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OPPOSITION TO LA PAROTA HYDROELECTRIC DAM PROJECT

The Council of Ejidos and Communities Opposed to the La Parota Dam (Consejo de Ejidos y Comunidades Opositores a la Presa La Parota, CECOP) is a resistance movement uniting peasant farmers, both male and female, who oppose the La Parota Hydroelectric Dam Project. The dam's construction would affect, amongst others, the communal land holders of the municipalities of Acapulco and Juan R. Escudero in the state of Guerrero. The movement was launched on 28 July 2003, when CECOP members blocked the roads leading to site of the proposed dam's contention walls. For a number of hours, CECOP members questioned three workers from the Federal Electricity Commission (Comisión Federal de Electricidad, CFE), demanding from them more information on the project. Recently PBI interviewed CECOP spokesman Felipe Flores Hernández.

¿Why are the Federal Electricity Commission and the [Guerrero] state authorities pushing for the construction of La Parota?

First they said they needed to build it because Acapulco needed water, then [they said they needed it] for electricity. We started investigating and [initially we thought that] the hydroelectric project was going to be completed to generate power to be sold on. Eventually, we discovered that the dam was going to operate at 19% of its full capacity for four hours a day. We realised that the company with the development concession will own the water. And afterwards, it will sell us the water if it wants to, and if not, we'll go thirsty. We will be left with the environmental damage and the displacement of thousands of peasant farmers.

¿Why is there a movement against the construction of the dam?

We're defending our territory and its natural resources, and we don't want our indigenous brothers and sisters to be displaced. They plan to flood 16,300 hectares, and over 40 communities which are home to 25,000 peasant farmers. Where are they going to take so many people? It will affect five municipalities: San Marcos, Tecoanapa, Juan R. Escudero, Chilpancingo and Acapulco, the most affected, where we are located.



Rogelio Teliz, lawyer from the Tlachinollan Human Rights Center of the Mountain (squatting above), Felipe Flores Hernández, CECOP spokesman (with loudspeaker), with PBI volunteer during a CECOP protest at the Superior Agrarian Court [Tribunal Superior Agrario] of Acapulco.

It provides no benefits to the communities. On the contrary, they would be left without land, they would be left with nothing because they would have nowhere to sow their crops and the people in those communities live off what they grow. The environmental damage would affect flora, fauna and the lowland jungle. Many endangered species would be lost.¹

¹ The Mexican Environmental Rights Centre (*El Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental, CEMDA*) and the Inter-American Association for the Defence of the Environment (*Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa*



PBI interviewing Felipe Flores Hernández, CECOP spokesman.

How was the CECOP born?

The movement was born following an assembly in Cacahuatpec, the community seat. We asked Carlos Pérez Aguirre, then responsible for promoting the project, who had given him permission to come onto our lands. He said, "The permit was authorised by SEMARNAT [Secretariat for the Environment and Natural Resources, Secretario de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales] and the CNA [National Water Commission, Comisión Nacional del Agua—CONAGUA]". But the lands are ours, they belong to communal owners, and those bodies don't have the right to intrude on them nor to give permits. After that assembly, we formed a small group and visited the different communities, asking if they agreed with the project being completed. This was in June 2003. Most people said they didn't agree because there was no information on what would happen next.

We got ourselves organised, and decided to hold a strike on 28 July 2003 to demand that they explain what would happen with this project. We didn't know if communities would disappear, whether there would be relocations, whether there would be payments.

What actions have you taken and what have you achieved?

We have held marches in Acapulco and in the communities, and meetings in different locations throughout the state. We have even gone to Chilpancingo, the state capital, and to Mexico City, again to hold protests. We have gone

del Ambiente, AIDA) carried out a study of the negative impacts which the construction of the La Parota hydroelectric dam might mean for the environment and its biodiversity.

outside of Mexico to spread the word about what the Guerrero government wants to do. We have legal advisers [lawyers from the Tlachinollan Human Rights Center], and we have pleaded our case before the Unitary Agrarian Tribunal [Tribunal Unitario Agrario]: we won four cases.² We have contested the assembly held on 28 April 2010.³ The first hearing was on 1 July, the second on 6 August. On 1 July the magistrate granted us precautionary measures, and this is important for us because as long as the trial is in progress, nothing can be done.⁴ The CFE can't come in, the state government can't come in, and the commissioner can't sign any documents until the trial is over. The government wanted to have started the tendering process by now, to change the soil usage or to expropriate the land. So now the government can't do anything because we have precautionary measures. If any document has already been signed, it is annulled by those measures until the case is resolved.

What type of obstacles have you faced?

We've had detention orders issued against us; they've fabricated crimes we never committed. When assemblies have been called, the government has sent the police to intimidate people so they won't attend. For those of us who are against [the project], we're refused entry. Before this megaproject arrived, we lived peacefully. Since then, there have been many problems within families, between lifelong friends [*compadres*], between sons and daughters. The government seeks division, provocation,

²The trials of San Marcos, Dos Arroyos, Los Huajes y La Palma.

³For further information on the 28 April assembly (in Spanish), see *La Jornada Guerrero*, 13 May 2010, www.lajornadaguerrero.com.mx/2010/05/13/index.php?section=sociedad&article=005n1soc.

⁴The magistrate Martha Leticia Gracida Jiménez, of the Unitary Agrarian Tribunal (Tribunal Unitario Agrario, TUA) of District 41 with seat in Acapulco, announced suspension measures of a precautionary character, which ordered the suspension of all work and action (on the dam) within the communal lands of Cacahuatpec [*los Bienes Comunes de Cacahuatpec*] until the Annulment Trial 360/2010 (regarding the irregular assembly carried out on 28 April 2010 in La Concepción), be resolved. In spite of this, on 16 November, the Federal Chamber of Deputies approved resources in the 2011 National Budget [*Presupuesto de Egresos de la Federación 2011*] of more than 4,200 million pesos in order to fund the construction of the La Parota hydroelectric dam. For more information (in Spanish), see *La Jornada Guerrero*, <http://www.lajornadaguerrero.com.mx/2010/07/02/index.php?section=sociedad&article=007n1soc>.

confrontation. It has given [funding or goods] to those who are in favour; to those in opposition it gives nothing. We are harassed, marginalised.

Do you think that the situation you're experiencing is an isolated case, or is it part of a pattern of repression against social movements who oppose so-called 'megaprojects'?

Our movement has been in contact with different sectors, such as the group in the state of Oaxaca fighting against the Paso de la Reina dam.⁵ We are also in solidarity with our companions in Temacapulín, in the state of Jalisco.⁶ We have received information that in Oaxaca they have suffered repression and harassment by the government of Ulises Ruiz [previous State Governor]. They are experiencing terrible

⁵Vélez Ascencio, Octavio, 'Ejidatarios de Oaxaca se alistan para luchar contra presa de CFE' [Oaxacan communal landholders prepare to fight against CFE dam], *La Jornada*, 28 July 2009 (Spanish),

www.jornada.unam.mx/2009/07/28/index.php?section=estados&article=027n1est.

⁶Partida, Juan Carlos G, 'Temacapulín organiza su defensa con el apoyo de AMLO y diputados' [Temacapulín organises its defence with support from AMLO and deputies], *La Jornada Jalisco*, 17 April 2010 (Spanish), www.lajornadajalisco.com.mx/2010/04/17/index.php?section=politica&article=003n1pol.

repression, the same as we are here. One could say that there is a pattern of repression against social organisations that fight against megaprojects.

When this conflict started, they said they were building the dam in order to improve clinics and schools. But that's their obligation already - giving you those benefits does not justify the fact that they take your heritage. But that's what they give you in exchange for your natural resources and your territory.

We have been to different places. We visited the Chixoy dam in Guatemala⁷ and we never even heard the term "development". We were with the protesters against the Cajón dam in [the Mexican state of] Nayarit,⁸ who accepted the project but were never compensated. They're still crying over it now: now they have no house, no land.

⁷ Environmental Defender Law Center, 'Guatemala: the Chixoy Dam and the Rio Negro Massacres', www.edlc.org/cases/communities/maya-achi-of-guatemala/.

⁸ Ruiz, José Luis. 'Nayarit: Inicia obra de la presa El Cajón' [Nayarit: Work starts on El Cajón Dam], *El Universal*, 31 March 2004 (Spanish), www2.eluniversal.com.mx/pls/impreso/noticia.html?id_nota=109305&tabla=nacion.

For more information on CECOP's work (Spanish), see www.comda.org.mx/index.php/integrantes/10-consejo-de-ejidos-y-comunidades-opositores-a-la-presa-la-parota-cecop, as well the following article: www.lajornadaguerrero.com.mx/2010/05/21/index.php?section=regiones&article=009n1reg

For more information about the La Parota hydroelectric dam, see the website of *The International Service for Peace* (SIPAZ) and click on problems: http://www.sipaz.org/gfini_eng.htm

Carlos Pérez Rojas' documentary *Y el río sigue corriendo*, whose central theme is the struggle of the communities affected by the La Parota hydroelectric Project, won the prize for Best Documentary of 2010 at the ImagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival de Canada. In order to see this documentary, click here: http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xb67b9_y-el-rio-sigue-corriendo_creation. Subtitles are available in French and English.

For more information about the effects of the La Parota project, see the website of the Mexican Centre of Environmental Rights (*Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental*, CEMDA), http://www.cemda.org.mx/artman2/publish/Actividades_Litigio_Ambiental_72/Proyecto_Hidroel_ctrco_La_Parota.php (Spanish), and of the Inter-American Association for the Defence of the Environment (*Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa del Ambiente*, AIDA), <http://www.aida-americas.org/> (English).