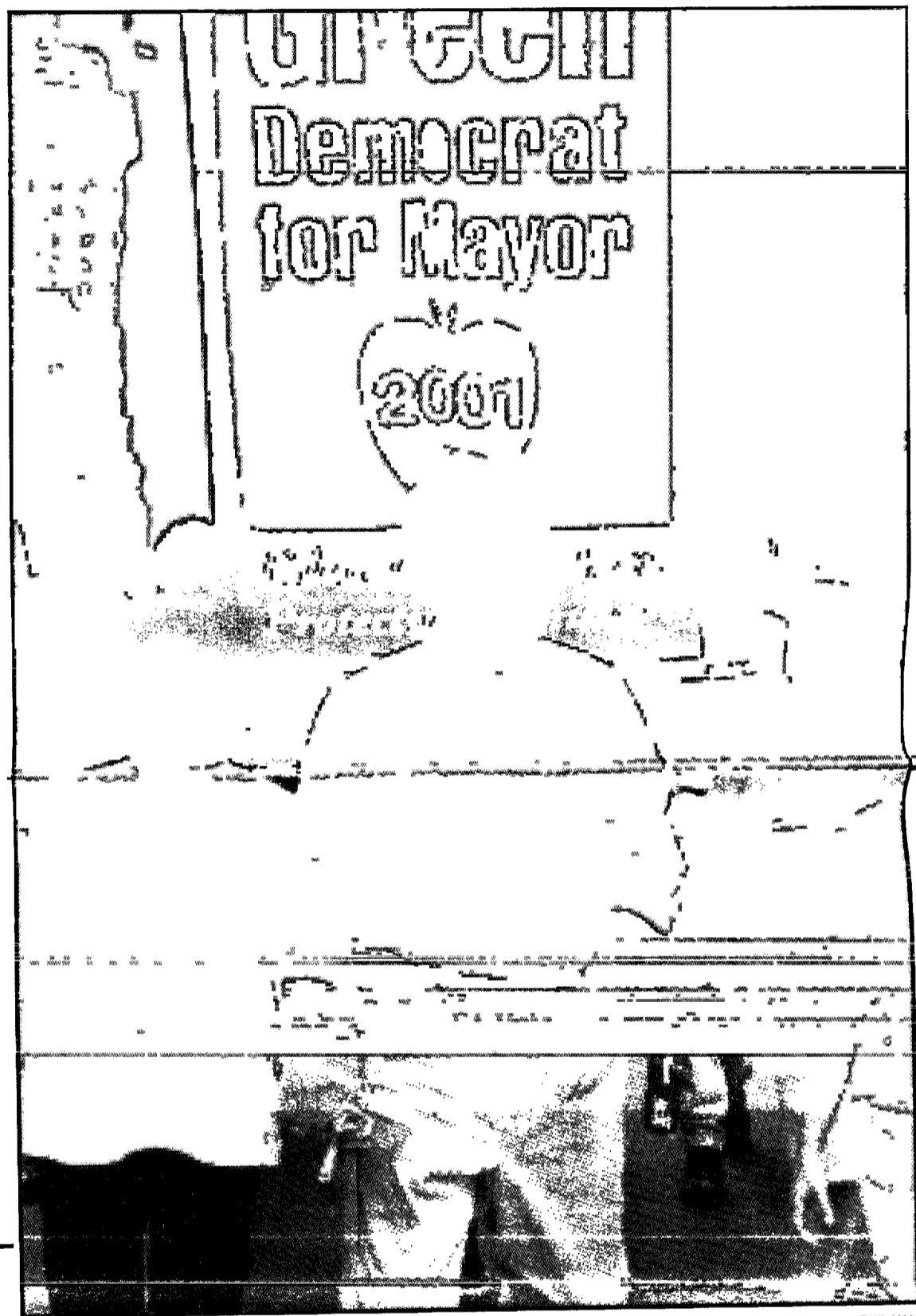


Behind Green's Blue Drapes

The story behind
Mark Green's
speaking appearance
at City College

Article by Rob Wallace on p. 6



PHIL HAN

Earn and learn

CUNY'S WRITING FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM, P. 8-9

LIVING AFTER THE TERROR

POVERTY, DESPAIR, GRIEF PLAGUE CHIAPAS COMMUNITIES

By Andrew Kennis

As part of a project with the Fray Bartolome Center for Human Rights, based out of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, Ryan Foster and myself, Andrew Kennis, conducted human rights observation work in the municipality of Chenalho and the pueblos of Acteal and Yibeljoj. We conducted human rights interviews, recorded and sometimes photographed military movement activities and helped with some of the labor work that the community needed to survive (in Yibeljoj, one had to walk 45 minutes just to get to some decent water and to get their wood as well). Such an experience enabled us, first-hand, to get a handle on what these brave people contend with on a daily basis.

Acteal and Yibeljo, Chenalho, Chiapas, Mexico: Writing about Acteal is no easy task, as anyone who has visited Acteal and subsequently tried to do as much as probably tell you. The experience of visiting this devastated and highly impoverished pueblo (village, town, or community), which resides in rural southeastern Mexico and consists of 250 families and about 500 refugees, is a very emo-

tional one and its immediate toll sticks with you for months, while the memories themselves are truly unforgettable. From the moment one arrives at the entrance of Acteal, which is perched on a hill on the side of a mountain, one is taken aback by Acteal's grief and impoverishment.

Its grief is immediately evident by the statue that adorns the side of the road near the entrance of Acteal. The monument, called the "Statue of Shame" and created by the Danish sculptor, Jens Galschiot, is dedicated annually to different places in the world that have been victim to a human rights atrocity. Acteal's atrocity took place on December 22, 1997, whereby a Mexican and U.S. supported paramilitary went on a killing spree that took the lives of 45 indigenous residents of Acteal, the majority of whom were women and children. A sign also accompanies the entrances that reads, "Welcome to the Holy Land where in one year, 45 died in martyrdom whom were praying and trying to help preserve the life of the community and the peace of Acteal."

The poverty of Acteal is also immediately noticeable. As you walk down the hill from the

entrance, you quickly notice the wooden and overcrowded shacks that are strewn about the mountainside where Acteal resides. Barefooted children, whom have no school to go to, run about with their bellies protruding from under their tattered shirts due to malnutrition (a rampant and long time epidemic in Acteal, which plagues most of the community).

Adding to the emotional impact of the visit is the fact that there are inspiring and remarkably uplifting aspects of Acteal as well. The people of Acteal are extremely friendly, hospitable and outwardly happy - albeit, underneath the smiles exists what is an obvious lifetime of impoverishment, even evident solely by the often horrible conditions of the teeth of Acteal's residents, who are without any access to dental care. Nevertheless, the spirit and hope of the people of Acteal live on, as is plainly clear through their good-natured humor and friendliness.

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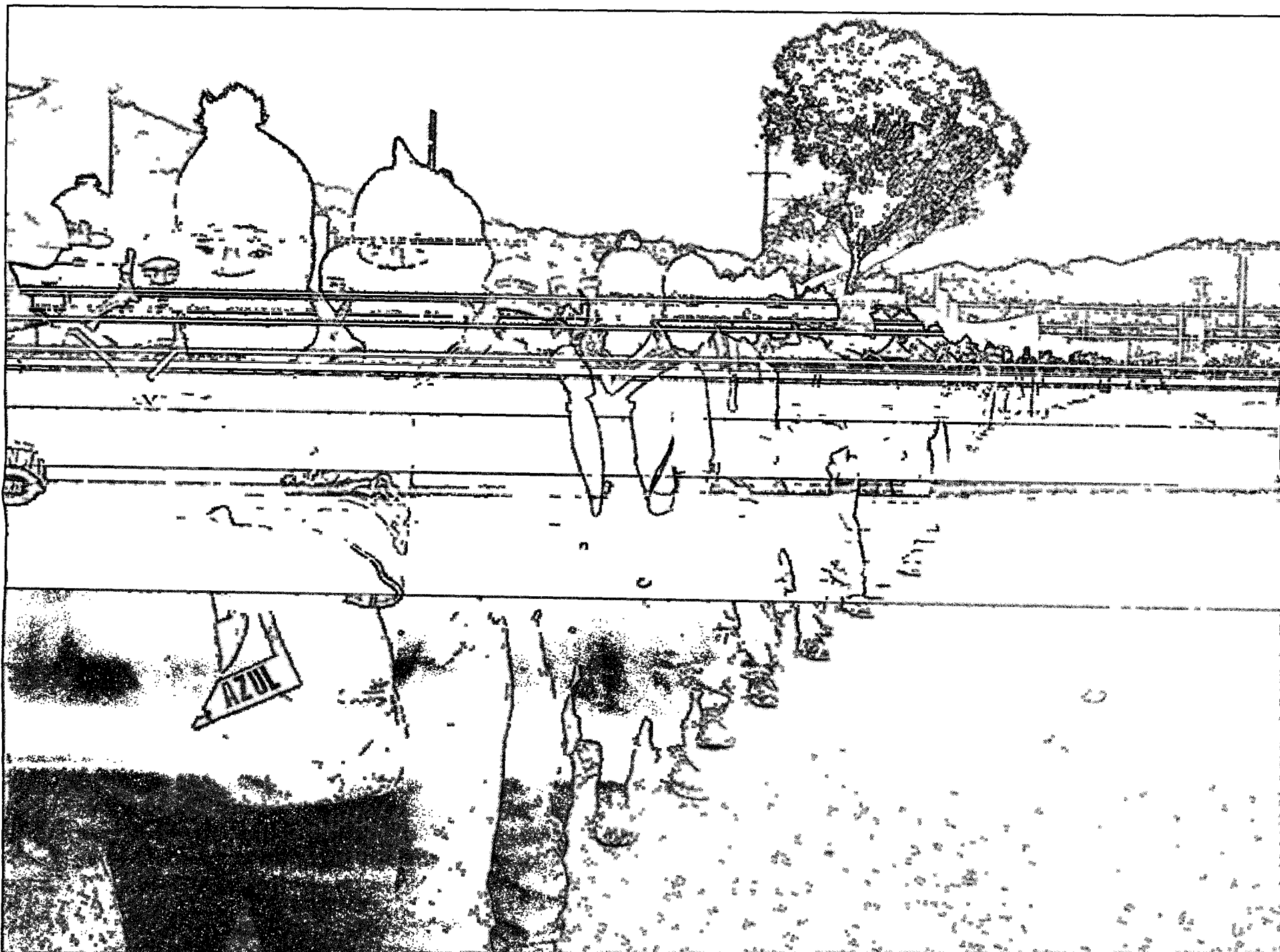
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The minute that we walked down the dirt and wooden stairwell at the entrance of Acteal, we were greeted by an elderly indigenous woman who asked in broken Spanish (the overwhelming majority of Acteal's residents, only speak Tzotzil, an indigenous language), "¿tienes hambre?" (are you hungry?). We answered just a little bit, but that was all it took to be instantly scurried off to the communal kitchen and seated. Soon thereafter, we were served beans, rice, tortillas, and coffee that were

natural surroundings are breathtaking. As mentioned above, Acteal resides on a mountain hilltop and is surrounded by other mountains that are in the midst of a lush jungle forest, which only rarely is not overcast by a misty and mystical fog. Despite the inspiring aspects of Acteal, however, its poverty and grief left greater imprints on us than anything else.

ic exploitation in the world. The most recent uprising in 1994 by the Ejercito Zapatista Liberacion Nacional (National Zapatista Liberation Army, or EZLN) was a shock to the Mexican government. Their reaction was to institute a brutal military occupation that exists to the present and has been condemned roundly by international and Mexican national human rights groups.

The situation that grew out of the uprising is not an uncommon one, and is



Mexican Zapatistas

made and/or harvested in or nearby Acteal. A family prepared the food for us and as we later found out, this responsibility is rotated on a weekly basis between the families of Acteal who cook for those who cannot eat with their families (as for example, many harvest coffee in the fields until late hours at night), those who don't have families to eat with (i.e. because of the massacre), or for visitors like us.

Aside from the incredibly hospitable and friendly character of the people of Acteal, another inspiring facet of Acteal is that its

LEADING UP TO THE MASSACRE

Along with Oaxaca, which is the northern neighbor of Chiapas, both states are Mexico's poorest and most densely populated indigenous states in the country. Accordingly, they have also been amongst the most exploited regions of Mexico, amongst its natural resources and its people. This has been the case for 500 years, and as such, explains the preponderance of indigenous uprisings and resistance to some of the most severe econom-

similar to that of Colombia (though less in scale and terror). The standard story is a familiar one: the military winds up receiving more of or at least the continued support of the U.S., in terms of military training, "strategic" advice and of course most crucially, financial support and arms sales. On the diplomatic front, the U.S. makes sure not to make a bit fuss about the increased human rights violations that inevitably (and predictably)

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