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One Triangle, Two Campaigns

by

Adolfo Gilly

Translated by Victoria J. Furio

Dispossession, contempt, and exploitation are the triangle upon which the domination of labor by capital has always been based in Mexico. During the twentieth century, peasant armies fought a successful revolution against two of the triangle's legs, forcing the powerful, through the Constitution of 1917, to return them land and show them respect. Under the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994), however, there was a counterreform, dismantling the agrarian reform and other social rights achieved by the Mexico people during the revolution and after. The Partido de la Revolución Democrática emerged during Salinas's term to fight this assault. Today, however, it has become a vehicle for the political ambitions of many of the same politicians who surrounded Salinas. Under these circumstances, the Other Campaign proposed by the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional is the only honest response to the presidential campaign of 2006.

Keywords: *Mexican elections, Other Campaign, EZLN, PRD, Andrés Manuel López Obrador*

The exploitation of wage labor in the history of this country called Mexico—as in the rest of Latin America from which they now want to separate us—has since the conquest been based on contempt and dispossession: contempt because since the European invasion in the sixteenth century, racism has been the ever fertile source of domination in these lands, dispossession because since those remote times but especially since the establishment of the Republic, the constant in Mexican history has been the expropriation by an ever more voracious few of what should be the common inheritance of all—lands, waters, forests, seas, air, and subsoil. Now this plunder has shifted to biodiversity, drinking water, and genetic codes.

Adolfo Gilly, a historian and writer, is a professor of political science at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. His latest book in English is *The Mexican Revolution* (2005). Victoria Furio is a Latin Americanist as well as a translator and conference interpreter currently living in New York.

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Dispossession and contempt are still the basis of the exploitation of wage labor today, barely tempered by laws now ignored if not repealed and by the visible and invisible resistance of the workers themselves. This exploitation now includes being forced to emigrate to the United States to be exploited there as the least protected of wage laborers. Dispossession, contempt, and exploitation are the accursed triangle upon which domination by capital is erected in today's Mexican Republic and in other latitudes of our Latin American continent as well.

It is this triangle common to all of us, along with the language, culture, customs, and history that we share, that has always made it impossible to isolate Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, or any other country of the continent from the rest of us. This applies even to Mexico, despite the North's desire to annex it through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), through "continental security maneuvers" with the U.S. Army, and through the imposition of Mexican visa requirements for Brazilians or Ecuadorians now that Washington has decided to move its "security border" to the border with Guatemala.

The peasant armies of the Mexican Revolution, especially Emiliano Zapata's largely indigenous Ejército Libertador del Sur (Liberation Army of the South), took up arms against this triangle but most of all against contempt and dispossession. A delayed but mature fruit of those insurrections—from the North and from the South—was the great agrarian reform of the 1930s, whose principles and legal forms were inscribed in Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917. That article was the juridical response to the pillage of Mexico's soil and subsoil, that is, of the land that was properly the patrimony of the whole people of Mexico. The practical responses were the Cardenistas' agrarian reform and the nationalization of foreign oil companies.

Under the presidential term of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994), however, the Congress of the Union and Presidency of the Republic gutted Article 27 and dismantled Articles 3 (popular education) and 123 (social rights). This counterreform opened the way for a new and devastating wave of dispossession of the national patrimony, in the process creating enormous fortunes for a handful of people whose names are all too well known. NAFTA and privatizations were other practical expressions of this counterreform. All this was openly done: this is why it is now deceptive and hypocritical to blame Salinas alone and pretend that his collaborators bore no responsibility. Demonizing Salinas de Gortari is a political fraud perpetrated largely by those who were his accomplices and beneficiaries.

The opposition political campaign against the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party—PRI) in 1988 was, in fact, a kind of civic rebellion. In it, a citizens' movement that emerged from the

1985 earthquake converged with those of the universities, the publicly owned industries, the *ejidos* (collective land grants), and many other sectors of a country beginning to mobilize. The movement represented a significant effort to contain the neoliberal flood gaining momentum with President Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988) and his associates. However, a huge electoral fraud deprived the Cardenistas and the popular opposition of its electoral victory and gave the presidency to Salinas de Gortari. Thus the neoliberal deluge broke through the improvised dike built up by the opposition and, like Katrina over New Orleans, swept across Mexico, covering it with privatization, flexibilization, deregulation, openings to foreign investors, taxes on consumption, and all sorts of other pillage, in addition to a black froth of political crimes that reached its peak in the repression of the Indian rebellion of January 1994 in Chiapas.

Today, a group of well-known politicians who were part of that assault on the rights and inheritance of all Mexicans during both the Salinas regime and that of his successor, Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000), have claimed control of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution—PRD), the political organization founded after the 1988 campaign precisely to continue the fight against these assailants, whose visible but not sole leaders were Carlos Salinas de Gortari and his “in-group.” Among these are Manuel Camacho, Marcelo Ebrard, Ricardo Monreal, Federico Arreola, Socorro Díaz, Leonel Cota, current president of the PRD, and Arturo Núñez, an outstanding PRI leader from Tabasco and well-known expert in electoral fraud.

From positions of power during Salinas’s years, all of them participated in the destruction of Article 27 and the signing of NAFTA, among many other less well-known but similar decisions, and remained silent about the political crimes of the regime, among them the murder of hundreds of PRD members. Now they are the pillars of the presidential campaign of the PRD and its candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. To say, as some former leftists do, that the opposition presidential campaign of 1988 also arose from a group breaking with the PRI is the flimsiest kind of excuse. In fact, that schism was the result of internal opposition to the neoliberal policy that these outstanding associates of Salinas themselves implemented. Indeed, its first programmatic expression of that schism was a manifesto against neoliberalism presented by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in October 1987 in Morelia, Michoacán. This time, however, there has been no schism in the PRI but only an exodus of advocates of neoliberalism from Salinas’s and Zedillo’s years who refuse to accept responsibility for the disastrous policies of which they were part. A schism is one thing; an exodus of the discontented and dissatisfied is another. To com-

pare the two is such an obvious mistake that I find it hard to believe that those who repeat it are unaware of what they are doing.

This takeover of the PRD starts from the top. For some time, the party has been giving “asylum” to politicians who lost out in disputes within the PRI, offering them its own candidacies for governor, as it also did with wealthy business figures. Among the recent PRD postulants for governor were José Guadarrama, responsible for the murder of PRD members when he was a PRI leader in Hidalgo; Maricarmen Ramírez, from the PRI in Tlaxcala; Gabino Cué, from the PRI-Convergencia in Oaxaca; Raúl Ojeda, from the PRI in Tabasco; Miguel Angel Navarro, from the PRI in Nayarit; Yeidckol Polevnsky, a businesswoman from the state of Mexico; Zeferino Torreblanca, a businessman from Guerrero; and Patricio Patrón Laviada, a distinguished member of the Yucatán oligarchy, and the current Partido de Acción Nacional (National Action Party—PAN) governor of the state. The list could go on.

I am not concerned here with analyzing the actions or character of these politicians. What is at issue here is that when they promoted or supported the neoliberal counterreforms of Salinismo from positions in the PRI or the PAN they were acting, we must assume, according to their conscience or convictions, but today they sit at the top of the PRD without, as far as we know, having changed those convictions or declared them to be mistaken. Thus, what is at issue is Article 27, NAFTA, the increase in sales taxes, and so on.

The leadership of the PRD’s presidential primary campaign, this new “in-group” that surrounds Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the contents of the 50 points of his campaign platform, his silence or evasion regarding the United States, NAFTA, Cuba, Latin America, and other issues critical to the present and immediate future of Mexico, and the sum total of his declarations lead me to conclude that what is being proposed is, again, a developmentalist project to stabilize the neoliberal reforms already in place. It is a proposal to be applied through public policies from the top, without any participation whatsoever of independent, autonomous organizations within society itself.

Right from the start, López Obrador’s original slogan said as much: “For the good of all us, the poor are first.” Given the social disaster and demobilization we live with today, it is not surprising that this slogan would kindle the hopes of many. In fact, López Obrador is not misleading anyone. He is saying very clearly what he intends to do and with whom. There is no deception, for example, in his visits to the bishop or archbishop in city after city in his political campaign.

What this is about today, as it always is when the time comes for mobilization, is the need to begin organizing from within society: to organize from the

position of the exploited, the dispossessed, the humbled and oppressed; to organize independently of government powers, without caring about whom the newly organized will vote for or not vote for on election day; to organize above all in order to be able to compel the owners of power, big money, and land to respect the conquests of the rest, their rights, and the endangered sovereignty and independence of this nation.

The PRD, which had these goals as priorities in its founding call in 1988, has long since filed them away as memories. Not only has it been taken over and conquered by those who were its enemies, but its leaders have meekly joined the conquerors and those allied with them and even justify and praise them. The leaders and *nomenklatura* of the PRD—the whole political machine paid for with campaign funds from the national budget—have fallen into line behind the developmentalist program to stabilize the neoliberal order.

Point for point, today's PRD reflects Max Weber's distant 1919 description, in his famous essay "Politics as a Vocation," of the political parties of Germany's post-World War I Weimar Republic: "Competing are parties completely devoid of convictions, purely organizations of position-seekers, whose changing platforms are drafted for each election without considering anything other than the chance to win votes."

The PRD, invaded, conquered, and humiliated by its new imported chiefs, has reached the end of its cycle. Anyone among its founding leaders, high, middle, or low, who agrees to reconcile or negotiate with this state of affairs will inevitably end up subordinated to the conquerors, to their Maximum Leader, and to his goals and platform. It would be a source of surprise if it were not one of disillusionment that political scientists, writers, analysts, journalists, intellectuals, artists, and learned people widely known and respected for their works, people who have long supported the PRD (even if with genuine critical doubts) and are not pursuing position or reward, do not see or do not want to see this state of affairs.

So what about everyone else? What about that vast popular movement that surrounded the PRD from the beginning, the party that yesterday used to call itself Cardenista and today declares itself "a party close to the people," whatever that may mean when its core leaders include a group of anti-Cardenista politicians? That broad base nowadays is shifting toward López Obrador, attending his events and giving him its trust. There are those who, in former years, built the PRD from below (because there really was a PRD from below, one that did not aspire to posts or patronage but only, as its adherents used to say in their letters, wanted to "live decently, with justice and dignity"). They cannot be discredited or decried because of the actions of PRD's officers, not to mention the conquerors recently disembarked from the burned ships of

Salinismo. They have an enormous experience of life and resistance, and without that experience, passed down through the generations, it is impossible to organize any national social movement or struggle in Mexican society.

The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, as promised in its *Sixth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle*, has now gone out on the highways, to small towns, urban neighborhoods, shantytowns, and workplaces, in a campaign to organize an autonomous movement of the exploited and dispossessed, independent of the institutional parties, the state-controlled unions, and the expensive current electoral campaigns. They are calling it the *Otra Campaña* (the Other Campaign).

For this campaign to be a real success, as it deserves to be, it will need to gain the support of the bulk of those others and with it their most valued treasure: experience, that nonmaterial heritage that no one can take away from them, part of which is their political experience in the PRD. If this valuable experience is not included, what is missing may remain, for the most part, missing.

This is one of the great challenges ahead not for the presidential campaign, which will go on with its ads and tricks in any case, but for the Other Campaign, the one that wants to organize in deeds and in life against the infernal triangle of dispossession, contempt, and exploitation. This is the challenge if that different and lasting campaign is to take root in the Mexican people and not just in the radical left and find a lasting place in their lives, struggles, and desires.