

## A Report Back in the Mexico that Doesn't Work

Second International Gathering of Women Who Struggle **Continues From Front page**



**“Word” - Day One:** It is difficult to bear the cascade of painful stories that bursts forth from the main gazebo, a cascade to which this first day is dedicated, but one day turns out not to be enough. More than 90 compañeras have asked to speak. Almost all of them tell us that it is the first time they have dared to recount their shame, their anger at the humiliation they lived. The silence, the weeping rage entwines us. Age, nationality, privilege or poverty matter not. The stories of each are the stories of all. Including of those who deny them or no longer remember them. And the power of the speakers, reflected back by the mountains, make the voices ricochet so as to be heard throughout the seedbed, at all hours, in every corner, in the testimonies of shaky voices and shouts, we all break a little remembering our teachers, or husbands, or bosses, or gods, or uncles, or strangers, or friends who humiliated us too often and for a long time. We recall our abortions, the vaginal infections, the beatings, the screaming, the brutal or “moderate” rape, the mocking laughter, the pressure to have sex without wanting to, the disappearance of a friend, her death, her murder. And we also recall our own acts of violence against other women, or against our daughters or sons.

On the microphone the voices reverberate non-stop. Voices of mothers without their daughters, of orphaned women, of the relatives of prisoners or those being persecuted, of girls from the city who name – for the first time – their harassers, their rapists, their brutes near and far. For millennia, women have learned to listen, perhaps to speak without being heard. Here, many women are learning to speak and to be heard.

When the moon shines dimly in the evening, the improvised songs and dances will begin, setting off a temporary healing. There are ancestral dances around small fires or songs with musicians who just met. Everywhere and for hours, others sing whatever brings us together, from La Bamba Zapatista to Selena, w/Dozens of organizations of indigenous and campesina women are present, demonstrating the importance of this gathering and an example of the intersection of struggles of women from several countries who are defending territory, human rights, and women’s organizational processes.

The Zapatistas present a performance that combines the strength and discipline of the militiawomen with the joy of a cumbia dance that makes us wonder, “*what if this is love, what if this is love?*” They are the daughters and granddaughters of those who put their bodies and lives into the uprising 26 years ago. Many come wearing bows and colored arrows and some without them. When the *cumbia* stops, the girl Esperanza

places herself in the center of the seedbed and expresses her need for help against violence. The militiawomen shout that they must protect her and they do. They run around her in concentric rows, forming a conch. Those armed with bow and arrow aim at the circular horizon while a thrice-given instruction asks them to “ready and aim” without firing. The nationals and internationals observe in silence. Around the seedbed which men are not permitted to enter, these militiawomen armed with bows and arrows will take care of us, be it under the sun or under a tender moon that is beginning to grow.

With the conviction that “everything changes,” ultimately arriving at the song we will carry in our throats: “Zapatista sister, your compañeras are here. Together we will win. Never, never abandon me in the struggle.”

**“Respect” - Day Two:** It’s December 28, and the Zapatista women give us complete freedom to organize the second day’s discussions. There are various workshops, such as self-defense, yoga, dance, healing and medicinal plants, or anything that someone proposes. Alongside those, working groups gather around various themes: differently abled women, maternity, communication, art, textiles, workplace or family harassment, pedophilia, migration, obstetric and gynecological violence, education, health, travel, and abolitionism. This last group triggers patriarchal-type passions as it debates proposals on the prohibition of sex work, a prohibition that is not accepted by sex workers nor many feminists who, characteristically, fight against any imposition upon our bodies. In addition, the trans compañeras perceive discrimination from us and strongly condemn it.

Few groups reach agreements, almost all of them functional. But there is a binding element within the whirlwind of topics being discussed: **respect**. Whether it be that we demand it from those identified as attackers in the stories of pain or that we obtain it and work for it among ourselves, the majority of the debates occur in an environment that tries to follow the Zapatista model and seeks respectful ways to generate discussion, conscious that in order to demand respect, it must be given. This is how we listen to every group’s stories of sadness or happiness, respecting all emotions and experiences.

*“They killed my boy.” “They disappeared my daughter.” “They forced me to give my baby up for adoption and I’m looking for him. I need help to find him.” “I haven’t yet decided if I want to be a mother. I’ve come to listen to those who are mothers in order to decide.” “For me, motherhood is the deepest and most intense act of reciprocity between two people.” “I’ve come to imagine ways of not feeling alone when I fight against the capitalist system.” “I don’t want to live in solitude anymore.” “I no longer want to just survive.”*

Throughout the day, many women spontaneously organize to support the Zapatista compañeras with cleaning the bathrooms or separating the garbage. Our hosts are perfectly organized and have arranged everything necessary for the work or the party to flow, but we are many and we are all busy with something. What remains is to share accounts of what has been achieved and to not let the light they gave us a year and a half ago go out.

As night falls, indigenous butterflies arrive from Canada to move us with a dance. They are the Butterflies in Spirit, a group of women who won’t allow for murdered or disappeared indigenous women to be forgotten. As a prelude to the dance, they leave us raw while narrating their own stories of repeated sexual violence as they tell us, “*You’ve now seen our faces and now know our names. It is your responsibility to find us and make us visible if one day someone disappears us.*” Then begins a series of documentaries on violence against indigenous women in other latitudes. The rising moon aligns clearly with Venus.

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## UC Strikers Defy Firings, Expand Strike

Opposition continues to grow to the decision by University of California officials to fire roughly 80 striking grad students at UC Santa Cruz, who have refused to submit grades until their demands for a cost-of-living increase is granted. Last week the strike spread to graduate students at UC Davis (UCD) and UC Santa Barbara (UCSB), with students in at least one department at UC Berkeley announcing a sympathy strike. There are major protests and grad student assemblies being held today in Santa Cruz, Davis, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, Berkeley, San Diego and other UC campuses.

Last Friday, UC President Janet Napolitano, the former US Secretary of Homeland Security under President Obama, and other UC officials terminated the students, making it clear that their major crime was defying the labor agreement signed by the United Auto Workers last year, which enforces poverty wages and a no-strike clause.

The graduate students’ chief demand is a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), ranging from about \$1,400 to \$1,800 per month depending on the campus, to cover the skyrocketing cost of rent in California. The majority of graduate students at multiple UC campuses spend over 50 percent of their salary on rent.

As support grows on and off the campuses, the unions and the Democratic Party are working hard to contain the strike and prevent it from spreading off campus and triggering a broader movement of the working class. The UAW has publicly stated it will not defend the strikers for any activity not covered by the contract. After the firings, the UAW filed a complaint that the administration had agreed to negotiate with the grad students who were acting outside of the legally sanctioned labor-management relationship!!! The UAW and other unions are complicit in the strikebreaking action of Napolitano, which is backed by Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom, billionaire Richard Blum (husband of Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein), and the rest of the Democratic Party-appointed UC Board of Regents.

Bernie Sanders denounced the dismissals as “union busting,” an absurd term given that the UAW supports the firing. Graduate students must break decisively with the entire trade union apparatus and form rank-and-file strike committees to fight for the broadest mobilization of the working class in their defense. In addition to reaching out to other students, faculty, and workers on campus, they must call on workers off the campuses, e.g. 14,000 northern California Safeway workers who have authorized strike action, and other workers to join the struggle for living wages, the right to high quality, free public and university education.

But this means urging workers to rebel against the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Education Association (NEA) and other unions, and to form rank-and-file factory and workplace committees too. Preparations must be made for mass demonstrations and strikes to demand the reinstatement of the fired UCSC grad students and to back their demands.



**Jonathan Burleigh**  
via World Socialist Web  
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## PERMIT FOR WHAT? MR. FORD

**Open Letter to the Office of the California Attorney General. CEQA Complaint.**

I am involved with organizations interested in protecting the natural environment. This is well known in my community, with the result that California state employees with the Department of Fish and Wildlife have called or emailed me with information about ongoing failures by the Planning and Building Department of Humboldt County to provide in their view adequate environmental protections during the County’s permit review and issuance process for marijuana.

I have been requested to make comments on certain projects based on information provided by them. The Planning Director, John Ford, has told me he is very angry that this information is being provided to me, and he has conducted a witch hunt to try to discover and curtail this practice. On 21 September 2019 he wrote to several officials of CDFW in an email which was forwarded also to Director Charles Bonham. He requested that the unknown employees cease “attempting to undermine the County.” He cites specific cases and references my inputs. He names some employees he suspects of involvement. These employees have received some form of censure from the Department even though these are not necessarily the ones who have contacted me.

This undue pressure smacks of whistle blower harassment pursuant to the California Labor Code and clearly violates the California Environmental Quality Act. For example, 15096 of the Guidelines establishes that “*A Responsible Agency complies with CEQA by considering the EIR or Negative Declaration prepared by the Lead Agency and by reaching its own conclusions on whether and how to approve the project involved.*” The County as Lead Agency may not dictate or intimidate the views of CDFW employees acting on behalf of the Responsible Agency, as John

Ford has done. This pressure has reached to wide aspects of the natural environment, including T&E species and dam site-ing.

The CDFW has unique State authority for these, yet the County has attempted to interfere with that authority, as may be noted in the several attachments to Director Ford’s letter. I have only a paper copy so do not here attach it. In addition, the issues and information under review pursuant to CEQA are not privileged under law. If a CDFW employee chooses to provide me this information on his or her own time it is beyond any purview of Humboldt County, John Ford, or CDFW. I request the California Attorney General advise Humboldt County of this complaint and request the County immediately cease these violations.

- **Robert Sutherland**

**The whistle echoes in the empty halls:**

*Hello Robert,* Sorry about the delay to responding to your earlier email. The complaint you submitted reached me at the State Water Resources Control Board, part of the CalEPA agencies. We are not part of the Attorney General’s office. I just referred your complaint to the AG office, *but I don’t know if the contact listed into our database will respond.* I am not aware of other options for contacting the AG’s office. *The nature of your complaint concerns CEQA and whistleblower concerns and those are outside the jurisdiction of our agency.*

Matthew  
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