

Subcommander Marcos's Words for the National and International Caravan for Observation and Solidarity with Zapatista Communities

Subcommandante Marcos

2008

Good afternoon, good evening. My name is Marcos, Insurgent Subcommander Marcos, and I am here to introduce you to Insurgent Lieutenant Colonel Moisés. Within the EZLN General Command, he is in charge of international work, what we call the Intergalactic Commission and the International Sixth Declaration, because of all of us, he is the only one who has the patience for you all.

Vamos a hablar despacio, para la traducción. We will speak slowly, for the translation. Nous allons parler doucement, pour la traduction.

We want to thank you for having come all the way here to understand directly what is happening with this Zapatista process, not only with the attacks we are receiving, but also with the processes that are being built here in rebel territory, in Zapatista territory.

We hope that what you see, what you hear, is worthwhile so you can take that word very far away, to Greece, to Italy, to France, to Spain, to the Basque country, to the United States, and to the rest of our country, with our compañeros from the Other Campaign.

We hope you are not going to be like the so-called International Civil Commission for Human Rights Observation, which only came here several months ago to wash the PRD Chiapas government's hands by saying that the attacks our people suffered did not come from the state government, but from the federal government.

I would like to give a talk to introduce what Lieutenant Colonel Moisés is going to tell you about. We are pleased that his being in this zone coincides with your visit here. He is the compañero who has most closely followed the process of building autonomy within the Zapatista communities. I wanted to explain, in broad strokes, the history of the EZLN in the Zapatista indigenous communities in this territory, in Chiapas, that is. I'm talking about the Chiapas Highlands, the Oventik Caracol Zone; the Tzeltal-Tojolobal-Tzotz-Choj Zone, belonging to the Morelia Caracol; the Chol Zone, which belongs to Roberto Barrios, in the north of Chiapas; the To-

jolobal or Border Jungle Zone, which is La Realidad Caracol; and this zone, the Tzeltal Zone, which is La Garrucha Caracol.

Tomorrow, you are invited to visit a village where people have been EZLN support bases for many years. You will have the honor of being guided by Commander Ismael, who is here. This *compañero*, along with Mr Ik- the late commander Hugo, or Francisco Gomez, which was his civilian name- was going through these canyons, talking about the Zapatista word, when no one else was with us.

He is going to take you. You are going to see where the soldiers were looking for marijuana. We want you to see if there's marijuana. If you find any, don't smoke it, make a denunciation so it gets destroyed. No, there's no marijuana. But they don't believe us- maybe they'll believe you...Nope, even less likely! When you see them, they aren't going to believe anything you say.

Commander Tacho is also with us today, here to my right. He is also one of the commander *compañeros* who was with Mr. Ik, Commander Hugo, when the EZLN was just starting in this canyon. And he is part of the EZLN Sixth Declaration Commission. He was with us in the north-east of Mexico going through Indian communities with *compañeros* and *compañeras* of the Other Campaign in Mexico, in that part of the country.

How did it all begin? Twenty-four years ago, almost twenty-five, a small group of urbanites- or city dwellers, as we call them- arrived not to this part of the jungle, but much deeper in, to what is now known as the Montes Azules Reserve. In that zone there was nothing, nothing but four-legged wild animals and two-legged wild animals, us. And this small group's conception- I'm talking about 1983- 1984, twenty-four or twenty-five years ago- was the traditional conception of liberation movements in Latin America: a small group of enlightened people who rise up in arms against the government. And that causes many people to follow them, rise up, and overthrow the government, and a socialist government is established. I am being very schematic, but basically it is what is known as "guerrilla foco" theory¹.

That small group- of those of us who remained- had that traditional, classic, or orthodox conception, if you want to call it that, but it also had an ethical and moral burden that had no precedent in guerilla or armed movements in Latin America. That ethical and moral inheritance came from other *compañeros* who had died confronting the federal army and the Mexican government's secret police.

All those years, we were alone. There were no Zapatista *compañeros* in the communities here. No one from Greece came to see us. Nor from Italy nor France nor Spain or the Basque Country. Gosh... Not even from Mexico! Because this was the most forgotten corner of this country. Something that was a downside would, further along turn into an advantage: the fact that we were isolated and forgotten allowed us to go through a devolutionary process. The orthodox will know of a book that talks about "the transformation of monkey into man."² In that time, it was the opposite: man transformed into monkey, which is what we were. Even physically- well, that's why I wear a balaclava. It is for questions of aesthetics and good taste that I must cover my face.

The small group survived the fall of the Berlin Wall, the crumbling of the socialist bloc, and the capitulation of the guerrilla war in Central America, first with the FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) in El Salvador, then with what was once called the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua, and, later on, with the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity, the URNG.

What made it survive were two elements, according to us: one was the obstinance or stubbornness that those people probably had in their DNA. And the other was the moral and ethical

burden that they had inherited from compañeros and compañeras who had been murdered by the army right in those mountains.

Things were left at that, with two options: A small group that spends decades holed up in the mountains, waiting for a time when something happens and they can act within social reality. Or end up, like some portion of the radical left in Mexico then, as congresspeople, senators, or legitimate presidents of the institutional Left in Mexico.

Something happened that saved us. It saved us and defeated us in those first years and what happened is sitting here on my left, Lieutenant Colonel Moisés, Commander Tacho, Commander Ismael, and many other compañeros who turned the EZLN- a focalist and orthodox guerrilla movement- into an indigenous army.

Not only was it an army made up of an indigenous majority. Majority... that's an understatement because, in reality, out of every hundred combatants, ninety-nine were indigenous and one was mestizo. Not only that, this army and its design suffered a defeat in its guide-based approach to leadership, which had been a classic revolutionary, authoritarian structure where a man, or group of men, become the savior of humanity, or of the country.

What happened, then, is that this approach was defeated when we came face to face with the communities and realized that not only did they not understand us, but their proposal was better.

Something had happened in all those years, all those decades, all those centuries. We were dealing with a movement for life that had been able to survive conquest attempts from Spain, France, England, the United States, and all the European powers, including Nazi Germany from 1940 to 1945. What had made these people resist- our compañeros and compañeras initially and today our bosses- had been an attachment to life that had a lot to do with the cultural burden. Language, dialect, the way of relating to nature presented an alternative not only for life, but for struggle. We were not teaching anybody how to resist. We were turning into students of that someone's school of resistance, someone who had been doing it for five centuries.

Those who came to save the indigenous communities were saved by them. And we found direction, destination, path, company, and speed for our step. Which, then and now, we call "the speed of our dream."

The EZLN owes a great debt to you, to people like you in Mexico and throughout the world, but our fundamental debt is in our heart: in the indigenous heart. And this community and in thousands of communities like it, inhabited by Zapatista support-base compañeros.

At the time when our small guerrilla group made contact with the communities, there was a problem and a struggle. I, the guerrilla group, have a truth, and you are ignorant; I'm going to teach you, I'm going to indoctrinate you, I am going to educate you, I am going to train you. Error and defeat.

When the language bridge was first being built and we began to modify our ways of talking, we began to modify our way of thinking about ourselves and thinking about the place we had in a process: Serving.

Once a movement that proposed putting the masses at its service, making use of proletarians, of workers, of peasants, of students, to take power and lead them to supreme happiness, we were gradually turning into an army that had to serve the communities. In this case, the Tzeltal indigenous communities, which were the first ones we set up camp in, which was in this zone.

Contact with the communities meant a re-education process that was stronger and more terrifying than the electric shocks that are customary in psychiatric clinics. Not everyone could put up with it, some of us could, but we still keep complaining this late in the game.

What happened next? What happened is that the EZLN turned into an army of indigenous people, to serve indigenous people, and went from the six of us who started the EZLN to over six thousand combatants.

What set off the January 1st, 1994, uprising? Why did we decide to rise up in arms? The answer lies in the children. It was not an analysis of international context. Any of you would agree that the international context was not favorable for an armed uprising. The socialist bloc had been defeated, the entire left-wing movement in Latin America was in a period of retreat. In Mexico, the Left was sobbing about defeat after Salinas de Gortari not only had committed fraud, but also had bought a good part of the Mexican Left's critical conscience.

Any marginally reasonable person would have told us: the conditions aren't right, don't rise up in arms, hand over your weapons, join our party, etc., etc. But there was something inside that made us defy those forecasts and those international contexts.

The EZLN then proposed, for the first time, defying the calendar and geography of above. The children, I said. It just so happened that in those years, since the beginning of the nineties, since 1990, there had been a reform that prevented peasants from being able to access land. As you're going to see tomorrow, when you go up the hill that goes toward the community of Galeana, that was the land peasants had: steep slopes, full of rocks. The good land was in the hands of the ranchers. In the next few days, you are also going to see those ranches and are going to be able to see the difference in land quality.

There was no longer the possibility of getting access to a plot of land. And at the same time, diseases began to kill off the children. From 1990 to 1992, there was no child in the Lacandon Jungle who reached five years of age. Before turning five, they died of curable diseases. It was not cancer, it was not AIDS, it was not heart disease- they were curable diseases: typhoid, tuberculosis, and sometimes a simple fever would kill children under five.

I know that in the city this might well be an advantage: fewer donkeys, more cobs, as the saying goes. But in the case of an indigenous people, the death of their children means their disappearance as a people, in other words, in the natural process, adults grow, age, and die. If there are no children, that culture disappears.

The mortality of indigenous people, of indigenous children, intensified the problem. But what made things here different from other Indian communities was that here there was a rebel army. The women were the ones who began to push for this. Not the men. I know that the tradition in Mexico- mariachis, Pedro Infante, and all that- is that we men are very macho. But it was not like that. The ones who began to push- something must be done, no more, and enough is enough- were the women, who are watching their sons and daughters die.

A type of murmur began in all the communities: something must be done, enough is enough, enough is enough, in all languages. Back then we were already in the Highlands Zone too. And there we had two compañeras that had been, and still are, the backbone of that work: the late Commander Ramona and Commander Susana.

This concern, this discomfort, began to emerge in different places... Let's call it by its name: this rebellion in the Zapatista women, the idea that something needed to be done. We did what we had to do then, which was to ask everyone what we were going to do. Then, in 1992, there was a consultation- no television, no Mexico City government, no nothing that there is now- and community by community it happened and assemblies were held, like this one right now. The problem was put forth. The dilemma was very simple: if we rise up in arms they are going to

defeat us, but it is going to draw attention and improve conditions for the indigenous. If we do not rise up in arms, we are going to survive, but we are going to disappear as Indian peoples.

The logic of death is when we say: they have left us with no other option. Now, after fourteen, almost fifteen years, those of us with the most time here say: it's a good thing we didn't have any other option.

The community said: that's what you're here for, fight, fight with us. It was not just a formal relationship of command. Because formally it was the opposite: formally, the EZLN was in command and the communities were the subordinates. But de facto, in reality, it was the other way around: the community sustained, cared for, and made the Zapatista Army of National Liberation grow.

Back then, the participation of a mestizo compañero was also important, a compañero from the city, Insurgent Subcommander Pedro, who fell in combat on January 1st, 1994.

When we brought this dilemma and the community said "let's rise up in arms," the military calculus that we made- Lieutenant Colonel Moisés may remember this well because there was a meeting with all the Zapatista leaders in these mountains here behind the community, up high, in an encampment that we have- the proposal I made was this: we have to think about what we're going to do, because when we get something going, there's no turning back.

If we start to ask people if we should rise up in arms or not, then we are not going to be able to stop it. We knew and we felt that the answer was going to be yes. And we knew and we felt that those who would fall would be those of us who had met in these mountains, here above La Garrucha.

What happened happened. I'm not going to tell you about January 1st, 1994, because you began to know about us- well, some of us, because there were some who were little kids- and an era of resistance opened, we say, where the transition was made from armed struggle to civil and peaceful organization of resistance.

Something happened in this whole process that I want to draw attention to: the change in the EZLN position regarding the problem of power. And this definition surrounding the problem of power is what is going to leave the deepest mark on the footprint in the Zapatista path. We had realized- and this we includes the communities, not just the first group- that solutions, like everything in this world, are built from the bottom up. And our entire previous proposal, and the orthodox Left's entire proposal up to then, was the opposite, it was: from above things are solved for below.

For us, this below-for-above change meant not organizing ourselves, not organizing other people to go vote, nor to go to a march, nor to shout, but to survive and turn resistance into a school. This was what the Zapatista compañeros did, not the original EZLN, that small group, but the EZLN that now had this indigenous component. What is now known, broadly speaking, as building Zapatista autonomy is a process that Lieutenant Colonel Moisés is going to elaborate on in a little bit.

Before that, I want to put out a few things. It is said, not unjustly, that in the last two years- 2006, 2007- Subcommander Marcos diligently and successfully worked on destroying the media image that had been built around him. And it captures people's attention that some who were close before have now distanced themselves and become definitively anti-Zapatista. Some of them went to their countries to give talks and were received as if they were the ones who had risen up in arms. They were the Zapatologists, willing to travel all-expenses-paid, to receive applause, caravans, and one favor or another when they traveled abroad.

What happened? I'm going to tell you how we see it. You will have your vision. At the time when the EZLN rose up... I'm going to explain myself: here in the indigenous zones, we talk a lot about the "coyotes." The coyotes, I want to make a distinction because for the Yaqui and the Mayos, the coyote is a real badass, it is emblematic. In Chiapas it isn't. The coyote is the intermediary. It is someone who buys low from indigenous people and then resells high on the market.

When the Zapatista uprising took place, something that we call "solidarity intermediaries" emerged. Solidarity coyotes, in other words. There are people who said, and still say, that they have a dialogue with Zapatismo, that they have the red telephone, that they are the ones who know what things are like here, and all that means political capital. They come and bring a little something, they pay a little, and go and present themselves as emissaries of the EZLN: they get paid a lot.

The appearance of this group of intermediaries- where there were politicians, intellectuals, artists, and social-movement actors- hid from us the existence of other things, of other belows. We sensed that the Spain of below was out there, that the Basque Country in rebellion was out there, that rebel Greece was out there, that insurrectionary France was out there, that the Italy of struggle was out there, but we did not see them. And so we feared that you would also not see us.

These intermediaries organized and did things when we were fashionable, and charged their political capital. Just like someone who organizes concerts, says that they are to benefit us, and keeps a portion: they charge something like a salary, or the organisations cut of the proceeds.

There was another below. We always had that idea: Zapatismo has always stated that it is not the only rebel, nor the best. And our conception was not to create a movement that hegemonized all rebellion in Mexico or all rebellion at the global level. We never aspired to have an international, the Fifth International or I don't know which one you're on... Alejandro? Now it's the Sixth Declaration, but this is different, this is the Other international. Alejandro knows about internationals.

What happened? I'm going to tell you some things that will not be new to you. The tale of an institutional Left is perfectly clear to the Spanish with Rodríguez Zapatero or Felipe González; for the Basque Country- Gora Euskal Herria- more still; For rebellious Italy it is also nothing new; and Greece, well, it can tell us a lot about that; and France since Mitterand, the man, the same goes³.

In Mexico, no. There continues to be that expectation: that it is possible for the Left we suffer from now, if it takes power, to do so scot-free. Which means: it is going to be able to attain governmental power without ceasing to be left-wing. Spain, Italy, France, Greece, practically every country in the world can give an account of the opposite, of left-wing, principled people- not necessarily radicals- who when they come to power are no longer so. The speed varies, the depth varies, but unfailingly, they change. It is what we call power's "stomach effect": it digests you or turns you into shit.

In Mexico, this approach toward power by the Left or what calls itself the Left... right now I'm remembering it came out in the newspaper that I was not here, that I was in Mexico City at Leftist parties- I didn't know there was a left-wing in Mexico City and that they throw parties... There still is but it is another left-wing. When the possibility of power presents itself this process of power's digestion and defecation of that Left began to emerge. To us Zapatistas, and everyone

who was in the centre... Pardon me if I break any hearts, but that centre is not in the centre, it's stuck to the right. It's the other side, to the right... Well, to your right...

So we had to, we were asked by this group of intellectuals, artists, social leaders, to turn back history to 1984, when we thought that a group, or a person, if it came to power, transforms everything downward. And we were asked to place our trust, the future, our life, and our process in an enlightened one, and one person, along with a band of forty thieves that is the Mexican left.

We said no. It's not that the legitimate president seems unpleasant to us, it's just that we plainly and simply do not believe in that process. We do not believe that someone, not even someone as good-looking as Subcommander Marcos, is capable of making that transformation- well, my legs. We could not, and so the split took place.

I want to bring something to your attention: back then, we said what was going to happen. What is happening now. When we said it, they said that we were playing into the Right's hands. Now that they are repeating, with our very words, what we said two years ago, they say that it is to serve the Left.

Zapatismo is uncomfortable.⁴ As if in power's puzzle there came a piece that did not fit and must be disposed of. Of all the movements there are in Mexico, one of them- not the only one- Zapatismo, is uncomfortable for these people. It is a movement that does not allow itself to conform, does not allow itself to give up, it does not allow itself to surrender, does not allow itself to sell out. And in movements from above, that is the logic, that is what's rational. It is "realpolitick," as they say.

So, this distancing took place, which little by little began to fundamentally permeate toward international sectors in Latin America and in Europe. In that trajectory, nonetheless, more solid relationships were built. To mention some: the *compañeros* of the CGT5 in Spain, the rebellious cultural movement in the Basque Country, the social Italy, and, more recently, the rebellious and unsubmitive Greece that we have encountered.

This rush to the right is hidden in the following way, people say: "The EZLN radicalized and became more left-wing." Excuse us, but our approach remains the same: we do not seek to take power, we think that things are built from the bottom up. And what happened is that those sectors, the solidarity intermediaries, the internationalist coyotes- or the coyote international- has run toward the right. Because power does not let you access it scot-free.

Power is an exclusive club that has certain requisites for entry. What we Zapatistas called the "society of power" has rules. And it can only be accessed if certain rules are followed. Anyone who seeks justice, freedom, democracy, or respect for difference has no possibilities of accessing it unless they surrender those ideas.

When we began to see this rush to the right by the sector that apparently was the most Zapatista sector, we began to ask ourselves what was beneath this, what was behind this. To be honest, we began the other way around: we began in the world, internationally, and then we asked ourselves about Mexico.

For reasons that you may be able to explain, Zapatismo's connection was stronger with other countries than with Mexico. And it was stronger in Mexico than with people from Chiapas. As if there were an inverse relationship in geography: those who lived farther away were closer to us, and those who lived closer were farther away from us.

Then came the idea to look for you, with the intuition and desire for you to exist: you, others like you. Along came the Sixth Declaration, the definitive split with this sector of solidarity

coyotes. And the search, in Mexico and the world, for others who were like us, but who were different.

In addition to this position towards power, there is an essential characteristic in Zapatismo- and you are going to see it soon while you're here in these coming days, or if you talk to the Autonomous Councils and the Good Government Committees, with the autonomous authorities- the refusal to hegemonize and homogenize society. We do not work toward a Zapatista Mexico, nor a Zapatista world. We do not intend for everyone to become indigenous. We want a place, here, ours, to be left alone, where no one commands us. That is freedom: us deciding what we want to do.

And we think that it is only possible if others like us want and fight for the same thing. And if a relationship between *compañeros* is established, we say. That is what the Other Campaign wants to build. That is what the International Sixth Declaration wants to build. A gathering of rebellions, an exchange of learnings, and a more direct relationship- not media-based, but real- of support between organisations.

Several months ago, *compañeros* came here from Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, India, Brazil, Spain- and I don't remember where else- with *Vía Campesina*. We saw them in La Realidad, we were there with them. And when we spoke, we told them: a meeting between leaders is worth nothing to us. Not even the picture that gets taken. If two movement's leaderships aren't good enough for the movements to meet and get to know each other, their leaderships are no good.

We say the same now, to anyone who comes to propose that. What we're interested in is what's behind you: you, others like you. We cannot go to Greece, but we can take a guess and say that of those who wanted to come, not everyone is here. How can we talk to those others? And tell them that we do not want charity, that we do not want pity. That we do not want them to save our lives. That we want a *compañero*, a *compañera*, and *compañeroa* in Greece to fight for what's theirs. In Italy, in the Basque Country, in Spain, in France, in Germany, Denmark, Sweden; I'm not going to say all the countries, because what if I forget one and in comes a complaint...

Where do we look? When I'm doing this quick run-through, I'm talking about a moral and ethical inheritance from those who founded us. Above all, it has to do with struggle and respect for life, for freedom, for justice, and for democracy. We owe a moral debt to our *compañeros*. Not to you, not to intellectuals who distanced themselves, not to artists or writers, not to social leaders who are now anti- Zapatista.

We owe a debt to those who died fighting. And we want the day to come when we can say to them, to our dead, just three things: we did not give up, we did not sell out, we did not surrender. And now for Lieutenant Colonel Moisés...

1. The theory that a small, committed group of revolutionaries can start violent action against a sitting regime that will eventually lead to revolution.
2. Frederick Engels's 1876 essay entitled "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition From Ape to Man."
3. Marcos is making the distinction here between the former French President François Mitterand and his wife, Danielle, who had visited Marcos in Chiapas in 1996 and who was to the left of her husband on the political spectrum.

4. The Spanish word *incómodo* can mean either “uncomfortable” or “inconvenient.”
5. The general Confederation of Labour (Confederación General del Trabajo) is an anarcho-syndicalist trade union.

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