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“I Shit On All the Revolutionary Vanguards of this Planet”

A letter to the Basque liberation movement ETA

Subcomandante Marcos

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“Marcos, the quintessential anti-leader, insists that his black mask is a mirror, so that ‘Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, a Mayan Indian in the streets of San Cristobal, a Jew in Germany, a Gypsy in Poland, a Mohawk in Quebec, a pacifist in Bosnia, a single woman on the Metro at 10 p.m., a peasant without land, a gang member in the slums, an unemployed worker, an unhappy student and, of course, a Zapatista in the mountains’. In other words, he is simply us: we are the leader we’ve been looking for.”

– Naomi Klein

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We received the letter that, dated January 1st, 2003, you sent us through news agencies, newspapers, web pages, etc. We knew of your letter's existence on January 6th, but not in the complete version until it came out in the Mexican newspaper La Jornada. This is the version we are referring to. The news came in the way all news arrives here. I was in the latrine, thinking about what would happen if ETA took my word and fulfilled my desires just as I would be completing necessities that are known as philosophy. I could already see the newspapers headlines the next day: "The Sup Dies, A Victim of his Big Mouth", and later the gun shot (it's a journalistic term, not what you think): "He left the shit he made" (ok, well the journalists who keep good manners and preserve the good customs could say "He left the poop he made"). And all the dailies would publish a centerfold, signed by the clearest minds and most elegant of Mexico and Spain that would say, "We always said that this dude was a shit".

In the end, I was in reflections of this type (that Salater and the CIA enthuse about so much) and returning to the comandancia (Command) when the commandantes Tacho, Mister, and Brus Li (and not Bruce Lee like they put in the news) came looking for me and told me:

- We heard in the news that the ETA has responded.
- Oh yeah? And what did they say?
- They scolded you.
- Great, this is already an international sport. And how is it "they scolded you"? It would be "they scolded us", isn't it "from my voice speaks the voice of the EZLN"?
- No, they scolded you. This is the deal: They directed the scolding to you and the greeting and congratulations to us, said Mister. He added, Maybe someone sent the complete letter. This took a really long time, seeing that we are supposed

to be “postmodern” guerillas with all the advanced technology and that we “surf” cyberspace.

With the letter finally in hand, they read it and later passed it to me with a sarcastic “Uy!” Tacho asked, “Why would they say “we know that you haven’t always guessed right”? Omar responded, smiling, “I think it is because we didn’t guess right when we put the Sup as the spokesperson”. The side-splitting laughter should have been heard all the way in Basque Country. Comandante David came close to me and consoled me: “Don’t take it seriously, they’re joking.”

Comandante Ester tried to say something but the laughter got in her way. For a change, Comandante Fidelia offered to prepare me a tea and told me: “There has to be a response, about all the children of the EZLN”. “Also about this”, Tacho said and marked for me some parts of your letter with a pen that once belonged to the General of the Division Absalo’n Castellanos (General of the Mexican Federal Army, famous for assassinating indigenous and persecuting, torturing, jailing, and killing dissident voices; he was taken prisoner by Zapatista forces in 1994, judged and condemned to the punishment of carrying with him for the rest of his life the pardon of those who were his victims). It goes like this:

First – I’ll clarify that the children of the EZLN don’t understand everything without words, as you incorrectly suppose in your letter. We treat the children like children. It is the powerful with their war that treats them like they are adults. We talk to them. We teach them that the word, together with love and dignity, is what makes us human beings. We don’t teach them how to fight. Well, yes, but only how to fight with their words. They learn. They know that the reason we are in all this is so that they won’t have to do the same. And they talk and they also listen. Contrary to what you say, we teach the children that words don’t kill but that yes it is possible to kill words and, along with them, the act of being human.

We teach them that there are so many words like colors and that there are so many thoughts because within them is the world where words are born. That there are different thoughts and we should respect them. That there are those who pretend their way of thinking should be the only way and they persecute, jail, and kill (always hidden behind the reasons of the State, illegitimate laws, or “just causes”) thoughts that are different than their own. And we teach them to speak the truth, that is to say, to speak with their hearts. Because the lie is another form of killing words. In the language of the bat men, those that in talking orient their paths, the Tzotziles, to speak with the truth they say “YALEL TA MELEI”. We teach them to speak and also to listen. Because when people only talk and don’t listen, they end up thinking that what they say is the only thing that is worth anything. In the language of the Tzotziles, those that in listening orient their paths, to listen with their hearts they say “YATEL TAJLOK ‘EL COONTIC”. Speaking and listening to words is how we know who we are, where we come from, and where our steps are going. Also it’s how we know about others, their steps, and their world. Speaking and listening to words is like listening to life.

Second — I see that you have a sense of humor and that you have uncovered us: we the Zapatistas, who have never had the attention of the national or international press, we wanted to “use” the Basque conflict that, as is evident, gets great press. Furthermore, since the day that we publicly referred to the political struggle in Euskal Herria, the positive comments about the Zapatistas, in the streets and in the national and international press, have been growing. In respect to how you don’t want to be part of any type of “pantomime” or “opera”, I understand this. You prefer the tragedies. About how you refuse to be the “next fashionable T-shirt on the main street in Madrid”, well this spoils our plans of putting a Zapatista souvenir stall on that street (this is how we were thinking about covering the costs of our trip). What’s more, I doubt someone would dare

From the mountains of Southeast Mexico, in the name of the girls, boys, men, women, and elders of the EZLN.

Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, Headquarters of the Zapatista National Liberation Army Mexico, January 2003.

P.S. Before I forget (Tacho has reminded me) in respect to your final “!Viva Chiapas Libre!” (Long Live a Free Chiapas!): We don’t ask for your respect, rather a familiarity with geography. Chiapas is a state in Southeastern Mexico. No organization or individual has posed themselves to liberate Chiapas (well, one time the Chiapan PRI, bothered because the Mexican federal army didn’t dedicate itself to annihilating us), much less the Zapatistas. We don’t want to make ourselves independent from Mexico. We want to be a part of it, but without leaving who we are: indigenous. So, figuring in that we struggle for Mexico, for the Indian peoples of Mexico, for all the men and women of Mexico no matter if they are Indian or not, the ending should say: Long live a Mexico with its’ Indigenous!

P.S. “ACCIDENTAL”.- Something should have happened, in the past, in the dates that I began and ended this letter.

Another P.S. It should already be evident, but I want to remark: I shit on all the revolutionary vanguards of this planet.

has stopped with the thought that their truth should be the truth for everyone and forever. And, sooner or later, they dedicate their force not so that their truth will be born, grow, be fruitful and die (because no earthly truth is absolute and eternal) rather they use it to kill everything that doesn't agree with this truth.

We don't see why we would ask you what we should do or how we should do it. What are you going to teach us? To kill journalists who speak badly about the struggle? To justify the death of children for reason of the "cause"? We don't need or want your support or solidarity. We already have the support and solidarity of many people in Mexico and the world. Our struggle has a code of honor, inherited from our guerilla ancestors and it contains, among other things: respect of civilian lives (even though they may occupy government positions that oppress us); we don't use crime to get resources for ourselves (we don't rob, not even a snack store); we don't respond to words with fire (even though many hurt us or lie to us). One could think that to renounce these traditionally "revolutionary" methods is renouncing the advancement of our struggle. But, in the faint light of our history it seems that we have advanced more than those that resort to such arguments (more to demonstrate their radical nature and consequences than to effectively serve their cause). Our enemies (who are not just a few nor just in Mexico) want us to resort to these methods. Nothing would be better for them than the EZLN converting into a Mexican and indigenous version of ETA. In fact, ever since we have used the word to refer to the struggle of the Basque people they have accused us of this. Unfortunately for them, it is not like this. And it never will be. By the way, in the tongue of the night warriors "To fight with honor" they say "PASC 'OP TA SCOTOL LEQUILAL". Ok, "Salud" and we don't try to tell anyone what they should do, we only ask for an opportunity to the word. If you don't want to give it one, too bad.

to wear a shirt with the ETA cause (and not because you lack sympathizers — you have them, we don't forget this — rather because if they make Batasuma illegal because it does not condemn the armed struggle of ETA, imagine what they would do to someone with a T-shirt that said "Gora ETA"). Apart from that, we didn't think we would ask for autographs or fight with anyone to share the stage with you. That the meeting would be something serious would be guaranteed because we wouldn't be the ones organizing it (we only specialize in zarzuelas [Spanish comic opera] or absurd theater), rather we proposed that Basque social and political forces organize it and make it happen even when it wouldn't be possible to have a debate with Garzo'n, whether it would be for obstacles from the Mexican or Spanish governments or from him or ETA.

Third — "The public manner, without prior consulting", in that we put forth our initiative of AN OPPORTUNITY TO THE WORD is how the Zapatistas do things. We don't previously agree "in the dark" so that we later feign to propose things that were already agreed upon beforehand. What's more, we don't have the means, or the interest, or the obligation to "consult" ETA before speaking. Because the Zapatistas have won the right to the word: to say what we want to, about what we want to, when we want to. And for this we do not have to consult with or ask permission from anyone. Not from Aznar, nor the king Juan Carlos, nor the judge Garzo'n, nor ETA.

Fourth — About us "lacking respect for the Basque people"; this is something that Garzo'n has also accused us of (which, consequently, he should auto-declare illegal because ETA is coinciding with his positions) along with all the Spanish and Basque right wing. This is due to the fact that to suggest giving an opportunity to the word goes against the interests of those that, from apparently contrary positions, have made their alibis and business out of the death of the word. Because the Spanish government kills the word when it attacks the Basque language Euskera or the Navarrorum tongue, when it harasses or

jails journalists that “dare” to talk about the Basque theme and include all points of view, and when it tortures prisoners so that they “confess” to whatever will be useful to Spanish “justice”. And ETA kills the word when it assassinates those that attack with words and not weapons.

Fifth — In respect to the fact that ETA is willing to “do everything possible so that the EZLN is better informed about the Basque conflict with the French and Spanish states”, we reject your disposition. We are not asking that anyone inform us. We are informed, and better than a lot of people suppose. If we don’t express this information, which is also an opinion, it is because one of our principles is that the matters of each nation correspond to each people which is why we point out that would not speak at the forum “An opportunity to the word”. But now that you are ready to inform, I think those that you should inform are the Basque people. We ask for an opportunity for the word. We should have directed this to various actors in the Basque conflict. We did it because we owe it, not because we are impassioned about writing to Garzo’n or ETA. In one form or another, from distinct points on the Mexican, Spanish, or Basque political spectrum (you included) they have taken this opportunity and they have talked (even though the majority of it has been to scold us). And so, even though it is grumbling and preaching, they are already giving an opportunity to the word. And this is the point.

Sixth — The matter about representation. The judge Garzo’n claims to represent the Spanish and Basque people (and unites with the representation of the king, Pepillo, and Felipillo) and says that if I offend these said people then I offend all the Basque and Spanish people. ETA claims to represent the Basque people and if we offend them by proposing an opportunity to the word then we offend all the Basque people. I don’t know if the Basque or Spanish people agree with being represented by one or the other. It is up to them to decide, not us. Contrary to judge Garzo’n and you, we do not claim

to represent anyone, only ourselves. We don’t represent the Mexican people (there are many political and social organizations in this country). We don’t represent the Mexican left (there are other consistent leftist organizations). We do not represent Mexican armed struggle (where there are at least 14 other armed political-military organizations on the left). Nor do we represent all the Indian people of Mexico (there are, fortunately, many indigenous organizations in Mexico, some better organized than the EZLN). So we have never said that the stupidities that you have dedicated to us have offended “the Mexican people” or “the Indian people”. They concern us and we don’t hide ourselves behind those we supposedly represent who, in the majority of cases, don’t even realize they are being “represented”.

Seventh — We know that the Zapatistas don’t have a place in the (dis) agreement of the revolutionary and vanguard organizations of the world, or in the rearguard. This doesn’t make us feel bad. To the contrary, it satisfies us. We don’t grieve when we recognize that our ideas and proposals don’t have an eternal horizon, and that there are ideas and proposals better suited than ours. So we have renounced the role of vanguards and to obligate anyone to accept our thinking over another argument wouldn’t be the force of reason.

Our weapons are not used to impose ideas or ways of life, rather to defend a way of thinking and a way of seeing the world and relating to it, something that, even though it can learn a lot from other thoughts and ways of life, also has a lot to teach. We are not those who you have to demand respect from. It’s already been seen how we are a failure of “revolutionary vanguards” and so our respect wouldn’t be useful for anything. Your people are those you have to win respect from. And “respect” is one thing; another very distinct thing is “fear”. We know you are angry because we haven’t taken you seriously, but it is not your fault. We don’t take anyone seriously, not even ourselves. Because whoever takes themselves seriously