

Irish delegation visits Mexican rebels

Workers Solidarity Movement

1996

AS AN IRISH DELEGATION visits Mexico to better its knowledge of the struggle there and to express solidarity with the Zapatista EZLN rebels, Shane O'Curry of the Irish Mexico Group reminds us that the struggle continues.

As representatives from Ireland took part in celebrations on the second anniversary of the uprising in Chiapas, the EZLN went in for more talks with the government. Elected delegates from Zapatista communities have been participating in the 'National Dialogue'. This dialogue with the delegates was agreed to by the government after it failed to crush the uprising in February 1994.

The February offensive had proved too costly in terms of publicity because of the litany of human rights abuses committed by the federal army. The ruling elite, conscious of the damage this was doing to Mexico's image as an investor-friendly market, opted for the softly softly approach.

This is not to say that human rights abuses have stopped in Mexico. In October 1995 Cecilia Rodrigues, an American national working to co-ordinate international solidarity with the rebellion, was kidnapped and subjected to multiple rape. Despite a press conference subsequently held by her in the United States, this drew little attention from the world's press. This stresses the importance of public interest and agitation to stop the situation from sliding back into unrestrained repression.

Despite the repression the Zapatistas remain unequivocal in their opposition to NAFTA and the US dominated neo-liberal economic order. NAFTA, they remind us, is a death sentence for the poor and indigenous of Chiapas and all of Mexico. Opening the economic floodgates to US and Canadian capital will wash away what precious little land they have left.

The rebel army which draws its numbers from the very poorest is ill-equipped and receives no outside financial help. This is in sharp contrast to the 40,000 American-equipped federal troops still deployed in the region. But the Zapatistas have on their side the terrain and the support of their communities. They also have the support of the millions of Mexicans tired of electoral fraud, government corruption and of paying the price of the economic crisis created by the country's rich.

The Zapatistas' strength also lies in their absolute commitment to grassroots democracy. This is what allowed them to successfully and credibly hold a National Convention for Democracy (CND) in rebel-held territory last year. This was attended by thousands (the 'official' figure cited by spokesperson Marcos at his inaugural speech was one fuck of a lot of people) representing peasants, trade unions, churches, Non-Governmental Organisations, and so on.

Although the Zapatistas' political programme calls for land, justice and democracy, at the CND they refrained from making political demands, preferring to let the forces attending the conference determine the agenda. This is in line with their stated belief that the revolution must be social, not one that can be determined alone by the outcome of an armed insurrection.

They share this anti-elitist view with Anarchists; not surprising perhaps considering the Zapatista tradition is influenced by the writings of Mexican Anarchist Ricardo Flores Magon. As an Anarchist he believed in the right of the oppressed to defend themselves and their gains through violence if necessary, but stressed the importance of the social revolution involving the participation of all, if real change is to be achieved. The Zapatistas' commitment to the will of the people may prove to be their only ace as they go in for this round of talks.

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