

From armed revolt to political revolution:

Convention sets program for Mexican revolution

BY ABDUL ALKALIMAT

SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS, Chiapas, Mexico — For four days (August 6-9), the revolutionary and democratic forces in Mexico held a convention to begin preparing for fundamental social and political change.

With the action of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), the Lacandón Jungle of Chiapas became the focal point of armed struggle against the one-party dictatorship of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and President Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

By hosting the National Democratic Convention, the Lacandón Jungle became the focal point of a political struggle to define a program for massive civil resistance and political transformation of the Mexican state.

The people of Mexico are being pulled into a ground swell of social revolution in this era of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The opening shot was the emergence of the EZLN on January 1. As one journalist put it, "Many Mexicans went to bed dreaming of NAFTA and becoming like the USA, and when they woke up they didn't find the USA, but [instead]

Mexico's democratic forces meet to prepare for fundamental change

on the five main topics of the convention: (1) the inviability of the one-party dictatorship of the PRI; (2) the 11-point program of the EZLN; (3) a peaceful transition based on massive civil resistance; (4) a transitional government; and (5) a new constitution.

There were two main parts of the convention: one day of workshops in the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas on the five main topics, and a two-day plenary session deep in the Lacandón Jungle.

Each workshop had at least 1,000 delegates. The morning session was devoted to convention rules, five-minute speeches from at least 30 delegates chosen at random, and the submission of written documents. The afternoon was devoted to proposals to take to the jungle.

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Participants in the National Democratic Convention held in San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas, Mexico.

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support. In a major speech given by *Subcomandante* Marcos of the EZLN, the point was made that the focus of political struggle at this stage is the question of electoral fraud. Because fraud has already occurred, forces at the convention were urged to prepare massive social protest to force the government out.

The EZLN announced that while it is an army and, as such, would never surrender its arms, the decision to escalate the armed struggle to overthrow the state was being turned over to the convention leadership.

Revolutionaries in the United States must stand ready to unite with this revolutionary upsurge, to stand shoulder to shoulder with our comrades in Mexico. The main task is to deepen and broaden the fight right here in the United States, especially on the question of immigration and the rights of the undocumented workers who will be forced to cross the border during the coming struggle.

These are the times we dream of, the time when the poor masses rise to take control of history. **Forward, comrades all, to the work that we must do!**

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After considerable discussion in the councils of the indigenous leadership, the EZLN rejected the offers by the Salinas government for reforms to settle all demands. Instead, the EZLN called for a broad convention to make a plan to replace the government.

At least 15,000 delegates requested credentials. While a plan was made for 6,000 participants, nearly 8,000 showed up. These delegates represented peasant farmers, community-based groups of the urban poor and organizations of both employed and unemployed workers, as well as teachers, students, professionals, small-business owners and political organizations and parties of all varieties.

In preparation, local conventions were held in at least 18 of the 31 states of Mexico, based

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One was the possible convention endorsement of Cuauhtemoc Cardenas. Cardenas is the presidential candidate of Mexico's Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) in the August 21 election. Everyone opposed the candidates of the PRI and the National Action Party. However, a PRD endorsement had some opposition from the Right and the Left.

The Left argument was that the PRD would betray the spirit of the convention decisions. The Right argument was that the convention's endorsement would drive middle-class voters away from Cardenas. The convention did not endorse the PRD, but explicitly opposed the PRI as the main obstacle to peace and democracy.

A second issue was the possible convention endorsement of armed struggle. This issue was the basis for the EZLN winning the hearts and minds of a new and broader base of

support. In a major speech given by *Subcomandante Marcos* of the EZLN, the point was made that the focus of political struggle at this stage is the question of electoral fraud. Because fraud has already occurred, forces at the convention were urged to prepare massive social protest to force the government out.

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This created a new politics: if political unity could be reached and maintained, and if the masses of people could be organized in mass protests, then armed repression by the government could be offset by the threat of armed resistance by the EZLN. The democratic leaders of the Mexican people are facing the practical possibility of ending a dictatorship and facing the challenge of transforming the state.

Today in Mexico, the fires of revolutionary optimism burn in the villages, the barrios, and in every center of political discussion and debate. This revolutionary upsurge begins with the land question and the indigenous, but runs right through every aspect of Mexican society. The first battle cries have been put quite clearly: **Land and Liberty! Freedom or Death!** More are being raised every day.

Participants in the National Democratic Convention held in San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas, Mexico.

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Arms buildup in Mexico

Heavy-duty riot-control equipment recently arrived in Mexico from the United States and Russia, the *Washington Post* reported August 7.

The equipment includes:

- Eighteen 13-ton water cannons from Cadillac Gage Textron in Warren, Michigan. These cost \$500,000 each and are used for crowd control.

- Several 17-ton Cobra riot-control vehicles from Custom Armoring in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. These vehicles are equipped with plows to destroy barricades, indelible dye to mark protesters for subsequent arrest and rows of gun ports.

- Twenty-three tanks and

armored vehicles, unloaded August 4 in Veracruz from the Russian-flag vessel *Ulan Bator*.

- Between 200-300 tons of war materiel, including rifles and other firearms.

- Military equipment, including riot-control vehicles, unloaded June 16 from the Russian freighter *Trutskavets*.

This sounds more like preparation for the Gulf War than the routine "replacing" of older equipment, the explanation given by a Mexican government spokesman.

Source: *The Washington Post*, August 7 edition, pages A23 and C1-C2, via the IGC News Desk.