

## **Picturing Politics: the Zapatista struggle**

### **By Dr Adam Morton**

Roger Peet's block print 'Aqui Seguimos' is an arresting image made in solidarity with the Zapatista communities in Mexico. In English the text reads: 'We don't sell out, we don't surrender, we stay'. The Zapatista's struggle formally announced itself on the public on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1994, in Mexico, when it stormed several towns in the southern state of Chiapas and announced demands for work, land, health, education, independence, freedom, justice and peace.

Their rebellion in strategy of commanding and occupying space intentionally coincided with the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA, which was a crucial catalyst for the extension of neoliberal restructuring, that included fundamental reform of the agrarian sector. Among other issues, NAFTA entailed altering the pivotal status of collective ejido landholdings and reform of Article 27 of the Mexican constitution of 1917, thereby accelerating the sale and purchase of land according to private property relations.

Since then at least five key accomplishments have marked the Zapatista's struggle. One, the activation of national and international civil society; two, the promotion of indigenous rights; three, the appeal to collective class interests beyond ethnicity; four, the campaign for wider democratisation from below; and five, constant innovation through new spatial forms of governance within the communities of Chiapas.

Roger Peet's image of masks hung upon a washing line sums up the persistence and endurance of the Zapatista communities. With a characteristic sense of timing, the Zapatistas marked the resurgence of their social struggle in December 2012 with a silent march of 40,000 members across Chiapas and a series of new communiqués against the return of the institutional revolutionary party or PRI.

More than ever it would be perilous to overlook this movement's attempts at another way of doing politics in Mexico and the wider world.