CHIAPAS, WHERE IS IT, WHY SHOULD WE CARE & WHAT IS THE EZLN?

Level: 11th & 12th grades
Course: Spanish III

Rationale

The study of Latin American countries and cultures in foreign language classes typically centers around traditions and festivals, the geography or government overviews of the specific country. This lesson will take a look at a contemporary issue in the Mexican state of Chiapas. The issue to be studied is that of the rise of the Ejercito Zapatista para la Liberacion Nacional (The Zapatista National Liberation Army). It is the goal of the lesson to make students aware that Mexico is more complex then it is often presented in the pretty pictures in their textbooks.

On New Year's Eve, 1993, the Mexican state of Chiapas was thurst upon the international scene as the zapatista guerrilla army simultaneously seized control of the colonial city of San Cristobal de las Casas and five towns in the surrounding Chiapas highlands. This unit will hopefully awaken students to the fact that Mexico is a country with severe internal and economic problems, and how ultimately these problems could affect the lives of the students themselves. Up until recently the United States has had little at stake in Mexico's economic health. But, as a partner in NAFTA, Mexico has become a buyer of U.S. goods and American jobs could be lost if purchases drop, not to mention the $50,000,000.00 U.S. bailout package.

by
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Lesson Overview

The main objective of this unit is to have the students gain an understanding of the history and current status of the EZLN including the ongoing peace negotiations and goals of the EZLN. The students will also participate in mock negotiations and play the roles of the EZLN, landowners, campesinos, and the government. The lesson also has as an objective the development in the student of objective reporting skills.

The main questions to be answered by this lesson are:

1. In brief, what is the EZLN?

The EZLN is the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (Zapatista National Liberation Army). It principally operates in the state of Chiapas, although its demands and influence are national.

2. Who are the Zapatistas?

The members of the EZLN are primarily indigenous people from the Lancandon region of Chiapas, Mexico. Current estimates are that the EZLN has around 12,000 troops, 2-3,000o of whom are well armed.

3. What are the EZLN's demands?

There are 11 general demands of the EZLN as outlined in the 1st declaration from the Lancandon jungle; they are: work,land, shelter, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace. They also want a new land distribution program and a favorable macroeconomic enviroment. Mayan communities must be given communal ejido holdings in fertile lowland areas, with guarantees of secure tenure. This is not so far-fetched as it seems, as previous Mexican land reforms have given some villages limited access to quality lowland farmland which they work on a seasonal basis. Fair credit must be made available too and crop prices should be supported sufficiently to allow for a sustainable livelihood, much as is done in Japan, Taiwan and elsewhere. This is best achieved through barriers to cheap imports rather than subsidies, thereby avoiding deficit spending.

Finally corrupt local authorities linked to the PRI must be thrown out, as has been demanded in the many peasant takeovers of towns that have taken place since the start of the Zapatista uprising. Of course these changes would require democratization, some rollback of NAFTA and the restoration of Article 27 of the constitution, but these are just the sort of issues that the Zapatistas have thrust into the national debate in Mexico.

4. Who is the EZLN named after ?

The EZLN took its name from the Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata, who led the armies of the south in the Mexican Revolution, developed the plan de Ayala, and was eventually betrayed and killed by Caranza's forces.

5. What is the Ideology of the EZLN? Are the Zapatistas Marxists?

The Zapatistas have been considered by many to be a "postmodern" army because they defy any totalizing theories or ideologies. There are elements of Marx, Gromsci, and others in the writings of subcomandante Marcos, but they do not comprise any overriding ideology of the EZLN. They identify merely as indigenous, and as Zapatistas.

6. Who leads the EZLN?

Most of the decisions of the EZLN are made by the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee — General Command (CCRI-CG) . The highest military authority is Subcomandante Marcos.

7. Who is Subcomandante Marcos?

Subcomandante Marcos is the enigmatic spokesman and army commander of the EZLN. He is not indigenous, and thus does not sit on the CCRI-CG. Marcos is known for his often long and extremely well-writtenpress releases, filled with wit sarcasm, and frequent references to himself in the third person. He is always masked in public, and often smokes a pipe. The government claims to have "identified" Marcos as Rafael Sebastian Guillen Vicente; Marcos and the EZLN have denied this. But what has been made clear, both in an indigenous ceremony for Marcos last November and in a recent interview with Major Ana Maria is that the issue is irrelevant, the previous identity of who he is now, Marcos, no longer exists for him nor for the EZLN nor for the country. To paraphrase Ana Maria, Marcos was born just over 10 years ago in the Lancandon jungle; since then he has lived, ate, drank, and fought at the side of the indigenous people of Chiapas.

Time Needed

The estimated time to teach this lesson would be about one week. The materials needed for this lesson would be a teacher created resource guide to help students research the issues to be discussed.

Procedures

The unit can be divided into two parts: in the first part the students will be divided into groups. Each group will be responsible for researching a topic or history of the EZLN, the campesinos, the landowners, and the government. The students will be given the resources needed to research the particular topic that they have been assigned. These groups will role play the topics assigned to them as if they were really a part of that group. For example the group that is assigned the topic of what is the EZLN? will be given the questions and answers given above in the introduction. They then will go to each group and be responsible for introducing the information as if they were members of the EZLN. A second group will be responsible for describing the geography and conditions of Chiapas as if they were residents and members of the campesino workers who work for the landowners. A third group will play the role of the landowners who are against the idealsof the EZLN. And a fourth group will play the role of the government who must also supervise a mock peace settlement. The second part of the assignment will be to hold a mock peace negotiation between the afflicted groups to see if the students can come to a peaceful settlement where all can be satisfied. As a final activity the students will be given a two page essay in which they will decide for themselves

in their own opinion what they think should be done to resolve the issues surrounding Chiapas, the students should be able to defend their opinions based upon the background information that they have learned.

First Day Activities

Place the students into there four respective groups, explain to them that they will be doing a lesson on the Mexican state of Chiapas and the role of the EZLN. Give a brief description of each of the groups and what their main ideologies are. Explain the major issues which are relevant to each group. Discuss with the students the importance of the lesson and what the expectations are for each group, entertain any questions that the students may have pertaining to the lesson. Some considerations to be given to grouping might include; placing the most advanced students and native speakers in the government group to simulate some translation problems that the EZLN has with the negotiations being that they are not native spanish speakers. The EZLN group could be made up of the classes best debaters and most liberal thinkers. Try to have the other two groups be made up of competitive students who take pride in being team members and who will be able to take on the roles of the haves and havenots.

Give each group their respective teacher made resource guide for them to read and review for homework. These will be discussed with the teacher and individual groups on day two.

Second Day Activities

Begin class by having the students discuss the homework lesson amongst themselves. The teacher may then go around to each group and discuss any questions which the students have about their roles which they will now assume. The teacher may also at this time begin to align the students groups with their allies; the campesinos with the EZLN, and the landowners with the goverment. Allow time for the students to share their roles with each other group both in a group setting and on an individual basis. Have the students role play their group's ideologies as if they were real members of that group. The teacher will have to do a considerable amount of monitoring and guiding. Save the last ten minutes of class for a question and answer period on any specifics that each group may have of another.

For homework have the students review their notes and notes taken on the other groups for a formal presentation of their group's ideologies to be presented in front of the class on day three.

Third Day Activities

Begin the class by having the groups organize their presentations and practice them in front of their groups. Each group will then be given ten minutes to present their side and views of their group with the goal in mind of convincing the other groups of their legitimacy. At the end of the period allow time for questions and answers and begin discussion an the upcoming peace negotiations of the next day.

For homework allow time at lunch for students to come in and prepare for peace negotitions time should also be given for teacher supervised prep-time in the morning before school.

Fourth Day Activities

The students will begin mock peace negotiations with the teacher serving as the chief mediator. Since this is a Spanish class the negotiations will be held in Spanish.(If your class is not a Spanish class this is not necessary.) The students do not have to resolve the issues but rather come up with a list of alternatives for the other to consider. Hopefully this can be accomplished by the end of the period so that the students can go back to the groups that they represent and discuss the alertnatives given. For homework the students will review the alternatives put forth to them and each individual student will then be responsible to write a responce to which alternatives and compromises they agree with and which they oppose.

Fifth Day Activities

The last day of the lesson will be a group discussion on the peace negotiations and each individual's position which they have taken. It will have to be moderated closely by the teacher. Students will have the chance to choose the group with which they agree regardless of which group they were first assigned to. Some debate and further argumentation may be presented at this time by any of the students who were not directly involved in the peace negotiations. Any final views can also be presented at this time.

Evaluation And Summary

Although the students should be evaluated daily for participation and contributions to their groups, a final grade will be assigned by having the students express their opinions on the issues that were presented during the week. The students will be assigned a two page composition as a homework exam to be turned in the sixth day or following the weekend.

Resources

These are a few of the resources that you may provide as guides for your students:

GROUP I: Members of the EZLN; information and history of the EZLN.

1. In brief, what is the EZLN? The EZLN is the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (Zapatista National Liberation Army). It principally operates in the state of Chiapas, although its demands and influence are national.

2. Who are the Zapatistas? The members of the EZLN are primarily indigenous people from the Lacandon region of Chiapas, Mexico. Current estimates are that the EZLN has around12,000 troops, 2-3,000 of whom are well-armed.

3. What are the EZLN's demands? There are 11 general demands of the EZLN, as outlined in the 1st Declaration From the Lacandon Jungle; they are: work, land, shelter, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace.

4. Who is the EZLN named after? The EZLN took its name from the Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata, who led the armies of the south in the Mexican Revolution, developed the Plan de Ayala, and was eventually betrayed and killed by Carranza's forces.

5. What is the ideology of the EZLN? Are the Zapatistas Marxists? The Zapatistas have been considered by many to be a "postmodern" armybecause they defy any totalizing theories or ideologies. There are elements of Marx, Gromsci, and others in the writings of Subcomandante Marcos, but they do not comprise any overriding ideology of the EZLN. They identify merely as indigenous, and as Zapatistas.

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7a. I heard his name was Rafael Sebastian Guillen Vicente. The government claims to have "identified" Marcos as Rafael Sebastian Guillen; and the EZLN have denied this. But what has been made clear, both in an indigenous ceremony for Marcos last November and in a recent interview with Major Ana Maria, is that the issue is irrelevant — the previous identity of he who is now Marcos no longer exists for him nor for the EZLN nor for the country. To paraphrase Ana Maria, Marcos was born just over 10 years ago in the Lacandon jungle; since then he has lived, ate, drank, and fought at the side of the indigenous people of Chiapas.

Understanding Chiapas

by Peter Rosset with Shea Cunningham

"We have nothing to lose, absolutely nothing, no decent roof over our heads, no land, no work, poor health, no food, no education, no right to freely and democratically choose our leaders, no independence from foreign interests, and no justice for ourselves or our children. But we say enough is enough! We are the descendants of those who truly built this nation, we are the millions of dispossessed, and we call upon all of our brethren to join our crusade, the only option to avoid dying of starvation!"

-- Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, 1993

On New Year's Eve, 1993, the Mexican state of Chiapas was thrust upon the international scene as the Zapatista guerrilla army simultaneously seized control of the colonial city of San Cristbal de las Casas and 5 towns in the surrounding Chiapas highlands. Though this immediately calls to mind the recent conflicts of neighboring Central America, the Zapatistas showed a much greater degree of organization and military

strength in their first action than had the FSLN in Nicaragua, the FMLN in El Salvador, or the URNG in Guatemala. And unlike most of the Central American guerrilla organizations, their rank and file are composed almost exclusively of teenagers and young adults from the ethnic Mayan groups of the highlands. Chiapas this and other paradoxes begin to make sense.

Roots of the Conflict: 500 Years Since the Conquest

Geographically the state of Chiapas is part of Central America, the volcanic isthmus where we find the southernmost frontier of the indigenous cultures of North America. The central region is a high elevation plateau composed of steep rugged terrain, known as the Chiapas highlands. To the Southwest are the fertile Pacific lowlands, to the East is the Lacandon jungle, and to the Southeast lies Guatemala. Originally part of the Captaincy of Guatemala during the time of the Spanish Colony, Chiapas was annexed by Mexico following independence. Nevertheless the highlands can be thought of culturally as the Northern extension of the Altiplano of Guatemala, inhabited by closely related Mayan peoples. Today Chiapas is one of the two poorest states of Mexico (see Box 1).

Box 1: Chiapas Poverty Statistics

(source: Anuario Estadstico de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, Instituto Naconal de Estadistica, Geografia E Informatica, 1991)

	urban	rural population
Mexico	71%	29%
Chiapas	40%	60%

Literacy rate

Mexico	87%
Chiapas	69%

Households with running water

Mexico	79%
Chiapas	58%

Households with access to electricity

Mexico	88%
Chiapas	67%

The historical roots of todays conflict go back to the pre- conquest era when the Pacific lowland areas served as the breadbasket of the indigenous civilizations. The arrival of the Spanish, however, ushered in a period of 500 years during which indigenous peoples were progressively pushed off those lands by the expansion of plantations owned by Spanish- speaking Ladinos (people of mixed Spanish and Indian descent).

By the turn of the century the fertile lands of the region were mostly occupied by cattle ranches and sugar, coffee and cotton plantations, while the indigenous people of Chiapas were forced to farm the thin, rocky soils found on the steep slopes of the highlands. Not only did the original inhabitants of the region lose their lands, but they have also been subject to centuries of fierce racism and discrimination on the part of the dominant Ladino society, which continues virtually unabated to this day. Yet the last 40 years have probably contributed as much to the current situation as did the 500 years since the Conquest.

The Past 40 Years

In the 1950's the shrinking plots of land in the highlands could no longer support the Indian population and the poorest began to migrate toward the last frontier, the sparsely populated Lacandon jungle area to the East. There these colonists cleared tracts of rainforest land and exposed red clay soils that lose their fertility within one to three crop cycles. They were soon joined by Spanish speaking peasants fleeing poverty in many other areas of Mexico, many of them with experiences in local peasant revolts.

Meanwhile those who remained behind in the Chiapas highlands saw a dramatic redrawing of social configurations within the indigenous villages during the 1970's and 30's. In the late seventies the oil boom in bordering states initiated a cycle of social polarization in the highlands that was accelerated by the debt crisis of the early eighties. Class lines were accentuated within the communities, with the increasing alignment of local, indigenous elites or caciques with the governing party, and the emergence of a burgeoning underclass of the newly dispossessed. These latter families once again initiated a cycle of migration and colonization of still unexploited lands in nearby lower elevation areas.

Together with the indigenous peoples of the neighboring state of Oaxaca, the lowland colonists and the destitute in the highlands were the poorest, most desperate people in Mexico. As if that were not already enough, the conditions faced by most of them have worsened substantially during the past 10 years, as successive Mexican presidents have implemented structural adjustment and free trade policies that have eroded fully 40% of the purchasing power of the Mexican poor. Finally, Mexican President Carlos Salinas' controversial Solidarity anti-poverty program never reached the Lacandon area to any significant extent. Thus it should come as no surprise that the lower elevation Lacondon settlements of highland colonists should be the incubators for armed rebellion.

The following is the full text of the declaration from the Lacandon jungle by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation:

Today we say enough is enough! To the people of mexico: mexican brothers and sisters:
We are a product of 500 years of struggle: first against slavery, then during the War of Independence against Spain led by insurgents, then to avoid being absorbed by North American imperialism, then to promulgate our constitution and expel the French empire from our soil, and later the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz denied us the just application of the Reform laws and the people rebelled and leaders like Villa and Zapata emerged, poor men just like us. We have been denied the most elemental preparation so they can use us as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country. They don't care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads, no land, no work, no health care, no food nor education. Nor are we able to freely and democratically elect our political representatives, nor is there independence from foreigners, nor is there peace nor justice for ourselves and our children.

But today, we say ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. We are the inheritors of the true builders of our nation. The dispossessed, we are millions and we thereby call upon our brothers and sisters to join this struggle as the only path, so that we will not die of hunger due to the insatiable ambition of a 70 year dictatorship led by a clique of traitors that represent the most conservative and sell-out groups. They are the same ones that opposed Hidalgo and Morelos, the same ones that betrayed Vicente Guerrero, the same ones that sold half our country to the foreign invader, the same ones that imported a European prince to rule our country, the same ones that formed the "scientific" Porfirsta dictatorship, the same ones that opposed the Petroleum Expropriation, the same ones that massacred the railroad workers in 1958 and the students in 1968, the same ones the today take everything from us, absolutely everything.

To prevent the continuation of the above and as our last hope, after having tried to utilize all legal means based on our Constitution, we go to our Constitution, to apply Article 39 which says:

"National Sovereignty essentially and originally resides in the people. All political power emanates from the people and its purpose is to help the people. The people have, at all times, the inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government."

Therefore, according to our constitution, we declare the following to the Mexican federal army, the pillar of the Mexican dictatorship that we suffer from, monopolized by a one-party system and led by Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the maximum and illegitimate federal executive that today holds power.

According to this Declaration of War, we ask that other powers of the nation advocate to restore the legitimacy and the stability of the nation by overthrowing the dictator.

We also ask that international organizations and the International Red Cross watch over and regulate our battles, so that our efforts are carried out while still protecting our civilian population. We declare now and always that we are subject to the Geneva Accord, forming the EZLN as our fighting arm of our liberation struggle. We have the Mexican people on our side, we have the beloved tri-colored flag highly respected by our insurgent fighters. We use black and red in our uniform as our symbol of our working people on strike. Our flag carries the following letters, "EZLN," Zapatista Army of National Liberation, and we always carry our flag into combat.

Beforehand, we refuse any effort to disgrace our just cause by accusing us of being drug traffickers, drug guerrillas, thieves, or other names that might by used by our enemies. Our struggle follows the constitution which is held high by its call for justice and equality.

Therefore, according to this declaration of war, we give our military forces, the EZLN, the following orders:

First: Advance to the capital of the country, overcoming the Mexican federal army, protecting in our advance the civilian population and permitting the people in the liberated area the right to freely and democratically elect their own administrative authorities.

Second: Respect the lives of our prisoners and turn over all wounded to the International Red Cross.

Third: Initiate summary judgements against all soldiers of the Mexican federal army and the political police that have received training or have been paid by foreigners, accused of being traitors to our country, and against all those that have repressed and treated badly the civil population and robbed or stolen from or attempted crimes against the good of the people.

Fourth: Form new troops with all those Mexicans that show their interest in joining our struggle, including those that, being enemy soldiers, turn themselves in without having fought against us, and promise to take orders from the General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

Fifth: We ask for the unconditional surrender of the enemy's headquarters before we begin any combat to avoid any loss of lives.

Sixth: Suspend the robbery of our natural resources in the areas controlled by the EZLN.

To the People of Mexico: We, the men and women, full and free, are conscious that the war that we have declared is our last resort, but also a just one. The dictators are applying an undeclared genocidal war against our people for many years. Therefore we ask for your participation, your decision to support this plan that struggles for work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace. We declare that we will not stop fighting until the basic demands of our people have been met by forming a government of our country that is free and democratic.

Join the insurgent forces of the zapatista army of National liberation.

General Command of the EZLN 1993

GROUP II: The residents of Chiapas; the geography and living conditions of Chiapas.

Chiapas: The Southeast in Two Winds: A Storm and a Prophecy
by Subcommander Marcos, August 1992

The First Wind: The One From Above

Chapter One

This chapter tells how the supreme government was affected by the poverty of the Indigenous peoples of Chiapas and endowed the area with hotels, prisons, barracks, and a military airport. It also tells how the beast feeds on the blood of the people, as well as other miserable and unfortunate happenings

Suppose that you live in the North, Center, or West of this country. Suppose that you heed the old SECOTUR (Department of Tourism) slogan, "Get to know Mexico first." Suppose that you decide to visit the Southeast of your country and that in the Southeast you choose to visit the state of Chiapas. Suppose that you drive there (getting there by airplane is not only expensive but unlikely, a mere fantasy: There are only two "civilian" airports and one military one). Suppose that you take the Transiste'mica Highway. Suppose that you pay no attention to the Army barracks located at Mati'as Romero and that you continue on to

Ventosa. Suppose that you don't notice the Department of Government's immigration checkpoint near there (the checkpoint makes you think that you are leaving one country and entering another). Suppose that you decide to take a left and head towards Chiapas. Several kilometers further on you will leave the state of Oaxaca and you will see a big sign that reads, "WELCOME TO CHIAPAS." Have you found it? Good, suppose you have. You have entered by one of the three existing roads into Chiapas: The road into the northern part of the state, the road along the Pacific coast, and the road you entered by are the three ways to get to this Southeastern corner of the country by land. But the state's natural wealth doesn't leave only by way of these three roads. Chiapas loses blood through many veins: Through oil and gas ducts, electric lines, railways, through bank accounts, trucks, vans, boats and planes, through clandestine paths, gaps, and forest trails. This land continues to pay tribute to the imperialists: petroleum, electricity, cattle, money, coffee, banana, honey, corn, cacao, tobacco, sugar, soy, melon, sorghum, mamey, mango, tamarind, avocado, and Chiapaneco blood flows as a result of the thousand teeth sunk into the throat of the Mexican Southeast. These raw materials, thousands of millions of tons of them, flow to Mexican ports and railroads, air and truck transportation centers. From there they are sent to different parts of the world: The United States, Canada, Holland, Germany, Italy, Japan, but with the same fate—to feed imperialism. The fee that capitalism imposes on the Southeastern part of this country oozes, as it has since from the beginning, blood and mud.

A handful of businesses, one of which is the Mexican State, take all the wealth out of Chiapas and in exchange leave behind their mortal and pestilent mark: in 1989 these businesses took 1,222,669,000,000 pesos from Chiapas and only left behind 616,340,000,000 pesos worth of credit and public works. More than 600,000,000,000 pesos went to the belly of the beast.

In Chiapas, Pemex [the national oil company] has 86 teeth clenched in the townships of Estacio'n Jua'rez, Reforma, Ostuaca'n, Pichucalco, and Ocosingo. Every day they suck out 92,000 barrels of petroleum and 517,000,000,000 cubic feet of gas. They take away the petroleum and gas, and in exchange leave behind the mark of capitalism: ecological destruction, agricultural plunder, hyperinflation, alcoholism, prostitution, and poverty. The beast is still not satisfied and has extended its tentacles to the Lacandona jungle: eight petroleum deposits are under exploration. The paths are made with machetes by the same campesinos who are left without land by the insatiable beast. The trees fall and dynamite explodes on land where campesinos are not allowed to cut down trees to cultivate. Every tree that is cut down costs them a fine that is 10 times the minimum wage, and a jail sentence. The poor cannot cut down trees, but the petroleum beast can, a beast that every day falls more and more into foreign hands. The campesinos cut them down to survive, the beast to plunder.

Chiapas also bleeds coffee. Thirty-five percent of the coffee produced in Mexico comes from this area. The industry employs 87,000 people. Forty-seven percent of the coffee is for national consumption and 53% is exported abroad, mainly to the United States and Europe. More than 100,000 tons of coffee are taken from this state to fatten the beast's bank accounts: in 1988 a kilo of pergamino coffee was sold abroad for 8,000 pesos. The Chiapaneco producers were paid 2,500 pesos or less.

The second most important plunder, after coffee, is beef. Three million head of cattle wait for middle-men and a small group of businessmen to take them away to fill refrigerators in Arriaga, Villahermosa, and Mexico City. The cattle are sold for 400 pesos per kilo by the poor farmers and resold by the middle-men and businessmen for up to ten times the price they paid for them.

The tribute that capitalism demands from Chiapas has no historical parallel. Fifty-five percent of national hydroelectric energy comes from this state, along with 20% of Mexico's total electricity. However, only a third of the homes in Chiapas have electricity. Where do the 12,907 kilowatts produced annually by hydroelectric plants in Chiapas go?

In spite of the current trend toward ecological awareness, the plunder of wood continues in Chiapas's forests. Between 1981 and 1989, 2,444,777 cubic meters of precious woods, conifers, and tropical trees were taken from Chiapas. They were taken to Mexico City, Puebla, Veracruz, and Quintana Roo. In 1988 wood exports brought a revenue of 23,900,000,000 pesos, 6,000% more than in 1980.

The honey that is produced in 79,000 beehives in Chiapas goes entirely to US and European markets. The 2,756 tons of honey produced annually in the Chiapaneco countryside is converted into dollars which the people of Chiapas never see.

Of the corn produced in Chiapas, more than half goes to the domestic market. Chiapas is one of the largest corn producers in the country. Sorghum grown in Chiapas goes to Tabasco. Ninety percent of the tamarind goes to Mexico City and other states. Two-thirds of the avocados and all of the mameys are sold outside of the state. Sixty-nine percent of the cacao goes to the national market, and 31% is exported to the US, Holland, Japan, and Italy. The majority of the bananas produced are exported.

What does the beast leave behind in exchange for all it takes away?

Chiapas has a total area of 75,634.4 square kilometers, some 7.5 million hectares. It is the eighth largest state and is divided into 111 townships organized, for the purposes of looting, into nine economic regions. Forty percent of the nation's plant varieties, 36% of its mammal species, 34% of its reptiles and amphibians, 66% of its bird species, 20% of its fresh-water fish, and 80% of its butterfly species are found in Chiapas. Seven percent of the total national rainfall falls in Chiapas. But its greatest wealth is the 3.5 million people of Chiapas, two-thirds of whom live and die in rural communities. Half of them don't have potable water and two-thirds have no sewage service. Ninety percent of the rural population pay little or no taxes.

Communication in Chiapas is a grotesque joke for a state that produces petroleum, electricity, coffee, wood, and cattle for the hungry beast. Only two-thirds of the municipal seats have paved-road access. Twelve thousand communities have no other means of transport and communication than mountain trails. Since the days of Porfirio Di'az, the railroad lines have serviced capitalism rather than the people. The railroad line that follows the coast (there are only two lines: the other crosses the northern part of the state) dates back to the turn of the century, and its tonnage is limited by the old bridges that cross the canyons of the Southeast. The only port in Chiapas, Puerto Madero, is just one more way for the beast to extract the state's resources.

Education? The worst in the country. At the elementary school level, 72 out of every 100 children don't finish the first grade. More than half of the schools only offer up to a third grade education and half of the schools only have one teacher for all the courses offered. There are statistics, although they are kept secret of course, that show that many Indigenous children are forced to drop out of school due to their families' need to incorporate them into the system of exploitation. In any Indigenous community it is common to see children carrying corn and wood, cooking, or washing clothes during school hours. Of the 16,058 classrooms in 1989, only 96 were in Indigenous zones.

Industry? Look, 40% of Chiapas's "industry" consists of Nixtamal mills, tortillas, and wood furniture mills. Large companies (petroleum and electricity), 0.2% of the total industry, belong to the Mexican government (and soon to foreigners). Medium-sized industry, 0.4% of the total industry, is made up of sugar refineries and fish, seafood, flour, milk, and coffee processing plants. Of the state's industry, 94% of the area's industry is micro-industry.

The health conditions of the people of Chiapas are a clear example of the capitalist imprint: One-and-a-half million people have no medical services at their disposal. There are 0.2 clinics for every 1,000 inhabitants, one-fifth of the national average. There are 0.3 hospital beds for every 1,000 Chiapanecos, one third the amount in the rest of Mexico. There is one operating room per 100,000 inhabitants, one half of the amount in the rest of Mexico. There are 0.5 doctors and 0.4 nurses per 1,000 people, one-half of the national average.

Health and nutrition go hand in hand in poverty. Fifty-four percent of the population of Chiapas suffer from malnutrition, and in the highlands and forest this percentage increases to 80%. A campesino's average diet consists of coffee, corn, tortillas, and beans.

This is what capitalism leaves as payment for everything that it takes away.

This part of the Mexican territory, which willingly annexed itself to the young independent republic in 1824, appeared in national geography when the petroleum boom reminded the country that there was a Southeast (82% of Pemex's petrochemical plants are in the Southeast; in 1990 two-thirds of public investment in the Southeast was in energy). Chiapas's experience of exploitation goes back for centuries. In times past, wood, fruits, animals, and men went to the metropolis through the veins of exploitation, just as they do today. Like the banana republics, but at the peak of neoliberalism and "libertarian revolutions," the Southeast continues to export raw materials, just as it did 500 years ago. It continues to import capitalism's principal product: death and misery.

One million Indigenous people live in these lands and share a disorienting nightmare with mestizos and ladinos: their only option, 500 years after the "Meeting of Two Worlds," is to die of poverty or repression. The programs to improve the conditions of poverty, a small bit of social democracy which the Mexican state throws about and which, under the regime of Salinas de Gortari carries the name Pronasol, are a joke that brings bloody tears to those who live under the rain and sun.

Welcome! You have arrived in the poorest state in the country: Chiapas

Suppose that you drive on to Ocosocoatla and from there down to Tuxtla Gutierrez, the state capital. You don't stay long. Tuxtla Gutierrez is only a large warehouse which stores products from other parts of the state. Here you find some of the wealth which will be sent to whatever destinations the capitalists decide. You don't stay long, you have just barely touched the lips of the wild beast's bloody jaws. You go on to Chiapas de Corzo without noticing the Nestle' factory that is there, and you begin to climb up into the mountains. What do you see? One thing is certain, you have entered another world, an Indigenous world. Another world, but the same as that in which millions of people in the rest of the country live

Three hundred thousand Tzotziles, 120,000 Choles, 90,000 Zoques, and 70,000 Tojolabales inhabit this

Indigenous world. The supreme government recognizes that "only" half of these 1,000,000 Indigenous people are illiterate.

Continue along the mountain road and you arrive in the region known as the Chiapaneco highlands. Here, more than 500 years ago, Indigenous people were the majority, masters and owners of land and water. Now they are only the majority in population and in poverty. Drive on until you reach San Cristo'bal de las Casas, which 100 years ago was the state capital (disagreements among the bourgeoisie robbed it of the dubious honor of being the capital of the poorest state in Mexico). No, don't linger. If Tuxtla Gutierrez is a large warehouse, San Cristóbal is a large market. From many different routes the Tzotziles, Tzeltales, Choles, Tojolabales, and Zoques bring the Indigenous tribute to capitalism. Each brings something different: wood, coffee, cloth, handicrafts, fruits, vegetables, corn. Everyone brings something: sickness, ignorance, jeers, and death. This is the poorest region of the poorest state in the country. Welcome to San Cristo'bal de las Casas, a "Colonial City" according to the history books, although the majority of the population is Indigenous. Welcome to Pronasol's huge market. Here you can buy or sell anything except Indigenous dignity. Here everything is expensive except death. But don't stay too long, continue along the road, the proud result of the tourist infrastructure. In 1988 there were 6,270 hotel rooms, 139 restaurants, and 42 travel agencies in this state. This year, 1,058,098 tourists visited Chiapas and left 250,000,000,000 pesos in the hands of restaurant and hotel owners.

Have you calculated the numbers? Yes, you're right: there are seven hotel rooms for every 1,000 tourists while there are only 0.3 hospital beds per 1,000 Chiapaneco citizens. Leave the calculations behind and drive on, noticing the three police officials in berets jogging along the shoulder of the road. Drive by the Public Security station and continue on passing hotels, restaurants, large stores and heading towards the exit to Comita'n. Leaving San Cristóbal behind you will see the famous San Cristo'bal caves surrounded by leafy forest. Do you see the sign? No, you are not mistaken, this natural park is administered by...the Army! Without leaving your uncertainty behind, drive on...Do you see them? Modern buildings, nice homes, paved roads...Is it a university? Workers' housing? No, look at the sign next to the cannons closely and read: "General Army Barracks of the 31st Military Zone." With the olive-green image still in your eyes, drive on to the intersection and decide not to go to Comita'n so that you will avoid the pain of seeing that, a few meters ahead, on the hill that is called the Foreigner, North American military personnel are operating, and teaching their Mexican counterparts to operate radar. Decide that it is better to go to Ocosingo since ecology and all that nonsense is very fashionable. Look at the trees, breath deeply...Do you feel better? Yes? Then be sure to keep looking to your left, because if you don't you will see, seven kilometers ahead, another magnificent construction with the noble symbol of SOLIDARIDAD on the facade. Don't look. I tell you, look the other way. You don't notice that this new building is...a jail (evil tongues say that this is a benefit of Pronasol; now campesinos won't have to go all the way to Cerro Hueco, the prison in the state capital). No brother, don't lose heart, the worst is always hidden: Excessive poverty discourages tourism. Continue on, down to Huixta'n, up to Oxchuc, look at the beautiful waterfall where the Jatate river, whose waters cross the Lacandona Jungle, begins. Pass by Cuxulja and instead of following the detour to Altamirano drive on till you reach Ocosingo: "The Door to the Lacandona Jungle..."

Good, stay a while. Take a quick tour around the city... Principal points of interest? The two large constructions at the entrance to the city are brothels, next door is a jail, the building further beyond, a church, this other one is a beef-processing plant, that other one, Army barracks, over there is the court, the Municipal

building, and way over there is Pemex. The rest are small piled-up houses which crumble when the huge Pemex trucks and ranch pick-up trucks pass by

What does it look like? A Porfirista-type large-landed estate? But that ended 75 years ago! No, don't follow the road that goes to San Quinti'n, in front of the Montes Azules Reserve. Don't go to where the Jatate and Perlas rivers join, don't go down there, don't walk for three eight-hour days, don't go to San Marti'n and see that it is a very poor and small community, don't approach that shed that is falling to pieces. What is it? A sometimes church, school, meeting room. Now it is a school. It is 11 a.m.. No, don't go closer, don't look in, don't look at the four groups of children riddled with tapeworms and lice, half-naked, don't look at the four young Indigenous teachers who work for miserable pay for which they have to walk three days, the same three days that you just walked, to collect. Don't notice that the only division between the classrooms is a small hall. Up to what grade do they teach here? Third. No, don't look at the posters which are the only thing that the government has sent to these children. Don't look at them: They are posters about AIDS prevention.

Better for us to move on, let's return to the paved roads. Yes, I know that it is in bad condition. Let's leave Ocosingo, continue to admire the countryside... The owners? Yes, ranch owners. What is produced? Cattle, coffee, corn... Did you see the National Indigenous Institute? Yes, the one as you leave the city. Did you see those pickup trucks? They are given on credit to Indigenous campesinos. They only take unleaded gas because it's better for the environment... There is no unleaded gas in Ocosingo? Well, that's not a big thing... Yes, you are right, the government is worried about the campesinos. Of course evil tongues say that there are guerrillas in these mountains and that the government's financial aid is really to buy Indigenous people's loyalty, but these are rumors, surely they are just trying to undermine Pronasol... What? The Citizen's Defense Committee? Oh yes! It consists of a group of "heroic" ranchers, traders, and corrupt union bosses who organize small guards to threaten the people. No, I already told you that the Porfirista large-landed estate was done away with 75 years ago... It would be better for us to move on...At the next intersection take a left. No, don't go towards Palenque. Let's go to Chilo'n... Pretty, no? Yes.

Yajalon...it's very modern, it even has a gas station... Look, there's a bank, the municipal building, the courthouse, over there the Army... It looks like another hacienda? Let's go and you won't see those other large, modern buildings on the outskirts of town, along the road to Tila and Sabanilla with their big beautiful SOLIDARIDAD signs, you won't see that it is a jail.

Good, we have arrived at the intersection. Now to Ocosingo...Palenque? Are you sure? Okay, let's go. Yes, the countryside is beautiful. Are those ranches? You're correct: they produce cattle, coffee, wood. Look, we're already at Palenque. A quick tour of the city? Okay. Those are hotels, over there restaurants, the municipal building, the courthouse, those are the Army barracks, and over there... What? No, I already know what you're going to tell me... Don't say it... Tired? Okay, we'll stop for a bit. You don't want to see the pyramids? No? Okay. Xi'Nich? Ah...an Indigenous march. Yes, it's going to Mexico City. How far? 1,106 kilometers. Results? The government receives their petitions. Yes, that's all. Are you still tired? More? Let's wait... To Bonampak? The road is very bad. Okay, let's go. Yes, the panoramic route...This is the Federal Military Reserve, that other one belongs to the Navy, the one over there belongs to the Department of Government... Is it always like this? No, sometimes they top it off with a campesinos' protest march. Tired? Do you want to go back? Okay. Other places? Different places? In what country? Mexico? You will see the same. The colors

will change, the languages, the countryside, the names, but the people, the exploitation, the poverty and death are the same. Just look closely in any state in the Republic. Well, good luck...And if you need a tourist guide please be sure to let me know. I'm at your service. Oh! One more thing. It will not always be this way. Another Mexico? No, the same...I am talking about something else, about other winds beginning to blow, as if another wind is picking up...

GROUP III: The landowners

Land Hunger Remains At The Heart Of Chiapas Troubles
by John Ross, Latin America Data Base, SourceMex 2/15/95

[The author, a freelance journalist who has written on Mexican political and economic affairs for many years, wrote this article while conducting research at Ejido Floresca, a communal farm near Comitan, Chiapas state. He also recently published "Rebellion From The Roots", a detailed account of the uprising of the Zapatista National Liberation Army in Chiapas.]

Despite President Ernesto Zedillo's characterization of the troubles in Chiapas as a matter of "common delinquency," land hunger remains at the heart of the conflict that continues to convulse this southernmost of Mexican states. The state's major ranching associations claim that since the Zapatista rebellion was launched 13 months ago, land-poor campesinos have seized more than 700,000 hectares (two million acres). The actual figure, however, is closer to 200,000 ha., according to Arturo Luna of the Consejo Estatal de Organizaciones Indigenas y Campesinas (CEIOC), an agricultural organization.

In a stop-gap effort to defuse tensions and end land invasions, the federal and state governments created funds to buy occupied land from ranchers and absentee owners who are willing to sell. To date, the fund has been utilized to purchase 31,000 ha. of disputed land. On the other hand, the CEOIC claims that only about 5000 of those hectares have been distributed to the campesinos who participated in the occupations.

Now, this program appears to be at an end. "We will not buy one more ranch" Chiapas Secretary of Government Eraclio Zepeda announced in January, explaining that "unscrupulous leaders" are turning the land purchases into an industry by ordering the occupation of some of "the saddest farms" in the nation and then demanding high commissions from the owners when they sell.

A parallel Chiapas "government in rebellion," headed by crusading newspaper publisher Amado Avendano, includes directors of the CEOIC on its state council. Avendano's government has been supportive of fresh land invasions throughout the state as a tool of "civil insurrection" and resistance to Chiapas's entrenched ranching elite.

Due to its historical and geographic isolation from the Mexican mainstream, Chiapas did not benefit from the agrarian reform that became the cornerstone of Mexico's post-revolutionary 1917 Constitution. Instead, the "finqueros" (estate owners) of Chiapas banded together to battle the victorious Carranza government's land distribution edicts. Appropriating the name of Carranza's most visible foe, the revolutionary martyr, Emiliano Zapata, bogus "Zapatistas" roamed Chiapas, frequently raiding rival landholders and defending their own property from seizure and redistribution.

Known as "mapaches" (raccoons) for the masks they wore and their raiding tactics, Chiapas's land-owning elite eventually forced the federal government into a tacit agreement that fixed a maximum total holding figure at 8,000 ha. (about 20,000 acres) for each family. Despite the size of their holdings, the land-owning dynasties identified themselves as "small property" owners to conform to the strictures of the nation's agrarian reform laws.

Such vast holdings have traditionally been patrolled by private armies of "Guardias Blancas" (White Guards). One such militia took the name of the celebrated "mapache" Tiburcio Martinez. In the troubled context of Chiapas today, the "Tiburcio Martinezes" have been reactivated and rearmed to enforce ranchers' control in communities where land conflicts have boiled over into mayhem.

Indeed, one group of White Guards bearing the name of the old "mapache" Martinez, now stalks the streets of Chicomuselo, where at least six people were killed in a shoot-out with protesting campesinos this past December.

The appearance of "mapache" Zapatistas in the hills of Chiapas is still another reminder of the state's lurid agrarian past.

The Ejido Floresca is situated on dry, stony land in the upland municipality of Comitan. When chartered in 1945, the largely Tzotzil Indian ejido—which is surrounded by the fences of "small property" owners whose holdings often exceed that allowed by law—was granted 381 ha. on which it has paid taxes but which its members have never even been able to locate to farm. In 1994, smitten by the "civic valor" that has accompanied the 13-month-old rebellion of the Zapatista National Liberation Army, the ejido stopped paying taxes, according to the ejido's Communal Lands Commissioner Alfredo Vazquez. Ejido members have marched with the CEOIC and participated in the "civil insurrection" of Avendano's "government-in-rebellion."

Ironically, on Dec. 8, while Floresca farmers were encamped in the state capitol in Tuxtla Gutierrez, seeking to prevent the inauguration of Institutional Revolutionary Party gubernatorial candidate Eduardo Robledo Rincon, masked interlopers, claiming that they had been sent by the EZLN's charismatic "SUBCOMANDANTE MARCOS," seized 103 ha. owned by a relative of ejido members. They then began logging the sparse land, leaving their initials—a reverse of EZLN initials—on the trees.

The aging owner, Domingo Vazquez Diaz, was himself no more than chattel property of the great San Antonio "finca" (estate) and, as a youth, he recalls working from dawn to dusk, in what amounted to 15 days a month of forced labor, which was a condition for the right to farm his own small garden plot. "It was nothing but slavery," recalls Vazquez.

Unlike the legitimate EZLN, whose leaders' identities remain clouded, the names of the "neo-mapaches" who have seized the old man's trees, are well-known on the Ejido Floresca. Relatives of Commissioner Vazquez and Domingo Vazquez are positive the masked occupiers are indigenous farmers from the nearby ejido of Maravillas, an assumption confirmed by the CEOIC.

"This is poor land. We grew one crop of corn here and then our people must go and work as day laborers for the finqueros in Comitan," said Commissioner Vazquez. "We know that our compadres in Maravillas

are just as poor as us and like us they support Amado Avendano and the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD). But it is not right that brothers should fight battles with guns over crumbs. If the government would put on its pants and take the good land from the finqueros, there would be enough here for all of us..."

Such a simple solution appeared more remote than ever in early February, as Mexican Army vehicles streamed down the highway skirting the Ejido Floresca, heading towards the jungle to root out the Zapatistas, a military advance that the elite ranchers of Chiapas had been demanding of the federal government for months.

GROUP IV: *Government negotiating a peace settlement and early position on the EZLN*

President Ernesto Zedillo Orders Arrest of Zapatista Leaders
Latin America Data Base, SourceMex 2/15/95

On Feb. 9, President Ernesto Zedillo issued arrest warrants for five leaders of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in Chiapas, including the group's prominent spokesman "Subcommander MARCOS." The arrest orders ushered in a new army offensive in Chiapas to militarily wipe out the guerrillas, marking an abrupt end to the cease-fire that had remained in effect since January 1994. Now, a tense military lull grips the zone, since Zedillo has temporarily ordered the army to halt offensive action to allow one more chance for peace negotiations. (For more in-depth analysis of the present situation in Chiapas, see other articles in this issue of SourceMex.)

Speaking on national television, Zedillo said the arrest orders were justified because federal agents had uncovered a conspiracy by the EZLN to "engage in new and greater violent acts, not only in Chiapas, but also in other parts of the country." He said federal authorities had confiscated weapons caches near Mexico City and Veracruz, which he said the rebels were going to use for attacks on federal facilities.

"In order to protect the population, to stop further violations of the law, and new violent actions by the EZLN, the government must immediately assume its constitutional duties to guarantee the security of Mexicans and maintain social peace," Zedillo said in his speech.

In announcing the initiative, Zedillo identified Subcommander MARCOS as Rafael Sebastian Guillen Vicente, a former university professor and son of a well-to-do businessman from Tamaulipas state. During public appearances since the uprising of the EZLN on Jan. 1, 1994, MARCOS has worn a ski mask to hide his true identity.

Despite Zedillo's claim, there appears to be strong public skepticism that Guillen is indeed MARCOS. The daily newspaper Reforma, which conducted an informal survey of 400 residents of Mexico City, found that roughly 50% of the respondents doubted that Guillen is MARCOS. Additionally, almost 59% of those responding to the poll said they considered MARCOS a "leader" and not an "outlaw," as claimed by President Zedillo when he ordered the arrest.

Nevertheless, to follow through on his order for the arrest of EZLN leaders, Zedillo immediately sent federal soldiers to Chiapas to seek out MARCOS and other leaders. As of Feb. 14, federal troops had moved deep into Zapatista territory, capturing the town of Guadalupe Tepeyac, which was one of the key bases for the EZLN. During the sweep, the army arrested one alleged EZLN leader, whom they identified as Jorge Javier Elorreaga, or "SUBCOMANDANTE Vicente."

The Zapatistas, meantime, did not resist the army incursions, and instead chose to move deeper into the Lancandon jungle. The Zapatistas, however, did not retreat quietly. In a communique issued on Feb. 11, the EZLN accused the government troops of committing human rights abuses, including air bombardment of four areas near the towns of Morelia and La Garrucha. The EZLN statement said thousands of civilians had been forced to flee their homes after the army dispatched its troops. The army mobilization was backed by helicopters, with ground support from small tanks.

The Interior Secretariat (SG) and the Attorney General's Office (PGR) immediately issued statements denying the Zapatista claims of bombings of Morelia and Garrucha. A PGR statement said the government's pursuit of rebel leaders was being done "legally and with strict respect for human rights."

For his part, Marcos—in a public statement issued late on Feb. 12—denied that he was Guillen. He also said that the US had pushed Zedillo to act in Chiapas. According to MARCOS, the US had demanded strong action against the Zapatistas as a central condition for US efforts to garner US$50 billion in financial assistance to bail Mexico out of the economic crisis brought on by the peso devaluation (see SourceMex, 2/1/95).

Earlier, in a Feb. 10 interview with La Jornada daily newspaper, MARCOS had warned the Zedillo administration that the troop incursion could rapidly deteriorate into a bloody war.

"What follows, if no one stops it, is total guerrilla war," said MARCOS.

Notwithstanding MARCOS's statements, a separate rebel communique hinted that the EZLN was still open to talks with the government if the Zedillo administration agreed to cancel the arrest order for MARCOS and other Zapatista leaders. "We reiterate our readiness for dialogue and to find a political solution to this problem, but on condition that the pressure on Subcommander MARCOS be called off," the EZLN said.

The troop incursions into Chiapas and the orders to arrest MARCOS and other EZLN leaders drew a massive protest from EZLN supporters in Mexico City. According to some estimates, more than 100,000 people filled Mexico City's Zocalo Square on Feb. 11 to demand an end to army intervention in Chiapas and a negotiated solution to the conflict.

Partly in response to public opinion against the operation, on Feb. 14, Zedillo ordered troops to suspend their military offensive in Chiapas in their pursuit of EZLN leaders, although he stopped short of ordering the withdrawal of soldiers from the state.

In issuing the directive, Zedillo called on the federal army to restrict its actions to routine patrols and urged the EZLN leadership to make clear its negotiating position so that a "fair, honorable and final solution" could be reached.

Meanwhile, debate is growing over the reasons why President Zedillo ordered the military action in the first place. Many political and economic analysts agree with Subcommander MARCOS that Zedillo's decision to go after EZLN leaders may have indeed been the result of pressure from multilateral institutions and the US government to resolve the situation in Chiapas, which has left foreigners reluctant to continue investing in Mexico. At the same time, there is strong concern that Zedillo's actions could worsen, rather than improve, the political and economic climate in Mexico.

"I think he is taking a really big gamble, this could go horribly wrong," one diplomat told Reuter.

On a related matter, on Feb. 14 Chiapas Governor Roberto Robledo Rincon announced his resignation. Robledo—who had assumed office on Dec. 8, 1994—insisted that his decision was based on a "personal conviction" and not on pressure from either the PRI or the PRD. He expressed hope his decision would contribute to the peace process in Chiapas.

As one of the conditions for negotiations, the EZLN had demanded that Robledo resign and that Amado Avendano—the PRD's candidate for the Chiapas governorship—be allowed to assume the position.

Nevertheless, to replace Robledo as interim governor, the Chiapas legislature has nominated Julio Cesar Ruiz, also a member of the PRI and a representative in the federal Chamber of Deputies. Avendano, while not nominated to assume the gubernatorial post, will probably represent the PRD whenever new elections to replace Robledo are scheduled.

There was no immediate reaction from the EZLN regarding Robledo's decision to step down, but Avendano told reporters that the resignation was only one step in bringing peace back to Chiapas. According to Avendano, for example, federal troops must withdraw from Chiapas as a prerequisite for peace.

(Sources: Excelsior, 02/10/95; United Press International, 02/10/95, 02/12/95; El Universal, La Jornada, 02/10/95, 02/13/95; Spanish news service EFE, 02/09/95, 02/14/95; Reuter, 02/09/95, 02/11/95; 02/12/95, 02/14/95; Associated Press, 02/11/95, 02/12/95, 02/14/95; Notimex, 02/12/95, 02/14/95; Deutsche Press Agentur, 02/14/95)

Zapatista Peace Talks: Gains Come Slowly as Indigenous Rebel's Mode of Communication Challenges Government Representatives
by Chris Balletto

June 20, 1995

SAN CRISTOBAL, MEXICO — After almost a year since the first dialogue between the government and the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) a new round of negotiations started on April 9. This first preliminary meeting took place in the Ejido San Miguel, Ocosingo, with the goal of determining a site and date for the resumption of peace talks. While the Zapatistas had been seeking a site in Mexico City where the mobilization of thousands of supporters would have been assured and the nationwide nature of the uprising could have been more easily presented, it was decided that the permanent site would be San

Andres Larrainzar, an indigenous Tzotzil village of declared Zapatista supporters, 40 km north of San Cristobal in Chiapas.

On February 9 President Zedillo put out an arrest warrant for the Zapatista leadership and ordered an Army offensive into the eastern jungle of Chiapas. He charged that the Zapatistas were planning a new offensive and claimed its leadership "is neither popular, nor indigenous, nor Chiapanecan." After three long dialogue sessions in San Andres this claim can now be put to rest. Government negotiators have been made well aware that the Zapatista representatives are indeed the same indigenous people who make up one-third of Chiapas's population. Five of the nine representatives at the negotiating table came dressed in their traditional Mayan costumes. Furthermore, a close look at each of the EZLN delegates, from their well-worn huaraches (typical sandals) to their thick callused hands, demonstrates that any one of them could remove their ski mask and instantly blend into the population of indigenous farmers that surround the negotiating site.

During an intimate meeting between the nine EZLN negotiators and a dozen national and international journalists the difficulty of the negotiations became strikingly apparent. Since most of the EZLN representatives speak Spanish as a second language, journalists had to speak slowly and rephrase questions when they were not understood. Chief Zapatista spokesperson for the negotiations, Comandante Tacho, has become quite skilled in handling the press, using wit and sarcasm both to push forward his points and to evade questions when he chooses not to answer. Yet, the legalistic language and patronizing attitude of the government representatives has become one of the chief complaints of the Zapatista negotiating committee. The EZLN wants the government to take the dialogue more seriously.

The absence of Subcomandante Marcos, the EZLN's eloquent non-indigenous spokesperson, was originally thought to be a setback for the movement. Yet, ironically, because of his absence and the indigenous composition of the EZLN delegation —representing three major Mayan language groups— the Zapatistas are forcing the government to recognize and confront essential cultural differences. This is very important in a nation with at least ten million indigenous people who represent 56 language groups. In the negotiations, the government delegation has dealt with the indigenous EZLN representatives face to face. This has put the government in a position where its technocratic language and mode of organization is alien. Zapatista supporters hope that if nothing else comes from these meetings the government delegation will at least learn tolerance and begin to understand the cultural differences.

The first meeting in Larrainzar took place April 20-24. The dialogue started with an explosion of support for peace and solidarity with the demands of the Zapatistas. In the early hours of the morning more than five thousand indigenous marchers from surrounding villages entered the site of the dialogue shouting slogans, "We are all Marcos!" "Viva el EZLN!" and "We want peace!" The government interpreted the mobilization as a threat to its security. However, by the afternoon the majority of the marchers, who had formed into a peace belt between the military and the Red Cross, were sleeping under the hot sun. More menacing was the army presence on a hill 500 metres from the village plaza, overlooking the negotiation site. The government accused the EZLN of manipulating the indigenous supporters into mobilizing and refused to come to the table. To continue the talks, the EZLN delegation released a communique the following day, thanking its supporters but asking them to leave. Zapatista sympathizers were furious, "How can the government demand that the indigenous people leave, when the negotiations are for them? That is not democratic!" said one peace belt activist.

In this first meeting the two sides exchanged proposals. The Zapatistas offered to remain in their bases if the army retreated to the positions it held before February 9. In turn the government proposed that the Zapatista insurgents regroup in three pre-determined sites in the following regions: 1) highlands 2) planes 3) jungle. In these sites the government offered food, housing, health care, etc. Neither the EZLN nor its supporters took the proposal seriously. First, the offer was focused exclusively at the local level which did not correspond with the EZLN's national demands for democratization. Second, such a proposal was dangerously close to the system of model villages used in Guatemala for controlling the indigenous people and stifling dissent. Clearly, the EZLN would never agree to that.

In the second dialogue May 12-15, the EZLN presented the results of its consultation with the Zapatista insurgent community bases —because of the military occupation it was not possible to include the thousands of indigenous peoples who make up the Zapatista part-time militia. The insurgent community bases voted NO to the government proposals. An EZLN representative stated, "the war will end when the dialogue ends, when the causes that motivated it are resolved; only when things change, but never if they stay the same." The outcome of the second dialogue was a document called, "Minimal Agreement on the Means of Distention." The army proposed to concentrate its forces in specific geographical areas along 7 transportation routes. The Zapatistas would then be responsible for keeping security in the areas under their control.

In an address given on the last night of the second dialogue, Comandante David made it known that communication between the two sides was very slow. He stated, "the talks have been very difficult because it has been very hard to understand the government delegation . . . as indigenous people we have another rhythm, another time, we go by a different clock. . . But as Zapatistas we have the will to continue ahead because we know, we understand, that if the talks go well the outcome will benefit all people, all the indigenous and non-indigenous campesinos, all the workers and all the Mexican people."

The government complained in the closing remarks of the second dialogue that the Zapatista's community consultations were too time consuming. The EZLN responded with an invitation for government representatives to attend the consultations so that they would understand why direct democracy needs time. The only condition stipulated by the EZLN delegates was that the government come without helicopters and be willing to walk to the communities and sleep in hammocks like the consultation organizers. The government did not accept the invitation, although journalists confirmed that during the consultations both the Zapatistas and their community bases were prepared to accept a government delegation. For peace advocates this was another sign that the government was not taking the dialogue seriously.

The third meeting at San Andres, June 7-11, opened with the usual flair. The nine Zapatista delegates arrived in Red Cross trucks to large cheers by the crowds that gathered outside the peace and security belts. Comandante Tacho arrived last with the "grandmother Trini," (Comandante Trinidad—rumoured to be his mother) an elderly Tojolabal woman with long braided gray hair and a red handkerchief covering her face. She had already made her first appearance at the second dialogue, affirming in a press conference that she represented the Zapatista and indigenous women of Chiapas and Mexico. Her appearance made a striking contrast with the absent, male, non-indigenous Subcomandante Marcos, reflecting the diversity within the movement and the importance it gives to representation.

At the end of the third dialogue's opening night Comandante Trinidad addressed the crowd by saying, "Tonight we have a surprise for you." She then pulled out a small tape recorder and played a 30-minute

speech by Subcomandante Marcos, calling for a National Consultation on 5 specific questions, most importantly asking whether the EZLN should become a formal independent political force and whether it should coalesce with other existing political organizations. The results of the consultation are to be made known 8 August 1995 to coincide with the first anniversary of the National Democratic Convention (CND) which was held the year before to unite Mexico's diverse popular forces under a common banner in support of the EZLN's demands.

The advances in the third round of talks were negligible. Most of the debate was over the government's proposed routes of concentration for military withdrawal. The government's seven route proposal was voted down by the Zapatista community bases, so the EZLN delegation counterproposed four alternative routes. Most notably, the EZLN's proposal stipulated that the Mexican armed forces withdrawal from Guadalupe Tepeyac and Aguascalientes —former Zapatista headquarters and site of the first CND— returning the community back to EZLN control. The government stated that because of the symbolic importance of this site it would never be returned to the Zapatistas. Comandante Tacho countered, "The government can keep its Guadalupe Tepeyac, we'll build a new one." The fourth round of talks are scheduled for July 4.

June 18, one week following the third dialogue in San Andres, the "authentic coletos"—the so called real citizens of San Cristobal, representing "white elites"—held a demonstration in the central plaza. They wanted to express their frustration at the slow pace of the peace talks and their displeasure with the publicity victories made by the EZLN. The coletos gave a series of emotional speeches distorted by their obvious inebriation—somewhat surprising for a Sunday morning. One particularly angry coleto shouted, "We the coletos demand authority!" The crowd of approximately 150 people was made up of mostly campesinos. The campesinos came en masse and left without joining the 50 or so remaining authentic coletos who were attempting to sing a patriotic anthem amongst the commotion. The interruption seemed to disturb the coletos who later marched through the plaza, screaming for foreigners to leave the city, and harassing men with long-hair.

The resident Associated Press photographer was enlivened by the display, documenting the spectacle when suddenly the crowd turned on him. One elderly man slapped at him, and when the photographer attempted to push him away, the old coleto struck him in the face. It was clear to bystanders that the coletos had lost any semblance of legitimacy, turning into a small unruly mob of drunks. One observer remarked, "The coletos just want to return San Cristobal and Chiapas back to the way it was when the Indians were obedient and it was clear who ruled." The coleto protests were stronger and more violent at the beginning of the year and this small demonstration did little to further their cause.

The biggest challenge facing the Zapatistas and the popular movement in general, after three rounds of peace talks in San Andres, is overcoming divisions that have boiled to the surface over the last months. The CND led by human rights activist, Rosario Ibarra, appears divided between its Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) bases and the Revolutionary Worker's Party (PRT) line. Ibarra is accused of using the CND to push forward and revive the agenda of the PRT, while the PRD faction is said to be concerned with giving Cuautemoc Cardenas a spotlight in the movement. Ibarra stated, "It is certain that two positions exist but they are not entrenched. The CND as a multiclass project can bring both positions forward. . . The EZLN has said, now is the time for unity."

Another division has appeared within the Chiapan popular movement. In October 1994, several indigenous communities in eastern Chiapas declared themselves autonomous and began a movement seeking local control over education, health, culture and economic resources. The movement put forth a list of concrete demands in coalition with 24 state-wide indigenous organizations, including the Independent Front for Indigenous Peoples (FIPI) who are also working at the national level for constitutional changes. Recently the Democratic State Assembly of Chiapan People (AEDPCH) met with a government negotiator to begin discussions which included the situation of the autonomous regions. In an EZLN communique, Subcomandante Marcos declared the State Assembly's action an "act of treason," charging that the move undermined the negotiating process in San Andres.

Later the "Rebel Governor of Transition," Amado Avendano, released a statement reaffirming that although he was part of the State Assembly (AEDPCH), he felt that the only true dialogue to support was that headed by the EZLN in San Andres. One FIPI spokesperson described a private meeting between the EZLN delegates and FIPI representatives in which Comandante Tacho appeared angry and chastised the representatives for going around the negotiating process. Later when larger national groups came in defense of FIPI's autonomous movement, Tacho was said to have affirmed that the most important point was maintaining unity. The autonomous groups hope that reconciliatory steps will be taken as soon as possible. This would allow room for the EZLN's call for the creation of a broad front, uniting all political forces of the left, centre and those without parties for the upcoming National Consultations announced at the third dialogue, during Subcomandante Marcos's June 8 taped message.

The differences among the EZLN's support bases do not appear insurmountable and can be expected in the type of pluralistic opposition front the Zapatistas are trying to create within Mexico civil society. In the last dialogue rumours were flying that Subcomandante Marcos would show up. Perhaps for the upcoming dialogue scheduled on July 4 in San Andres, the appearance of Marcos and some well staged publicity events can begin the momentum necessary to carry the movement to its next stage. Many people believe that the National Consultations will result in a decisive NO on the question of the Zapatistas becoming a new independent political force. Whatever the outcome the consultation process will serve to give the movement more legitimacy. The Zapatistas can demonstrate to the nation that they are at the orders of Mexican civil society and ready to follow the popular will. The EZLN appears open to accept whatever outcome, even if it means that it remains a belligerent force until the political system changes to permit the reforms its indigenous bases are seeking. Marcos made clear in a June communique, "We are not proposing an orthodox revolution, but instead something much more difficult: a revolution that makes possible the real revolution."

Also check the listservs for the latest developments in the July 4,1995 rounds of peacetalks.