

# **‘Delinking’: Current Strategies of the EZLN**

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## **‘Delinking’: Current Strategies of the EZLN**

The expansion of the global market economy and the introduction of policies known as the ‘Washington Consensus’ (see Williamson 2000), have resulted in a widened gap between the rich and the poor and a decrease in economic growth throughout most of the underdeveloped countries. Latin American countries in particular experienced a lower rate of average per capita income in 2000 than 1970. “[P]er capita GDP for the entire region grew by 75 percent from 1960 to 1980 but only 7 percent in the subsequent neoliberal era, 1980-2000” (Veltmeyer 2007a: 25). According to World Development Indicators Database (World Bank: April 2007), Mexico experienced an average GDP growth of 4.7% from 2000 to 2006. These economic indicators show the failure of neoliberal policies to bring about economic growth as promised. In practical terms “[l]iberalization...is a mechanism for centralization of capital on a world scale: metropolitan capital-in-production ousts third world producers, while metropolitan capital-as-finance (which is the dominant component of globalized finance) gets control over third world resources and enterprises...at throwaway prices” (Patnaik 1999:53). This results in the economic disparities as exhibited throughout the underdeveloped countries today. In response to the hardships generated by these economic developments, people and organizations have engaged in various forms of political activity and resistance. But because of the changing role of the state and the expansion of international institutions, opposition forces engaging in resistance have had to innovate. Teeple (2004: 122) explains that

[b]ecause national states must act more or less in the interests of capital, the people of the world are increasingly left voiceless...and defenceless...With no political rights to speak of at the global level, non-corporate sectors in the emerging global civil society have few means of countervailing leverage. It is difficult for these same sectors to exercise national rights...in response to the decisions at the global level. When political activity cannot find a legitimate outlet, however, it becomes extra-parliamentary or extra-legal. Given the growing nature of this predicament everywhere, resistance outside legitimate institutions can only continue to increase.

The primary purpose of this article is to examine how the Zapatista movement has terminated conventional political dealings with the Mexican state and established its own unique internal structures parallel to the ‘legitimate’ institutions. I will hold that given the current political situation in Mexico and the historical context, the Zapatista initiative, while radical and innovative, is unsustainable. I will draw on Amin’s theory of delinking and Bello’s theory of deglobalization to make sense of this form of resistance.

### **Delinking**

From a world systems perspective (see Wallerstein 1987, 2004; Hopkins and Wallerstein 1996) the Egyptian political philosopher, Samir Amin (1990) argues that the ‘delinking’ of national governments from the international political arena is the only means to set the stage for socialism. The United States and the international institutions it backs are, he argues, the biggest obstacles for political, economic and social development in underdeveloped countries. The U.S. (Ibid. 2003: 18-19) lives parasitically to the detriment of its partners in the world system...The world produces, and the United States, which has practically no funds in reserve, consumes. The U.S. advantage is that of a predator whose deficit is covered by loans from others, whether obtained by consent or force.

Amin is careful to state that ‘delinking’ will not always lead to socialism but rather is a process or a transition which over an extended period could potentially lead to socialism (Ibid. 1990: 55, 67). In discussing ‘delinking’, Amin emphasizes the need for underdeveloped countries to adopt new market strategies and values different from northern developed countries. Delinking, he explains, does not mean “autarky but refusal to bow to the dominant logic of the world capitalist system” (Amin 2006: 27). This is in contrast to the neoliberal push in the North for political, economic and social “integration” (read, capitalist domination) through “international laws and institutions” (read, empire). The integration

concept has provided a means for the “industrialized countries” (read, northern ruling classes) to benefit from the natural resources, labour force and accrued interest on the debt payments of the underdeveloped countries. It is not a process of equal integration where all benefit. It is expected that the underdeveloped countries of Latin America will submit to international laws, conditions and structural adjustment programs. This international integration emerged with capitalism and has become more institutionalized in the last two decades. Underdeveloped countries like Mexico are linked to the international market and to the dominant countries at the centre. “Capitalist expansion, argues Amin (1990:56), disintegrates the societ[ies in the periphery], fragments [them], alienates [them] and eventually destroys the nation[s] or destroys [their] potential”. Unlike autarky, which is “the withdrawal from external commercial, financial and technological exchanges”, delinking is the “pursuit of a system of rational criteria for economic options founded on a law of value on a national basis with popular relevance, independent of such criteria of economic rationality as flow from the dominance of the capitalist law of value operating on a world scale” (1990: 62). Delinking does not necessarily reject foreign technological developments. It is a process of transition which tends to put less emphasis on comparative advantage and give more attention to introducing economic, social and political reforms in the national interests of southern countries. Delinking implies a transfer of political hegemony to new ‘centres’. Delinking is a form of cutting oneself off, “a kind of active anti-globalization which is in dialectical relationship with globalization itself” (Hannerz 1996: 18).

There are four propositions to Amin’s (1990: xiv) thesis of delinking. He explains them in the following way:

First, the necessity of delinking is the logical political outcome of the unequal character of the development of capitalism...Unequal development, in this sense, is the origin of essential social, political and ideological evolutions...Second, delinking is a necessary condition of any socialist advance, in the North and in the South. This proposition is, in our view, essential for a reading of Marxism that genuinely takes into account the unequal character of capitalist development. Third, the potential advances that become available through delinking will not ‘guarantee’ certainty of further evolution towards a pre-defined ‘socialism’. Socialism is a future that must be built. [And] [f]ourth, the option for delinking must be discussed in political terms. This proposition derives from a reading according to which economic constraints are absolute only for those who accept the commodity alienation intrinsic to capitalism, and turn it into an historical system of eternal validity.

Amin and Gunder Frank agreed that the “centre grew at the expense of the periphery” (Velasco 2002:44). It was in this context that Amin argued that the only way for the third world to prosper would be through the process of delinking. Contrary to Amin’s position, Gunder Frank eventually came to the conclusion that delinking was not “a very viable or fruitful policy” (Ibid.: 45). Sandbrook et al (2006:76) refer to delinking as a “utopian project...they [the advocates of delinking] call for an unrealistic future: self-contained communities and the reduction or even elimination of long distance trade”. The case study examined here will contribute to this debate.

Bello’s theory of ‘deglobalization’ is similar to Amin’s delinking theory in that it refers to a severing of conventional relationships. Bello (2004: 107) considers “the current crisis of global economic governance [as] a systemic one”. In that vein, he promotes the idea of “reorienting economies from the emphasis on production for export to production for the local market” (Bello 2004: 113). It is not about withdrawing from the world economy but rather shifting the emphasis to reforming existing economic arrangements. Bello sees the central target as the WTO whose mandate needs to be halted or reversed (2004: 109). The reconstructing of a new pluralist system of global governance would follow the deconstruction of WTO hegemony. The central components of Bello’s deglobalization model involve the implementation of the following processes (2004: 113-114):

- Drawing most of a country’s financial resources for development from within rather than becoming dependent on foreign investment and foreign financial markets;

- Carrying out the long-postponed measures of income redistribution and land redistribution to create a vibrant internal market that would be the anchor of the economy and create the financial resources for investment;
- De-emphasizing growth and maximizing equity in order radically to reduce environmental disequilibrium;
- Not leaving strategic economic decisions to the market but making them subject to democratic choice;
- Subjecting the private sector and the state to constant monitoring by civil society; creating a new production and exchange complex that includes community co-operatives, private enterprises and state enterprises, and excludes TNCs;
- Enshrining the principle of subsidiarity in economic life by encouraging production of goods to take place at the community and national level if it can be done at reasonable cost in order to preserve community.

Amin and Bello's theories both accentuate the role of nation states within the current economic model of global governance and the importance of turning inward. They discuss what the relationship between the state and the international institutions looks like and how it can be resisted, rejected or modified. Bond (2005:4) warns that "[t]he hope of attracting potential allies from a (mainly mythical) 'national patriotic bourgeoisie' still exists in some formulations of delinking and coincides with reformist tendencies among state-aligned intelligentsia and trade unions". In some cases such reforms, he continues "tend to legitimize, strengthen and deepen existing state control and capital accumulation functions, while doing nothing to shift the balance of forces towards the oppressed" (Ibid).

The Zapatista movement does not have state power and does not connect directly to the transnational institutions and hegemonic powers, yet it has engaged in a similar process of 'delinking' or 'deglobalization' at the sub-national level. The movement has severed all political, economic and social relations with the Mexican state and the state of Chiapas. It is the severing of this traditional relationship between a nation state and an internal, territorially based movement of opposition that will be discussed here. In keeping with Amin's assessment, the Zapatista process of delinking does not overtly propose a transition to socialism, although many left-wing organizations would like to see it move toward that end.

While the Zapatista movement has introduced new political actors and relationships, it falls short of the classic Marxist revolutionary program, which is class based and advocates armed confrontation to terminate class divisions in a bourgeois dominated society.

The communist revolution is directed against the preceding mode of activity, does away with labour, and abolishes the rule of all classes with the classes themselves, because it is carried through by the class which no longer counts as a class in society, is not recognized as a class, and is in itself the expression of the dissolution of all classes, nationalities, etc...this revolution is necessary, therefore not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew" (Marx (1845-1846) in Tucker 1978: 193)

While it can not be considered a Marxist revolutionary movement, it can be said to exceed the standard social democratic reformist approach which works within the existing political system in alliance with the state and the capitalist elites in order to effect change. Reformist approaches to effecting change abound in Latin America. Current examples are those of Lula in Brazil, Bachelet in Chile and Kirschner in Argentina.

In my analysis I will hold that the Zapatista resistance movement, whether referred to in terms of 'delinking' or 'deglobalization', serves as a useful means to address immediate needs yet is ineffectual in bringing about sustainable generalized change *unless* it clarifies its relationship with the capitalist mode of production. One could argue that by not proposing an alternative mode of production, it is in fact clearly demonstrating its desire to work within the capitalist mode of production with certain modifications, which is precisely why I consider its approach to be unsustainable. Just as the theory of

“socialism in one country” (Bukharin [1925] 1982a, [1927] 1982b) is unsustainable (see Trotsky [1931] 1969) because the country in question will eventually find itself isolated and crushed, the Zapatistas’ advances in ‘delinking’ and ‘deglobalizing’ will be crushed in turn if they do not clarify their end goal and if they proceed as an isolated entity. That said, there can be varying degrees of delinking that can be interpreted as positive advances towards full disconnecting and a socialist end.

### **The Zapatista Movement:**

Chiapas (Sipaz 2007) is one of the poorest states in Mexico and while it produces 35% of the electrical power for the country, 34% of the population in Chiapas lives without electrical services. Furthermore, according to 1994 statistics (Sipaz 2007)

In an area rich in natural resources, agriculture, and oil, nearly 60% of the population survived on the minimum wage [\$5.00 per day]. Sixty percent of school-age children were unable to attend school and the illiteracy level is 30%. Only 57% had access to potable water. Fifteen thousand indigenous people died in 1993 due to their impoverished conditions.

On January 1, 1994 the EZLN entered San Cristobal de Las Casas in the state of Chiapas in response to these political economic conditions. 800 armed men and women ransacked the municipal archives and set them on fire while thousands of other members of the Zapatista army seized five other nearby towns. The uprising was staged on the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement was proclaimed among Mexico, the U.S. and Canada, and about six months prior to the 1994 Mexican presidential elections. As evidenced in the EZLN *communiqué* (EZLN 2004: 643-645) of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994, the initial demands were economically and politically framed. The Zapatistas demanded “work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace”. They were acting in response to the changes in the national economy which endangered the livelihood and wellbeing of all Mexican citizens. One of their central foci was to call an end to the “70 year dictatorship” and to give the people the right to elect their own representatives. From February 1994 to February 1996 the EZLN and the government were in and out of dialogue while the Mexican army continued to occupy areas surrounding the EZLN camps.

On February 16, 1996 Round One of the San Andrés accords was signed by the government and the EZLN. This marked what many considered a monumental breakthrough for the EZLN. Round One covered indigenous cultural, religious and political rights. In December of the same year it was agreed that the COCOPA<sup>1</sup> would prepare a bill that would reform the constitution to cover the agreed upon points. Round One comprised the following eight points (see Accords in Almeyra and Thibaut 2006: 216-217): 1) the reformation of Article 27 of the constitutions which they argued should be in keeping with the spirit of Emiliano Zapata’s slogans that *the land belongs to he/she who works on it* and *Land and Liberty*, 2) the indigenous people should not be held responsible for the damage to their lands or territories retroactively, 3) that given the triple oppression which indigenous women suffer as women, as indigenous people and as poor people, a new society should be built with an economic, political, social and cultural model that includes all Mexicans, 4) concrete dates should be established for the implementation of each section of the accords, 5) cultural and linguistic interpreters and translators should be available at all times for all legal issues involving indigenous people and land reforms, 6) legislation should be introduced that will protect the rights of indigenous people that migrate to other regions within the country or outside of the country, 7) in order to strengthen the municipalities the government must agree to provide access to infrastructure, training and adequate economic resources, and 8) that the indigenous communities be guaranteed access to reliable, opportune and sufficient information regarding government activities, as well as access to the existing means of communication and that the indigenous communities be allowed to have their own means of communication such as their own radio stations, television stations, telephones, newspapers, computers and satellite access.

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<sup>1</sup> The Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación or the Commission for Peace and Reconciliation is a mediating body created to mediate the dialogue between the EZLN and the government. It comprised academics, and religious and political actors.

Unfortunately the process reached an impasse in 2001 when the government demonstrated its unwillingness to honour its end of the San Andres Accords. The Mexican government breached the trust of the indigenous people in Chiapas by not keeping to the agreement but instead legislated its own version of an Indigenous law. It is in this context that the EZLN withdrew or 'delinked' from the Mexican State, its services and its institutions.

On April 25, 2001 the Congress of the Union passed a document called Constitutional Reforms on Indigenous Rights and Culture. This document was a modified version of the original agreed upon COCOPA initiative from 1996. The EZLN rejected the government's modified document. Marcos ended his rejection speech stating that there would be no further communications between the EZLN and the federal government or with President Fox until the agreements made in San Andrés were met. In the meantime they would remain in a state of resistance and rebellion. It was after the Fox government introduced the new indigenous law in 2001 that the Zapatistas began to renew the struggle for autonomy in response to years of betrayal and being misled by the Mexican government. On January 1<sup>st</sup> 2003, Brusli (Muñoz Ramírez 2003: 235) made a speech reflecting this new approach to autonomy and the need to act on the Acuerdos de San Andres. He stated:

It is now time that together we organize ourselves and that we form our autonomous municipalities. We don't need to wait until the 'bad government' gives us permission. We should organize ourselves like true rebels and not wait until somebody gives us permission to become autonomous, through laws or without laws.

As the July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2003 elections for deputies approached, the Zapatista communities refused to participate. They refused to allow the government to set up polling booths in their communities. This expression of discontent was in response to the manner in which the government was handling their affairs. Immediately following the election, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July, the EZLN decided to sever all relations and contact with the government and other political parties. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August they shut down all of the Aguascalientes<sup>2</sup> and replaced them with Caracoles<sup>3</sup>. This was a move to create a political and cultural space for the Zapatistas and the non-Zapatistas to communicate. It was an attempt to put the decision making powers in the hands of the communities; after all there are many people living in the indigenous communities that are not Zapatistas. The EZLN's role was to protect the area against government intervention and it was not possible for them to address the particular issues in each community. According to Gonzalez Casanova (2005: 81-82)

The caracoles give communities engaged in resistance a new way of exercising power, in which their commanders bow to the communities' authority in formulating and implementing plans for struggle and organization...[they] express...a culture of power that arises from 500 years of resistance...[it is a means of] building a peaceful transition towards a viable world which is less authoritarian, less oppressive, less unjust, and which can continue to struggle for peace with democracy, justice and liberty.

When I was in La Realidad in the summer of 2004 the Zapatista supporters pointed out the road which divided them from the non-Zapatistas. It was nothing more than a small gravel road running through the town. Along with the five caracoles<sup>4</sup> were formed their respective new Juntas de Buen Gobierno<sup>5</sup> (Munoz 2003: 245). The role of the Juntas de Buen Gobierno is to find peaceful solutions, through dialogue, to conflicts that arise between Zapatistas and non-Zapatistas or between the autonomous communities and the national and state governments. The Junta also serves as a means to monitor the projects that are realized by supporting NGOs and civil associations. Representatives are elected for three year terms in general assemblies. During that three year period the representatives

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<sup>2</sup> Six Aguascalientes or outdoor amphitheatres were built by the EZLN following the 1994 uprising to hold international conferences with their supporters.

<sup>3</sup> Autonomous indigenous municipalities in Chiapas.

<sup>4</sup> The five caracoles are: La Garrucha, Oventic, La Realidad, Morelia and Roberto Barrios.

<sup>5</sup> Autonomous municipal indigenous governments.

rotate responsibilities every ten days. The three areas of governance which they rotate are vigilance, information and governing (see Almeyra and Thibaut 2006: 33). As autonomous bodies, the Caracoles have rejected all support from the Mexican government whether financial or through services. This delinking process provides a means for communities to manage their local economy and political decisions. Two of the government services that remain intact are the transferring of severely ill patients to state hospitals (Almeyra and Thibaut 2006: 137) and the collaboration with state judicial bodies for criminal cases that reach beyond the mandate of the Juntas. Regarding most other issues, they have turned inward to satisfy their immediate needs while accepting the support and aid of NGOs to complete larger projects. The Juntas collect taxes, plan economic strategies, maintain basic education and health services, and build and repair highways. That said, it could be argued that as *excluded* members of the political process in Mexico, the indigenous people of Chiapas and throughout the country have *always* had to depend on their own resources to survive. The Mexican state took little interest in their wellbeing prior to January 1, 1994.

There have been many indigenous struggles for autonomy over the past 500 years in Mexico but none have gone as far as the Zapatista movement (see Diaz-Polanco 1996 and Favre 1998). The Zapatista movement has disconnected or delinked from the Mexican government in a strategic move which goes beyond conventional autonomous state-society relationships. In the 60s and 70s, movements seeking similar anti-systemic transformations would have organized around revolutionary slogans while still working within the system. The Zapatistas do not promote revolution but rather have terminated relations with the government and developed relationships among the indigenous communities in Chiapas and other parts of the country and with national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

NGOs provide services, resources and support that the government would otherwise have provided, or in many cases not provided, but whose obligation it should have been to provide. For example, there are volunteer medical practitioners who travel to the area to provide very basic medical care and deliver medication. The support they provide to the communities is volunteer work they do on their own time. One can assume that without their regular income (which needless to say is far inferior to what a doctor of any rank makes in Canada) the doctors would not be in a position to volunteer their time to the Zapatista cause<sup>6</sup>. One of the grassroots healthcare NGOs, Comision de Salud para la Atencion de Comunidades Indigenas (COSACI), comprises general practitioners and nurses, who support the cause, by giving primary care for simple curable illnesses. "We usually go to the zona (area) during our vacation period" (Interview Irma de la Cruz January 17, 2004). With the aid of these practitioners the EZLN has also helped to train what they call 'healthcare promoters'. These trained volunteers include mid-wives, herbalists, bone doctors (hueseros) and healthcare workers who reside in the communities and treat simple medical problems. The Zapatistas take great pride in pointing out that the medical services are free of charge, unlike anywhere else in Mexico. Of course there are risks to rejecting medical care from the federal and state governments yet as a strategic political move it sends a strong message of discontent.

A similar process of delinking exists in the education sector. Some teachers are trained locally while others come from other parts of the country and volunteer their services to the community. In principle this is a very positive arrangement, but volunteers are only volunteers as long as their own financial resources allow them to provide volunteer services to others, especially in the case of the teachers who come from afar. School supplies have arrived from NGOs all over the world. During my visit to La Realidad in May 2004, the schools had been without a teacher for four months and it was unclear when the position(s) might be refilled. The benefit to having locally trained teachers is that they are sensitive to the 'usos and costumbres' of the communities and the ideological views of education. It is also a means to ensure that native languages are preserved.

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<sup>6</sup> Is this not in fact indirect government support?

These are just two of the basic services that the Zapatistas have rejected from the Mexican State and for which they have instead sought extra-state sources. Other services which have been provided through NGOs include constructing buildings of different sorts, building electrical plants and providing technical support. In 2005 the Zapatistas solicited national and international financial support for their communities. This solicitation went out to supporting groups and individuals, independent of governments. Obstacles abound for the autonomous communities and one of the biggest blows occurred when Bancomer informed the EZLN that they had until the end of June 2005 to close their bank account<sup>7</sup>. The banks claimed that Enlace Civil was engaged in money laundering and that they did not want to be a part of it. All support coming into the communities is now managed locally by the Juntas de Buen Gobierno rather than through Enlace Civil.

Put abstractly, delinking in the case of the Zapatistas is a matter of the disconnection of a non-state political actor from the prevailing political arrangements within Mexico. It differs from conventional political opposition where an organization or group protests, denounces or rebels against political authority in that it seeks to function outside of the conventional state-society relationship. Although it could be argued that opposition forces are always disconnected to some degree from the government in power, there would have to be a more radical, unconventional withdrawal to fit Amin's or Bello's theoretical model. The Zapatistas' delinking from the Mexican state is a consequence of over 500 years of oppression and ultimately the government's unwillingness to honour the San Andres accords of 1996. By 'delinking', the Zapatistas have taken their political, economic, social and cultural actions into their own hands. They have created their own government, their own healthcare promoters, their own school curriculum, they train their teachers and healthcare providers, they reject the presidential electoral process and they market their own goods.

One of the early tasks of the Juntas de Buen Gobierno was to address the revived Plan Puebla Panama (PPP). The PPP was first introduced in June 2001 by PAN President Vicente Fox. His stated objective was to increase trade in the corridor running from Puebla, Mexico to Panama by building infrastructure to facilitate mobility such as proper highways and airports, and by integrating electricity and communications resources (see Pickard 2004). Although put on hold for about 18 months, the Plan was relaunched in early 2004 under a more secretive agenda. The Zapatistas took great exception to the intentions of Fox's PPP and the effects it would have on Indigenous lands throughout the corridor. In July 2003 the EZLN declared its opposition to the Plan and stated that "at the very least in the mountains of southeastern Mexico, its [the PPP] implementation will not be permitted for any reason" (Subcomandante Marcos 2003). Shortly after this pronouncement the Zapatistas called for the Plan La Realidad Tijuana on August 9<sup>th</sup> 2003. This plan was to unite all of the political struggles from La Realidad, Chiapas to the border town of Tijuana that fight for democracy, liberty and justice. It would eventually provide the framework for The Other Campaign. The plan was founded on the following seven common agreements:

- 1) Reciprocal respect for the autonomy and independence of social organizations... for their processes and decision making methods, for their legitimate representatives, for their aspirations and demands, and for the accords which they reach with their opposition parties.
- 2) Promotion of forms of self-management and self-governance throughout the national territory, according to each of their means.
- 3) Promoting of civil and peaceful rebellion and resistance in response to the regulations of the *bad government* and the political parties.
- 4) Lending of total and unconditional solidarity to the one who is attacked, and not to the aggressor.

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<sup>7</sup> The bank account is actually that of Enlace Civil, a civil organization, which functions as a liaison between the EZLN and civil society.



- 5) Form of a network of intercommunity basic commerce and promotion of staple foods in national shops, giving preference to small and mid-sized business and informal commerce.
- 6) Joint and coordinated defence of national sovereignty and direct and radical opposition to impending privatizations of the electric industry, oil and other natural resources.
- 7) Forming of a network of information and culture, and the demanding of truthful, complete, timely and balanced information from the media. Creating of local media, and establishing of regional and national networks for the defence and promotion of local, regional and national culture and of universal arts and sciences. [Brusli 2003]

### **The Other Campaign**

In preparation for The Other Campaign, in June of 2005, Subcomandante Marcos released a document called “The Impossible ¿Geometry? of Power in Mexico” (Subcomandante Marcos: June, 2005). In this document he assesses and characterizes the three primary political parties in Mexico. More specifically, he refers to the PAN as the ‘nostalgic party’ – that is, they suffer from nostalgia for the democratic struggle, for political humanism, for the war of the Cristeros, and for good conscience etc. The PRI is referred to as the stabilizer of development, the repressor, the government of devaluations and electoral fraud. He describes the PRD as the ‘party of tactical errors’. He references the erroneous alliances the PRD has made with the PRI and the PAN in different states, the mistake of repressing the student movement in 1999, the mistake of turning the Zócalo over to entertainment monopolies, the mistake in sending the paramilitary forces after the indigenous population of Zinacantán in Chiapas, and the mistake of introducing a zero tolerance policy which provided a means to justify the repression of young people, gays and lesbians etc.

From this document came the 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. What is unique about the 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration was that it pronounced itself anti-capitalist and leftist. These are attributes which, in theory, would draw the movement closer to the workers, the small peasant farmers, and to political and social organizations of the left. The 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration calls for four action steps:

- 1) ...to continue fighting for the Indian peoples of Mexico, but now not just for them and not with only them, but for all the exploited and dispossessed of Mexico...
- 2) ...to go to listen to, and talk directly with, without intermediaries or mediation, the simple and humble people of Mexico, and according to what we hear and learn, we are going to go about building...a national program of struggle, but a program which will be clearly of the left, anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal, and for justice, democracy and liberty for all Mexican people.
- 3) ...to build, or rebuild, another way of doing politics, one which once again has the spirit of serving others, without material interests, with sacrifice, with dedication, with honesty, one which keeps its word, whose only payment is the satisfaction of duty performed...
- 4) ...to struggle...to make a new Constitution, new laws which take into account the demands of the Mexican people, which are: housing, land, work, food, health, education, information, culture, independence, democracy, justice, liberty and peace. A new Constitution which recognizes the rights and liberties of the people, and which defends the weak in the face of the powerful. (see Almeyra and Thibaut 2006 : 213-214)

In Part III of the Declaration the EZLN gives a sound definition of what it refers to as capitalism yet it has yet to announce what it considers a viable alternative. The Declaration explains how capitalism benefits a select portion of the population. It is through the exploitation of the many that a few become rich. Capitalists rob the fertile lands and the natural resources from the workers and the peasants. After stripping the dispossessed of their basic means of subsistence they repress those that denounce these injustices. Capitalists are only interested in the sale and the possession of merchandise and profit. “They turn everything into merchandise; they turn people, nature, culture, history and consciousness into commodities” (Almeyra and Thibaut 2006: 206).

By the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 2005 over 90 social organizations, over 55 leftwing political organizations, 162 social organizations, approximately 453 NGOs, 103 indigenous organizations and

almost 1600 individuals had adhered to the 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration (Comite Clandestino Revolucionario Indigena: Sept 18, 2005). Although not all adherents participated, there were over 2000 people who gathered in Chiapas to express their expectations and interpretation of the 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration.

To pave the way for the Other Campaign, the Frente Zapatista por la Liberacion Nacional (FZLN)<sup>8</sup> was dismantled and became an integral part of the EZLN. The Other Campaign was to replace the FZLN and become the civil branch of the EZLN with a newly defined role and agenda which was spelt out in the 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. My own experience with the FZLN when I interviewed people at its central office in Mexico City in 2003 was a sense of uncertainty regarding its long term goals. When I asked participants what they saw as those goals or how the movement might develop over the next few years I received the following responses (Interviews May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2004): “I don’t know”, “Where ever it takes us”, “We are currently working on the next steps”. The people that had adhered to the Front were from all backgrounds; many had militated in other political organizations in the past only to end up disappointed with their sectarian ways; they saw the FZLN as more inclusive and open to discussion. Others simply wanted to focus their attention on supporting the EZLN and having their voices heard. To adhere to the FZLN you could not belong to any other political or social organization.

The first stage of the Other Campaign was programmed to run from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 to June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006. It held its first public event in San Cristobal de las Casas in Chiapas on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006<sup>9</sup>. In Marcos’s words<sup>10</sup>, “what we are going to do, together, is to shake this country from below, raise it up, turn it on its head”. This stage was one of consultation and was to culminate in a summary plenary in Mexico City at the end of June, 2006. The second stage was to begin in September 2006 and run until March 2007. As I will explain later on in this chapter the tour came to an abrupt end in May, 2006 and was reinitiated in April 2007. The Other Campaign is not a short term project attempting to effect immediate change but rather, as Delegado Zero describes it, a long term project of 10 to 15 years in duration. Delegado Zero, otherwise known as Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos (June 2006: 5), acknowledges that in keeping with political tradition, opposition groups establish their principles, their statutes, program and action plan, whereas The Other Campaign has gone only as far as establishing general parameters and principles which will become more defined as the movement expands. He (Ibid.: 7) also explains that to be anti-capitalist does not necessary mean to be socialist. For example, within the anti-capitalist movement there are anarchists and libertarians. He considers it pre-emptive to determine where the movement will lead without letting the movement itself lead the way. This is his direct response to the anti-capitalist, socialist organizations which are calling for the movement to clarify its anti-capitalist goals.

La Otra Campana’s approach was to consult with leftist organizations around the country and to create a ‘national plan of action’. The EZLN organized la Otra Campana at a time that political candidates from all parties were touring the country on their election campaigns leading up to the 2006 presidential elections. Although not considered a call for abstentionism, the EZLN was clearly opposed to the platforms of all parties and repudiated their dishonesty around the San Andres Accords. The practices of the Other Campaign reinforced the ‘delinking’ strategy of the movement.

### **Effects of Delinking – Empirical Observations**

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<sup>8</sup> The FZLN was founded in September 1997. Its role was to organize civil society around the EZLN cause.

<sup>9</sup> On January 6<sup>th</sup> 2006 Comandanta Ramona died. She had been fighting cancer of the kidney for over a decade. Ramona’s role in the EZLN ranged from advocating women’s rights, to leading the speeches during the negotiations with the government, to leading the military action on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994 in San Cristobal. Her death is a reminder of the deficiencies in the healthcare services in the indigenous communities. Comandanta Ramona’s death marks a great loss to the EZLN and sympathetic struggles throughout the world. Her death resulted in a minor delay in The Other Campaign and a modification to the original schedule.

<sup>10</sup> These words were spoken by Subcomandante Marcos on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005 in a speech he made in the Caracol La Garrucha. In this speech he also made public the initial itinerary of the Other Campaign. The itinerary was modified in January after the death of Ramona and again after the repressive attacks on the town of Atenco in early May.

There are a number of concerns that that have evolved with the ‘delinking’ process being practiced by the EZLN.

One of the most notable observations is that the ‘delinking’ being practiced by the leadership of the movement does not filter down to the groups and organizations that support them. This is evident in the relationship that supporters of the Other Campaign maintain with the Mexican government and its institutions. The majority of these groups and organizations, if not all of them, continue to work within the political and economic framework set out by the Mexican government. For example, the environmental groups which met The Other Campaign while travelling through the state of Morelos, were calling for the conservation of the few remaining park areas in the state. They did not adopt the anti-capitalist, anti- neoliberal discourse of Delegado Zero. Likewise, the Independent Human Rights Organization whose headquarters are found in Cuernavaca, Morelos, also fought within the capitalist mode of production to bring justice to different sectors of society which had suffered repression at the hands of the state. They maintained a relationship of negotiation with the state to address human rights abuses. In both case they benefited from services provided by the state such as health care and education. They propose reform rather than delinking. I am not suggesting that these struggles are illegitimate. Rather I am highlighting the different strategies adopted by the EZLN and its supporters. Left-wing Trotskyite and Marxist parties and organizations which support the Zapatista movement, promote anti-capitalist slogans and actions yet members of these groups continue to reap the benefits of services provided by the capitalist Mexican state and have not themselves delinked. While supporting the movement, many of these organizations also criticize the EZLN for not seeking more radical socialist change. It is premature to predict whether the Zapatistas’ delinking strategies will be effective over the long term.

Another observation worth noting is that by disconnecting from state services the most vulnerable often pay the price. I observed this while doing fieldwork in La Realidad, Chiapas in 2004 when I accompanied a medical doctor to the village where she gave consultation to people with medical concerns. Her stay in the village was to last six weeks. After this period, the only remaining medically trained people were the health promoters – people who took an interest in the wellbeing of people in the village but that had been trained only to deal with the simplest of medical cases. For example, minor cuts, diarrhea, straight forward child birth and common bacterial respiratory infections. The Zapatistas use the government hospital services for the most serious cases while managing the minor cases locally. Severe skin rashes were common ailments which had not been treated properly by the healthcare promoters. The lack of medical drugs to treat curable diseases, such as skin rashes, the absence of laboratory facilities and the difficulties in transporting patients to state hospitals complicates the outcome of patient care. Serious illnesses are often overlooked because of the rudimentary services provided.

As mentioned above, one of the primary supports of this delinking process are the NGOs which have been working in the area since shortly after the 1994 uprising. Without this support the communities would not have such things as the building supplies to build their schools, the school supplies for the children or the electrical plants to provide electricity to the communities. The lack of such supplies and services is the result of centuries of neglect and exclusion. This has left many villages struggling to provide the most basic necessities of life.

What makes NGO support problematic is the fact that they are not permanent structures, they are not there as elected representatives, nor are their projects long term. As new crises arise in distant lands, NGO resources are redirected (see Veltmeyer 2007b for a detailed account of development theories). As a SIPAZ spokesperson stated [Interview May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2004], many international organizations have stopped supporting their centre because funding had been redirected to other international projects. For example, an organization called Common Frontiers “is a [Canadian] multi-sectoral working group which confronts, and proposes...alternative[s] to, the social, environmental and economic effects of economic integration in the Americas”(Common Frontiers). It works in coordination with labour, religious and

political organizations. Its initial mandate was to confront the Canada-U.S Free trade agreement. Its resources were soon redirected to the North American Free Trade Agreement. At the time of the Zapatista uprising they were in close contact with Mexican organizations against NAFTA. They sent representatives to Chiapas in 1995 to support the Zapatista movement. Although they did not provide financial support to the Zapatista movement, their physical support and attention was subsequently redirected to the FTAA cause.

Development and Peace, a Canadian NGO which channels much of its support through Desarrollo Economico Social de Los Mexicanos Indigenas (DESMI), provided emergency support to the Zapatista zone immediately following the uprising on January 1, 1994 in the form of human rights observers and money. Since this initial emergency support, Development and Peace has continued to provide financial support to DESMI and the Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Centre on a smaller scale. In fact its support in 2003 was only half that of 1994.

The rejection of the electoral process, which again is a form of 'delinking' from the established institutions, also provokes another issue of concern. This action has been criticized by many progressive political activists who saw the PRD candidate, Manuel Lopez Obrador, as the strongest contender for the 2006 Presidential election and a viable alternative. If he were to have won the presidential elections they would have considered this the lesser of all evils next to the PRI and the PAN. Marcos did not consider this a good enough reason to vote for a party that had betrayed the indigenous struggle at the national and local level. Marcos criticized the PRD for voting in favour of the Indigenous Law and for its hostile and aggressive attitudes in some of the indigenous communities in Chiapas while in office. Some (see Almeyra and Thibaut 2006: 147) argue that the image of the PRD outside of Chiapas was quite different and that Lopez Obrador has the support of many anti-capitalist organizations. The support that he received was not necessarily support for his political positions but rather a strategic attempt to divert support away from the PRI and the PAN, the two predominant right wing political parties in Mexico. Ornelas Delgado (2006:124) comes down hard on the EZLN's Other Campaign stating that "it has won the support of and sparked enthusiasm from President Fox...[who congratulated the EZLN], a political-military organization, for having chosen the political route in its struggle to improve the situation in the country". He reminds us that Fox guaranteed protection and safety for the Other Campaign in its "anti-Lopez Obrador tour".

After numerous pauses in the campaign a delegation continues to travel around the country trying to organize under a common mandate. From the onset, Delegado Zero announced that this was a long term project. Unfortunately the delinking process that began in 2003 has not solved the economic or material needs of the indigenous people in Chiapas, it has not succeeded in ending political repression and it has been unsuccessful in organizing a national anti-capitalist movement. The Mexican government under Calderon continues to ignore the San Andres accords that were signed in 1996 by his predecessors.

### **Conclusions:**

Delinking is promoted by some as a possible means with which to effect systemic change, in contrast to standard development strategies and programs. Reformist strategies (see Bernstein 1993 [1937]) are considered yet a third approach. The reality is that none of these approaches have effectively addressed the political, economic, social and cultural disparities that exist in Mexico. Amin's theory of delinking allows for a degree of uncertainty in the final outcome. This is evident in his assertion that a state which is delinking from global governance could *possibly* evolve into a socialist state, without this being always the case. Delinking is seen as a first step toward a transition of some sort. In the Zapatista example the political actors are rejecting the status quo but the final outcome or goal needs to be defined by the actors themselves. The movement will not automatically progress to a socialist state or some other mode of production.

Regardless of the source of its financial resources, the political autonomy of the Zapatista municipalities supersedes other similar attempts of self-governing in Mexico. As a political statement

and practice the Zapatista approach of self-sufficiency has sent a clear message to the government that they are a force to be reckoned with. This is a government that has sought ways to assure the international community that everything in the region is under control. However, the government's neglect to honour the agreement signed in San Andres in 1996 has brought the EZLN to sever all relations with them and to look for new ways to organize and reach out to other non-state actors beyond Chiapas.

Without question the biggest enemy of independent developments in Latin America is U.S. imperialism<sup>11</sup> but lack of unity of the political left has also played havoc on its ability to dismantle capitalism and replace it with a political economic system that will truly address the anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalist goals as laid out by The Other Campaign. Electoral reforms have given people a greater sense of affinity with northern democracy and a greater connection with the developed world. Elections will not, however, solve the everyday hardships of the people, nor will they lead governments or movements to delink themselves from the grips of imperialism. Mexico is a good example of how this is the case.

The current approaches to effecting political change have one important advantage over the revolutionary tactics of earlier times and that is, they are peaceful, non-violent actions. In academia there is much controversy over what social-political change should look like and how to get there. One thing to keep in mind when studying movements in the south is that in contrast to northern academic circles, revolution and class struggle continue to be seen as viable means to an end. Delinking from the capitalist mode of production, with a clear vision of the future and a strong leadership, could prove to be an effective alternative to revolutionary action.

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<sup>11</sup> Veltmeyer (2007a: 22) holds U.S. imperialism responsible for the "40 to 60 percent [of the population which]...is mired in poverty". This percentage is as high as 80 percent in many rural areas. In fact "thirty nine percent of the extremely poor, those who have to survive with less than a dollar a day, are found in Mexico and Brazil, both regional champions of neoliberalism" (Ibid: 31).

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