

“Rebellion from the Roots-II”

Stephen Lendman

The EZLN struggled to win redress for their major demands, but the Zedillo government in the 1990s reneged on a promise to address them. The key betrayal came in 1996 when EZLN leaders thought they had a deal known as the San Andres Accords. It was a landmark document based on the International Labour Organization's Resolution 169, the universally accepted benchmark for defining an indigenous people stipulating they have both territory or habitat and "territoriality" meaning they have autonomy over their own lands free from government control.

Had it passed, it would have given Mexico's 57 distinct indigenous peoples local autonomy over all aspects of their lives—agrarian policy, natural resources, the environment, health and educational institutions, judicial system, and their overall social and cultural rights. It needed to be legislatively approved by changes in state, federal, local laws and the Mexican Constitution committing the government to eliminate "the poverty, the marginalization and insufficient political participation of millions of indigenous Mexicans." But like before and always, it wasn't to be as PRI President Zedillo, an "inflexible globophile" and technocratic servant of empire, upheld Mexico's business as usual *mal gobierno* (bad government) dark forces reneging on the deal as fast as he could unleash Mexican army troops against the people of Chiapas stepping up his "dirty war" on them to undermine their popular support and end the EZLN rebellion.

"PRIista" Zedillo failed, biting off more than he could chew, because the Zapatistas then and now aren't giving up their struggle or going away. Their response was a greater effort to mobilize broader support throughout the country. In 1999, the collective Zapatista Revolutionary Indigenous Clandestine Committee (CCRI) leadership made up of 23 commanders and spokesperson Subcommandante Marcos organized a national consulta, or referendum, for indigenous rights and implementation of the San Andres Accords that were signed in 1996. More than three million Mexicans participated with 95% of them endorsing the EZLN's demands providing the kind of mass support hard to ignore.

In December, 2000, National Action Party's (PAN) Vicente Fox (and former Coca-Colaista big cheese) had to address it. He shook Mexico's political firmament in the July elections becoming the country's first president able to end the PRI's stranglehold single party 71-year rule under a system known as "Presidentia-lism." After taking office, he arrogantly promised to cut the Gordian knot deadlock with the EZLN and would meet with Subcommandante Marcos to "fix things up in 15 minutes" by committing to submit the San Andres Accords or La Ley Cocopa Indian Rights Law to Congress for resolution where almost for certain they'd be none.

Still, the Zapatistas and their supporters went on the road for it for 16 days going from Chiapas to Mexico City in February and March 2001. The climax was a mass rally of hundreds of thousands in the capital's Zocalo, to no avail as the Congress gutted the Accords ending the EZLN's hope for redress through the political process that was reinforced when the nation's Supreme Court upheld the legislators 8 - 3 on September 7, 2002. It left the Zapatistas high and dry and more than ever determined to work for change outside the political process that works for the privileged, not the people.

EZLN'S OTHER CAMPAIGN

The Zapatista's Other Campaign grew out of the organization's Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle (the Sexta) issued June, 2005 calling for a new approach outside traditional party politics the EZLN rejects because it doesn't work for ordinary people. The idea was to build a grand alliance of all jodidos (the "screwed" over people) to include Indians and the "real left" to join in solidarity from the bottom up outside the political process and call a constitutional convention to write a new anti-neoliberal document protecting the nation's land and resources as well as enact an Indian Rights law.

The Other Campaign went on the road to all parts of the country during the 2006 electoral period working outside the political process withholding support for opposition Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) presidential candidate and ex-PRIista Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, popularly known as ALMO.

Ross calls him El Peje, his nickname, noting while serving as Mexico City's popular mayor he eschewed ostentation; provided essential social services for the people like free milk for young mothers; shelters for the homeless; and jobs for tens of thousands. He also cut deals with the business class from Mexico's Council of Businessmen (CMHN) made up of the country's 37 richest men like he did with billionaire tycoon Carlos Slim showing he was a "demon in disguise, a demagogue, (a) dreaded politician. A danger, in short, for Mexico." A man who sleeps with the devil. Not anyone the Zapatistas could trust or support, and they didn't, sitting out the campaign to further their own to end Mexico's unjust economic system of corrupted predatory capitalism exploiting people for profit. Their goal is noble, and they're committed to it - to one day bring real social, economic and democratic change to the country but do it outside party politics within which it can never happen.

Working through the system always turns out the same. The dominant PRI and PAN are Mexico's Republicans and Democrats - two wings of the nation's property party exploiting the masses to serve the country's capital interests, latifundistas, and foreign investors from el norte. It hardly matters whether PAN or PRI rules with the PRD scarcely better as most in it are recycled "PRIANS" (formerly from PRI and PAN) - aka, Mexico's bipartisan criminal class with softer edges offering the people more crumbs, but still crumbs. In power they'd never address the Zapatistas' original 13 demands - land, work, labour, bread, education, health, shelter, communication, culture, independence, democracy, liberty, and peace as well as foster solidarity with the aggrieved.

Ross' criticism is even harsher calling the PRD "mortally flawed, enomously venial and vulnerable to splintering into brittle battle over scraps of power." In his judgment, if ALMO became president (he didn't, but it was unresolved at press time), the dominant business class, Washington, and even the Church would slap him down each time he proposed overly generous crumbs. And if he managed doing more than thought possible, Ross adds an exclamation point - "Think Salvadore Allende" who was no match for Nixon-Kissinger the way a Mexican progressive today would be out of his league against the demon-duo Bush-Cheney, even meaner and nastier than their uglier-than-sin predecessors.

They don't daunt the EZLN's 13- year resolve against *mal gobierno*, running strong and gaining strength with the Other Campaign continuing throughout 2006. It's still ongoing in the new year with the country now under PAN president-by-mass-electoral-fraud Felipe Calderon. Ross will pick up the story in his next book, sure to come, continuing his chronicle of rebellion for a better world Zapatistas are in the vanguard for.

La Otra Campana grew out of planning meetings and is composed of many thousands of supporters including Indians, farmers, workers, social movements, NGOs, autonomous collectives, all groups on the left and all others willing to join a social movement for change. The plan was to take Subcommandante Marcos (who's mestizo, not Indian) and a 16-member Sexta commission on a six month brainstorming blizzard, beginning January 1, 2006, to all 31 Mexican states to meet and listen to a diverse range of people, groups and organizations. They want their ideas as input to use toward building broader support toward the goal of real change in a country stultified by decades of corruption and mass exploitation.

This was the fifth time the Zapatistas left their Chiapas stronghold home taking their message to the country, the last time being in 2001 for the "March of Those Who Are The Color of the Earth" after Congress gutted the La Ley Cocopa or Indian Rights Law. This time the plan was much more ambitious with goals great enough to make Marcos tell his followers "we could be jailed, we could be killed. We may never return home" because at stake is the future of Mexico also playing out in the streets of Oaxaca since May for social justice long denied because getting it is never easy in a country ruled by powerful interests unwilling to sacrifice their privilege and till now never having to.

The Other Campaign aims high continuing into 2007. It calls for enacting a new constitution barring privatization of public resources and getting rid of the whole array of neoliberal poison served up by Washington-controlled international lending agencies and WTO one-way "bunko game" free trade deals unmasked as unfair. It also wants indigenous autonomy for Mexico's 57 individual Indian peoples and a nationwide public stage for the EZLN to spread its message to people in every Mexican state. It comes down to "the Other Campaign vs. Politics as Usual" meaning elections for sale to the highest bidder or easily stolen when the Mexican power structure controls them and won't tolerate power to the people in a country run by and for the privileged alone, the way it's always been. The EZLN renounces them all while knowing the PRI's return to power would be a big step backward in Mexico's glacial struggle for democracy that at best advances in mini-fragile steps easily reversible.

The Other Campaign is still ongoing aiming toward its longer range goal for a new constitution with regional autonomy run from the bottom up outside the political process it wants no part of. Today the EZLN is the most interesting, radical and important grassroots democratic movement in the world. Subcommandante Marcos believes new fraudulently elected Mexican president Felipe Calderon "is going to start to fall from his first day (December 1 and) we're on the eve of a great uprising or civil war." He believes the Mexican people will join him in "spontaneous uprisings, explosions all over, civil war" the way it's gone on uninterrupted in Oaxaca since May. "When we rise up (he says), we're going to sweep away the entire political class, including those who say they're the parliamentary left" as the political process corrupts them like all the others.

It's the way all social revolutions take root that begin from a committed core, then broaden into a unified network of mutual support for real democratic change. The spirit

of resistance is alive in Latin America. It bubbled up in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, and in Mexico it's electric and more alive than since Emiliano Zapata Salazar led the 1910 Revolution that ushered in a period of real change, albeit short-lived. Today Mexicans again are fed up with decades of fraud, corruption and abuse, and modern-day Zapatistas are in the vanguard of resistance for real social democratic change for people long denied it. No one knows how this will end and if it will turn out to be a watershed moment in the country's history. Those in power never yield it easily, so things may get ugly as events play out. For now, Mexico's future is unfolding on its streets and mountains and jungles of Chiapas that will chart the road ahead for better or worse to an uncertain time the Zapatistas are struggling to make a better one.

It isn't easy, and since early 2007 Zapatista communities have been up against increasing opposition from a government-allied paramilitary group called the Organization for the Defense of Indigenous and Peasant Rights (Opddic). It uses threats of violence, land invasions, crop thefts, beatings and kidnappings to expropriate Zapatista land so private developers can exploit natural resources and develop large tourist projects. Opddic has been around since the late 1990s but grew more powerful while Vincente Fox was president. It's present activities signal what's ahead from the Calderon government's policy to seize Zapatista land, weaken the movement, and give corporate predators an open field to develop the land indigenous Chiapans claim as their own.

Zapatistas say they'll defend their lands against Opddic incursions but up till now have avoided violence. That may not last as attacks continue that may be intended to provoke a response strong enough to set up the ominous possibility the government may step in with force making things very ugly.

It won't step in to help the Chiapas-based NGO Center for Economic Political Investigations of Community Action (CIEPAC) threatened by a late February note saying: "Enjoy your last day. We will kill you I am looking for you and now we have found you." This followed other incidents of threatening surveillance and harassment against CIEPAC members for several months. The organization takes the threats seriously and asks for "national and international organized groups (to join) in solidarity (to) maintain your vigilance in anticipation of events that might occur shortly, continue your solidarity with social movements in Mexico, and denounce the continuous violations to human rights that are affecting civil society in this country." Whatever may happen, John Ross will be there following the Zapatistas' struggle against the dark forces affecting them and ordinary people everywhere.

Ross ends his current chronicle in 2006 where it began—in Chiapas with the Mayan people the color of the earth and the corn, "maiz" in the "milpa" that's the core of their life. The country and people can't survive without it. He writes: "The Zapatistas are Mayans and the Mayans are the People of Maize, not just because it is the center of their universe but because they are actually made from it. And like the maize....the people the color of the earth return, renew themselves, are reborn and flourish." They won't allow the country's dark forces to take that from them. Their spirit is alive and so is their hope another world is possible. Their struggle for it continues, and Ross will be there chronicling it all for the world. □

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