

# AUTONOMOUS RESISTANCE

First grade textbook for the course  
“Freedom according to the Zapatistas”





# Glossary

**70 y Más** – a cash transfer government program for individuals aged 70 and older.

**agente/a** – a local authority.

**bastón [de mando]** – a scepter or baton of authority.

**caracoles** – literally, conches. The Zapatista caracoles are the political and cultural centers of each of the five zones of Zapatista territory. Each caracol is the seat of one of the five **Juntas de Buen Gobierno**. For the Zapatistas, in addition to the role of the conch in calling one into resistance, the spiral-like formation of the conch symbolizes “doors to enter into the communities,” “windows to see in and out,” and “to remind us that we must be vigilant and pending all of the worlds that make up this world.”

**CCRI** – Comité Clandestina Revolucionaria Indígena (Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee). Often simply referred to as “el Comité.”

**comisariado/a** or **Comisariado/a Ejidal** – a local authority responsible for land issues.

**compañero/a, compa** – the Zapatistas often refer to a member of the organization as *compañero*, *compañera*, or *compa* for short. In contrast, the Zapatistas often refer to non-Zapatista indigenous as “brothers” and “sisters.”

**consejo** – Within the **Consejo Autónomo** or **Consejo Municipal** there is often a position of authority sometimes simply referred to as the “consejo.” In this text, “consejo” seems to refer to at times to the Consejo body as a whole, and at times to the individual authority position in the council.

**Consejo Autónomo** – Autonomous authorities at the municipal level. In the text, **Consejo Municipal** and Consejo Autónomo seem to refer to the same body (also see: **consejo**).

**Consejo Municipal** – Autonomous authorities at the municipal level. In the text, Consejo Municipal and **Consejo Autónomo** seem to refer to the same body (also see: **consejo**).

**ejido** – a classification of the post-revolutionary Mexican Constitution of 1917 which recognized and protected collectively held lands so that they could not be bought from or sold by their communal owners nor titled by an individual owner. This prevented their expropriation as collateral or debt payment. An **ejidatario** is a member of an ejido.

**Guardias Blancas** – armed paramilitary groups, traditionally organized and paid for by large private landowners.

**Junta de Buen Gobierno** – literally, Good Government Council. The central unit of Zapatista self-government operating at the level of the five Zapatista zones. Often referred to as **Juntas** in the text (also see: **caracoles**).

**MAREZ** – Municipios Autónomos Rebeldes Zapatistas (Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities in Resistance).

**milpa** – Nahuatl word used to refer to an agricultural field (usually corn, beans, squash).

**núcleo de resistencia** – as detailed in the Escuelita textbooks as a whole, the núcleos are bases of support, usually young people, who receive political education from the **CCRI** and are charged with sharing their knowledge with their home communities.

**Oportunidades** – previously named “**PROGRESA**.” A conditional cash transfer program targeted to poor rural families in exchange for sending their children to government schools and government health clinics.

**PAN** – Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party). Members are often referred to as **PANistas**.

**PRD** – Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution). Members are often referred to as **PRDistas**.

**PRI** – Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party). Members are often referred to as **PRIlistas**.

**PROCAMPO** – Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo (Farmers Direct Support Program). A government and International Development Bank program providing cash payouts to farmers.

**PROCEDE** – Programa de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales (Program for Certification of Ejidal Rights). A government instrument used to title land as individual property and therefore progressively eliminate the **ejido** and communal land protections established in Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution.

**PROGRESA** – Programa de Educación, Salud y Alimentación (Education, Health and Nutrition Program). A conditional cash transfer program targeted to poor rural families in exchange for sending their children to government schools and government health clinics. In 2002, the program’s name changed to “**Oportunidades**.”

**promotor/a** – Zapatista bases of support trained to work in the autonomous health and education systems. They are referred to as “**promotores**” (“promoters”) rather than “teachers” or “medics” in order to describe a different relationship to those they teach or care for, not as “experts” but as trained “accompaniment.”

# AUTONOMOUS RESISTANCE

First grade textbook for the course  
“Freedom According to the Zapatistas”

## Caracol I

- 6 **Economic resistance**  
MARISOL, ROEL & DOROTEO
- 13 **Ideological resistance**  
ANAHÍ & GABRIEL
- 14 **Psychological resistance**  
FLOR & WILLIAM
- 15 **Cultural resistance**  
LISBETH & NICODEMO
- 18 **Political resistance**  
MARISOL & ROEL
- 21 **Social resistance**  
FLOR & WILLIAM
- 22 **Resistance to  
military presence**  
ANAHÍ & GABRIEL

## Caracol II

- 24 **Resistance to the military  
and paramilitary attacks**  
EMILIANO
- 27 **The situation of the displaced  
people in San Pedro Polhó**  
AQUILEO
- 30 **Economic attacks by the  
bad government**  
VÍCTOR & GONZALO
- 34 **Ideological resistance**  
BULMARO
- 36 **Cultural resistance**  
ESMERALDA & MOISÉS

Colectivos de Pollos



## Caracol III

### 38 **Autonomous resistance**

ROBERTO & VALENTÍN

### 44 **Dismantling the autonomous municipalities**

ELENA, ROBERTO & GERARDO

### 48 **Defending recuperated lands**

MAURICIO & MATEO

### 49 **The bad government's ideology**

RAMÓN

### 50 **Resistance in autonomous health and education**

DARINEL & RAMÓN

## Caracol IV

### 52 **Introduction**

ROSA ISABEL & GERÓNIMO

### 54 **Ideological resistance**

SAULO & GERÓNIMO

### 57 **Economic resistance**

FLORIBEL

### 59 **The work of the *compañeras***

MIRIAM & GERÓNIMO

### 61 **Cultural resistance**

MANUEL & ROSA ISABEL

### 65 **Social politics**

OMAR

### 68 **Support from our brothers in solidarity**

SAULO

### 68 **The bad government's provocations**

MANUEL

# Caracol V

**70 Autonomous government  
in resistance**

ANA

**71 The politics of the  
bad government**

VALENTINA

**72 The politics of  
autonomous government**

VALENTÍN

**72 Political ideology**

JACINTO

**75 Social politics of the  
bad government**

ROSALÍA & GERMÁN

**76 Resisting the bad government's  
attacks and provocations**

SALOMÓN, JUVENTINO & ANA

**79 Economic politics of the  
bad government**

ANA

**80 The economic politics of autonomy**

ALONDRA & ALEX

**83 Cultural politics**

GERARDO

**83 Work for the resistance**

NAZARIO

**85 Space for notes**





# Caracol I

**Mother of the Caracoles  
Sea of our dreams**

La Realidad



# Economic resistance

Marisol (Former Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ San Pedro de Michoacán)

In our zone the bad government is attacking us economically. They provide many projects and benefits, not to us directly, but to our indigenous brothers who are not Zapatistas anymore. We know that they do this so that we or our *compañeros* [see glossary] see the support they are receiving. But we don't pay any attention to their projects or programs.

We are organized at the family level, at the village level, and as regions, municipalities, and zones. Why does organization begin with the family? Because we must provide for our families and buy what is necessary for them so that when it is our turn to carry out a task in the organization, our family also feels strong and involved in the struggle.

We organize as families to resist economic attacks by working our Mother Earth; it is for her that we struggle. We are cultivating corn, beans, coffee, banana trees, and sugar cane. We also have pastures for cattle and we raise chickens in order to maintain the resistance and sustain ourselves as families. This is how we resist.

We are also organized at the village level. To do this, we have organized different tasks as collectives or cooperatives of collectives. The *compañeros* always have a *milpa* [see glossary] or a bean field. There are villages that have cattle collectives, collective stores that are part of larger cooperatives, and transportation collectives also organized as cooperatives.

One of the reasons we think it is necessary to organize collectives and cooperatives of collectives is that in each village we have people with different organizational responsibilities: health *promotores*, education *promotores*, authorities, *agentas*, *agentes*, *comisariados*, *comisariadas* [see glossary], local authorities, different authorities in each village. That's why we have to think about what work we can organize as a village in order to at least help them out with transportation costs. Maybe we can't help them a lot because there are various workers, but at least we can help them with their transportation so that they can fulfill their organizational responsibilities. As a community, we have to make this effort to organize ourselves according to what the community can agree on.

We have also been organizing ourselves as women to evaluate the needs of each community and, above all, because we have *compañeras* in the role of local or community authorities. They have to travel for their work and need transportation. To help cover these costs, we have organized chicken raising collectives and bakery collectives, and in some communities the *compañeras* have a *milpa* of corn or beans.

This work that we are doing as families or as communities has the ultimate goal of creating funds to help in the case of illness or other things that might happen, and to provide ourselves with transportation for the different work areas.

We have various forms of collective work at the regional level. There are cattle collectives and grocery stores, trucks that serve as regional transportation, and *milpas* in some regions. The goal of this work is to generate funds that we can then use for our regional travel expenses, or as collective contributions to help



support our celebrations. The *compañeros* from the *núcleo de resistencia* [see glossary] also promote collective work for the region because we have workers with different responsibilities throughout the region, such as health and education coordinators and *compañeros* who are regional authorities. This is why we find it necessary to create collective work projects.

We don't do all of this work in order to divide the meager profits between us, but in order to create a small regional or community fund to support each other as *compañeros*, and to support those of us who have different roles in the organization. This work, which extends from the family to the regional level, is done with neither government support nor contributions from solidarity networks. The *compañeros* organize themselves to figure out how to obtain the funds so they can begin, even if they start with only a little, and the work grows from there. It's our effort to build an economy from within our struggle, one always built together among *compañeras* and *compañeros*.

Why do we put in all of this effort? We think it is necessary in order to resist the bad government's economic plan against our zone's communities. We have to organize ourselves in order to resist more strongly, that is, in order to do the work of the struggle. All of the work that we do has an objective.

Roel (Former Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ San Pedro de Michoacán)

Our municipal *consejos* [see glossary], or municipal authorities, have designed and helped implement collective work for the municipality because we have to be thinking and planning for how we will sustain our own authorities and other municipal level workers in the future: our municipal *consejos*, municipal health coordinators, and municipal health trainers.

In this case, the municipal *consejos* in our zone have promoted collective work in each municipality. Each municipality has a cattle project, which is what is working the best in our zone, and each municipality has its own way of organizing it. The *Consejo Municipal* [see glossary] has a person in charge of overseeing the livestock project, but there is also a special municipal board organized at the village or regional level which keeps track of everything that is needed in order to move this work forward such as the clearing of a land area for pasture, putting up posts and fencing, and vaccinating the cattle.

For example, the Municipality of General Emiliano Zapata currently has 50 head of cattle; Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas has 35 head; the Municipality of Tierra y Libertad has 20; and San Pedro de Michoacán has 35. All of this helps us establish and grow our own municipal fund.

The work we do at the municipal and zone levels we do with support from solidarity projects. But at the level of the region, village, and family, the work is funded by the efforts of the *compañeros* themselves, the bases of support.





One of the problems we face is when some of the projects do not work out. For example, in General Emiliano Zapata we have a rice husk-removing machine that the municipality thought would help out *compañeros* who were organizing themselves to plant rice, since that is what is produced there. They used it once, but due to lack of promotion and organization at the municipal level, the machine is currently not in use.

There is still a lot that we need. There are some things that work out and other things that don't. So we have to keep evaluating what is working well throughout the municipality. For example, the municipal cattle projects are working out nicely, each with its respective board. But the rice husk-removing project is not working for us.

We have a metalworking workshop in the Municipality of Tierra y Libertad with a municipal board working under the authority of the villages. It had been closed for some time, since the *compañeros* there weren't using it, but then interest started to grow in getting it up and running again. With the increased demand for the municipality to organize to open it back up, they started to train *compañeros* to run it. Today the workshop is up and running under the direction of the municipal board, and they are now making those stoves that are called "Lorena stoves."

The municipality has its own way of organizing and working with its respective board. This work is not permanent, but done whenever necessary or when there is a petition from a community that needs stoves or doors, or anything that can be made in that workshop. So now those *compañeros* have found a way to make the workshop function.

We also have a shoemaking workshop in Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas, which is closed for the same reason – lack of municipal support and organization, although we have a trained teacher at the people's disposal. *Compañeros* from the *núcleo de resistencia* in our zone have now formed an initiative with regards to these stalled or paralyzed projects. We who make up the *núcleo* are talking with the *compañeros* of that municipality to see if there is a way to pass the project over to us. We are discussing this now because those of us *compañeros* in the *núcleo* want to jump-start projects that are stalled in our zone or in our municipality. That's the idea of the initiative.

All of this municipal work is helping us build a fund to support whatever costs we have at the municipal level. The *Consejo* has its own fund, even if it is in animals rather than money, for example with the cattle projects. But there exists a fund that is growing little by little. This is how we'll be able to sustain the future expenses that we have as municipalities, regions, villages, and families.

The collective warehouse store is one work project we have been able to create throughout these years, and which our authorities in our zone have promoted. The store began with the objective of raising funds to sustain the permanent workers at our hospital in San José del Río.

We saw that the warehouse was helping us as a zone, and that communities in remote locations were benefiting since they didn't have to go all the way to Las Margaritas, which is the municipality closest to us. When we saw how much the warehouse helped, we decided to create two more warehouses in the zone. The first warehouse is located in the Municipality of San Pedro Michoacán, and the second in the Municipality of Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas, which administers the warehouse jointly with the Municipality of General Emiliano Zapata. We thought of creating the next warehouse in the Municipality of Tierra y Libertad, which is near the Guatemalan border.



These three warehouse stores are administered by the municipalities in coordination with the *Junta* [see glossary]. There is a special commerce administrator from the *Junta* providing oversight. The municipality also has a person in charge of keeping track of everything, but the communities make up the board. That's how it is in the three warehouses; each has its own board.

The agreement on our warehouses and the *Junta*'s objective in promoting them is to generate funds that we can use when there is a mobilization at the zone level. So the resources they generate support the zone; that's the final objective. This means that the communities no longer need to come up with the money when something is needed at the zone level. Rather, the *Junta* is helping us by working to generate these funds at the level of the zone. So for example, if we need thirty thousand pesos, the *Junta* would meet with the *Consejo [Municipal]* and perhaps take ten thousand pesos from each warehouse to resolve the matter.

When we started the first warehouse store we had our own directive board, and each community had to take a turn staffing the warehouse by sending someone to work as a sales clerk. The problem was that there were losses because we kept sending people who did not know how to do the accounting. This taught us that we had to find another way; the administration wasn't going to work like that. So during an assembly with the municipal and local authorities, *agentas*, *comisariados*, men and women of our zone, we discussed it.

We asked: Are we going to go on losing money with this warehouse? And we thought that wouldn't do, because it's really the community that loses in the end. The agreement was that each community had to make up any losses accumulated when their sales clerk was working.

There were several communities that were losing money, and so the assembly discussed the problem. Does the administration at the level of the *Junta* have nothing to do with these losses? Why are there losses whenever we sell? They began to see what was happening, and we know these sorts of problems can be solved with some thought. So the assembly decided that when losses happened, 75% of the debt would be paid by the community and 25% by the *Junta* representative responsible for oversight. That's how we made clear that things couldn't continue like that.

The assembly itself recognized that future sales clerks should not be just anybody. The communities would continue being in charge of administration, but they couldn't send just anybody as a clerk; there would have to be a work commitment on behalf of each community's authorities. We already proved that it didn't work to just pick anyone from the communities, as this led us to lose money. So we tried to think of another method and decided by unanimous agreement that the community authorities would cover two weeks, and the *compañeros* of the municipality would keep track.

That's how we learn from the problems that we face. We have to look for a way forward, we can't fall into despair and close the warehouse because there are problems. On the contrary, we look for solutions and if one idea doesn't work out, we find another. We can't stop working just because there is a problem; rather, problems make us think about how we are going to find the right mechanism to go forward. For example, the set of regulations we had when we started the BANPAZ [Autonomous Zapatista People's Bank] had to be modified and have gotten better. If a regulation doesn't work for us, we modify and improve it as time and the situation allow.

BANPAZ's regulations include several points. For example, if a *compañero* in the zone does not repay his debt, his community must take responsibility in demanding that he repay. In this case we already have the word of the local authority and the local health *promotor* that this *compañero* did in fact need the loan. But if for whatever reason he does not repay, his own community is obligated to demand repayment, because they are the ones who know him best and know why he does not want to comply.



If the community does not demand repayment from the *compañero*, then other members of that community cannot receive loans until the matter is resolved. That is the rule in our *Caracol* [see glossary] right now. For example, if there is a *compañero* in my community who has a loan that is past due, we as a community have to require him to pay. If we don't and someone in my family gets sick, I can't ask for a loan from BANPAZ because I am not obligating that *compañero* to pay his loan back.

The agreement that the community enforce repayment by any member with an outstanding BANPAZ debt has worked well for us. With everyone in the community doing their part in enforcing repayment, other members will have the right once again to ask for loans. This way, little by little, we create the understanding that just as the first *compañero* needed a loan, other *compañeros* will need loans too, thus we have to comply with this requirement our authorities ask of us.

Another of the BANPAZ regulations is that if one of the *compañeros* who has a loan passes away, and if it is the father or the mother of a family, then nothing is charged, neither the capital nor the interest, and the entire loan is pardoned. This is the agreement of the communities and the assembly of the zone. This has happened before, although it's not common. It happened in our zone with the family of a *compañero* and we applied that rule; we didn't charge him anything at all because that was the agreement of the assembly. In the case that it is the parents who request a loan and something happens to their children, the assembly has agreed that the time to repay must be extended in accordance with the *compañero's* ability to pay.

The assembly has discussed what to do in case a *compañero* really can't repay a loan. For example, the community may determine that the *compañero* who took out the loan really does not have any money or anything to sell, but that he legitimately needed the loan in order to take care of an illness. In these cases the assembly decided that if the community has investigated thoroughly and determined that the *compañero* truly cannot pay with money or by selling something, then repayment will be made through work in the zone. That's what the *compañeros* figured out: not to close off the possibilities but to find a way forward.

With these work projects we are creating small funds that help maintain the resistance at the zone level. As another example, we have a form of work that is specifically for *compañeras*. Their initiative was to create a cafeteria-store, which has a small diner and a small grocery store. They started with 15 thousand pesos; they requested a loan of 15 thousand pesos and this idea took form. The regional and local authorities made the initial proposal in coordination with the *Junta*.

They started out with 15 thousand pesos. They have a board of directors at the zone level, and the delegated *compañeras* at the local level take turns preparing the food and selling groceries. After their first account balance, they informed us that they brought in a profit of 40 thousand pesos. With those 40 thousand pesos they were able to pay back the loan of 15 thousand pesos and keep the remaining 25 thousand pesos as pure profit.

But the *compañeras* saw that they were lacking some things in order to round out the business. The *Junta* had been supporting them by providing dishes and tables, but later the *compañeras* began thinking that they could use the profit to improve the business, so they began to acquire better equipment. Their current form of organization is to take turns doing the work in the cafeteria-store and change the make-up of the board of directors each year. They have informed us that currently they have 56,176 pesos in cash from the last time they balanced their accounts.

The objective of all of this work that we are doing at the zone level is not to pay out dividends to everyone involved or spend the small funds that are generated. Rather, the idea is to be prepared for any necessity that might arise in our zone and to use these resources for things that help our struggle.





At the level of the zone we also have *milpa* collectives. This year, for example, we have planted 12 hectares [~ 30 acres] of corn. It was our turn to *doblar* [bend or double over] the cornstalks. Among 24 *compañeros* over three days we finished the task; the cornstalks have now all been *doblados*. The municipality keeps track of whose turn it is, of which community is up to go *doblar* or harvest the corn.

The *Junta*'s plan is that the corn we cultivate in the zone's *milpa* will support those who have permanent positions in our zone, for example, those who work in the hospital. Part of what we harvest from the crop will support the *compañeros* working in the hospital, and the other part we will sell to support other work that the zone has planned.

The ultimate goal is that these 12 hectares serve as a zone-level pasture for livestock. As a zone we have 12 heads of cattle but no place to put them. For now the cattle are being kept in the municipalities' pastures; they are distributed across all municipalities, but this is just borrowed space. But the zone is planning to have its own pasture for its own animals to serve as a source of funds for the zone in the future, to keep moving our organization forward little by little. We have already planted those 12 hectares with grass so that we can feed the animals.

We still do not have much at the zone level, since we have been organizing ourselves at the level of the community, the family, the region, and the municipality as well as the zone. In all of this collective work, and in the *sociedades* [cooperatives of collectives] we do not seek to divvy up the profits. We have family-level work that can support our own families, and then collectives and *sociedades* at other levels to support each respective level of government. That's how we're trying to organize ourselves in order to resist economically in our zone.

Doroteo (Former Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas)

There are many different ways we resist economically. Although we organize ourselves in education, health, and other areas, we have come to realize (and I think this is the same in every zone) that economic organization is primary. As we have heard in everyone's presentations, we need money for transportation costs; there is need for travel support. And if there is no economic support then people sometimes stop being *promotores* and stop being members of the *Junta*. That's what happens.

In our zone, the work that we do is not 100% collective. Each family also works individually, that is, between the husband, wife, and kids; we each have to do something. If the man goes to the *milpa*, for example, the woman has to do something in the house, such as raising chickens or pigs. For instance, if I have to go to Oventik and I need money for refreshment or something, we sell a chicken. I don't know how much a chicken costs here, but there a chicken is cheap, just 150 pesos. If we sell two chickens, we have money for travel to Oventik and back. That's how every family does it where we are.

I am going to tell a story about a community. It's a story I heard from a *compañero* about how he confronted issues with brothers who are not Zapatistas and who have accepted government projects and all that. One community is Zapatista, and the other isn't. They're neighbors. The Zapatistas are always working really hard, as much as they can, in their *milpas* or small businesses or other tasks, because they know that later they'll need to go to the clinic or the *caracol* to cover their shift, or they'll need to go to a meeting, depending on each person's responsibility. So the days that they're in their home community they work hard to have enough to feed themselves and to sell whatever is extra.



Neighboring that Zapatista community is a community where they all support the PRI [see glossary]. They have government programs and don't grow hardly anything on their land anymore. The *compas* [see glossary] of the Zapatista community always go there to sell their goods, almost every day, and their customers are the PRI community members.

Some people there say that at times it feels almost shameful to sell. But I think that it's the most dignified option because it's more shameful to steal, as the saying goes. They sell what they produce: avocados, oranges, *chiles*, tomatoes, beans, corn, *sapodillas*, bananas, plantains, everything that can be produced, even chickens and pigs. One day a man from the PRI community and another from the Zapatista community were arguing because the Zapatista *compa* was eating a banana and the other man got mad and said:

– “Do you really not have that at home that you have to eat it here?”

– “Yes, I have it at home, but I'm eating it now because I'm on my way somewhere. When I arrive at my house I have food to eat. It's worse in your community because there it's just a market,” and he mentioned the name of the other community. “It's a market because people go there to sell everything as if there were no land, as if you weren't living on the land.”

The other guy didn't answer, because that's the truth. The PRI brothers are like that and the Zapatistas are not going to wait around for them. That's how resistance is carried out, and not just in one community; this is done in every community. And beyond the resistance of the families, the communities also try to find a way to resist through their collective work.

We have approximately N communities in the zone. Although there are not collective work projects in all of the communities, we estimate that 80% have some kind of collective. There are communities that have two collective projects, some that have three, four, or even five collectives. It depends how they are organized and the number of *compañeros* in each community.

In the communities there are collective *milpas* of beans and corn. There are also cattle collectives, collective stores, chicken collectives, and small businesses. These are not necessarily permanent businesses that are there all of the time, but sometimes there are small events and the *compañeros* go there to sell their goods. One *compañera* told us that in one community in her region they started a business to raise ranch chickens and once in a while they would kill one or two chickens and make *tamales*. They would then sell those *tamales* and little by little they saved to buy a mill for grinding corn. That's how they developed their collective work.

A *compañero* told us about another community that has become a center where many people from other communities visit. The *compañeras* there organized themselves to make a tortilla shop. But they didn't buy one of those machines that we see in the cities; the *compañeras* make the tortillas with their own small press or by hand and then sell them among the people buying there.

That project is a collective now. Many other things are organized like that in the communities. What is this good for? So that a *compañero* from that community, say an education *promotor* or a health *promotor*, can be given money for transportation, something to help him out when he goes to do his work.

The majority of regions in the zone have collectives. Some have passenger trucks that provide transportation on the routes there. Others have a *milpa*, livestock, or stores. This has come to be the custom, that if there is a *compañero* who is going to do a job for the region, the collectives of the region support him, in addition to the fact that his community will also contribute a little.

There are also collectives at the municipal level. Most are livestock collectives, some are stores, but here we are seeing that all of the municipalities have two or three collectives. So across municipalities we



have eight or ten collectives. Each municipality makes use of this collective work when it needs to send out a *compañero* who was named for a specific task at the zone level.

This is how we are resisting economically, and we work according to the abilities of each community. The communities do not sit there saying that they can't do it; we seek and find a way. One example is the sugar cane work, which is to resist the rising price of sugar. The *compañeros* who do that work do not have that problem. Each community searches for a way so that there aren't complaints of, "I can't do this thing because I don't have that equipment." We handle this in our zone in accordance with each community's abilities. Sometimes it looks very simple and small but it serves for something in the future.

## Ideological resistance

Anahí (Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*)

The bad government uses every means of communication at its disposal to control and misinform the people: television, radio, soap operas, cell phones, newspapers, magazines, and even sports. It puts lots of commercials on television and on the radio to distract people and uses soap operas to seduce and corrupt them, making them think that those things that happen on television are actually going to happen to us.

The bad government's education system makes sure that children are properly uniformed in school every day, without caring whether they learn how to read and write. It is all for appearance sake. The government also makes scholarships available so that students go to school, but at the end of the day the only ones who benefit are the companies that sell all of those uniforms and school supplies.

How can we resist the bad government's ideological evils in our *caracol*? Our principal weapon is autonomous education. The education *promotores* in our *caracol* learn true histories relevant to our peoples so that this knowledge is transmitted to the girls and boys. They also teach them our demands [as Zapatistas]. We have also begun political education with our youth so that they are awake and alert and don't easily fall for the bad government's ideology. In addition, each community's local authorities give talks to the people about the thirteen [Zapatista] demands.

Gabriel (Former Member of the *Consejo Autónomo*, MAREZ General Emiliano Zapata)

Many government ideologies are introduced into our zone, but we resist in ways that allow our communities, our youth, and even our children to understand our struggle. We have been resisting in this way since the time when we organized clandestinely. In one part of our zone there were many divisions among other organizations that used to be *compas*, but we are resisting all of those ideologies.

What the bad government has continued doing since '94 is to launch counterattacks on the collective work we have done. For example if the *compañeras* of one community organize a bakery collective, the bad government counterattacks by creating a project with non-*compañeros* [non-Zapatistas]. Then they say that the *compañeras'* bakery isn't as good because it's more humble, more simple, and the non-*compañeros* who work with the government have better projects.





There are also many things that the bad government puts on television and our youth are taken in by those ideas. For example, there are young people who know what time the soap operas air and maybe they saw a preview that on tomorrow's episode the guy is going to marry the girl and they're waiting to see how that turns out. So then if there is a meeting, there are hardly any youth there. In the movies they see someone who has some new trinket, showing that he's really cool, but this is all fake. We explain to our *compañeros* that this is just to make us lose our mentality of struggle.

We discuss our struggle with the youth and explain that those things are not good for the people. We resist all these kinds of things and work with our youth, our bases, so that they don't fall for the bad government's ideologies.

They also use sports, such as soccer. If Mexico is going to compete with Spain, then even if it's on a Monday or a Tuesday – a workday – the youth lose that time. They will even go pay 5 or 10 pesos to go to see the game. So what we have done in our zone is to promote sports by arranging youth matches and playing soccer and basketball together with the *compañeras*. It isn't much, but this is what we have been able to do so far in our zone.

Ideological resistance also consists of organizing events where the children present their poetry and dance programs. This is so that they begin to understand our struggle and that it is us as *compañeros* that have to construct our own education. This is also still at a very small scale, but we are working on it in our zone.

The events are held at both the zone and municipal levels, with both the *Junta* and the municipality doing their part to attend to the children's events. If the event is convoked at the local level, in the municipality, then it is held in one of the communities and the bases of support go to cook the children's food. Members of the Education Committee also go to help watch the children.

## Psychological resistance

Flor (Former Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas)

How is the bad government attacking us and how are we resisting? There is the consumption of alcohol. The government is pushing alcoholic drinks so that our brothers drink and create problems. But they don't just try to get these brothers to drink; they actively push the alcohol so that we as Zapatistas make the mistake of consuming liquor and then divulge our secrets in a drunken stupor.

What do we do to counteract or resist this? We as Zapatistas organize ourselves and make our own laws or agreements. For example, a Zapatista *compañero* who consumes these products will be punished. But we also explain to this *compañero* that it's not necessary to get to that point, that aside from the fact that alcoholism doesn't do anything good for us, we have to serve a punishment for consuming it. So the *compañeros* realize that this is the truth and they stop consuming alcohol. That is how we resist the psychology that the bad government wants to impose on us.



William (Member of the *Consejo Municipal Autónomo*, MAREZ San Pedro de Michoacán)

The bad government also uses development projects against us. The government starts to bring in projects so that our brothers accept them and start believing them to be good and then forget about their work. They do this so that the brothers are no longer self-reliant and instead become dependent on the bad government.

What do we do to resist those things? We organize ourselves into collective work at the level of the community, the region, the municipalities, and in the zone. This work meets our basic needs and provides a way for us to resist falling for the bad government's projects. Here we depend on ourselves and not on the bad government.

There is also the problem of witchcraft. Many of our brothers are still deceived into believing in this because after '94, the bad government started spreading rumors on the radio to convince people about the existence of witchcraft. When a family member is sick, these people go to witch doctors and the witch doctor tells them:

–“That brother who lives near you is doing you harm, or that brother is eating you.”

The bad government invents all of this so that we go on having problems with our brothers. Sometimes they accuse one of us Zapatistas of being the witch. What do we do as Zapatistas to resist and not fall for these tricks? We go visit with our *compañeros*, to talk to them, to tell them that it's not real, it's not true. We ask, how can we go around believing that we are going to eat each other? We guide the *compañeros* so they can see that it's a total lie. That's how we are resisting those things, and I think that we *compañeros* don't believe in those things anymore because we are clear that they simply do not exist.

## Cultural resistance

Lizbeth (Future Authority of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ San Pedro Michoacán)

In our *Selva Fronteriza* zone we speak different languages: Tojolabal, Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Chol, Zoque, and Spanish. We identify ourselves through our regional dress, and that's how we know what language each person speaks, except for Spanish. There are communities in which our culture is kept alive, but there are other communities that are losing their language, their dress, and even their regional music.

In terms of regional music we have the violin, the marimba, the drum, and the reed. These instruments are only used now in traditional festivals for special ceremonies. In the past, they were used for dances in the communities, but now the keyboard is really in fashion.

The religious festivals that we celebrate in our zone and that are recognized in the communities are December 12, December 24, Holy Week [Easter], All Saints Day, and May 3. But as Zapatista communities we also have our own commemorative dates, such as November 17 (the arrival of the [first] six *compañeros* to the Lacandón Jungle); January 1 (the armed uprising in 1994); April 10 (the death of General Emiliano Zapata); and March 8 (International Revolutionary Women's Day). At the community festivals we usually eat *tamales*, *atoles* [sweetened hot corn beverages], or community foods.



Nicodemo (Former Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ General Emiliano Zapata)

We have lost almost all of our craftsmanship because, as we know, neoliberalism is modifying everything our ancestors did by hand. But we're still able to do about 50% of what they did by hand, such as pottery, clay jewelry, and clay *comales* [flat pan used on an open fire]. We still have these things because they are useful for our resistance, for example, on the clay *comal* we can make *tostadas* without burning them. The metal pan has the disadvantage of channeling heat too directly and the *tostada* will burn immediately if we're not careful.

We still use the *Matamba* basket because it helps us resist the use of plastic. We also have the sugar cane mill because we live so far from everything and transportation is difficult, and this way we don't have to travel to buy sugar. We plant sugar cane so that we don't have to buy *jarochos*, which are expensive and actually rust very easily. You have to wash it well in order to use it because otherwise it smells terrible. The mills that we have are made of wood.

The mill helps us resist by not having to buy sugar, because the price of sugar goes up every few months or days. It goes up and down, depending on the business of the sugar producers in Oventik, Pujiltic, and other places. We also use roofing tiles in order to not buy corrugated metal. In our zone we also know how to make bricks for the floor and walls.

Education is also important, and we keep training our *compañeros* even when there are obstacles in one's personal life or due to lack of support from our communities and municipalities. But we keep resolving problems in good ways. If a *compañero* does not want to continue their work of being an educator, then we propose other *compañeros*, and that's how we keep going.

We see that it's important to have an education *promotor* in each community because they are our future, they are the ones who will replace us, who will be our successors, who will give continuity to our struggle. This is why we never allow education to fall by the wayside in any community or at the level of the zone; our *promotores* give us a good history for our future. They can share our language with our children, our sons and daughters, so that they understand our struggle and can continue on after us; so that they are not tricked by the plans and the lies of the government.

## Questions

*Capitalist culture, in this case in Mexico, teaches us that in order to choose governments there are elections and in order to vote you have to get an identification card. Do the compañeros still vote for political parties such as the PRD, PRI, PAN [see glossary] or Green Ecologist Party [PVEM]?*

We understand that what the government wants is power and property. It tricks people into accepting a soda or bag of cookies in return for a vote, and then these people can go screw themselves for all the government cares. The person who ends up benefiting is the politician, the one who buys the vote. For that reason, we have decided that there will be no more of that. We want the person in government, whoever they may be, to do what we request. That is our view on things.

*You mentioned that you still use a mill to grind sugar cane. Is that a job that you do in the zone, in a collective, or in every community or municipality?*

In my community we have a sugar cane collective, and we are working now at attempts to grow sugar cane at the level of the region. So far, we have found that the ground is not adequate, it does not allow the





cane to grow. We planted, but there were no results. It grew in patches and there was not enough water at that site so we are going to move it elsewhere. We still have to see what solution we come up with on the question of the sugar mill because there are *compañeros* who propose using metal, but we'll see if that's necessary since what we already have on hand is wood. In any case, we will find a solution that we can apply to the situation. This is how it is in our community: we have the sugar mill because it is useful when we have a meeting, or a community festival, in order to not spend a lot at the store because the store is a business. In contrast, the mill helps provide for our collective work.

*Are the authorities figuring out how to resolve the problem we have of losing elements of our culture? Is there a plan for that?*

At the level of the *Junta* they are trying to promote the recovery of some things, but there's not a plan for the entire zone at this point. We see that there are communities that do strongly maintain the culture, so, yes, there is work in that area. How? Through our education *promotores* who are required to teach in their own language.

Since it's the *Junta's* responsibility to promote the importance of recovering our culture, the *Junta* itself has to be an example. It can't just say this is important. So take adobe as an example, in the majority of our zone's communities, people use other building materials. So the *Junta* decided to make its new office with adobe in order to demonstrate what can be done with the materials that already exist in the region. The *Junta's* adobe building is right in the middle of the *caracol*, and there it serves an example. In this way, we're not just trying to convince the *compañeros* that we can recover our culture, we're showing that it's possible.

There is also the example of the sugar mills, which are used in the communities themselves. This is just at the local level, but we keep it going because it means we don't have to buy sugar, which helps us a lot. We usually plant sugar cane as families and we use it to sweeten coffee, or we drink the cane juice and that helps us to not have to buy anything at the store. Most communities have their own sugar cane fields.

All of these things keep on helping us. As Zapatistas we have to strive, we have to work maybe even twice as hard as those people who receive the bad government's programs. That is why we work the way we do, we have to strive as Zapatistas to do everything possible to maintain the resistance. But there is no plan in place for development of this area at the moment, though we are thinking about it and making small steps. Maybe we won't find a way to do it, but we are looking at the possibilities.

*How are you managing the production of roofing tiles?*

In my community we use roofing tiles a lot because they keep the buildings much cooler. They are more comfortable and more affordable than corrugated metal. Many of us still know how to make tiles, but the work is very hard and very difficult. It is impossible to make them in the rain; to make tiles you need hot, dry weather because water decomposes them. They are very delicate and it's not so easy to prepare them for construction. This work is only done in community right now, it's not regional and it's not much.

*How do the compañeros make their clothes? Do they sew by hand with a needle or use a sewing machine?*

In some communities they have maintained the tradition of weaving, of embroidery, and in some communities they have machines. Both methods are used.

In making clothes, for example in the Tzeltal style of dress, which is different from the Tojolabal style and from Chol, they just buy fabric and sew it in their manner of dress. There is also the Tzotzil style, which uses thicker fabric and is more expensive. But they also buy the fabric and sew it in their manner of traditional dress. That is almost lost now; there are very few people left who wear it. Commercial clothing is winning out. What we do is try, little by little, to convince a *compañero* to wear traditional clothes. But in our organization we also say:

—“It doesn’t matter if you are dressed like those above as long as your sense of struggle is here present with us.”

We know very well that the consciousness of struggle is to guide our children so that they do not get taken in by trendy fashions, because that is another way we can resist. It’s up to each household to decide how to handle that situation.

*To make clay pots, comales, and dishes, do you work as a collective or is it just a few compañeras in the community making them?*

That work is done locally among families because there are so few teachers who have this knowledge. There are few who still maintain that custom and know how to make the pots and *comales* out of clay. But the people still use them because it gives the food a whole different flavor. For example, beans have a different flavor when cooked in an aluminum pot instead of in a clay pot.

We see it as the job of the *Junta* to figure out how to recover those knowledges that still exist in each community. The *compañeros* have given us these examples. If there are few left who possess this knowledge, how can we increase that number in the zone? It is the authority’s responsibility to promote the knowledge that still exists in each community.

## Political resistance

Marisol (Former Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ San Pedro de Michoacán)

In our zone the bad government is attacking us by constructing buildings. First, in the center of our *caracol* they built a clinic to see if some *compañeros* would go to it. Now they are building a children’s hospital in the center as well. We understand these as modes of counterattacking our demand for health.

In this zone we are resisting with our autonomous health system. As *compañeros* and *compañeras* we have gotten used to going to our health *promotor*, or to our municipal clinics, or wherever is closest; and we also have our own hospital in the zone. The *compañeros* realize that if they go to a government clinic, the first thing they’ll be asked is whether they have a government-issued health care card or they may even ask us for our official identification card. We don’t have anything like that, so they won’t allow us to see medical staff or provide the necessary attention. To resist the bad government’s politics in the area of health, we have built clinics in the municipalities and small health consultation centers in the communities.



We are also seeing that instead of losing, we are winning. Brothers who are not Zapatistas also come to our clinic because when they go to the bad government's hospitals or clinics, the medicine that they receive there doesn't cure them. They visit our health *promotores* and see that the medicine our *compañeros* give them cures them more quickly. So we are seeing that we are coming out ahead with our own health *promotores*.

In our zone we started with the recovery of our culture, the wisdom of our ancestors, our grandfathers, and our grandmothers in three areas: bonesetters, herbalists, and midwives. That's how we trained our bonesetters and *compañeros* and *compañeras* who use medicinal plants. We also have a group of *compañeras* who are midwives. These *compañeras* are already in our communities, so we don't have to go to the bad government's hospitals or clinics. This is how we ourselves are strengthening our demand for health.

In the area of education, the bad government is attacking us by building middle schools and even high schools in our zone. That was never seen or heard of around here before. We think that although we may not have been to middle school or high school, we gain learning and experience in other ways: the *compañeros* and *compañeritas* who have been taught by our *promotores* or trainers now participate as local authorities, municipal *consejos*, in the *Junta*, and in other areas. These are the advances that we have made in health and education, and this is how we counteract the politics of the bad government.

Roel (Former Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ San Pedro Michoacán)

The government is attacking us politically with buildings, roads, in health care, and with schools. Too often, we don't value the work done by our own *compañeros* who are health and education *promotores*.

Since we live very close to a government hospital, we can share an account of how we resist the bad government's methods and how we organize ourselves. Thanks to the *compañeros* who taught us, who showed us how to train our people to work in these areas, we can defend ourselves against these government policies.

There is a huge hospital in a community called Guadalupe Tepeyac, and now the government is constructing another one close by – say, a half hour or an hour away – in the middle of La Realidad. It's a children's hospital. But what's really happening? What have we seen happen in that hospital in Guadalupe Tepeyac? Well, despite the fact that it is fully equipped, people from different communities and various municipalities end up coming to our hospital.

It turns out that if anyone goes to the bad government's hospital needing an ultrasound or a lab analysis, for example, the doctors end up sending them to our hospital. The doctors know our hospital is very close, the *Teaching Hospital Los Sin Rostro de San Pedro*, and they can't do analyses in that government hospital because they have no trained personnel. The machine is there, but there is no trained staff. So what they do is provide the initial consultation and then send the patients to the Zapatista *Teaching Hospital* to do the lab work.

So they go to do their lab work and, of course, the hospital charges a fee for this service. But people begin to notice and appreciate that the official hospital can't offer them a solution and that our hospital, although it's modest, can tell them what problem they have when the ultrasound or lab test results are ready.

There is one lab worker in the bad government's hospital in Guadalupe, but there are still many things, many tests, that he can't perform and so he sends people over to our *Teaching Hospital*. We have a *compañero* who is trained and who has by now trained various other *compañeros* to perform the analyses. But that's not all he does.

The advantage with our *compañero* is that when people are sent from the hospital in Guadalupe, he does the test for them and also provides the prescription for treating their illness. He can do this because he has had a lot of experience in this area of lab work. The lab worker in the official hospital, on the other hand, just does the test and that's it; he sends people to another doctor to receive treatment.

When we become aware of things like this we realize that maybe as communities we haven't understood or valued the work that we have been doing, how we have been preparing ourselves to politically resist the programs that the bad government creates. We are not competing, but rather we as Zapatistas are doing the work that a health *promotor* should do: providing service.

The bad government in our zone has tried to create political divisions with various civil organizations that it has links to, as well as with some new political parties and development programs. The worst is that it has used indigenous brothers from our own communities, in our zone, to try to provoke us into a confrontation to make it look like the problem is between us internally. When this happens, we try to find the best solution, taking steps to not fall for these kinds of provocations. Because at the end of the day, the bad government's plan is for us to fight amongst ourselves as indigenous people.

If we fall for these provocations we aggravate the situation, so we try to find a solution, exhausting all possibilities. If we find a peaceful solution, that is the best possible outcome. There have been many provocations in our zone, but the authorities – the *compañeros* of the *Junta* and the autonomous municipal *consejos* – have tried to resolve all the problems that arise in our zone. This way, those organizations or those brothers that want us to take the bait or respond to the provocation don't achieve their objectives. These kinds of provocations continue to this day. It's one of the government's plans in our zone. It doesn't happen to all communities, it is most common in those communities closest to our *Caracol*.

We also politically resist the government's educational programs. Currently in our zone there is a lot of talk about new official schools and that all of the students who go to those schools will be required to wear uniforms in order to look nicer. But we won't be a part of that. Children don't learn more by being properly uniformed. What matters in education is the quality of instruction given by the teacher or the education *promotor*.

Our education *promotores* work with the children, familiarizing them with everything important about the struggle, so that they learn to differentiate between autonomous education and official education. There are communities where there exist both autonomous education and official education, but we can't give up or allow ourselves to feel inferior because we see that there is an official school. On the contrary, we have to keep strengthening ourselves all the more in our zone, in our communities, in our regions, and in our municipalities.



The greatest and most valuable part of our political resistance to the bad government's system is the work of our authorities, our autonomous communities, the *agentas*, *comisariadas*, *comisariados*, municipal authorities, and the creation of the autonomous municipalities and the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*. These entities are the primary weapon of all the Zapatistas in resisting the government's plans.

This is precisely the most important work we have to carry forward now, strengthening it more and more in order to resist everything that the bad government does to politically counterattack us. This is how we see it: that the authorities and workers in the municipalities and in the *Junta* are the strongest, most valuable weapon that we have. It is they who directly confront the problems that exist in the zone. The communities are always working but it is our authorities who have to think doubly hard to resolve all of the problems in the zone, whether in the community or in the municipality. We see that our authorities' work is very valuable in the communities, in the municipalities, and in the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*. It helps us so much.

## Social resistance

Flor (Former Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*)

In our zone, Selva Fronteriza, there have been many changes. Before 1994, we were organized differently as communities because our grandparents had another way of understanding things. The work that they did in common maintained a community life, but what they didn't practice was women's participation in the assemblies. Women weren't taken into account, as if they didn't have the right to participate.

In 1994, with the Women's Revolutionary Law in effect, women's participation became part of daily practice. This law opened the space for women to hold positions of authority starting from the community level as *agentas*, *comisariadas*, health *promotoras*, education *promotoras*, as well as bonesetters, herbalists, and midwives. They could also serve as local authorities, regional authorities, substitutes in CCRI [see glossary], radio broadcasters, *Consejo* authorities, municipal *consejos*, and members of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*.

In addition, we maintain the custom of sharing and enjoying a communal life where we make agreements to celebrate festivals. We organize ourselves to do the work that is needed to prepare for the festivals: making *tamales*, making *atole*, and preparing beef dishes for everyone.

William (Member of the *Consejo Municipal Autónomo*, MAREZ San Pedro de Michoacán)

We have in our communities a form of social resistance. We maintain the custom, for example, of helping out when someone dies: digging the grave, transferring the body to burial, and anything else that is needed. We also resist through the way in which we are organized in village life, working on *ejidal* lands [see glossary], for example, clearing new roads, making hammocks, and building bridges. We maintain all of this work as the work of the community.

# Resistance to military presence

Anahí (Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*)

Since 1994, we've been organizing ourselves as men, women, and children to peacefully resist the military presence in our zone. On February 9, 1995, when Zedillo sent 60,000 soldiers to capture the Zapatista commanders, many communities had to leave their villages in order to not provoke the military. There were villages that returned to their communities after just a month or a little more, but there were also villages that were away from their territory much longer because the army was stationed there. For example, the community of Guadalupe Tepeyac was in exile for six and a half years, resisting until the army retreated. The community returned on August 7, 2001 with the support of civil society and the Zapatista communities to rebuild their homes.

Gabriel (Former Member of the *Consejo Autónomo*, MAREZ General Emiliano Zapata)

On August 11, 1999, the military arrived at the *ejido* Amador Hernández in the Municipality of General Emiliano Zapata. As *compañeras* and *compañeros* we resisted the military from entering. The military was going to occupy the community, arriving first at a dance hall. But the *compañeras* of the community confronted them and kicked them out, forcing them to a place outside of the community.

The military stayed there, and so we built an encampment in which everyone in the zone of *caracol* La Realidad participated. Civil society also participated in that resistance and endured a lot because it was the time of biting flies, mud, and rain. We never fell for their provocations; we confronted the military peacefully rather than militarily. We organized dances in that encampment and we danced in front of the military. We also held religious rituals and the *compas* produced events and programs, and sometimes we would spontaneously give the soldiers talks on the politics of the struggle. What happened with the soldiers? Well, we started to convince them because we were face to face with them, so the military commanders installed loud speakers so that they couldn't hear our words anymore and ordered them to retreat a little further.

After that, the *compañeros* invented another form of resistance. I think you may have heard about the paper airplanes. They made paper airplanes with messages on them explaining the reasons for the encampment, and threw the little planes at the soldiers who picked them up. This was the first appearance of the Zapatista Air Force, in Amador Hernández; they were just little paper airplanes.

All of that happened during our resistance to the military incursion. Sometimes we got into shoving matches with the soldiers; our *compañeros* and *compañeras* were standing opposite the soldiers who were in two lines. The military shoved us with their shields and they had those short clubs, *toletes* they call them. They shoved us and there was one really short *compa* who stepped on a soldier's foot, and then the soldier stepped on the *compa's* foot. There was another, much bigger soldier there who started to laugh because the *compa* and the other soldier were stepping on each other. So this big soldier starts laughing and the short *compa* said to this jerk, "What are you laughing at little guy?" even though that soldier was much taller and the *compa* much shorter. It was really funny. That was the resistance that we were able to create during that time when the military entered Amador Hernández. All of this, *compañeros*, was part of our military resistance. By now the *compañeros* have gotten used to seeing the soldiers. There are communities that live on the edge of the highway and so now when the military passes, they just see them as another transport vehicle. It's as if they have shaken off their fear of them.



# Caracol II

**Resistance and rebellion  
for humanity**

Oventik



## Resistance to the military and paramilitary attacks

Emiliano (Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ San Pedro Polhó)

Since 1994 there have been many attacks and many problems in the Highlands Zone, and the bases of support in this zone have suffered heavily.

In 1995, the bases of support took control of the municipal seat in Polhó. The government sent the military to attack them, and 60 of our people were imprisoned and displaced from their homes. They were in jail for three days, but that wasn't the end of it, because the *Consejos* and the bases of support held their ground. They even went on to establish an office in Polhó in a borrowed house. The autonomous authorities overcame all types of suffering that year.

Polhó suffered intense attacks again in 1997. In truth, what the bad government did that year was very painful. We had many dead and injured, and many bases of support were detained and imprisoned. There is one community, Yaximel, in which many bases of support – men and women – were detained by paramilitaries who were demanding that each detained person pay a fine of ten thousand pesos; they were trying to force people to become members of their party. Later, the fine ended up being five thousand pesos per person.

– “Yes, I'll pay. Give me fifteen or twenty days. I'll give you five thousand pesos,” some of the *compas* said to the paramilitaries. There are some very clever bases of support.

Then those *compas* went and hid in the mountains; they went to look for their displaced *compañeros* and they didn't pay the five thousand pesos. Some bases of support did pay the five thousand pesos, but afterwards they left the PRI and went back to building their organization. There are *compas* who never stopped struggling, who are politically aware, who are very committed. That's what happened that year.

When that attack took place – that attack carried out by the paramilitaries, the public security forces, the uniformed police, along with people from other municipalities who were paid by the bad government to come – the *compañeros* fled from their houses and went to other communities. Many of those who fled came to Polhó. There were bases of support who were in the mountains or by the river for I don't know how many days. There were *compas* who disappeared, who were forced to abandon their houses, their animals, and everything that they had. The paramilitaries took everything that belonged to the bases of support and even burnt their houses down.

There is one community where the *compañeros* can no longer go to their land or to their houses. They are still displaced and remain in Polhó. And thousands of bases of support continue to suffer. They have been displaced since '97; they don't have their houses, they don't have anything. Some of the displaced communities can now go to their land and work a little, but not all of them. But, yes, they resisted the attacks. And the attacks were intense because the attackers were well trained.

The paramilitaries were going to try to go back in – to where the bases of support were located – but they couldn't enter the area because it was well guarded day and night. We always had someone posted there. The paramilitaries couldn't go in because by that time the bases of support were stronger; thousands of Zapatistas



were gathered there. They didn't even leave to work; they just stayed there for months, guarding their spots. Day and night the paramilitaries shot off their weapons to scare the bases of support, and they had the support of the municipal president, Jacinto Arias Cruz, who is now in prison. This *cabron*, Jacinto Arias Cruz, kept his people, his paramilitaries, supplied with bullets.

The bases of support endured this suffering, these attacks. But there were also some who couldn't take it. There were bases of support who returned to their community, to their houses, and gave themselves over to enemy hands. But most of the bases continue firm in their struggle. Thanks to the brothers and sisters in solidarity who supported the displaced people, they have been able to endure all of this suffering. They saw that they are not alone in this struggle and that there are people in other countries across the world who support our struggle. Every two weeks, supporters sent a little corn, beans, cooking oil, and soup. Every two weeks, the displaced people received provisions, and it allowed them to bear the suffering. They have been displaced for years, but they continue on.

There were also bases of support who have now forgotten that suffering, even if it led to the death of their husband, wife, or child. There are some who joined another party, others who sought out other organizations. There were others who went elsewhere because the resistance was really difficult. But only some left, not everyone. So that's what happened that year, 1997, in Polhó. The problems began on May 24 and continued until December 22 of that year.

The last attack was on December 22, when 45 people were killed. They weren't exactly bases of support – they were the civilian group Las Abejas – but they were supporting our struggle. They too are against the bad government, and they work with the same idea that we do – they don't accept government support. They were in a church praying for an end to the problems. The bases of support knew that major attacks were coming and had gone to the other side of the mountains, but the people in Las Abejas didn't want to leave:

– “God knows that we are here praying,” they said.

Then came that moment when a shitload of paramilitaries showed up and killed the poor indigenous people there – 45 men and women. This was part of the government's plan to send soldiers and public security forces into the area. After many people had died there in Acteal, the bad government sent in thousands of soldiers who set up encampments throughout the area and in the surrounding communities. The bases of support suffered immensely because they couldn't leave their homes – the women couldn't even walk around in the afternoon; the soldiers would check their bags. The presence of the soldiers made things extremely difficult; they set up camps in this municipality in order to have better control over the Zapatistas, and there were constant military flyovers.

Those damned soldiers even brought marijuana seeds in order to create more problems. They spread rumors on the radio that the Zapatistas were planting marijuana, but these were pure lies; they were the ones with the marijuana seeds. Later the soldiers abandoned their encampments. They left their posts in some of the communities, but this was due to the power of our *compañeros* and of our brothers and sisters from other countries across the world who were present there. For example, there is a place called Poconichim, and a whole bunch of organizations went there to criticize and mock those soldiers, and the damned soldiers were so scared that they hid themselves in the mountains.

The bases of support withstood and resisted these threats. The soldiers are still stationed in some communities, but not in all of them. What happened in 1997 in the Highlands Zone was very difficult.

The people of San Juan de la Libertad established their own government in the official municipality by appointing an autonomous authority there. In 1998 the bad government used military force to expel the autonomous authority, and the police pursued, incarcerated, and threatened many *compañeros*. But the people didn't just sit there with their arms crossed, they garnered even more strength and continued to build their government, even if that government was on the run because at that time it didn't have a stationary office. Little by little they established their office in another location so that the community's self-government could have a permanent location.

In April 1998 the bad government dismantled San Andrés Sakamchen. At that time, we saw that it was necessary for other communities to support them in rescuing the municipality and kicking out the public security forces. But the threats continued and became more intense, so we implemented an indefinite sit-in to protect the autonomous municipal headquarters. The sit-in lasted for almost two years.

So that's what happened during the years of military attacks. But it wasn't only in those places; there were many attacks in other communities. There were attacks in Chavajebal, in Unión Progreso, and in San Pedro Nixtalucum. The military attacks were very intense in many communities, but the people weren't silenced; they continued forming their own authorities and everything they needed for the resistance.

In this zone, when the people in struggle were threatened and harassed, they marshalled more strength to form other autonomous municipalities. They established the autonomous Municipality of Santa Catarina, and soon after the Municipality of 16 de Febrero, and after that Magdalena de la Paz and then San Juan Apóstol Cancuc. That's how the seven MAREZ [see glossary] in our zone were formed.

## Questions

*How many displaced compañeros from the bases of support are still living in Polhó today? Has the Junta presented them with the possibility of living on recuperated land, even if it may be in other caracoles?*

Yes, *compa*. There are communities where there are a shitload of weapons, a shitload of paramilitaries, and the bases of support can't work there anymore. Our authorities told us that there was recuperated land available in other *caracoles*, and one day the bases of support came to an agreement to go and work there. But they said that the corn doesn't grow well there, or that their corn got stolen. They cited many different problems, and they came back. There are some families that are still there, but most came back and now they're in Polhó.

Now they don't want to go there to work, and they are surviving through different means. Some work in collectives. Many years have already passed since they went to recuperated lands to try to work there; I think that was in 1998. Most didn't stay, but, yes, there are some who have houses there, animals, *milpas*, and beans.

*Have you suggested to the compañeros who stay, for example in Polhó, the possibility of doing what those compañeros did – of going to these other caracoles not just to work but to actually live there? That is, the possibility of establishing themselves on a piece of land or creating a community on recuperated land?*

At this point they have other ideas. I'm not sure how to explain how many families are organized in different communities, in different groups. There are a few families who are working in other *caracoles*; they just go there to work and bring corn back to their community; they work collectively. But recently, last year, more of them organized themselves. A bunch of bases of support went to work on recuperated lands, but they don't live there permanently; they only go to work and then return to their houses. There are other families that have gone to live there and don't come back. They left their houses and the little that they had they left with their communities.

But we don't have a list of how many families leave and come back, or how many families are still there [on recuperated lands]. So yes, now there are lots of bases of support who are working on recuperated land, but it was only in the last year that they organized themselves. We don't have a handle on how many families are still there or how many have left the organization, or how many have gone to the PRI or other organizations. We don't have a good sense of these numbers. We, as the *Junta*, don't have a handle on these numbers and this is our mistake, an error in our work.

*So you say that the Junta doesn't have a plan to solve these compañeros' problems, that the Junta doesn't have a way to intervene so that these compas can go work on a recuperated land and come back. You say that there are a ton of people, but you don't have a handle on the numbers of how many go and come back. So what relation does the Junta have to these displaced compañeros?*

We, as the *Junta*, still don't have a plan. We have the numbers from before, when the regional authorities gave us their lists of people, but now there are *compas* who don't want to go and work. People have gotten discouraged again. There were a lot of bases of support who became discouraged this year, which is why we don't have good numbers. Just last week the *compañeros* in the *Junta* were discussing how we were going to start to keep track of the number of families who are working, of how many have their houses [on recuperated land], and how many go back and forth.

## **The situation of the displaced people in San Pedro Polhó**

There have been a lot of attacks on the Municipality of San Pedro Polhó since 1997. Back then, there was a *Consejo* but not a *Junta de Buen Gobierno*. First, we tried to occupy the municipal presidency in San Pedro Chenalhó, which is the name of the official municipality, but the government ousted the *Consejo* and the *compañeros*. Sixty people went to jail in three days. The location that the government dismantled was in Chenalhó, not in the center of Polhó.

The *compañeros* went back and found a spot, an office in the center of Polhó, and they have governed from there ever since. The *Consejo Autónomo* [see glossary] began functioning out of a borrowed house. The worst attacks were in 1997, when thousands of *compañeros* from different communities were attacked. Many *compañeros* were displaced and had to leave; they left their houses, their land, their coffee plants, everything. Some of them fell into the hands of the paramilitaries, but most of them escaped and assembled in the center of Polhó, where they organized themselves into encampments. Nearly ten thousand displaced men, women, and children assembled there.

So back then there wasn't a *Junta*, only the *Consejo*, and it didn't know what to do with these thousands of displaced *compañeros*. Little by little it became known that there were many problems and many displaced people, and then the international solidarity organizations started to realize there were serious problems. These organizations went there directly and saw what had happened. Since there wasn't anywhere specific for them to go and check in, they would simply show up and ask what had happened. Support was sought and even the International Red Cross came eventually. They started providing some support – a little bit of corn, beans, and canned food.

The problem was that the aid was disorganized – there was no way for the *Consejo* to manage the situation. All the authority could do was watch aid arrive with organizations who wanted to run things themselves and deliver aid directly to the displaced people. But the people, the bases of support, began to become accustomed to the little aid that they were receiving. Every now and then they [Red Cross] would come to hand out this aid, but the *Consejo* had no control over it and the people started to get used to that.

Soon the authorities began to notice that what was happening was not good. It was very similar to how it had been with the bad government; the *compas* were simply receiving handouts. They realized this was a problem and they decided that the Red Cross could continue to provide support, but that support had to pass through the *Consejo*; the *Consejo Autónomo* had to be able to decide how to use that support. Little by little this started happening, but then the Red Cross stopped its support because they only wanted to provide support if they could give it directly to the people, to take advantage of their suffering. When they could no longer do this, they stopped providing support and left. After that, another problem began – the *compas* started to complain:

– “Now what are we going to do?” they complained to the *consejos*. “Now you, the *Consejo*, aren’t letting us receive this support,” they complained.

– “What we’re doing here isn’t right,” the *Consejo* responded firmly. “If another type of aid arrives, it won’t be distributed in the same way. First we have to decide whether it is useful or not for us to accept it.”

The *Consejo* began to organize itself a little bit and managed to get support from another project. It organized some work there in the encampment, because the displaced could not return to work on their land or see their houses. That area remained off-limits.

That went on for a few years, and later they obtained some aid from other organizations and started to organize collectives for growing vegetables, raising livestock, and raising chickens. Other support was found through the *Consejo*. For example, they began to see if there was a way to take advantage of the big sand and gravel pit in the municipality.

They found some support for this and bought a machine to extract the gravel and sand, and they began to generate some income. This was all done through the *Consejo* because at the time there was no *junta*. But then things started to change a little. The *compañeros* were hard on the *Consejo*; they didn’t like how they were doing things; they thought that the *Consejo* still didn’t understand the people.

So that is how these problems have been evolving. The paramilitaries still have the community shut down, and they don’t let the displaced residents enter. The *Consejo*, on the other hand, has started to organize better. They started asking the people if they could endure more challenges and figuring out how many *compañeros* could organize themselves to work lands in another area. They inquired in other *caracoles* where there was recuperated land available. They asked how many *compañeros* were willing to go and live on recuperated lands, because they wouldn’t be able to simply come and go all of the time. This was because there, in those areas, there was already an agreement for how people must work the land. So that was what was proposed.

I don’t remember how many families decided to go, but it was only for a short time, because little by little, people started returning to their own homes. This was the problem. If the people are just misleading us and are not determined to stay there, then it is better for us not to ask them to go, they should just stay put. Some time passed like that, but then the *Consejo* eventually started figuring out what was possible with the people from this municipality.

This is what has been happening. We are telling you so that you can understand that there were some really bad times because people got used to living on humanitarian aid from the International Red Cross. Even



if it was just a little bit of salt, soap, sugar, and corn, the people got used to it just as if it had been the bad government. It was like that for a little while, but we realized that it couldn't continue like that; the *Consejo* had to organize things. Little by little they began to advance until the *Consejo* really grasped how to organize those *compañeros*.

The resistance had to be strong because no one could enter their community due to the fact that the paramilitaries were there waiting for them. Things changed some when it became clear that there were *compañeros* who couldn't make things work on recuperated lands. We looked for another way to resist. Some people continued with the existing small collective projects. Some of the women created a bakery and the *compañeros* created a store that is still functioning.

Then little by little, those who could do so began returning to their land. Others could go to their lands to work, but they could not live there because they would be attacked again by the paramilitaries. So those *compañeros* are organizing themselves into small groups, small collectives, and each group goes to work on their land. They cultivate their *milpa*, get firewood, and check on their coffee, if it's still there.

There is one community where the *compañeros* left 15 years ago and still cannot enter even today because it has a high paramilitary concentration. Any base of support that goes there could be attacked again.

There is another community where most people can go and see their lands, but they can't live there; they have to come back again. So we proposed the idea of the recuperated lands again. We asked if anyone was willing to go and work. Even if they felt that they couldn't move there, maybe they could just go and work there. The problem is that it is very expensive to just go and cultivate your *milpa*; I don't know what can be done in that case.

But this is an agreement between the two *Juntas*: the *compañeros* from La Garrucha have responded to the request by the *Junta* from Oventik. They discussed whether they have land where the *compañeros* might work even if they aren't going to live there, and they have already come to an agreement. They are leading the way – there are already *compañeros* working in Benito Juárez, and in Río Naranjo, which is more or less where this land is located. The work has begun, though we don't know how long they will be able to do it; we don't know if they can manage to come and go. We'll have to see, but we do have an agreement between the two *Juntas*. Now they are going to ask people from other municipalities besides San Pedro Polhó if they are willing to work on these lands.

Aquileo (Member of the *Consejo Municipal*, MAREZ San Pedro Polhó)

The autonomous Municipality of San Pedro Polhó has a bitter history. The truth of 1997 was that many *compañeros* and *compañeras* lost their way in the mountains or the river; many *compañeras* got sick, some of them were pregnant and suffered heavily – their children were born in the mountains or along the way.

When the military arrived in 1995, they worked hard to mislead the people. They gave things away; they supplied people with food and they provided doctors and barbers. They were very cunning. Even people from the official municipalities got their food from the soldiers; those women and children went to them, but the Zapatista *compañeras* did not. The soldiers even had children there who they left behind. When they attacked us 1995, we didn't just sit there with our arms crossed. By that time we were more organized; we had more strength and a better understanding of how to organize ourselves.

In the autonomous Municipality of San Pedro Polhó we received a small donation of an excavator and a dump truck. Today, the community, together with the local and municipal authorities and the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, is learning how to better organize itself in order to be able to work in this gravel and sand pit.

We organized ourselves to figure out how to manage this work and we chose *compañeros* to be managers. These *compañeros* worked weekly and managed our backhoe, the excavator, and the dump truck. The bases of support rotated through these jobs weekly, but the authorities did not participate in the rotation because they had to work in their offices to keep track of the money that came in each week. This money went to the municipal secretary, the *Consejo Municipal*, the municipal treasurer, and the municipal official; they were the ones who kept track of things.

The money that comes in does not stay in the office or in the treasury. Rather, from there it goes to municipal expenses that the municipal treasurer manages. Some of that money stays with the project treasurer and another part goes to the municipal treasurer. The municipal treasurer directs the money toward expenditures by the local or regional authorities or to other areas of work such as health, agroecology, bonesetting, midwifery, etc. The money for their transport comes from there as well, so if those areas need a little help with transportation costs, the municipal treasurer provides it. So that is how they manage the sand and gravel pit, and that's how we are working in an organized manner in each municipality and in each community.

## Economic attacks by the bad government

Víctor (Former Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ San Juan Apóstol Cancuc)

The bad government could not get rid of our *compañeros* by sending soldiers to kill them, so they had to find another way to get rid of them; they used economic means to see if our people could resist or not. This is how they tried to divide our people and make us fight amongst ourselves. This was a powerful attack on the Zapatista people, on those who struggle. But the *compañeros* and *compañeras* resisted and withstood these attacks, even though the saddest things have taken place, like the things that we already discussed. They resisted even though they suffered. The government could not get rid of our *compañeros*, so they had to find another way to try to put an end to them.

The *compañeros* searched for another way to resist these attacks – with work. They figured out how to work in collectives, searching for a way to survive in order to continue resisting the attacks. The bad government thought that it would be easy to finish off the Zapatista bases, but it wasn't. They endured, with intense suffering, yes, but they endured.

In our Highlands Zone we responded to the attacks with collectives; there may only be a few of them, but we do have work collectives. We have cooperative stores. *Milpa* collectives are rare in this zone because we have very little land, so the *compañeros* and *compañeras* had to find another way to survive. We began to raise chickens, opened artisanal stores, and started a few bakeries.

This is the only way that we could survive as bases of support. Come what may, we must endure. The situations vary in terms of the land that we have in each zone or in the municipalities. In our zone, we haven't been able to create large work collectives because we lack land, so sometimes we don't have anywhere to do collective work. But we have endured; we have resisted through this collective work and we will continue to endure the attacks. This is how we have responded to the economic attacks – through our collective work. This is how the people have resisted.

Gonzalo (Former Judge, MAREZ San Andrés)

Before '94, the *compañeros* of the CCRI and the local and regional authorities told us that when the time came to take up arms, we would have to be careful. They advised each community: "Be careful. When the time comes to take up arms or declare our struggle, the bad government is going to respond with economic attacks."

At the time, I didn't believe it. But it was true; these economic attacks came to pass. I remember, as do the other *compañeros* and *compañeras*, that before 1994 they always warned us that the government would attack us through economic means. They told us that the bad government would make gifts of money and other things, and we see now that the bad government always sends their development projects and materials for housing construction.

It happened just like the local and regional authorities said that it would; what they said was true. That's why we started the collectives before 1994. We were very strong and all of the work that was done was collective. The *compañeros* and *compañeras* from each group or community organized themselves well. We were very strong and we created collectives for everything: for all of our expenses, all of the money that came in, all of our economic resources, *milpa* planting, chicken raising – it was all handled collectively.

Unfortunately, after the armed uprising in '94 the bad government started providing a lot of economic resources. But many *compañeros* saw that it was the bad government only acting as if it was a good government. The *compañeros* and *compañeras* saw that the government was just pretending to be good, but there were other less politically aware *compañeros* who became addicted to these resources from the bad government.

We all know that the government is sending a lot of stuff to its party followers in our zone. They send chickens and sheep. They send greenhouses because these cold lands often freeze and the greenhouses protect the things people plant. They are sending fruit trees to San Andrés and other cold areas. Some *compañeros* really trust this government handout and become attached to these things. But this isn't all that the government is doing. They're also sending housing construction materials. We have noticed that there are piles of gravel, of sand, and cinder blocks for house construction on the road and on the highway. They are also sending cement for floors and they are building toilets.

Our response to this is our work collectives, even if there aren't very many. For example, the women are organizing themselves. The *compañeros* don't think that they can trust the bad government, and they are resisting because they don't believe in its projects. Planting a *milpa* is only one part of our response here because we don't have a lot of land; we have just enough to build a house and to have a few animals and chickens, which is why many *compañeros* went to recuperated lands. They went in collectives to work and to plant *milpas*, coffee, and some are even planting bananas.

This is what's going on with the bad government and its economic attacks here in the Highlands. The *Junta* and the municipalities haven't yet organized many work collectives. What we would like to know as part of our exchange of experiences is what the *Junta* is doing in other places. How is the *Junta* responding to the economic attacks in your zone?

We still haven't figured out the best way to organize the people. The *Junta* itself has not been able to organize work. Things are really different here from what our *compañeros* have described in La Realidad and La Garrucha, where they have collective *milpas* and livestock. We can't tell those same stories here. Most of our resistance is through the force of the people, mostly on an individual level. Of course, part of this is through collectives, but it is the villages themselves who are organizing these.

We have to make clear that in the beginning, when there was no *Consejo* and no *Junta*, there were what we called "central regions." Before 1994, the people were already organizing. I think there are still some people who know, those who are old like we are, that here they called them "zoological zones." There were regions that were closer; they weren't the same regions that now we call the zone. When they started to create communities, to recruit people, they were advancing politically, but not through the *Consejo* or the *Junta*, just with the local and regional authorities and the CCRI.

At that time, the collectives were moving forward a little. Then there was a time, after we had been organizing for six or seven years, when the *compañeros* combined our work in corn, bean, chicken and sheep production. We did everything in work collectives, almost as if it were socialism; no one was allowed to work only for him or herself. It was all collective. We lived that way, clandestinely, but information started circulating.

– "What are these groups doing? Who are they? Are they communists? Are they socialists?" they accused us.

This went on for a time, but unfortunately starting in 1994, this level of collective organization started to disappear. I don't know if it was because of a mistake on the part of the CCRI, of those in charge – I don't know, but things started to fall apart. Most of the *compañeros* dispersed. We lost what we had been organizing, and now it isn't so easy to start over again. We hope that you understand that here in the Highlands it is totally different. We still haven't found the best way to work. Most of the municipalities do have communal land, but it is divided up. The *compañeros* each have their little piece where they put their houses, and the limited *milpas* that they can plant.

The problem is that in this zone, we do not have a way to organize ourselves in the ways that the other *caracoles* have described. This is our justification. We think that this is why, but maybe we just have not found the best way to organize ourselves. In any case, this is how things are today.



There are some *compañeros* who are trying to start collectives in each municipality, but it is an initiative by the communities, not the *Junta*. I am not sure how big the Municipality of Magdalena is, but they have been organizing since '94. They continue to resist – although not all of them – but they have been organizing themselves since then. The *compañeros* in Magdalena do part of their work individually and the other part is collective, like their coffee and other things, but it isn't managed by the *Junta*.

The *compañeras* in San Juan have just begun organizing themselves too, but not with their own money, others have supported them. They opened a collective store, but it isn't like the other *caracoles* who sell their coffee or their cattle to get their collectives started. It is totally different.

This is how we have responded to the economic attacks. I cannot explain in one day everything that the bad government is doing; they are totally fragmenting the communities. The community is separated into small groups – the official groups are in one place, the autonomous groups are in another. The official school is in one place and the autonomous school is in another. The *Consejo Autónomo* is in San Andrés and right across the way is the official one. They are face to face. It is very different in this zone and so I can't say in just a few words how the people are organizing.

Another *compañero* (Former Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ San Juan Apóstol Cancuc)

In 2005 when I was a member of the *Junta*, we made a plan for the seven autonomous municipalities, and I remember that we invested money in each one. I don't remember how much because that plan was made at just about the time that I was leaving my post, but we invested in the autonomous municipalities in order to begin work collectives.

For example, in my municipality where I still participate, Municipality of San Juan Apóstol Cancuc, we got about eighteen thousand pesos to create a cooperative store for the autonomous *consejos*. This is one way to resist the economic attacks. This small collective store still exists today. It doesn't advance very quickly, but it continues.

One time in 2010 there was a problem, a confrontation in the community of Pozo, and this cut down the amount of money available in the store. The *Consejo* used some of the store's money to maintain itself, but then the store was displaced and this really reduced the amount of money that the *consejo* had access to. But the work is still going on, the store is still there.

The *Junta* did this in the seven municipalities, not only in San Juan Apóstol Cancuc. They divided up these investments in 2006, so I don't remember how much went to each autonomous municipality.

In my municipality, San Juan Apóstol Cancuc, there are twelve small work collectives, but the truth is that it was not because of the *Junta's* initiative that they exist. We saw that there was no way to implement large collective projects because we don't have land, but we have been able to create small projects in most of the communities in this municipality. There are collectives that cultivate avocados, *milpas*, pineapple, and beans, and there is the store, but it is just a small cluster of work collectives.

There are also *compas* who are figuring out how to resist economically. We are always analyzing, always discussing, and always organizing. And so in this municipality, we are beginning to work collectively, but we are only just beginning. We have initiated this work, but we still have a long way to go. There is a lot that the *compas* still need to understand.

Those *compañeros* who are beginning to work in other places, in recuperated land in La Garrucha for example, are there now. They are beginning this collective work there, but they aren't going to live there. They just go, work, and come back, though someone is always present there because they have organized themselves in shifts. They are able to work this way thanks to our autonomous authorities who authorized the plan. We have not found another way to start working collectively, so for now we have to go there to work, even though it is far away. We still don't know if the *compañeros* will be able to endure this difficulty.

## Ideological resistance

Bulmaro (Member of the *Consejo Autónomo*, MAREZ Magdalena de la Paz)

We are resisting what the bad government is doing with their political parties in the municipalities. Because we are in resistance, the bad government uses its political parties to get into each community and then does whatever they can in our autonomous municipalities to convince us to abandon the struggle.

They put a lot of stuff in the media – on the radio or on television – but in the autonomous municipalities and in the zone we are organizing so that our *compañeros* won't be convinced by what the bad government says on the radio and on TV. We are responding with revolutionary ideology on community radio stations. In order to not be swayed by the bad government, we have *Radio Resistencia*, *Radio Amanecer*, and *Radio Rebelde*.

## Questions

*Could you tell us a little bit about what the bad government is doing and what is happening with the people in this thing called the “rural city” in Santiago El Pinar? What is going on with the people there?*

The government created a rural city in an official municipality called Santiago El Pinar. We live very close by and we are organizing what we are going to do. People originally from Santiago are living in this rural city, but what the government made there is not dignified housing – it is clear that the government deceived the people of Santiago. We, in our Zapatista organization, see that what the bad government is doing is really bad and we are getting more and more organized in the resistance.

Another *compañero* responds: The first thing that they did in the rural city was build houses. Our *compañeros* tell us that the building materials are made from that flimsy plywood, not like the sturdy wood that we have here. Right now, the buildings are inflated like balloons. They've been discarded because they can't withstand strong winds, the heat, and the rain. All of the materials have already gone bad.

Various families from different communities went to live there for a few days, and they stayed in the houses. According to what they say in the media about the rural city, the houses have a kitchen that is 3x3 meters, really small, and a tiny bedroom with a living room next to it. But you can't do anything there because you cannot have your cooking stove in the house. So right now the rural city is not working out. Some families went there for a few days, but as far as we know they had to return to their communities. Some other families are still there, but under very bad conditions. They say that there is a little hill up above the houses where they put water tanks, but that these tanks do not work.



They say that there is a bank there to lend money. I don't know if it is a state or a municipal bank, but it isn't functioning either. Everything there is just a shell at this point. It isn't anything like what they say in the media about the rural city – the name is very pretty, but there isn't actually anything there. Why would we believe that they have projects and other things? It is all lies.

This is part of the enemy's war. That is why if some *compañeros* from this zone have let themselves be convinced by these ideas it is because they were not able to see through them, not because they are going to have a more dignified life. Those who have left the organization or who are part of political parties do not have a better life than the *compañeros* who are bases of support. Everything that they are saying about the rural city and everything that they are doing is pure lies.

To provide an example of the ideological manipulation enacted by the bad government in Santiago El Pinar, they promised the women there that they would give them egg-laying hen farms. And in these types of hen farms, you have to have chicken feed. When they gave them these farms, they also gave them a lot of chickens to lay eggs, and so it was great in the beginning because the hens laid a lot of eggs. But the government didn't seek out a market for them to sell these eggs. So then hens laid a lot of eggs, but they couldn't compete with the major grocery stores that sell eggs.

So what they tell us is that they divided up the hens, but then the government stopped providing the feed, and the hens became sickly and stopped laying eggs. And so the women asked:

– “Now what do we do?”

– “We have to cooperate.”

– “But how can I cooperate if I already ate the eggs? Where will I find money?”

The hens died. It didn't work out as the bad government had said that it would. They do all of this just so that the cameramen come and document the fact that they implemented this project, that everything looks nice or whatever. But this all lasts one month, two months, and by the third month it's all over.

So that, among other things, is the problem. The houses are worthless because they inflate, as they say, like a toad. The women are accustomed to making their tortillas either on a hearth or over a fire on the floor, an earthen floor, but in this case the houses have wooden floors – plywood, really – and you can't have a fire there. And so they gave people gas cylinders but if you don't know how to use a cylinder the gas won't last you even a month, and so now you have the cylinders tossed out as garbage and stoves that don't work.

Also, we know that the life of peasants, of the indigenous, is such that behind one's house there are vegetables, sugar cane, pineapple, plantains, whatever there may be, as is our way of life. But [in the rural city] there is nothing, simply a house and that's it. So the people don't know what to do, because now their lands are far away and they need to go there to work, but it is expensive to come and go.

The politics of the bad government is to put an end to life in common, to community life, so that you leave your land, or you sell it, and if you sell it you're screwed. It is a politics of injustice; it creates more poverty. All of the millions that they receive from the UN, which is the United Nations, is kept by the bad government – state, municipal, and federal – and used to organize those groups that provoke problems in the communities, above all for those of us who are the Zapatista bases of support.

It is the continuation of the much-touted policy, which now they don't want to hear mentioned, and which we no longer hear about in the media: the Puebla-Panama Plan. Now it has a different name [Mesoamerican Integration and Development Project] because the Puebla-Panama Plan was highly criticized, but it is the same thing; they only changed the name so that they could go on individualizing the communities, to put an end to the life in common that still exists. And we know that the plan is going to continue because on the coast, near Motozintla, near Huixtla, they are saying that they are going to build another rural city; in Huixtán as well. What they really want to do is to put an end to the community. But there is no benefit to that project.

## Cultural resistance

Esmeralda (Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ San Juan de la Libertad)

The bad government is attacking us both culturally and socially. For example, they are attacking us through education, where they are trying to put an end to our knowledge and our language. We resist by having our education *promotores* teach in two languages. They teach us our languages so that we don't lose them.

Through clothing: Most of the men in our Highlands Zone don't use their traditional dress; they use commercial clothing. But the majority of the women use our traditional clothes.

Through food: In our zone, our food is based on corn, beans, *chiles*, squash, *chilacayote*, *chayote*, and other vegetables. We plant these things because they are our natural foods and we know that what the bad government is selling in the stores isn't healthy food.

Through housing: In this area, we are falling behind because it is rare to find houses in our communities that are built from the kind of building materials that our ancestors used.

Through *fiestas*: At the parties in our zone, municipalities, and communities, we still have our traditional music. The people still dance to this music even if they do so a little less than they used to.

Through religion: We still respect our sacred places, such as the springs and the sacred hills, and we combine the practices of our ancestors with the Catholic religion. We also play and dance to traditional music.

Moisés (Member of the *Consejo Autónomo*)

We are in the process of figuring out how to recuperate our culture because, before, our ancestors had their own culture. We are thinking about how to recuperate these practices because we are losing them little by little today. But there are a lot of things that we need to overcome, a lot of things to recuperate. For example, our traditional medicine. Before, our *compañeras* didn't use doctors to deliver their children; everything was taken care of in their own home, they had their own medicines, their own medicinal plants. There are many things that we are still in the process of recuperating; we have to figure out how to recover and maintain our culture.

Of course, they have attacked us in many ways, but we resist by disseminating our culture through our radio communication, our community radios. We also have to respond to the attacks: speaking out is another form of resistance, a way to make it known that what the bad government is saying is not true. This is some of what we talk about. Most of us can't translate perfectly what goes on here; we can't explain things well because we do not speak Spanish. Here in our zone we all speak our language, but we aren't embarrassed by this because it is our original culture.

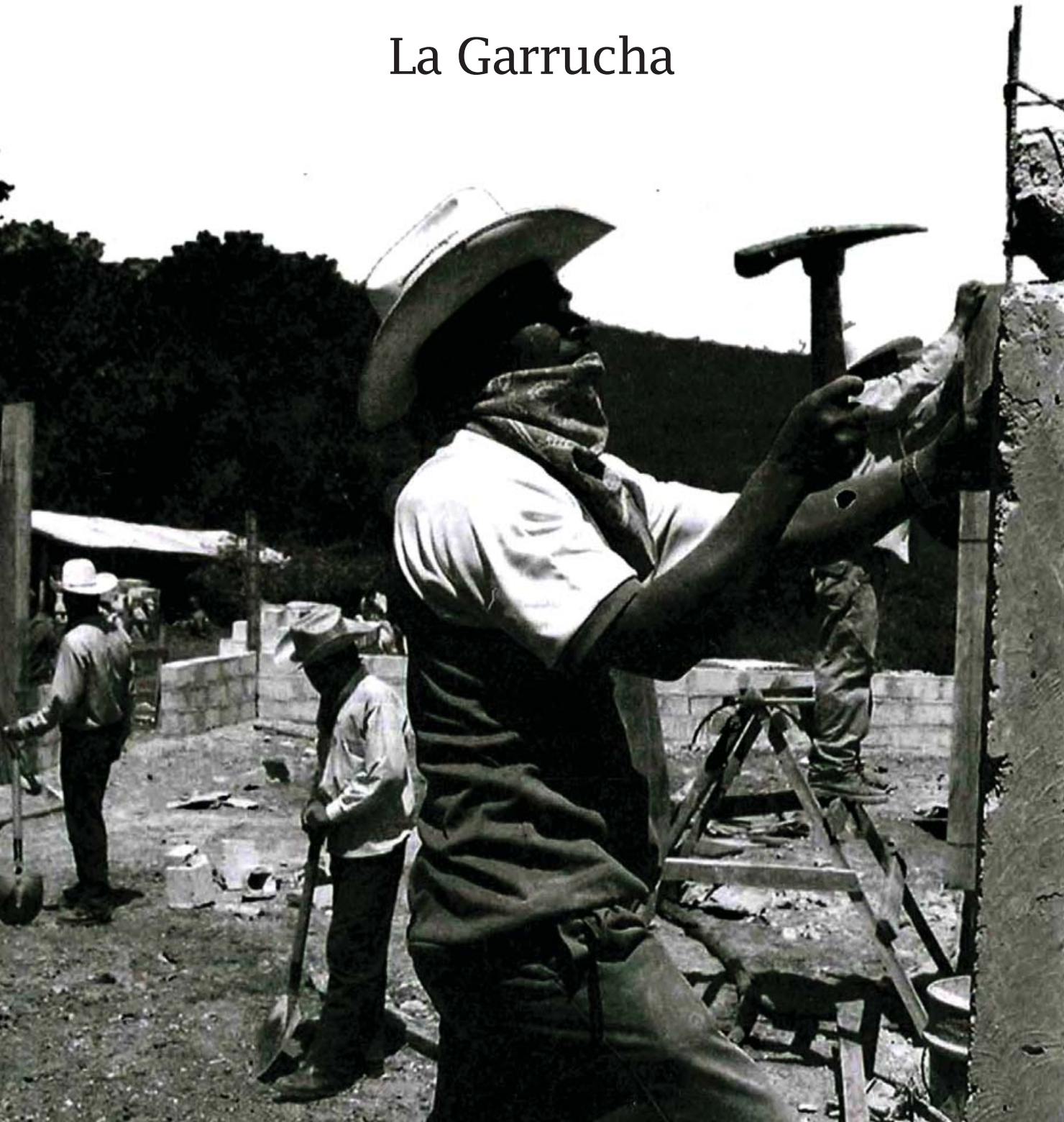




# Caracol III

Resistance toward  
a new dawn

La Garrucha





## Autonomous resistance

Roberto (Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ Ricardo Flores Magón)

The Zapatista bases of support in our zone are organized into four rebel autonomous municipalities: San Manuel, Ricardo Flores Magón, Francisco Villa, and Francisco Gómez. They organize in resistance against all of the projects and aggressions of the criminal and oppressive bad government.

We formed our own autonomous authorities in different work areas as local authorities (*agentes*, *agentas*, and local land authorities), municipal authorities (*consejos*, agrarian commission, honor and justice commission), and zone level authorities (*Junta de Buen Gobierno*, health and education advisors). Our authorities are created to administer our autonomous demands – land, housing, health, education, work, food, justice, democracy, culture, and independence – without intervention from, or relationship to, the bad government's officials.

We organize our people so that they are not demoralized by the bad government's projects and programs. We explain what the government's strategies and tricks are to make us forget our cultural identities, traditions, and customs – that is, the knowledge of our elders that speak truth. We explain what is happening in our country, Mexico, and what these bad governments at the state, federal, and municipal levels are trying to do.

When we began to organize ourselves in resistance, we formed our authorities and organized ourselves to work together as villages, regions, municipalities, and even at the zone level. We worked collectively in the *milpa*, cultivating beans, raising livestock, and growing coffee in order to strengthen and exercise our autonomy and to facilitate our authorities' work in each center, region, and municipality.

To resist does not mean not to work. To resist is to work, because resistance is made and constructed by the people. That is, resistance is our house, our roof, our shelter where we are together as villages, families, and as *compañeros* and *compañeras*.

As we are working and organizing ourselves we are attacked – the blows come from the three levels of the bad government who are the real authors of the attacks, they are the ones responsible for what is happening. They have sent various police forces to our villages, regions, and to the municipalities in our zone in order to intimidate us and crush our resistance. But our resistance has not ceased. On the contrary, we have continued working collectively alongside our people.

The task of the autonomous Zapatista government – what we do in our villages, regions, municipalities, and zone – is to coordinate our work with each level of autonomous government, for instance with the municipal and regional authorities. We have to work to figure out how to move our collectives forward, helping shape health and education within our village so that we can see the achievements and fruits of our resistance.



We put authorities in place such as health and education *agentes*. We carry out our work in order to serve as an example in our village, municipalities, and in our zone for our future *compañeros* and *compañeras* who will come after us. In each area, we designate *compañeros* and *compañeras* to carry out this work because as authorities in the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* we can't work in all areas. We have to name authorities to work, administer, and take control of these areas, and they are the ones who monitor if each area is working well or not. We do our work little by little. We never say that our work is done, but that we are constructing the path.

Valentín (Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*)

In *Caracol III La Garrucha*, we have been resisting since the armed uprising of 1994. The resistance began then because the *compañeros* from the CCRI gave us notice that from that day forward, we would not accept a fucking crumb from the bad government. Around then we also began our resistance against the military attacks by the government on our communities and our people. Thus began our resistance.

On February 15, 1994, the bad government's soldiers tried to enter the zone. As civilians, we didn't do anything, but the *compas* who are trained for this defended our zone and didn't let the military enter. The soldiers were forced to retreat and the people continued resisting. We maintained our resistance, even though we couldn't do anything because we cannot respond with weapons or anything like that. We know that civilians cannot take up arms and resolve a military issue.

That was in 1994. But then the bad government began sending soldiers and forming paramilitary groups and *Guardias Blancas* [see glossary] to harm each community, each *compañero*. Persecutions began against our *compañeros* who work as authorities. As Zapatistas, we organized ourselves even further in resistance.

Being in resistance means that for us, the bad government is our enemy. We cannot ask for anything from the bad government no matter what it offers us, no matter what it tells us, even if it tries to buy us off. This is because we are not fighting for crumbs, for a piece of corrugated metal roofing, for a bag of cement, a kilo of nails. This is not what our struggle is for. We decided that what we needed to do was resist all projects sent by the bad government. Their politics is to buy off *compañeros*, to buy us off or offer us money to turn in our arms, but we have never and will never turn them in.

Later, the bad government formed other paramilitary groups – “OPDDIC” [Organización para la Defensa de los Derechos Indígenas y Campesinos], “*Chinchulín*,” and “*Paz y Justicia*,” – to attack us on our recuperated lands and try to take them away from us. We as Zapatistas resisted. We did not allow them to expel us or to take our land because it was recuperated with the blood of our fallen *compañeros* in 1994. We can't simply give it away like it's nothing.

We maintained the resistance even as the *PRlistas* [see glossary] and the paramilitaries tried to do away with us, tried to expel us from those lands. All of us, *compañeros* and *compañeras*, children, and elders refused to leave our lands. They positioned themselves to confront us there, but we are also in position, and we will never give up the land. Many years went by like this, where they wanted to take our lands by force but we could not give them up. To find a solution for this problem – and to avoid a massacre – we let them remain in their position and we remained in ours, each in their place in order to avoid problems.

After this, the bad government started up with its stupid claims, which we all know about. It began to say that the Zapatistas had disappeared, that we were dead, that there was no one left. It even said that the Sub [Subcomandante Marcos] had died, that he no longer existed. This was all on television, on the radio, in the news, but we didn't believe it because we know it's not true.

Since the government has not been able to do away with us, it tries other things. Its biggest project in our zone is the cement flooring project – cement flooring for political party followers, they say, not for us. They offer corrugated metal for roofing, cement, and construction materials. But instead of the *PRlistas* having better housing, we Zapatistas in fact have more houses with corrugated metal roofing and walls made of wood, and the *PRlistas* end up even more screwed over than we are. What happens is that the *PRlistas* accept these materials but instead of building their houses they sell the materials to us and we build our own houses. But we buy the materials with our own money from our own work; we don't need this project from the bad government.

The bad government also offers other things, such as livestock projects or “PROCAMPO” [see glossary] for the *milpa*. We won't accept these things either because we are in resistance. The *PRlistas* also accept livestock, but within two or three weeks they are selling it off. We Zapatistas buy it, but we buy it with our own money; we don't accept the government project.

So everything that the bad government has done has turned out backward, although there are some *compañeros* who have gone over to that side. Not all of us have a clear political awareness. It is important to state this clearly because it is what is happening. The bad government began forming groups, buying off some people who had been authorities, ex-CCRI, or had worked in other areas. This has happened in *Caracol* III with an ex-*compa* named Constantino, alias “El Santo;” another named Faustino, whose *nom de guerre* was “Israel;” and another named Raúl Hemán who went by “Ausencio.”

Those ex-*compañeros* formed groups that sought to buy people off. They formed an organization called “ORUGA” [Organización Rural de Uniones en Gestoría de Asociados] – some of the other *caracoles* have mentioned it – which started in *Caracol* III La Garrucha. These ex-*compañeros* try to coerce people into joining their organization but in my community there are more Zapatistas so they haven't been able to. I am going to share this story with you because it is important.

One of these ex-*compañeros* had come to my community to form groups in support of their organization, and about 10 or 15 indigenous brothers had joined ORUGA. Some people in our community are in resistance, that is, we are a mixed community – there are Zapatistas and *PRlistas*. But we were able to make an agreement because there are more Zapatistas in the community; that is, the *PRlistas* must follow what we Zapatistas decide because we have full control. We explained what ORUGA was and that we would not allow them in our community because they are directly tied to the bad government and are traitors to our struggle.

This is how we managed to make ORUGA disappear there, and we told anyone who did not want to leave that organization that they would be expelled from the community because that organization is no good. While we were able to stamp out ORUGA in our community, it is still functioning in other parts of the zone. It has now appeared in another *Caracol*, and I think that they have a lot of people now, because that ex-*compa* found other *compañeros*. They managed to access some development projects, but under false names.



## Another *compañero*

The government of the dirty, corrupt Sabines buys off those who have stopped being Zapatistas. What happened in that community was that there were about 10 or 15 youth who had already joined ORUGA. They were the children of *ejido* members with voting rights, and they began to pressure all the *ejidatarios* [see glossary] with voting rights, saying that they had to hand over a portion of their lands. They wanted to be in charge there, because that is how the government trains them in order to start problems. When the *compas* learned this they said, as parents say:

– “Children do not give orders around here. How can they come here and say these things?”

Those youth wanted to divide up the land, but really it was the government that organized it all. It was intended to create problems, so that we would start fighting amongst ourselves, so that we would forget that our real enemy is the bad government.

This incident with ORUGA happened four or five years ago. The media and the newspapers reported that on such-and-such day, Comandante David, Comandante Tacho, and Comandante Zebedeo received thousands or even millions of pesos and that they met up [with the government] in Ocosingo; later it was reported that they met up in Comitán and again later in San Cristóbal:

– “So the Zapatistas say that they are against the government but no, their leaders are negotiating under water, or under the table, or however you say it, in secret.” These are the lies that the government spreads.

We don’t know exactly who did it, but in this zone falsified project documents started to arrive to our authorities, including the *Consejo Municipal* and the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*. The signature was forged with the name of a *compañero* who really is a Zapatista, and the stamp of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* was falsified.

They would present these documents to the bad government to make them believe that they were really Zapatistas, and that it really was the autonomous authorities who were asking for projects. For example, one of these projects requested 6 million pesos for the widows of our *compañeros* in the militia who fell in Ocosingo in 1994. They falsified these documents so that it would seem like it was *compañeros* who were asking the bad government for projects, but it was actually the people from ORUGA.

The leaders of ORUGA proposed these projects to the government without their own support bases knowing that they were doing so. They started getting rich and bought cars; they even bought a Hummer. The leader had his own car and owned various houses. So their bases of support began asking where all of these things were coming from:

– “Why does he have things and we do not?” To be sure, the leaders had taken out tiny, tiny projects for the bases, but for themselves, they had gotten money from the government through trickery.

When that happened, ORUGA’s bases of support realized what their leaders were doing, and in a meeting they asked to see the accounts. This caused a split in ORUGA because it was the leaders themselves who were the cheats, tricksters, and forgers. But they also already had those who would serve as their “replacements” – they had copied our way of organizing. It was these replacements who weren’t getting as much and who had noticed what the leaders were doing, and it was they who asked to see the accounts.

So they split. The leaders of ORUGA left with another little group and later created another organization, again with the idea of asking the government for projects. They called this organization URPA. Who knows what the hell “URPA” means.

Since knowledge about the mess they had made had gotten around by then, these new leaders of URPA presented themselves to the *compañeros* of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*. They said that they respected the Zapatistas and that they as URPA wanted to work together with us, that is, with the autonomous governments, and that they would not do bad things like ORUGA had.

They told us the names of the liars who were going around saying that they were Comandante David, Comandante Zebedeo, Comandante Tacho, and Comandante Pedro, which is how we learned who the impostors were; now we know who they are.

They outed themselves, as we say, with their own bullshit, with all the bad things that they were going around doing.

But it turns out that the new leaders of URPA also have a relationship with the bad government to access projects. The same ones who had spoken to the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* later went to tell that slimy Sabines that they, as URPA, had a good relationship with the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno*. Just weeks after they had gone to the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* to say that they would not cause problems, they went to Sabines to say that they had a working relationship with the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*. It may seem that these are their ideas, the ex-Zapatistas, but they aren't; they are paid for by the bad governments.

The bad governments' politics is to claim that Calderón and Sabines' governments are protecting the environment, and that's why they're always traveling to the United States and Europe – for the environment, for the Lacandón Jungle, for the Montes Azules Biosphere, and for who knows what else. This is what the bad governments say out there publicly, but it is not how it is here. The money from all of those projects that the bad governments present out there goes to pay the very worms, the very parasites that are trying to destroy us over here.

We are not lying, and we need to be clear that there are some who do leave our work. For example, some insurgent *compañeros* and insurgent *compañeras* leave their work but continue to be Zapatistas, whether as members of the militia, bases of support, health or education supporters, *consejos*, or whatever, but they do not lose their way. But these others I am speaking about have become parasites, maggots; they have sold out. They are always on the lookout to see if anyone leaves:

–“Ah, now I will go,” they say, like a worm, like a parasite, “to see if this person will come over to my side. Maybe if I show him all the dough the bad government gives me I can convince him.”

And the bad government presents this as environmentalism, using the Montes Azules Biosphere as a pretext.

What I want to say is that the *compañeros* from the CCRI have their eye on them. For example, in one village there is an ex-insurgent, and that parasitic ex-insurgent goes to the community where they know him and he says:

–“Here, I brought you something, and I will pay you such-and-such amount if you would do me the favor of delivering this letter to so-and-so,” that is, to *compañeros* from the CCRI.



And the other says, “Well, what’s it to me to deliver an envelope if he’s going to give me a thousand pesos – how is that any trouble? He’s going to give me a thousand pesos to do a simple task that will only take ten minutes, and just like that I will have my thousand pesos.”

So he goes and tries to deliver it to the *compañero* from the CCRI, but the *compañero* asks who sent the letter.

– “I didn’t ask, but it is for you.”

– “No. I don’t have any dealings with them. I will not accept their letter.”

– “But then what? Just open it and then burn it if you don’t like what it proposes.”

– “I don’t accept this letter. I don’t know who it is from.”

The ex-*compañero* – not the parasite who has already sold out but the one who hasn’t yet – then takes the letter and opens it himself. And he finds out then what they were proposing to the *compañero* from the CCRI:

– “Leave your work already, you don’t earn anything there. Think of all the time you have wasted there. If you are interested, let’s work together and you will earn millions of pesos,” the letter says. “And if you are able to convince that ex to come (referring to the *compañero* ex-insurgente), you can earn even more.”

What we have to understand is that the bad government is coming hard after us in particular; it is looking for new ways to make us sell out. Now I’m not talking about the “*Oportunidades*” project [see glossary], or the cement flooring and other government programs like housing or scholarships; as all of that is openly visible. What I am telling you about now is not visible, it’s hidden and targeted to only a few people.

And it’s not only that, there is another group that does other things with the same intent, but what is so messed up is that they are our own race, our same color, they are not white. This is happening amongst ourselves. For example, they are sent to try to get photographs of us, and if they manage to take a photo of Tacho without his mask, that photo is worth 500 pesos. The person running this scam was offering 500 pesos to a young *compañero*, a boy, telling him to take the camera and if Tacho is sitting there, for example, to take his photo. And if he does it, maybe Tacho wouldn’t say anything. Actually, he might even feel playful and pose handsomely for the camera without knowing that this youngster is earning 500 pesos from the guy sent by Calderón or Sabines.

One has to be careful even if it is a *compañero* who is taking your photo, as you may not know if that *compañero* is being paid. This happened recently, and we know who is doing it. One has to be very careful when there are celebrations in the *caracoles* especially, because the government wants to know our physical characteristics and what we look like in photos. I mention this because it has taken place in this zone and it is happening more and more. It is happening in La Garrucha and also in Morelia, both places where ORUGA and URPA exist, and they are going to continue trying to do this.

One has to be very careful with this issue I am telling you about, and when something like this is discovered the EZLN authority in the area must be informed, because it is a security issue for our struggle and our organization. The biggest problem has not been the forgery of our seal or our signatures. Yes, those are part of the problem, but the bigger problem is those who pretend to be Comandante David, Comandante Tacho, Comandante Pedro, and Comandante Zebedeo. We need to know who these people are, what their names are, and where they live. These are the principal manipulators, so the EZLN authorities need to be directly notified.

## **Dismantling the autonomous municipalities**

Elena (Member of the *Consejo Autónomo*, MAREZ Ricardo Flores Magón)

When the autonomous municipalities were dismantled, my municipality suffered attacks provoked by the bad government. On April 10, 1998, we constructed the municipal offices so that our autonomous authorities could work. Once they were built and inaugurated with the collective labor of our Zapatista bases of support, the bad government organized paramilitary groups to attack us.

Pedro Chulín was the leader of the organization that helped destroy our municipal building in the *ejido* Taniperla. Police and military forces also attacked us and took out arrest warrants against our *compañeros*. At that time, Ernesto Zedillo was president. But none of what they did could destroy our autonomy; autonomy exists in our hearts. So as Zapatista bases of support we got our villages together and met with our authorities to analyze what had taken place. We agreed to find another space to rebuild our municipal building as a collective project of all the Zapatista villages in resistance so that our authorities could tend to the needs of each village.

Roberto (Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ Ricardo Flores Magón)

When we inaugurated the autonomous municipal building of Ricardo Flores Magón, we publicized both nationally and internationally that our villages had constructed this building where the authorities named by the people would work as an exercise of our autonomy and a way to attend to our principal needs. Then the bad government of Ernesto Zedillo ordered the total destruction of the autonomous municipality.

The three levels of bad government – federal, state, and municipal – sent in their armies and police, and the *Guardias Blancas* participated as well. All of us who were taking part in the inauguration's festivities returned to our villages and when the various police forces arrived they destroyed and burned everything.

It seemed as though our work would stop there, but it didn't. In our villages, we sat down together, organized ourselves and talked, and we began to see, analyze, and study what had taken place. There were families who had been attacked for being bases of support, and there were other *compañeros* in positions of authority who had been taken to jail at Cerro Hueco. They also arrested a professor named Checo Valdés for simply giving lessons on how to dilute paint, how to paint a wall, and demonstrating what a community mural in Zapatista indigenous communities can be. Just for this they took him to Cerro Hueco.

There were many attacks against our municipality provoked by the bad government which completely destroyed our collective work. But our villages began to form our local, regional, and municipal authorities



anew. We began searching for another space to construct our municipal building, and we chose the *ejido* La Culebra. Once our authorities were named, they went to work in the new building where they would tend to the needs of our people. We named those authorities so that they could work on the issues that affect us, because the bad governments have neither interest nor ideas for how to resolve the issues our communities face. We have great needs but we will resolve them ourselves.

Once the authorities were named, we began presenting our needs to them, such as health and education. We began to realize that we could maintain the resistance, that we could endure all of the blows and everything that came our way. And the bad government saw that our autonomy continued. We began working, giving it our all, our greatest efforts, and organizing and encouraging our *compañeros* and *compañeras* so that our municipality could function.

The authorities began serving their shifts to hear and resolve the needs of each village, region, and municipality. This is how we went about it, working and advancing little by little. We began creating health and education work.

We have a clinic named “Compañera María Luisa,” and on the *ejido* San Jerónimo Tulijá we have a clinic named “Compañera Murcia (Elisa Trina Sáenz Garza).” This was a *compañera* who fought and died in the battle of El Chilar, near our location here. We named the clinic for her because she died there. Another center is named “Lorenzo Espinoza” after a *compañero* who was a *consejo* and was assassinated by paramilitaries and *Guardias Blancas* from the PRI. In Amaitic, both a municipal *agente* and a municipal *consejo* were killed. Those who killed them are not in jail, they are free, because the bad government does not do justice. The other clinical center we have, in Jerusalén, is named “Guadalupe González.”

In our municipality, the clinics’ functioning is coordinated with our authorities. There are *compañeros* and *compañeras* who are permanent health *promotores* and *promotoras* who take turns working in the four clinical centers. We also have visiting doctors who work for 20 days and rest for 10 days. We coordinate with SADEC in Palenque, so the medical doctors come as support from the UAM (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana).

Thus, the bad government could not destroy our autonomy. Why? Because, as we know, it exists in our hearts. When political awareness is mature, when political awareness is not weak, we can keep moving forward collectively, as men, children, women, and elderly all working together.

When the bad government saw that it could not destroy our autonomy, it sent another project our way called “Planting African Palm.” There were soldiers stationed next to where the project was developed – their barracks were right near our village – and so drug addiction, alcoholism, and prostitution began to grow. The *PRListas* had requested that they be stationed there, and when they came, the project to plant African Palm came with them. But African Palm is absolutely useless. It is destructive to the land, and it’s like a cancer that can’t be stamped out; even if you cut it down, it remains.

When the government saw that our resistance was very strong, it began organizing paramilitaries, such as the *Guardias Blancas*, to create conflict among *ejidatarios*. But it did not work out as planned, and when the government saw that it could not destroy our resistance, it created yet another project, called “PROGRESA” [see glossary]. This program did arrive in the area, but it was clearly just a measly handout. We talked about all of this together day and night; over bread and coffee we would study the bad government’s strategies. This was in 1997.

Our municipality and our region mobilized in order to kick out the army stationed there – about 1,500 of them – but we could not get them out and they have been there ever since. It is as if the bad government planted the seed, divided the community, and from there something like four parties were born.

Now the bad government says that it will name four *comisariados*. We who are autonomous have our own authorities, such as the *Comisariado Ejidal* [see glossary] and the Vigilance Commission. But the bad government wants to name four *comisariados* in the same place, saying that theirs are good and ours are bad, but what it is really trying to do is take land.

The surface of the *ejido* is 26,000 hectares [~ 64,250 acres] with 532 *ejidatarios*, and within the *ejido* there is a large piece of land, about 6,000 hectares [~ 14,825 acres]. The government wanted to keep those 6,000 hectares because it is mountainous jungle, wild and untamed, with water and stone-filled areas. The government wanted to buy that reserve, and if it couldn't buy it, it wanted to install other *ejidatarios*.

Those are the bad government's dirty tricks, ideas it has taken all the way to the region of Palestina. In Palestina they say there is a sort of buffer zone around protected reserves, then there are urban areas, and there are lands that are worked – that is, plots for farming. They tell the *ejidatarios* there that they will pay them 2,000 pesos each month to stop working the reserves, that is, to stop working in the buffer zones. In Palestina right now one plate of food costs 280 pesos and a bottle of water costs 24 pesos; in the *compañeros'* store in Oventik, it costs 5 pesos. They wanted to do in our *ejido* what they did in Palestina, build cabins, tourist centers, hotels. And who is going to sleep in that hotel? Who is going to eat that 280-peso plate of food? Who is going to buy that 24-peso bottle of water?

This is part of what is happening there. In Ricardo Flores Magón, there are large bodies of water such as the Nahá and Metzabok lagoons, and in San Jerónimo Tulijá there are great lagoons that measure from 2 or 3 hectares [~ 5 or 7 acres], to 4 hectares [~ 10 acres], to 10 hectares [~ 25 acres]. They wanted to do the same thing there that they are doing in Palestina, set up that program where they pay 2,000 pesos to the *ejidatarios* every month or every two months.

There was a *compa* there who worked in the *Junta* and when the bad government began doing all this. That *compa* immediately went to inform the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* what was going on. Some *PRlistas* and members of other organizations were also opposed to this plan and sought support from the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, asking for advice on what to do.

We created an official letter that asked the *Comisariado Ejidal* from the PRI not to not allow the project, because it would affect our *compañeros*. We explained that we are in resistance and cannot accept government projects, and that in that *ejido* we have *compañeros* and *compañeras* who are bases of support.

After that, we held a meeting with many of the *ejidatarios*. That *ejido* is the largest one in our zone. Zapatistas and non-Zapatistas alike got together and drew up a plan to oppose the bad government's plan. There were some *PRlistas* there as well, as the *PRlistas* were split, with some in favor and others opposed. We sent the official letter and we also called a meeting. The resolution to the problem is currently pending, but this is between the *ejidatarios* themselves. What we did [as the *Junta*] was tell them not to accept that project, and they have respected our request.

The problem still needs to be resolved among the *ejidatarios*. We told them that they will need to work it out themselves because as *Junta* authorities, we can't get too involved as these are not recuperated lands. The *ejidatarios* have to decide based on which side has the majority.

Gerardo (Education Coordinator of the Zone, MAREZ Francisco Villa)

In our municipality, similar things have happened. In 1999, a bunch of police came to Paraíso, a village in our municipality. They wanted to force the community out, but the *compañeras* who are bases of support organized themselves to kick the police out. *Compañeros* from other villages in the municipality also began to arrive to help. When the police saw this, they began firing their weapons, shooting bullets into the air to frighten us. They didn't actually want to kill our *compañeros*; they only killed a dog that belonged to a *compañero* from that village.

When the police saw that the *compañeros* were not scared but instead confronted the police even more strongly, they returned to Ocosingo seeking reinforcements. Three days later they came back, this time not to the same community but to another, an *ejido* called Nazaret. The police positioned themselves there and began to organize and train "ORCAO" [Organización Regional de Cafeticultores de Ocosingo] groups.

Soon a problem arose there: they detained a *compañero* from the CCRI and shot at a member of the *Consejo Autónomo*. The *compañeros* on that *ejido* were unable to work their lands as they were in danger; they had to go up to the mountains because the enemy was close by. So the autonomous authorities began trying to figure out what to do, and the people organized themselves to figure out how to kick the police out.

Once we organized ourselves, *compañeros*, *compañeras*, and even children came to kick out the police. But the *compañeros* who were from that village got to the police first, and by the time we got there they had already thrown the police out. We kept watch there for some time, because before the police were forced out, they had prepared a paramilitary group in that *ejido* that remained, and so the *compañeros* still could not really do their work. That was a problem, but the police did not return. So this is how we resisted in that *ejido*, as we have learned that these kinds of problems have long occurred in different municipalities.

On another occasion we had another problem in our municipality when a group from ORCAO arrived wanting to invade the municipality. The authorities began to organize themselves and question how this problem could be resolved. We wanted to find a solution that would not force us into a confrontation with these *compañeros* non-Zapatistas because we know very well that those who are not Zapatistas are deceived by the bad governments. So the solution was to create an agreement where we divided the land equally. That area, the municipal center, is on 2 hectares of land, [~ 5 acres] so we kept one hectare for the autonomous municipality and the other hectare went to the other group. That was the agreement, and it continues to be respected.

This is how problems are dealt with: with patience, proposing a solution that may not always be immediately accepted but is always seeking a way to solve the problem. This is how we solved this problem, and it is how we have resisted to this day.



## Defending recuperated lands

Mauricio (Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ San Manuel)

The bad government forms violent groups to try to create conflict and force us off our recuperated lands. In 1996, a group from the organization ORCAO entered Peña Chabarico in an attempt to evict us from the land. We resisted and they retreated. They left that village, but returned in 2007 to occupy recuperated lands. At the same time, in 2007, another group from ORCAO entered the community of Benito Juárez. We resisted there for six months.

The ORCAO organization returned to Peña Chabarico and occupied recuperated land in La Pimienta. This group of people occupied a 40-hectare plot of land [~ 100 acres] and never left. They held onto the land and there was no way for us to recover it. This is what has happened here and these are the kind of problems we have been resisting.

Another problem began to unfold in August 2009 and continued until 2010. This time, some of ORCAO's groups entered the community of Santo Domingo and we resisted them for a year. With the bases of support in that municipality, we took turns guarding the land. During the first shift, 300 of us from the bases of support arrived to keep guard. After we saw that the situation was more or less under control, we reduced the numbers of *compañeros* keeping guard.

Eventually we reduced our number to about 40 *compañeros*. We didn't know if the problem would be reignited. We had been in resistance in Santo Domingo for a year when our autonomous engineers went to clean the boundary markings of the recuperated land. The most serious problem arose then because there was a confrontation with groups from the ORCAO and there were only 40 of us keeping guard so we didn't have sufficient strength. Our *compañeros* were wounded and detained. Four *compañeros* were held and tortured in an *ejido* called Santo Tomás.

Mateo (Member of the *Consejo Autónomo*, MAREZ San Manuel)

In Santo Tomás, the confrontation was even more serious. We were resisting with the Zapatista bases of support, but when that confrontation took place, it hit us hard because we had no idea what would happen to us. We only had 40 people guarding that land on the first day of the attack. Our *compañeros* were in the village, they were coming through the alley and heading down the road where those groups from other organizations were coming up, and there they got into a confrontation. This is how four of our *compañeros* were detained.



In the end, the people from those other groups didn't last very long because we are used to resisting everything, any provocation sent our way by those organizations that sell out to the government. That is why they couldn't dominate us. This time we guarded the recuperated land for over a year because they kept threatening and insulting us even as they left that village, saying that they were going to come back. That's why we organized ourselves at the municipal and regional levels to guard that land for one year to see if it was true that they would be back.

And so nothing happened. They left us alone because they saw that they could not do anything, couldn't act on their sinister ideas. We know very well that we, those of us in the struggle, are not there in the interest of money. We are in resistance. If we have been able to keep up the resistance it is because we organize our work collectively at the municipal and village levels. It is thanks to this that we have been able to keep up the resistance. Whenever we need to mobilize, everything that we do is possible because of the work organized in the municipalities.

## **The bad government's ideology**

Ramón (Coordinator of the Zone, MAREZ Ricardo Flores Magón)

We see that now with modern communication media, such as cell phones, radio, television, and film, we are being attacked within our communities, our villages. In our zone, we see that there are a lot of *compas* who, even if they are really bad off, have cell phones even though they can barely afford them.

The government tries to screw us with these sorts of things that we try to buy even if we don't really have the money. We also see that there are indigenous brothers who do not have good houses but they have televisions and fancy furniture, objects that the government uses to dominate and screw us over. Why? Because even if we can't really afford it, we waste the little money that we do have on them.

In our zone, we are working on this through the education system. We explain this problem to our education *promotores* who then teach our children to follow the path of our customs, not to keep wasting money on these things. This is what we are doing in our zone so that our children can understand their rights and their culture. In our education system, we instruct the education *promotores* to teach about the rights of the people, because this is principally where the government orients its attacks. But we are also, simultaneously, building our autonomy.

Everything the bad governments do to us, they do because they cannot figure out how to finish us off. That is why they invent lies about having contact with our authorities and all of those other things they make up. But we as communities hold municipal meetings and village visits to explain to the *compañeros* that none of this is true, and explain to them how our organization is advancing.

# Resistance in autonomous health and education

Darinel (Health Coordinator of the Zone, MAREZ Francisco Villa)

Through our resistance as bases of support, we have exercised our autonomy without needing to establish a relationship with the bad government. We have trained *promotores* for different areas of work, such as general health. The progress we have been able to make concerning general health in our zone is thanks to the process of the villages themselves in naming their own health *promotores* who are trained to establish and develop a true health for our people. The *compañeros* and *compañeras* who are health *promotores* work in the municipalities and villages, and serve the people in good conscience and with discipline and respect. They take the patient's illness seriously, and they decide if the patient can be cared for in the clinic or if the patient needs to be transferred to a hospital. The patients who are sent to the hospital have a reference letter from the *promotor*.

We are also working on sexual health in the zone, both in the villages and in the municipalities. The *compañeras* in the area of sexual health take turns in the zone's clinic and are working to lower maternal and infant mortality. Those *compañeras* have been able to detect certain illnesses in *compañeras* and non-*compañeras* who come to the zone for treatment. The *compañeras* who do this work always give talks about Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) prevention. They determine if the *compañeras'* and non-*compañeras'* illnesses can be treated in the clinic or if we need to take them to a hospital. We are also working in the three areas [of traditional health] with bonesetters, herbalists, and midwives, though these areas are not yet at 100%. But the *compañeras* are getting these three areas off the ground. The *compañeras* work together, as health work for the people is always coordinated.

Ramón (Coordinator of the Zone, MAREZ Ricardo Flores Magón)

Through our autonomous education system we resist the bad government which brings official [state] teachers into the communities. In some communities that have both Zapatista *compañeros* and *PRlistas* there are teachers from the state education system as well as autonomous education *promotores*. They try to crush autonomous education by making fun of the *promotores*. The idea they have going around in the official schools is that the *promotores* do not know anything, and they make fun of us because the children of non-Zapatistas are given scholarships and provisions. They spread these types of ideas in order to try to do away with autonomous education, but we are working with the coordinators, with the *consejos* of education, and with the *consejos* of the municipality, so we know that they will not be able to stop us and we are going to continue moving forward in autonomous education.

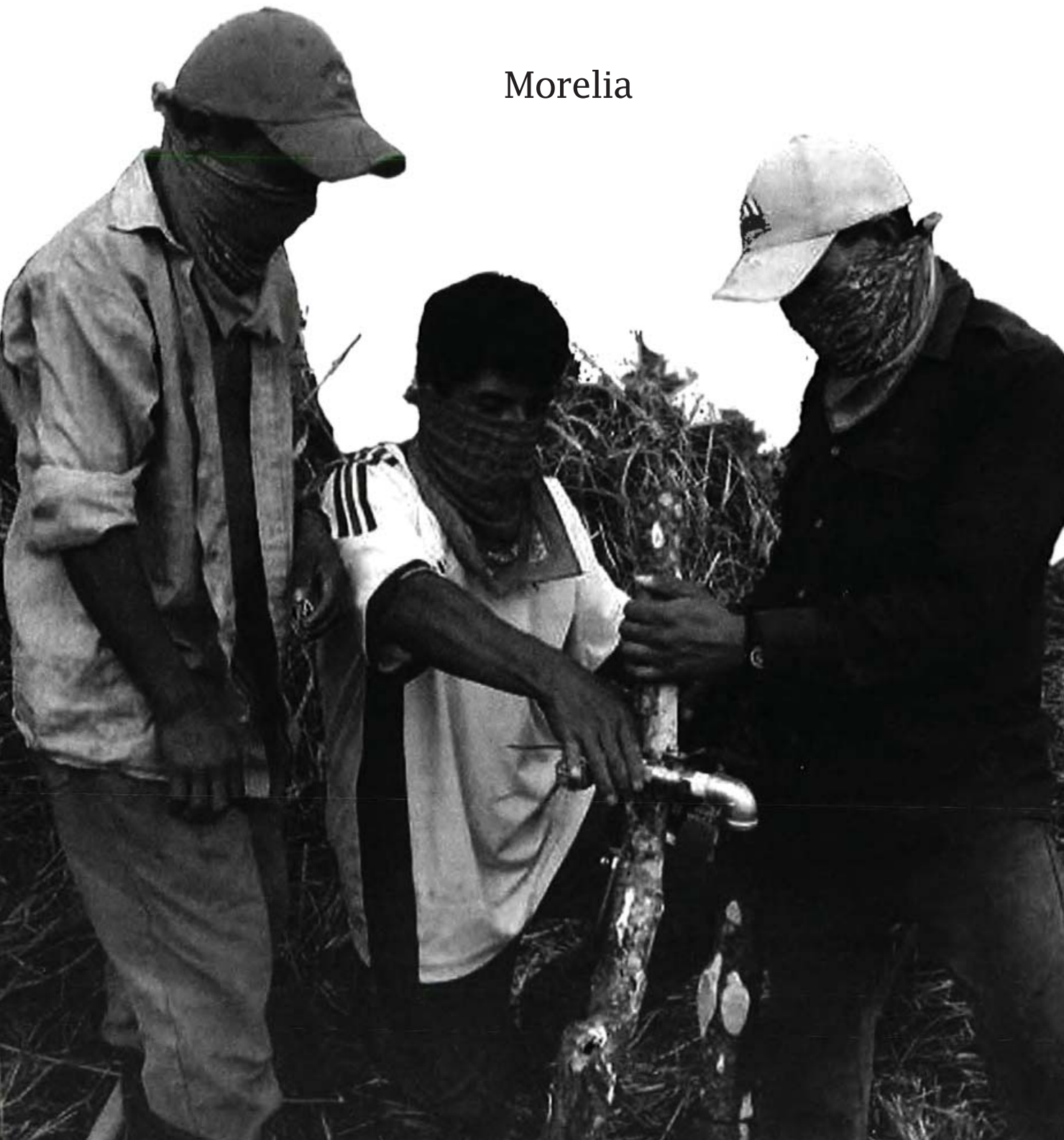
In places where both official teachers and autonomous education *promotores* exist, the *compas* have never given in; they keep working with and teaching the children. There are some *promotores* who say that they feel bad when they are mocked as they work, that they cannot concentrate on their work with all the criticism and so they leave their positions, though even if they stop being *promotores* they continue as bases of support. When this happens, other *promotores* are named so that the work of education can continue. So instead of regressing, autonomous education continues to move forward. As part of the education system we commemorate the anniversaries of the fallen *compañeros*; we raise the flag, and we stage theater productions in our municipalities. This allows those from the official schools to see that we are not retreating and that we continue resisting despite their criticism and taunting. This is how we have resisted thus far.



# Caracol IV

## Whirlwind of our words

Morelia



# Introduction

Rosa Isabel (Base of Support, MAREZ 17 de Noviembre)

When we rose up in arms in 1994, the government repressed our communities militarily with tanks, planes, and helicopters. Many communities were attacked, including Morelia and Nueva Esperanza. They attacked us again in 1995, 1996, and 1998, always trying to enter the *Aguascalientes*, destroy our municipalities, and wipe out our collective work projects.

We *compañeras* united with the *compañeros*, and there were many of us. In response to our uprising, the bad government introduced some programs into our communities and municipalities that sought to divide us, such as “PROGRESA” and “Oportunidades.” Some *compañeras* began to accept these government programs and lose our collective discipline. These programs were designed to destroy our collective work, but they were not successful because we resisted them and kept working our recuperated lands. Every time the government has sought to crush our efforts, we *compañeras* and *compañeros* organize ourselves in defense – the *compañeras* most of all, as we are the ones who kicked the soldiers out of our communities.

We have been able to resist the bad government’s repression by working collectively. We were in fact working collectively well before we recuperated our land, and today, throughout the villages, the municipalities, and in the zone, we continue our collective work in order to sustain our resistance.

There are different kinds of collectives in the villages, with some managed by women and some managed by men. For us, working in collectives is very important because whenever there is a common need in the zone, the municipality, or in our communities, we are able to meet this need with the resources generated through the collectives. For example, if the *compañeras* and *compañeros* have a little extra profit from their collective work, they can share the expense of buying something we need, like a communications radio.

So this is how we work. There are still communities, however, that don’t give much importance to collective work. In our zone, in our municipalities, and in our villages, we keep pushing the importance of working the land because it is the only thing we have. Our communities do grasp its importance, and so we have created *ejidos* and we keep on working the land.

Our communities have also grasped the importance of having a good education, good health, and our own forms of production. This is why we first began forming our authorities. Today we have our municipal authorities, which make up a different system than the “parliamentary representatives” that we had before. We established the autonomous municipalities and created the autonomous *consejos*, and to this day we continue working with the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*.

We continue resisting the bad government’s attacks through this organizational form. We also study what is happening at the national level and analyze the current reality. This allows us to explain why the bad government tries to counterattack everything we create. But this just leads us to resist even more. We understand that we have to keep working the land and organizing ourselves as *compañeros* and *compañeras*, so that our collective work can continue advancing.





Gerónimo (Former Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ Lucio Cabañas)

There have been attacks and repression by the bad government in many different places. Here in *Caracol IV*, the role that the *compañeras* have taken up against those attacks has been crucial. The community of Morelia is in *Caracol IV*, and it is quite large. It used to be that the majority of its residents were *compas*, but later it divided and so now the majority are *PRlistas*, *PRDistas*, and *PANistas* [see glossary]. But before, back when the military would come to repress the community, the *compañeras* from the community would get together and form the first line of defense against the soldiers.

One time, the military occupied Nueva Esperanza for two or three days. The *compañeras* responded by organizing a mass mobilization, gathering support from within the municipality and throughout the zone. Thanks to that mobilization, the military retreated, though it never stopped harassing us. Since it has found that it can't crush us militarily, it tries other repressive methods.

These new methods are making it very difficult for us now. The organizations "ORUGA" [Organización Rural de Uniones en Gestoría de Asociados] and "ORCAO" [Organización Regional de Cafeticultores de Ocosingo] continue plaguing our zone, and the bad government's economic projects keep intensifying. In the *ejido* Morelia, which is a very large community, the bad government is trying to build a rural city. What it wants is for us Zapatistas to think that they're helping the people out, which it hopes will then demoralize our bases of support. But it's not working because the collective work being done there has reinforced the people's resistance.

Morelia is the seat of *Caracol IV*. What we've seen happen there is that the bad government has built a lot of housing and also decided to install a drainage system. But there isn't any water in that community, so why the drainage system? Here we can see that it's only a tactic to stir the people up. The bad government hired some non-Zapatista brothers to work on that project for one year, and during that time they did not tend to their *milpas* so they had no corn and no beans. All they did was dedicate their time to construction work.

Right now, people aren't even living in those houses because, although they may have gotten a house, that drainage system is a joke. Why would anyone want the house if there isn't any water? Those houses are constructed with a place to put a stove and a bathroom, but nobody has any of those things – those houses are merely a shell. These sorts of things are created to deceive the people, and this is how the bad government's methods work today.

## Ideological resistance

Saulo (Former Member of the *Consejo Autónomo*, MAREZ 17 de Noviembre)

The bad government is attacking us with these methods, here and in the other *caracoles* as well. But our communities want nothing to do with those things it hands out to political party followers. Our communities, together with our autonomous government, focus on working the land. This is the path of our struggle, individually and collectively. We have some communities that don't work on recuperated lands but they do have a piece of land where they have a *milpa*, grow coffee, and sometimes raise livestock or other little things like beehives and poultry.

This is what our resistance is currently facing, but our collective work projects are helping us out quite a bit because they help our commissions function. For example, if the *comisariado* has a meeting to go to in the municipality, funds from the collective work can for his transportation. And this way there's no need for every *compañero* to donate individually. But we don't always use resources from the collective work projects when we need something. Sometimes, if we need to do something big, the bases of support will each contribute.

We're seeing that both collective and individual work is moving our struggle along and making our organization stronger. There are villages where *compañeras* and *compañeros* manage collective work projects. If the village has a need, sometimes the contributions come from the work the *compañeras* do. For example, if something needs to be purchased or if a delegate or a teacher needs some support, the *compañeras* start to think:

– “Why don't we contribute a bit from the collective work we do as *compañeras* to help out the *compañeros*? We can help support the teachers like this, too.”

This is how some villages do it, and we're seeing that the collective work the *compañeras* do really helps out because sometimes they do end up supporting a teacher or helping with one of the village's needs. It's not always like this, of course, because the reality of collective work is that it doesn't generate much profit. But when there is an urgent need, we check to see if we can use some of those resources. We don't constantly look to depend on them, however, because if we did we would deplete them in no time.

So this is how some villages do it, but not all of them. In those villages where their autonomous government is awake, they are doing well. If the authority in that village is asleep, however, then sometimes there's no collective work and that's not good. It's kind of like when an idea comes to us but we don't take it seriously or try it out because we think it will turn out all wrong. Well, of course then nothing happens. But if we try it out in practice, even if it turns out all wrong then at least we learn from the attempt; this is also the fruit of our labor.



This is more or less how our resistance work functions. *Compañeros* who work the *milpa*, grow coffee, or raise livestock will sometimes sell part of their harvest or some of their animals and can still be left with some economic resources. But because the bad government is attacking us with their projects for cement flooring, housing construction, home improvement projects, and other things that they send over to the *PRlista* brothers and party followers in other communities, these people have gotten quite accustomed to money. Their sights are set on the bad government, and they spend their time waiting for more money and more projects to come their way.

Sometimes these brothers who are party followers sell the corrugated metal roofing the bad government gives them. The government thinks that it's improving its party members' lives by handing out these things, but the reverse happens. The party followers end up selling all this stuff, and our *compañeros* in resistance buy it with the fruits of their own labor. This ends up benefiting the *compañeros* because one sheet of corrugated metal roofing costs something around 180 pesos at the hardware store, but the brothers who are party followers will sell it for 100 or 80 pesos. They also receive cinder blocks for construction, and those cost about five, six, or seven pesos at the hardware store. But they end up selling them to the Zapatistas for two or three pesos.

Maybe one day you will see that some of our new communities have houses with corrugated metal roofing. This is the result of our *compañeros*' own work. We are in resistance and we do not waste the fruits of our labor. It's the party followers who come around selling these things.

By now, the bad government has seen that their project has gone all wrong. Their handouts have not benefited their party followers, because the *PRlistas* sell off everything they receive, and the Zapatistas are able to buy them up cheaply. Once the bad government caught on to what was happening, it started sending a carpenter over with the building materials so that the materials would be immediately installed instead of sold off. So now when the materials arrive, so does the carpenter, because the bad government noticed that it was the Zapatistas who were improving their homes.

Since '94 until today, the bad governments have tried attacking us through various methods. But their goal is the same: to try to crush us or discourage us in our struggle. They want to convince us to leave the struggle, but we have our minds set on our resistance as our hope, and we keep our sights set on witnessing the future of our work. The bad government can keep on pouring thousands of pesos into handouts and construction projects, but we still won't abandon our struggle because it is in our consciousness. We are not falling for any of those things that the government is doing; we don't even think about those things. On the contrary, the government's plans are backfiring on them.

As a municipal government, we are also resisting by finding ways to do collective work. Our autonomous municipal governments resist the bad government's ideologies, and this is why each municipality promotes collective work.

The Municipality of 17 de Noviembre has a livestock collective and a municipal store in the region Independencia. We have also planned out a collective women's project at the municipal level, and are currently in the process of starting there with livestock. It's not done yet, but it has been thought out and discussed with the villages. So far, the region has planted a *milpa* and some grass to serve as pasture for the *compañeras'* cattle.

There is a store called "Maya" in the Municipality of Lucio Cabañas, in the region Puente, which was created by the communities themselves. There is also a new coffee collective, and we're thinking that this will help out with the municipality's needs. It's what we're hoping.

In the Municipality of Olga Isabel, our *compañeros* have a coffee collective right in the municipal seat. They also have a municipal store called "Nuevo Amanecer," located in the town of Chilón.

The idea with the collective municipal work projects is that they will help us along in our resistance. But also, as the autonomous government mentioned, the municipalities, the communities, and the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* are all promoting autonomous education and health. This is the idea we have going in our municipalities, but the bad government also has plans to stop us. For example, in the area of education, the government provides scholarship programs for children to go to official schools and even secondary schools, which we had never seen around these parts before '94. It sends these projects over to the *PRlista* communities as a way to crush our plans for autonomous education.

We are also making advances in health care; we now have municipal clinics and regional clinics, and in some cases clinics located in the micro-regions. The bad government tries to counteract our health projects by building clinics in the *PRlista* communities. But those clinics aren't even open; they build them and then the clinics just sit there closed all of the time.

What ends up happening is that the *PRlista* brothers will sometimes come to our municipal or regional clinics asking for an appointment. Obviously, the bad government's plan is not working out because it just builds the clinics but does not provide the medicine or doctors required to run the clinics. In our clinics, on the other hand, we are seeing advances, and it has a lot to do with the knowledge of the *compas* who work as *promotores*.

The *Junta de Buen Gobierno* is also promoting collective work such as the store "Arcoíris," the autonomous bank, and the livestock collective. These were created because the collectives can help us out in the future. We're not saying that we're seeing the results right now, but that we're thinking of ways to improve them because one day these collectives can help us on the path to our autonomy.

Something new that we're thinking of doing for the zone is to create a coffee collective in the region Independencia in the autonomous Municipality of 17 de Noviembre. Most recently, we started a cacao collective in Bolon Ajaw, in the Municipality of Olga Isabel. These collective work projects are part of the zone, and we hope that one day they will help us out. We aren't expecting to see the results of these projects now, but rather they will play a role in helping us out in the future.

Gerónimo (Former Member in the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ Lucio Cabañas)

Collective work isn't easy. There are difficulties sometimes, but we always find a way to improve so they can continue to develop. The collective work projects on all three levels – local, municipal, and *Junta* – are done in coordination.

The *Junta's* main responsibility is to promote collective work in the municipalities and in the villages so as to provide ourselves with some sustenance. Sometimes the brothers who are political party followers have problems because they accept all of those projects from the bad government, stop tending to the land, and eventually stop working it. Those programs they count on like *PROGRESA*, *Oportunidades*, and also “70 y Mas” [see glossary], have put them in a difficult economic situation because these projects really only go to small groups in a few communities.

We also have as an example those clinics that the bad government builds. There are two of them in the region Independencia. One is in the Municipality of 17 de Noviembre in the *ejido* Venustiano Carranza, a large *ejido* inhabited mostly by *PRlistas*. The clinic is only a shell. The person in charge of it has a car and dedicates more of his time picking up passengers and charging them for transportation than he does to tending to the clinic. And in the clinic there is no medical attention or anything else. The other clinic is in another large community called Belisario Domínguez, also a majority *PRlista* community. It's a shell as well, and is often used as a warehouse rather than a clinic.

Maybe the party followers themselves recognize that they're being lied to by the government, who knows. But as for our living conditions, they're really getting better even with the little bit that we've been able to do. On health issues, for example, we organize workshops for bonesetters, midwives, and health *promotoras*. All of these work projects are done in order to counter the bad government's ideology in our communities.

## Economic resistance

Floribel (Former Member of the *Consejo Autónomo*, MAREZ Lucio Cabañas)

Before 1994, we Zapatistas didn't have anything because we hadn't yet recovered the land that we control now. But that never stopped us; we organized ourselves to move our organization forward. We looked for ways to work in our communities, and little by little we built our economic resistance, a very important aspect of our organization.

Once we recovered lands in 1994, we organized ourselves in our communities to create different collective work projects. These have included chicken collectives, vegetable gardens, small stores and other things that can be done within the communities themselves. That's how we continue working to this day. It's not very much, but we can say that we're advancing a little. Most of the communities in our zone have collective work projects, but there are other communities that do not because there are only a few *compañeros* living there. So we can't say that all of the communities have collectives, but the majority of them do.



The *compañeros* are also working in *milpa* and bean collectives, and in some large communities there are cattle and coffee collectives. This is how we go along, little by little, and we now have made a few advancements in the zone including a collective store in the commercial warehouse, a livestock collective, and a new coffee collective.

We also have two swimming holes that help us out economically. They're in the tourist centers: one in Agua Clara, which is in the Municipality of Comandanta Ramona; and the other in Tzaconejá, which is in the Municipality of 17 de Noviembre. These two tourist centers are part of the zone's collective work projects, and they've helped us out a lot economically because if the *Junta* needs something, they can draw the resources from there. We've also been improving aspects in the two tourist centers. So these swimming holes have helped our organization in that sometimes we can divide up the resources they generate among the municipalities, and each municipality will see which of their expenses their portion will cover. They may also invest it in other collective work projects or use it for other things, such as transport fare.

## Questions

*How did you go about recovering or fixing up those two tourist centers you just mentioned?*

The one in the Municipality of Comandanta Ramona is on recuperated land, but that recuperated land is in the hands of the *PRlistas*, indigenous brothers from Agua Clara. As we well remember, it is part of our recuperated territory from 1994, so we had to organize to defend that area.

First, the municipality organized itself to defend it, but it was unable to do much. So it passed the task over to the zone's general assembly, and the zone decided it would defend that land. We have about 30 hectares [~ 75 acres] of land in that area, within which the tourist center is located. So the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* began promoting its use. Previously, the federal government was using it, but we decided to start putting it to use to generate some economic resources.

The swimming hole in Tzaconejá is in the official seat of Altamirano. The official government used to manage it and people visited from Comitán and Teopisca during Holy Week [Easter]. But after we took those lands where it is located, we no longer allowed the official government to run it. There were problems, of course. The municipal president tried to butt in, saying he was going to build *palapas* [thatched roof cabins] and bathrooms, to modernize everything. But once the place was in our hands, we organized ourselves and used the resources generated by the tourist center itself to make the *palapas* and repair the bathrooms. Visitors continue to come, but now it's the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* that manages the site. It wasn't easy, but we did it; we recovered it because it is ours, it is in our territory.

*How do the women who run the livestock collectives manage? Do the compañeros support them?*

The *compañeras* that work in the livestock collective do receive support from the *compañeros* in some communities. They help out by rounding up the cattle and vaccinating them.

## The work of the *compañeras*

Miriam

Collective work did not begin in 1994 – we’ve been doing it since 1988. We were working clandestinely at the time, and we didn’t know all that well what collective work was. But we started nonetheless. We began by raising chickens together or by planting a garden collectively. We didn’t do this in all of the communities; only some communities began this sort of work. We were already in resistance as of then because the situation was very difficult.

The first collective began in Morelia, which is a very large community where everyone used to be a *compañero*. With the earnings we generated, we were able to purchase some things for our organization, such as communication radios and other things that helped us prepare for the ’94 uprising. This is how we women went about supporting the *compañeros*.

With Zedillo’s betrayal in ’95, the military entered the community and we all had to flee. We had to abandon all of our collective work, and it got ruined. When we returned three months later, we saw that there was nothing left; everything had been used up by the *PRlista* brothers, who had been allowed to stay. We then began reorganizing the collective work projects, but it wasn’t working very well because we saw that when one community worked and shared what they produced with another community, that second community couldn’t seem to understand the collective work involved. But little by little we began understanding and today we are working collectively.

The *compañeras*’ collective work uses part of its earnings for transportation costs for the *compañeros* to attend meetings, but they have also invested part of the earnings in another work project: the collective stores. The earnings from those stores have then gone on to buy the *compañeras*’ livestock in some communities. But as we say, our organization seeks equality between men and women, so we understand that we women do not own the collective work; it belongs to the *compañeros* as well.

Those communities who have understood the importance of collective work and have been able to move it forward have learned from their experience that the men and women must support each other mutually. The *compañeras* buy the livestock, the salt, and the medicine; the *compañeros* treat the livestock with the medicine and clear the pasture. But when the community has a special need, like when a radio needs repairs or batteries, the women will sell their livestock and contribute right along with the *compañeros*. This is how we walk together in our work.

When we throw *fiestas*, for the founding of a new community for example, maybe the women will contribute livestock for the celebration this year, and the men will contribute next year, alternating like that. This is how the women’s collectives are functioning now; they can now take the initiative and move the work forward on their own. It used to be that the regional authorities or members of CCRI had to come up with the ideas. But now the *compañeras* understand how to develop their collective work, and they develop their own ideas.

To be clear, it's not done this way in all communities. We're still lacking this level of organization in other municipalities because not everyone has come to understand the importance of collective work. And also, there are municipalities with very tiny communities – where there are maybe just four or five *compañeros*. In those communities we haven't been able to build collectives yet. But we're working on trying to figure this out at the level of the zone.

Gerónimo (Former Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ Lucio Cabañas)

With regard to the *compañeras*' livestock collectives, we as *compañeros* aren't going to leave them all alone to do the work. It is very labor intensive to clear the pasture and put up the posts for fencing. But for sure, the *compañeras* will be the ones administering the project. It is their collective; we just help them out with some of the tasks, just like they help out with the *compañeros*' collectives. So the work is very much a joint endeavor.

We don't see the *compañeras* engaging in collective work in all of the municipalities, but this is for various reasons. The *compañeras* can't do the *milpas* all by themselves, so they need to create a collective. For example, the Municipality of 17 de Noviembre is where the largest ranches used to be, the really massive plantations where the Castellanos, the Kanteres, and others used to live. Those ranches were vast expanses of land, about 500 to 1,000 hectares [~ 1,235 to 2,470 acres]; those ranchers occupied the entire canyon, everything along the bank of the river. But not anymore. Today those lands are new *ejidos* that have declared themselves to be in resistance. This is part of our task now, to decide, through the zone's assembly, how to defend those lands. We have to work hard there, in the *milpa*, growing coffee, in raising livestock, in all of the collectives. This is where our focus is now because we have in our hands the land that belonged to our ancestors; the land we recuperated because we had no land to work before. Now the land is ours, for the purpose of building our economy.

If a *compañero* has already harvested his corn, beans, and other products, it's so that he can sell them and have some resources to care for his family's needs. We don't want to do what the party followers do: they are stuck relying on the crumbs that the bad government throws their way. These brothers sit and wait for the government's handouts to come, and when they think it's on its way the women go to the store and buy on credit, promising to pay everything back when their *PROGRESA* arrives. They are so dependent on this program, but what will happen to them when it ends?

We are responsible for giving guidance to our *compañeros* and *compañeras*, explaining to them why we have to work hard. This same responsibility runs through the *Juntas*, the municipalities, as well as the communities. We made the landowners flee from those lands, and so we need to show that we're working those lands. So we're working, and it's difficult, but we do see results. Before, some of our *compañeros* were living in the hills, without adequate houses – just small constructions of straw and grass. But now, as a result of all their work, the *compañeros* have houses with corrugated metal roofs. They may be modest houses with wooden walls, but they are real houses. And where did the money to make such houses come from? It came from our own work on the recuperated land.

This is how we go about constructing buildings in each village, in the municipalities, and in the communities. This is the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*'s task – to promote work plans, to see that they're being carried out, and to make sure no village falls behind. The *Junta* must check to see how the work is going: Is it advancing? Is it turning out well? Is it failing? What problems exist? Have the problems been resolved?



# Cultural resistance

Manuel (Former Member of the *Consejo Autónomo*, MAREZ 17 de Noviembre)

We Zapatistas in the Morelia zone choose our authorities at the three levels (local, municipal, and *Junta de Buen Gobierno*) without organizing political campaigns, dropping our votes in a ballot box, or requiring some sort of credential. Why don't we do these things? Because we don't want to do the same thing that the bad government does all over the country.

We select our authorities in *Caracol IV* through the assembly. We select our village authorities – including the *comisariado*, *comisariada*, *agente*, *agentea*, *consejo*, members of the Vigilance Commission, or any other local authority – through a local general assembly. All of the *compañeras* and *compañeros* of the community participate in choosing them: we nominate two or three people and then vote. The assembly chooses and supports whichever person they want named as an authority.

When the name of a *compañero* or *compañera* that has been nominated is said out loud, we vote by raising our hands. Whoever receives the majority of votes is named as the authority. That is how it is done in the communities and in the *ejidos*. Once named, whether as a *comisariada* or *comisariado*, *agentea* or *agente*, or whatever role is assigned, this *compañero* or *compañera* must go to the autonomous municipality to present him or herself and receive information and work tasks from the *Consejo Autónomo*.

Selecting the municipal authority is done in a similar way. Everyone gathers, a municipal assembly is summoned, and the authorities gather to hear everyone's nominations. For example, when we name the *Consejo Municipal*, three, four, or five nominations are made. Then the majority of the assembly selects who will be the president, who will be the *consejo*, and so on, until all of the commissions are filled. Sometimes, the *compañeros* who are elected are present at the municipal assembly; but other times someone is elected who isn't present; they may be back working in their village and don't even know they were named as an authority. When this happens, the *comisariado* or the *comisariada*, the person responsible, arrives to that village to inform the *compañero* or *compañera* that he or she was named as a municipal authority. Then that *compañero* or *compañera*, even without having been present when named, accepts the responsibility because it's a part of the duty that comes with being a member of the organization.

Municipal assemblies are also held in the zone. Each municipality is tasked with naming a delegate to participate in the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*. Selecting the person takes into account his or her discipline and behavior. This is how we've done it in our zone when we name authorities at all three levels of government.

When the new authorities in all three levels have been named, we organize a traditional inaugural ceremony. For example, in the municipality, the elders, the new authorities, and the outgoing authorities all wear traditional dress. We present our elders, who give advice to the new authorities on how to govern well throughout their three-year term, and bid farewell to the authorities who have completed their term. They also tell the new authorities that they should care deeply about their community. The elders burn incense, as is our custom, and we play regional music. In our zone, we have Tojolabal and Tzeltal people, so all the elders gather at the municipal level and use both traditions in their work.



This is how we do it at the three levels of our autonomous government. When a municipal authority has been selected and begins his or her work, we all respect that person because we chose him or her as an authority. The authorities coordinate to organize a general municipal assembly and then present their proposals. The *comisariados* and *comisariadas* go to that assembly. Some items can be decided in the assembly, but others can't, so the *comisariados* and *comisariadas* take the latter points to the community to decide. The community analyzes these points and gives their response, which is presented at the next assembly.

The authorities' task is to promote collective work with the coordinators so that it's never left by the wayside; they are always promoting collective work. This is how we carry out cultural politics in our *Junta de Buen Gobierno*.

Rosa Isabel (Base of Support, MAREZ 17 de Noviembre)

Our elders are tasked with the transfer of authority. When new authorities are about to enter their posts, the elders begin preparing the incense, the flag, the drum, the flute, and the holy water. We find a location for the ceremony, and those that are leaving their posts wear traditional dress and prepare to pass on the *bastón* [see glossary] they received when they first entered their position. The new authorities then also go to the location of the ceremony, carrying the flag, the drum, and their traditional dress. When they arrive to where everyone is gathered and waiting for them on a kind of "stage," they line up below the stage. The outgoing authorities are also in formation, holding their *bastones*, and they each take turns greeting the new authorities and handing over their *bastón*. The new authorities receive the *bastón* and take their seats.

The elders are also organized in formation, with the very oldest holding a particular position of recognition. Once all of the *bastones* have been transferred, the elders, who are old and wise, begin advising the new authorities. Sometimes they pray for the new authorities to be able to do their work well, because being an authority is no small thing. The elders know this as they themselves were authorities in their municipalities before. The elders give us advice, as is customary in our culture, because we have to take the task of being an authority very seriously. So the elders tell us that we must be very responsible, and when they finish they get into formation and offer a blessing to the new authorities. This is the work of the elders, and we respect it very much.

Once the new authorities have been granted their responsibilities we do three or four dances to our traditional regional music. When the old authorities transfer their responsibilities over to the new ones the *compañeros* who are bases of support who are present, both men and women, legitimize the transfer of authority. Once the transfer is completed, then all of the assembly's bases of support get together and share a meal with the new authorities. Sometimes afterward we have a cultural event, with a *fiesta* and a dance. This is how we carry out the transfer of authority in our municipalities, and the zone does it this way as well.



Within our autonomous structures, we must grant respect to our authorities. Whether the authority is a minor, a young adult, or an older person, we grant respect equally because that person is an authority. They didn't buy power like the political parties buy votes by giving out food, beer, liquor, so that people show up to vote for their candidate. It's not this way with us. Here, it is the people, the *compañeros* and the *compañeras*, who select their authorities. And because they themselves have selected their authorities, they have to offer their work with happiness so that their authorities can also do their work well. Of course, if an authority does not do his or her work well in the three years they hold their position, they will face the criticism of the bases of support and the other authorities.

The transfer of authority takes place joyfully. Those leaving their posts have turned in their final reports and account balances for the donations and revenue the *Junta* or municipality has received. The people have approved these final reports and so there is joy in the process. They dance throughout the night of the transfer of authority, because the new authorities have been inaugurated and the communities are happy since they received a satisfactory final report from the outgoing authorities.

Compare this to the official governments, currently under Juan Sabines and Calderón, who waste many millions of pesos on their electoral campaigns. Even worse is the fact that they make all kinds of promises during their electoral campaigns and never keep any of them afterward. So the difference is that the *compañeros* who serve in our autonomous government are in their posts because the people offered them these governing positions, not because those *compañeros* offered to govern. They were chosen and they have to accept the job of fulfilling the needs of the communities.

We see that the bad government wastes a lot of money, and this is bad because that money belongs to the people. We are not wasting our people's money. The little bit that we spend is not to pay the authorities, but to do what is necessary for the communities, this is the role of a good authority.

## Questions

*On the topic of culture, some traditions and customs are being lost, including traditional dress and our original languages. What is it like in your zone, and what plans are there to recover all that has been lost?*

The languages in our zone are Tzeltal and Tojolabal, and in some places we also have Tzotzil. There are municipalities, such as I 7 de Noviembre, where both Tzeltal and Tojolabal are spoken, and so the government there is always composed of half Tzeltales and half Tojolabales. That way, communication between the government and the people can take place. There are also various languages spoken within and between the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* and the autonomous municipalities, so because we have Tzeltal, Tzotzil, and Tojolabal languages, we have to circulate information accordingly and translate for those who understand Spanish.

This is how we manage to communicate, and in cases where everyone understands Spanish we also work effectively together. Regarding traditional dress, most people wear what they want. There are a few who continue wearing traditional dress, but we can't lie and say that everyone continues to.

*What roles do elders have that can allow them to help the authorities through their life experiences?*

During the time when we had the “parliament,” as of ’94, the elder *compañeros* served as examples, taking charge as *agentes* and covering other commissions. Today, the elder *compañeros* have to be respected. They have turned these responsibilities over to us. We respect them because they share their experiences with us, explaining and reasoning with those of us who are serving in positions of authority. This is how our elders accompany us in our activities and help us during those moments when we need them. At other times, they are in the communities taking part in other activities.

*Speaking of cultural resistance, we see that in each community, but especially in those communities where the majority of the residents are PRlistas or follow other political parties, there are middle schools and high schools, including COBACH [Colegio de Bachilleres de Chiapas, state-sponsored high schools]. At that level of government schooling what they emphasize most is learning Spanish, and English too.*

*In my zone, in Caracol I, we haven’t found a way to counter this in our autonomous schools. We have Tzeltal, Tzotzil, and Tojolabal, and we are really losing Tojolabal. Unfortunately, we don’t have an education plan or program where maternal languages can be studied. Do you have a plan in your schools so that the languages aren’t lost, or do all the children speak their mother tongue fully?*

To counter the loss of our mother tongues, the students in our secondary schools are learning these languages. We have programs to teach languages in each village or municipality at the third level of the primary school. Each educator or *promotor* teaches Tzeltal if the student *compañeros* are Tzeltales, and if they’re Tzotzil, the *promotor* will speak in Tzotzil. We have a program for this sort of language study in all of our schools.

We don’t speak our mother tongues perfectly, but in our local and secondary schools our languages – Tojolabal, Tzeltal, and Tzotzil in this zone – are being studied and practiced. The kids are always asking how a certain word is said in Tojolabal, for example. When we know the answer we respond, but there are some things that we don’t know the exact words for in Tojolabal anymore, and so we have to work on this. Sure, we are promoting our mother tongues throughout our schools, but there are still things that we have lost and words that we’re mixing with Spanish.

This is why our education workshops focus on rescuing our mother tongues. Many *compañeros promotores* and *promotoras* who attend our primary education workshops speak their original languages. So those that speak Tzeltal receive their teaching materials and guides in Tzeltal, since they will be teaching in Tzeltal. Those that speak Tojolabal have their material and guides in Tojolabal. And there are villages that have lost their language and now speak in Spanish, so the *promotores* in that village have materials and guides in Spanish. This is how we’re trying to recover our languages, although it’s not easy. But yes, there exist programs in the municipalities as well as in the zone that help promote the recovery of our languages and customs.

# Social politics

Omar (Former Delegate of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, Region Che Guevara)

Let's begin this theme with education. Why do we speak so much about education? Because education is very important to us, it allows us to theorize and to practice with the students.

But we did not always have autonomous education. We first had to convince ourselves that we needed it. Many of us that are *compañeros* today used to be *PRlistas* before 1994. Others were already Zapatistas, and many more have become Zapatistas since then. But early on we still had ideas from when we were *PRlistas*. When we recognized the need to teach our children ourselves and when the official teachers left – we threw them out – we began to figure out how to create our own education. And that's when the criticism began.

– “You mean you actually know how to teach? But you're a Zapatista. You know nothing,” they would say.

But that was all nonsense. We did in fact create our own education, and we continue creating it, all of us together. As an example, in my village, which is located in the region Che Guevara, about a year and a half ago some *compañeros* left the organization. They had four children: one of them had been in first grade and the others in the second and third. Those ex-*compañeros* live in a neighboring community, San Antonio, where an official government school was started and they transferred their children there. When the teachers and supervisors met them, they said:

– “These four children have already been to school.”

Why did they say that? Because the children had passed quickly through our autonomous school's first grade, second grade, and one had even gotten to sixth grade. That ex-student later went on to compete for and win a spot in an official municipal school, and later a state-level school. And to this day, the question persists from the bilingual teachers in the official school:

– “Who taught you all?”

– “The Zapatistas taught us,” they respond.

– “But who was your teacher?”

– “My teacher was the son of our Zapatista *compañeros*.”

– “How did they learn those things, and how come we don't know how to teach these things? Where did they find this training, these Zapatistas?” These are the questions the supervisors keep asking and what the official teachers still can't figure out.

This is our education, and it is why we're working hard. But when we first began, we received threats from the *PRlistas*, from the governments, and from the military. It was worse with Zedillo's betrayal in 1995, when 60,000 soldiers invaded our territory. We suffered much persecution, mistreatment, and military harassment simply because we wanted to have our own education. But we weren't scared. On the contrary, we began organizing our education as a way to both protest the military invasion and carry out the work we needed to do.

Today, we can clearly see the results. We didn't endure hunger and live off of *tostadas* in vain. We did it so that we could design our own education. And it really is true that *tostadas* give you strength and wisdom. When we first embarked on our education work our collective practices helped us out a lot, we learned together with the *compañeros* and *compañeras* in each village and in each municipality. We learned how to confront those damned soldiers that invaded and harassed our communities. In that process the *compañeras* learned how to defend themselves; they used clubs, rocks, shouts, and insults to kick out the soldiers. I saw it myself and I always think about it as the moment when the *compañeras* realized that they had it in them to confront the military, and demonstrated that they could indeed do so.

The socio-political problem that the bad government had with us is that it wanted to crush us and not allow us to create our own education. But it was unable to finish us off because we organized ourselves carefully to work in our own education and in our work collectives. So thanks to our organization, and thanks to our *compañeros* who first gave us this idea, we were able to collectively create our autonomous education.

Years went by and after things settled down a bit, the bad government began finding ways to work against our autonomous education more quietly – under the water – we could say. They began introducing projects to build government schools, especially the COBACH. In my municipality, they wanted to build various high schools, and today there are two of these COBACH schools that they built in the same year. The idea with these schools was to kill off our secondary school, but their plan hasn't worked out because they have many internal problems and are ruining their own project.

There's a village called Cuxuljá that had hundreds of students in the official schools. These schools also have community swimming pools and places where the students eat and sleep. But the problem was that many of the young ladies studying there would come out pregnant, and drug abuse started to grow. They found two or three kilos of drugs on that campus. With that, the *PRlista* brothers have realized that this isn't working out. Some of those brothers were our *compañeros* back in '94, but today they are ex-Zapatistas, while some of them have always been *PRlistas*.

–“Why is it that we trust the government?” they ask. “Our daughters are now in trouble, they are addicted to drugs.” This is what those brothers are today worrying about. “And the Zapatista brothers keep on resisting,” they continue, “and they have good students who are well prepared, and their teachers come from their own communities.”

This is what the brothers who follow the political parties are realizing now. But what we can't figure out is why, with merely the crumbs the government throws their way, they keep quiet. The government wants to finish us off with its social politics, but it can't.

In the year 2000, we had a problem with our collective store, “Arcoíris.” Ex-Zapatista brothers from ORCAO wanted to take over the place. When we first opened up the store in a house we had recovered, the ORCAO attacked us. The store was near an intersection, and so they arrived from Altamirano, Ocosingo, and San Cristóbal, threw out all of our merchandise and piled it up outside. Because we were unable to defend ourselves at that time, we had to let them stay there for the time being.

It didn't paralyze us, however. While the brothers from ORCAO took over the house, we began selling the merchandise outside at the intersection. We had to make a space outside, laying down just a tarp

for the merchandise because we didn't have the building. We handled the problem this way for about a month, and then we started to think about a plan to take back our house.

The zone mobilized to defend that space, keeping guard over it for six or seven months and keeping it running. The encampment we made there was really strong and those lousy people from ORCAO were unable to remove us. Although those bastards did try to get smart with us, threatening us by saying they knew who we were, because they had been Zapatistas before. We didn't want to provoke them, we needed to find other means to have our little store so that we could generate economic resources for the collective work in the zone.

We had another problem on the socio-political front. It was a problem again with the ORCAO, but this time it was over land. The ORCAO invaded our land; they didn't ask, they just came in and seized it.

– “I'm standing my ground and I'm not going anywhere – the land is mine!” they said.

By the time we realized it, they were already on the land working. We confronted this problem collectively. The best idea we came up with was to use our animals as support. We used the little bit of livestock that belonged to the zone's collective and the community closest to where this happened. We guided the animals onto the land so that they would become the front line of confrontation, and we would follow behind them. We did worry that one of our animals might die, but nothing like that happened. This was the first time our animals came to the defense of our recovered land.

This is the problem we have with ORCAO and also with “OPDDIC” [Organización para la Defensa de los Derechos Indígenas y Campesinos], and now we have additional problems with the groups that have come from La Garrucha into our zone: the ORUGA and the URPA. The bad government is looking for ways to get them onto our lands because they really want to fuck us over, but they can't. Thanks to all of those problems we experience, we are always thinking of new ways to defend ourselves. All we need to do is sit together and think. The *consejos*, the *Junta*, the *comisariados*, the *agentes*, and also our CCRI all support us in planning and thinking through the best ways to solve our problems and defend our recovered lands.

We have also heard on various occasions that the federal and state governments have gone around saying that the Zapatistas no longer exist and that the *comandantes* have sold out. The people heard this information on the radio and television. So we began to look for ways to explain to the *compañeros* why these lies are spread.

Some *compañeros* who heard these lies did start to wonder if they might be true. But their doubts are assuaged when they see our mobilizations as an organization. For example, the march of 1,111 Zapatistas in September 1999; and the one where 5,000 Zapatista delegates traveled throughout the country. All those who were lucky enough to go and share their word at the national level demonstrated to everyone our response to these lies: it's not true that the Zapatistas are dead or that our *comandantes* have sold out.

The bad government looks for thousands of ways to mess with the people psychologically. This is why these encounters and collective work projects are important. Thanks to them, we can exchange experiences and devise new ways to organize together.



## Support from our brothers in solidarity

Saulo (Former Member of the *Consejo Autónomo*, MAREZ 17 de Noviembre)

The solidarity projects help us in our resistance by funding construction projects that benefit the communities. We used to refer to our new *ejidos* as “population centers,” but we changed that on February 14, 2009, when we began referring to those areas as *ejidos* or *colonias* [new small communities]. The brothers in solidarity helped us install electricity in these areas. We have electricity in those places that were established before '95, but not so much in those areas we established afterward.

We have also had solidarity help with water projects. The large majority of our new communities have potable water through a pipeline. This and the buildings they have assisted us with have helped us out a lot because we don't have many economic resources in the municipalities and in the *Junta*. The support our brothers in solidarity have given us has always gone to projects that are useful for our communities and municipalities. At times we have also used that support for equipment, either for our secondary schools or for our municipal clinics. We have also sometimes used that support for training in the area of production. This is how we are using the support that our brothers in solidarity provide. It really does help.

## The bad government's provocations

Manuel (Former Member of the *Consejo Autónomo*, MAREZ 17 de Noviembre)

One of the provocations the bad government sent our way was Zedillo's betrayal on February 9, 1995 when 60,000 soldiers were sent into our zones. It was very difficult for us during this time because many villages and zones had to seek refuge in the mountains in order to avoid confronting the enemy. We had to withstand all of this and find ways to sustain ourselves. This was one of the most serious provocations from that particular federal government. But since even this did not get rid of the Zapatistas, it had to try other things so that our organization couldn't continue advancing.

So we Zapatistas had to figure out a way to resist. One important way we organized our autonomous municipalities was through the *compañeras*. We needed to be able to get our work plans and documents through military checkpoints and the *compañeras* were able to do it because they were never frisked by the military. They had a very large role in this. But when the bad government saw that it couldn't get rid of us militarily it began organizing paramilitaries. In our zone, in *Caracol* Morelia, the *compañeros* that were most harassed were those that accompanied Comandanta Ramona in the area around Bachajón and Chilón. They were harassed by OPDDIC, the *Chinchulines*, the *Aguilares*, and *Paz y Justicia*. These are the paramilitary groups the bad government created to confront our bases of support and take our recovered lands.

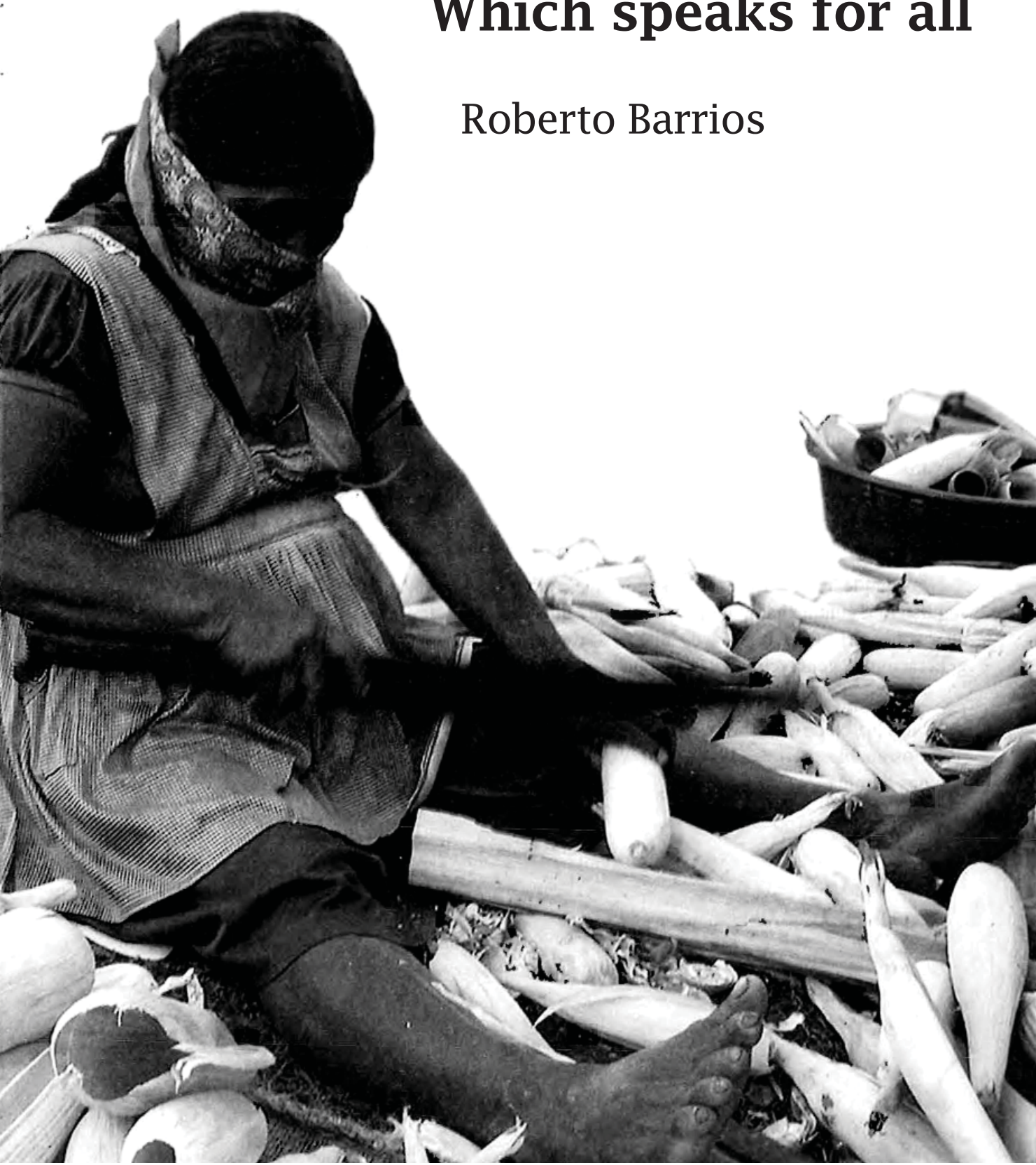
Our *compañero* bases of support withstood all the blows from the paramilitaries and to this day we continue working on those lands. Right now there is a problem in the Municipality of 17 de Noviembre in a place called Ranchería El Nance, where the ORCAO and OPDDIC were present. The *compañeros* have been maintaining an encampment there in order to defend the land.



# Caracol V

Which speaks for all

Roberto Barrios



# Autonomous government in resistance

Ana (MAREZ El Trabajo)

The resistance in our communities, the resistance that we are carrying forward in our struggle, did not begin in 1994 or in 2003. Rather, indigenous peoples have been resisting for over 500 years.

This resistance began when the Spanish arrived to conquer our people. They wanted to impose a different form of life on us, to destroy our governments so that they could rule or govern. They wanted to take away our ancestors' lands so that they could capture and control the people on their ranches and make them work as servants. They wanted to change our way of thinking, imposing their education and religion on us so that we would believe that they were the wise ones, the good ones, and that they had the most advanced language. They wanted to make us think that in order to live happily and in abundance there had to be inequality, so that some could live in luxury without worrying about those who had nothing.

This is the thinking, or the ideology, of the capitalist system today. But our ancestors understood that this was not how life should be, and that they had to struggle against this imposition. Some fled to the mountains to escape slavery on the ranches; in other cases they rebelled against the *patrones* [bosses], killing their oppressors. They risked their lives to maintain their language, their religion, and their knowledges.

Although during the Spanish Inquisition the church authorities punished our ancestors severely, at times almost annihilating them completely, our ancestors held onto their ways of life in their memory and passed them onto their children, generation after generation. That is why we are here and why we continue in resistance.

But resistance is not merely refusing the support of the bad government, or not paying taxes or electric bills. Rather, resistance is constructing everything that we need to maintain the life of our people. That is why resistance is one weapon in our struggle to confront the capitalist system that dominates us.



# The politics of the bad government

Valentina (Vigilance Commission)

The rich are the ones who control the government and in their neoliberal politics everyone who has money is free to buy and sell all of the means of production. The rich who rule – both in Mexico and in other countries – are the owners of the big factories, companies, businesses, and lands.

The bad government has different levels, starting with the federal government, which is the highest authority and can execute its power throughout the country. Next are the state governors, who are the authority within each state. Then come the municipal presidents who wield power in the municipalities. There are also other structural components, such as the *comisariados*. These levels of government all function as a means of control, because everyone must abide by the laws in the constitution and those who govern reform these laws to benefit the rich.

In Mexico, there are three State powers: the executive, the judiciary, and the legislature. These powers share the rich's way of thinking, and they unite in a structure to weaken the people in resistance. They are chosen through elections, where people vote for the candidate of their political party – the PRI, the PAN, or the PRD. But the candidates from all political parties serve only the rich. The rich are the ones who select the candidates that suit them; it's not the people who choose.

The federal, state, and municipal governments appoint the officials responsible for managing the government agencies, such as the Federal Electricity Commission, the Secretary of Social Development, the Secretary of Education, and all other social services.

These agencies are supposed to provide services to the people, although that is not how it works because the government officials appoint their friends and family to these management positions. These appointees also come from the wealthy ruling class, and so they decide which services the people need according to what will benefit the rich businessmen.

The weight of the work necessary to maintain this system of government – which controls us through taxes – falls on the peasants, workers, street vendors, students, teachers, and all of the poor people. They pay us poorly for the products that we sell, and they sell off our natural resources, such as petroleum, for cheap. This is the politics of the bad government.

# The politics of autonomous government

Valentín (Former Member of the *Consejo Autónomo*)

Our people and their autonomous governments focus on the construction of autonomy, which includes how to change the situations of poverty, inequality, exploitation, and injustice that our people suffer because of the rich people's bad government. We struggle for a dignified life for all of the children, youth, men, women, and elderly, so that everyone has a place and there are opportunities for everyone, without exclusion.

This is our thinking on the structure of autonomous government: the people are the ones who have the power to decide on their form of political, economic, ideological and social organization, from below to above. The different levels of authorities are only representatives of the people.

Each community has their local authorities, composed of the *Comisariado Ejidal*, the judge, and the Vigilance Commission. Each area of work, like health, education, and women's work, also has its own committees who work in coordination with the authorities.

Each autonomous municipality has its own authorities, such as the *Consejo Autónomo*, which is composed of a substitute authority, treasurer, and secretary. They work with the health, education, women, and justice commissions, as well as with those who coordinate the civil and agrarian registries.

At the zone level, the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* is comprised of bases of support delegated by their municipalities. Within the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* there is a Vigilance Commission, which is named by the people in each MAREZ, and is responsible for watching over the work that the autonomous government does and any mistakes that it might make.

## Political ideology

Jacinto (Education Trainer, MAREZ El Trabajo)

I am supposed to talk about political ideology. We have divided this topic into two parts. One, as mentioned before, is about the political ideology of the bad government. We think that it is important to clarify this because we are also going to explain a little bit about the political ideology of resistance.

The bad government's political ideology is something that we know and hear on a daily basis. They disseminate their ideas in part through the media, we can hear their ideology at any given moment on the news, and in advertisements. We constantly hear, for example, that the government is putting an end to poverty and is combating the insecurity that exists in this country. We know these are lies, but it is one of their instruments for spreading their ideology.

Another thing that they talk about constantly is that the services needed by people in this country, such as education, health, and other basic needs, can only be met through private investment. Privatization is the bad government's only solution for meeting people's basic needs. We are also told in the media that if we





have more and better education, then everyone will have more opportunities. This is another ideology that they impose on us; they make us believe that if we study, if we prepare ourselves, then we are going to have a better life. In every corner of the country they put this idea into people's heads. But it is not true; many people study but never find work, nor do they live well.

We hear political parties say that they are against populism, but what they are really against is people expressing their opinions or voicing how they want to live. Social organizations produce a problem for the government because they weaken its power. The government talks about unity because they don't want people to organize themselves. They say that if everyone is united [with them] then things will improve, that the country will progress. This is what they want us to think.

The political parties use the media to try to make us think that they are the ones who will solve our problems, that they will solve the problem of poverty and that they will provide all of the services that the people need. The political parties and their candidates present themselves as if they were the saviors of our country. This is what they want us to believe. They use the media to try to impose the ideology of elections on us. When they talk of democracy, they say that just putting an "X" on a ballot means that the people are practicing democracy.

Another part of the ideology of the rich is private property. They don't say this openly, but it is how they understand the world. They believe private property is very important, that individuals should own the things around them, like land and natural resources. They believe that accumulating individual capital is key to living well. They don't say this openly, but in the official [state] schools, they teach us that this is the best way to live.

History tells us that one of the things that Benito Juárez said was that "peace means respecting other people's rights." The rich applauded when he said this, because it meant that if we respect private property we will all live in peace. For them this implied that no one could touch what they have, including the vast land that they have monopolized. That is why Benito Juárez appears in national history as the country's savior – when really what he saved was the property of the rich.

This is the bad governments' political ideology. But what is the political ideology of our resistance? We think that change cannot come from the government. Rather, change comes from the base, from the people – when the people are the ones who give their opinion and make decisions.

In our organization we are practicing participatory democracy, where the people choose their authorities directly, not through the kind of voting done by the bad government. This is one way that we are resisting what they want to make us believe is a better way of living.

When the autonomous governments perform their work, in order to govern well they take our seven principles into account: Serve, don't serve yourself; represent, don't supplant; construct, don't destroy; obey, don't command; propose, don't impose; convince, don't defeat; go below, don't climb above. This is the ideology of autonomous government.

Our ideology is also based on other ideas from our struggle, such as "a world where many worlds fit," because we struggle so that everyone has a place, without exclusion. We struggle and build autonomy so that all men, women, children, and elderly – everyone – can have a place.

The phrase, “For everyone, everything, nothing for ourselves,” is part of our Zapatista ideology. Like our name – EZLN – implies, we struggle not just for what we want, but for everyone, even if we ourselves have nothing. We may sacrifice our lives or die along the way, but what the elder *compañero* authorities have said is true – that although we may not see the fruits of our struggle, we are fighting so that our children can have a better life. This is part of our ideology, because we are committed to struggle not just for ourselves, but for everyone.

One way we have resisted the governments’ politics regarding private property is by learning how the autonomous government can regulate land such that everyone has a place to work and live off the land. The *ejido* is the most common form of land tenure in the Northern Zone.

The *ejido* was formed during past struggles for the defense of the land. The government at that time legalized the land under collective title; each person didn’t own their own plot of land. But later [the government] parceled it out, giving each *ejido* member their own piece of land. This was one step toward privatization of the *ejido*. “*PROCEDE*” [see glossary] was the next step, which further divided up the land, fragmenting and weakening the assembly which was the highest decision-making authority on the *ejido*.

Originally, *ejido* members did not own their particular parcels. They could leave when they wanted to, but if they left they could not sell their land because it was owned by the *ejido*. Once the government introduced *PROCEDE*, it corrupted this land tenure structure. This is another hidden way that the government attacks us.

The autonomous governments in our zone understood that recuperated land should not be private property; they understood why they should not give a piece of land to each *compa*. For example, there was a case where some *compañeros* established themselves on recuperated land and said that they were going to work communally, but then they started to have problems. They agreed to parcel out the land, with each *compa* getting 5 hectares [~ 12 acres] to work, but the individual *compas* did not own the land. It remained the property of the community.

We have to understand the benefits of communal land – when people own their land individually, there isn’t room for everyone. For example, when each person has their own parcel, the custom is to pass their land onto their youngest child, but if there are other children, they are left with nothing. So then the question is: Where will the other children live? This is one of the practices that the autonomous government in the Northern Zone is figuring out how to change.

We mention this issue because those of us in struggle have to figure out how to make it possible for everyone to reap the benefits of our land, *ejidal* or recuperated. Because in this struggle no one should be excluded.

We have accomplished many things in the resistance, but there are also things that we have yet to do. In the Northern Zone, there are some *compañeros* who continue to think that they are in resistance simply because they don’t pay for electricity or property taxes. We don’t know what it is like in the other zones, but we are going to be honest, this happens in our zone. Another thing that happens, which appears to happen more generally too, is that some *compas* get discouraged and go back to the government.



There are problems that the autonomous government in the Northern Zone has been unable to resolve. One case is when we receive support for a community building, say an autonomous school, and this school is built on the land of a *compa*. So if this *compa* abandons the struggle and sides with the government, he takes the school with him. Or, for instance, there are cases when a community's cooperative store is constructed on a *compañero's* land. If he abandons the struggle, he keeps the store. These types of problems usually happen in *ejidos* with only a few *compañeros*. For example, if most people living in a community are *PRlistas* and there are only ten *compañeros*, these types of things happen.

This is one of the challenges that the autonomous government has been unable to resolve in the zone. Another difficulty, in terms of ideological resistance, is that in communities where there are few *compañeros* – maybe just two or three families – the *compañeros* sometimes feel isolated and get discouraged. Sometimes their ideology and their political consciousness weakens. They may begin to ask themselves what kind of future their children will have in this struggle, and they begin to doubt, to think about trying to keep two options open at the same time.

On the one hand, they still want to have government documents. They want their child to have a voter registration card so that if all of the *compas* in their community abandon the struggle, their children can go and find work in the city. This kind of doubt exists – there are communities that want to walk those two roads at the same time. In these cases, the autonomous government has not been able to convince them or to adequately support these *compañeros* so that they can remain strong in the resistance, confident in our ideology and in our thinking.

## **Social politics of the bad government**

Rosalía (MAREZ Rubén Jaramillo)

The presence of the political parties in the communities divides us and causes us to fight amongst ourselves. The same thing is also happening with the many different religions now present in the communities, which criticize one another and create more division.

The government created the *PROCEDE* program, which misleads the *campesinos* [peasants] by telling them that if they participate they can easily access financial support. But the program's true objective is to break the system of social organization within the communities – the *ejidos* – making each person a small landowner who can sell their land without consulting the assembly. The *ejidal* officials then pressure the bases of support to abandon the resistance. They want to require them to pay for electricity and property taxes.

The government says that people have to accept *PROCEDE* in order to continue to receive *PROCAMPO*, which is the program through which the government supports the *PRlista* communities. They want the communities to sign up for *PROCEDE* so that the *campesinos* can sell their land to the wealthy landowners. Many people in nearby communities who have sold their lands to the rich then migrate to the city to become laborers.

It is mostly young people that have migrated to the cities, because in school they are not taught to work the land. The official schools don't teach them to work, to produce on the land, or to use what is harvested there. In other words, what they learn in official schools doesn't serve the community. It doesn't even prepare them to find good work if they go to the city.

Another problem is that as indigenous people we suffer discrimination for our way of being, to the point that many people do not want to be indigenous anymore. Some people do not want to be indigenous because they are discriminated against for the way that they dress or the way that they speak as *campesinos* who have different languages.

Germán (Member of the Vigilance Commission, MAREZ Benito Juárez)

To resist these problems, we have created our own projects – such as autonomous education and autonomous health – but we also have weak points where the government attacks us or tries to trick us. One example is in the area of religion. Many of us are Catholics and we still go to church, but if we want to be baptized in the church, they ask for an official birth certificate. If the *compañeros* do not have one because they are in resistance, they have to get one in order to be baptized, receive first communion, or whatever it is that they want to do. The minister, the president of the church, demands that *compas* get a birth certificate in order to have their children baptized. I have seen in my municipality, Municipality of Benito Juárez, that there are *compañeros* who still hold their positions as catechist or as church president, and so the government knows that we still don't understand this part of their attack, that we still believe what they tell us: that if we don't go to church then we are against God. What they say isn't true, but we still haven't understood this.

## **Resisting the bad government's attacks and provocations**

Salomón (Member of the *Consejo Autónomo*, MAREZ Benito Juárez)

The bad government attacks us in different forms – in some communities in our zone there are military and police patrols; sometimes military helicopters do flyovers of communities; there are checkpoints on the federal highways; there are military bases installed in strategic places; and there is training for paramilitary groups who attack the *compañeros* on recuperated lands.

The government creates obstacles so that the Zapatista struggle cannot receive more economic support from civilians for things like education, health, etc. They even change laws to this end – for example, now it is prohibited to carry cash in quantities greater than 100,000 pesos. If you do so, they accuse you of having money from drug trafficking and money laundering.



The government has laws saying that any organization that supports the communities with projects must pay taxes and have invoices for their purchases. They place limitations on our municipal stores by stopping us from buying goods directly from the factories because we don't have permits and registration. We can't commercialize some of our products in other states because we don't have the registration from SAGARPA [Mexican government's ministry of agriculture and rural development].

When the Zapatista struggle began, we started creating the work collectives that we were discussing earlier. But then the government began to attack us by copying what we were creating in the Zapatista struggle so that the people would stop struggling and leave the organization. The government has organized the *PRlista* women to raise chickens and pigs, for example, and to have a bakery, which they support by providing a flour mill and some other things. But have these communities really benefited from this support? Not at all, because all of the projects have failed.

How do we resist these attacks? In some communities, we continue to promote work collectives, despite the fact that there is competition for our bakeries, artisanal production, and chicken, pig, sheep, and cattle raising collectives. Our people and our authorities have not allowed themselves to be provoked by the bad government's aggressions. Rather, they have negotiated peaceful solutions with the official authorities in the communities where there have been problems. The *Junta de Buen Gobierno* has also denounced the paramilitary aggressions in our zone.

The paramilitaries were very active in the lowlands of the Northern Zone. There have been many problems, many *compañeros* killed. The autopsies are done in the town where I live, and many bodies arrive mutilated. And how do these bodies arrive? They don't arrive intact; they come in burlap bags, as if they weren't even human beings. What has happened here is really sad. *Compañeros* have also been disappeared.

The leaders of the paramilitaries are in my town and some are still in prison. The top leaders are Samuel Sanchez, ex-congressional representative, Raymundo Hernandez Trujillo, and Miguel Moreno Arcos, from Tumbalá. Who supports the paramilitaries with arms and uniforms? The municipal president along with the municipal DIF [Family Development Agency]. The precinct police themselves deliver weapons to the paramilitaries late at night. This is how the "*Paz y Justicia*" paramilitary group functioned.

Juventino (Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, MAREZ El Campesino)

On June 18, 1996, the paramilitaries from *Paz y Justicia* started to steal our belongings, including our cattle and our chickens, and they burnt down all of the *compañeros'* houses. They attacked the communities of Huanal, Jolnixtic, Patastal, and Corozil. These paramilitary groups were themselves from Huanal, which is why the *compañeros* were displaced from that community and had to go live in other communities. The *Paz y Justicia* paramilitaries are from Panchuc, Miguel Alemán, Agua Fria, and the lowlands of Tila. They started to organize themselves there to attack us and our struggle.

At that time, the *compañeros* also suffered the presence of the military, the public security forces, and the *Guardias Blancas*; it was six months before they could return to their houses. They denounced what was happening in these communities, and so civilians and human rights groups began arriving to investigate.



There were also attacks in the Municipality of La Dignidad. That is where I am from, and we were displaced when I was nine years old. The paramilitaries burnt down all of the houses. They destroyed all of the *compañeros*' belongings, killed the *compa* in charge, and dragged him through the community with a lasso as if he were a dead animal. They treated him like a dead dog. There were 600 of us total who were displaced – including children, elderly, and youth. The most intense attacks were in '96, when they would arrive at the house, start shooting, and the children would hide. I remember that we hid under the bed because we were scared of the threats in the community.

The *ejido* where we lived was called Jesús Carranza. There were many of us who fled from there, and when we left there we went to a small community where we lived six or seven families in a single house.

We were only in that community about two weeks before we had to move somewhere else. We stayed in that next community for eight months and then left again. There was some recuperated land nearby – San Marcos, it's called now – so they sent us there. Now the displaced *compañeros* live there, though not all of them because there were a lot of people who couldn't take all the work that had to be done. They went back to their communities and now they are *PRDistas* or *PRlistas*.

Now everyone living in the community of San Marcos is a *compa*. But living there is very difficult for us because the *compañeros* working there on recuperated lands are not all from San Marcos; there are three different communities there working different parts of the land. So the *compas* often cultivate their *milpa* and plant their beans on land rented from people from Moyos who are Tzotziles. These Tzotziles aren't *compañeros*, they are *PRlistas*, but they rent their land and that is what the *compañeros* are living off of.

A few *compañeros* go and work their land in the Jesús Carranza *ejido*, but they say that they do so in fear; they feel unsafe because in Jesús Carranza they still hate us. When the *compas* arrive – I personally have never gone back – but the *compañeros* say that when they arrive there they are mocked. The *compañeros* who have houses in that community know that their houses are grown over with weeds, but they are still there; they haven't allowed the sons of the *PRlistas* to take over their plots. This has been prevented because the authorities always intervene when the *PRlistas* try to take over the plots.

There were many communities affected by the bad government's attacks, it wasn't only Jesús Carranza. The *compañeros* from Bebedero and Moyos also suffered. There were several communities where there were many problems and murders. When we were displaced, we had to leave without our clothes, without anything. There was a lot of sickness and many difficult things happened. Maybe that is why the *compañeros* there say that they are still outraged by what they suffered there.

# Economic politics of the bad government

Ana (Education Trainer, MAREZ El Trabajo)

How does the bad government attack us economically? The price of basic goods like soap, sugar, salt, rice, tools for working in the field, materials for house construction, gasoline, medicine, etc. increases on a daily basis. And while the price of these basic goods is higher, the workers' salaries continue to fall.

They pay us very poorly for our products – coffee, corn, *chiles*, beans, and cattle – because the *coyotes* [middlemen] that buy them hoard them to sell them on the international market. Those who work in the fields do not determine the selling price of their products; rather, the *coyotes* have cornered the local markets and set the prices and the world financial system says how much the products will cost.

Because the bad government knows that poor people need many things, they try to buy their loyalties by offering them handouts – things like the “*Oportunidades*” program, support for the elderly, scholarships for the children and youth who study, housing construction materials, concrete floors, latrines, agricultural support, *PROCAMPO*, pesticides, palm, rubber, citrus trees, and improved seeds. The improved seeds they distribute are corn seeds, but they are not “improved,” they are genetically modified.

The gifts the government sends are mere crumbs. They are leftovers that they send because they know that the people are hungry, and they know that rather than improve the people's situation, these crumbs will make them increasingly dependent. We see clearly that although people receive these government resources, their situation is not improving. Instead, they are getting poorer.

It is like a child who, if you give them everything they want when they are little, they grow up wanting you to keep doing everything for them. The same thing happens with the people – now if they don't get their crumbs, everyone complains. There is much unrest in the communities when the government money doesn't arrive because people have already indebted themselves by spending it in advance. They take on debts trusting the money will come from the government. For example, in the community of Las Gardenias, we have a Zapatista grocery store and the *PRlistas* come to get their groceries, saying that they will pay when they get their *Oportunidades* money.

# The economic politics of autonomy

Alondra (Member of the Women's Commission, Jacinto Canek Region)

We *compañeros* in the organization can already meet some of our own basic needs; some *compañeros* have learned to cultivate their land parcels with vegetables and other crops that provide us with sustenance. This has allowed us to meet some of the basic needs in our family, but to truly resolve these problems we need many more families.

Our authorities are committed to supporting each Zapatista family in cultivating their parcels and planting the crops that grow well in our region. We need to learn which plants will grow on our land and revive the practices of our ancestors, such as making pots and *comales* [flat pans used on an open fire] out of clay and planting the type of trees that produce gourds or *tecomate* [gourd cups], so that we will not be so dependent on capitalist products.

We need to learn to manage the little bit that we earn from selling our products so that we don't mispend it; we need to know how to make that money grow. In my community, we still have clay pots, cups, and the *comal*. We *compañeras* know how to make artisanal goods from clay. We use gourds for drinking coffee and *pozol* [fermented corn dough refreshment]. We can save the little bit of money that we make and learn to manage it so that we don't waste it.

Community economy: The communities have strengthened their economy by creating work collectives, especially in agriculture. This has helped the struggle significantly, allowing us to pay transportation costs for the *compañeros* who have to leave the community in order to do their work in the struggle. The communities that do not yet have work collectives are committed to creating them.

Some communities have cooperative stores and others do not. Things have gone well for the *compañeros* who work in a cooperative store, but there are also communities where competition has caused them problems. But the *compañeros* have agreed not to get discouraged, so they continue to sell products that other stores do not sell – regional products such as corn, beans, etc.

We must take care of our native seeds because they are the best type of seed and they help us remain strong in our resistance. Some of the communities in our municipalities practice agroecology, and the *compañeros* who do this work say it has helped them improve production and nutrition in their communities, which is why it is an important task. The *compañeros* who produce coffee in the five municipalities have been able to organize themselves and form a cooperative where they export their coffee to other countries for a good price.



Municipal economy: Some municipalities have work collectives that plant *milpas* or beans, raise cattle, and run regional warehouse stores that sell groceries. The commitment to do collective work in all of the municipalities is very important, because collective work has provided a lot of support for the struggle. The municipal authorities must be very focused in organizing, managing, monitoring, and caring for the growth of this collective work.

Zone level economy: We are doing collective work at the zone level, such as raising cattle, which we began only a year ago. We are doing this work on recuperated land and we already have 101 head of cattle, which we are working to fatten up. The municipality organized us to take turns caring for them – ten *compañeros* per week. Right now the work is going really well and we haven't had any problems.

Alex (Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, Jacinto Canek region).

The *compañeras* and *compañeros* are making their collectives at the family, local, municipal, and zone levels. At the family level, the *compañeras* or *compañeros* work in the *milpa* and plant vegetables, and if the *compañera* cannot leave the house, then she plants vegetables in her yard. The men help the women when they can, and in some communities they are also raising pigs – not in all of them, but in a few communities the *compañeros* are starting to do this work.

These things are always discussed in the [autonomous] authorities' general assembly, and right now the authorities are responsible for supporting the *compañeros*' process of learning to do this work, of starting to grow our economy ourselves instead of waiting for the bad government's programs. We know that we don't depend on them, that we are in resistance.

The same thing is done in the communities. There are *compañeros* who have corn and bean collectives that function at the community level. They name a director who organizes the work and coordinates with the community authorities. In the municipalities there are also *compañeros* who have their own collectives, like *milpa* collectives or grocery store collectives. So they are also working like this at the municipal level. There are municipalities that have honey collectives; they keep bees and produce honey, which they can later sell.

## Questions

*You mentioned that you have 101 head of cattle. How many did you start with and how many hectares of land do these beef cattle have in order to graze?*

We do not have an engineer who has measured exactly how much land we are using, but we have a rough estimate – we are using a piece of land in the zone that is approximately 110 hectares [~ 270 acres]. The idea is that we will ultimately cultivate all of the land that we have, but we are going little by little to see how the work advances. We cultivate more and more of the land as different needs arise.

The work at the zone level has begun more recently. We were not working at the zone level before, but, as they say, necessity dictates. We have about 60-65 hectares [~ 150-160 acres] fenced off, but this parcel does not have any water. When we began doing this work with the *compañeros*, we used a *jagüey* [watering hole] that the previous rancher had made, but when there was a drought it began to dry out and we had to fence in a larger area – between 10 and 15 hectares [~ 25-37 acres] – so that the animals could have a place to run and drink water.

We still have not sold the cattle because we have only just now selected about 20 animals – the ones that weigh between 280 and 300 kilos [~ 615-660 lbs.] – to fatten up a little more and then sell them, but we are doing this little by little. The *Junta* is worried about pulling them out of the herd; we have to invest a little bit more to make sure that the animals are good and fat or else they won't sell. We don't have a market in mind where we would take them to sell, but animals in this zone sell like hotcakes; people come right to your door to buy them.

*How did you get the funds to buy the 101 heads of cattle? Was it through your own work? Or how did you do it?*

This is a zone project so it was the *Junta* who got together the money that we needed through small donations. Some donations came in to support education, but after analyzing the situation we decided raising livestock was the best way to use these funds because this project would serve in the future as a learning center for the young people. We want these donations to support the creation of this project. This is our dream, and the dream of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, because if we do not create these things our young people are going to migrate.

*How much did you spend on this work?*

The *Junta* spent a little over 500 thousand pesos to buy the steer. But between the posts and the fencing, freight costs, and the gas that we spent to transport the materials, plus transport for the bases of support, we have invested about 700 thousand pesos. In addition to this, we just finished renovating a weather vane. After we recuperated the land, some people came and tried to destroy it so the *compañeros* couldn't put it to use. And there have been plenty of other ne'er-do-wells who have come to destroy things. They filled up a deep well with sticks and rocks, and we had to spend more money to clean it up. We had to pump it out so that this water could be used again. But now we have it functioning again, and it will have a distribution network to provide water to different areas. That is why we are thinking about having a permanent collective from the zone stationed there. Even when we die, the next generations will come along and continue to work, moving the collective work forward. This is our goal.



# Cultural politics

Gerardo (Delegate from the *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, Felipe Ángeles Region).

How does the capitalist system attack our culture? One way is through the media – television, radio, internet, cable TV, magazines – which it uses to confuse and influence the thinking and knowledge of the youth. It also uses modern music trends and instruments, television programs, and youth entertainment centers like discos, the cinema, and bars. Then there are the problems of drug addiction, alcoholism, and drunkenness. Capitalism also attacks our ways of speaking, of expressing ourselves, what we eat, the way we work, how we are educated, how we impact the environment, and through the institutions of marriage and religion.

How do we resist the attack on our culture? We are constructing our own methods of communication, such as radio broadcasts and community video. In the area of education we are developing our practices of speaking, reading, and writing in our mother tongue. We are teaching our children the wisdom and knowledges of our ancestors in the autonomous schools, through storytelling, reading, and recounting beliefs and histories. We continue to preserve our forms of celebration in both religious and community festivals. We continue to conserve and cultivate our native seeds and our way of sustaining ourselves with the food produced in and by our communities, which is healthy and organic. We continue to preserve and develop our ways of caring for Mother Earth, respecting the earth and all that we have in nature.

We are cultivating our ways of living together – *compañerismo*, brotherhood, and the services that we must provide for the good of our people. In the Northern Zone there are still conflicts in our communities – sometimes even among *compañeros* in the organization. Sometimes there are fights between neighbors or within families – clashes between sisters-in-law, mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law, or brothers-in-law. We bring it up because it is still happening there and the *compañeros* from the CCRI have talked about it also – that we still have more to learn about the idea of brotherhood. We also talk about the fact that the more divided we are, the more the system roars with laughter. It likes when the people are divided because it knows that a divided people are a weak people, and that is why we are trying to change these kinds of things.

## Work for the resistance

Nazario (Member of the *Consejo Autónomo*, MAREZ Rubén Jaramillo)

Some of the communities are creating collectives through their own effort, without help from solidarity projects. These communities have created bean and corn production collectives, among others, depending on which crops each community is growing. In our zone we have areas of both very hot climate and temperate climate, so we have to see what grows best in each place.

Take, for example, the collective work of the *compañeras* from the community of Victorico Grajales, in MAREZ Vicente Guerrero. First, they organized themselves to begin planting vegetables and beans. It was not only the women who worked – they did it with their *compañeros*, because, as we have said, the men and women work together collectively.

The *compañeras* organized themselves, each contributing a little money to buy seeds. As their work progressed, they were able to create a fund. Then they organized themselves into groups to start other projects, including raising pigs and chickens, and starting a cooperative store and a bakery. The *compañeras* work in groups, but it's not each one for herself. Rather, they work together, generating funds from each work collective and deciding how to spend this money together.

They used this money to buy cattle little by little. The *compañeras* bought the cattle, but the *compañeros* also participated by providing several hectares of land to maintain that cattle. As the number of head of cattle grew, they analyzed the situation and thought about what to do with the funds that they already had, and they decided to organize themselves again to buy more land. They agreed to buy another 20 hectares [~50 acres] to sustain their cattle.

Later there were divisions among them – there were some people who didn't understand our struggle and so they left. Those who left began to complain about the work that they had done, but the *compañeros* gave them their share so that there would not be problems. But those who remained have always defended and maintained the land that they purchased – this land was not divided – and they continue to work there.

This work has continued and now they have begun to create another work collective – a butcher shop – which also includes youth. They had some cattle that they needed to sell, so they bought a machine for the butcher shop which cost 40 thousand pesos. The resources to buy it came from the women's cooperative store. This is how all of the collective work has continued to advance, and continues today.

The *compañeras'* collective work began before '94, when they gathered together the resources from the work that they did. Now they are earning consistently and they have begun to buy cattle, which we keep in this community. They did not ask for outside money to do this work, not even a loan, nothing. They did it all through their own work, although the *compañeros* supported them by helping clear the terrain and doing the cattle vaccinations. This is how the *compañeros* were able to work without the support of solidarity projects. Those who stayed in the organization and are doing this work know where they will spend the money that is generated and what kind of work they will do. We know that we need resources for our authorities' travel costs, and there are other work areas that also benefit from the profits from this work.

So now you know how we began, planting vegetables and beans. Even if it is not this way everywhere, this is one way that people are working in order to continue building our resistance, and so that the *compañeros* who are authorities can continue to attend to their different work tasks.

There are also communities that have productive projects that have been supported by our brothers in solidarity. These projects have also supported the struggle, they have helped pay transportation costs for their authorities to go to meetings. The communities have benefited from these productive projects in health, education, and women's participation, and they have done what they could to make them grow, taking care not to misspend the capital that is invested.

Most of our collective work projects have received some kind of support from our brothers in solidarity; but there are some communities with just a few *compañeros* – only two or three families – where they have not been able to receive collective projects. There are also communities who are working collectively in order to sustain their authorities.



# Notes



# Notes



# Notes





# Notes