

73. Popular Responses to Neoliberalism (the Late 1990s)*

One of the most concrete manifestations of Mexico's adoption of neoliberal economics in the 1990s was President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's alteration of state policy on communal landholding, as articulated in Article 27 of the Constitution (Source 55). In theory, this article limited the size of large-scale estates, banned foreigners from holding property, and restored *ejido* (communally held) land to those populations that had possessed it before the presidency of Porfirio Díaz. The ejidal system established that the federal government technically owned this land, but that peasants had the right to farm and profit from it in perpetuity. The largest distribution of this land occurred during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940). In its development, the ejidal system had many shortcomings, including the poverty of the land the state sometimes distributed and peasants' lack of access to capital to develop it. Salinas's reform to this system removed the ban on private ownership of ejidal land. Supporters of the measure argued that the change would help end rural poverty and improve low agrarian productivity while providing financial opportunities to small landholders. Critics saw it merely as a means whereby the law ceased to protect poor farmers from forced sale to large landholders and corporations. Disputes between proponents of the two positions sparked across the Mexican countryside, including in Chiapas in the wake of Salinas's reforms (Source 72).

Conflicts over foreign incursions into national territory also arose in municipal centers. One of the most heated occurred in the scenic colonial town of Tepoztlán, Morelos, a gathering place for both domestic and international progressive organizations. In 1995 citizens of Tepoztlán organized themselves into a movement that successfully contested the plans of the multinational conglomerate Kladt Sobrino (KS) to develop an eighteen-hole golf course, a country club, and a subdivision of eight hundred luxury homes in the historic town. The following is an open letter created by the movement organizing resistance to the development. By comparing this text with earlier sources (sources 7, 20, 27, and 53), readers might study how this group consciously or unconsciously drew from the historic concept of the rights of the indigenous *pueblo* (people or town) as a means of legitimizing their grievances against the state and foreign interests. How does this text compare to petitions from earlier eras (sources 29, 57, 63)?

*Carta al C. Presidente de la República at Committee for Tepozteco Unity (CUT) website: <http://www.tepoz10.0rg/documentos/index.htm>. Translated by the editors.

Open Letter of Protest

To the Citizen President of the Republic
 To the Citizen Secretary of the Interior
 To the National Institute of Ecology
 To the Political Parties
 To the Non-Governmental Organizations

AND ABOVE ALL, TO EL PUEBLO OF MEXICO:

El Pueblo of Tepoztlán, despite recent national events, continues to believe that NO ONE SHOULD BE ABOVE THE LAW. With respect to the profoundly ILLEGAL intent of the company KS and the government of the state of Morelos to build a large subdivision and golf club in Tepoztlán, we declare that:

1. The people of Tepoztlán are morally and legally in the right with regard to the legitimate ownership of their communal lands, given that there is a 1929 decree clearly establishing this. The "purchase" alleged by KS is evidently illegal, its sole foundation being the corruption of the officials who legitimized it and continue to support it today.

2. All of the lands where they intend to build the aforementioned subdivision are located within the TEPOZTECO NATIONAL PARK, within the WILD FLORA AND FAUNA PROTECTION ZONE, along the CHICHINAUTZIN-AJUSCO BIOLOGICAL CORRIDOR; therefore they belong to the NATIONAL SYSTEM OF PROTECTED AREAS and cannot for any reason be devastated in order to build a residential subdivision. This is clearly established by the General Law of Ecological Equilibrium and Environmental Protection currently in effect.

3. Water needed for the subsistence of the Tepoztecan population as well as that of other towns in the state of Morelos depends heavily on the replenishment of groundwater in the region where their golf course is supposed to be built. Moreover, the company's claim that it will irrigate over one million square meters of land with the aquifer water—while at the same time supplying hundreds of swimming pools and luxury homes—when the wells in the region are suffering severe reductions in capacity, is a crime against the local population.

4. Municipal zoning regulations expressly prohibit the construction of residential subdivisions and golf clubs in that area.

5. The National Institute of Ecology (INE), in accordance with law, chose not to approve environmental impact studies presented on two separate occasions, because it believed that the company had omitted studies of fundamental importance, such as the impact on the local climate, water, soil, population, flora, fauna, landscape, etc. The INE responded thus to the company KS: "As long as Constructora Semantzin [Kladt Sobrino, KS] can not demonstrate the environmental feasibility of its project, and until this General Department issues a Resolution of Environmental Impact as per the terms specified under Environmental Legislation, NO WORKS OR ACTIVITIES WHATSOEVER OF THE TEPOZTECO GOLF CLUB SHALL BE CARRIED OUT; OTHERWISE, THE COMPANY WILL BE SUBJECT TO ANY SANCTIONS IT HAS INCURRED."

6. State Governor Jorge Carrillo Olea, seconded by his Secretary of "Environmental Development," the nefarious ex-environmentalist of Swiss origin Ursula Oswald, has decided to join the company's campaign, promoting in diverse media the construction of the subdivision: threatening any regents who oppose the project with imprisonment, firing government employees who have taken positions against the golf course, inventing civil, criminal or agrarian lawsuits against local residents opposed to the project, pressuring ejido, communal, and municipal authorities, local residents, etc. The local press is filled with indications, threats, and accusations formulated by the Governor and Mrs. Oswald against the Tepoztecan people. Carrillo Olea's **Great Alliance** consists of businessmen and government officials allied against the rights of the people of the state of Morelos.

7. Above and beyond all this, the resolution of the Tepoztecan people stands: NO TO THE RESIDENTIAL SUBDIVISION AND GOLF CLUB ON TEPOZTECAN LANDS! KM and government officials know that the population will not allow this construction to take place, yet they insist on using threats, provocations, and intimidation. During a Popular Assembly against the Golf Club attended by over 3,000 people outside the Municipal Presidency of Tepoztlán, the company bussed in hundreds of thugs from Cuernavaca to confront the population; but their provocation failed. The company has attempted to confront the town by deceitfully offering jobs and by handing out money left and right. In the state's most impoverished and needy communities, they publicized an alleged hiring campaign, deceiving and manipulating people, and trying to use this against the Tepoztecan population with the argument that there would be work for everyone. The history of this company in the state of Morelos shows us that the offer of progress and jobs for everyone is nothing but a con game, an attempt to turn the population against itself. These worthy people no longer let themselves be fooled. They are tired of all this mockery and injustice, both from the businessmen and from corrupt government officials. We declare state governor General Jorge Carrillo Olea and the KS company responsible for any harm, imprisonment or direct or indirect repression suffered by any member of the Tepoztecan community. How long will they continue to violate the Mexican Political Constitution in order to favor the groups and mafias of economic and political power in the State of Morelos and nationwide? Does General Carrillo Olea intend to continue employing the methods of his colleague, Rubén Figueroa, in order to eliminate all those who oppose his policies?

POPULAR ASSEMBLY OF THE TEPOZTECAN PEOPLE