gas used in the attack. More than twenty teachers have been wounded. Pineda Ríos told me that the teachers were unarmed but that the federal police (I asked him twice whether it was local police or federal; he says federal and told me that more federal police are on the way) accompanied by the state troops entered with gas, clubs, and guns. He also told me the teachers were awaiting a renewed police attack at 2 pm. An older teacher was circulating with surgical masks, handing them out to everyone.

The radio station of the university, which is acting as a news station for the strikers, reports ten dead.

I saw one teacher cleaning the broken glass off his car. The back

window was shattered when a gas canister shot through it, landing on the front seat beside the teacher. Helicopters are circling.

THE TEACHERS REMAIN defiant and are sending out requests for citizen assistance. The radio stations reporting for the government say stay home, as the teachers are burning, breaking, and rioting. That's clearly not true. They look shocked but not violent—grim, I would say, including the women who remain.

Some who received the worst of the tear gas retreated several blocks and were washing out their eyes with water. The radio reported many injured arriving at the hospital.

Every business in the center is closed, with their metal doors padlocked.

June 15

OAXACA TEACHERS RETAKE THE CENTER OF THE STATE CAPITAL, WAITING FOR NEGOTIATIONS

The Day after a Failed Police Invasion, Strikers Seek Removal of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz

A RAUCOUS AND exuberant crowd of teachers, some armed with metal poles or machetes, reoccupied the zocalo today at noon. They were joined by students from the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca (UABJO, by its Spanish initials), the Technological Institute, and several high schools.

New plastic canopies were strung up while the students held forth in the center gazebo. Despite another helicopter circling overhead, nobody ran for cover. Instead, they all hollered “*Ulises ya cayó, Ulises ya cayó*”—that is to say, Ulises is out. No new sleeping tents were available yet, but a teacher assured me they would be purchased and distributed if today’s negotiations should fail.

The negotiator is coming down from Mexico City this afternoon. The teachers fear that he is not a top-ranked official and will be unequal to Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, whom he does not know.

ACCORDING TO SNTE Section 22 member Nicandro Ruiz Silva, 70 percent to 80 percent of Oaxaca’s teachers are against Ruiz, while the others support Ruiz’s party, the PRI. Many teachers come from cities where supporting the PRI is part of the common heritage and means receiving aid in advance of every election. On the coast and the Isthmus

of Tehuantepec, however, the towns are largely governed by the opposition PRD, and teachers feel less pressure to support the government. In solidarity with SNTE Section 22, teachers have taken over several cities' municipal offices in that southern region, including Salina Cruz, Juchitán, Tuxtetepec, and Pinotepa.

The teachers who oppose Ruiz say that since PRI candidate Roberto Madrazo said he would "give the keys to Los Pinos (the Mexican presidential residence) to Ruiz" when he is elected president, they fear a PRI return to national power. It is believed that Madrazo would appoint Ruiz to the top cabinet position of Secretary of Government. Thus, if negotiations do not come to a successful conclusion, SNTE member Ruiz Silva believes that a boycott of voting will be another form of pressure on Ruiz.

Nevertheless, he is cautiously optimistic that the third megamarch, which takes place on Friday, June 16, will bring the whole strike to a conclusion. One teacher's wife, Gloria Rosales Castro, was less sanguine. She said she had just come from comforting a woman who was seeing off for burial the coffin of her friend, killed Wednesday morning by the police.

Both Nicandro Ruiz Silva and Gloria Rosales Castro are completely sure that deaths occurred among the teachers, although Ruiz denies it. Ruiz controls the mainstream media and the government hospital where the injured were taken. The hospital refuses to give out information.

The teachers spent last night housed in various schools close to the zocalo. They emerged this morning refreshed and ready to reoccupy. Meanwhile, the general public is assisting the teachers with food and beverages brought to nearby buildings. No shops or restaurants in the center area have reopened.

June 17

IN OAXACA MEGAMARCH, 400,000 SEND A FIRM “NO” TO REPRESSION BY GOVERNOR ULISES RUIZ

Blockades and Occupations throughout the State; San Blas Atempa Takes Back Its Autonomous City Hall

THE THIRD TEACHERS’ megamarch in Oaxaca on June 16 brought out all sectors of civil society in a vast repudiation of the repressive policies of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. The march was the direct response to the brutal police attack on the encampment of striking teachers in the center of the city at dawn on June 14—the straw that broke the camel’s back.

First estimates of the number of marchers are 400,000. A smaller march took place on Thursday, June 15.

The first marchers arrived at Llano Park at twilight in the rain; the end of the march arrived around 10 pm. Along the route, supporters on the sidewalks held up signs and handed the chanting marchers food and water. No signs were about salaries, education, or classrooms. The entire march, every shout, chant, and banner, repeated the same theme: Ulises out.

Oaxaca united in a very disciplined and focused show of strength against the governor.

THE STRUGGLE OF Section 22 of the SNTE has not been a simple question of teachers’ salaries, nor of the pitiful level of education in this, Mexico’s second poorest state. From the first days of the strike nearly

four weeks ago, the idea of impeaching Ruiz was mentioned. The calls to oust him gain strength even while renewed labor negotiations take place.

Since the attack on June 14, a civil movement has emerged and coalesced around Section 22's aggressive demand that Ruiz go, an event that would break the grip of the PRI in Oaxaca. The demand has united all levels of Oaxacan society.

The next presidential election (Mexico has six-year terms) takes place on July 2, and Ruiz is best buddies with PRI presidential candidate Roberto Madrazo. According to popular accounts, Ruiz siphoned off hundreds of millions of pesos in public funds from the extraordinary number of undesired public works undertaken in the city of Oaxaca during the past year. The funds are alleged to have gone toward the election campaign of Madrazo.

The extraordinary convergence of support for Section 22 has produced an unprecedented set of events:

1. Radio Universidad of the UABJO was taken over by students dedicated to maintaining contact and communications in support of the teachers, whose station was destroyed.
2. Thousands of people from civil society have rallied in the city, responding not only with food and clothing but also with their physical presence.
3. First victory: teachers taken prisoner when police attacked Radio Plantón (the community radio station allied with striking teachers) on June 14 were released on the night of June 15.
4. Second victory: seven municipal offices (city halls) were captured by teachers around Oaxaca State, including the retaking of the San Blas Atempa municipal building.
5. Support and solidarity messages have been received from other Mexican states around the country.
6. The outpouring of concern by non-governmental organizations regarding the attack of June 14 includes Amnesty International. This

was the second attack by police forces in Oaxaca this spring; the first one took place on May 1 with the arrest of several reporters covering the labor march.

7. National and international civil groups recognize Oaxaca's struggle, as evidenced by international and national calls in solidarity with the teachers of Section 22.
8. A bill has been introduced in the federal Senate to strip the Ruiz government of its powers.

Enrique Rueda Pacheco has been relentless in calling for Ruiz's impeachment. The night before the super megamarch Ruiz was presented with a social movement quickly growing beyond his control. He then offered to negotiate with Section 22, using the monetary figures that last week he claimed were unaffordable. The Secretary of Government mediated a truce between Section 22 and the state government.

After Radio Plantón was destroyed, left-leaning students of UABJO took control of Radio Universidad, 1400 AM. The students have been supporting the strike twenty four hours a day in their function as a news center. They broadcast calls for food, water, and clothing to replace the destroyed and burned belongings of teachers who had been camped in the zocalo. They broadcast phone calls from students and teachers, calls from people shouting or weeping. They broadcast information, meeting places for groups, speeches by students and professors, declamations of stories and poems, and a teacher singing "Venceremos" inside the radio station. During the astonishing civil society response, the students maintain guards outside the studio. Radio Universidad has been the closest thing to free radio that Oaxaca has experienced.

Today a weeping teacher exclaimed on the air, "We avenge our dead!" One of the unconfirmed dead was a child from the town of Villa Alta. Names of the dead and injured were not released for reasons of family security, and true numbers remain a secret. Gossip is everywhere, including the assertion that Ruiz has the bodies under lock and key in a morgue. Although the names of the wounded, including

police, have been made public, the names of the alleged dead and their numbers have not.

According to the leader of Section 22, Enrique Rueda Pacheco, twenty teachers were arrested and eight "disappeared." According to *Noticias de Oaxaca* on June 15, Rueda said that two teachers and two children were killed. Between 30 and 100 were wounded from both teacher and police sides of the fight, according to various unofficial sources.

Ruiz has claimed that there were no deaths. He also lied about the police carrying arms, saying there were none. *Noticias* published on June 15 photos of the ministerial police carrying AR-15 assault rifles.

ON FRIDAY, RADIO Universidad maintained a steady stream of information about where various sectors would meet for the march. The civil response included doctors from the public hospital, medical students, sociologists, electricians, professors, taxi and bus drivers, lawyers, parents of families, and landlords, as well as retired teachers and many more. Most denounced Ruiz for theft, repression, assassination, and failure to consult the citizenry about the public works that are destroying Oaxaca's cultural heritage. Others denounced him for the lack of state works for potable water, drainage, classrooms, and basic needs. One teacher said she was conducting classes under a tree.

Dozens of nongovernmental organizations within civil society have signed letters of solidarity published in both daily newspapers. (*Noticias* is generally slanted against the governor; *El Imparcial* is generally slanted for him. Both accept paid ads.)

Ruiz's actions were supported by private business organizations whose incomes have suffered during the prolonged occupation of the fifty block city center. A "congratulations" to Ruiz was signed by Publisorpresas (a publicity agency), Caféina (a cafeteria), Rosso (a restaurant bar), PROFAS (Forest Products of La Asunción), Servicios de Outsourcing de Antequera, and El Mundo de los Globos (organizing and decorating social events). Ruiz's own radio speech implied that he was ready to come to some agreement but "always putting the education of the state's children first."

The democratic sector of the national teachers' union's took out a full-page ad in support of Oaxaca's strikers. The archbishop of Antequera-Oaxaca, José Luis Chávez Botello, deplored the violence of the police. Nongovernmental organizations published declarations in support of peaceful resolution of differences.

AROUND THE STATE of Oaxaca, sympathizers and teachers occupied seven municipal buildings. The southern towns of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, such as Matías Romero, Tapantepec, Zanatepec, and Juchitán, have a long standing quarrel with the PRI because of the neoliberal development project that took communal land for private development and destroyed farmlands for highways. Sympathizers blocked the federal Pan American Highway at Jalapa del Marqués. From Salina Cruz to Puerto Escondido to Tehuantepec and Pinotepa, along the southern Pacific coast teachers mobilized. In San Blas Atempa, the site of repression on March 1, the residents took back the municipal building. To the north, the highway was blocked on the route to Huajuapán.

Teachers in other states, including Michoacán and México, have called in with support. The PRI must know that its last chance to rule is rapidly slipping away.

Some say the order for Ruiz to attack the encampment with 1,500 police, armed and with dogs, came to him from Madrazo. Whose idea was it to have helicopters shoot gas canisters into the crowd?

Personal Observations

CLEARLY RADIO UNIVERSIDAD is in the hands of students on the left. Many see themselves as socialists, Maoists, supporters of the Zapatistas' Other Campaign ("La Otra"), and sometimes all of the above. Many teachers also adhere to La Otra and have joined the national struggle to free the political prisoners in Oaxaca and the country.

In my view, this struggle is not concerned with supporting goals of

either the teachers or La Otra. It is a citizen movement to rid the state of the PRI, whose control has been repressive and abusive, both physically and economically, beyond what seems supportable. The calls for *destitución* (that is, either resignation or impeachment) have grown louder. Today they were a thunderous roar.

The two sides drawn up within the city seem to fall into merchant class versus everyone else. In other words, it's not an income division, but business owners against non-business owners, indicative of the government's connections with capitalism and globalism. NAFTA and capitalist development have been a plague for rural Oaxaca, where the majority of the population lives, including the teachers.

THE "DEVELOPMENTS" OF Oaxaca follow WTO and World Bank demands; that is, they put profits not social benefits first. The lack of social benefits includes the miserable education most children receive. The current president of Mexico is a former Coca Cola executive, and Coke is one of the biggest consumer products in Mexico, where potable water is not free. The development of natural resources, petroleum, gas, forests, tourism, et cetera, as the teachers' demands indicate, does not trickle down to most people. The complaint that the damage done to tourism during the month-long occupation of the historic city center puts hotel workers and waiters out of jobs borders on naïveté. One of the speakers against Ruiz on Radio Universidad spoke of Plan Puebla Panamá, a perfect example of the government's desire to create a vast zone safe for capitalism on Oaxaca's isthmus.

The city itself, the seat of political power, is rarely visited by the majority of rural people in the state, and they don't care much about its discomfort or its tourism. For those who do live in the city, especially the old wealthy who regard Ruiz's arbitrary changes to the character of the old colonial city as an affront to their sensibilities and their self-importance, Ruiz is hated.

The word *democracy* comes up over and over. Most of the voiced complaints against Ruiz have to do with his "not consulting" before embarking on public works that destroy the city's quality. But what

people are really complaining about is that public funds are being siphoned off for Madrazo's presidential campaign. The majority want health, education, sewage, and drainage. In the city itself they want water projects. The ruling oligarchy thrives, while in Oaxaca directly across from the new Chamber of Deputies people live without electricity or drainage.

The majority of Oaxaca residents, whether financially well-off or not, are still very much connected to their families, with family obligations that serve as the social security network. They are connected to lands, heritage, and roots. They have not yet become attuned to individualism, and the blatant self serving greed of the PRI is a moral offense, along with the endless murders perpetuated by the bosses still holding control of the municipalities.

Today I learned that three prior governors have been ousted in Oaxaca's history. During the first megamarch of this strike, I saw some Other Campaign signs carried, but not a great number. The Other Campaign and the Zapatistas may have solidified the sense of ordinary Oaxaqueños that their ire is justified. But this civil rage is not newly conscious since January, when La Otra launched itself; rather, the Oaxaca rage parallels the Chiapas rage, and for many of the same reasons. That has long been known—thus the fierce crackdowns on anything remotely suggesting rebellion.

What is truly different in Oaxaca here and now is the moment: the convergence of so many streams of the population united against the PRI.

As Marcos says, the wind comes from below.

June 21

OAXACA TEACHERS ORGANIZE POPULAR ASSEMBLY TO OPPOSE STATE GOVERNMENT

Talks with Federal Negotiators Cancelled as Teachers' Strike Dedicates Itself to Ousting the Governor

THE FIRST POPULAR Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO, by its Spanish initials) met on June 17. Created by Section 22 of the SNTE together with other organizations, the APPO seeks to create a permanent space for citizens to exercise their guaranteed constitutional rights and to assume a political position to face the state's present political and social realities.

THE FIRST POPULAR assembly was attended by 170 people representing 85 organizations. Also invited to attend were all the SNTE delegates, union members, social and political organizations, nongovernmental organizations, collectives, human rights organizations, parents, tenant farmers, municipalities, and citizens of the entire state of Oaxaca.

Negotiations with the federal government (held with the Secretaría de Gobernación, or SEGOB) came to an end with no satisfactory conclusion. SEGOB refuses to deal with Ruiz's removal because it is not an education issue. The teachers refuse to agree to anything less.

The second popular assembly took place today, Tuesday, June 20.

THE ZOCALO AND three blocks in each surrounding direction was

once again under the control of the teachers. Because their camp tents were destroyed in the police attack on June 14, teachers sat on the sidewalks on pieces of newspaper or cardboard. They plan to sleep in a safer area and return by day. The zocalo is also adorned by artisans selling their blouses, skirts, and *huipiles*. Most of the shops on the zocalo are open and a few cafes also; a few tourists were in sight.

The APPO calls for the removal from office of Ruiz Ortiz as its first goal. Ruiz, for his part, is apparently paying people 1,000 pesos each to march in a "silent march" in his support on Thursday, June 22. The university radio station also broadcast a presentation by a professor confirming payments of 400, 500, or 1,000 pesos (US\$35, US\$44, and US\$87 dollars, respectively) and recommending that people not sell their dignity. One person reported a message left on his cell phone offering the 1,000 peso payment, which is more than Ruiz usually offers. As Victor Cruz Romero, a teacher from Loma Bonita in Oaxaca, put it, "a bag of food for a vote is what the poor receive."

As one of its first actions, the popular assembly will convoke more than 500,000 people in the next few days, according to Section 22's secretary of "alliances and social administration," José Antonio Hernández Santos, in a press conference held in the Law and Social Science Building of the UABJO after the assembly.

The fourth SNTE Section 22 megamarch is scheduled for Friday, and supporters from the states of Chiapas and Zacatecas are expected, according to Cruz Romero.

The SNTE members have received no salaries since May 30, when their checks were cut by five days' pay. The strike began May 22. Teachers are receiving food and other assistance from the residents of Oaxaca. They say that this struggle is worth it and they won't give up until Ruiz is out. Cruz Romero indicates, as does the SNTE leadership, that if Ruiz does not resign by July 2, presidential elections will be blocked by the SNTE in Oaxaca.

That Ruiz must go, as have three of his historic predecessors in this volatile state, is an opinion held by many people, excluding the hotel owners of Oaxaca City, who suffer 1,500 room vacancies at this

time. Owners believe that the SNTE is responsible for destroying tourism, often claimed to be the only industry in the state, which supports “thousands,” according to Charles Gray, an American expatriate who referred to the importance of “trickle-down” economics. However, I spoke to three waitpersons, a baker, and a house cleaner, and I heard from them clear support for ridding the state of Ruiz’s dictatorial regime, despite the personal sacrifice they are now enduring along with the teachers.

THE HOLDING OF a popular assembly echoes the Oaxacan tradition of “uses and customs” (*usos y costumbres*) by which many towns still govern themselves in open citizen assemblies. The presence of political parties within such assemblies is not permitted; it is also forbidden in the APPO.

The justification named in the first popular assembly document states, “Given that sovereignty resides in the people and for the people who have the inalienable right to expel their governments when those do not comply with the mandate for which they were elected, the people of Oaxaca are justified in soliciting the revocation of powers in the State of Oaxaca.” This reflects the traditional idea that the leaders are supposed to respond to their people’s will.

“Furthermore, the conduct of Ruiz has generated all types of antipathy and repudiation by the different sectors of Oaxaca society.” The marches of June 2, 7, and 16 are mentioned. The popular voice, as repeated by Cruz Romero, does not forgive the attack on June 14 in which he claims three children died, one was blinded, and one is gravely ill. In addition, Cruz Romero believes, seven teachers died, including one by a heart attack and a pregnant woman who suffered a miscarriage (a week later, there are still no confirmed reports of deaths).

Arbitrary detentions of leaders of social organizations throughout the state have increased. The destruction of the historic patrimony, both natural and cultural, was cited.

The declaration of the popular assembly also states that they will fight for the revocation of judicial, legislative, and executive leadership

powers within the state.

Tables were set up in the center of the zocalo to collect signatures demanding the ousting of Ruiz.

MEANWHILE, TEN MUNICIPAL town halls have been taken over in Oaxaca state, among which are Juchitán, Zimatlán, Huautla de Jiménez, Teotitlán de Flores Magón, Matías Romero, Huajuapán de León, Puerto Ángel, and Puerto Escondido. Farmers have marched in from Tuxtepec. Inhabitants of San Salvador Atenco, in Mexico State, have made their way toward Oaxaca City. Followers of the popular uprising in San Blas Atempa retook their municipal building in solidarity with the teachers' movement. The government buildings of Pinotepa Nacional, Tuxtepec, San José Chiltepec, Valle Nacional, San Pedro Pochutla, and Asunción Nochixtlán have all been occupied.

The APPO reports that popular assemblies will take place state-wide.

June 24

THE UPRISING OF OAXACA: HOW FAR CAN IT GO?

Two Issues Must Now Be Resolved: Removal of Governor Ulises Ruiz and Resolution of the Teachers' Educational Demands

OAXACA IS A contentious state, with conflicts in towns, on public and communal lands. Assassinations each year number between twenty and thirty. The state has 570 municipalities, but in 2004, 750 cases of agrarian conflict were reported.

Ulises Ruiz Ortiz has united the people of Oaxaca—in opposition to him and to the PRI, which has maintained a stranglehold on Oaxaca for more than seventy years, maintaining caciquism (the power of local political bosses) and aggravating the agrarian conflicts to divide the people. Selling their votes to the PRI is how towns obtain what should be rightfully theirs, including schools and educational supplies.

The APPO has now met three times. Today, June 24, 2006, at the close of the APPO, the general secretary of Section 22 of the SNTE, Enrique Rueda Pacheco, held a press conference in which he assured the public that the teachers' strike will be settled this weekend.

Now the question becomes, can the education demands, which may be settled soon, be separated from the demand for Ruiz to resign?

By all reports, the range of APPO attendees extends from PRI affiliates to the anarchists and revolutionaries on the far left. The APPO declared itself unified by a desire to oust Ruiz. Today's decisions, beyond Rueda's statement, are not yet known.

However, Rueda announced on Friday, June 23, 2006, that the threatened boycott of the July 2 election won't happen. That's a withdrawal of previous threats by the union.

Rueda announced a new group of mediators for the education negotiations, among them some of the least militant personalities of Oaxaca: artist Francisco Toledo; Archbishop José Luis Chávez Botello, the emeritus bishop of Tehuantepec; and businessman Carlos Guzmán Gardeazábal.

The union refuses to negotiate with Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz or with any federal official of second rank. The union demands talks with somebody who has real power, that is, an official at the level of the secretary of government (SEGOB, similar to a White House Chief of Staff in the US, or Interior Minister in Europe), Carlos Abascal Carranza.

SEGOB has made it clear that it cannot negotiate with regard to Ruiz's removal, but it will negotiate with regard to education, which is as much a federal matter as a state one.

Meanwhile, the city of Oaxaca bubbles with spontaneous demonstrations of support for Section 22's call to remove Ruiz. Yesterday, Section 22 received ten tons of supplies delivered in solidarity by the Union of Mexican Electricians, and an unscheduled people's march sprang up in the Oaxaca City neighborhood of Rosario, picking up anti Ruiz voices along its way to the center. It replaced the previously announced and then-cancelled fourth SNTE megamarch.

Blockades and work stoppages were announced on Radio Universidad, the united student teacher station operating out of UABJO.

PRESENTATIONS AIRED ON Radio Universidad discuss the exploitation of Oaxaca under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Plan Puebla Panamá, neoliberalism, and globalization—previously unmentionable subjects. Information percolates among the general public, which formerly held few conversations on subjects that were the province of intellectuals and student radicals. In call ins to the station, housewives and retired people are suddenly talking about class differences. They mention the World Trade Organization and the

benefits the rich receive. They mention Ruiz as aligned with capitalist powers and decry how some who call for a return to the classrooms by the teachers actually send their own kids to private schools. Many callers are indigenous.

The consciousness raising politicization of Oaxaca has arrived.

The APPO is having a moderating effect on the teachers, while the strike is radicalizing the people. The foremost demand, that Ruiz resign as governor, has not softened; it's difficult to see how either the APPO or Section 22 could back off on this issue—now that the entire state is ungovernable—without losing any future support from the public.

The astonishing unification of Oaxacan society may be what pushes Section 22 to bury its own internal differences, something that could not be achieved during the tour of Oaxaca last February by Subcomandante Marcos in his role as Delegate Zero for the Zapatistas' Other Campaign. At that time, Delegate Zero expressed his unwillingness to meet with groups that could not resolve their own internal conflicts to unite in a common struggle against the authoritarian government.

The Zapatista method of permitting everyone to speak, and listening to them indefinitely, is not practical for the APPO (not surprising given this urgent and stressful time period), but the sessions are still very long. Also, the APPO decided not to function by consensus, but by majority vote. The APPO declared that political parties, like the press, are not allowed in the assembly, but naturally many individuals espouse positions in accord with their politics.

In a marathon session, the second meeting of the APPO took place on June 20, 2006, lasting from noon to nine o'clock at night. The participating unions included the Health Workers' Union, the Telmex (private telephone company) workers' union, UABJO workers, and the bus drivers' union. A total of seventy-nine groups participated, including popular and student organizations, municipal authorities, social organizations, and independent citizens. Today, the day of the third APPO, I hear the student announcers on the radio calling for the presence of *colonos* and *colonas*, residents of the suburbs.

AT THE SECOND meeting several accords were achieved, including how the assembly should be made up and how to maintain communications between different sectors. A very difficult issue will be how to maintain civil peace and conduct a parallel government—before, after, or parallel to Governor Ruiz, who is now optimistically referred to as the ex governor

Among the action points discussed were the boycott of the federal elections of July 2 (which was cancelled) and further marches and blockades of offices and highways. A statewide work stoppage called for Friday, June 23, was cancelled. A shopping boycott called against the supermarket Pitico, the Ahorros pharmacy chain, and some of the zocalo (central plaza) restaurants didn't happen. The Oaxaca zocalo, still in the hands of the teachers, was well guarded on all sides but open enough for pedestrians to enter.

The entrance to the university building where the second APPO met was controlled by students and other youngsters, all of them members of the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights, who, with faces covered with bandannas, carried sticks and machetes and blocked access to the press.

Among the groups present were the Wide Front for Popular Struggle (FALP, by its Spanish initials) and the Revolutionary Popular Front (FPR, by its Spanish initials), as well as the Union of Revolutionary Youths of Mexico, the Committee for Defense of the People, and the General Strike Council of the Autonomous National University of Mexico.

An anarchist faction seeks the removal of powers from all the branches of government in Oaxaca: legislative, judicial, executive.

A substantial number of the teachers and delegates are adherents of the nonviolent Other Campaign of the Zapatistas.

The majority of delegates belong to social nongovernmental organizations, which work in Oaxaca to improve conditions for the people without overt political party affiliations, as is required by Mexican law. These organizations were among the first to call for nonviolence after the June 14 attack and pledged their support to the united struggle

against Ruiz. They constitute nonmilitant, middle-of-the-road factions that hope to forge from the APPO a unified popular sector that will act in a reasonable and balanced way (read, nonradical) in negotiating with the government and that will continue as an ongoing public voice, regardless of the outcome of the current negotiations.

Many young folks, of course, are implacably radical.

HOW TO MAINTAIN the startling moment of unity is the big question. The question for many teachers after this weekend may be, can I go home now? Within Section 22 itself divisions break out between PRD and PRI supporters. The national SNTE, led by Elba Esther Gordillo (a widely disliked PRI militant known for both her fierce combativeness and her corruption) opposes the presidential candidate Roberto Madrazo. Section 22 is split within, into pro Gordillo and anti Gordillo factions, as well as PRD supporters.

The outcome of the federal presidential elections July 2 looms on the horizon. Although Fox won't jeopardize the candidacy of the PAN candidate Calderón by interfering (the reports of federal troops nearby turned out to be rumors planted to intimidate the teachers), should Calderón or Madrazo be elected, the situation changes. Thus it looks more urgent for Rueda Pacheco to agree to some resolution of the teachers' educational demands before July 2.

The teachers' educational demands focus on the neglected educational infrastructure and the restructuring of teachers' salaries. Education in Oaxaca is poor, and the illiteracy rate is around 25 percent (compared to about 8 percent nationally), and most of the illiterate are indigenous women. Many teachers complain of having to conduct classes in shacks made of laminated cardboard and of a lack of books, supplies, and food for the children who arrive hungry. Ruiz was roundly denounced for his neglect of education.

"Ruiz has remained deaf to all demands and necessities of Oaxacan society, causing widespread dissatisfaction in all civil sectors," the APPO declared in its first meeting. Ruiz is accused of the unauthorized use of public resources for Madrazo's campaign. So when he claims

there's no money for education, the public response is understandable outrage.

Ruiz is also accused of the destruction of the historical, natural, and cultural patrimony; harassment of independent media; excessive use of police; and repression of unions and independent organizations.

Section 22 went on strike on May 21, 2006, establishing an encampment in downtown Oaxaca City, which effectively brought to a halt the center city's tourist and commercial activities.

The police attacked the teachers' strike encampment on June 14 before dawn. A popular *corrido* (ballad) hit the airwaves of Radio Universidad on June 16, celebrating the teacher heroes.

THE NEW PEOPLE'S assembly held its first meeting on June 18, 2006. Today, June 24, the third APPO took place at the Hotel Magisterial. Two clear issues must now be resolved: removal of Ruiz and resolution of the educational demands.

Tomorrow, Sunday, a cultural fiesta in support of the teachers will be held in the zocalo.

June 29

A TEACHER IN EVERY TOWN

Forty Percent of Oaxaca's Municipal Governments Are in the Hands of Education Union Supporters, as Mobilizations and Assemblies in the State Capital Keep Growing

RUMOR ON THE street has it that Ulises Ruiz Ortiz has already agreed with the teachers' union to take an extended leave from office as governor, directly following the presidential election July 2, three days away.

Nobody expects PRI candidate Roberto Madrazo to win from his third place position in the polls. Daily radio spots on the part of the teachers' union, aired noncommercially on Radio Universidad, urge people to "vote punishment" to the PRI and PAN. That was repeated at the popular assembly the night of June 28 to an overflowing audience in Benito Juárez Stadium.

The wave of revolt we're seeing is the heritage of seventy years of PRI repression, theft, and neglect. People who may not know Madrazo's name can tell you of the bad activities of Ruiz, who embodies his party's infamy. According to my same rumor source, 80 percent of the state population stands in opposition to the PRI. I don't doubt it; coincidentally 80 percent of the population lives in extreme poverty.

If Ruiz's bowing out is not a true rumor, my guess is that it will be true soon. By state law, if the governor is absent for some months, a new election to fill his term is required. Given that the APPO is not only planning for a new government in Oaxaca but also looking forward to

forging a new national constitution, I think it's safe to assume that the assembly will choose the interim government and the legislative program of the state.

MY OBSERVATIONS (that's why this is comment, not news) lead me to believe that a statewide revolution has been in the planning for quite a while, waiting only for the correct moment. The plan to get rid of Ruiz was surely on the agenda from the first day: I saw placards among the strikers calling for his removal. More important, the plans for bringing the state under popular, not party, rule sounds like a longtime effort.

Ruiz helped, by attacking the teacher encampment on June 14. It was the spark that ignited the revolt and provided the moment to initiate the expulsion of the PRI.

As of today, teachers occupy the offices of Government House, where Ulises Ruiz Ortiz operates in the isthmus; the barracks of the director of public security, the attorney general's office, the chamber of deputies, the municipal offices of Oaxaca, the state transportation and traffic office, the firefighters' headquarters, and the downtown bureau office of Channel 9 of Oaxaca television, according to reports published in the daily newspaper *Noticias de Oaxaca* June 28.

The airwaves of Radio Universidad, where students have been maintaining open lines in support of Section 22, were busy with bulletins with announcements such as the governor's shutting down of all urban transportation after 2 pm, and announcing meeting places for people seeking private volunteer transport. Buses arrived from all regions of the state, while blockades by both sides roll back and forth like dice.

A representative of the Government Workers' Union went on air, gave his name, and announced his union's support for the teachers.

The struggle (now in its thirty-seventh day) of Section 22 of the SNTE presented a formal petition in Mexico City for judicial intervention against Ruiz. The petition was handed to the Permanent Commission of the federal congress, accompanied by the first box of citizen signatures: 146,000 out of a goal of 1,000,000.

PRI congressman Heliodoro Díaz Escárraga confirmed that SNTE has presented a demand to impeach Ruiz and explained that the application “will follow the formal process.”

THE FOURTH MEGAMARCH to oust Ruiz moved along a distance of fifteen kilometers (more than nine miles) from the airport road to the Oaxaca sports stadium. The marchers extended for about eight kilometers (five miles) starting with a motorcycle cavalcade and about fifty automobiles. Along the route supporters handed the marchers food, water, and refreshments. When the first marchers arrived at the stadium, many were still at the airport road. Sound systems were erected outside, and the largest session of the APPO ever was convened. It was more like a soccer rally than a reasoned discussion, but I doubt anybody there held an opposite point of view. It was OUT! OUT! OUT! all the way.

In Oaxaca, local assemblies are the historical custom, usually meeting on the level of communities and cities, and, rarely, regions (Oaxaca is divided into seven regions).

A statewide meeting is significant not only as the vast show of popular opposition to the entrenched PRI domination but also as a preview of national assemblies. The talk is of constitutional changes.

The present coalition—and this is not a teachers’ strike; it’s a social movement spearheaded by Section 22—hopes assemblies will replace the elected legislature controlled by the PRI. The custom in Oaxaca, as in Zapatista territory, is that the leaders are those who carry out the commands of the people.

The first meeting of the APPO on June 14 elected by vote the Comisión Directiva Provisional, or the Committee of Provisional Directors, which is comprised of three representatives each from the Front of Democratic Unions and Organizations of Oaxaca (FESODO, by its Spanish initials); the Promoter of National Opposition to Neoliberalism; Section 22 of the teachers’ union; students of all levels; the nongovernmental organizations; and all seven of Oaxaca state’s regions—thirty-six people. The provisional directors formed the base for establishing

the popular assembly. The APPO, after its initial formation, now claims to function by consensus.

APPROXIMATELY 40 PERCENT of the state's local municipal government offices have fallen into the hands of supporters of Section 22. Oaxaca contains 570 *municipios*, or county seats, some of which serve large territories in the mountains and encompass perhaps twenty or thirty small towns. Towns in the mountains that are also designated *municipios* contain smaller villages called *agencias*, like Russian dolls within dolls. The mayors of eighty towns are teachers by trade, some party affiliated and some appointed by traditional popular processes (known as *usos y costumbres*).

The towns in the mountains, which include speakers of sixteen different indigenous languages, have long been ripe for organized opposition to the PRI. Some of them contain sophisticated populations, like the people of Guelatao. Guelatao is the birthplace of Benito Juárez and the home of Jaime Martínez Luna, one of the original social philosophers on the implications of traditional *usos y costumbres* in confrontation with individualism, NAFTA, and neoliberalism.

In the more passive, poor, and repressed towns, a PRI vote is bought with a bag of cement. These are the people who obey PRI caciques (local bosses) in order to obtain the minimum for survival.

One might wonder if remittances from the United States and other cities in Mexico are having another unexpected result. With this new source of income from relatives abroad, has the PRI lost the leverage to buy families' votes with small handouts? By June 27, the day before the fourth megamarch, teachers had occupied the municipal offices of twenty-two of the larger county seats, which had been previously governed by political operatives. PRI officials were locked out. The twenty-two towns in rebellion include some from the southern coastal tier, and from another tier that crosses the Sierra Norte to the Cuenca del Papaloapan, reaching to the border with Veracruz.

Ulises Ruiz forgot that there's a teacher in every town. Maybe he forgot that the number of teachers statewide is nearly 70,000. The popu-

lation of the entire state is between 3,500,000 and 4,000,000.

THE NATIONAL ELECTION for president takes place on July 2.

July 1

“NO TRUCE; NOT ONE STEP BACK”

Oaxaca Popular Assembly Holds Its Fifth Meeting, Refuses to Recognize the State Government and Vows to Install a Popular Government on July 5

THE FEDERAL ELECTION will take place on time in Oaxaca. The PRI government of the state will be put aside on July 5. That's the APPO plan.

The fifth popular assembly took place Friday morning, June 30, in the city of Oaxaca. The consensus of the assembly was first that the effort to oust Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz will not be abandoned. The removal of the governor unites everyone and is the first goal of the statewide social movement that has now grown well beyond any teachers' strike.

During the weekend and during the July 2 presidential election, the strike is in a holding pattern—literally holding the zocalo and surrounding streets. The first concern is that the election not be declared illegal, giving the federal government an excuse to discount the votes of Oaxaqueños. The voters are told to be careful in marking their ballots, the poll watchers careful to avoid any illegality.

The second consensus urges that people cast a “punishment” vote, meaning other than the PRI or the PAN candidates. While asserting that there is no guarantee of change through any of the present political parties, the public is encouraged: “Don’t stay home watching soap operas or soccer [*fútbol*], go vote.” It won’t be “all the same” to elect as

president either Madrazo (PRI) or López Obrador (PRD)—“there will be six years of the new president.” APPO recognizes that political parties exist, but citizens ought to vote for critical and thoughtful reasons, not for a payoff.

APPO IS PLANNING how to take the reins of government away from the established powers: the governor; the secretary of government, Jorge Franco Vargas; and the director of public security, Jose Manuel Vera Salinas. They are verbally referred to as a “trio de locos,” a trio of madmen. Ruiz personally, and the government officials in general, are referred to as *mapaches* (raccoons), *rateros* (thieves), and *perros* (dogs); they are denounced as mafiosos, fascists, and assassins. They are the elite, who don’t represent the people.

APPO gives the date of Wednesday, July 5, for installing a popular government in the old state government building recently converted by Ruiz into a museum. The laws of the state, according to one assembly participant, are “*leyes de chicle*”—they are laws of chewing gum, meaning they stretch and bend at the will of the current rulers.

After the election several actions are anticipated to keep the pressure on, including no further recognition of the PRI government of Ruiz; a July 4 blockade of the principal highways in Oaxaca, including Huajuapán–Puebla, Isthmus–Chiapas, Isthmus–Veracruz, Pinotepa–Acapulco, and Teotitlán–Tehuacán. The first permanent state assembly (*asamblea estatal permanente*) on July 4 will be followed on July 5 by the installation of the new popular government. The long-range plans include a rewritten constitution for the state, and eventually (very long range) for the nation.

Collection of citizens’ signatures for presentation to the federal congress continues. The executive, judicial, and legislative offices will be blockaded, along with commercial and financial centers. An alternative Guelaguetza (the July celebration of the peoples of Oaxaca) is planned.

All actions will be pacific. Efforts will be made to counter the government propaganda. There is recognition of the possibility of govern-

ment attacks against individuals—since attacking the encampment ended in failure—with its attendant need for mutual protection.

THE APPO RECOGNIZES that leadership of the state must shift from Section 22 of the teachers' union to the general population, in order to concretize the plans now being made. After the installation of a new government, the APPO recognizes, dependence on the general population will be even stronger. To encourage public support (especially in the occupation of the *zocalo* by volunteers from nearby towns), people will participate in more local or organizational assemblies, where a diversity of peoples and opinions will be respected, and people can evaluate the situation and make proposals. The APPO is envisioned as the permanent body governing in benefit of the majority. It is referred to as a "different participative democracy," not oppositional like traditional political parties, but united despite differences of ideas and ideologies.

APPO attendees say that the assembly is not dominated by intellectuals or political radical groups. It is, they affirm, a social movement of the people, largely served by nongovernmental organizations, to establish a space to break both the political and the legal stranglehold of the PRI. The public has demonstrated support for the APPO with four megamarches, each larger than its predecessor.

The new government, according to the APPO participants, will not permit repression of students, workers, campesinos, or the general public. There will be no attacks or political arrests, and the current political prisoners will be released.

Ruiz has been consistently condemned during the preceding month for repression, the June 14 attack on sleeping teachers, the destruction of Oaxaca's cultural patrimony, the assassination of campesinos and taxi drivers, the theft of natural resources to enrich the elite while the general population lives in poverty, corruption and theft, and submitting to the privatization demanded by the United States and the World Bank.

A statewide general and civic strike is called for July 6.

It should be noted that the information presented here is public

information. It appears on printed handouts and has been explained on Radio Universidad. The revolution is not a secret plot. It's a grand public movement.

July 3

OAXACA VOTERS PUNISH THE PRI

Citizens Denounce Electoral Fraud in a Show of Democracy from Below

WHY WAS THIS election in Oaxaca different from all other elections?

For one thing, the students at Radio Universidad, the station of UABJO opened its phone lines for citizens to call in with accusations of electoral fraud throughout Election Day.

I monitored during one hour, from 2:15 to 3:15 pm. In that time eleven citizen calls from different areas of greater Oaxaca City were aired. Three reported that there were no ballots available: voters had been waiting three hours, six hours, and seven hours, respectively. One caller said her credentials for voting were rejected. Four callers reported that the ruling PRI was handing out food and staples in exchange for votes. One reported that in the town of Zaachila nobody marked off names of those who had already voted.

And then there was a call saying that the state police barracks at Santa María Coyotepec held thousands of ballots that the troops were busily marking for distribution to the polls at the close of the day—a believable scenario given that so many polling places had “inadvertently” run out of ballots. The caller said his uncle, a police officer, just couldn’t bring himself to do it and blew the whistle. The uncle said the police had been working for three days to mark the ballots. The caller’s voice wavered with emotion as he described his uncle’s information.

As Radio Universidad announced each of the possible trouble spots, the public was urged to get there with video cameras, personal cameras, and cell phone cameras to document the potential fraud. And they did.

CITIZENS RESPONDED TO the marked ballots by surrounding the police quarters into the evening to prevent the transfer of the stolen ballots, neatly marked for the PRI, to closed polls. The newspaper *Noticias de Oaxaca* featured the story on its front page July 3, adding details of how people stood outside the police building shouting, "Fraud, Fraud."

In other polling sites citizens refused to permit officials to take away boxes of marked ballots without the presence of an official from every party, that is, if the opposition PRD wasn't represented. Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz's boast—that he would deliver a million votes for Madrazo—failed.

Radio Universidad also announced which rumors had been shown to be false and called on everyone to remain calm. As a result of its enthusiasm for a free and fair election, the radio station was told it may be taken off the air. This was reported by Oaxacapolitico, a website that reports hour by hour bulletins, usually right wing. The PRI accused students of telling voters how to mark their ballots by using a "password." That's an action that would negate the vote, an act deserving sanctions and possible cancellation of its broadcasting license.

Although I was listening carefully with pen in hand, I must have been in the bathroom at the precise moment when UABJO transgressed the Federal Code of Electoral Political Procedures.

The areas (the town of Zaachila, the neighborhood Colonia Volcanes) that received airtime at Radio Universidad for their nefarious goings on, did the best in voting punishment for the PRI.

Enrique Rueda Pacheco, the leader of SNTE Section 22, said, "This is democracy from below. We have done what we set out to do." The winning candidates will know who put them in office, he said. The APPO will meet in the former government palace, which was con-

verted to a museum by Ulises Ruiz and has now been retaken for the people's use.

ODDLY, SOME CLING to the belief that this massive movement is still a teachers' strike. Wilfrido Mireles, Francisco Toledo, and Arturo Lona withdrew after their last meeting as members of the Commission for Intermediation, which was created to find a solution to the educational demands of the teachers' strike, going on now for more than a month. Arturo Lona Reyes, bishop emeritus of Tehuantepec and commission member, complained of the APPO: "it cannot be that the educational demands have been a sideshow and now APPO demands an autonomous government, as well as taking over the government palace and the Government House." His lamentation—and dare I say, surprise—was reported by the Mexico City daily *La Jornada* and the local newspaper *Noticias de Oaxaca* on July 1.

The APPO is urging everyone to organize popular assemblies at every level: neighborhoods, street blocks, unions, and towns. "No leader is going to solve our problems," members of the APPO repeat. The announced goals, in addition to forcing Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz to resign or accept impeachment, is to retake the wealth of natural resources to benefit the people. The APPO plans to present the popular demand for the removal of Ruiz to the state legislature this week.

Meanwhile, Section 22, assisted by the citizenry, is blocking government offices such as the Secretary of Finances, the attorney general's office, the new Government House in the municipality of San Bartolo Coyotepec, the offices of the Federal Electoral Institute, the state congress, the office of State and Metropolitan Traffic, and the state television station, Channel 9.

Statewide, twenty-five municipal town halls (palacios municipales), are occupied by teachers.

The next megamarch is scheduled for Wednesday, July 5. A celebratory fiesta will take place on July 6 in the downtown area when the government palace-cum-museum is inaugurated as a space for the APPO.

There are one hundred days until the inauguration of the new

president of the republic, whoever that may be. Within all the celebrations, extreme precautions will be maintained until the outcome of the presidential election is resolved. The PRI governor of Oaxaca, with no national backing, and his state in the hands of the people, has nothing left to lose.

July 7

OAXACA INITIATES ALTERNATIVE GOVERNMENT

Popular Assembly Reclaims Government Palace for the People

THE APPO DECLARED itself the governing body of Oaxaca on the morning of July 5.

During a student march of several thousand, the popular assembly convened representatives of Oaxaca's state regions and municipalities, unions, nongovernmental organizations, social organizations, cooperatives, and parents. They met for several hours in the teachers' building to decide the next steps of this social movement. Meanwhile, perhaps two thousand citizens milled around outside in the zocalo.

Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz last year converted the anchor of Oaxaca's colonial zocalo, the block-long Government Palace, to a museum. He moved government offices outside the city to discourage protests in front of it. Today, as APPO symbolically reopened it for the people's government, it sports some new artwork to celebrate.

Directly in front of the Government Palace, a gauntlet formed through which unwanted persons—press and PRI government workers—were rudely expelled from inside the edifice, while high shrills, whistles, and cries of "*Fuera! Fuera!*" ("Out! Out!") pursued them.

DECISIONS MADE BY the assembly include a return to classes on Monday July 10, so that the schoolchildren will not lose their school

year; putting the encampment in the zocalo into the hands of the alternative government; strengthening the fight to oust Ulises Ruiz Ortiz as governor; and boycotting the tourist Guelaguetza celebration in favor of a free celebration for the people.

The zocalo's central gazebo, from which the decisions were announced, was adorned with flags and banners. The teachers have strung plastic canopies and tents, to protect themselves from sun and rain. In the heat most of the public crowded under whatever protection they could find. When the speaker on the bandstand announced the name of marching groups and assembly representatives, the crowd responded to each name by shouting "*Viva!*"

Although some groaned at the news that classes will resume, Enrique Rueda Pacheco, secretary-general of Section 22, asserted in a separate press conference that there is no crack in the solidarity of the struggle. Rueda spoke of "recovering the power of the people for the people." The intention of the APPO is to install a general assembly of citizens as the foremost authority of Oaxaca, preparing a plan of municipal, state, and national development, "with honesty and an ethics of service."

Rueda stated that local efforts around the state will be essential in maintaining Oaxaca as ungovernable, as pressure on Ruiz. It's generally agreed that Ruiz's attack on the sleeping teachers on June 14 caused the public to vote against the PRI in the local and presidential election on July 2. His ouster remains the unifying focus of the struggle. The three most recent governors of Oaxaca (Diódoro Carrasco, José Murat, and Ulises Ruiz) have repeatedly violated the peoples' civil rights with unconstitutional actions, leaving smoldering anger in the general public.

That anger surfaced with a million activist participants as well as a vote against the PRI.

At the moment, with the rebellion in the hands of the APPO, it becomes the task of lawyers to figure out what legal recourses are available against Ruiz as the social and nongovernmental organizations struggle with their new responsibilities.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF the popular government of the state of Oaxaca is an attempt to revitalize and broaden the historic form of government familiar to peoples of Oaxaca. This form of government is known as *usos y costumbres* (literally, "practices and customs") and is recognized as a legitimate form of local self-rule in the Oaxaca state constitution. The *usos y costumbres* system doesn't acknowledge political parties; the system functions by consensus. Presently, when a person is elected to the state legislative assembly, she or he is then assumed to belong to one party or another.

The effort to keep political parties out of local government has led to decades of conflict, in which the PRI has tried to establish local power through bosses (*caciques*). Dependence on government handouts was encouraged, as were land conflicts. The *usos y costumbres* system was damaged by the power of money and then by the fact that the population became more mobile.

As people poured into the more urban areas, the system of political parties overwhelmed the system of *usos y costumbres*. New residents were not brought into local civic ways of governing; to the contrary, in large cities, *usos y costumbres* vanished. This politicization broke important knots that unite the members of a community, such as unpaid community service (*tequio*). Nevertheless, statewide, the greater part of public works in some four hundred small communities are still carried out by citizen *tequios* that accomplish a variety of tasks like building roads; repairing churches; bringing in the harvest; and sharing the expenses of weddings, baptisms, or deaths. The system of *usos y costumbres* has long been the basis for left political thinking.

Most significant, the authority of a general assembly composed of a town's residents is acknowledged where *usos y costumbres* are retained: municipal authorities, farmers, the council of elders, and all the citizens make the decisions that affect communal life; the assembly is the law, the judges, the executive branch, and the legislators all in one.

Political parties don't convoke a general assembly of the population to make decisions regarding municipal development. There is no monitor for the spending of public monies. Political parties, a collection

of private powers, act on their own discretion and make decisions that often strip the towns' natural resources to benefit private enterprises. Theft is common. The population is largely left ignorant of what was done and where the money went, while certain persons became inexplicably wealthy. That is the case in the capital city of Oaxaca.

(As a side benefit of the present struggle, residents of the city are uniting to confront Mayor Jesus Ángel Ortega Arias, who up until now, as Ulises's puppet, has been largely discounted as responsible for the damage and neglect in the city. He was elected as a PRI candidate.)

The new popular assembly of Oaxaca aims at nothing less than expanding the traditional idea of general assemblies of citizens to form a new state government. Such assemblies, under *usos y costumbres*, oversee the execution of the resolutions taken by their municipal authorities. That is to say, "the executive branch" (the authorities) is charged with accomplishing the tasks the assembly gives it. The municipal president, foremost among the authorities, leads (as the Zapatistas' phrase explains) "by obeying."

For the population of Oaxaca, the idea of governing by consensus remains part of the common cultural heritage. Therefore, as the APPO was convoked, the modest people who comprise 80 percent of Oaxaca's population recognized it immediately. And they support it, despite the obvious difficulties of convening authorities from around the state. Since these authorities receive no pay, a trip to the capital city is not easy. But it's happening.

The APPO also includes representatives from other groups in addition to municipal authorities—regional delegates, nonprofit organizations, unions, social groups—and the structure is still fluid. Nevertheless, it has already made the difficult decision to release the teachers for two weeks to finish the school year. The second difficult decision is to maintain indefinitely the encampment in the *zocalo*, and to do that, citizens must step forward without the teachers, until the teachers return on July 22.

This is a big test for an infant popular assembly movement, much broader than a teachers' union, with demands far beyond the educa-

tional ones, a test that is taking place within the context of national uncertainty.

July 15

BISHOP SAMUEL RUIZ VISITS OAXACA

An Ungovernable State Seeks Historic Solutions

BISHOP SAMUEL RUIZ, well known bishop emeritus of San Cristóbal de Las Casas in Chiapas, moderator of peace talks between the government and the Zapatista rebels and chair of a leading human-rights monitoring organization there, has come to Oaxaca for two days to meet with citizens of Oaxaca and the teachers union.

The presence of Don Samuel is both symbolic and strategically significant, given that since the attack on teachers by police on June 14, Oaxaca has been in a state of civil rebellion, with town after town falling into the hands of the new popular movement. See examples below.

Miguel Álvarez, Don Samuel's secretary, set the tone by saying that he and Don Samuel had come "seeking ways to make links during this profound crisis of national proportions." He asked the listening representatives of civil society, "How does Oaxaca relate to Atenco?"

On Thursday, July 13, Don Samuel Ruiz, accompanied by Miguel Álvarez and Arturo Lona, the bishop emeritus of Tehuantepec, undertook back to back meetings. The first meeting drew fifty representatives of civil organizations, with participation of the two bishops and of Padre Uvi, the priest of San Pablo Huixtepec, known for his human-rights work in Oaxaca.

During the day, meetings took place with the Ricardo Flores Magón

Popular Indigenous Council of Oaxaca, women, the teachers, and the APPO in the capital city—an unmistakable show of Don Samuel's moral weight in support of the popular movement.

Both Miguel Álvarez and Don Samuel placed Oaxaca in the national context, emphasizing a history of repression and the destruction of the people's culture. Don Samuel called for "sincerity and solidarity" as the popular movement tries to negotiate the specific difficulties it faces, such as how to coordinate the differing agendas of the teachers' union and the civil society that has consolidated around it. Making more visible the reasons behind the desire to have Ulises Ruiz Ortiz removed as governor is essential, Álvarez said. This must be followed by delineating the separate roles of political, magisterial, labor, and nongovernmental organizations, while establishing inclusive participation.

Long term agendas are required, both bishops said, and a firmer structure for the APPO that confronts problems that are "long-term, not local, facing bad media, and very complex." Desperate short term actions won't work. The struggle must become a solution with different (civil) dynamics and naturally linked to the national movement. The APPO needs to assume the moral authority as well as the political authority.

Neither Don Samuel nor his secretary referred to the Zapatistas directly.

"The struggle cannot be negotiated," stated Álvarez, referring to the failed mediation efforts. Bishop emeritus Arturo Lona spoke on why the efforts at mediation between Section 22 of the SNTE and Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz failed. He declared that the teachers' struggle had morphed into a social struggle, setting the participants on different paths. Referring back to the statement by Álvarez, he said, "The logic of mediation is different from the logic of APPO, which needs to achieve national prestige, explain what it is, and explain its proposals." Bishop Lona exhorted the people to take the high road, be nonviolent and yet still face the government. And, he said, "It's always darkest before the dawn."

Twenty arrest warrants outstanding against the teachers were

dropped the preceding day, a movement success added to the electoral defeat of the PRI on July 2.

THIS WEEK ENRIQUE Rueda Pacheco, the secretary-general of Section 22, announced that he will present to the national congress the Oaxaca petition to remove all state powers from the ruling government. Oaxaca state is presently ungovernable, as both bishops agreed. A news blackout, which is very evident when one turns on Channel 9, the television channel of the state government, creates a split in perception—as if we live on different planets—some on the ground affected by what is happening, some in front of the screen oblivious until they come upon a road blockade.

Then, Channel 9 repeats lies as disseminated by the PRI partisans, assigning violent actions to students and teachers. The post-June 14 struggle to profoundly alter Oaxaca is thus far bloodless as it erupts across the state. The popular movement threatens a takeover of Channel 9. It is not yet clear if that means a shutdown or popular use, as is the case with Radio Universidad, the radio station in the hands of the movement.

Some examples of the situation confronting the visiting bishops and Padre Uvi: The town of Santa Cruz Xoxocotlán reconstituted its dormant general assembly, saying that this was necessary to guarantee citizen participation. The upwelling of popular participation springs directly from the teachers' popular movement. "Xoxo" is a town where the neglect of neighborhoods is a scandal—no drainage, no pavement, dubious provisions for water, and the continuing lack of bathrooms in the public school, an issue that had been contentious for two years and finally caused parents to occupy the municipal building.

San Juan Bautista Tuxtepec, population 205,595 with 8.85 percent of the state's credentialed voters, was also taken over on July 4 by the teachers' popular movement. The teachers occupied the government building and the two bridges that give access to the city.

But the example that will be the test case for the entire state is the municipality of Villa de Zaachila. In an attempt to throw out politi-

cal parties and formally reinstitute government by popular assembly, Zaachila is the first entity to approach the state legislature for a change of status. On July 7 adherents to the teachers' popular movement occupied the town hall and threw out Mayor José Coronel Martínez, a PRI member who sent local police to assist the forces of Ruiz (already being widely referred to as the ex governor) in the infamous attack on the sleeping teachers on June 14. Coronel, who admits to wearing a bulletproof vest, refuses to leave town.

The PRD carried Villa de Zaachila in the July 2 presidential election by a three-to-one margin.

The situation of Zaachila, population 30,000 and located 15 kilometers (9.3 miles) from Oaxaca City, can best be understood in the context of Oaxacan state government. Oaxaca has 570 municipalities (similar to U.S. counties, containing several towns and villages each), of which 360 are governed by tradition (*usos y costumbres*) using the nonpolitical general popular assembly. That leaves 210 governed by some political party, including the PRI, PAN and PRD. As Joel Aquino Maldonado, a campesino member of the APPO said, "100 municipal presidents have no interest [in the people]. They are corrupted." Of the forty named by the popular movement as the most-corrupt PRI presidents, twenty-two have lost their municipal buildings to the movement. Keep in mind that no shots are fired; the movement is taking over their municipalities armed with sticks and righteous anger.

As one of the twenty-two "captured" municipalities, Zaachila could make a good criminal case against its president José Coronel; he's apparently a prototypical PRI thief, using municipal funds for his own benefit, buying votes for the PRI, and practicing land fraud, repression, and corruption. Six town councilors resigned of their own will, and their substitutes will take their places according to municipal law.

But taking it one step further, Zaachila chose, in its first twenty-first-century popular assembly, a new president, Miguel Ángel Vásquez, on July 10. Then the assembly took a three-hundred-person caravan of taxis and buses to the state legislature to seek Coronel's official removal from office, plus to register the change of Zaachila's status from a mu-

nicipality by political elections to one governed by popular assembly. And not incidentally, the Vásquez followers called for the removal of Ruiz.

WHEN THE CARAVAN arrived, the president of the Fifty-ninth State Congress, Bulmaro Rito Salinas, received the demands. Rito told the twenty Zaachila representatives headed by Vásquez that “the intra municipal conflict will be analyzed and a solution will be given according to the constitution.” The petitions were handed over to the director of the Juridical Department, Patricio Dolores Sierra. In other words, the state legislature sloughed off the petitions, despite blockades and rallies. Finally the legislature scheduled a meeting for Thursday, July 13, the same day that Bishop Samuel Ruiz arrived in the city.

Those hundred corrupted municipalities in Oaxaca referred to by Aquino could also be in serious difficulty as entities for diverting public funds for the campaign of Roberto Madrazo. They are facing judicial problems in case of an investigation, said Benjamín Hernández Silva, the federal congressman elect of the district of Miahuatlán. (Oaxaca is divided into thirty districts.) Both the state and the federal government could call for investigation.

Only the states of Tabasco and Oaxaca have no law of transparency and access to governmental information. That law means, exactly as it does in the United States, that public records are available for public scrutiny. At present, the effort to make transparency a federal requirement is stalled, but with the nine new delegates from the PRD, the balance of votes will shift, and along with the shift will come federal pressure on the two states that have no such law. In Oaxaca public resources vanish with no accounting. That’s about to change, affirmed Hernández, as soon as the new representatives of the PRD led Coalition for the Good of All assume office in the House of Representatives. “We are going to become a stone in the shoe of the state legislature until it passes the Law of Transparency for Oaxaca.”

Rueda of Section 22 has spoken of “recovering the power of the people for the people.” The intention is to install a popular assembly as

the foremost authority in the state. The recognition given to the popular assembly by Don Samuel may provide further impetus for strengthening its structure, as he observed must be done in order to govern statewide.

The gathering in Oaxaca City of municipal presidents from as far away as eight or ten hours' journey down from the mountains to participate in the APPO is a sure sign that plans for municipal, state, and national assemblies are underway.

A strong APPO has to be in place if the movement intends to undertake complete removal of judicial, legislative, and executive powers that were firmly controlled by the governor, as Don Samuel pointed out.

How likely is that? The PRI lost not only in the presidential vote, but also seats in the national Senate of the republic, and nine of the eleven federal House seats as reported by the Preliminary Program of Electoral Results (PREP).

The biggest fear is that Ruiz, on his way out, will sell whatever he has left of power among his PRI operatives, who are very likely to abandon the sinking PRI ship. If they ally with a PAN president, Calderón may decide to restore order in the state with a *mano dura* ("hard hand"), that is, military repression.

Don Samuel's simple presence is meaningful, as is his emphasis on a national link.

However Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz proceeds, the repercussions of the June 14 repression have extended beyond Oaxaca.

July 17

THE REAL THING

Guelagueta Is Postponed

WHEN THE FIRST little girl stepped out onto the platform, holding high the orange satin skirt of her costume and clutching on top of her head a basket of flowers, she was grinning with such evident combination of pride, glee, and terror that tears sprang to my eyes. I had to get out of my folding chair on the crooked pavement and go stand in the back of the crowd so nobody would notice my attack of sentimentality.

The rest of the children trooped out. The females, child and adult, in these Guelagueta events are invariably dressed to represent the indigenous nineteenth-century version of a Spanish lady, and the guys always wear white cotton to represent very clean campesinos—so why scoff at the colonial history? It's tradition. As I watched the kids step around to the creaky recorded music it was impossible not to understand how well loved they are, in a way one cannot imagine for adult performers, not for adults who dance at Radio City Music Hall or the Sands Hotel.

These kids learn their parents' traditions, and even when one confused boy turned the wrong way, and one girl's braid fell off, the audience applauded heartily. And the audience wasn't all parents, at least not parents of these particular offspring. Some were tourists who never

imagined traveling a thousand miles to see children dance.

I stood back in the crowd of maybe three hundred people who, with formal events cancelled, had wandered to this splendid corner in Oaxaca: the handsome campaniles of Santo Domingo church strong against the clear sky as clouds sailed by; the first bats swooping forth at twilight. I suddenly remembered my pretelevision teen years of a summer night, when on the street corner a crowd of boys would stand and sing "Goodnight, Irene," surrounded by black clad old women in chairs set out on the hot sidewalks, old men in their suspenders. Good night, Irene. It was like that.

So where was the real Guelaguetza? For those of you who don't know the word, it's an old one, originating long before its people learned to read and write, let alone give it upper case billing. It means mutual aid—like, if there's a wedding, the neighbors help out by bringing food and drink and music and a gift or two for the young couple; they do it knowing full well that in time the neighbors will reciprocate, and the reciprocity will circulate forever, like bread cast on the waters, or if you're a Hindu, like a kind of edible karma. Last night when the teachers' popular movement took possession of the auditorium on Oaxaca's Fortin Hill, the "neighbors" brought food and coffee and whatever they had, to help ten thousand or so occupy the hill last night and persist until today, Monday, the day Governor Ulises Ruiz set aside for the commercial Guelaguetza.

The movement wasn't having it. In this stubborn struggle, in which Ruiz holds the police, the media, and the money, the popular movement has a hold of the people. I listen to callers on the Radio Universidad phone lines. (Lousy technology: "*Bueno? Bueno? Bueno? Estás en el aire! Dígame! Estás en el aire! Adelante, compañero!*" for two minutes before the conversation gets rolling.) And then, after the technology struggle, what do we hear? "This Guelaguetza is not for the people; it's for the hotels and restaurants! I cannot afford this; it's for the rich only! Why should our tax dollars go to support neoliberalism!" What? *What?* Tax dollars going to support neoliberalism? I did listen one day when there was a discussion of what neoliberalism is, and what it means,

and I guess it took only that one lesson, because everyone caught on so quick. The best tickets to the Fortin auditorium sell for 400 pesos, in a state where the minimum wage is 40 pesos per day. That's about \$4.00.

For the first time, the upper case Guelaguetza, maximum party of the Oaxaqueños, refused to cater to the tourists and the wealthy, and the people took back their fiesta. Ulises Ruiz Ortiz at 10:20 A.M. in a black suit—and if that doesn't prove he's mad, what could? Who wears a black suit on July 17?—was revealed in living color with a Mexican flag on his desk, on his state television Channel 9, between acts of the televised 2005 Guelaguetza. His white, white teeth showed beneath his black, black moustache as he transmitted the cancellation message, his defeat obscured by a variety of falsehoods and slanders.

RUIZ CLAIMED THAT his decision was made to avoid attacks on visitors who might come to see the show. The cancellation was described as a rescheduling, although with no date for a future event. And he repeated his willingness to “maintain dialogue”—there is no dialogue—and “find a solution to the teachers' demands,” although the demands are not from the teachers but the people, who have only one demand: Out. Ruiz out.

The governor, or as the people refer to him, the ex governor, informed the Channel 9 audience that he has already requested the federal government's intervention to recoup the economic damage caused to Oaxaca by postponing the biggest tourist draw of the Oaxacan calendar.

Except it's not postponed; it's just going on free and in different venues and on different days. Historically, the Guelaguetza has been held on the last two Mondays in July, and that's when the people will observe it. It's called Monday on the Hill (*lunes del cerro*), and only in 1951 was it assigned the people's stolen word, Guelaguetza, as it became a commercial event. Now the APPO has scheduled a series of free fiestas, the biggest one set for July 24, Monday, on Fortin Hill.

Participants in the Guelaguetza come into Oaxaca City from the seven regions of Oaxaca: Central Valleys, Sierra, Cañada, Tuxtepec,

Mixteca, Costa, and the Istmo, delegations of dancers who display their professionalized regional dances and their professionalized regional costumes, their dance routines, and the fruits of the earth representative of each area, such as a pineapple hefted on a dancer's shoulder. And please don't point out that Mexico's national bureau of government statistics (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, INEGI in its Spanish initials) says there are eight regions. The people say seven, and before the governor tore it down, they used to have a monument to prove it: Siete Regiones.

IT USED TO be their hill, too. Unfortunately, Governor Ruiz decided that widening the access road from two to three lanes would be a good idea. Nobody was consulted (he likes widening roads, in a state where 90 percent of the people cannot afford an automobile), apparently not even a civil engineer. The sad result was that dynamite blasting revealed a substantial geological fissure in the hill, and off the top of the hill rolled—no, not the houses, not yet, although people were temporarily evacuated—rolled down several white stones. It so happens they were the same white stones placed to form the last word on a sentence printed out in white stones on the side of Fortin Hill. The sentence is a famous quotation of Benito Juárez, the indigenous and much cherished (*benemerito* is his appellation) president of Mexico, a poor humble Zapotec boy from Oaxaca. The famous sentence, visible for miles, read, "Respect for the rights of others is peace."

The *peace* fell off. The outcry that followed surely compelled the retaking of the Guelaguetza, to revitalize it like the popular assemblies are being revitalized. Next week we'll see young men leaping in their feather headdresses, women's naked shoulders, flaring skirts, and stomping heels. All that will play out free in the Rotunda de la Azucena, the people's auditorium on the people's hill.

No tickets required. Just come. Bring the kids.

July 22

THE POPULAR ASSEMBLY LODGES LEGAL DENUNCIATION OF GOVERNOR RUIZ

Congress Receives a Legal Complaint

ACTING AS ALTERNATIVE government of the state of Oaxaca, the APPO has moved on the legal front to oust the governor of the state. On June 21 the nine page legal complaint was handed to the national congress.

Based on the Constitution of the United States of Mexico, the APPO issued its formal denunciation of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. The denunciation calls for revocation of his post as governor of the free and sovereign state of Oaxaca.

The call for Ruiz's removal was composed and signed by seventy-two civil organizations and members of CIESAS (Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, the top-ranked institute for the study of society and anthropology in Mexico). It was handed to the legislature of Mexico on July 16, one month after the governor ordered a predawn attack on sleeping teachers from Section 22 of the teachers' union. Some teachers were accompanied by children and family members in their encampment in the zocalo of Oaxaca City. The attack was made by police supported by helicopters firing tear gas canisters.

Within days the teachers' strike had changed into a statewide popular social movement, with its single demand the removal of Governor

Ruiz. Ruiz is a member of the PRI, which has controlled Oaxaca for more than seventy five years.

The denunciation is being circulated to the national and foreign press. Meanwhile, outbreaks of the struggle to control town governments continue throughout the state. On July 20 the blockade and occupation of the government buildings for the legislative, judicial, and executive offices of Oaxaca organized by the APPO were carried out.

July 23

PART I: RADIO UNIVERSIDAD, A VOICE OF OAXACA'S SOCIAL REBELLION, ATTACKED

Supporters Defend the Student Run Radio Station from "Paramilitary" Aggressors

AT 9:15 PM on July 22 shouts interrupted on the air Radio Universidad, a shout for help, while in the background I could hear the doors being pounded as if someone was trying to smash them and a woman screaming. A male voice managed to shout, "We are being attacked!" There was a sound like glass breaking. Then the station went silent.

Static crackled for about fifteen minutes while I twirled the dial to see if any commercial radio station was paying attention. Silly me. It's now 10 pm. The woman teacher at the microphone is hysterical. The station was populated with women and children for the evening while everyone else was at the people's Guelaguetza in the zocalo. Since the radio station is also used as a collection area for food and supplies, not only for the teachers but now also for the Guelaguetza people who have come in from the countryside, there were many elderly women and children in the building.

The single cry for help that made it onto the air brought people from the neighboring streets, but the students and people inside managed to beat back the attackers.

With the station back on the air, the men now speaking are wild. Apparently the teachers' Radio Plantón also picked up the alarm. A man at the microphone is screaming for SNTE people from every state

to come. The immediate danger is over but the adrenalin is understandably racing.

The men on air identify the attackers as thugs brought in by three vehicles, about twenty-five *paramilitares* carrying arms of the type used only by the military, that is, high-powered automatic weapons.

Nobody was shot.

The movement people claim to have a video of the vehicles that the attackers used—one a bus, license plate 410 of public transport; one a white vehicle with plate number 25; the third vehicle is not identified.

"How could they come to attack a place where there are children?" These words after the recovery are all broadcast at panic level: "We are going to die here in Radio Universidad," meaning they will die before they give up the struggle.

The announcing voices keep changing as various people arrive. Urgent request: come to help, all society and civil organizations, to reinforce the zocalo and the radio station. Heliodoro Díaz Escárrega (secretary of government) and Jorge Franco Vargas (who held the position during the June 14 attack on the zocalo, and was fired as a scapegoat), puppets of Ruiz, have tried to murder youngsters at the university.

"Here are people to defend Radio Universidad, but maybe it's a decoy to invade the zocalo. . . Be careful, go to the zocalo, heads of families. We don't need any more of this. . . We need your presence."

Secretary-general of the SNTE, Enrique Rueda Pacheco, asked for reinforcements. Someone else shouted that police patrols are on the road. "Everyone go out into the streets to defend ourselves."

The level of rage is very high, along with the demand for Ruiz to be removed for attempts against their lives. A student broadcaster denounced, "The federal government"—Fox has accepted Ruiz's assurance that absolutely nothing has been happening in Oaxaca—"is also responsible for not paying attention to the situation."

Zaachila, one of the towns whose *palacio* was taken over two days ago by movement people, is attending the Guelaguetza and somebody arrived at the radio station. He is shouting that Zaachila is *presente* to defend the people and the station.

THERE ARE NOW several thousand people gathered outside the station. It's now seventy-five minutes after the attack. People are asked to mobilize in the zocalo. All the radio voices are urgent and agitated. "It is urgent right now to have the removal of powers!" referring to the three branches of Oaxaca's state government, all of which are controlled by Ruiz.

At 11:35 pm people are advised to buy flashlights and batteries and to stay alert. The director of the law school arrived at the station and in a calm voice condemned Ruiz and Heliodoro Díaz Escárrega, whom he said is directly responsible for the attacks, and then he denounced the violence perpetrated at the university. It was announced that a press conference with the rector of the university is scheduled for Sunday July 23, at 11 am. At noon there will be another press conference, this one with the people's assembly.

Felipe Calderón and Ulises Ruiz are meeting right now, another announcer informs us, in Huatulco (Oaxaca's rich-kid playground on the coast), where Calderón is vacationing.

At midnight the station is settling into sequential denunciations and announcements of emergency meetings for the morning and of the various calls received from around the state where towns are on alert.

The announcer, now a woman, thanks everyone for their incredible support, and says, "It's calm." So I'm going to bed, with the hope that no more bad events happen, and that I can sleep, because that adrenalin rage is contagious.

July 23

PART II: OAXACA'S STATE OFFICES BLOCKED

Fears of a "Dirty War" after Paramilitary Attacks; Movement Requests Constitutional Impeachment of Governor and Recognition of New Popular Government

AFTER A SUCCESSFUL display of organizing the general public to stage a free celebration of the traditional Guelaguetza celebration, the APPO embarked on the hard work of taking the next steps to strengthen the struggle.

Backed by its majority membership of striking teachers, during a twelve hour session concluding at 5 am on July 26, the APPO decided to blockade indefinitely the access to the state congress, the state supreme court, and the offices of the secretary of finances, and the attorney general. The press office of Section 22 of the teachers' union, through its spokesperson Daniel Rosas Romero, said the measure was taken in order to increase the ungovernability of Oaxaca and hasten the departure of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. The occupation began at 6 am on July 26, according to news broadcast on Radio Universidad.

The broadcast on Radio Universidad called for citizen participation to maintain the blockade. A citizen meeting was scheduled for 6 the same evening to receive ideas on what next steps to take.

THE APPO SENT delegates to Mexico City to emphasize that it now holds the government of Oaxaca. A caravan left Oaxaca on July 25 for the national capital to demand attention to the petition for impeach-

ment in the national senate. According to spokespersons for the APPO, national support for the movement is growing. Teachers' organizations from Michoacán and Chiapas came to Oaxaca to offer aid. International offers of support have come from the U.S. American Federation of Teachers and from a group of Cubans and other Latin Americans who were meeting in Oaxaca.

It must be driving PRI people nuts. I ran into one middle-class Oaxaqueño who was outraged because, as he complained, "a handful of people" can interfere with the business of Oaxaca.

On the part of the government, the new phase is dirty war. Thus far, men assumed to be government paramilitaries have thrown Molotov cocktails into the homes of two prominent movement leaders (indigenous leader Alejandro Cruz López, and Enrique Rueda Pacheco, secretary-general of Section 22). Radio Universidad has been attacked twice. Its phone lines and signal are frequently blocked. The station has been the main avenue of communication for more than two months, since the destruction of Radio Plantón, the teachers' small FM station, on June 14.

Witnesses at the radio station identified the attackers as "paramilitaries," because they carried high powered assault rifles. Students and citizens thwarted the first attack; the second attack involved the burning of a bus outside the university but did not penetrate the building, which is now well guarded by citizens. The fire department did not respond to calls from the university, but no damage was done to the radio station.

The following day, a delegation of students of the Technological Institute ("El Tecnológico") of Oaxaca declared that they would hold a student vote on July 28 to affirm their support for the movement. The Tecnológico stadium was used for an overflow crowd of attendees, estimated at 20,000 by *La Jornada*, celebrating the people's recovery of the original free Guelaguetza on Monday July 24. (The official, state organized Guelaguetza had become a high priced show for tourists.) For every government attack, three citizen groups align with the movement.

THE REMOVAL OF the three branches of government in Oaxaca, according to lawyer Juan Manuel Cruz Acevedo, would be completely legal. He cited paragraph 5 of article 76 of the Federal Constitution of the Republic, which says the government can be removed "if the government were physically unable to exercise the inherent functions of its positions, or were unable to because of situations or unresolved conflict, which affect the life of the State, impeding the full validity of the juridical order."

"It would be a lot better all around if [Ruiz] resigns," Cruz Acevedo said. If he doesn't resign, Cruz Acevedo predicted, the state will "fall into a climate of general disobedience." At the present writing, twenty four municipalities have evicted their municipal presidents in takeovers by their residents. Among them is Santa Cruz de Xoxocotlán ("Xoxo"), where the new state government buildings are located (moved there to avoid protests in downtown Oaxaca City), and its neighbor town of Zaachila. The struggle in Xoxo is a classic, involving the ouster of a municipal PRD president by the PRI, the installation of a PRI interim president, and now the uprising of the residents against her.

The more I learn, the less simple everything becomes. For example, on April 3, President Vicente Fox inaugurated a highway to link San Juan Petlapa with the rest of the state of Oaxaca. Petlapa is the only indigenous municipality without a road. But the road was abandoned without completion, and one week ago the rains again isolated the Sierra North's Chatina community. So the inhabitants of Petlapa added their town to the teacher led social movement. This type of affiliation with the social movement invariably involves citing public grievances. When people speak of these grievances—the destruction of the cultural patrimony, the environment, the lack of water, schools, and roads—they accuse Ruiz personally, but they are really voicing the accumulated grievances against the PRI and the impending privatization of even more public services and spaces. In a feeling of diffuse dread and anger, one often hears "this is our culture," "we are not like the northern cities," and references to *el raiz*, which all reflect a sense of Oaxaca being

unalterably changed for the worse. One person said, "If people want to see a modern northern city let them go to the United States."

APPO LISTS ITS successes thus far as the enormous popular turnout for anti Ruiz marches; the vast number of teachers who have maintained the occupation of the zocalo; the forced shuffling by Ruiz of three cabinet members; the "punishment vote" that on July 2 replaced nine of eleven PRI legislative delegates with people from the PRD; and the takeover of twenty four (or is it twenty-five?) municipalities fed up with PRI rule. Meanwhile, now that the school year is over, the teachers have returned from their duties and reoccupied fifty-two blocks of the center of the city.

On the dark side, the APPO cited the absence of public support from the newly elected PRD representatives. But on July 25 some did step forward in solidarity, at least verbally. They have not much choice but to do so: the situation is now "for or against" the movement.

Another sore point is the participation of police who are "working against their own people" in defense of the rich. INEGI (the bureau of national statistics) refused to make public the poverty statistics during the election period. Meanwhile, lies are promulgated by television, and newspapers are controlled by the government.

The state legislators are reportedly meeting in a hotel in the exclusive suburb of San Felipe.

No injuries of movement people have been reported since June 14, and Section 22 of SNTE also declared that no deaths occurred in the June 14 attack, despite many claims of between three and twenty deaths.

The movement expects an intensification of the dirty war. I see no way this cultural social revolution will end soon.

August 2

OAXACA'S STATE TELEVISION STATION UNDER POPULAR CONTROL

Women March to the Zocalo against Governor and Take Over Channel 9 Studios

IN THE STYLE of the *marcha de las caserolas* (cooking pot march) made famous in Argentina, the women of Oaxaca took to the streets with their pots, frying pans, and spoons to beat out the call "Ruiz fuera!": Governor Ruiz out!

On Tuesday morning about two thousand women gathered at the Fountain of the Seven Regions and marched toward the zocalo, a distance of eight-and-a-half kilometers (five miles). Along the route they were greeted by cheering onlookers who handed them water and waved signs in support of the social movement that has set as its first and foremost goal the removal from office of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. The women tapped out the rhythm of "*ya cayó*" ("he's out") and used pan covers as cymbals. Many carried wooden spoons and drummed on their frying pans.

When they gathered in the zocalo, the drumming sound was like a tropical downpour, rain on a tin roof. Then the bells of the ex-government building, made over as a museum by Ruiz, began to ring. The movement has attached ropes from the bell towers to the pavilion in the center of the zocalo, and over the sound of the tapping of thousands of spoons on pots, the bells pealed out.

No tropical rain: the sun at midday glared, and many women, some

of whom carried children, also carried sun umbrellas. The females present ranged in age from babes in arms to tough old grannies. As many women wore the traditional aprons (a trademark of street and market vendors in Oaxaca) as wore jeans. Before the march dispersed at 12:30, somebody announced from the pavilion, "Women are going to Channel 9." The location of the state television facilities is a bus ride outside the downtown area, across from the Alvaro Carillo Theater.

Women have played a strong part from the beginning of the movement, as they comprise half of the teachers' union and/or are mothers of students affected. As parents they have expressed rage over the lack of decent schools and classrooms, and most recently over paying enrollment fees for public schools. Free education is guaranteed by the Mexican constitution. Fees to register, as well as to purchase uniforms and books, appear to have fronted yet another method of state theft.

About 350 women marched into the state television Channel 9 facilities at approximately 1:30 pm. Nobody stopped them. Perhaps a thousand more women and children stood on watch outside the building. At 3:30 the channel went off the air. Within an hour, the women telephoned Radio Universidad to say they had two radio stations working from the site, one AM and one FM, but no television. They reported that there had been no opposition, no struggle, and that nobody was hurt. They asked the listeners for backup—guards, food, water, and people who know how to operate television cameras.

By early evening some of the occupying force of women had returned to speak in person on Radio Universidad, while most remained at the television station.

"We are not afraid," the spokeswoman said. "Whatever happens, happens. We are fed up with this situation. We are fighting for our children. We women cannot stay home."

ON THE PREVIOUS day, Monday, July 31, the government sponsored a second Guelaguetza tourist event organized by the state's Department of Culture in the newly paved Llano Park, another renovated piece of cultural patrimony. Although Radio Universidad—yesterday the only

source of public communication for the social movement—had suggested that people let it go, stay away, and not provoke trouble, the students (I'm guessing by the youthful voices) rushed right down to Llano where the event was starting, screaming "*ya cayó!*" However, they stationed themselves at the opposite side of the park from the event.

According to a report in the local newspaper *Noticias de Oaxaca*, a near confrontation was provoked when one youth climbed the park's monument to Benito Juárez. The boy who climbed the monument was literally lowered off the pedestal among a rain of peanuts, empty water bottles, and some stones. A movement contingent went to his defense. The shouts, insults, and physical aggression multiplied. Then someone began to fire a pistol of the type used exclusively by the army, according to reports from the APPO. The audience fled and the event was canceled.

The alleged shooter was captured by the APPO representatives. He was, it was reported, handled with care, not mistreated, and verified as healthy by a doctor before being handed over. Representatives of the federal attorney general's office went to UABJO to retrieve the prisoner, identified as Isaías Pérez Sánchez. Pérez declared his innocence.

The news reports indicated that Pérez was dressed in civilian clothing but is in fact a member of the police force. As usual for Oaxaca, it is very slow going to burrow down to the truth. However, as an observer, I can say that if a shooter, whoever it might have been, wanted to hurt anybody he could have. But he did not.

Therefore, I place the event in the realm of the government policy to create fear, anxiety, and threats. Police cars stop in front of the homes of leaders and members of the movement. Reports of armed paramilitaries grow like weeds. The general atmosphere is flooded with confusion and misinformation and outright lies, such as attributing to the teachers the unlawful behavior committed by thugs.

FROM THE SIDE of the social movement, the government buildings of all the three branches have been blocked for four days; movement people picketed the various hotels and restaurants where the state del-

egates and governor have been trying to meet; several major highways are shut; denunciations of various PRI criminals continue on Radio Universidad; as reported previously yet another tourist event was cancelled yesterday by protesters; and from outside the city, towns call in to say they have taken back their municipal buildings from the PRI caciques who have been draining town resources while the people cowered in fear of repression.

Against this backdrop, at 7 this evening Channel 9 went back on the air. Terrible sound, full of static, but there was the APPO. Seated in front of a movement banner, which read "When a woman advances there is no man who stays behind," Daniela, a lawyer who works both with the APPO and the civil rights commission CODEP (Comité de Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo), introduced half a dozen women. (None were introduced by name; I simply recognized Daniela.) The women took turns with a handheld microphone to demand that Ruiz resign. "The women organized for a great march," one said. "We are in the struggle. Thanks to Ulises Ruiz the people have risen up, with marches, and concentrations of citizens. Channel 9 never gave us information, only lies. The APPO is the people. In a peaceful way we have taken the channel which is the public channel."

Another woman said, "This is a historic moment." The scene's backdrop, handheld, walked with invisible feet to stand behind her. In white letters on red background it read, "Fuera Ulises": Ulises out.

After the women's victory broadcast, Channel 9 briefly broadcast parts of videos by indigenous community members. At 8:30 all was quiet.

UPDATE, WEDNESDAY MORNING, August 2: This morning on public television Channel 9, the people are showing all the videos of the June 14 attack with armed police, interviews with the teachers in the hospital, the marches, the rallies, and the meetings. All this material was taped as it happened but never shown on any station. It's fantastic to watch it now for the first time.

August 9

THREATS AND GUNFIRE AS 300 FEDERAL POLICE ARRIVE IN THE STATE CAPITAL

Popular Assembly Blocks Oaxaca City Government Buildings and Repels Another Police Attack

A BLOCKADE OF the Oaxaca city hall was carried out at 10 am on August 7. In the name of the APPO, five hundred teachers from Ocotlán prepared an encampment in the recently “renovated” Plaza de la Danza, which abuts the entrance to the municipal building of the capital city of Oaxaca State. Ocotlán has a total enrollment of one thousand in Section 22.

In the effort by the APPO to totally block all the state government functions, up until Monday the city government was ignored. Although Mayor Jesús Ángel Díaz Ortega is heartily disliked and disparagingly referred to as Chucho Bolas (Fat Jesús) he has generally been regarded as a puppet of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. Therefore, when various parts of the city were violated to obtain the renovation funds diverted to Madrazo’s doomed campaign, people were quick to blame Ruiz and never mentioned Chucho Bolas.

All efforts were focused on the state government functions that were halted, and when citizens spot the “ex governor” with any of his cabinet trying to meet in a restaurant or hotel, there’s an immediate crowd to block the doors.

WHILE THE MOVEMENT maintained for the tenth consecutive day

the blockade to the state government house, the state congress, and the Oaxaca Superior Tribunal of Justice, as well as the Department of Finances, the attorney general's office, the penal tribunals, and other facilities, three hundred officers of the PFP arrived in the city on Monday night.

By my own informal count, forty municipalities and towns around the state have decided to make changes sufficiently important to be mentioned in newspapers and/or on the radio, including the occupation of twenty municipal town halls, seven with physical aid from the teachers of Section 22 of the SNTE. Nineteen municipalities have affiliated formally with the APPO, meaning they will send people to aid the struggle.

The movement has also captured sixty buses and eighteen official vehicles, among them two patrol cars. Rogelio Pensamiento Mesinas, member of the provisional coordination of the APPO, said that in the collection of vehicles they prioritized those belonging to mobile brigades of the government under the state Department of Traffic, and the municipal police, as well as of the preventive police. The vehicles are white, and highly visible.

They only passed over vehicles of the municipal police, the fire department, and aid ambulances.

He explained that the vehicles will be concentrated in the historic center or in the parking areas of captured public buildings. The movement will try to harm the vehicles as little as possible, "because they belong to the people whose taxes paid for them." Two small Volkswagens are now being used to block access to the zocalo.

Monday, the morning of these events, blockades of the main state highways were also carried out intermittently or continuously, in accordance with the conditions of each municipality.

So it was on to the next goal: further cripple the area with ungovernability by taking the Oaxaca city hall, or municipal palace. In all the action, few noticed what was happening.

Two days before, some agents of Oaxaca's municipal police abandoned their general barracks and were quartered in the barracks located

in the municipality of Santa Cruz Xoxocotlán, (now also in rebellion). That's apparently where they were to be met by the PFP.

ON MONDAY MORNING a red alert was broadcast. Both the teachers' station, Radio Plantón at 96.8 FM, and the students' station, Radio Universidad at 1400 AM, went on the air to broadcast the alarm.

The previous night, August 6, about three hundred PFP arrived in Oaxaca. Monday at 10 am an attack by about thirty police who arrived in five pickup trucks, some in civilian clothes and some wearing ski masks, took place in the Colonia Reforma neighborhood, where APPO supporters were blocking the office of the Department of Finance.

Radio Universidad reported while shots were fired and tear gas was used. After the APPO supporters fought back with stones and sticks, the police were repelled, leaving several APPO members injured by blows but only one woman by gunfire, in the leg. This woman may have been hit by the coordinator of public security, Aristeo López Martínez, Oaxaca's head of special police operations, who was using an AR 15 rifle, according to *La Jornada*. The newspaper reported that when the APPO men gave chase, López Martínez began to shoot for the body, not into the air. The pursuers hit the ground, and all the police escaped, López Martínez on a black BMW motorcycle.

The wounded woman later went to the radio station to speak, so I assume she was not badly hurt. In the attack, three municipal policemen were wounded in the head by stones and a teacher was injured on his spine by a sharp blow.

It is not legal for police to be on duty in plain clothes, nor for them to be arriving in private cars, nor for them to attack a peaceful civil protest.

And that was just the morning.

All day various alarms were sounded, but none of them proved to be an attack by the three hundred federal officers. However, it was broadcast that a man identified as Catarino Torres Pereda was picked up by three men in a car and vanished. Eventually, after much time lapsed while the APPO assumed he was "disappeared," the secretary

of civil protection revealed that Torres Pereda, director of the Citizen Defense Committee, had been arrested in Tuxtepec and was jailed in the city of Matías Romero before being transported to the state of Mexico. His name is added to the list of political prisoners.

WHEN THE MORNING attack at the Finance Building interrupted normal broadcast I was passing a vendor's radio, and I also happened to be passing the Plaza de la Danza. Surprise! I could see the usual outline of an encampment—blue and yellow tarpaulins strung with ropes from high points against the rain; women settling in the shade; men on the stadium seats lounging while one sharpened his machete on the stone. The entrance was blocked by teachers sitting on the new smooth cement, beneath an Ocotlán banner strung up on the municipal building. The teachers looked to me like their main weapons of defense would be the yellow plastic chairs arriving at that precise moment.

By the time I arrived home, various reports were flying. Then there were periods of calm, and then more alarms. A roller-coaster day, reaching a climax of anxiety when the APPO broadcast a summons for everybody to come who could. People poured in from the Central Valley, where Oaxaca City is located. At 9:30 at night, Channel 9, the captured state television station, introduced by name and town twelve good men who represent the people's force, one of them by his looks a boy of about eleven, one a senior citizen.

Rumors flew that the big attack would be at 11 pm. López Martínez confirmed that the state and municipal governments were preparing to dislodge people from the APPO encampment in the historic center of Oaxaca. That should have been a clue that no such thing was going to happen.

This morning—no big attack having taken place—we learned that one man was murdered. He was a teacher at the UABJO. He was identified as thirty-five year old Marcos García Tapia from the Dental School. The reports say he was killed by two men on a motorcycle, driving at night outside the zocalo's guarded perimeter.

I went down to Plaza de la Danza, and from there to the zocalo.

Both places were calm. The newly arrived campesinos in the zocalo were armed with sticks and iron rods and were accompanied by women and children.

SO, IN MY view what we have now is a low intensity dirty war. Several opportunities to kill people have been bypassed. I believe the game plan is to exhaust people by fear and high tension levels, supplemented by a few deaths in which there is no risk that Ruiz can be accused of anything. Indeed, today there are denials that he ordered the police to attack the blockade at the Finance Building. He can deny he even asked for the PFP to be sent here, or that once sent, that they had been involved, since they seem to be doing much of their dirty work in civilian clothing.

But the movement is also capable of psychologically exhausting Ruiz, who is followed everywhere. In the style of a good revolution, he is continuously mocked and called bad names, along with his former secretary of civil protection José Franco Vargas (currently carrying on in an unofficial capacity) who is now referred to as Chuckie II, in honor of the American horror movie. Furthermore, the people most stalwart in their denial must now, as Channel 9 repeatedly says, open their eyes. The television station shows not only every march and every instance of repression but also videos of other repressions, including one of the 1968 attack on students in Mexico City's Tlatelolco Square and another of the oppression in Palestine by the Israelis. It's an educational project that is playing on radio, television broadcasts, and public screens in the zocalo. The entire state is involved in open warfare in which the goal is throwing out the remaining PRI bosses and establishing a more just order.

A *mano dura* policy now would involve military invasion and the setting up of a Oaxacan counterpart to the militarized state of Chiapas.

August 11

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF OAXACA ISSUES ARREST WARRANTS FOR FIFTY MOVEMENT LEADERS

Three Indigenous Triquis Shot Dead on the Road in Putla; Protest March Attacked Leaving One Dead, Two Wounded

THE GOVERNMENT OF Oaxaca has advised the public that it will arrest all the leaders of the APPO to “guarantee the safety” of the state, Secretary of Public Security Lino Celaya Luria said yesterday.

This clarifies the sudden rash of plainclothes operators snatching men off the streets. That’s what they mean by “arrests.”

Celaya indicated that the government has identified sixteen leaders of social organizations who, along with leaders of Section 22 of the teachers’ union, have directed the complete blockade of government buildings and the taking of highways and public offices of the state of Oaxaca.

State Attorney General Lizbeth Caña Cadeza has begun to implement the ruling by issuing fifty previous warrants based on past crimes. Caña Cadeza said that the “leaders” of the APPO are among those fifty names. The charges are based on both actual “crimes” and the intellectual authoring of those crimes, both common and federal.

ONE HOUR AFTER this statement, state police intercepted the founder of the Union of Poor Campesinos, Germán Mendoza Nube, a member of the directing committee of the APPO. Along with him, they picked up Eliel Vásquez and Leobardo López, who were helping Mendoza

leave his car because he uses a wheelchair and is unable to walk.

The APPO immediately called for a blockade on every road out of town to prevent the transport of Mendoza out of the state. The three snatched men have not yet been found. In addition, three others disappeared. They are teachers who set out looking for Germán Mendoza and never returned. They have been identified by name, and the people asked to keep a lookout.

The wife of Leobardo López reported on Channel 9 Wednesday night, August 9, that she was shoved to the ground with her baby in her arms when the police carried out the "arrest." She said that her husband was not affiliated with the APPO but just happened to be helping Mendoza at that moment. The police were in civilian clothes and did not offer any reason or warrant when they hefted Mendoza into their vehicle and drove away.

In all these kidnappings, the vehicles have been without license plates.

On August 8, presumably before the warrants were issued, Catariño Torres Pereda, a leader of the indigenous rights group CODECI, was "arrested" in Tuxtepec and secretly driven to the state of Mexico and imprisoned there, in the maximum security prison La Palma. The charges against Torres Pereda were common crimes, leaving unexplained why he had to be transported out of state to a maximum security prison.

The national daily newspaper *Reforma* reported on August 10 that seven other state governors from the PRI back party member Ruiz in his efforts to recapture control of the state, although it was not explained what the nature of their backing might be. The governors issued a statement reported as, "We can not permit that the state of law be damaged with impunity and that a person democratically elected, by processes validated by the electoral authorities and public opinion, be subject to unreasonable pressure or intolerance."

The PRI ruled states named in the report are Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Colima, Oaxaca, Mexico, Durango, Chihuahua, and Hidalgo. Their statement was endorsed by the secretary general of the PRI, Rosario Green.

Meanwhile, members of the APPO detained three of the five presumed thugs who infiltrated the movement to gain access to Radio Universidad, which had been broadcasting on behalf of the APPO. Speaking for the APPO, Rosendo Ramírez Sánchez identified by name the three who were captured and turned over to the Red Cross. One was wounded on the head.

The rector of the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca, Francisco Martínez Neri, said that the university has no connection to the APPO, that the radio station was captured by students, and that he has lodged a complaint with the secretary of communication and transport. The radio station was damaged when the accused (Carlos Alberto Paz Vázquez, Salvador Jiménez Baltasar, and Rene Vázquez Castillejos), along with two accomplices who set afire a bus outside the station as a diversionary tactic, entered the station and threw corrosive acid on the equipment.

At 7:15 on the morning of August 8, two individuals, one of them reportedly armed with an Uzi, assaulted the offices of the local newspaper *Noticias de Oaxaca*, which has supported the APPO. The assailants shot at the ceiling. Some sixty people were present in the offices on Independencia Street, where *Noticias* relocated after an attack on its previous building two years ago by the former PRI governor Murat. The attackers stole a laptop and a registration notebook, but they didn't take the money from the cash box.

Six people were injured by falling pieces of ceiling and lights.

On this same day, an instructor of dentistry at the university was shot and killed in his car.

The *Noticias* headline from August 9 proclaims, "[Governor] Operating Undercover Terrorist Plan."

No shit, guys.

The APPO, for its part, called on the federal government to "stop the wave of terror against civil leaders, and not permit their transport to the maximum security prison." The APPO directly accuses Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz; Secretary of Government Heliodoro Díaz Escárrega; his predecessor, Jorge Franco Vargas; and Secretary of Public Security

Lino Celaya Luria. The APPO calls them "intellectual authors of this attack on constitutional rights."

THEN, RADIO CACEROLAS (the new name for the relocated Radio Universidad) reported early today, August 10, that three indigenous Triqui members of MULTI (Movimiento Unificador de Lucha Triqui Independiente) were shot near Putla last night. The radio reported that the Triquis, who belong to both MULTI and the APPO were on their way to a meeting. They were killed by unknown shooters in an ambush on Highway 125 Putla de Guerrero–Santiago Juxtlahuaca, in the Mixteca region. Andrés Santiago Cruz, one of the victims, was a municipal agent of the community of Paraje Pérez, part of the municipality Santiago Juxtlahuaca, and a member of the commission for vigilance and safety of the APPO in the zocalo encampment. The two other victims were Pedro Martínez Martínez, seventy, a MULTI leader in Paraje Pérez, and a boy with them, Octavio Martínez Martínez, twelve.

Jorge Albino Ortiz, director of MULTI and a member of the provisional committee of APPO, said that his companions were traveling on route to Paraje Pérez, when at about 1 am they were attacked. Brothers Ignacio and Agustín Martínez Velásquez were wounded and taken to the Hospital for Women and Children, in Putla de Guerrero, where they were treated.

Thursday, a march of about twenty thousand (this number consisted mainly of members the general public because many teachers remained in the blockades) set out at 4 pm in repudiation of the governor's actions. In the neighborhood of Ex-Marquesado three people were shot by unknown persons along the way. The victims were taken to the nearby Santa María Clinic. One of the three died of his wounds.

AN APPO SPOKESPERSON on Radio Cacerolas at 9 pm said in part:

The march was to reply to Ruiz, the media, Fox and all the branches of government with a show of strength in the face of the detention of Germán

Mendoza and his companions, and also the detention of Catarino Torres, and to reply to the assassination of three MULTI companions including one twelve year old. . . . The face of Ruiz was the face of these events and the stupid declarations of Secretary Celaya Luria regarding the leaders of the movement. This movement does not have leaders; it is built on the bases. . . . Today the mobilization showed the strength of the people. APPO has ability to mobilize because it has lifted the hopes of the people. What produces rage in Ulises is that we are now building the bases, and transmitting the voice of the people. . . . The solidarity of the people is the way to save this movement. Nobody else will do it for us. . . . Repression and fascism cannot continue. Strengthen the encampments, everybody from all the neighborhoods come.

THE WHEREABOUTS OF five hundred agents of the PFP are unknown.

August 14

SILENT MARCH FOR VICTIMS AS DIRTY WAR ACCELERATES

Eight Popular Assembly Leaders Abducted; Four Leaders and Activists Are Dead

JOSÉ JIMÉNEZ COLMENARES, a mechanic by profession married to a teacher, was shot in the street while participating in a march organized by the APPO on August 10. Two others were wounded. At the front of the march the empty wheelchair belonging to Germán Mendoza Nube (the Union of Poor Campesinos founder and APPO leader arrested on August 9) was pushed, with his photo on the back of the chair.

Mendoza Nube has since been located alive in the prison in Miahuatlán, Oaxaca, and according to the human rights commission, as a paraplegic and diabetic, has had his medical needs attended to.

His assistants at the time he was abducted, Eliel Vásquez and Leobardo López, were released.

Also located in prison in Miahuatlán is the ornithologist Ramiro Aragón Pérez. His two companions were tortured and beaten before their release. The three were abducted from the town of Santa María Atzompa, allegedly betrayed by the mayor, who is now in plenty of his own trouble with the townspeople. The mayor was allegedly discovered to be wearing a bulletproof vest and in possession of a military weapon.

The wife of Ramiro Aragón insists he is innocent of the charge of

carrying weapons and has asked the international scientific community to intercede on his behalf. Aragón is known for his studies of birds and the environment.

STILL UNACCOUNTED FOR is former secretary-general of Section 22 Erangelio Mendoza González, who was abducted Saturday by agents of the state police near the small town of San Martín Mexicapán.

Sunday, August 13, another march, silent, retraced the route on which Jiménez Colmenares was shot. This march passed without incident and ended in the zocalo of Oaxaca with several speeches in homage to Jiménez. His brother's eulogy included José Jiménez's concern with reforestation. Those who crowded around the central pavilion still carried the sprays of white flowers, which in Oaxaca signify that a soul has gone to heaven. The Triqui women, dressed in their traditional overdresses of bright red, rested and ate with their weary children.

When Jiménez fell, men on that protest march entered the house from which the shooting took place, searched it, and decided it belonged to a PRI activist. According to *La Jornada's* report of August 11, one of the cars parked at the house contained a license plate of the Federal Judicial Police as well as numerous documents and evidence now in the possession of the APPO. The house was not occupied. It was thought that the house was rented by the police.

The APPO protesters exploded the household gas tanks and left the house in flames. By then reporters were present. The firefighters did not arrive for half an hour.

Outside, the marchers shouted, "Ya cayó, ya cayó, Ulises ya cayó"—the movement's war cry—"He's out! He's out!"

The press and information secretary of Section 22, Daniel Rosas Romero, named Ulises Ruiz Ortiz as responsible for the state policy of terror (*política de terror*), which is one reason why the people demand his ouster. Rosas remarked that in just the past thirty hours, the policy of terror has left four dead (as well as four wounded), which amounts to a total of thirty-six political assassinations committed in the nineteen months that Ruiz has held office.

THE APPO POLICY calls for calm and restraint. Nevertheless, the APPO acknowledges certain violent acts committed by teachers and movement adherents, including the capture of the alleged shooters and three doctors who failed to save Jiménez (all the hostages were subsequently turned over to federal authorities), burning of the suspicious house, and the possible burning of a couple of vehicles. Ramiro Aragón Perez allegedly carried military-issue arms, which are not permitted by either the state or the APPO.

The teachers have withdrawn their agreement to begin classes on August 14, two weeks early, to make up for weeks lost last May. Those who send their children to private schools will have no complaint. The number of public school parents who complain if schools don't open this year will be a true indication of the movement's viability. Many parents are with the movement for the long run, especially because of the registration fees charged to enroll their children in the "free" public schools and the cost of books and uniforms. The teachers, from their side, maintain that those who walk hours to their schools in the mountains would be extremely vulnerable to assassinations. The APPO has decided that the teachers will not return until Ruiz leaves.

In the past, I often heard teachers described as flojo ("lazy"; after all, they have two months off every year) and ignorante. Sunday, a woman called in to Radio Cacerolas, one of the movement-run radio stations, to denounce teachers from her town who were resting in their homes instead of taking their places on the many blockades in the city of Oaxaca, where they should be, defending the movement!

The words I hear from the movement to describe the ex governor are blatantly denigrating: weasel, donkey, assassin, madman, liar, incapable of governing. To describe the people, the words dignidad and noble are frequent. This is especially important for the indigenous people to whom those words signify their—well, what shall I call it—dignity, self-worth. The movement is a credible mix of teachers, intellectuals, unions of all sectors, nonprofit civil society, parents of families, workers, and campesino farmers who come down from the mountains to

declare “*ya basta!*” (“enough!”). Echoes of struggle sound everywhere, from videos shown repeatedly on Channel 9 to phrases such as “the movement has no leaders, we are all equal.” Descriptions of the dead and abducted often include that they are adherents to the Zapatistas’ Other Campaign.

Radio and television programs explain capitalism, imperialism, genetically modified crops, the sucking out of natural resources, the denigration of women, and Plan Puebla Panamá. One teacher said, “Modernization and neoliberalism are not synonyms.” People discuss the need for a new constitution.

PEOPLE CALL IN to the radio with denunciations of acts of corruption by authorities and municipal mayors who abuse their offices and betray their obligation to serve the people. I no longer keep count of how many towns are mentioned on the radio as having local movements, but it must be more than forty statewide, and I guess that Santa María Atzompa, where residents accuse the mayor of betraying Ramiro Aragón Perez to the police, will be among those named this week.

The heroism of Oaxaca’s population is established as a mythic part of history even while we live through it. The proudest word is *presente*. New songs celebrate events and heroes, artworks are draped (or painted) on the walls, white flowers or fists are held aloft. Oaxaca’s struggle against repression and exploitation is related to that of the nation and the world. Consciousness raising is a high priority.

All of this suggests to me that a prior and firm ideology, like that of the Zapatistas, cements the movement even while it creates itself. A national forum will take place August 16 and 17 in Oaxaca to discuss the politics and realities of Oaxaca’s situation.

List of the Abducted

AUGUST 6: CATARINO Torres Pereda, grabbed in Tuxtepec, ac-

tive member of Comité de Defensa Ciudadana (CODECI), now held in the maximum-security prison Centro Federal de Readaptación Social Número 1 La Palma, Almoloya de Juárez, the state of Mexico.

AUGUST 9: **GERMÁN Mendoza Nube**, hero of decades of struggle, made paraplegic by government torture in the eighties.

AUGUST 9: **LEOBARDO López**, bystander.

AUGUST 9: **ELIEL Vásquez**, aide to Germán Mendoza

AUGUST 11: **ERANGELIO Mendoza González**, from San Martín Mexicapán, ex-secretary-general of Section 22 of the SNTE.

AUGUST 11: **RAMIRO Aragón Pérez**, ornithologist, thirty-four years old.

AUGUST 11: **JUAN Gabriel Ríos**, teacher, twenty-four years old, tortured and released.

AUGUST 11: **ELIONAI Santiago Sánchez**, teacher, twenty-four years old, tortured and released.

List of the Dead

AUGUST 10: **ANDRÉS Santiago Cruz**, municipal agent of the community of Paraje Pérez, part of Santiago Juchtlahuaca, and a member of the commission for vigilance and safety of the APPO in the zocalo encampment.

AUGUST 10: **PEDRO Martínez Martínez**, seventy, a MULTI leader in the town of Paraje Pérez.

AUGUST 10: **OCTAVIO Martínez Martínez**, twelve

AUGUST 10: **ELEUTERIO José Jiménez Colmenares**, mechanic, shot during the protest march.

August 20

GENERAL STRIKE IN OAXACA: 80,000 WORKERS PARTICIPATE IN STOPPAGE

**Former Chiapas Bishop Ruiz Makes Second Visit to Oaxaca for
National Forum**

THE DOOMED EX governor of Oaxaca, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, has appeared on mainstream national Mexican television, both on Televisa and on TV Azteca, the two major national networks. His grip on the spin is slipping. “Oaxaca is at peace” (“*No pasa nada en Oaxaca*”) is a phrase no longer accepted even by the sycophants at Televisa.

Events are curiouser and curiouser, or, leaving Alice behind in Wonderland, things are furiouser and furiouser. So I’ll start with the summary: repressions accelerate. A national forum was convoked, “Building Democracy and Governability in Oaxaca,” but the title didn’t spell out the thinking behind that forum. Here’s a hint: the former bishop of Chiapas Samuel Ruiz García made his second appearance in Oaxaca.

Because of abductions and attacks by government thugs, the people got really pissed off. Ulises Ruiz Ortiz apparently thought that he could turn the people against the social movement by turning the screw. What Ruiz doesn’t understand is that the social movement is the people, and every time he ratchets up the repression the people get furiouser.

On Wednesday morning, August 16, the teacher led social movement called a statewide work stoppage for Friday, August 18.

By Wednesday afternoon access to all the banks and ATM machines was blocked. The union of health workers declared itself in sympathy

with the movement and halted clinic services.

SINCE A NATIONAL forum to discuss ungovernability and a new constitution was scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday in Oaxaca, the total work stoppage was scheduled for Friday, August 18, to allow guests to leave before the roads and highways were blocked. More than two hundred civil organizations and academics from different parts of the country were invited to participate.

Among the forum attendees was the former bishop of Chiapas Samuel Ruiz García. Don Samuel, as he is called, became well known during the early years of the Zapatista rebellion. This was his second visit to Oaxaca since the June 14 attack on the teachers by government police units.

The national forum on governability was sponsored by fifty organizations within Oaxacan civil society on August 16 and 17 in the historic center of Oaxaca, as an opportunity to analyze the crisis and propose alternative solutions from the perspective of civil society, including a new Oaxacan constitution, and by implication, a blueprint for the nation.

The forum opened with a traditional consultation with Oaxacan elders, grandfathers and grandmothers who spoke in the Plaza de la Danza (where the city hall is being blockaded) on Wednesday morning.

The consultation was followed by the first public discussion, held in the law building of the UABJO. I estimated that more than 1,200 people crowded into the area, sitting on chairs as well as on the floor and steps around the central patio. The entrance and exits were both guarded, and people entering presented identification when signing in. An organizer reported the sign in attendance at 1,500 people.

The fact that perhaps 70 percent of the Oaxacan population is familiar with government based on *usos y costumbres* (the native customs for community government still used in many indigenous towns) makes collective decision making familiar and acceptable to the people.

PRESENTATIONS BY PABLO González Casanova (from the organi-

zation Peace with Democracy), Marcela Lagarde (federal congressman from Oaxaca), Luis Hernández Navarro (editorial writer for the Mexico City-based daily *La Jornada*), and Manuel Canto (of the Citizen Movement for Democracy) were followed by open discussion from the floor. This first plenary set the scene and presented the background. It was followed by open discussion from the floor, controlled more or less for length and relevancy by shouts, whistles, and clapping on the part of the attendees.

The plenary then adjourned for work sessions. Each work session dealt with a separate issue:

1. A new constitution
2. Strengthening social and political participation; constructing democracy from below
3. Politics of inclusion and respect for the diversity of Oaxaca.

Events playing out in Oaxaca will affect the national scene—maybe as a test case, maybe as a bigger movement toward participatory government. Mexico stands with one foot in the north with neoliberalism and one foot in the south with populism. Populism, as it's being offered by Venezuela, for example, only partially dovetails with government by participation. The APPO is promoting smaller assemblies everywhere within the state, giving the people spaces where they can choose their affiliation or interest group in a way that will then have statewide impact.

Meanwhile, Ruiz is maintaining a steady stream of attacks on the known persons in the movement, including the abduction and imprisonment of four, one of them a paraplegic. Four people have been killed since the teachers' strike began more than eighty days ago. An attempt on another member of the APPO, Flavio Sosa Villavicencio, in nearby San Bartolo Coyotepec, was foiled by citizens who rushed to his defense.

The summations of the work sessions were presented the following

day, Thursday, at the closing ceremony, also in the Plaza de la Danza.

FORMER BISHOP RUIZ, wearing sunglasses and a golf cap, spoke very briefly standing in front of the media in the hot sun. He said:

I am still not over my surprise not only for having been honored by an invitation to these events but also by having discovered a completely unforeseen situation which I have never experienced in all the long years of my life, or it might be that we are standing in two time dimensions, the past and the future. In these days we are living something that we are leaving, and cement is being placed beneath something that doesn't come automatically but is the result of working together, of our construction. But I have seen also in the forum something unheard before, that suddenly in the forum not only is there very direct discussion of issues but it has gone a distance that never was foreseen, not articulated before... including that the future is here.

Following Don Samuel's words, Oaxacan priest Carlos Franco referred to the identity of the APPO. Many people have speculated on the origins of the APPO; speculations on "who is behind all this." Ruiz has accused the PRD, the party of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, of fomenting the popular movement, but Ruiz is caught in the contradiction of saying that nothing is happening while he's accusing the PRD of directing whatever it isn't. The PRD, in my opinion, simply isn't oriented enough toward participatory government to be behind this social revolution, in which most people believe the words, "There are no leaders . . . we the people" are directing this.

Father Carlos Franco said that the APPO must address its own identity, "know who it is and why it is," and address up front the "delicate" issues, such as the role of indigenous women, who historically in Oaxaca have been second-class players in the lives of their men. However, Father Carlos said, look at the women who took over Channel 9. These are women who are now also risking arrest and reprisals. "So it's not only a question of wearing the pants, but also of wearing the panties."

Others who spoke briefly in the closing ceremony were Javier Fran-

cisco Rodríguez, the secretary of the assembly of taxi drivers from the Colonia Alemán neighborhood, and Eduardo Castellano, who referred to the resurrection of Radio Plantón, the pirate radio station allied with the teachers' zocalo occupation, "which might not be legitimate in the eyes of the law but which is legitimate in the hearts of the people."

A representative from the mountain town of Villa Alta reminded the audience that when the townsmen captured a full-grown jaguar, the government took it on the promise of bringing it back in a month. Two years later the jaguar, sacred to the mountain people, has not been returned to its home.

THE REPRESENTATIVES OF the work sessions presented their conclusions, including a call to punish the perpetrators of the repression, to impeach the state attorney general, Lizbeth Caña Cadeza, and to halt the repression and abductions by getting rid of the state police and their chief. The significant statements from the work sessions included a call for a national assembly and the rewriting of the state constitution, the latter to be based on respect for each life and respect for the environment.

Many are thinking ahead to a national assembly. "Given the lack of credibility of the institutions for public order, it is indispensable that these be legitimate instruments to fulfill the will of the people; people are not made for the institutions, the institutions are made for the people," read the forum's formal written conclusions. This is not a local problem, but one that is national and international, the document said.

The final words outside in the bright sun of the closing ceremony were spoken by the wife of political prisoner and ornithologist Ramiro Aragón Pérez, abducted on August 11. Ruth Guzmán Sánchez stood simply in front of the microphone and said, "The forum has concluded."

The next day, a nearly complete work stoppage involved eighty thousand workers (according to an estimate by *Noticias de Oaxaca*) and represented many of the major unions in the state.

At least twenty organizations stopped work, allying with the teach-

ers' union: the road and airport workers, the health workers, local and national unions of Social Security (health care) workers, malaria prevention workers, and the workers and employees of the UABJO.

At 6 pm the march of the unions set out from Llano Park to the zocalo. I estimated that about ten thousand participated in the latest people's demand for Ruiz to leave Oaxaca. The woman at my side assured me it was seventy thousand. Well, anyway, it was thousands.

OUT IN THE regions beyond the city, other protests took place, including blockades of the main roads on a schedule of two hours closed, half an hour open.

Reports of additional assaults and abductions perpetrated by the government thugs are coming in. During the Friday stoppage, one teacher, Benito Castro Juárez, from Huautla de Jiménez, was shot at a roadblock, and another attack occurred closer to the city, wounding Professor Antonio Marcos Santos Sarmiento.

The small businesses have declared their alliance with the movement, including the Benito Juárez market, which serves the center city. It shut down for the work stoppage on Friday.

I like the slogans in Spanish, "*La lucha sigue*" ("The struggle goes on"); and now we're hearing the quotation from Che Guevara, "*Hasta la victoria siempre*" ("Until victory, always," which I read as: "There's no turning back").

August 26

THE BATTLE OF OAXACA IN THE CONTEXT OF MEXICO'S POST-ELECTORAL CRISIS

"I Never Wanted to be a War Correspondent When I Grew Up"

ANDRÉS MANUEL LÓPEZ Obrador announced the forthcoming Mexican revolution on the front page of *La Jornada* of August 24, 2006. He said that as of September 12 there would be two presidents of Mexico. On national television's Channel 11 last night, he amended that to September 16. A small detail. It's on...

That is, unless the Election Committee unexpectedly decides to somehow avert the chaos sure to result if Felipe Calderón is crowned. How about if the court annuls four thousand precincts and declares López Obrador the winner?

I never wanted to be a war correspondent when I grew up.

Here in Oaxaca, dirty war already cruises the streets, and it is due only to the nonviolent posture of the APPO that the death toll remains relatively low. But the list of dead, wounded, abducted, and disappeared grows daily, aided by a website called Oaxaca en Paz ("Oaxaca in Peace," operated with government support, according to claims by the APPO) advising freelance killers whom to shoot and where to locate them: a hit list.

The latest death is APPO adherent Lorenzo San Pablo Cervantes, a fifty-two-year-old public works employee, murdered August 22 in another predawn incursion by government thugs against the radio sta-

tions captured by the movement. A means to broadcast authentic information is essential, and both sides know it.

Today in central Oaxaca I can find two commercial stations still functioning with the voices of the movement, down from ten. Both of them are located in better sections of the city—Oro (1120 AM) near the government clinic in the central city, and La Ley (710 AM) in Colonia Reforma. La Ley was the site of the murder of San Pablo, who was guarding the street when he was shot. Radio Plantón 98.1 FM is still broadcasting. A young friend from the movement tells me there are actually five operating (three inside the one Oro station) but I can't pick up their signals.

The *modus operandi* of the government is to use plainclothes, heavily armed men who roam in vans and shoot their way into radio facilities; they kill the machinery as well as whomever stands in the way. The *modus operandi* of the movement has evolved to include bus blockades at every important intersection, to protect both the remaining radio stations and the lives of important APPO figures, both men and women. Neighborhoods organize to defend their sections, with heaps of stones stockpiled behind the thrown-up barriers of bedsprings, wood, rocks, and wheels.

By day, one could almost believe that nothing, as the ex-governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz says, is going on, until you see the buses stationed sideways to block the streets, the uncollected garbage heaped on the corners, the shutters on certain shops and restaurants, and an eerie lack of traffic.

Our newest source of information would like to have a *nom de guerre*, so I'll call him Pedro. He's a Zapotec, from the community of San Miguel Alvaredes in the Sierra Norte, and he belongs to a student organization in Oaxaca called Gresetec (students from the technological university). He's a good-looking young man (in my elderly female opinion) with straight black hair and skin the color one often sees in Oaxaca, dark honey.

"The most serious problem is misinformation," Pedro said, referring to the multiple problems faced by the social movement. The

youngsters have established certain ways to share information, but Pedro knows that a large part of the state's population doesn't listen to radio—hasn't got one, has no interest in remote events, or is passive. But since the situation is serious, the APPO is disseminating information every which way it can, including to Europe and the United States through the Web and with phone calls to people in Oaxaca. The cell phone is a major weapon in this war, used to call each station and encampment and to collect and disseminate news.

In Pedro's opinion, the only solution possible is for Ruiz to resign. According to Pedro and many others, Ruiz doesn't live in Oaxaca anyway; he's only here three days a week, and his other four days are in Mexico City. Truly, without Pedro to prompt me, I can say decisively that Ruiz just doesn't get it, doesn't know diddly about Oaxaca *profundo* or its people. He wanted to clean out the zocalo of the only features that made it interesting: indigenous vendors, protest marches, and encampments in front of the state government palace (made over into a museum, then shot up by the police on June 14, then the symbolic seat of the APPO government, and now a stone hulk draped with banners), and oh, yes, the heavy bell on top to ring for alarms. Ruiz wanted it pretty for the well-promoted tourist trade.

The U.S. consul in Oaxaca predicts that the U.S. travel advisory warning coming out this week will suggest Americans bound for Mexico should avoid the state.

"Is it better," asked Pedro, "for the tourists to see reality, or is it better for them to not come? Tourists believe what they see on TV."

The governor, Pedro continued, imposes his will and defends the interests of capitalism and socialism, both of which may have their theoretical good points, but neither of which has a role here in Oaxaca. "The Mexican revolution never arrived here in the south." And then he adds, "The group [Gresetec] has adopted more or less the social philosophy of César Chávez. No ideology. Everything for peace."

Hey, do you mean Hugo Chávez of Venezuela? No. He means César Chávez, leader and hero of the National Farm Workers movement in the United States.

The PRI government has promoted a lot of internecine killing; territorial boundaries for decades have been manipulated to set off one group against another, and land ownership that should have remained communal was undercut by Carlos Salinas de Gortari's neoliberal amendment to the Mexican constitution, allowing privatization. Oaxaca is largely rural; Oaxaqueños refer to themselves as "people of the corn."

"But this social and teachers' movement is pacific," said Pedro. "The theory that the people are sovereign—[Ruiz] doesn't understand that. There's no reciprocity. The government knows only violence. He aids his capitalist friends." A sore issue is Plan Puebla Panamá, which would affect nine states. It is opposed by the indigenous people whose lands and lives would be destroyed by the super superhighway and industrial and commercial development alongside it. There would be no benefit for them; low-paid labor in factories cannot compensate for siphoning off natural resources, polluting the southern coastal waters, and pushing people off their land. As one person said to me, we can have development without self-destruction.

Designating the local community as the decision maker for future development will be written into a new Oaxaca constitution, as presented to the National Forum on Constructing Democracy and Governability in Oaxaca, which took place August 16 and 17. Why a national forum?

And I haven't heard anybody connect the dots on this one: if Oaxaca's teachers achieve "re zonification" in their request for a pay increase (that is, raising the official cost-of-living figures and therefore the minimum wage in the state), that re-zonification would affect the labor costs for Plan Puebla Panamá as well. It's a minimum wage increase across the board by geographical zone, not just for teachers.

Before Ruiz's inauguration, he pledged development, progress, and peace with no more protest marches. What a campaign pledge. "He believed that indigenous ignorance would protect him. He made a social pact with many municipalities that he would give them what they need," said Pedro, citing popular necessities like cement, roads

and food), "as long as they let him [Ruiz] go ahead. Then the repression began, because some would not agree. Political prisoners (three in the Sierra Norte who would not sign on) are now forty five in number, nine dead, thirty disappeared. Did you see the website Oaxaca en Paz? It names people as criminals, to be grabbed and killed."

Ruiz practices selective repression. That leads to redoubled organization, to an extent that appears almost miraculous, like a tree full grown overnight.

But there is another side: "Unfortunately, many people speak in favor of the government, without knowing what it means for indigenous people," Pedro stated. Oaxaca is 70 percent indigenous. Many guys like Pedro speak Zapotec or some other indigenous language as their mother tongue. "Things are getting worse—the last two nights—now it's like a curfew. We are trying to put out the truth but we are attacked."

That's the truth.

The second big truth is that plans are going forward to support the national "revolution," whatever form that may take. With "two presidents," Obrador may find his firmest base in the south. I was chatting with my pediatrician yesterday (he also does gerontology) and asked him flat out if he thought a civil war might come to pass. This guy is moderate in his views, a doctor with youngsters attending private universities. And he answered yes. In my personal poll of unimportant persons, that view was repeated by several people, including members of the APPO. There's a lot of nervous anxiety, especially because of repeated reports of troops and further attacks. The APPO's official take on it, reported on the radio, is that everything now depends on how the feds respond to the contradictions in Oaxaca, not least of which is that the APPO simultaneously asks for and rejects federal intervention—to take out Ruiz, to take out the federal military, to agree to the removal of Ruiz before any negotiation can take place. And anyway, who can negotiate? Not Ruiz, he's the "ex." That leaves the secretary of government, Carlos Abascal Carranza, arriving in Oaxaca to talk with the former bishop of Chiapas, Samuel Ruiz. Whoops, that's over. No mediation group can take on the task. It's impossible. Okay, the APPO

will talk to the Government Minister directly.

The APPO has reiterated dozens of times that until Ruiz is out, there's nothing to discuss. The social/teachers' movement glues itself together on that bottom line, putting authoritarianism on the chopping block and recognizing the will of the people as sovereign.

What will it take on the national stage to make clear Oaxaca's position and its ability to stand by it? If the electoral tribunal incites the national uproar by designating Calderón president, Obrador will declare himself president, too. What scale of civil disobedience will that bring?

September 7

OAXACA'S POPULAR ASSEMBLY "EXPELS" THE STATE GOVERNMENT

Events Announced to Build a "National Movement from Below"

IN AN EIGHT-AND-A-HALF-HOUR meeting of the APPO on September 3, the 193 delegates from different organizations that constitute the APPO declared Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz *proscrito* ("banned, exiled, unwelcome") in the state of Oaxaca. The ex-governor will be replaced by a "proclamation of good government for the city of Oaxaca, a proclamation for the 570 municipalities, and a manifesto to the nation, declaring the banishment of [Ruiz] from the government, and that the government will continue to be exercised from the historic center of the city of Oaxaca."

In the days following, the APPO proclaimed various regulations for governing, including ways to open the barricades on city streets during the day, closing them only at night for protection of the radio stations and antennas.

It was proclaimed by the APPO that "laws" or rules laid down by the assembly will be binding on the rest of the state, which sure sounds to me like a state government. The forthcoming proclamations will deal with reactivating the economy, citizen security, cleanliness and beautification of the city, measures for the urban and suburban transportation system, an announcement to attract tourism, and another for "harmonic coexistence."

ON TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, federal Highway 190 was opened. On September 15 and 16 caravans will leave Oaxaca bound for other states in the north, south, and center of the country, to spread the word about Oaxaca's movement. The APPO pronouncement is: "For the construction in the nation of a single national movement from below." On September 28 a national and international forum in solidarity with the people of Oaxaca will take place, in an as-yet-unspecified location.

On October 12 at 11 am a statewide popular forum will be held in the city hall. Exactly where the vanished mayor is or will be has not yet been revealed. Jesús Ortega has been "missing in action" for several weeks.

In Oaxaca, the only government is the APPO, affirmed César Mateos Benítez, in a press conference. He is a member of the provisional coordinating committee of the APPO. This proclamation was contradicted by Miguel Ángel Concha Vilorio, a spokesperson for the Ruiz regime, who said, in essence, that that would be breaking the law! Only legally constituted governing bodies can make regulations.

People living in Oaxaca have made it known to the APPO that they feel severely inconvenienced by this revolutionary movement, not only because of the loss of income but also because they have to drive blocks out of their way to navigate blocked streets. Furthermore, the children are not in school and no municipal police are on the streets; there's a curfew to discourage roving paramilitaries and ordinary thieves. Public transport is never certain, and the bus routes are regularly changed to avoid blockades.

Acknowledging the inconvenience of the revolution, Mateos Benítez said that the APPO was obliged to put forth the declarations in order to minimize the problems and inconvenience to society.

The "mobile police" of the APPO, if one can call them that, have been cruising the streets, aided mainly by cell phones and calls to radio stations to issue alarms. The new police force is "members of the Honorable Body of Topiles of the APPO and of the Magisterial Police of Oaxaca." Topil is a word from colonial times now used for a volunteer

guard or messenger under the indigenous system of *usos y costumbres* that governs many of the state's small towns.

The national patriotic holidays of Mexico will be observed in the city, with the traditional "*Grito de Dolores*"—the reenactment of the cry for an uprising in the Mexican town of Dolores that sparked Mexico's war for independence—emanating from the capital building on September 15.

The Secretary for Citizen Protection, according to Mateo Benítez, has started to hire some eight thousand people from different parts of the state to constitute reinforcements for the state police, with a goal of massive attack on the movement's encampments, to dislodge them "at the moment when the federal government intervenes."

On September 6, the federal election commission unanimously declared Felipe Calderón the president-elect of Mexico. Andrés Manuel López Obrador is pushing for an alternative government.

Oaxaca is not alone in its approach to changing Mexico.

September 18

OAXACA'S CRY FOR INDEPENDENCE

More Than Ever, It Is the People Who Govern This State

OKAY, I'LL JUST offer an observation: Oaxaca State is now governed by the APPO, not the PRI.

The national senate declined again this week to form a special commission to deal with the subject of Oaxaca, despite pressure from the PRD (the party of opposition presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador), and the Convergence Party, to which Gabino Cue belongs. Oaxaca's last governmental election, in which Cue was a candidate, is widely believed to have been fraudulent: it brought Ulises Ruiz Ortiz to power. Cue is now a national senator.

A Oaxaca unitary commission formed from Section 22 of the teachers' union plus representatives of the APPO has been unsuccessfully soliciting federal intervention to legally take away the governing powers of Ruiz and the legislative and judiciary branches of government.

Instead, the Senate charged the federal SEGOB (secretary of government) with the task of negotiating a "settlement." The PRD and the Convergence Party pointed out that the federal government is doing nothing, and intervention by the Senate is urgent. SEGOB—that is to say, Government Secretary Carlos Abascal—has had more than 115 days to resolve the situation in Oaxaca, while the state remains without a formal government.

Meanwhile, the attendees at the Twenty-ninth Annual National Conference of Governors, held in Nuevo Vallarta, Nayarit, declared themselves in support of Ruiz. This was done because these governors are PRI and PAN members, and because they are afraid that if Ruiz goes, they will all go, one by one. The fear of the domino effect in its most recent guise must now be considered as part of the PAN national strategy.

Despite the endorsement of his fellow governors, Ruiz will not return to Oaxaca. As long as Ruiz is not recognized by the people of Oaxaca as their governor and remains outside the state, he gives the APPO and the peoples of Oaxaca time to take charge of affairs as necessary—for instance, the mobile police force, the formation of neighborhood crime-watch groups, the formation of local and municipal assemblies, the sweeping out of PRI remnants still in power through municipal uprisings, and the celebration of important national holidays such as Independence Day.

The Oaxaqueños, as citizens of a federal entity, enjoy the constitutional right under article 27 of the Oaxaca state constitution to formalize the exit of Ruiz, whose repressions have backfired and whose probable election fraud has become a key rallying point.

September is referred to as the month of the nation. On the morning of Friday, September 15, the occupied central city square, or *zocalo*, looked like a fairground, with cheerful people bustling between the stalls and under the colored plastic strung as protection against sun and rain. At the former government palace, spider men of the APPO balanced on the facade of the building stringing red, white, and green bunting and draping plastic chains of the same colors. The traditional Grito would be pronounced from the balcony of the government palace, an APPO member who stood laughing on the pavement told me, gesturing while his friends climbed around and dangled over the parapets.

"So who's giving the Grito?" I asked. It was scheduled for 11 pm. The reply was, "a commission!" The APPO can't select one person to place in the position of "leader."

In Mexico City, the president was refused the ability to give the

Grito there, and in Oaxaca, the ex governor Ruiz likewise was banned from what should have been his ceremonial post. According to my informant, Ruiz wanted to give the Grito in the southeastern town of Tehuantepec, but the APPO sent members south to intercept him and forestall that possibility. In an internal struggle, Tehuantepec is presently operating with two parallel governments.

AS FOR THE Grito in Oaxaca, as usual, information received verbally from this "friend" was incorrect – because of my own preconception. (I learn this same lesson daily.) In addition, I got caught (yes, again) by the time designations: the Grito was at 11 pm in the hour of the *campo* or the natural hour, not at the neoliberal hour, also known as daylight savings time, which meant the Grito took place at midnight. Of course.

I was down at the zocalo in plenty of time to see the folk dancers from Guerrero and admire the bunting draped profusely off the balconies where the windows remain boarded up. In front of the government-palace-cum-museum hung huge portraits of Hidalgo and the independence hero General Vicente Guerrero. During the prelude to the Grito, the crowd of about five thousand raised their left fists in a salute to justice. Overhead, fireworks exploded in sparks raining down on our heads. Several paper hot-air balloons in lovely colors illuminated by the fire inside each one sailed up while the crowd shouted "Ya cayó"—he's out. At 11:30 neoliberal time, the Declaration of Independence was read out, and then came the Grito itself, which by tradition consists of reading a list of names of the original patriots. So if you are from the United States, reader, imagine it like this: "Benjamin Franklin, viva!" And the crowd roars, "*viva!*" "Thomas Jefferson", *Viva!* "Samuel Adams," *Viva!*

This annual ceremony of thousands of voices affirming in unison their patriotism repeated across Mexico each midnight on September 15, held a special significance for Oaxaca. The Grito was read by José Cruz Luna, the mayor of the town of Zaachila, one of the strongest in support of the social movement, and one that bears a large share of the daily movement tasks. Zaachila threw out its prior mayor and, after an election by popular assembly, installed Cruz Luna.

Just as Oaxaca is left twisting in the wind waiting for some federal action, so too PAN may be left twisting while waiting to see what repercussion Oaxaca's actions will have on the national scene.

THE NATIONAL DAILY *La Jornada* reported on September 13 that PRD senator Ricardo Monreal Ávila openly questioned whether the senate's refusal to use its powers to remove Ruiz from his post as governor of Oaxaca was to protect Ruiz or was done in exchange for the PRI (functioning as part of the new "PRIAN" coalition) upholding the presidency of Felipe Calderón.

My understanding of what is going on in regard to the noninterventionist federal government is that Government Secretary Abascal's offer was considered ahead of time to be a no-starter. When the APPO negotiating commission returned to seek the popular consensus in Oaxaca, the vote yielded more than thirty thousand to reject the government offer and nine thousand to accept it. The offer included raising teacher wages through "re-zonification" (a reevaluation of cost of living in Oaxaca that would mandate a raise in the minimum wage).

"The government offer by Carlos Abascal Carranza doesn't resolve anything," affirmed Flavio Sosa Villavicencio, a member of the APPO Provisional Coordinating Committee, in a press conference. Well, that didn't require a rocket scientist. The negotiation is all about co-opting the teachers' union and says nothing about the removal of powers in Oaxaca. Nevertheless, teachers' union leader Enrique Rueda Pacheco spoke cheerfully on the détente between SEGOB and Oaxaca's educators.

On Friday, the negotiating commission met with PAN senator Santiago Creel, the former government secretary who is now leader of PAN's Senate delegation.

Does Rueda bring back to the people this sort of "offer" from the SEGOB, and what was offered by Creel on Friday to the APPO, just to keep up the level of adrenalin? The SEGOB "offer" was discussed fervently, and placards appeared posted to the walls, reading: "The teachers don't sell their dignity." What is being gained, or lost, is time, for

both sides in this tiring game.

If Ruiz falls before December 1, new elections can be held, as the APPO knows, to run a working-class candidate with a political, social, and economic plan to benefit ordinary Oaxaqueños. If Ruiz is ousted through institutional means (through action by the Senate) after December 1, his two-year mark as governor, then an interim governor is appointed to fill out his term. Such a PRI governor would, nevertheless, be weak and probably unable to fulfill promises made by Ruiz, such as the Plan Puebla Panamá, which the people don't want.

THE NEXT FEDERAL legislature will have a different composition, and the Oaxaca state legislature will be mostly PRD. The wild card is the PRD and Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and how occupied and/or preoccupied Calderón will become.

My crystal ball says Calderón will let Oaxaca go by default, in order to keep up his pretense of governing the nation. Units of the Mexican Army from the 57th Infantry Battalion, whose base is in Pinotepa Nacional, a southwestern city, have been sighted around the state in mountain areas since August 21. In the municipality of Santiago Ixtayutla the authorities solicited an explanation but received none. In the Sierra Norte the situation is much the same. Despite the pronounced fear of the presence of the military in Oaxaca, I don't envision a major military repression while the remainder of Mexico is on the verge of a massive popular movement toward political and economic change. The government *de facto* is already the APPO.

For Oaxaca, with its economy wrecked, it will be tough going to play in this tournament until December. Many people favoring the PAN hope for an attrition that will cripple the APPO, and Section 22 of the teachers union. The SEGOB's previous offers have been largely economic bribery, having to do with teachers' salaries and federal funds with no guarantee that such funds would go anywhere other than into the pocket of Ruiz or his likely clone. As bribery, such offers are inadequate, and as politics, they are horrible. On Friday, September 15, Creel outlined three options he can present to the national senate, and

all are methods of creating a commission to discuss what can be done. On the other hand, the longer the federal government stalls, the more entrenched the popular government becomes.

On Independence Day, September 16, the APPO organized four small marches. One was a delegation of teachers and civil organizations such as the Wide Front for Popular Struggle, the Popular Revolutionary Front, and the Committee in Defense of the People, which have been strong supporters of the APPO from its inception. In place of military and police uniforms, which usually dominate September 16 festivities, regional costumes prevailed. The Oaxaca women marched.

Afternoon festivities included more folk dancing, music, and speeches, such as the "Manifesto of the 15th of September," in which the APPO called for continued struggle to oust Ruiz. The manifesto referred to the creation of a new state constitution. In the hot sun, children ran about still wearing masks and crowns from the previous night or were held by their mothers. The popsicle sellers circulated. The APPO called for more organizing from below on the part of the citizens.

The customary military parade in Oaxaca was cancelled.

September 24

NO WAY TO GO BUT FORWARD

The APPO Undertakes a Long Walk to Mexico

ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, members of the APPO set out on a walk, from the zocalo in Oaxaca City to The Zócalo in Mexico City, a distance of 506 kilometers, more than 314 miles.

In the zocalo, as people signed up and gathered for the preliminary speeches, I guessed that about two thousand participants came for the *marcha caminata*—the march by foot, not a motorized cavalcade. On Friday, September 22, the newspaper *Noticias de Oaxaca* calculated that five thousand people were on the road when the marchers reached Etla, a town about twenty-five kilometers (more than fifteen miles) away, under a broiling sun.

A teacher mentioned that there is some fear of shooters stationed along the vacant stretches of highway. The rumor mill grinds along even while most people seem cheerful and no shootings have been reported for the past two weeks. Mood changes are frequent, but I haven't spoken to anybody who thinks the governor will return. One friend added to the rumors by telling us she heard that the governor is going to fly to Fort Lauderdale.

MANY TEACHERS ARRIVING for the march carried umbrellas, which, if they don't stop speeding bullets, are at least good sunshades.

The umbrellas were on high as the first trekkers twisted their way through the Oaxaca streets, blocked in many places by parked cars and trucks, or metal barricades or sandbags, burnt wood, barbed wire, or combinations of all of the above. One main street on the route, Morelos, was blocked and the marchers had to snake their way single file among barriers of automobiles, with their umbrellas shining aloft as they serenaded ex governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. To me, the words sounded kind of like "Fuck you and your mother, too," but sometimes my Spanish fails me. Both men and women are walking—*pantalones* and *pantaletas*—and singing and shouting slogans on the first stage of their journey.

The barricades serve to protect access to the radio stations, which serve as the lifeline of communication for the APPO. In addition, I saw nine eighteen-foot vans parked in the center of the city at the corner of Hidalgo and Huzares. I was told they would be used to block the highway while the marchers pass. Although that answer does not make much sense, I have no other, and for sure I saw the vans. Later, I learned they were used for sleeping areas.

The first day, the departure wasn't until 1:30 in the afternoon, after the two hours of speeches. Adolfo López informed the crowd that Germán Mendoza Nube, the imprisoned director of the Union of Poor Campesinos, has declared a hunger strike. Mendoza, a paraplegic, also suffers from diabetes and renal insufficiency. Prison life is doing him no good.

The blessing of the project, named For the Dignity of the Peoples of Oaxaca (Por la dignidad de los pueblos de Oaxaca), was offered by Manuel Marinero Magaña, allegedly a priest excommunicated when he made public that he had married and fathered a son. After the religious ceremony a teacher, José Antonio Altamirano, handed over to an APPO member the national flag, which had been used in the last teachers' caravans in 1986 and 1997.

When the marchers reach Mexico City their intention is to establish an encampment in front of the Senate to demand the removal of Ruiz. Arrival date is set for around October 3.

At the mid afternoon outset of the march, the Oaxacan local Section

22 of the SNTE was occupied in a statewide assembly of teachers. The spokesperson for the union, Daniel Rosas Romero, said that the teachers would leave as soon as their assembly ended, which may explain why two thousand left the zocalo but five thousand arrived in the town of Etla at the end of the day.

MEANWHILE, THE PRI sent to the federal government a request for public armed forces to come into Oaxaca. The teachers must be concerned not only with possible roadside shooters but also with the mundane logistics of how the five thousand walkers will be fed and provided with dry clothing and replacement shoes. The movement depends on the support of the people, who, at least in this first segment, appeared along the highway with tortillas, fresh fruit, and bottles of water. Among the walkers are the ex-rector of the public UABJO, Felipe Martínez Soriano, and a member of the leadership collective of the APPO, César Mateos Benítez. The UABJO students called a three-day classroom strike in support of the APPO.

The march is a physical representation of the determination of the teachers' / social movement to rid the state of Ruiz. One might say that stepping forward is the most obvious way of saying "not one step back" ("*ni un paso atrás*"). It is daily more evident that the APPO situation affects the PRI-PAN alliance in the national legislature, the Government Secretary's office, the Mexican Supreme Court, the parents of children with no schools, the vendors in the zocalo—in other words, everybody. Some parents are organizing classes or trying homeschooling. The Oaxaca street vendors are besieging the expatriates who remain to buy whatever they can, and some expatriates have organized dinners to sustain their favorite restaurants. In all of this, those who most detest the APPO also detest Ruiz and want him gone but have no other remedy to hand.

Meanwhile the PAN assures the PRI that it won't break their alliance by ousting PRI governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, since most agree that if Ruiz goes, so will several other governors, as the APPO idea spreads from state to state. The political parties agreed again to delay discus-

sion of the removal of powers in Oaxaca and they rejected formation of a legislative commission. The national legislature has twice previously failed to take up the subject. PRD senator Pablo Gómez summed up the situation for *La Jornada* by saying "the PAN would like very much to get the governor out of Oaxaca but doesn't do it because it doesn't want a conflict with the PRI in the very moment when there's a political crisis in the nation, and it's not going to break off relations with the party that supports it"—referring to the PRI's support of Calderón's presidency, while Obrador has accepted the designation of president from his PRD supporters.

Government Secretary Carlos Abascal has held lengthy talks with APPO negotiators that go nowhere, since the bottom line on the part of the Oaxaca negotiating committee reads, "Ruiz out." The negotiations are once again cancelled, although SNTE leader Enrique Rueda Pacheco doesn't choose to use the word *cancelled*. Maybe they're just in abeyance.

THE TEACHERS' STRIKE is now four months old. The popular movement, despite propaganda pointing out diminution of the teachers' energy and their impoverishment as the lack of salaries takes hold, is evidently growing among indigenous communities. I understand that along their route the marchers will also speak to others, both in Oaxaca and in other states (Puebla is on the route) about forming Popular Assemblies. The governors of Puebla and neighboring Morelos have both been linked to major corruption scandals in the last few years.

A September 19 article in the Monterrey newspaper *El Porvenir* says, "The popular Oaxaca-style assemblies have begun to proliferate in other states, such as Michoacán, Guerrero, Mexico City, and Baja California, and on the other side of the border in Los Angeles and Sacramento." The report describes communities in the United States reaching all the way north to Alaska, where Oaxaqueños have settled, bringing with them their customs and participatory government. Money for the teachers is coming from the United States both from Mexican communities and from American teachers.

The propaganda battle focuses on the imminent arrival of federal police or federal troops, including a military convoy disguised as buses of musicians on tour. On September 20, *Noticias* reported that the PFP continue to send agents to Oaxaca but in disguise. They're supposedly going to put down the movement and save the day for Ruiz, but that newspaper cited the APPO as its source. The APPO simultaneously said, through the commissioner for security and order, Gustavo Adolfo López, that the federal police are here to get us but they won't get away with it. "Oaxaca isn't San Salvador Atenco," he affirmed, and that is true.

On the third day of the walk, Sunday, September 24, the governor threatened the teachers with federal army intervention, increasing the tension. The governor appeared in public in Oaxaca for the first time this month, meeting legislators at a hotel because the government buildings are blockaded.

Unfortunately, someone guessed that he was at a different hotel, in the city. A crowd gathered and the scene became nasty, with shots being fired. According to some accounts, the hotel guards did the shooting, but *La Jornada* reported late this evening that the shooters were undercover police officers. At least one APPO supporter was shot and injured, according to *La Jornada*.

At the same time, the state director of education declared that if the teachers don't return to the classroom tomorrow they will be fired and replaced with strikebreakers from among retired teachers and parents.

The Oaxaca business community called for a shutdown on September 28 and 29 to include not using electricity or telephones, not paying taxes, and shutting down transportation. It's hard to say on whom that will put more pressure. But the growth of the regional Popular Assemblies and the movement in the countryside is too widespread now for even one step back.



A banner displayed at the Oaxaca teachers union strike and encampment. It reads: "Murderer Ulises—Out of Oaxaca." Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, the governor of Oaxaca, ordered the attack on the encampment of the striking teachers on June 14.



Teacher's encampment September 26. This encampment of a few hundred teachers has closed Oaxaca's justice department since July 22nd. Encampments like this covered the zocalo during the initial months of the strike.



The seventh megamarch on November 25, 2006. Thousands marched the eight kilometers from Santa Maria Coyotepec to the Oaxaca City Center.



Federal police enter Oaxaca October 29th. A lone woman speaks to a full line of riot police in the zocalo before they move in and destroy the teachers' encampment which had remained there since May 22nd.



Makeshift blockades guarded the occupation of downtown and many other Oaxaca neighborhoods.



Federal Police October 30th. "Asesinos"—Murderers.



"Free the Political Prisoners! With the people until the tyrant falls." Germán Mendoza Nube, active in the APPO, was kidnapped when plainclothes police shoved his wheelchair into an unmarked van.



Teachers gather to discuss the latest developments. Almost any time of day teachers were in circles discussing various proposals of how to continue forward in the struggle.



The sixth megamarch on November 5.



Indigenous women, part of a November delegation from Chiapas, called for peace surrounded by armored federal police.



Stencil graffiti artists during the seventh megamarch on November 25.



Women carried mirrors with labels such as "I am a rapist, murderer, oppressor" which they held up to the federal police during a November 19 women's march.



The November 20 march turned into a four-hour standoff between marchers and police.



During the sixth megamarch on November 5, the APPO placed volunteers at each of the police lines surrounding the zocalo to prevent instigators from attacking the police.



Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, surrounded by plainclothes police and political operatives on November 26, one day after federal police arrested close to 200 people, wounded more than 250 (twenty from gunshot) and assassinated three. Workers arrived at seven a.m. to paint over graffiti and clear the burnt encampment remains, spent tear gas canisters and dried blood from the streets.

September 29

OAXACA IS THE FOOTBALL, AND THE PRI, PAN, AND PRD ARE KICKING IT AROUND

None of Them Has Figured Out a Way to Score

WITH SO MANY big feet in the game, the Oaxaca population is getting battered. The latest was the alarm for the arrival of the PFP, who in fact are present, in quarters. If ordered to do so by President Fox, they will come in with maximum force and “clean up.” How exactly that could happen, I don’t know, because “cleaning” the zocalo would disperse no more than a few thousand people. Blockades are erected in many areas, at the radio stations and government buildings, and would all have to be attacked simultaneously to minimize citizen support in any one place. The popular teachers’ movement most likely contains two million sympathizers within the state and sympathizers in neighboring states as well.

My reasoning against attack may be too simple. There are three and half million in the state: the country’s largest indigenous population, the country’s largest teachers’ union, and about forty of the country’s poorest communities. Put it all together and it spells trouble for a repressive force. More, I would say, not like kicking a hard ball but like squeezing a balloon.

THE MORNING OF Thursday, September 27, after the latest terror tunes were heard, I walked as usual down to the zocalo for a look-see.

This was supposed also to be the first of two days of a work stoppage by the business community. I have not yet figured out why they would want to do that, and I suspect they haven't either. Some ask for federal forces to intervene for law and order; some ask for the federal government to take Ulises Ruiz Ortiz out of the state government; some ask for the federal forces to intervene on behalf of human rights and thus on behalf of the movement; some would frankly appreciate the establishment of military law. Nobody likes Ruiz; nobody wants bloodshed or perpetual war. No wonder President Fox doesn't want to do anything. In these contradictions, it's a lose-lose decision.

Only the popular teachers' movement remains consistent, demanding the ouster of Ruiz.

So, the work stoppage: The buses and taxis were running, and the normal stall-and-crawl traffic was wending down the main north-south street. No work stoppage there. I made it into the area of the "blockades," which in this part of the city consists, in daytime hours, of many women sitting on the ground with their embroidery. I dropped off some photos from the United States, of teachers in sympathy. Big smiles.

In the zocalo, the first thing I noticed was the smell of fried bananas, a sweet odor that can be recognized for a city block. The food vendors, the CD vendors, the fruit, soda, water, popsicle, clothing, salad bowl, and jewelry vendors were spread around the sidewalks surrounding the kiosk where the usual banners hang. On three sides the tourist cafes were closed. No cappuccino today, but since no tourists were present either, it was irrelevant. The small supermarket was open as usual. Of the little shops, maybe three were closed, despite the grand headline by *Noticias de Oaxaca* that six thousand businesses would be shut down. What I think happened is that six thousand signed up, and when morning arrived with still no attack by the PFP force, they shrugged and opened up. The big central market stood open, with a sheepish sign saying, "We will close for one of the two days of the work stoppage." Tomorrow, I guess.

I stopped at the movement tables to get some word on what had happened during the night. Must be I'm the only one in Oaxaca who

slept poorly. Nothing happened.

The teachers voted again last week to maintain their strike until Ruiz goes. This was followed on September 27 by the most recent teachers' vote in their assembly—again, not to return to the classrooms until Ruiz leaves. The teachers also demand the release of the movement's political prisoners: Germán Mendoza Nube, Erangelio Mendoza González, Catarino Torres Pereda, and Ramiro Aragón Pérez. No change there.

THE APPO FOOT march—Oaxaca to Mexico City—changed its route to prudently avoid the state of Puebla, where resides one of the governors who is thought to be “*dominó número uno*” if Ruiz goes. The marchers have been fed and brought water and fruit along the way, both by local people and by the vans the APPO sends. They sleep indoors or in vans, off the ground. A photo in *Noticias* shows them accompanied by an open truckload of soldiers, who don't appear to be hostile. Nevertheless, the APPO has designated a contingent of members to walk ahead of the two to three thousand people on the road, to act as a guard. They are armed with the usual sticks and pipes.

I headed out of the zocalo for two blocks and saw some shops closed and some open. I rewarded one of the open shops, which has a chain competitor, with a purchase of two glass beer mugs, setting me back four U.S. dollars. Then I went home to read the newspapers.

Teachers declare “maximum alert” was the headline. At the very same time, the government secretary, Carlos Abascal Carranza, stated, “We are neither anticipating nor ruling out the use of federal forces.” What's going on?

Ruiz's PRI has only the power of alliance. It's too small now to carry off anything on its own.

President Fox's PAN needs the PRI to beat back a surge against its president-elect Felipe Calderón, whose victory the left-wing PRD believes was fraudulent. If the PAN lets Ruiz fall, this would be taken as a sign that the PAN won't support any of the other PRI officials whose heads would roll if a popular movement sweeps the country. Thus far, the historical political rivals, PRI and PAN, have been united by their

common fear of a widespread uprising of some kind led by Obrador. On the other hand, Fox has been reluctant to overtly support the unpopular Ruiz.

The PRD is quick to point out what is going on. If the PAN cuts loose the PRI, it cannot outvote the PRD in the national congress.

The PRD, we may recall, was formed not two decades ago, mostly by dissident PRI members, so it's not as if the PRD is the knight in shining armor. That is to say, it knows how to kick the ball.

MANY MEMBERS OF Oaxaca's APPO back the PRD and expect to be backed in return. This puts pressure on the PRD. But many of the APPO follow other political currents, many to the left of Obrador, who after all is another capitalist in populist mode. What kind of currents? Well, the APPO itself is a movement without political pretensions. It's in a daily battle to rein in the socialist, communist, Trotskyite, and PRD elements, along with adherents to the Zapatistas' Other Campaign, so that a focus will be placed on its own popular assemblies.

It is the APPO politic that attracts the indigenous and campesino adherents. The socialists tend to be urban intellectuals. The APPO model is being presented in other states, and the APPO has sent out delegates to further that work, much as have the Zapatistas to further their position.

Of the above-named groups, all have a political agenda with a clear political leader or aspirant thereto, except for the Zapatistas. Like the Zapatistas, the APPO is horizontal in structure, or at least it's trying to be. The "movement leaders" supposedly are dispensable, and like the union assemblies, from which the teachers move their consensus up the ladder from the base, this is what the APPO is all about. That's why the teachers, the Zapatistas, and the APPO fit. The issues of each group, not the method, constitute their differences. However, they all are concerned with the poverty of the many and the wealth of the few, and the disregard for the indigenous population. The APPO is openly antineoliberal, as are the Zapatistas.

So what's a political party to do? *La Jornada* ran a headline Septem-

ber 26 that read: "The resignation of Ulises Ruiz was never considered in the meeting carried out at Los Pinos" (between Ruiz and Fox). Huh? We also read that Ruiz was offered once or twice a face-saving kick upstairs to federal office, but he declined. He wants to stay as state governor.

So Fox and the PRI governors have a new political strategy that, as I read it, sounds like buying off the struggle. Rosa Elvira Vargas writes in *La Jornada*: "A new political strategy to resolve the conflict in Oaxaca . . . consists of a new economic proposal to the teachers of Section 22 . . . and in an offer to the organizations making up the APPO, to reform various laws and local institutions and solve specific political problems, like the liberation of political prisoners." It took eleven governors and more than two hours to conceive of this plan: "An integral package which takes care of the demands of the teachers' Section 22. Second, attending to the social claims and a profound political reform: what the prisoners of Loxicha demand, what the APPO demands, the businesses, all of that is on the Oaxaca agenda. Third, the coordinated, respectful responsible action of all the governments—municipal, state, federal—seeking what is the best policy and the agreements to resolve this conflict."

A package of reforms of institutions, electoral methods, and a transparency law was presented. Along with this was the idea that somehow Ruiz would be monitored by the federal authorities, sort of a governor's house-arrest procedure.

This incentive package was followed by claims and disclaimers regarding the use of federal forces. Fox is saying that he'll resolve the Oaxaca crisis before he leaves office. Maybe.

October 3

ABDUCTIONS IN OAXACA

But As Happened in 1994 with the Zapatistas, Word Is Spreading

ANOTHER STREET ABDUCTION took place October 1 in Oaxaca. Pedro García García, identified as a student activist and law student at UABJO, as well as an adherent to the popular teachers social movement, was snatched at 2:20 in the afternoon, in full view of observers. The group who took him was driving in a black Ford Lobo, and the witnesses jotted down the license plate number.

Despite broadcasts of the event, with license plates and car description repeated several times during the day and evening, García was not spotted. Unidentified plainclothes thugs, presumably PRI hired by the governor, were initially reported to have snatched two others at the same time, one of them a woman with an infant, with whom García was walking, but this has not been confirmed.

In events related to the ongoing PRI assault on Oaxaca, at 10 pm the same night, Radio Ley, a radio station in possession of the popular teachers' movement, broadcast several alarms and calls for assistance in Brenamiel, a northern area bordering the city, where one of the vital radio antenna is located. The APPO through Radio Ley called for reinforcements from all the nearby neighborhoods, emphasizing that shooters were present, as well as thugs beating and attacking the APPO barricades and viciously beating the people on guard there.

The PRI is just another word for "nothing left to lose." Oaxaca has been subjected in the past few days to acts of random violence perpetrated by the all-but-destroyed governor. The sounds of gunfire and helicopters were heard all night on October 1. In reply, a general response of the citizens of Oaxaca is under way. Apparently federal intervention is on hold once again, despite the immediate circling of a helicopter during the Brenamiel attack. Perhaps the government secretary of does not want to commemorate October 2 (the date of the 1968 massacre in Tlatelolco Square in Mexico City) with a government attack on citizens.

ULISES RUIZ ORTIZ may believe that if he's going down, he'll take with him as many as possible. On the other hand, if Ruiz believes that the federal government will fully intercede, he himself might experience real restraints. Militarization, as apparently is happening right now throughout the state, might also imply a federal presence that would not permit Ruiz to target teachers and the APPO for murder and/or imprisonment, because the federal government must remain conscious of the bigger situation in the country.

The news of the situation in Oaxaca has spread to other states and other nations as well. Telephone calls from Mexicans residing in the United States were broadcast live on Radio Ley during the evening of October 1, asking for the Mexican government to cease the militarization of Oaxaca. As happened in 1994 with the Zapatistas, word is spreading. Civil assistance might arrive too late for Pedro Garcia, but it seems like it's on the way.

October 5

CRISIS ESCALATES AS MARINES LAND IN OAXACA

Governor's Departure Now a National Demand, as Political Figures Pledge to Travel to the State as Human Shields in the Event of an Attack

THE EVENTS OF this past week have left the population of Oaxaca in a state of fear, rage, and uncertainty, with calls on all sides for human-rights watchers, encampments, and marches.

In the most recent development, opposition leader Andrés Manuel López Obrador's national movement pledged to mobilize its followers around the issue and to go to Oaxaca as human shields in the event of a military intervention.

On Saturday, October 1, two gray helicopters circled at 5 pm, flying in circles around the city. On our short street three families ran out to look. One elderly woman was carrying a white pillowcase and waved it, as if men in the helicopter could see her. White is the color of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz's PRI: peace at any price, one might say. Afterward she looked at me fiercely and declaimed, "We are hostages in our own city! They can clean out these people!" (referring to the APPO). Across from us, another house displays a white banner. The houses flying the Mexican flag of red, green, and white are the APPO supporters. Most houses show no signs, pro or con. Most people sit tight, waiting.

They are navy helicopters. Many people took photos. On Radio 710 AM, the APPO broadcasts in a pleasant voice: keep calm; there are three thousand people at each barricade; they are probably more afraid than

we are; keep calm; maximum alert; this is not Atenco; we are on our own turf and they are strangers here.

A CALL IN to radio APPO came from a man in the town of Ocotlán de Morelos. He was weeping. He said, he "never thought that Fox would ally with the PRI against Oaxaca, to attack our Oaxaqueño people. We never thought there would be a massacre of our people."

And the next call: "We are not afraid, we have only our bodies and our sticks and they have guns. We are brave, we are Mexicans . . . we have the force of justice . . . I will defend my country. If we die, we die with honor, but they die with shame." And then he began to weep also. The announcer replies, "*Animo! Animo, compañero!*" ("Keep your spirits up, have courage.") Well, by now I'm weeping myself.

The announcer remains calm. They are organized; they are ready. The helicopters are doing military reconnaissance and are certainly trying to terrorize. A press conference at 6:30 in the zocalo by the APPO said pretty much the same. We're ready. Keep calm. Don't give in to provocations.

From *La Jornada* I learned that the helicopters arrived at the Oaxaca airport with military units, and the armed forces were also moved to Salina Cruz and Bahías de Huatulco, along with other military equipment such as tanks, and troops. When they landed "*Bienvenidos, cabrones!*" "*Bajen, aquí los esperamos!*" were the shouts launched at them from people carrying sticks and pipes. "Welcome, bastards! Come on down. We're here waiting for you!"

At 9 pm Saturday night the APPO closed off the historic downtown area, telling people who were caught away from home to present themselves as rapidly as possible to pass through the barricades. The APPO was determined to fight off any attack, asking people to unite in support, and at the same time telling those outside the city and around the state to organize their defense.

Radio Ley continued calmly presenting a lawyer's account of what could happen next, as the barricades defended the city center, an island inside the highway roads.

Thousands gathered very quickly to defend the barricades. Among them, I was told, were international media, including Univisión and CNN. The PRD was heavily represented. The radio voice asked for food, water, telephone lines. I went to sleep around 12:30 and could hear the people singing at the barricades—the basic revolutionary songs. It was kind of like being in a movie.

AT 8 AM on Sunday, October 1, I learned that a strong overnight mobilization of the popular teachers' movement and APPO went unchallenged. No attack was launched by the federal government. The morning "shots" turned out to be rockets fired as the helicopters circled. Another strategy—is this high tech?—is to run out with mirrors to reflect back into the helicopters "to confuse them." Yet another "solution" was to burn green wood, setting up a smoke screen.

Daylight lets everyone relax. The APPO instructed the guards to take down the barricades, except for those around the radio stations and outside the zocalo. In the normal APPO response to challenge, another march was scheduled by the national health service workers this morning from several points to the zocalo. About two thousand to three thousand people marched. Another day.

The state is militarized, although Captain Unda Pomposo, chief of the guard in the 10th Naval Military Zone, was quoted as saying they are only doing "one or two routine flights" in the state. Over the weekend, three trailers arrived in Bahías de Huatulco, each one carrying three amphibious tanks that were placed in the naval base. According to *La Jornada*, this makes the biggest military operation the country has seen since the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas in 1994.

Another concentration of forces on the coast arrived by ship to Salina Cruz, where troops disembarked by sea, air, and land. Usually, according to reports, the Army keeps ten thousand troops in the state, and there are four thousand police from the different state units. Now, *La Jornada* calculates there are as many as twenty thousand military and police. The state's population is about three and a half million.

From Salina Cruz also came the four Puma helicopters to circle the

city of Oaxaca. One of them circled overhead Sunday night when a PRI squad attacked the barricade located in the neighborhood of Brenamiel. Thugs kidnapped, beat, and tied up three youngsters who had been on the barricade, one of them twelve years old. Two of the three youngsters rescued required medical attention. The APPO people saved them after a broadcast that generated the mobilization of hundreds of Oaxaqueños, by the middle of the night almost two thousand.

The flight was registered by the Institute of National Government Statistics; it was violating the rules of civil aviation.

Monday, October 2, after the commemorative march for the 1968 massacre, the PRI came out again like roaches. Two more abductions were reported, one of a law student and activist from UABJO, Pedro García, also a member of the Revolutionary Front, who was walking on Sunday with a woman friend toward the university when he was snatched by occupants of a van. On October 3 he was located in the prison at Tlacolula, charged falsely with carrying explosives. It seems the police or thugs have reinitiated the use torture.

The other case is Alfredo Melchor Tirado Cruz, member of the Wide Front for Popular Struggle and of the APPO, who was grabbed at 1 on Tuesday afternoon. His whereabouts are still unknown. These two abductions bring the total of arrests to eleven since the onset of the teachers' strike, now blossomed into a wider popular assembly movement.

The SNTE local Section 22 began intensifying the mobilization of the teachers in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec region, occupying offices of the government and marching. In a press conference the union's auxiliary secretary of organization, Eleuterio López Ruiz said that the teachers are in agreement to stick together until Ulises Ruiz Ortiz falls. He insisted there will be no return to classes, although some teachers are indeed in the classroom in some zones, thinking to hold on to their teaching jobs, in a dissent that chips off fragments of the union.

By Tuesday, October 3, dozens of organizations from civil society that belong to the APPO demanded that the federal government "order the deactivation of all possible operations and the departure of military troops from the Oaxaca territory."

At the same time the APPO rejected the "electoral reform" passed by the Oaxaca legislators (non-PRD members only) to lengthen the term of office for sitting legislators and other governing figures, to which in all the turmoil nobody gave much thought. If Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz comes out on top, extended legislative terms will be only a minor annoyance in comparison to what many believe will be total repression.

GOVERNMENT SECRETARY CARLOS Abascal met with twelve PAN members of the state legislature led by federal congressman (and former Oaxaca governor) Dióodoro Carrasco, president of the Commission on Interior Governance of the House of Deputies (Mexico's lower house of Congress). PRD officials were not invited.

Carrasco admitted that the conflict in Oaxaca changes every minute. He listed three new ingredients: "the invitation of the federal government to build an agreement to restore governability and tranquility to the state; the military flights over the city, and," he claimed, "the fact that the Popular Revolutionary Army guerrilla group is calling for continued popular struggle."

Interviewed at an Inter-American Press Society meeting, Abascal had exhorted the APPO to look for an agreement within the institutional means. Before, in a radio interview he again hinted that the government could carry out "a peaceful occupation of Oaxaca" so that the citizens can carry out their activities with security.

With twenty thousand military and police personnel looking over your shoulder, you might not give credence to guarantees that there will be no repression on the part of the federal government. Abascal offers a package of reforms to convert the state legislature (those guys who just voted themselves extended terms) into a space for talking amiably with the people and a refurbishing of the current legal government. The departure of Ruiz won't be put on the table.

Neither the APPO nor the teachers attended the meeting scheduled with the Secretary of Government for October 4. In a live radio broadcast of an assembly of the Wide Progressive Front from Mexico City on

Wednesday October 4, it was averred that the problems of state ungovernability could be solved promptly after the removal of the powers from the three branches of government of Oaxaca. The departure of Ulises Ruiz is the only nonnegotiable demand. The assembly was attended by the PRD politicians elected on July 2 as federal deputies, who are also members of the APPO. It was reaffirmed that the Mexican Senate has the constitutional right and obligation to remove state powers.

IN A DIRECT question posed by the Oaxaca radio contact, the secretary general of the PRD, Guadalupe Acosta, was asked if the National Democratic Convention—the opposition movement that “elected” Andrés Manuel López Obrador as “legitimate president of Mexico” on September 16—would be willing to act as a human shield in Oaxaca. Acosta responded, “*Claro que sí*” (“Yes, of course,” or, *We are inclined to participate.*) We had information that [Ruiz] is planning a provocation today to bring in the federal intervention.” Acosta went on to say, “Today our senators asked the secretary of the navy not to participate in any attack on Oaxaca.”

Tomorrow, Acosta said, there will be a national mobilization on the part of the National Democratic Convention to defend Oaxaca.

October 17

OAXACA WOMEN TAP FOR HOPE WITH THEIR FINGERNAILS

As Stalemate Continues Between Federal Government and Popular Uprising

LET'S LOOK AT ten recent developments here:

1. Oaxaca's secretary of government issued another ultimatum for the teachers to return to classrooms today or face the consequences. This is the fourth such ultimatum. Each one has carried a threat—loss of contract pay for the school year, loss of future pay offers (including rescinding an increase in base wages for Oaxacan workers, which the teachers had fought for and which would benefit all salaried workers), the firing of every teacher who doesn't show up, or the use of armed forces. Today Elba Esther Gordillo, the head of the PRI-dominated SNTE but also close to PAN president-elect Felipe Calderón, threatened to cut Section 22, the SNTE's Oaxaca local, from the union body. Section 22 referred to this as a “declaration of war,” and a parallel national committee is now on the table. Omar Olivera, spokesperson for the teachers camped in Mexico City outside the national senate, repeated his repudiation of Gordillo as leader of SNTE. He stated that the behavior of Gordillo is an “action of ‘Calderonism’ to break the Oaxaca movement.”
2. Over the weekend in the capital city of Oaxaca, during a forty-

eight-hour period, ten different marches took place. They followed a public funeral in the zocalo's central pavilion for Alejandro García, who died from a gunshot wound to the head while at the barricade in Colonia Alemán, bringing coffee to the night team. A car with four military men in civilian clothes, recently seen leaving a local cantina, tried to break through the barricade. During the ensuing scuffle, two members of the APPO were shot, the second victim in the arm. The accused soldier, Jonathan Ríos Vásquez, declared himself innocent.

3. The federal senators who visited Oaxaca to check on the state government's "loss of powers" opined that there seems to be increased rancor in Oaxaca. According to *Noticias de Oaxaca* of October 16, senators Alejandro González Alcocer (PAN), Tomás Torres Mercado (PRD), and Ramiro Hernández García (PRI), though not drawing conclusions about ungovernability, nevertheless reached that astonishing conclusion. As I understand it, the Mexican constitution says that the Senate can declare the state ungovernable if the three branches of state government no longer function. Here, with state powers having disappeared, basic functions are no longer carried out. This is not the same as declaring that powers that exist should be nullified. This is why Ulises Ruiz Ortiz showed up with boxes of papers that he claims prove state functions are continuing.
4. The state director of the PAN, Jorge Valencia Arroyo, opined that the governor should consider resigning or taking a leave of absence: if the national senate decrees that there is an absence of powers, the shit will eventually hit the fan for him. No, he didn't say that. Excuse me. What he said was that once there is an effort to call on people to be accountable for their crimes, there are crimes aplenty to go around—including the really nasty ones like assassination and torture ordered by Governor Ruiz. The crimes of the APPO consist of delinquencies such as damaging cultural patrimony with spray paint and blocking the free transit of citizens. They have been trying to maintain a peaceful movement and, with some exceptions

(like beating up firemen who tried to destroy a barricade over the weekend of October 13), they have succeeded.

5. The Alliance of Business Owners and Civil Society states that it is not with Ruiz, that violence is not the right solution to a problem that reflects seventy years of authoritarianism and abandonment. Thus, Ruiz's presumed base is coming out against him.
6. The APPO has been reproduced in at least eleven states, among them Chiapas, Guerrero, Michoacán, Veracruz, Jalisco, Puebla, and Quintana Roo. Each assembly has its own name, but more or less the same social problems. Twenty-three states signed on to send people in defense of Oaxaca should there be a federal intervention. Four assemblies have formed in the United States: Chicago, New York, Texas, and California.
7. An indigenous Nahuatl and Mazatec community radio station, Nandia, was attacked and destroyed by government agents. The women who ran the station belong to an organization of Mazatec indigenous women. After the attack they tried to leave the small northern town of Mazatlán Villa de Flores to travel to the capital, hoping to make known their outrage. The state constitution guarantees the right of the indigenous to radio stations, but the only road out of town was blocked by people identified only as PRI loyalists. The Mazatec women were planning a hunger strike in the atrium of the cathedral in Oaxaca. *La Jornada* of October 7 indicates that the attack was called for by the state government secretary and carried out by the local PRI. Now the women are calling on international support for the community.
8. In other areas of the state, rumors and threats abound, not only in small towns but also in larger cities, such as Tuxtepec, Matías Romero, and Miahuatlán, as reported in an October 16 article written by Carlos Beas Torres, the leader of the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus. In Matías Romero, PRI loyalists burned the radio station La Consentida. In the Isthmus

of Tehuantepec, operators of the indigenous radio stations, along with their families, have been held hostage and have received death threats. Radio Huave, a powerful community radio in the isthmus, was first to be threatened, followed by the coordinator of Radio Ayuuk, and now the mayor of San Dionisio del Mar has threatened the directors of Radio Umalalang. This is the communications war, Beas says, that has attacked the newspaper *Noticias de Oaxaca* and reporters. The dirty war also encourages groups like PRI members and police in civilian clothes to open schools by force on the isthmus. The mainstream media, Beas Torres observes, emphasizes the big events such as helicopter flyovers and the amassing of marines at Salina Cruz and Huatulco. In Oaxaca there are two wars: one has the aspect of military invasion, and the other is carried out by local political bosses and government officials who are desperate to hold on to their seventy-seven-year-old privileged role.

9. For the Oaxacan people, authorities, and indigenous organizations to come together for discussions, the APPO and other sponsors held the Dialogue for Peace on Friday, October 13, in Oaxaca City. The former bishop of Chiapas, Samuel Ruiz, again showed up and spoke for five minutes. This indicates that Ruiz, who has come three times that I know of, has put his whole moral weight behind the Oaxaca movement, most likely because of its importance to indigenous peoples. The inauguration was celebrated with a band and several speeches, including Bishop Ruiz's address: "Oaxaca is like the body of all the nation, where something new is being born. We are celebrating with happiness, music, and singing because we understand that a new world is coming; not only for the state of Oaxaca but for the very nation. . . . In this new stage of our history we are beginning by having respect for our differences; the world is watching our peaceful construction of a new participatory government and dialogue."

In addition to the well-known public personages, the event was attended by sociologists, academics, campesinos, women, men, children, and representatives of national and international civil organi-

zations, as well as statewide indigenous authorities and the Triqui women, who are always so visible in their red beribboned overdresses. More than one thousand people signed up as participants.

The opening hour unified the crowd with symbols, such as blowing conch shells to summon the people, wafting incense over the plaza, and offering prayers in several languages. The leader of the religious ceremony told the people, "We align ourselves with nature, from which we take our dual representation of god and goddess, of heaven and earth, male and female. We call the forces of the universe to aid and support our road." As the woman lead the prayer, the audience turned to salute each of the four cardinal directions. Directly in front of me stood three older women who expressed their private prayers in a low undertone. Then began the drumming, a spontaneous light tapping that rippled across the entire audience. The women near me had taken out small plastic compacts and were tapping a steady rhythm with their fingernails.

After the ceremonies, the meeting broke apart to several tables where serious discussion took place. Just how serious we don't yet know because they will not report until later this week. The best hope is that whatever they decide will be included in the November constitutive meetings to establish a permanent state assembly based on the APPO model.

10. Stress, fatalities, and tension abound. Neither the APPO nor the APPO member teachers are backing down. The departure of Ruiz is not negotiable. The indigenous communities are organizing, as is the nation. We're all drumming with our fingernails.

October 24

OAXACA TEACHERS REJECT LEADERSHIP'S AGREEMENT TO RETURN TO CLASSES

National Senate Refuses to Resolve Oaxaca Standoff; APPO Must Find Its Own Solutions

ANOTHER DIFFICULT NIGHT in Oaxaca. Around 2 am church bells rang furiously, the emergency sound, dogs ran up and down our street barking madly, and fireworks exploded. I got out of bed and turned on Radio Universidad, which was reporting on the statewide assembly of Section 22 of the teachers' union.

At 8 am the radio broadcast an approximation of what happened and the position of Section 22.

First, on October 19, the national senate of Mexico, voting along party lines, refused to intervene in the Oaxaca crisis. The possibility that the Senate would declare that the government of Oaxaca has “disappeared” came to nothing, leaving the people's and teachers' social movement—which comprises the APPO, Section 22 of the national teachers union, Oaxacan communities, and civil organizations—to find their own solution to the stalemate that grips the state of Oaxaca.

WITH SEVENTY-FOUR VOTES in favor and thirty-one against, the Senate accepted on Thursday afternoon the statement of the Internal Governance Commission not to declare a disappearance of powers in Oaxaca and not to proceed with the removal of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. The thirty-one votes against accepting the report were cast by the

PRD, the Labor Party, and the Convergence Party, while the seventy-four votes in favor were cast by an alliance of PRI, PAN, and Green Party legislators.

Meanwhile, during the time that the senators were considering the issue (which in reality involved the formation of an alliance between the PAN and PRI), another teacher was murdered in a drive-by shooting on Wednesday, October 18. Primary school teacher Pánfilo Hernández Vásquez, coming out of a neighborhood assembly in the Jardín district, was shot twice in the abdomen. His death brings the total of movement murders—of teachers and APPO and indigenous leaders—to eleven since August (including the deaths of three members of the Triqui indigenous group—two men and a twelve-year-old boy—murdered in rural Oaxaca and left off some versions of the death toll reported in the media).

By radio, the APPO called for citizens to strengthen and reinforce the barricades, maintaining the level of maximum alert decreed the night before. It was reported at the same time that as part of the government plan for Operation Iron, the state government of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz has completed renovating the prison in the city of Tlocolula, suggesting that it expects massive detentions of teachers and APPO members. The remodeling involves separating each cell into two, to double the holding size from two hundred to four hundred. However, teachers, students, and the APPO openly discuss that many of them will die by government-sponsored activities before they see their half cell in Tlocolula.

Thousands of people had gone out to the streets on October 19 to show their allegiance to the APPO, which declared that it is preparing for the next phase of the struggle. APPO spokesman Florentino López Martínez announced that the people of Oaxaca will continue to seek international support—for example, from the Inter-American Human Rights Commission—to pursue the demand for a declaration of failed government.

THE STATE WAS in a grim mood as the teachers' union returned to its

base for another consultation about returning to the classroom. Many teachers viewed themselves as facing a choice between death or continuing to fight. But for the first time I saw on Saturday a spray-painted wall that read "Rueda P, you are a traitor to the teachers and to the APPO." Enrique Rueda Pacheco, the head of the teachers' union, had announced the return to classes on national television. His declaration was "illegal," in the sense that no consultation with the base—required under Section 22 principles—had yet taken place. When teachers received their ballots to vote on the future of the strike, the ballot questions asked only when they thought classes should resume; continuation of the strike was not offered as an option.

Rumors abound (stoked by the commercial media, which has got most everything wrong since the conflict erupted last May) about blocs forming within the movement that may split it, including the splinter teachers' Central Committee for Struggle, which is affiliated with the governor's PRI party and has also called for a return to classes.

The Wide Front for Popular Struggle (FALP, one of the more important groups that make up the APPO) convened a meeting of the movement and the teachers to call for "the reflection of those forces which many times have acted and continue acting in an irresponsible manner, immature and excessively protagonist, and that many times have carried this movement to the brink, from which it has been difficult to extricate itself." In a communiqué, the FALP stated: "One has to put above all the general interest and the continuity of the movement; one should not permit the goals of groups, often illusory, chimerical, to change the years of popular struggle in Oaxaca."

SOME TEACHERS MARCHED to Mexico City on foot, camped out, and launched a hunger strike in anticipation of the Senate's vote on the disappearance of powers. In a communication published in *Noticias de Oaxaca*, the encamped teachers wrote to their compañeros in the rank and file of the Oaxaca teachers' union:

The first accord of the state assembly on October 18, 2006, says: the de-

parture of Ruiz is not revocable or negotiable, therefore, the consultation that appears to propose the return to classes leaves us with the clear idea that within the teachers union there are positions which favor the state, shown by putting dates to this resolution, which squeezes our base for an immediate reply without the opportunity to think if this is the best way to achieve a dignified exit from the conflict that we face today; such an exit was being analyzed by the senators of the republic who, upon seeing the result of the state [teachers'] assembly radically altered their decision. Of the 14 members of the Internal Governance Commission in the senate, 11 voted against and only 3 in favor of the disappearance of powers once they confirmed that this teachers union was inducing their bases to lower the pressure which was being exercised, in place of waiting for the result of this commission as was agreed in the prior State Assembly [of teachers].

THE DOCUMENT GOES on to cite the brutal repression of June 14, the ten assassinated companions, the four comrades imprisoned, the five hundred kilometers walked to Mexico in the march, and the twenty-one teachers on hunger strike.

"While we agree there is a commitment to the children and parents, we also consider that the return to classes under present conditions does not guarantee in any way the security and physical safety of all the education workers and of the people organized in the APPO, as was shown in the cowardly assassination of the compañero Pánfilo Hernández Vásquez of the Sector Zimatlán tonight in the Colonia Jardín."

Those camped in front of the Senate building in Mexico and the hunger strikers camped out at the downtown Juárez monument jointly agreed in their document that this is a movement of the rank and file, not of the leaders. Therefore, individual teachers have the right to decide to return to classes or not, without subjection to the dates and conditions indicated. Thus Oaxaca waited anxiously for the result of the teachers' vote. Once again callers to the radio station (now the resurrected Radio Universidad) were weeping, and others with great sadness reminded the teachers that the people have supported them, fed them, and lived with them on the barricades and encampments. Granted that callers are self-selective in support of the APPO, the constant stream of phone calls pleading for the teachers to hold on was moving.

Many teachers remain committed to the APPO maxim that the departure of Ruiz is not negotiable. In two previous votes, the rank and file vowed to open classes only five days after Ulises Ruiz Ortiz leaves office. On Saturday, October 21, in the third consultation vote since the strike began by the membership of Section 22 across the state, initial reports suggested that a majority of the teachers rejected Rueda's call to return to classes, citing their obligation to honor their dead, as well as their promises to the people and the APPO.

THE FIRST RESULT of the teachers' consultation was received by telephone to Radio Universidad on Saturday. They were read on the air, declaring the vote in favor of continuing the struggle, with no return to classes. The initial vote results announced on Radio Universidad and in *Noticias* reported that six of the eight regions had rejected the opening of schools before Ruiz left.

However, when Rueda arrived at the teachers' assembly, after hours of delay, the vote seemed to have shifted (or to have been shifted by Rueda). Now the vote was to return to classes, with figures like twenty-five thousand in favor of a return and fifteen thousand against. The fight was on. Radio Universidad called on everybody to go to the teachers' union hall to protest, with that loud clamor that woke those asleep.

On Sunday morning, the proposition has emerged that another consultation be held to verify the teachers' position. The questions for the new consultation are, first, do you agree to open the classrooms. Second, if yes, when? This indicates that Rueda's ploy did not work.

Meanwhile Oaxaca must cope with its alarms. For example, the town of Villa Alta, in the Sierra Norte, issued a formal complaint on October 16 against the presence of military troops who give no explanation as to as why they are there and have increased the fear among the people. Many small towns are inhabited only by elderly people who are strong in demanding their rights but physically incapable of defending them. If conditions are so dictated, they might be living permanently under military control, similar to parts of the state of Chiapas. Furthermore,

in addition to the rural towns, many cities are presently held by APPO sympathizers who expelled local PRI politicians and now occupy the government buildings. As the movement goes, so goes their fate.

Another example is the declaration by the Oaxaca human-rights network stating that armed police in civilian clothes were stationed outside the meeting place for the Dialogue for Oaxaca, which has entered the worktable phase. When the participants left the building they were followed by vehicles, holding eighteen heavily armed men. This case of intimidation is one of many.

RUIZ FIRST DECLARED that he would once again reorganize his cabinet, and on the basis of the teachers' return to classes, issue a general amnesty. Immediately upon the teachers' apparent Saturday rejection of resuming classes, he changed his statement to a threat to call in the PFP to clear the encampment and barricades by force. But Ruiz does not control the PFP; the federal government does.

Therefore, once again the embattled state awaits some sort of resolution, now not just the standoff with Ruiz but also relief of the exhausted teachers who have no income and bear the brunt of sleeping in the encampments. No way out, no way back, no way to separate the strands of the movement—the teachers, the indigenous, the rural towns, the workers, and the citizenry of Oaxaca—appears clear. The only glimmer in the darkness is the creation of more and more popular assemblies such as the newly formed assembly in the state of Mexico. As I'm listening to the radio, the strongest mood prevailing is determination to hold on, united if possible.

October 28

FEDERAL POLICE AUTHORIZED TO ENTER OAXACA

A Day of Killings while Teachers Negotiate in Mexico City

PRESIDENT VICENTE FOX, through his secretary of government Carlos Abascal, has authorized the entry of the PFP into Oaxaca in direct response to the events of October 27.

Following a declaration by the APPO to launch an all-out work stoppage and boycott to force the hand of governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, PRI supporters, both police and private individuals, assaulted the population in several different areas of the city on Friday. The result, according to Radio Universidad, was four dead and thirty wounded. The dead have now been identified as Emilio Alonso Fabián, Bradley Will, and Eudocia Olivera Díaz. The fourth reported death, of Esteban Zurita López, is at the center of accusations by both sides of the conflict, with each blaming the other.

Airplanes full of PFP officers and riot gear have already arrived, with the police now gathered at a nearby military base, reports the national daily *El Universal*.

My analysis is that if the PFP enter the city by day, a negotiated exit is open for the APPO, possibly implying the removal Ruiz from office. If the PFP comes by night, they're likely coming to dislodge by force the resistance in the zocalo and the 1,800 barricades. Ruiz precipitated the intervention by his attacks. The question is, does the PAN party of Fox

and Calderón want to maintain Ruiz as a sop to the PRI, or has Ruiz become so costly that the PAN chooses to dump him? If so, Ruiz's setting up of the APPO backfires.

The state assembly of the local teachers' union, Section 22, called on Ruiz to resign before November 30 and to guarantee the physical safety of teachers returning to work, to pay salaries in arrears, to release political prisoners, and to retract arrest warrants for the leaders of both the APPO and Section 22, among other demands. These demands were part of the decision of the teachers' vote to return to the schools, scheduled tentatively for October 30.

While Section 22 spokesperson Enrique Rueda Pacheco was in Mexico City talking with Government Secretary Carlos Abascal about the conditions for a phased-in regional opening of schools, the attacks began in Oaxaca. The problem for Ruiz, of course, was that a return to the classrooms did not imply a lifting of the APPO's occupation of the city center or the return of government buildings to the government. The teachers' vote to return also included the condition that they would continue their struggle to oust Ruiz.

Meanwhile, Ruiz refuses to resign or to take a leave of absence. During the teachers' assembly meeting, shooting and bus burning went on outside the Hotel Magisterio, where the meeting took place.

On Friday morning, the day scheduled for the onset of the big anti-Ruiz strike, I walked up the north-south street close to my house. The newly constructed small neighborhood barricade consisted of three men, six women, a snarl of barbed wire, a banner, and a barrel. On the main road, traffic was light and getting lighter. In the middle of Niños Héroes Street, a woman held an umbrella against the sun with one hand and with the other tossed aside the rocks that impeded traffic in front of her shop. When she reached the sidewalk where I was watching, she snarled, "Ya basta! That's enough of these blockades!" It appeared she did not understand that less than three hundred meters behind her, two buses were being maneuvered into position for a complete blockade of the avenue.

The peaceful appearance of this shutdown was brief. By the time I

returned home, the radio told a different story. Ruiz had been sighted in Santa Lucía, and people were reminded not to overreact.

BY MIDDAY ON Friday, a mechanic, Gerardo Sánchez, was abducted by two plainclothes men and one woman in a vehicle near the El Rosario Bridge and driven to Tlocolula, where the prison is located. His abductors were later identified as state ministerial police.

The operation resembles what happened to Pablo García García on October 1 (García, a student, was beaten, tortured, and released). Earlier reports claimed that Gerardo Sánchez had been abducted in Tlocolula. The report said that two lawyers and the PRI mayor were complicit. A call went out for the people of Tlocolula to take over the municipal building. Crowds gathered and that situation remains unclear.

During the afternoon three other teachers were abducted and taken to the city prison, where another shoot-out occurred. Emilio Alonzo Fabián, a forty-two-year-old teacher from Loxicha in the Pochutla municipality, was shot and killed when he ran with others to intercept a car identified as one of those used by the police.

Attacks continued throughout the afternoon in San Antonio de la Cal, in the La Experimental neighborhood, where Oaxaca's state prosecutor's office is located; in Santa Lucía del Camino; and in Santa María Coyotepec.

Three people were dead before the 11 o'clock news came on. During the Oaxaca segment of TV Azteca news, Ruiz announced firmly that four were dead but that the shooting was done by the APPO while his police were all in their barracks. Photographs and videos emerged later revealing the shooters as members of the ministerial police. Ruiz was interviewed via phone by TV Azteca, which simultaneously showed people with sticks in their hands running away from what could be heard as gunshots. In the video clip, they were carrying the body of Brad Will, a U.S. reporter for Indymedia who was killed during the afternoon in Santa Lucía del Camino during a confrontation with ministerial police. Along with him, a photographer from the Mexico City daily *Milenio* was shot in the foot. Santa Lucía del Camino is now in the

hands of the PRI.

In Santa María Coyotepec twenty-four people were wounded by 11 pm in an attack on the people at a barricade. According to citizens present at the time, the victims were shot by plainclothes police officers and thrown into prison with no medical treatment.

During this same long day, Enrique Rueda Pacheco was in Mexico City negotiating a return to classes with Carlos Abascal. When he called the radio station at about 10 pm, he didn't seem too angry, but the others who followed him on the radio were stronger in their outrage. The kindest thing said about Rueda was, "He's young, he's a politician." Joel Castillo, the state's PRI government secretary, was named on Radio Plantón as being behind the attacks. "The conditions to go back to classes don't exist," said one spokesperson for the teachers.

At noon on Saturday, October 28, we are waiting for the entrance of the PFP. The announcers on Radio Universidad are saying that neither the barricades nor the zocalo will be surrendered.

October 30

PFP ARREST AT LEAST FIFTY DESPITE THE APPO'S NONVIOLENCE

High Presence of Citizens and Awareness on the Streets Give Oaxacans a Sense of Solidarity

RADIO UNIVERSIDAD HAS come back on the air. However, electric power to the entire zocalo had been lost, and Santa Lucía del Camino, the site of Brad Will's death, was blacked out as well.

We're at the end of a long day. Some APPO people are holding a few barricades, but several buildings have been retaken by the PFP. Two boys, a fourteen-year-old and a twelve-year-old, have been reported killed. The police wielded large trucks with plows, some with high-pressure hoses, and tanks. There was also rumor of another shooting death, but this has yet to be confirmed. Fifty people have been arrested so far. The PFP are entering houses and have arrested eight as a result. Those eight have not been specifically identified as APPO leaders and their names are still unknown. The news was later confirmed by *La Jornada*.

A friend within the APPO who was in the zocalo when the PFP began to approach said the following: "I have been in the center of Oaxaca since the PFP started to move in. I came from the northern entrance to the zocalo at around 2 pm and at first the police were keeping a line two blocks to the north with people from the APPO standing face-to-face with them. There were a few scuffles but no serious confrontations."

After a while, my friend informed me, the PFP drove in on three

buses and blocked the north and southbound streets of the zocalo. However, shortly after blocking the streets with the buses, the police left the scene heading west, leaving the buses behind unguarded. People from the movement did not wait long to unblock the streets by pushing the buses off the intersections where they had been placed by police.

Later in the afternoon the PFP, standing man to man in full riot gear, closed off the southeast corner street of the zocalo and sealed off the southwest corner of the square as well, forming a wall with their shields. Behind the line of southwest corner were approximately two hundred police officers and a bulldozer; on the other corner stood about fifty police. The people were right in the faces of the police, chanting "Oaxaca is not Atenco," among other slogans. The area was filled with press photographers, internationals, and Oaxacan men, kids, and women, who made up the large majority of the crowd. Speakers mounted the gazebo to demand that the presence in the zocalo be maintained all night. People were urged not to confront the police, to maintain their calm, and to not give the police a pretext for attack. One man, who to my eyes looked too small for hand to hand confrontations, was carrying a metal bar for protection. He was told by another person to leave it behind. After he handed the bar away the people around him started to applaud.

The PFP stayed in the same place for hours and were still there when darkness fell. People I spoke to were speculating that the federal police had been surprised by the number of people on the street and were going to retreat. An air of winning the battle spread, but I'm not convinced that more violent PFP actions won't be seen tonight.

The scent of tear gas was apparent in the whole area. It seemed to have been fired, but not directly in the zocalo. I think two buses and one car were set on fire, and a lot of tires and garbage were being burned on the street corners.

Generally, people went out onto the streets when the PFP moved so they could watch what was going on. Groups of people were standing on each street corner, listening to the radio and informing one another of happenings elsewhere. Surprisingly, most of those standing outside

weren't movement people. I saw a few Oaxacan friends that I know are nonpolitical and are not involved whatsoever. I heard no pro-PFP sentiments or negative feelings toward the movement. There just seemed to be genuine concern about what was happening to our neighbors.

November 2

PART I: IN OAXACA, FOX OPTS FOR THE HEAVY HAND

The Federal Police Use Cherished Zocalo for Toilet Needs, and More Violent Civil Rights Violations

THE APPO CALLED for a massive mobilization on Friday, October 27, to try to force the resignation of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. It didn't work. Instead, the Fox government sent the PFP to invade Oaxaca. Since the occupation by the PFP and the Mexican Marines, part of the Navy, who landed October 28, violations of human rights including detentions, deaths, arrests, and injuries both of Mexican citizens and foreign journalists have occurred.

The constitution states that if Governor Ruiz resigns before December 1, a new election must be held—a sure win for the PRD. If Ruiz leaves after December 1, his state government secretary, Heliodoro Díaz Escárrega, also deeply involved in the five months of murders and abductions, will automatically be appointed in his position, thus leaving the situation just as bad, if not worse, than before. On October 30, the national senate suggested that Ruiz resign. It could have declared a removal of powers two weeks ago but did not, thus causing the present disaster. “Disappearance of powers” signifies that the state is not governable, and all three branches of government are vacated.

DESPITE RESTRAINT BY both the APPO and the PFP, the mere fact of invading the state with the goal of repressing a popular movement

made certain results inevitable. The people are angrier than ever; lawless shooting and abductions on the part of the PRI's hired guns (possibly in coordination with the PFP) have increased; growing sections of Mexico, including organizations from the states of Chihuahua, Sonora, Puebla, Quintana Roo, Michoacán, Veracruz, Guerrero, and Chiapas have declared common cause with Oaxaca; the Zapatistas' Other Campaign issued statements of support; foreign organizations from France, Venezuela, Canada, Madrid, Barcelona, London, Italy, New York, and Los Angeles are condemning the Mexican government; and the popular assembly movement has gained widespread recognition, more so when an American Indymedia reporter was killed.

Today, the cherished family holiday, the Day of the Dead, has taken on overtones of the movement as observances include the assassinated teachers, leaders, children, bystanders, and the American journalist Brad Will.

The invasion, which began on October 29, has included ongoing attempts to block Radio Universidad, the main voice for the APPO. The station's electricity was cut off, along with the power to the center of the city and the neighborhood of Santa Lucía del Camino, where Brad Will was killed. The UABJO issued a declaration decrying the federal attempt to interfere with university property. The rector of the university, Dr. Felipe Martínez, went on the air to praise "the heroic attitude of the people," and he exhorted them, "Don't give up resisting." He then referred to the governor as "a psychiatric case." Along with Martínez's denunciation, the unanimous board of twenty-seven as well as eight officials wrote to Fox decrying the assault on UABJO, subjected first to an acid attack by thugs, which put the station off the air on August 11. The students managed to raise enough money to restore it, and it has been the main communication center ever since it came back on the air two weeks ago.

THE PFP'S INVASION of Oaxaca began while the leader of Section 22 was in Mexico City negotiating the return to classes of the striking teachers. Some reports now indicate that the southern region of the

state, Juchitán and Tuxtepec, will resume anyway. These areas were scheduled to go back first in any case. However, the spokesperson for Section 22 opined that “the conditions are not right” for a return, referring to widespread fears that with Ruiz still in charge, or any other member of the PRI, the movement teachers will be picked off one by one. Nevertheless, the teachers, who spent five months in encampment, have been without income for several weeks, as have the state health workers who also support the movement. The problem is not so much that individuals will starve—they won’t—but that a main source of disposable income in the state comes from government salaries.

Ironically, tourism is not possible, even if tourists were so inclined, because all access roads in and out are blocked to prevent the entry of APPO supporters. There is no internal bus transportation; incoming riders have been dumped off by the roadside at night with no idea how to get into the city. Furthermore, presumably because the PFP were sent in with inadequate preparation, the troops sent to hold the zocalo after its “cleaning” of APPO banners, slogans, tents, and people, had to use public areas for their toilet needs. Additionally, the troops were not supplied with rations, so they sacked the shops in the main kiosk, which prompted shop owners to lodge complaints with the government. Their hope of redress may be small, given that assassins walk around freely.

In a smaller irony, while the PFP were scrubbing the walls in the zocalo, the spray-painting youngsters were adding slogans in other areas, including the area outside the zocalo. In nearby Llano Park, Ruiz staged a support march for himself, to which about two thousand people responded. Simultaneously, about three thousand APPO supporters gathered in front of Santo Domingo church to jeer and hoot at parade participants who left the pro-Ruiz rally by that route.

The situation in Oaxaca, as documented by the Commission for the Defense of Rights of the People, is reported as follows:

Sunday, October 29

These are the results of the resistance in the capital, according to informa-

tion received by the Oaxaca Human Rights Network (Red Oaxaqueña de Derechos Humanos):

Dead: 3

Jorge Alberto López Bernal, a nurse taking care of the wounded, killed by a tear-gas bomb that penetrated his thorax; Fidel Sánchez García, beaten by PRI loyalists; and a twelve-year-old boy whose situation has not been confirmed.

Confirmed Arrested: 22

Isidro Yescas, José Manuel Ramírez Zarate, Pedro Hernández Águilar, Elizabeth Xola Vásquez, Daniel Luna Méndez, Gerardo Valdez Valdez, Daniel Mejía Martínez, Rey Feria Reyes, Isaac Zarate Pérez, Alejandro Gutiérrez, Félix López Medina, Abraham Ramírez Jiménez, Said Ordaz Pérez, Israel Velasco Pacheco, Juan Martínez López, Gerardo Águilar Chico, Juan Dolores Agustín, Guillermo López, Anastasio Contreras Hernández, Jesús Antonio Aquino, Mario Pineda, and Pedro Hernández.

Disappeared: 16

Antonio Castellanos Hernández, Rosa Anastasia Martínez, Jesús Canseco García, Alberto Hernández Calvo, Mauro Arturo Mogoza García, Eusebio Mendoza Sabines, Javier Mateo Calderón, Mamerto García Magaña, Abdón Águilar, Cenobio Girón Pablo, Raymundo Gómez Martínez, Juan Manuel Ortiz González, Alberto Miguel Guadalupe, Apolinar Noriega, Alejandro Alcántara González, and Teodoro López Gutiérrez.

Forceful Entry of Private Homes

Carried out in Colonia Alemán, Colonia Jardín, and the small village of San Martín Mexicapán.

The arrested have probably been taken to the prisons of Ixcotel and Miahuatlán in the 28th Military Zone, as is usual in cases of high security.

Monday, October 30

In the town of Nochixtlán, the PFP prevented the passage of a caravan coming from Tlaxiaco, headed for the city of Oaxaca to participate in the march to protest the presence of the federal forces and to demand the departure of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. The police beat the participants who protested the violation of their constitutional right to free transit, with the following results:

Arrested: 8

Sergio Barrios Robles, Miguel Ángel López Pena, Víctor Alejo Plata, Pedro

Osorio Nicolás, Manuel Villegas Mora, Cuitláhuac Santiago, Omar José, and Manuel Ojeda García.

The first three are members of CODEP and apparently are being held in the prison of Tlacolula.

Not only the federal forces have acted in these operations, but also the state ministerial police. They have used strike groups from different points where there are barricades, with the intention of provoking confrontations.

Up to now the PFP occupies the zocalo, where yesterday they sacked the commercial operation of the kiosk and today they opened it to the public, but they don't permit access to groups of more than ten people. The PFP also occupy Love Park and are not permitting any entry at all. The APPO encampment that had been in the zocalo is now at Santo Domingo.

In the march organized for the state government in support of Ruiz, the marchers basically consisted of families linked to the business community, government functionaries, and employees. The slogans on their placards, referred to as fascist by CODEP, included congratulations to Vicente Fox for the police occupation backing Ruiz. The only incident reported here was the confrontation with a person who was identified as a teacher but who was fortunately able to enter a building where he was rescued. This provocation to violence and lynching of teachers and members of the APPO is promoted by Citizen Radio operating clandestinely and without license under the order of Ruiz.

Tuesday night the PFP was removing barricades and invading homes in Santa Lucía del Camino. Faced with the failure to discourage the APPO with the weekend's operations, it seems that the present plan may be to capture the leadership of the movement.

The Day of the Dead observations in honor of the movement's dead give a new meaning to the holiday. The entire pedestrian street approaching the zocalo is filled with altars and traditional sand paintings, all while the PFP stand at their posts, confronted with fearless and furious Oaxaqueños.

November 2

PART II: THE WAR IS ON IN OAXACA

PFP Attacks Radio Universidad, the People Defend it and Force Police to Retreat as the Battle Is Broadcast Live

THE WAR IS on in Oaxaca. It begins at 8 am with the gathering of the PFP and an infiltration by porros (hired thugs) along with state police in plain clothes. Five thousand riot police swarm onto the UABJO campus as the university rector calls for unity and denounces the federal government. The university is an autonomous community. Voices on Radio Universidad – the presumed target of the police invasion – call for pacific resistance, but with the feds shooting tear gas, the people are more than pissed off; they defend their own. The announcer reports that the defenders are using rocks and sticks. Several people are arrested and others wounded, including three children. At least one helicopter lands there and airlifts detainees to the airport to fly them to various prisons. Later reports reveal that the prisoners are beaten and tortured.

The barricades are up in Cinco Señores and the area surrounding University City. Most of the barricades consist of cars and barbed wire.

On the radio, voices call for the erection of barricades at Santo Domingo on the other side of the city, where the APPO is camped.

AT NOON, THE radio reports that the troops illegally landed helicopters on university property with intent to invade the station. Invading

an autonomous university is a huge mistake on the part of Fox.

Heard on the air: "People are gathered and resisting with paint (throwing it on the armored cars), nails under the tires, gasoline (that sounds like fires). The military may be reinforcing the police, but this has not been verified. Human-rights observers, anybody with a camera or video should go to the university; people are wounded and are being arrested."

Tear gas wafts all over Cinco Señores and the neighbors take to the streets. Tear gas was also used in the morning. The Sorriano area at Plaza del Valle is under attack; UABJO buildings about the vicinity.

The call is out for everyone to resist.

Shades of 1968.

THIS IS AS bad as we can imagine. The APPO people in the Santo Domingo area are mobilizing. The military is reported to be backing the PFP with heavy weapons. The gas attacks are reported everywhere. Children are injured and, according to reports, abducted by helicopters. The first report, probably more accurate, was that arrested people—which included minors—got loaded into helicopters to be taken to the airport. That was the case the day before. People with videos and cameras specifically get grabbed or shot.

All-out resistance is under way. Thousands of APPO supporters are pouring into University City to defend the radio station. According to one eyewitness (and captured on a score of videos) elderly people remain in the background breaking rocks and loading them into shopping carts. The carts are then run up to the battle lines where younger women and men hurl the rocks against the armed troops. A young boy, referring to the defenders, runs across the battlefield panting, "They are *pueblos*! They are *pueblos*!"

MORE HELICOPTERS ARRIVE. The rumor that Fox ordered the PFP to back off appears to be false. Another confrontation between the people and the PFP begins at 1:45 p.m. At 1:50 p.m. the radio calls for an ambulance; someone is badly wounded.

In addition to everything else, the PFP is invading the *panteón* (cemetery) to make sure nobody is regrouping there. Bad idea: Today is the Day of the Dead.

"This is the moment to reorganize": the message from the APPO. The PFP is invading every adjacent area including private homes. The radio reports that the PFP is planting arms to make it look like the people are armed.

NOW AT 3 pm, after broadcasting that the helicopters have been firing tear gas indiscriminately into neighborhoods, La Doctora Bertha – reporting with unfailing aplomb all day long – suddenly announces that the PFP is surrounded. The APPO refuses to release them.

Then I hear that the explosions are savage, canisters of gas fired from helicopters. Houses burn in residential neighborhoods. The APPO demands a total withdrawal and the resignation of Ruiz. Seven are said to be wounded, a boy gravely.

As the attack escalated earlier in the day, PRI *porros* had gathered in front of the radio station—which was not invaded, I think because of the instant national outcry—to provoke the movement activists. I can hear a helicopter right now circling overhead in center. We are close to Santo Domingo and the APPO may have called for supporters to retake the zocalo. That rumor turns out to be false.

Seven people have been arrested in Cinco Señores, and the APPO demands their release. Many are wounded, including women and children.

This is the Battle of Oaxaca. You read it here first. But I'm going to wait for the real reporters to report in.

November 5

SIXTH APPO MEGAMARCH UNDERWAY IN OAXACA

DURING THE NIGHT helicopters brought military troops into the city. According to La Doctora, impeccably calm and intelligent as ever on Radio Universidad, the people must remain nonviolent. She mentioned Mahatma Gandhi and avoidance of the provocations the military and the PRI will attempt. The people must remain organized and dignified, she said.

This morning a student from the Technological Institute in front of Radio Universidad was shot in the chest. His name is Marcos Manuel Sánchez Martínez. He is still alive and receiving medical care. La Doctora says that the shooters are establishing an early morning pattern of attacks.

Meanwhile, supporters are on the road toward Oaxaca for the march, which was scheduled to convene at 10 am in front of the monument in the Viguera neighborhood. About seven hundred people left Mexico City to come here, according to *La Jornada*. They were stopped by a military roadblock (*retén*), made to get off the bus, searched while the bus was also searched, but then permitted to continue. Last night other busloads were sighted as well, coming from Nochistlán and other main roads.

Fox is not completely impeding free transit in the country or in the

state of Oaxaca, and that's a small victory, similar to the PFP's failed invasion of the autonomous university. Symbolic rules still hold.

The sixth megamarch will be another face-off between the people and the government forces. Attention must be paid.

THE MARCH ARRIVED at Santo Domingo about 1:40 pm. Among the marchers, men, women, and children of all ages arrived unmolested, carrying banners and slogans against Ulises Ruiz and condemning Fox for sending the PFP. No federal police accosted them along the way, although in precaution the women from the Mixteca carried sharpened sticks and the men carried iron rebar—none of them young people, as most of the mountain towns survive bereft of their young people, who have migrated.

Young people did participate, but not as many as one might have thought, from what photos show. The crowd continued to arrive for about two hours. I would guess maybe thirty thousand people, but I have no official count as yet. Photographers swarmed on the streets and roofs. APPO and teacher leaders addressed the crowd in front of Santo Domingo and congratulated them on their courage and dignity. The streets around Santo Domingo were completely filled with protest marchers.

As it begins to darken, the radio mentions that the PFP could be nasty if people try to enter the zocalo. Up until now they have not tried to confront the troops; discipline is holding well. In fact, people are weary and want peace, with the PFP out of their state. The *tanquetes* and police were clearly visible at the southern end of the street parallel to Santo Domingo. They did not venture away from the empty zocalo.

The shooters by dark have repeatedly been identified as Priístas (PRI loyalists) or their hired thugs. The young student shot this morning is surviving, although there has been a hassle at the public hospital. The nurse-director wants Sánchez moved to a special hospital, but since he is a student he's entitled to public services and the radio is calling for mothers to go to the hospital in aid of the youngster's family to demand that he not be moved. La Doctora, a medical doctor who

teaches at the university, says he's better off where he is.

November 14

OAXACA'S APPO FORMS PERMANENT GOVERNMENT, ANNOUNCES ESCALATION OF RESISTANCE

3,000 Delegates Meet in the Midst of State Repression and Reorganize for the Struggle Ahead

THREE THOUSAND OAXAQUEÑOS responded to the first call of the APPO on Friday, November 10, to forge a new constitution for Oaxaca. The APPO sprang into life in the two days following the attempted eviction of striking teachers from their zocalo encampment on June 14. It has guided the social movement in Oaxaca since then and has dissolved itself in favor of a permanent structure of government that includes executive and regulatory functions. The provisional directorship dissolved upon formal initiation of the work of the constitutive congress.

The new organ is the State Council of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (CEAPPO, by its Spanish initials). It consists of 260 representatives from all seven regions of Oaxaca. Forty seats were assigned to the democratic teachers' union. The CEAPPO also includes merchants, students, bus and taxi drivers, unions, women, nongovernmental organizations, political parties, and social groups. Honorific spaces were reserved for the political prisoners. All members of CEAPPO have the same rights and obligations.

Between eight hundred and one thousand (depending on sources) delegates from neighborhoods and barricades, political and social organizations, joined arrivals from the seven regions of the state. An-

other one hundred invited people joined them, wearing yellow guest badges. The sixty or so national and international press people who also showed up were not permitted into the working sessions headed by the APPO's provisional directors, including among its members Flavio Sosa Villavicencio, Zenén Bravo Castellano, Rosendo Ramírez Sánchez, and Marcos Leyva Madrid. Zenén was selected as president of the council. The men were nominated by a plenary, along with two vice presidents and four recorders.

The meetings were held in the auditorium of the Hotel Magisterio, which was also the venue for the meeting with Delegate Zero of the Other Campaign when the Zapatistas visited Oaxaca last February.

CEAPPO has formed in the face of the extreme repression currently under way by Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, who operates through both his PRI and paid henchmen and police in civilian clothes. The spirit of the CEAPPO is revolutionary, in a pacific, democratic, and humanistic way that is openly antineoliberal and based on the traditional people power shown in *usos y costumbres*, a face-to-face method of governing. Ample provisions for recall of officials, referenda, and plebiscites are included in the form of the council.

In content, CEAPPO supports economic social justice, equality of persons, respect for differences, respect for the rights of women, respect for indigenous people and their autonomy, and development in benefit of the people of Oaxaca, with high concern for sustainability and renewable resources.

The gathered constitutive congress met for three days. On Friday the work began on the registration of delegates from different organizations and community leaders, as well as participants on the barricades that the APPO designed after June 17. Registration took the whole day Friday, and so little time was left for work sessions that the meeting adjourned.

At the initial meeting of the first night's constitutive council, which was heavily dominated by men, the women present protested vigorously. Ultimately it was decided that a minimum of 30 percent of the permanent council will be women. The sessions were all lively, with the

booing of objectionable suggestions and cheers for good ones—participative democracy.

On Saturday, some six hundred delegates defined the statutes, the declaration of principles, and the program of action for the new body. They elected permanent directors who will function in a role akin to an executive department.

Working Sunday and throughout the night, by dawn the congress had elaborated its new plan of action, which includes continuing the struggle to unseat Governor Ruiz. The departure of Ruiz is “not negotiable.” Activities were outlined such as putting up more blockades and renewing the mobile brigades. This has to take place within the uncertainty of the occupying forces of PFP, who may or may not be withdrawn, and with the dirty war under way.

The Oaxacan movement will also send a delegation to Mexico City on November 20 to participate in the protest of former presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, but only as a symbolic expression of the struggle for democracy. The APPO also agreed to protest the inauguration of Felipe Calderón if Ruiz doesn't leave before December 1.

At the first meeting on Friday the APPO reiterated, “The conditions don't exist for a return to classes.” Nevertheless, about 70 percent of teachers are returning. Some remain in the encampment in Mexico City. It is expected that returns will be phased in during next week, with the avowed purpose of teaching about what happened in Oaxaca and about the popular movement. While Ruiz remains in power, this may be very dangerous work.

While the congress was gathering for its first day of meetings, the zocalo was occupied by the PFP, and the tourist area was occupied by the APPO and teachers who won't return to classes while danger exists. During the time period of November 1 to November 10, about forty-nine students and APPO leaders were snatched off the street without warrants by men in civilian clothing who drove unmarked automobiles. Among the apprehended were two minors. Civil-rights violations perpetrated by the government included entering private homes with-

out warrant to arrest the highly visible members of the APPO and the teachers.

Although human-rights organizations demanded to know where and who was being held, or an account of the dead, it was not offered.

Seeking safety, the most visible APPO members and teachers who have received threats asked for sanctuary within the church and were granted it by church official Wilfredo Meyran, who a day later was over-ridden by the bishop of Oaxaca, José Luis Chávez Botello. The bishop, in a news conference, declared that the church was devoted to the kingdom of heaven and could not get involved in earthly politics. Meyran is a longtime ally of former bishop of Chiapas Samuel Ruiz and appeared with him when Ruiz was in Oaxaca in support of the APPO.

University classes were scheduled to resume on Monday, but many did not because of the violent conditions around the university campus. Some professors decided it wasn't safe; some students made the same decision. At the same time, the static blocking of Radio Universidad's frequency continued, and the blockade of University City was maintained, so that in effect the information coming from the APPO was unavailable. The radio broadcasters were unable to leave University City for fear of their lives, and are living inside the autonomous area.

Radio Ciudadano, also known as Radio Patito – the pirate radio station generally regarded as a project of Ulises Ruiz's political machine – continued broadcasting names of the movement adherents as well as those of teachers, with suggestions to capture or harm them. The names of the Radio Universidad broadcasters are well known and have been made public. Human-rights protests to prevent the pro-government station from issuing threats have been ignored. By the end of the week, November 10, the Radio Universidad signal was completely blocked.

At virtually the same time, a nationwide assembly modeled after the APPO is being constructed. The national convention of state delegates will take place in Mexico City on November 18 and 19. It will analyze the national situation, the actual situation of the member assemblies, establish its own form and rules, and plan its national action. To date, about twelve states are expected to send delegates to the Asam-

blea Popular de Pueblos de Mexico (APPM).

Although Ulises Ruiz in Oaxaca tries to portray in the mainstream media that all is returning to normal (the PFP boys eat popsicles while standing on guard blocking entry to the zocalo), my personal observation as your commentator is that the movement remains active and resolute.

November 17

OAXACA'S POPULAR MOVEMENT AT SIX MONTHS

Arrests, Disappearances, Assassinations, and Human-Rights Violations Are Manifold but Have Failed to Stop the Struggle

TABLES SET UP in the Santo Domingo encampment now occupied by the APPO are a clear indication of how grave the human-rights issue has become in Oaxaca. At some hour of the day or night it's possible to find the table staffed by human-rights lawyers or teachers. At other times volunteers staff the tables, where the names of the disappeared are registered in a book by their families. Lists are published by the Mexican League for the Defense of Human Rights (LIMEDH).

From October 29 to November 14, thirty-one people disappeared. Of the 104 people arrested illegally, 95 have been freed and 9 are still held inside state prisons. The crimes that they are accused of include hindering free passage, sedition, criminal association, conspiracy, theft, rebellion, and threats. Warrants are outstanding for many teachers and APPO members, who move nightly from one house to another to sleep. The PFP have entered homes illegally to search and seize people. At Radio Universidad the now-famous Doctora Bertha, whose voice prevailed as the voice of sanity, calm, and reason on the air, does not leave the university grounds. Like others, she virtually lives inside its protective walls. Radio Universidad still broadcasts, but its signal is blocked by the government.

November 15 was the day when Ulises Ruiz Ortiz was scheduled

to hand in his second *informe*, or state of the state address. It was supposed to illustrate the governability of Oaxaca, and indeed how well things are going here. Because of the level of ungovernability actually in force, the governor handed his written statement over to his secretary of government (chief of staff, in the U.S. counterpart) for him to hand it, in turn, to the legislators. At the same time, the governor asked for 123 billion pesos from the federal government to put down the popular assembly movement in Oaxaca. Although Ulises Ruiz claims the state is functioning normally, he nevertheless requires an influx of tanks and armaments. The *informe* requests the firm hand of Felipe Calderón.

Excuse me, but that sounds like a clear admission that the state is not governable.

The APPO, on the day of the *informe*, chose to demonstrate that Oaxaca is indeed ungovernable. Marches were scheduled from three different points to demand the departure of the PFP.

The march of about ten thousand teachers from the Central Valley and Sierra Norte, along with APPO adherents, was met with PFP attacks from "friendly roofs" of private houses, using slingshots to fire glass marbles that struck several of the marchers (this tactic of harassment was also used on November 2). The march, which had originated outside the center, now proceeded to a point south of the zocalo, where one or two marchers, despite calls from APPO leaders not to provoke retaliation, provoked the PFP who guard the zocalo. The PFP first responded to taunts of "Oaxaca is not a barracks," "PFP out of Oaxaca," and other slogans by shooting stones and marbles from slingshots. The marchers responded with rocks and bottles of water. Then the PFP launched tear-gas canisters. The intersection where the confrontation occurred is between shops and the primary school Enrique C. Rebsámen, where about four hundred students were in classes. The gas penetrated both sides of the street, causing harm to both students and shopkeepers. The marchers took to another street.

At the same time, two other marches took place in the city of Oaxaca and one in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Several highways were blockaded.

The same day two young photographers were abducted in the zocalo. They were taken by vehicles that had license plates, noted by the observers. A woman who had been out shopping witnessed the PFP grab the cameras, throw the two photographers to the ground, and kick and beat them. The men, who had been taking photos of the PFP guards, were first approached by an officer who told them to stop. Then the police took away their backpacks. The woman who witnessed all this approached the police and said that the men were within their rights, that they were Oaxacan citizens, and that it wasn't right what the police were doing. A group of police officers surrounded the woman in what seemed like an effort to intimidate her. They then surrounded the two men and threw them, bloody and beaten, into a police car and drove away.

The PFP then took many photos of this woman witness and followed her as she headed toward the barricade of Cinco Señores to report the abduction. The woman was connected by telephone to a human-rights observer to whom she spoke at length, describing the situation, the abducted men, and the car (with the license plate numbers) that took them away. After getting off the phone she continued to express her outrage and her disgust with the police, in terms that indicated that a housewife out to do some shopping had been abruptly radicalized.

Within two days the human-rights lawyers obtained the release of these two photographers, who clearly had been arrested with no legal grounds. Foreign photographers use extreme caution and report being followed. This dirty war is growing in Oaxaca, with paramilitaries, disinformation in the press, intimidation, and repression of all forms of political speech.

Foreign observers seem to be everywhere, not just amateurs but big-name people (here, nameless) including one American doctor, a filmmaker, a German photojournalist, and teams of reporters. Today one team went to interview a man who was taken prisoner and in an eight-day ordeal was tortured by the police; one team went to discuss the disappeared and the matter of twenty-four corpses sitting in the Red Cross amphitheater.

The only people authorized to enter the morgue to look for bodies are LIMEDH and Red Oaxaqueña de Derechos Humanos. They are the ones who have compiled the lists of disappeared and the related testimonies. They are the ones who work directly with the committee of family members and friends of the disappeared, detained, and political prisoners. Furthermore, they have a long-existing (though strained) relationship with the Red Cross, which gives them access to the morgue. The committee formed only a few weeks ago and, while filling an important role, is not the sole body dealing with the question of disappeared persons. Many people who assist the committee (for example, by staffing the human-rights table in Santo Domingo) are volunteers.

The Story That Didn't Happen

ON THE MORNING of Sunday, November 2, two curious photographers (who I will call L and H) stopped by the human-rights table in the Santo Domingo area where the APPO supporters are presently camped. All around them were videos showing various government attacks and the response of the population that fights back against the high-caliber weapons of the police with stones, slingshots, sticks, and homemade Molotov cocktails. In the past twenty days, a human-rights calamity has overtaken the movement. Under the guise of keeping the peace, the PFP and/or PRI operatives of Governor Ruiz have killed, abducted, or disappeared 130 people. There have been two major battles. One was on October 29—the attempt to dislodge the APPO barricades from in front of the government buildings they were blocking. Twenty-two were arrested, with sixteen more in the two days following. Dozens were injured. The second was the failed PFP attempt to invade the UABJO radio station in a seven-hour battle that took place on November 2. At that time, people were shoved into helicopters and presumably flown to the prison. About a dozen simply vanished.

Subsequent interviews with released prisoners verify that people

were held at the helicopter doorways and threatened with being hurled out. Those in prison were tortured both physically and psychologically.

When L and H approached the human-rights worker, who I will call C, for information, they were told that bodies had been discovered in the small amphitheater on the Red Cross grounds. A report said that the bodies had been held in the morgue at the state public hospital for an unknown number of days. Then the hospital decided it could store them no longer and moved them to the Red Cross building on Bustamante Street in the center of Oaxaca City.

L and H took their cameras and headed down.

When they arrived at the Red Cross building, they found a window—too high to look through, but H was able to hold his camera above his head and look through a viewfinder. What a view. There were the bodies, stacked one above another on shelves. The bodies were all nude. It wasn't possible to count exactly how many from the angle of view, but apparently at least one was female, and there were about twenty-four altogether.

While L and H were snapping pictures a person emerged from the building and asked them to leave immediately, which they did, taking with them precious evidence. The photos were transferred to a hard drive and to several CDs for safekeeping.

That same evening after dark two women walked back to Santo Domingo to inform the human-rights observers of the existence of the videos. It was necessary to act rapidly because there was no way to know how long the Red Cross would or could keep bodies in the Oaxaca climate. More important, photographs of the faces of the dead, fingerprints, and evidence of how they died were essential to retrieve, both for the bereaved families who might be able to claim their dead and for the evidence of murder.

When the two women spoke with the human-rights workers, they were directed to a human-rights lawyer, who exclaimed over the importance of the filmed evidence. The lawyer's wife, a teacher, simply sat in the semidarkness with tears in her eyes. She knew the families

of the disappeared have been in anguish for two weeks, wondering if their missing family members are dead or imprisoned.

Two human-rights lawyers, with a letter in hand, proceeded to the Red Cross building on Monday afternoon accompanied by a team of seven people. They demanded entry to see the bodies. They were told that they could, but the person in charge of letting them in was not present. They waited almost four hours. Eventually, the rules changed and they were told that four people only could go in. The four selected were a doctor from the United States, a photographer from Germany, a Oaxacan doctor admitted as a helper without admitting his medical capability, and a male nurse admitted as an anonymous helper.

Before they entered the building, phone calls were made to alert friends and relatives as to where team members were and to ask for more APPO people to come to the Red Cross building to protect them when they left. In addition, multiple copies of the CD showing the corpses had already been made and were in safe hands. By this time it was dark out, and surprising for Oaxaca in the dry season, raining steadily.

It had been decided that the first priority was to identify the bodies to determine whether they were among the disappeared. That meant a face photo, fingerprints, teeth photos, and the recording of identifying marks such as scars. By this time the team was tired.

Finally the director of the Red Cross arrived to open the building, and with him another worker who admitted all seven of the team, after their four-hour wait for admittance, while the director was in another area.

The team, during an hour-and-half investigation, documented all it could of the dead. But it decided the corpses were too old to be the disappeared—probably dead since September, and with no signs of violence on their bodies. Nevertheless photos were taken and forensic procedures completed.

The Political Prisoners and Disappeared

THIS SPONTANEOUS HUMAN-RIGHTS investigation yielded no results for the anxious families of those who disappeared. "Yet, whoever has a minimum of consciousness of history," writes the Human Rights Committee of the APPO:

Cannot hear at different hours of the day the noise of the spy plane, or pass through the historic center of this city, or the installations of Channel Nine or the Parque del Amor, where the federal police are posted, without thinking of Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco, and feeling the indignation which is provoked by the intention to maintain in power Ulises Ruiz . . . using for that purpose all the weight of the state apparatus. . . . Thanks to the popular resistance, 131 compañeros have been freed after being arbitrarily detained during the occupation of the PFP. Nevertheless up until November 11 the following are still imprisoned:

Humberto Jiménez
Jaime Guerrero Ríos
Gerardo Martínez
Héctor Guzmán Acosta
Joaquín Benjamín López Castillo
Marcos García Martínez
Miguel Ángel García
Valentín Pérez Hernández
Víctor Hugo Martínez Toledo

Also still disappeared:

Alejandro Merino García
Ángel Santos Callejas Rodríguez
Ángel Soto Gallegos
Armando o Arnaldo Rojas Galán
Camilo Domínguez de los Santos
Erick López Ortiz
Felipe Pérez Tomás
Félix Ricardo Méndez Venegas
Fernando Ruiz Santos
Isaías Pérez Mireles
Jesús Martínez Hernández

Máximo Reyes Pérez

Pedro "N"

Teodoro Tiño Verado

Ubaldo García Guzmán

Yeni Jarquín Aguilar

Diego Magdiel Rodríguez Hernández

Twelve more were carried off from the barricade in the Felipe Carrillo Puerto neighborhood at Avenida Ferrocarril.

With the indignation of whoever sees their sky, parks, and plazas converted into visible signs of repression, we sign [committee members].

Those, whose efforts yielded only twenty-four unidentified bodies continue to locate the families of those dead. The Human Rights Committee also carries on trying to locate the disappeared. The governor remains in power.

November 20

ON THE 96TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION, OAXACA

The Movement Has Taken on a Life that Confounds Observers; "The Federal Police Could Suffer Military Defeat"

THE DAILY NEWSPAPER *Noticias de Oaxaca* ran as its headline on November 19, "National governability will be defined in Oaxaca." The paper was quoting the journalist Jenaro Villamil, who believes that Oaxaca is the key element to what happens in the nation. They could have asked me; I knew that.

Oaxaca is occupied by the PFP, who are deployed in the city while military troops are deployed around the state. On November 18 a woman was sexually abused by PFP agents, an assertion documented by civil organizations in defense of human rights. On Sunday, November 19, more than two hundred people circled the zocalo, where the PFP are entrenched. The protest marchers stopped at each entry to the zocalo, painted slogans on the sidewalk, and offered street theater, in which actors tried to give the PFP agents a glimpse of what it is like to have a family member sexually assaulted. Photographers gathered and the PFP stood elbow to elbow while the small group of protesters berated them, holding up mirrors so they could see themselves as they really are.

What was most interesting to me was how few people it took to provoke the PFP, who used an irritant chemical water and pepper gas to ward off the marchers. Dressed in their helmets, carrying their

shields, and backed by armored trucks, the PFP held off the protesters who were unarmed and backed by an ambulance. The ambulance loudspeakers repeated at intervals, "Don't engage in provocations!"

Since Sunday, October 29, when the PFP blockaded Highway 190 in the isthmus, in the city of Zaachila and its Guelatao Bridge, and entered the capital to "reestablish order," the APPO surprised everyone with its willingness to confront the troops and sometimes oblige them to fall back, as it did when the Radio Universidad building was threatened, after a six-hour battle.

In the five months since the movement has demanded, without success, that Ruiz resign, it has taken on a life that confounds observers. It is not a Paris commune, not a left-wing political party; it disclaims having leaders; it discounts the influence of the PRD and is not engaged in an overt class war. It is something unforeseen. It is formless yet incredibly well organized; it defends its streets and, after taking and losing one television station and ten radio stations, it defends Radio Universidad. It has a well-defined self-defense by people who do not belong either to the teachers' union or to the APPO, but somehow independently maintain their hold on main intersections like Cinco Señores. Now it's planning a democratic transition for the state. To achieve that, the APPO has embraced historical and traditional forms of popular organization.

The rocket blasts of weddings and fiestas are now used to signal alarms. Furthermore, this unarmed movement has created minibazookas and Molotov cocktails, which the kids know how to make, lining up bottles on the streets. For rock fights they break the sidewalks or loose stones and transport these "weapons" in shopping carts from the rear to the front of the battle. If needed, explosive devices are manufactured out of dust, hydrochloric acid, knives, nails, and tacks, wrapped in aluminum foil and secured with tape. But it's a nonviolent movement.

The APPO rejects the use of these weapons and rejects attacks and provocations. As the highly visible Flavio Sosa says, "We're not trying to act like a military, as if we were an armed movement. We're not." The struggle is legal, according to the constitution, having to do with the right of assembly. It's public and open to all.

The constitutive congress of the APPO met November 10–12 to define rules, principles, programs, and objectives of the organization. It elected its first state council, which will approve future actions. “In spite of the climate of repression that flourishes around the movement of the peoples of Oaxaca, it’s necessary not to stop, but to move ahead in the attainment of our objectives and toward solution to the demands of the Oaxaca peoples,” the convocation stated.

The congress analyzed the situation of the state on national and international levels. It discussed the characteristics of a new government, a new constituency, and a new constitution.

In this moment of extreme repression and violation of human rights, many believe the APPO is on its last legs, a tired, impoverished movement. But this neglects the gathering of sixteen state assemblies in Mexico, a national convention of APPOs. The national movement, like the local movement, is “wide, pluralistic and democratic.” Its avowed purpose is to fight neoliberalism and the ultraright. The first members are the APPO of Mexico, the Union of Independent Workers of the Autonomous Metropolitan University, the Committee for Defense of the Rights of the People, the Popular Revolutionary Front, the Movement Here We Are, and about fifty more organizations, who declared themselves in “open struggle against the ultraright that rules the country and for the creation of a space for unity which revitalizes the perspective of the social and political mobilizations.”

The ill will accumulated during decades of PRI rule is coming to the fore through a movement without leaders, embracing civil organizations, human-rights organizations, indigenous people, municipal authorities (at the minimum, twenty towns in Oaxaca are in the process of changing local governments; I counted almost forty whose internal arguments have been noted in the newspapers), campesinos, agrarian organizations, students, and religious persons. Ruiz has inadvertently unified the people of Oaxaca, sparking a national movement.

Today as I was watching the marchers return from the confrontation at the zocalo over the assault of a woman two days ago, I stopped on the corner and leaned against a building. A well-dressed woman

passing by, neither young nor poor, asked me what was going on. She told me that although her family supports Ruiz, she does not. She supports justice.

This new collectivity, this amorphous group, is supported by three cultural aspects: the *asamblea* (assembly) in which the people have the power and the "leaders" are administrators who carry out the decisions of the community; the *guelaguetza*, a Zapotec word that means mutual aid and is the symbol of solidarity; and *tequio*, unpaid community work. The *asamblea* began to identify itself through these ancestral practices of the indigenous population of Oaxaca, in which at least 418 municipalities of the state continue to govern by the system of *usos y costumbres*. One of the more important aspects of *usos y costumbres* has been written into CEAPPO regulations: authorities who don't follow the people's will are put aside. This seems to be the case with the absence of Enrique Rueda Pacheco from the assembly, and many expect that Flavio Sosa of the APPO will also vanish.

Although Section 22 of the SNTE, initially the backbone of the movement, has been obliged for financial reasons to return to work—perhaps 30 percent are not yet in classes—it has strong community links; some teachers are municipal presidents or leaders in their neighborhoods or other organizations. The needs of the APPO workers and supporters are met by *guelaguetza*, in the form of feeding stations established on the streets and the barricades, staffed by whoever wants to do it. The Graphic Arts Museum in the Santo Domingo area is serving as a storehouse for food, water, and other supplies; Radio Universidad serves as a medical center.

This is the fabric that holds together the movement. It is social, not political, founded on a sense of justice and injustice and the need for dignity. These are the rebels that the federal forces sent by Vicente Fox are "putting in order."

In the APPO, the experience of radical organizations like the Popular Revolutionary Front, the Committee for Defense of the Rights of the People, and the National Movement Against Neoliberalism have come together with other organizations such as the Mexican League for Hu-

man Rights, and the New Left of Oaxaca. Students, teachers, workers, and housewives support it. When battles were engaged, people came from the neighborhoods and have died or have been imprisoned or wounded but have shown great determination to defend what they see as their right to take back the government. When tear gas or chemical spray is used, people rush to the aid of the injured with water, vinegar, and home remedies.

"The military has been defeated, they fled. Fox is putting into play the value of the PFP as an institution, because it may result in tragedy in Oaxaca if Ulises Ruiz mounts a provocation," explained Flavio Sosa.

The people are not going to stay quiet and [the PFP] can suffer a military defeat. They are four thousand and the movement can mobilize eight hundred thousand in the state. Accordingly, it would be incredible to come to an all-out confrontation because the federal government can't find the political will to respond to the demand to get Ruiz out."

The battle against inequality, poverty, marginalization, and lack of services is today obvious to everyone, and consciousness has spread from Oaxaca to other states.

The state council of the APPO has announced its weeks' actions, which include capturing the *palacio municipal*, the government building converted by Ruiz to a museum. The *palacio* is located on the south side of the zocalo, so tactics will have to be very original.

On November 28 and 29, the State Forum of the Indigenous People will take place and on December 1 the massive national movement against the new president Felipe Calderón is planned, followed by a million-person march to reaffirm the demand for Ruiz to go.

On Friday, Ruiz declared in a speech in front of a thousand leaders at the Seventh Seminary of Christian Leaders that only God can remove or put in place governors. So, are we all going mad? Wilfredo Mayrán, the church official who originally stated that the leaders of the APPO would have sanctuary in the church, only to be overruled by the archbishop of Oaxaca, replied to Ruiz's interesting assertion, "What we are presently living in is an idolatry of power."

Meanwhile, in the rest of the state, public works lie abandoned, schools are openly in the hands of unqualified PRI parents or the break-away teachers' group the Central Committee for Struggle, a PRI faction of Section 22. The governor is hiding out and either government functions don't take place or legislators meet in hotels while several cities struggle for control of their municipal powers and the mayor of Oaxaca City has vanished.

Today, November 20, is the anniversary of the revolution.

November 27

AN AFFRONT TO THE PEOPLE OF OAXACA

Chronicle of the Battle of November 25

THERE WAS SCARCELY time for the blood to dry on the pavement, or for the teams of street cleaners to eliminate signs of ash and broken glass when the APPO called for its next meeting on Sunday morning, the day when Ruiz declared that the struggle was over.

Saturday had seen the historic center of Oaxaca erupt into war, with Oaxaqueños fighting the police forces of the federal, state, and city governments, plus unknown numbers of PRI loyalists in civilian clothes. According to an article in *Noticias de Oaxaca* on November 25, repeated in *La Jornada*, more than two hundred ministerial police (Policía Ministerial de la Procuraduría General de Justicia de Oaxaca) in Oaxaca are more or less out of control. They are allegedly the ones responsible for the lightning-strike detentions of members of the APPO and against members of other civil and human rights organizations, academic and social groups that oppose Ruiz. They are commanded by the Oaxaca government.

Sources, claims *Noticias*, indicate that the federal government has taken control only of the municipal and state police, not of the ministerial agents assigned to the city of Oaxaca. Thus they don't discount the possibility that federal agents committed acts of violence during the march of Saturday, November 18.

The federal government investigators agreed there is a state of ungovernability in Oaxaca that "cannot be solved by police actions, but only by obtaining and administering justice, social development, infrastructure, and education. In this moment the conditions are not there, and the capacity to do these things is not there, although the social justice demands of the APPO and the organizations that belong to it have been fully validated."

On Sunday morning in the stunned silence that descended after the previous night, the governor called for a support rally in Llano Park. With helicopters circling overhead, about 200 people turned out to celebrate his "victory"—a victory that included, according to his government, 149 arrests. According to *La Jornada*, there are about thirty-eight wounded and possibly three dead. Those arrested in Oaxaca have been consistently subjected to torture, according to the Human Rights Network. The number of those disappeared is not clear. The number of burnt vehicles add up to more than a dozen. Buildings burned include offices of foreign relations located on Pino Suárez Street and the Superior Tribunal of Justice building on Juárez Avenue.

The confrontations erupted in different parts of the city after a peaceful march of protest from the government buildings of Santa María Coyotepec to the historic center. The APPO announced that because of the risk of violence, more than two hundred of its state councilors would function as human shields for security during the march itself. The purpose of the march was to demand the departure of Governor Ruiz and withdrawal of the federal forces from the state.

The APPO plan, to encircle the PFP occupying the center zocalo, was carried out at about 5 pm, with the APPO supporters standing a block or two away from the PFP lines. The PFP stationed shooters on "friendly" rooftops, and during the day had been searching the backpacks and handbags of persons trying to enter the zocalo. Many entrances were simply blocked to foot traffic.

At about 5 pm the PFP began to react to the protesters. In my opinion, there were some young people present who wanted to go beyond verbal insults and attack the PFP so as to drive them from the zocalo.

Furthermore, there is no doubt that some of these protagonists were infiltrators who sparked the physical fighting. Additionally, PFP forces on the roofs began to shoot marbles and other projectiles. During this time the APPO, by way of radio broadcasts, was asking for a pacific and calm protest. Given that there had been sexual abuse of Oaxacan women by police the day before and that the numbers of the PFP had increased, it did seem inevitable to the population that confrontation would erupt. By 2 pm the usually busy pedestrian streets were deserted, and virtually all the shops surrounding the zocalo were locked.

After about an hour into the showdown, the PFP began to shoot at the demonstrators. The state ministerial police and the PFP began moving into some specific areas such as Llano Park, Crespo Street, the warehouse district ("Centro de Abastos"), and other points. In this sweep they arrested approximately forty, including twenty women. Several were wounded. There were no warrants or official causes for arrests other than possible affiliation with the APPO or with barricades.

The PFP together with state police had been waging this ongoing detention against the members of the social movement in Oaxaca. Vans carrying police in civilian clothes, as well as other PFP forces, were carrying out massive detentions in several places in the city, including in front of the university, against citizens who were not carrying identification.

In a related side note, a PFP guard requested identification from a friend of mine, who is eighty-one years old, when he went shopping. He produced his senior identification card and was permitted to pass. He carried no bag or backpack. The challenge, though illegal, was permitted.

Battles were waged up and down the seven or eight blocks to the north and south of the zocalo, until they reached the ADO bus station on the main avenue of Niños Héroes de Chapultepec. Ironically, the bus station was crowded with tourists trying to flee the embattled city while the government forces were dedicating themselves to making the city once again safe for the business and tourist industries. Tear gas followed the visitors to the bus station.

At the same time, the esplanade of Santo Domingo church was cleared and burned of APPO tents and tables.

In the face of the overwhelming attacks, the APPO decided to retreat from the field, which happened around 10 pm, with La Doctora Bertha of Radio Universidad assuring listeners that the shame fell on the government, not the people, who struggle with dignity for their rights. Many people took refuge in friendly homes and were able to avoid the police sweeps.

Meanwhile, blockades had been placed on the superhighway Cuacnopalan–Oaxaca, in the municipality of Nochiztlán, located about eighty kilometers from the state capital, and in the toll booth of Huitzo, some twenty-five kilometers away, to try to impede the entrance of APPO sympathizers into the city. It is difficult to say how many people were prevented from arriving. For those already in the city, the so-called Radio Ciudadana was broadcasting advice to government followers to throw hot water and hydrochloric acid from their roofs onto APPO sympathizers. The radio broadcasters have been identified as Alexis and Marco Tulio, affiliated with the PRI.

"Be careful," Radio Universidad explained, "there are many PFP who are electrifying the wires on the roads. The PFP are in unmarked vans. This is the seventh megamarch. Bring your placards, your slogans. Be ready but don't fall into provocations."

Marches have occurred almost daily in the past week. Maintaining a steady drumbeat, though not a loud one, women marched against the sexual assault of a woman by the PFP. Students marched against the presence of the PFP in Oaxaca, and more students from the Technological Institute of Oaxaca protested the detention and torture their peer Eliuth Amni Martínez Sánchez suffered at the hands of the federal agents during the confrontation on Monday, November 20. Martínez was located in Tlocolula Prison, thrown onto the floor of a cell, missing one fingernail, with a severe head wound, a broken nose, and a broken kneecap. The lawyers who found him obtained his transfer to a hospital. Thereafter, students from the Technological Institute demanded that the institute honor its commitment to close down if violence

against students continued. The institute is now closed.

Another personal aside: a young friend who is a medical student stopped by to say hello today during the strange silence of the morning. When the battle erupted, he had sensibly gone home to stay out of trouble, although, he told me, he thought he spotted guys from Mexico City who were UNAM *porros*. No proof of that.

In any case, as we chatted, he told me he will serve his obligatory public-service year as a new doctor in a little town in the mountains.

"And what," I asked him, "happens with a new doctor when there's an unexpected emergency?" I've seen those mountain clinics, which seem to consist of nothing more than a cement-block room.

"We are instructed to send special cases down to the city," he replied.

I asked, "And how is that done? Is there a helicopter ambulance?" He laughed.

"Well, how about an ambulance? I know some of those towns are seven or eight hours away."

"The patient has to find a private car to take him down to the public hospital," he told me. That ended our conversation.

Sunday night, the time of writing this commentary, the radio is announcing that there is a possibility of another battle and please come to defend the barricades around Radio Universidad, whose signal has been repeatedly interrupted by government blocking.

At this time Radio Universidad is saying that there has been an attack on the medical team at Siete Principes (the medical school area). Last night, the voice of La Doctora announced that the PFP and state police had entered the hospital dressed as doctors and then were able to arrest patients. The radio is also announcing a march for Monday morning to protest the situation.

Not spoken is that only a week remains before the inauguration of Felipe Calderón as the president of Mexico. Today a meeting of member APPO states took place in Mexico City.

PRESS BULLETIN FROM THE APPO

November 26, 2007

POPULAR ASSEMBLY OF THE PEOPLES OF OAXACA

TO THE PEOPLE OF OAXACA;

TO THE PEOPLES OF MEXICO AND OF THE WORLD;

TO THE COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA:

The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca after the aggression which our people have suffered in recent hours, within the framework of our struggle for a profound transformation of the economic, social, political, and cultural situation, to overcome the situation of ancestral misery and hunger to which our peoples have been subjected by the oppressors, states:

In the context of the day of struggle that we planned for yesterday the 25th of November, the APPO had contemplated carrying out a megamarch from the Government House in Santa Maria Coyotepec, with the goal of ending in the historic center of Oaxaca by encircling the PFP, which is occupying the zócalo of this city. Since this encirclement was specifically to be peaceful without contact with the PFP, and in view of

the events that were unleashed yesterday, the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca declares the following:

WHEREAS:

That Ulises Ruiz Ortiz several days ago declared that he was initiating the operation of a plan which would obtain control of the city before the first of December. That several days ago the PFP in coordination with different police forces, paid assassins, paramilitaries, and thugs of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz began to post themselves on various roofs of the historic center. In many cases neighbors denounced them to us, because they did it without permission of the buildings owners. Their idea was that from these roofs they could provoke aggression against this movement.

That yesterday, after a group from the Consejo Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca occupied the majority of the entry streets to establish the circle around the PFP, the police, shooters, and paramilitaries posted on the roofs of different buildings in the historic center began to launch marbles and pepper and tear gas at our companions at several places, to provoke the general aggression which was unleashed immediately into a general offensive, consisting of aggression by the PFP in several facing streets, the massive detentions of companions who retreated at several points in the city, the immediate action of the thugs and paramilitaries who participated together with the PFP and other police units, and that many of them shot firearms at the APPO militants.

That in the face of this general offensive, the members of the APPO and the people in general made use of their legitimate right to defend themselves, to avoid a massacre against our people, making use of stones, sticks, rockets, and objects found at hand, since the majority did not come prepared for any confrontation.

That with the preliminary figures that we have now, it seems there are

165 political prisoners, tens of disappeared, hundreds of wounded and injured, as well as several deaths which up to now we have not been able to confirm.

In the face of this situation, the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca declare the following:

- We condemn energetically this attack of repression which our people have suffered, which continues as the worst stages of fascism in our history.
- We reaffirm our struggle for a social, political, economic, and social transformation, the struggle for popular power, and we reaffirm that the fall of the tyrant Ulises Ruiz is the start for the reestablishment of peace and tranquility for the Oaxaqueños, as well as the immediate withdrawal of the PFP, since starting with their arrival, violence and ungovernability increased.
- We ratify that the struggle of the people of Oaxaca and the APPO is a struggle of the masses in which the people of Oaxaca participate, and it has a civil and pacific character, for which we declare that the burning of different buildings of the city was not a direction nor a decision of the APPO:
- We denounce that some minutes ago, they took several companions who were in the prison of Miahuatlan de Porfirio Diaz, Oaxaca, among them our companions Cesar Mateos Benitez, and Jorge Sosa Campos, to an unknown destination, with no reason, by which they have violated the most basic human rights.
- The presence of the PFP, and the events which have occurred show that in the state of Oaxaca there is ungovernability, and tranquility has not returned for the people of Oaxaca.
- We declare that the struggle of the People of Oaxaca for the fall of Ruiz will continue as our daily struggle, and our plan of action is going to continue developing.

For all the above reasons we call on the peoples of Mexico and the entire world to continue actions in solidarity with the people of Oaxaca, and to stop the bloody repression which continues unfolding against our people; to the national and international press, to the organizations for human rights, that they create brigades to assist this city in disseminating the facts regarding violations against the people of their most elementary rights.

FRATERNALLY

ALL POWER FOR THE PEOPLE

POPULAR ASSEMBLY OF THE PEOPLES OF OAXACA

[City of the Resistance, November 26, 2006]

Postscript

WHERE AND HOW is the APPO fairing since unconstitutional repression was acknowledged as government policy after Saturday, November 25? The indigenous forum took place on November 28 and 29, shortly after the heavy-duty repression began. The indigenous peoples, with former bishop Samuel Ruiz present, declared their affiliation with the APPO. The federal military occupies areas around autonomous indigenous rural towns which might pose a threat of insurrection. The peoples, on the other hand, regard the troops as a threat to their women, their crops and their independence.

Their forum *Foro de Pueblos Indígenas de Oaxaca* declared, "The government can arrest 500 or more, but this movement is invincible because when a people decides to transform itself, it does it" (Gilberto López y Rivas, *Noticias de Oaxaca*, November 29).

They proposed to continue outlining and defining ways to achieve a transformation of Oaxaca, to establish a new social pact, and to construct new forms of living together to achieve a more just Oaxaca, one more worthy and democratic. The forum took place despite widespread fears of arrests. The three hundred delegates slept in the church sanctuary. Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Chontals, Mixes, and Huaves participated while police and military, often in civilian clothes and carrying radios, sur-

rounded Church of the Poor to intimidate participants. Don Samuel of Chiapas, a nationally recognized champion of the indigenous peoples, attended the forum and by doing so, blessed it and its goals. He also made it possible for some people to leave without being arrested.

Four days later some individuals known to the government were still sleeping in the church safe house.

Between June 14 and December 4, 2006, 304 people were arrested, among them teachers, university students, leaders of civil society, and some directors of the APPO. They suffered all kinds of arbitrary insults including refused communications, denial of legal defense, denial of medical attention, and torture.

The popular assembly movement, with its legitimate cause, has suffered a brutal repression without regard for common law, civil rights, international treaties, and human rights. Under these circumstances it can be considered a triumph that the indigenous delegates arrived, met, and confirmed their alliance to the APPO. They documented seventeen dead and said:

We do not want even one more death... an analysis was made of the Oaxaca mobilization from the national perspective.... What we are doing is continuing with a path we didn't initiate, our ancestors did, and today we are taking a further step and I hope that future generations will also take this path, as we are doing, because the indigenous are not vanishing, here are our roots and surely, in spite of the adversities, in spite of the obstacles, of the pain, our hope has stayed alive.... There are black clouds, there are strong threats over the identity of the peoples, and the test of that is that many of the detained are teachers and students of indigenous communities of Oaxaca, but in spite of the pain we go on with hope of a new dawn.

This can only mean that whatever happens during this phase of repression the indigenous peoples will be an important future pillar for change as illustrated by their vow to install as many as possible community radio stations to spread information.

For several weeks Oaxaca endured a repression similar in depth of fear to what was experienced in Guatemala in its worst days. People were scooped up off the streets and from the classrooms, with no

crimes or offenses beyond having participated in the social movement. Many of the "leaders" of the APPO are now in hiding; many have been arrested, and with arrests come torture. Students have been arrested and tortured. Teachers have been arrested, literally grabbed in their classrooms in front of their students and hauled away, presumably also tortured. Governor Ruiz declares there will be no amnesty and everyone will be punished.

However, since the 2007 August state elections moved into the news in February, overt terrorism has diminished, giving to those who rely on horror-headlines the notion that the movement has subsided.

Thus, there immediately spring to life analytical and philosophical reasons why the APPO failed.

First, it hasn't failed. It is indeed cautious, but since the movement's cause has not gone away, neither have the results; that is, the APPO resistance continues.

Second, I never blame the victim. In this case, the APPO is a dignified, extraordinarily well-organized popular movement that was attacked by both the federal and state governments. As a means to rid Mexico of the movement, attacks have had only the most ephemeral success. Repression radicalizes as many as it frightens.

The most serious APPO error, in my opinion, was to trust the government's guarantee that teachers could return to classes safely. There was a lot of uneasiness beforehand on the part of both the APPO and the teachers when a majority voted to return to classes in January. The teachers believed the assurances of the government, pressured by their own financial needs or by a desire to be with students, or by their political affiliations. Or perhaps they wanted to believe. Fatigue and stress stood at high levels. Surely there was some duplicitous negotiating with the government by Rueda, the now-disgraced union leader, that slipped by. In any case, the result was that the teachers temporarily withdrew and the APPO suffered harm from the minimizing of the on-site physical presence, which in turn opened spaces for deaths and arrests.

However, the repression was inevitable. One way or another Ruiz

insists on retaining power, as opposed to any graceful withdrawal that has been offered to him. While he may not be the psychopath some claim he is, he certainly is vicious and unforgiving. His inability to govern is in no doubt, even among his fellow Priístas. One woman told me forthrightly, "I don't support the APPO but until Ruiz goes we will never have peace." He is the one responsible for initiating and carrying out this current civil struggle. Don't confuse cause and effect: Ruiz and eighty years of PRI government, with its history of *caciquismo*, theft, assassination, and corruption, brought the peoples of Oaxaca to resist.

One would suppose that Oaxaqueños themselves, regardless of their allegiances, will sooner or later sicken of the murders and tortures. There was only one unifying slogan in the first instance, and that was "Ulises out!"

Meanwhile, out in other regions of the state, daily struggles continue. They are of two types. First, legal struggles resulting from the awakened awareness of the indigenous peoples who want to reclaim their lands, as in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec where transnationals, together with the Mexican state, constructed wind power generators. Another example is the objection in the Santiago Ixtayutla area to the creation of a hydroelectric dam on the Río Verde whose water is used by the local peoples.

Secondly, there are the literal struggles: PRI vs. the movement supporters fighting to take, hold or regain control of their municipal governments, e.g. Zaachilla, Xoxocotlán, and Santa Cruz Amilpas. A few deaths have resulted from shootings (As in San Antonino). Most of these towns are attempting to re-install *usos y costumbres* in an authentic, clean form, without PRI *caciques*.

In August of 2007 the state legislative elections will take place. The APPO, itself not a political party, again asks Oaxaqueños to deliver a punishment vote. The APPO's intention, once the PRI is out of power (and Ruiz possibly impeached for crimes), is to further open spaces for the popular movement. That means open debates, financial transparency, forums with public input, and an advance toward social and economic justice. The process to involve the public is well underway,

despite the current presence of the PFP and their attack dogs. Certain gathering spaces such as the zocalo and the atrium of Santo Domingo are blocked by the government, but the APPO has been able to meet in buildings belonging to the university and the teachers union.

Those who are the PRI supporters for the money and power have always been a minority. The electoral vote on July 2 of 2006 indicated that the PRI is not wanted or trusted. Out of eleven federal deputies elected that day only one went to the PRI. It is nationally evident that the PRI, after its eight decades in power, is dying. It's dying slowly and with considerable agony for those victimized by its death throes.

The logical questions then, are what does Ulises Ruiz win by this repression, what does the national government of Felipe Calderón win, and what do they lose? First, the national PAN party of Calderón is alleged to have stolen the election. In any case, he's a minority president. The scene of his inauguration in the House of Deputies was televised, replete with fistfights, jeers, chants, slogans, and emptying bottles of liquids over one another's heads. Calderón, a man who could not possibly have looked dignified in any case, stood shoulder-high next to the outgoing president Vicente Fox, accepted the presidential sash in his hand, slipped it over his shoulder, pinned it on himself, swore the oath of office, sang the national anthem (which for the moment halted the fights) and departed. Four minutes.

As a minority party with a dubious leader, the PAN has accepted a coalition of the PRI and PAN in order to outvote the PRD in congress. That's pretty simple. To get the assurances of the PRI that it would vote with the PAN, the PAN was obliged to support the PRI governor, Ulises Ruiz. That's also pretty simple. Many in the PRI foresee losses across the nation, as well they should, and having a PRI governor kicked out is hardly a good sign. So they bargained with the PAN to support the hated Ulises Ruiz.

What does the PAN lose with this temporary victory by alliance? I guess they lose about 80 percent of the population, coincidentally the percentage that is poor (not middle class). They set themselves up for six years of struggle and confrontation, with or without the interven-

tion of the “defeated” candidate López Obrador.

Why? There are now at least eleven states—some estimate as many as twenty, of the thirty-three Mexican states—that have formed their own popular assemblies. The national movement is not going to die. The overt struggle against neoliberalism is underway, as presently expressed in Oaxaca by the indigenous demands to clear off transnational corporations from communal lands, and fulfill social services. Each struggle sparks another.

It is also helpful to note the position of Mexico between the United States to the north and Latin America to its south. Latin America is moving leftward. The United States is not only a dying *imperium* but also has built a wall to exclude the very people who might have kept its economy functioning vis-à-vis the fantasy of the American dream. The United States thus far appears to act as if it could simultaneously punish the Mexicans and count on their support to promote NAFTA and neoliberal policies. Felipe Calderón has declared himself in the neoliberal camp, as did Vicente Fox. But recent public information reveals that the six years of Fox’s neoliberal policies have left Mexico’s population worse off economically than before. What does Calderón have to offer? His first declared fiscal policy is austerity! And to make it work, he espoused law and order, which is to say, keep the poor in their place.

Neither of these positions bodes well for Calderón, who, as of this writing in February must confront a massive popular complaint regarding the rise in price of corn, and hence in tortilla prices. At the same time he may need to either occupy Oaxaca (and other states soon to rebel) and Chiapas, the two poorest states, or permit them to escape from the neoliberal plans made for them, specifically Plan Puebla Panamá. Thus he enters his six-year term faced with national opposition and two states overtly in rebellion.

One might suppose that a statesman could find another solution, even co-option, but that seems not to be the way Calderón thinks. He seems set on fighting the popular assembly movement, which regardless of the *form* other states adopt in the national struggle, is spearheading the Mexican movement away from neoliberalism and toward the

local-control politic gaining credibility in Latin America.

Oaxaca presents a uniquely appropriate culture for an anti-neoliberal social movement because of its historic traditions of community labor (*tequio*), mutual aid (*guelaguetza*) and local popular assemblies. But other states in Mexico are watching. Other peoples around the world are watching. Inevitably Oaxaca will provide a model for change.

Oaxaca City, Mexico

February 14, 2007

Appendix

OAXACA 2006: A MODEL FOR THE WORLD

By George Salzman

THE GREAT MEXICAN volcano Popocatepetl, its snowcapped upper reaches soaring to almost eighteen thousand feet above sea level, its huge deep crater encircled by a vast irregular rim, always alive with smoke and steam trailing up into the sky, and at times threatening to erupt, reflects the geophysical seismic activity of this land of many mountains. About forty-five miles northwest of El Popo, as it's commonly called, lies Mexico City, the heart of a metropolis with about twenty-five million souls. At 7:19 am local time on September 19, 1985, an earthquake that measured 8.1 on the Richter scale brought unprecedented devastation to the city. A massive self-mobilization of ordinary citizens responded spontaneously to rescue as many of those trapped alive in the wreckage as possible. Many speak of that event, which shook the heart of Mexico, as the beginning of an enormous surge in Mexican civil society. It is that civil society, triggered by the uprising in Oaxaca, that is now making the Mexican state tremble, threatening an eruption from below as the government fast loses its legitimacy in the view of most Mexicans.

Civil society, as distinct from government or corporate organizations, exists in every modern nation-state. It arises from people's efforts to meet needs and desires unfulfilled or thwarted by governments,

such as the desire to be secure that their human rights will be respected. Every nation with a population divided into a very rich part and an impoverished part, if it is to maintain the privileges of the wealthy, cannot avoid violating the human rights of the poor.

In Mexico a great deal of poverty exists in Oaxaca State. The violation of human rights *by the state* is fierce. That is the basis for the remarkable uprising that began in May 2006, which is now pitting the state and federal governments and corporate interests (national and international) against a formidable group of organizations, most of them part of Mexican civil society.

Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Guerrero are the three most impoverished states of Mexico. These contiguous states, among the richest in natural resources, lie along the Pacific coastline in southern Mexico. Oaxaca is flanked to its southeast by Chiapas and to its northwest by Guerrero. Oaxaca's population (according to the 2005 census, more than 3.5 million but perhaps closer to 4 million residents) is unique among Mexican states in that it contains the largest percentage, two-thirds, and the largest absolute number of people with indigenous ancestry (the 2005 census indicates that 35.3 percent speak an indigenous language). Corruption is endemic throughout the world, and Mexico is no exception. The most powerful and privileged members of society are the principal beneficiaries. The overwhelming majority of the indigenous population is among the most impoverished. They have been sympathetic to and inspired by the struggles of indigenous peoples in other parts of Mexico to better their lives, such as the attempts of the Zapatista base support communities in Chiapas that have declared themselves "in rebellion" and asserted their autonomy in opposition to state and federal efforts to crush that attempted autonomy.

The powerful state education workers' union, Local 22

THERE ARE ABOUT seventy thousand public schoolteachers in

Oaxaca. These teachers and other education workers belong to Local 22 of the National Education Workers Union (SNTE, in its Spanish initials). About 10 percent of Oaxaqueños live in the capital city; the other 90 percent are in many smaller communities—cities, towns, villages, and *rancherías* (tiny groupings of dwellings smaller than villages) – throughout the state. Private schools and colleges are primarily in the capital. Most Oaxacan children and parents are thus in closest contact with those teachers who are state employees. These teachers and other education workers belong to Oaxaca's Section 22 of the National Education Workers' Union (Sindicato Nacional de los Trabajadores de la Educación, SNTE by its Spanish initials).

SNTE is a very large and powerful union, hierarchical in its national structure, a company union created by the governing party more than seventy years ago. From the start it was in bed with that ruling party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI by its Spanish initials). SNTE remains essentially a government union, although the PRI lost the presidency, for the first time, in 2000. The national union boss of SNTE is Elba Esther Gordillo, who also served as vice president of the national PRI party, just below Roberto Madrazo, the unsuccessful PRI presidential candidate in the 2006 election.

Within the SNTE is a democratic current, the National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers (CNTE). In 1980, the CNTE democratized Section 22, wrestling the Oaxaca local from Gordillo and her allies, and has since maintained a dramatically more democratic process for structuring the local and making decisions. It is regarded as one of the most militant and independent union locals in the country. The local is designated Section 22 in both the SNTE and its democratic current, CNTE.

Most teachers are considerably better off than the impoverished majority of Oaxaqueños, who do not have, as the teachers do, government jobs. An important exception is that of bilingual teachers in indigenous communities. Paradoxically, they are paid less on the grounds that their positions require less academic preparation. Rural teachers in poorly

equipped schools have to pay for books for the students and other supplies out of their own pockets, and many also face higher transportation costs, commuting to and from distant communities. From the start of the teachers' occupation of the city center on May 22, until the attack on their encampment on June 14, a good many small-business people and others in the so-called middle class held mixed views of the teachers' action. Some of them were quite critical. As part of the state's middle class, most teachers are, by Oaxacan standards, far from poor, especially in the urban centers. There is thus an economic class divide between them and most of their students' families. Normally, one might expect a lack of sympathy on the part of the mostly poor families for the economically privileged teachers. However, immediately following the police assault, support for the teachers surged throughout the state and beyond. Students and their families in particular swarmed to support the teachers.

This crossing of class lines happened because of the personal bonds between many of the teachers and their pupils. Both groups were victims of institutionalized governmental neglect. The teachers were obliged to accept assignments to remote, impoverished communities. Many of them met their students in makeshift quarters lacking the basic needs of a functional school: sanitary facilities, blackboards, and so on. Funds allocated to provide help to the poorest pupils—for clothing, meals, paper, pencils, books—disappeared in the corrupt administrative chain. This bleeding of educational funds happens because there is no fiscal accountability; it is not even legally required in Oaxaca to maintain records of appropriations and expenditures. No bookkeeping! Teachers spent part of their pay to help their students. Naturally the union's demands included increased pay for the teachers, improved physical quarters for the schools, and the monetary support for pupils that they were supposed to receive, according to law.

On May 15, National Teachers' Day in Oaxaca, the already-frustrated leadership of Section 22 of SNTE declared that if negotiations with the state government did not progress, they would initiate a statewide strike the following week. They were demanding an upgrade in the

zonification of Oaxaca, which would increase the federally designated minimum wage for all state employees in Oaxaca. The rationalization for having lower legal minimum wages in poor states, like Oaxaca, is probably that it's supposedly cheaper to live in a more impoverished region than in one with a higher average income. Such an upgrade in Oaxaca, though it would affect waged workers in Oaxaca who are paid the minimum wage, would not affect the teachers, whose pay is above the minimum. For themselves the teachers demanded a salary increase.

Negotiations from May 15 to 22 between the union and the state, instead of moving toward a compromise, became even more acrimonious. Beginning May 22, a large group of teachers, other education workers, family members, allied individuals and members of allied organizations, numbering perhaps between thirty-five thousand and sixty thousand (hard numbers are impossible to know) from throughout the state occupied the center of Oaxaca City—the large central park (the *zocalo*) and some fifty-six blocks surrounding it—with their encampment. Local business, hotel, and restaurant owners were by and large critical due to the financial losses caused by the disruption. Quite normal. The ritual of an annual teachers' strike was by now familiar, but never before had it been so massive and so prolonged, and with no end in sight.

During a period of barely three-and-a-half weeks (May 22 to June 14) the strength of the teachers' opposition to Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz continued to grow. Additional adherents, nursing their own grievances against the dictatorial regime, joined with the formidable SNTE contingent. Frequent marches, and two megamarches, the first on June 2 with between 50,000 and 100,000 supporters (the police and Section 22 estimates, respectively), and the second on June 7 with 120,000. brought to the city demonstrations of size and vehemence never before seen here. I watched the June 7 march from the parapet on the north side of the Plaza de la Danza as endless mockery of Ulises Ruiz paraded past, demanding boisterously that he leave the governorship. Undoubtedly there were state spies in civilian clothes with cameras, cell phones, vid-

eo cameras, and tape recorders, but no one seemed in the least intimidated or cautious. The entire event was permeated with a sense of the people's power.

A struggle transformed by a state police attack

ON JUNE 14, state police, under Ruiz's orders, unexpectedly carried out a surprise predawn attack on the sleeping teachers (many of them women with their children), destroying and burning their tents and other camping gear and firing tear gas and bullets—even using a police helicopter to spray tear gas on the campers, to drive them out of the city center. This ignited a mass uprising throughout the state and beyond. The teachers fought back, drove out the police after about five hours, recapturing the city center and gaining admiration throughout the state for their gritty, seemingly fearless determination not to be terrorized into submission and to continue facing the risk their defiance entailed.

In his year and a half in office since December 1, 2004, Ruiz had succeeded in generating a reservoir of hatred in the state toward him because of the extremity of his tyrannical rule. This included his overt attempt to destroy the state's largest-circulation daily newspaper, *Noticias de Oaxaca*; his arbitrary destruction of much-loved parts of the capital city's world-famous cultural heritage; and numerous killings by armed thugs tied to the ruling party in communities struggling against corrupt and oppressive state-appointed municipal administrations. In summary, it was his attempt to rule by excessively overt terror, including kidnappings, imprisonment on baseless charges, torture, and death, and always impunity for the state agents terrorizing the people, who had turned the population en masse against him.

Moreover, history was against him. Fresh in the people's memory was the shockingly brutal, unrelentingly sadistic early May attack in San Salvador Atenco in Mexico State by federal, state, and municipal police, and the massive outrage against the authorities then, always

with incarceration and worse for the victims and impunity for the perpetrators. There was a pervasive sense that in such a society, everyone is a political prisoner unto death. A multitude of civic organizations in and outside of Oaxaca swarmed in to declare their solidarity with the teachers. Immediately after the attack, the teachers announced and two days later led a huge march, their third megamarch, with four hundred thousand, according to the Narco News Bulletin, that included many new adherents to the confrontation with state power. They all demanded Ruiz's resignation or forced removal from office.

The show of strength, solidarity, and determination quickly led to formation of a statewide assembly that termed itself the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (La Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca, or APPO in its Spanish initials). Though instigated as a result of the teachers' initiative and the ugly state repression, the assembly went much beyond the teachers' original demands, which had been strictly limited to educational matters. Ousting a hated governor had been done before on three occasions in Oaxaca—risky of course, but not by itself a revolutionary act.

In addition to the third megamarch on June 16 (two days after the assault), the rapidly coalescing but still loosely structured popular movement of teachers and other members of civil society held the first statewide popular assembly the following day, *just three days after the attack of June 14*. As Nancy Davies wrote in her report "Popular Assembly to Oppose the State Government," its initial meeting on June 17 "was attended by 170 people representing 85 organizations." Included, or at least invited, "were all the SNTE delegates, union members, social and political organizations, nongovernmental organizations, collectives, human rights organizations, parents, tenant farmers, municipalities, and citizens of the entire state of Oaxaca."

The APPO's deliberately broad representation evidently excluded any explicitly electoral political groups; it was to be a nonpolitical formation, truly a people's government. Its intention was to be open to all the citizens of the state. The only "absolute" requirement for participation was agreement that Ruiz must go.

Among the groups that convoked the initial meeting of the APPO, Section 22 of SNTE-CNTE played a major role. It proposed a core document as the basis upon which the APPO organization would be constituted. The APPO would become (it said) the concrete organized instrument for participation and exercise of citizens' rights by the people. It would be converted into the supreme authority that would function at the state and regional levels. This first assembly set the second meeting to be held three days later, June 20, at which the popular assembly would be formally installed, a collective chosen to guide its work, and a plan of action decided upon. The intensity of self-organizing initiatives that the June 14 attack on the teachers' encampment unleashed continued almost without letup through 2006. The APPO remains, in early 2007, very much at the center of the popular movement, and the educational workers are a major part of this determined, militant struggle.

By mid-October, statewide popular assemblies, inspired by the APPO, were reported in eleven other Mexican states, and four popular assemblies (clearly not statewide) in Chicago, New York, Texas, and California. Also reported is a group called National Movement Here We Are (Movimiento Nacional Aquí Estamos, MONAE by its initials in Spanish), with members in at least twenty-three states who announced their readiness to travel to Oaxaca if necessary to repel aggression and undertake self-defense actions.

Flimsy barriers such as those that had not prevented the police assault of June 14 were clearly inadequate. The APPO adherents went about establishing stronger impediments against future invasions. They began commandeering buses, some commercial, as well as police and other government vehicles, using some of them to block access roads to the zocalo and other APPO encampments. Other commandeered vehicles they used for transportation.

The APPO's major strategy for bringing pressure to bear on the government, in order to force either Ruiz's resignation or his legal removal, has been to literally prevent the institutional government from carrying out its functions: legislative, judicial, and executive. The tactic adopted is what I think deserves to be called "aggressive civil disobe-

dience,” meaning that APPO adherents carry out their forceful “illegal” actions as civilians (unarmed, or without firearms). Some of them have poles, iron rods, and even an occasional machete, but these are for self-defense. The culture here is not one of turning the other cheek. They don’t sit down and pray if police attempt to beat them. They have blocked highways; occupied government buildings; and indirectly, because their conflict with the government has been widely misreported in corporate media abroad, contributed to the drop in the number of tourists and to severe economic consequences for many people in the city.

As for winning the hearts and minds of Oaxaqueños, the hearts part of the task has been in large part already accomplished, thanks to the arrogant aggressiveness of Ruiz and the hatred he managed to sow since taking office as governor on December 1, 2004, which he’s now reaping. Even people who are, to put it mildly, not thrilled with the APPO are so disgusted with Ruiz that they are more likely to be passive rather than to actively oppose the APPO by supporting the governor.

Winning the minds, as the APPO well knows, is essential. They have made that a major part of their work. The government and its corporate allies fully realize the importance of what people think. The media of communication are therefore a prime arena in the contest to influence peoples’ consciousness.

The fight for the communications media

THE VERY FIRST action of the state forces in their June 14 predawn attack was to destroy Radio Plantón, a community radio station that had been on the air for more than a year when the teachers’ strike began. A public voice for the teachers’ union and other social movements, Radio Plantón had been serving as a vital communications link for the strikers, broadcasting (within its limited range) twenty-four hours a day. Soon after the Radio Plantón equipment was smashed, students

at the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca (UABJO, in its Spanish initials) seized the university's station, a licensed station with a much more powerful transmitter, and kept it going nonstop in support of the then rapidly growing rebellion. The student-operated UABJO station was attacked several times, first on June 22, and was eventually put out of commission on August 8 by a diversionary tactic that night that enabled three people (who had earlier infiltrated the movement) to enter the studio and throw sulfuric acid on the equipment, ending at least for a time those broadcasts.

Revolutions are not, by their nature, tidy affairs. There is no simple chronology according to which, at certain key dates, one important group of actors halts its activity and a different group takes the stage. Rather, a multitude of groups fills the stage at any given time, and the flow of activity is continuous. There is no separation of the actions marked by curtain calls. Thus it may be a questionable effort to try to divide the flow into phases. While the attack of June 14 did clearly mark a separation of events into two different phases, the ensuing struggle has been and will likely remain a continuous flow.

The struggle over access to the communications media illustrates the flow and interweaving of initiatives by various actors. As underscored by the state police destruction of Radio Plantón on June 14 and the corresponding seizure, by the popular movement, of Radio Universidad, the battle for control of the media, and the airwaves in particular, is a critically important part of the popular struggle in Oaxaca. By late July, Radio Plantón had gone back on the air with a new transmitter and it and Radio Universidad were the only broadcast media airing the movement's grievances in opposition to a massive campaign of distortion and disinformation by the commercial broadcast media. Then on August 1, participants in La Marcha de las Cacerolas (the march of the women beating their pots and pans with wooden spoons, a mode of protest made famous by Argentine women during the dirty war of that country's military dictatorship) went on to seize the powerful state television and radio stations. One week later, on August 8, the previously mentioned sulfuric acid attack on Radio Universidad, which had been

broadcasting daily for almost seven weeks, temporarily shut that media down. But by then the occupied state Channel 9 (dubbed TV Cacerolas by some, TV APPO by others) and its 96.9 FM had been broadcasting for eight days.

The move to seize the state radio and television stations (or as a graffiti on the wall of the control room at the transmission tower explained more fully, to reappropriate facilities paid for with the people's money) was a bold escalation in the struggle for the media.

When first occupied, the broadcasts from Channel 9 and 96.9 FM reached the entire state. However, after some days, the relay towers were blocked from operating, and the transmissions reached a somewhat reduced geographical area. For three weeks, from August 1 until the early-morning assault on August 21, the voices and images of the people dominated these previously state-controlled airwaves in the struggle aimed at winning the minds of the people, although of course the powerful national corporate channels, TV Azteca and Televisa, continued their pro-state broadcasts. But what a vision of hope sprang from the screen those three weeks! Ordinary people in everyday clothes spoke of the reality of their lives as they understood them, of what neo-liberalism meant to them, of the Plan Puebla Panamá (a megaproject envisioned by transnational corporations, and much promoted by the Mexican government, to construct a gigantic corridor of transportation, telecommunications, electricity, industry, pulp tree plantations, tourism, and more, running from Central America to the Mexican state of Puebla, just north of Oaxaca), of their loss of land to developers and international paper companies, of ramshackle rural mountain schools without toilets, of communities without safe water or sanitary drainage, and so on—all the needs that could be met if wealth were not being stolen by rich capitalists and corrupt government agents.

And not all was about Oaxaca and its problems. The horizon of consciousness reached abroad as, on one occasion that Nancy mentioned to me, Channel 9 broadcast a documentary videotape of living conditions of Palestinians in the occupied territories. One can only imagine the level of global grassroots solidarity if the media, worldwide, were also

controlled by popular groups instead of transnational corporations. Instead of promoting the sale and consumption of Coca-Cola and aftershower skin creams to enhance sex appeal, we could all learn from television and radio of the realities of life as normal people actually live it.

This flood of uncontrolled, unmediated, authentic communication among the population must have terrorized the former economic and political rulers of Oaxaca by the threat it posed to their continued dominance, but they dared not try a repeat of their June 14 heavy-handed attempt to crush the now-massive movement. Rather than risk another open failure, the state authorities pursued a strategy of clandestine warfare, as described vividly by Diego Enrique Osorno in his August 28 special report from Oaxaca to the *Narco News Bulletin*. The desperate authorities pursued their so-called Operation Clean-Up. As the *Narco News* headline stated, "Following the CIA's 'Psychological Operations' Manual for the Nicaraguan Contras, the State Government Has Unleashed a Bloody Counterinsurgency Strategy to Eliminate the Social Movement."

The spectacular attack in the very early hours on Monday, August 21, by heavily armed police officials, in reality plainclothes state agents, on the transmission facilities of TV Cacerola and Radio APPO up on Fortín Hill above the city revealed the government's frantic state of mind. This assault destroyed the control equipment housed in a building at the base of the transmission tower. The racks of electronics were smashed and sprayed with automatic weapons fire, bullet holes only inches apart in some of the panels, which I photographed that Monday evening. There are, as explained to me by a student friend involved with one of the movement radio stations, several components that make up the state's television and radio broadcasting systems: (1) the studios where interviewers, news reporters, and panel members met; (2) a repeater station whose antenna receives the signals from the studio building and bounces them to the transmission station; and (3) the transmission facility atop Fortín Hill, which, when the relay towers operate normally, broadcasts the programs to the populous Central Valleys region and to more relay towers throughout the state.

By knocking out the transmission tower facility, the government-directed thugs ensured that the APPO could not operate the occupied state television and radio stations. The damage wrought at the transmission control room was a shocking double admission: (1) Ruiz's government knew it was unable to retake and hold each of the components of its broadcasting system, and (2) the impact of the APPO broadcasts was an intolerable threat to traditional ruling-class cultural hegemony. Therefore, they destroyed a key physical component of what they surely regarded as their own governing infrastructure.

Later the same day, August 21, having lost the use of Channel 9 and 96.9 FM, the APPO groups seized twelve commercial radio stations belonging to nine different companies, according to the next day's *La Jornada*. The number of seized stations broadcasting for the APPO varied from time to time; in the morning on August 29 we were able to pick up three, one AM and two FM at our location below the base of Fortín Hill. Apart from radio, the movement produces and distributes a great deal of printed material, videos, and CDs, and seeks to spread its point of view by all means of communication. Radio, of course, remains particularly important.

On August 16 and 17, a national forum, "Building Democracy and Governability in Oaxaca," was held in Oaxaca. Sponsored by fifty organizations from Oaxacan civil society, as Davies wrote, it provided "an opportunity to analyze the crisis and propose alternative solutions from the perspective of civil society, including a new Oaxacan constitution, and by implication, a blueprint for the nation." The basic problems that beset Oaxaca exist throughout Mexico, and so it was not surprising that the invitations to attend brought people from all parts of Mexico. What was taking place in Oaxaca was clearly inspiring people throughout the nation. And if we can get the truth out more widely in spite of the terribly distorted pictures painted by the *New York Times*, Associated Press, and much of the rest of the corporate media, even the people in the United States might be inspired by the courage of so many everyday Mexicans. That, of course, is the real danger to the ruling class that runs the empire—an informed and thoughtful citizenry.

"A revolution with an absolute minimum of violence":

It's not news, but it should be

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2006, was a beautiful sunny day in Oaxaca, clear air, ideal for enjoying a mole tamale and hot coffee for breakfast. So I walked down the street to the market, Mercado Sánchez Pasques, to get tamales for Nancy and me. The market was teeming, people and dogs moving uncertainly in all directions. I slowly worked my way through the crowd toward the tamale lady's great aluminum vessel sitting on a glowing brazier. From the towel across the top of the giant pot steam escaped, condensing into the fresh morning air.

I had just passed the newspaper stand in the outdoor part of the market. Big black headlines in *Noticias* said that the popular movement had already rejected the federal government's Thursday offer. It was almost a foregone conclusion that the APPO could not accept that so-called offer. For the moment, I hoped, there would be only continuing threats (primarily by the state government) and continuing so-called negotiations, but no large-scale violence. Talk was infinitely preferable to armed attack, though it's not what the corporate media was lusting after.

I first visited Oaxaca in 1996. Three years later I wrote, referring to the two major essays on my website, "I have no doubt that the ideas expressed in these essays are absolutely crucial for the social revolution so many of us are striving to achieve (as the massive actions against the World Trade Organization in Seattle a few short weeks ago make clear). *If these ideas prevail, it will be a revolution with an absolute minimum of violence.*"

The real news of the current struggle in Oaxaca is *precisely* the news that the governments (Oaxaca State, Mexican, U.S., and Canadian) and the overwhelming part of the corporate media (television, radio, newspapers, and news magazines) have done their utmost to ignore, hide,

and distort. They have simply told outright lies about what has been happening.

The real news consists of two salient facts: (1) the popular movement, which developed immediately following the attack on the striking education workers on June 14, 2006, has become a vast coalition of many different groups within Oaxacan society; and (2) perhaps more significant, nearly all adherent groups are strongly committed to a nonviolent struggle based on militant civil disobedience. Of course, civil disobedience means "breaking the law," as the perpetrators of the deadly law-and-order regime of Ruiz and of the federal government claimed while preparing to crush the rebellion by military and paramilitary attacks. They are itching to launch a real clean-up operation, a clean sweep throughout the state of all "subversives" who adhere to and support Section 22 of the SNTE and/or the APPO.

The low-intensity dirty war against the popular movement was evident to all by August 8, when APPO member Germán Mendoza Nube was dragged from his wheelchair and imprisoned. Two days later, José Jiménez Colmenares was killed during a peaceful march. A day later, Erangelio Mendoza González was illegally arrested, and from there on out seemingly random detentions, assassinations, and torture occurred regularly. The August 21, 2006, destruction of the APPO-occupied state television and FM radio transmission facilities atop Fortín Hill marked yet another escalation in that dirty war. APPO's determination not to submit to terror was shown by its immediate reaction later the same day in occupying and broadcasting from various commercial stations. In what was clearly an attempt to terrorize and intimidate the APPO adherents who were providing security for the occupied radio stations, armed state agents carried out drive-by shootings and some beatings and kidnappings. After a few weeks, during which the APPO participants became more outraged and determined to persist, and because of the bad press that the government had received, including condemnations of human rights abuses leveled by international agencies such as Amnesty International, the state government eased off, apparently on instructions from the federal government. However, the low-intensity

dirty war resumed in early October. Since then fatalities have slowly increased.

The principal characteristics of the current phase of the struggle have been (1) a continuation of the extremely low rate of known fatalities caused by the conflict, probably not more than eight or nine by October 19; (2) an intense propaganda war in which, despite the overwhelming control of media by governments and their corporate allies, much of the truth of the conflict is finding its way abroad; (3) seemingly endless negotiating sessions between the government and the movement over issues that are, at base, nonnegotiable; (4) a barrage of governmental declarations alternating between promises not to use force and threats to use force (including troop deployments and military helicopter flyovers), with the expected psychological rollercoaster effect on the population; and (5) continuing and deepening economic deprivation within the state.

I believe there can be no doubt whatsoever that if the ruling allied political and economic forces in Mexico have been confident enough to have launched a successful attack to crush the Oaxaca revolt, they would have done so without a moment's hesitation. From this fact (I take it to be a fact, for reasons I will give below), it follows that since there has not been a full-scale assault (other than Ruiz's abortive June 14 attack by state forces), the big boys in Mexico City have been, up until now, fearful that a military-type attack, likely with much death and destruction, might backfire, fearful that they might lose even the seemingly tenuous control they still hold.

They're fully aware that a critical mass of Mexicans is convinced Felipe Calderón's so-called electoral victory on July 2, 2006, was a fraud, and they themselves *know* it was. They that Andrés Manuel López Obrador was the real winner. López Obrador was the candidate of the center-left Democratic Revolution Party (PRD, in its Spanish initials) in coalition with smaller parties. Mexico's other two major parties – the National Action Party (PAN) and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) colluded prior to the election by stacking the Federal Elections Institute (IFE, in its Spanish initials) with their own operatives, and in the

fraudulent election-night tallies. We can be certain that the unresolved presidential contest adds to the hesitancy of the PAN/PRI coalition to act decisively against the Oaxacan rebellion. Everyone knows that the entire national superstructure is slithering in the deep muck of corruption. Only at the base of the society can honesty and principled adherence to the real need for a just and equitable society be found. So much for the certainties.

If the true nature of the current rebellion were widely known, not just in Mexico but in all of North America, there would be no justification for crushing it that could find popular acceptance. The simple fact is that for almost eighty years the PRI has run Oaxaca, ruthless in its control and imposing dire poverty on the majority of the population so that members of an elite group can enjoy extreme wealth and power. This grossly unjust state regime was closely allied with the equally ruthless power structure in Mexico City and with major financial interests in foreign countries.

Ruiz, the focus of so much hatred, is only an ephemeral tip of the entire Oaxacan ruling infrastructure. A human being as devoid of vision as he is of compassion is useless in the power struggle of his former PRI co-rulers, now aligned with the PAN against the PRD, except as a bargaining chip to divert attention away from the more fundamental demands of the popular movement and to jockey between the government and the popular movement. The first lightning bolt struck him: “¡Ulises ya cayó!, ¡ya cayó!, ¡ya cayó!” (“Ulises is out!”) was shouted and still is shouted endlessly from thousands of throats. Seen as a hated tyrant, he was the obvious initial target.

But individuals are always expendable if the ruling structure remains intact. Simply getting rid of Ruiz, by itself, would no more effect significant change in the government of Oaxaca than getting rid of George W. Bush, by itself, would make any meaningful change in the U.S. ruling infrastructure. As I wrote in early July, of far greater impact on society, if it can be achieved, would be the demand made early on “to replace the long-standing political government by a Popular Assembly with *no political parties*. . . . The swelling support for the movement to

oust Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz and *to change the form of government of Oaxaca state* has emboldened the participants to insist on this truly revolutionary change at the state level." Such a development would be a nightmare for the entire capitalist system, potentially threatening its continued existence, as I now argue.

Autonomous self-government: A threat to capitalism

I SEE THIS as the crux of the conflict. In today's world, the capitalist system dominates life universally. It rests upon its ability to exploit both natural resources and people for the material profit and power of the ruling sectors of society. It is rapidly destroying the biosphere, on which all life depends, and the lives of millions, or even billions, of people. Everyone knows this. Only the details remain to be quibbled about. The destruction is manifest.

In calling for an end to hierarchical government in Oaxaca, for its replacement by a system of multiple popular assemblies based on direct face-to-face democracy at the local level, with no political parties, and for a maximum of local autonomy, the APPO has challenged the ruling power structure, not simply to reform itself but to totally give up its power, its control of the entire state. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to know that the majority of wealthy, privileged, powerful beneficiaries of this abysmally unjust system cannot even begin to accept losing their special status. They'll fight like hell to prevent it from happening.

It's not just the privileged Oaxaqueños who are threatened by the demands of the APPO for social reorganization. Nor is it just those other Mexicans and foreigners who directly benefit from the exploitation of Oaxacan natural resources and/or cheap Oaxacan labor (including, also, migrant farm laborers forced by economic hardship to go to the United States). Everyone whose material wealth is enriched in part by

the exploitation of natural resources in other parts of the world and/or by the exploitation of cheap labor stands to be affected, because if the people of Oaxaca can manage to end their own exploitation and that of their land by Mexican and foreign capitalists and corporations, that will serve as an example and an inspiration to other people. In fact, the struggle here has already caught the imagination of many Mexicans and even foreigners, to the extent that the real news about this struggle has gone beyond the borders of Mexico.

Naturally, any threat to profits, whether current or future, impending or hypothetical, is of urgent concern to the entire capitalist system. Think money; that is the dominant concern. To understand how utterly dominated by money are the minds of the capitalists and those who aspire to be capitalists, one has only to recall that wonderfully symbolic 1967 act in which Abbie Hoffman, from the balcony of the New York Stock Exchange, flung a large bagful of dollar bills onto the trading floor below and brought the whole operation to a dead halt as the greedy brokers scrambled to the floor to scoop up as many dollars as they could. Totally individualistic, each one avidly seizing for himself whatever he could, no thought for the common good. That's the controlling value of the anticivilization misnamed western civilization.

The struggle in Oaxaca is a gamble for the highest stakes. Throughout Latin America the imposition of neoliberalism during the past several decades has brought increasingly severe polarization between the economically wealthy and the much more numerous, and growing, impoverished classes. As in Bruno Traven's *The Rebellion of the Hanged*, as in Chiapas with the largely indigenous Zapatista rebellion, so also in Oaxaca, the most indigenous Mexican state, finally, when the oppression became too great to bear any longer, "¡Ya basta!" ("Enough already!") became the cry, the scream, the watchword.¹ Preferable to lose life itself than to continue enduring so degraded an existence.

The global system of capitalism would not be so threateningly chal-

¹ *The Rebellion of the Hanged, La Rebelión de los Colgados*, by Bruno Traven. London: Allison & Busby 1984.

lenged if it were merely the people of Oaxaca and their land and economy that were largely withdrawn from the capitalist pool of exploited natural resources and people. That would be a loss of but a drop in the global bucket. The threat to the bourgeoisie is that the popular movement in Oaxaca is an example of great moral courage by (in this case) a largely indigenous population, shrewdly negotiating its own liberation from oppression, in an age of worldwide instant communication, and trying to do it without threatening bodily harm to a single one of its adversaries. Deservedly, it unquestionably holds the moral high ground, in stark contrast to the despised governor and all the other political toadies grasping for ill-gotten pesos and threatening, and eager to use, lethal force. The currencies of anticivilization: money and deadly force.

The governments are eager to incite a violent response from the education workers and others in the APPO, because it would, in many people's eyes, legitimate a heavy-handed military crackdown to crush the rebellion. The corporate media, along with the entire infrastructure of giant capital, whose prime protectors are the nation-states, likewise want the rebellion—until now determinedly nonviolent though militant—to lose its cool and respond violently to the attacks against it. Within the APPO, and perhaps also within Section 22 of the SNTE, there are some factions that glorify the idea of armed struggle against the repressive state and probably some young hotheads who would relish the opportunity to beat up some cops, without realizing the full consequences of attacking the state forces head-on. Fortunately, thus far the more mature elements in the movement have prevailed, and the calamity of full-scale military repression has, at least until now, been avoided.

As James Herod correctly wrote in his seminal essay, *Getting Free*,

[I]t is impossible to defeat our ruling class by force of arms. The level of firepower currently possessed by all major governments and most minor ones is simply overwhelming. It is bought with the expropriated wealth of billions of people. For any opposition movement to think that it can acquire, maintain, and deploy a similarly vast and sophisticated armament

is ludicrous.... It would take an empire as enormous and rich as capitalism itself is to fight capitalists on their own terms. This is something the working classes of the world will never have, nor should we even want it.

This does not mean though that we should not think strategically, in order to win, and defeat our oppressors. It means that we have to learn how to destroy them without firing a single shot. It means that we have to look to, and invent if necessary, other weapons, other tactics.

ALONG WITH THE governments, which want to crush the rebellion, and seek, through armed attacks by their agents, to incite armed responses, is the vast phalanx of corporate media owned by the same capitalists and corporations that the governments serve. These media subject us to an endless torrent of lies to persuade people that the education workers, adherents to the APPO, and the other popular groups demanding change are a sordid lot of malcontents who are breaking the law and resorting to violence. The purpose of their propaganda is to persuade the population at large that a military crackdown is not only necessary, but desirable.

Above all else, those who own the media are committed absolutely to save the system of giant capitalism on which their highly privileged class depends for its special status. The truth, as I've argued above, is that the movement's aim of replacing hierarchical governing structures based on political parties with nonhierarchical popular assemblies, multitudes of them, with maximum local autonomy is a direct threat to the capitalist system. That is the deeper truth, rather than the obvious hatred of Ulises, that must be hidden. It is the entire value system of "México profundo" that is rising, not just in Mexico, but also in much of Latin America, to reject capitalism and its entire system of distorted values, values which dictate the supremacy of money over life itself.² This is the truth that threatens to hurt these beneficiaries of giant capi-

² *México Profundo: Una Civilización Negada*, by Guillermo Bonfil Batalla. Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1989. Translated into English as *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*, by Philip A. Dennis, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996.

talism. That's why they are determined to suppress it.

Many people who rely on the mass media for their information about world news will object to my wholesale condemnation of corporate media. They will point out, correctly, that much of what they learn from the media is true. But that does not invalidate my criticism. It is the invariable refusal to provide enough of the *whole* truth, and to do it in a timely fashion, so that the selected factoids they report can be understood in context. It is often possible to state partial truths without anyone in the dominant sectors of society being threatened, and in fact such partial truths, factoids out of context, are reported in a manner that benefits them.

Consider, for example, the current conflict between the mass movement in Oaxaca and the state and federal governments. The governments repeatedly allege that armed guerrilla groups support the rebellion. Such dramatic assertions are widely reported by the corporate media, both in Mexico and abroad. The partial truth on which these lies rest is that in Oaxaca State there do exist, I'm quite sure, elements of some armed guerrilla groups—the Popular Revolutionary Army is one that comes to mind. The lie, sometimes explicit, sometimes merely implicit, but endlessly repeated, is that there is a deliberate connection between the civic struggle of the APPO and the education workers and armed revolutionary formations. It's much more gripping to imagine some Che Guevara-style group attacking state agents with deadly weapons than to contemplate a bunch of teachers sitting in an assembly discussing resolutions.

The media touts violent incidents, despite their small number (as reflected by the small number of injuries and the extremely few fatalities in those first six-and-a-half months from mid-June to the PFP attack of November 25–26) as “armed clashes.” In fact, that is seriously misleading, suggesting as it does a face-off of two more or less comparably armed sides. But it is only the government agents, whether uniformed or plainclothes, who carry firearms. These paid attackers face teachers and other members of civil society who are “armed” at most with poles, bars, and stones, and occasionally someone with a machete (a lethal

weapon in close combat, but nothing compared to the automatic pistols and semiautomatic weapons of the police and paramilitaries).

I believe no one at this time can accurately predict the outcome of the popular struggle. On the one hand, the potential stakes are very high for the large-scale capitalist sector. On the other hand, a negotiated settlement that leaves Oaxaca's traditional political system basically intact, no matter how many promises are made to introduce "safeguards" for the human and other supposed rights of citizens, will surely mark continuation of the regime of gross economic injustice for the great majority, enforced by assassination, corruption, political imprisonment, and torture, with impunity for state agents who perform the oppression. Those individuals who are prominent in the APPO, in Section 22, or in other allied groups especially will be at immediate risk for their lives, as indeed some of them now are.

The situation in Oaxaca remains full of uncertainty, with much seemingly dependent on the power struggle centered in Mexico City over the presidency. Those currently in the saddle are doing everything possible to ensure continuance of PAN/PRI rule, but the majority of Mexicans (I'm guessing) are thoroughly fed up with politicians and may be ready for much more fundamental changes than those possible within the electoral system.

As I walked in the bright sunshine early that Sunday morning into Sánchez Pasques Market to get tamales for breakfast, and drank in with my eyes and ears the animated throngs of shoppers and vendors, children playing with little toys, the life of the market, the life of the people, I thought of other markets, of how everyday people pursue our lives normally, day after day, as though we expect them to continue that way. I thought of people in those other markets, in Sarajevo, in Beirut, in Baghdad. One can only hope that the confluence of social forces and consciousness in Oaxaca, in Mexico, and in the world is such that there won't be a bloodbath, either large or small, and that a true *milagro mexicano*, a Mexican miracle, will begin to show the world how to move from an anticivilization of death to a true civilization of life.

State tools of oppression: Money and murder

FROM MID-JUNE UNTIL about mid-October, the number of known fatalities among the adherents to the popular movement was amazingly and encouragingly low, only about eight or nine deaths in four months. Following that initial period, the state and federal governments moved with massive and increasingly lethal force to impose a reign of terror on the entire state of Oaxaca. By the end of November, with the total attack the night of November 25–26, known fatalities more than doubled, and the ferocity of government forces was at such a level that the Oaxaca daily newspaper, *El Imparcial*, supportive of the government and critical of the popular movement, ran as its huge front-page headline on November 28, "Total attack against the APPO." The APPO, which had been meeting and carrying out its marches and demonstrations completely openly and with as much advance publicity as it could manage despite the attacks on its means of communication, was being treated by the state and federal governments as though it were a criminal organization.

In fact there *is* a criminal organization active in Oaxaca: the armed adherents to Ruiz's PRI faction, which includes hired assassins, corrupt elements of various state and local police forces and local caciques, and the PFP. The violent August 21 surprise attack on the APPO security encampment at the base of the transmission facility on Fortín Hill by state agents, and their destruction of the electronic broadcast controls for the APPO-occupied state television channel and FM radio, signaled the calculated phased increase in state violence that was already under way. APPO's seizure hours later of the city's commercial radio stations showed its determination to maintain and strengthen its struggle. The August 21 attack seems to have been followed by a two-week lull, during which only a single person was murdered by the state agents.

On September 1 the APPO and other groups within the popular movement held the fifth megamarch. And on September 21, five thou-

sand people in the March for Dignity set out from Oaxaca City to Mexico City, a long trek on open highways through mountains with ample exposure to possible snipers. During those early weeks in September, the popular movement appeared relatively secure against the low level of aggressions mounted by state agents, who mainly acted clandestinely at night, firing at barricades set up to protect the radio stations under popular control. Casualties rose slowly, but that seemed only to enrage and increase the determination of the APPO and its adherents.

In the final week of September, there was a marked increase in state and federal aggression against the APPO. Hermann Bellinghausen's report in *La Jornada* filed on September 24, was titled, "Police attack civilians, teachers and APPO." On September 26, the APPO declared a red alert, declaring, "We are ready to resist." Federal naval forces disembarked at the Pacific ports of Salina Cruz and Huatulco, and units moved to Oaxaca City airport.

Despite the palpable threat of federal troops being used to restore order with public force, as Fox's Secretary of the Interior Carlos Abascal indicated was imminent, the popular opposition maintained a strong posture. As is evident in retrospect, the PAN/PRI alliance in the federal government and the Oaxaca PRI regime were pursuing a definitive plan to destroy the entire popular movement, using the time in October for the state to maintain, albeit at a lower level, its assaults against the barricades while federal forces, already in the state, were in waiting, for an emergency. With the fading of AMLO's threat to the Calderón presidency, the PAN/PRI forces saw their way clear to bring down the *mano dura*, the heavy hand. But the discussions went on, with the APPO delegations shuttling back and forth to meet with secretary of the interior officials in Mexico City, and people in the popular movement believing, wishfully, that as long as the talking continued, fruitless negotiations but nevertheless ongoing, the Fox administration would not attack. Ruiz's forces alone couldn't regain control. But on October 27, Ruiz upped the ante as his agents killed four people, three of them in the nearby community of Santa Lucía del Camino, including an American documentary videographer.

The following day, October 28, Fox authorized sending a substantial force of the militarized Federal Preventive Police (PFP, by its Spanish initials) to regain control of Oaxaca. Then on Sunday, October 29, the PFP advanced from about a mile or so north of the center of the city, confronted peacefully by protestors who gave way before the slowly advancing force, led by its armored tanklike trucks with bulldozer blades, water cannons, tear-gas launchers, and mounted video cameras. The protestors vacated the zocalo, offering no resistance to the advancing PFP, who immediately occupied the highly symbolic center of the city. The protestors moved the APPO encampment to the Santo Domingo Plaza, about a quarter mile north of the zocalo, which, together with the surrounding streets, remained the organizational center of the APPO until the massive PFP assault four weeks later, on November 25.

After securing the zocalo, barricading all the entry streets and maintaining its army of robocops with their truck-tanks, high-power firearms, tear-gas canister launchers, and barbed- and razor-wire entanglements, ensuring that this public space could not be recaptured, the PFP then focused on stopping Radio Universidad. After it was disabled in the August 8 sulfuric acid attack, the students had eventually managed to repair it and it was serving as a major communication center. Located in the enclave of the UABJO, it was supposedly in a zone from which all authorities (state, federal, municipal police) were barred unless the UABJO rector asked them to enter.

Four days after seizing the zocalo, a large PFP contingent, on November 2, made a major assault in an attempt to capture Radio Universidad. At the end of the day, the PFP gave up its assault, temporarily, and the commander lied that they had not intended to take the radio station but just to clear the barricades from Avenida Universidad. This energizing, widely acclaimed people's victory happened only because the PFP did not use its deadly firearms, engaging instead in a truly surreal rock fight with the determined defenders of their turf.

Three days later, on November 5, the APPO and other popular groups held the sixth megamarch. The next day's *Noticias* front page had one massive headline, "¡SORPRENDENTE!" ("Surprising!"), with

a huge picture of the march and the lead article by Octavio Vélez Ascencio explaining the headline. He began, "In spite of the accounts of an eventual intervention by security forces and aggressions by paid thugs and PRI gunmen, tens of thousands of Oaxaqueños, men and women, turned out yesterday to the streets to demand the exit of governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz and the removal of the Federal Preventive Police (PFP)." The next three weeks were characterized by growing tensions, increasing attacks, and provocations, but with the popular forces not backing down. On November 9, members of Las Abejas, including survivors of the December 22, 1997, Acteal massacre in Chiapas, set out for Oaxaca to give humanitarian support to the popular struggle. On November 10, the APPO opened a constitutive congress to formalize its structure. The next day the dedicatedly nonviolent, religious Las Abejas walked dramatically between the PFP armored trucks to enter the zocalo area. The PFP made an exception in not blocking an organized group from entering the zocalo, the single exception of which I know.

Deliberate provocations continued as the PFP and state forces pursued their intended plan: to up the level of aggressiveness until some real fighting occurred to provide a photo op that would justify, to the public outside of Oaxaca, a total military clampdown. The major television coverage (by Televisa and TV Azteca), along with all the rest of the corporate media, would show how necessary it was to restore law and order, with an iron fist. The popular movement was to be portrayed as having run amuck.

On November 20 came the beginning of the payoff in a major confrontation between police and demonstrators with many injured and arrested. The day ended with a temporary standoff. The APPO announced that it would hold its seventh megamarch on November 25, with the goal of nonviolently surrounding the PFP in the zocalo. The march indeed got to the PFP encampment, the confrontation quickly turned violent, and the federal and state forces put into operation their clearly preplanned actions. They swept through areas of the city near where the protestors were concentrated, encircling and carrying out mass arrests of anyone they found trapped in their (real) encirclement.

A brutal action intended to traumatize and terrorize the city. It succeeded. Many were flown to distant prisons and badly mistreated.

So began the definitive state of siege. Following the intense fights of Saturday, November 25, the number of people kidnapped, arrested, tortured, and disappeared by state and federal agents has continued to climb. On December 2, *Noticias* reported "It has been clearly demonstrated that the PFP came to back Ulises Ruiz. Since it came [October 29] it has been dedicated to repression. Up to now more than 14 deaths, 522 arrests and 100 disappeared are added [to the previous totals]." The January 18 *Noticias* reports higher figures. These scanty data hardly tell the full horror. Nancy Davies's reports give a much more robust picture. The ugly rumors of mass graves remain, and hopefully will continue to be only rumors, but I would not rule out the possibility that the military and paramilitary resorted to such clandestine disposal of unwanted bodies. If they did, we will almost surely know about it eventually. In either case, this is a war of terror against the people of Oaxaca, a calculated decision to try to crush whatever hope they may have of attempting to better their lives by changing the society.

Government by extreme terror

NANCY DAVIES WRITES that a recent column in *La Jornada* said Oaxaca is now enduring a repression similar in its depth of fear to what was experienced in Guatemala in its worst days. In quantitative terms, there is simply no comparison between the actions of the Guatemalan government and those of the Oaxaca State and Mexican federal governments. In its official report, the Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification (popularly called the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) concluded that more than two hundred thousand people were killed or disappeared, about 83 percent of them Mayans and 17 percent Ladinos. I believe the disparity between the physical destruction visited on its population by the Guatemalan government and that of the

Mexican government on the peoples of Oaxaca will remain huge, but not because the latter fascists are more benign than their Guatemalan predecessors. The tools of both are identical: money and murder. As are the goals: a population terrorized and traumatized into absolute submission.

When, a half century ago, the progressive Jacobo Arbenz government of Guatemala was overthrown by the CIA-instigated coup to ensure continued economic control by U.S. financial interests (primarily by the Boston-based United Fruit Company), the Mayans, the indigenous majority of Guatemala, had to be beaten down. This savage chapter lasted from 1954 to 1996. Eight U.S. presidents (three Democrats and five Republicans) collaborated in this sustained attack by its client Guatemalan regime to maintain U.S. economic hegemony.³ Today in Oaxaca, it is the many decades of economic impoverishment suffered by the majority indigenous peoples that lies at the heart of the struggle. It's widely recognized that the neoliberal incarnation of capitalism must be ended if Oaxacans' lives are to be improved. But giant capitalism, both foreign and Mexican, is determined to maintain the status quo. Its profits are its first concern. That requires terrorizing the majority of Oaxaqueños—crushing them psychologically so that they not even dream of resuming the social struggle of the APPO and the education workers.

There can be no doubt that the fascist measures adopted by the federal administration in its attempt to obliterate the popular struggle have generated widespread fears, indeed outright terror, in large sectors of the population. Unlike the Guatemalan government fifty years ago, the Mexican fascists have not burned entire poor villages and massacred the populations of those communities. I think there are several reasons why the physical measures have not been as extreme as those employed by the Guatemalan government.

³ An account through 1990 is in *Bitter Fruit: The Untold story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, by Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer. New York: Doubleday, 1990.

1. The techniques for carrying out a dirty war are much more sophisticated than they were a half century ago. Communications within Oaxaca ensure that if even a limited number of ordinary people are kidnapped, tortured, jailed, threatened with death, and/or killed, the news will terrify other similarly innocent people, such as other teachers. Rumors are very effective, including one that people were threatened with being thrown out of helicopters, or that they actually were. Such rumors are widespread, bolstered by the existence of missing or disappeared persons. Part of the dirty war is to withhold information and to lie incessantly (they call it disinformation), which stimulates the spread of rumors. The terror can thus be generated without the need for such massive killings as the Guatemalan government carried out.
2. Today's much more rapid and widespread communication networks also act to inhibit the scale of government atrocities. This was evident in January 1994 and February 1995 when the military assaults against the Zapatistas in Chiapas were immediately publicized worldwide and in each instance led, first President Salinas in 1994 and then President Zedillo in 1995, to cancellation of the attacks after but a few days. Otherwise the Zapatista Army of National Liberation would have been wiped out a long time ago.
3. A third reason for the lower-scale atrocities against Oaxacans is uncertainty within the ruling group. How much violent repression can they get away with without the Mexican people throughout the country rising and doing away with the entire political class? If they trigger a full-scale revolution, they risk losing everything in terms of their wealth, power, and privileges. The instability of the nation itself inhibits them. I think that until it became clear to the PAN and PRI that López Obrador would not effectively challenge Calderón's stolen victory, but confine himself to the usual politicians' games, presidents Fox and Calderón and the rest of their murderous crew were too fearful and uncertain to unleash a real terror operation.

Ruiz's readiness to butcher and terrorize those who don't support him was undiminished, but he lacked the power that the PFP later provided.

4. Despite the terror tactics used by Ruiz's state agents and by the PFP, and the substantial escalation of deaths since October 27, a major fact of the struggle is the relatively very small number of known fatalities suffered by the adherents to the popular movement in nine-and-a-half months of militant, essentially nonviolent struggle. This policy of nonviolence, the main tendency within the APPO and Section 22 of the SNTE, is responsible for the fact that, despite the major efforts of the governments and the corporate media to paint a false picture of events, the popular struggle has been able to retain the high moral ground that it deserves. I believe this fact made a major contribution to the low level of casualties. The use of firearms by the PFP was very restrained until almost the final week or so, ending with the major assault on Saturday, November 25.

A model for the world: The future can be ours

NO ONE IN Mexico harbors the illusion that the use of massive terror in Oaxaca has done more than temporarily force the popular struggle to find other tactics to be effective. Across the political spectrum all the hack politicians (Ruiz excepted) are saying, "We must solve the problem of Oaxaca." These are empty proclamations, except insofar as they acknowledge that brute terror hasn't solved the problem. The basic problem is that decent, dignified lives for all Oaxaqueños cannot be achieved in the confines of global capitalism without threatening the entire capitalist enterprise, worldwide. It is against this threat that the entire political class felt compelled to act. They were backed, of course, by the whole banking, finance, megabusiness and megamedia class, as well as by the dominant economic and political forces in the United

States, the current top dogs in the global culture of money, murder, and terror.

Ever regardless of what should be the sanctity of each human being's integrity, the APPO seeks to redeem in liberty the lives of all political prisoners, all the disappeared, all the beaten and tortured. It maintains a meticulous record of each comrade who has fallen victim and insists on a total accounting. No victim is written off or forgotten. Each human life, including those of the oppressors (even that of Ruiz) is respected and unthreatened by the APPO. Yes, the terrorists have succeeded in temporarily suppressing part of the overt struggle, but at the cost of losing the last shred of their legitimacy as a government in the eyes of a vastly growing majority of people in Oaxaca, in Mexico, and around the world among those who follow international developments. The *form* of the struggle and the *form* of organizing social life, as Nancy Davies emphasizes, is the key that the indigenous peoples of Oaxaca and the APPO offer the world. It is not a struggle for power over others, but one to end power relationships, so that each of us will have the power to act freely in determining our own lives to the extent consistent with nature. No oppressors, no oppressed!

The effort to impose a state of terror had substantial initial success, but it is not lasting. People we know who were literally afraid to sleep in their homes are no longer hiding out. Despite the wave of arrests on and immediately after November 25, on November 28 and 29 a forum of indigenous peoples of Oaxaca took place here in the city, attended by about three hundred participants. On December 10 another megamarch, the eighth, showed clearly the defiance of the popular movement. The city of Oaxaca remains under an effective state of siege, with state operatives showing their deadly but inadequate muscle, while the federal military is deployed throughout the state. But the people are continuing to organize in their communities, and I think it's clear that the era of PRI control is coming to an end, though they are pulling out all the stops to try to prevent losing power. They will of course try to steal the election for the state legislature in August.

Although the political struggles are a part of the process of change,

they are not the deeper part. If the PRD succeeds in gaining majority control of the state legislature, that will be an important blow to the PRI. But many of the channels of corruption and coercion will be realigned as individuals immersed in the game of power and privilege shift their allegiances to the newly dominant power structure. By itself, such a shift in power will not ameliorate the suffering and injustice imposed upon the vast majority of impoverished people in Oaxaca. The new PRD bosses will hire the old PRI parapolice goons and thugs. In brief, Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas' condemnation of the political class will be validated once again. What a PRD electoral victory will achieve is an initial opening of space for the popular movement—civil society, indigenous communities, teachers, health workers, the APPO, and so on—to organize much more openly than they can now under the threatening heel of Ruiz's openly fascist operatives.

The deeper part of the transformation of Oaxacan society is taking place outside of the dominant political framework, in the popular movement that insists on struggling primarily nonviolently with the intention of doing away with governance by the exercise of coercive power, replacing centralized power structures with local communal self-government based on a multitude of local general assemblies that practice direct democracy, as opposed to representative pseudodemocracy. Right now it is a contest in many areas of the state, as one can see daily in *Noticias* reports of communities ousting the so-called constitutional mayors and other officials and replacing them with popularly chosen officials determined in the popular assembly according to their local *usos y costumbres*, or uses and customs. Nancy Davies mentions, in a recent posting to the OSAG Listserv, "the establishment of the new Triqui autonomous community" and "the new *asamblea popular* of the Costa."

As Pedro Matías prefaces his report on the forum of the indigenous peoples of Oaxaca, quoting Gilberto López y Rivas: "The government can arrest 500 or more, but this movement is invincible because when a people decides to transform itself, it succeeds."

I both believe and hope (maybe it's wishful belief) that humanity

is at a juncture in our development at which, with growing ecological awareness, we will recognize the absolute imperative to give up seeking liberation by struggling for power and instead join the visionary tradition, still alive and practiced among some indigenous peoples, of struggling to do away with power relations. In that way we might survive (if the ecological damage is not already irreversible) as human, and humane beings. I hope López Rivas is correct, and that we can generalize and expand his prediction to all the world's peoples. In struggling for ourselves and our grandchildren's children, we also struggle for the success of the brave Oaxaqueños, of whom Nancy Davies speaks with sensitivity and compassion in her reports.

Oaxaca City, Mexico

March 1, 2007

A prior version of this essay by George Salzman appears at the following link with extensive footnotes available free and online:
site.www.umb.edu/faculty/salzman_g/Strate/2007-01-31.htm

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Responsibility for any lapses or errors in the printed version is mine.

- Al Giordano

ONLINE SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE OAXACA STRUGGLE:

NARCO NEWS

Ongoing reports from Nancy Davies and others (English and Spanish)

www.narconews.com

Salón Chingón

Video newsreels and more (English and Spanish)

www.salonchingon.com

Oaxaca Study Action Group (OSAG)

Email discussion list in English with public archives

www.groups.yahoo.com/group/oaxacastudyactiongroup

Noticias de Oaxaca

Daily newspaper in Oaxaca City (Spanish)

www.noticias-oax.com.mx

La Jornada

National daily newspaper in Mexico City (Spanish)

www.jornada.unam.mx

Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca

The website of the APPO (Spanish)

www.asambleapopulardeoaxaca.com