

72. The EZLN Views Mexico's Past and Future (1992)*

The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) burst into international consciousness on January 1, 1994, when it occupied several cities in Chiapas, among them San Cristóbal de las Casas and Ocosingo. Launching the public face of its movement on the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect, the EZLN declared that neoliberalism in general and NAFTA in particular exacerbated the historic exploitation of the state's land, labor, and resources. For several days, these masked fighters—later known as the “Zapatistas”—occupied San Cristóbal's municipal palace and issued the first in a series of “Declarations” from the Lacondón Jungle. The Zapatistas disputed the legitimacy of Carlos Salinas de Gortari's presidency, charged the Partido de Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) with unconstitutionality, and appointed themselves defenders of Mexico's impoverished majority. The EZLN came to some rapprochement with the federal government at the time of the 1996 San Andrés peace accords, but today the group contends that the federal government never honored its commitments to these agreements. Indisputably, the widely popular—and well-publicized—Zapatistas played an instrumental role in cementing the downfall of the PRI in the 2000 federal elections.

The Zapatistas are at the forefront of a new wave of revolutionary political movements that have made effective use of the Internet and other media to captivate broad audiences and effectively engage civil society in their political struggles. The following excerpt comes from an essay that the eloquent EZLN spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos wrote in 1992 and released publicly on January 27, 1994. Like many of his writings, “Chiapas: The Southeast in Two Winds: A Storm and a Prophecy”—published in *La Jornada*, a liberal Mexican news daily, and on the Internet—was received by an enormous audience. Why do you think Marcos adopts the tone toward his audience that he adopts in this piece? What is the presumed relationship of the reader to the history discussed? In his essay, Marcos presents a particular view of Mexican history. What is it?

*Subcomandante Marcos, *Chiapas: El sureste en dos vientos, una tormenta y una profecía* (1992), originally from www.ezln.org/documentos/1994/199208xx.en.htm (accessed September 26, 2007); see also Irish Mexico Group, EZLN Communiqués, at: http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/marcos_se_2_wind.html.

***“Chiapas: The Southeast in Two Winds:
A Storm and a Prophecy”***

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. . . . Suppose that you take the Transístmica Highway. Suppose that you pay no attention to the Army barracks located at Matías 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, bananas, 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 towers of Estación Juárez, Reforma, Ostuacán, Pichucalco, and Ocosingo. Every day the suck out 92,000 barrels of petroleum and 517,000,000,000 cubic feet of gas. The 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* [rural workers] 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. . . .

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? . . .

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

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. . . .

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. . . .

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 Gutiérrez, the state capital. You don’t stay long. Tuxtla Gutiérrez is only a large warehouse which stores products from other parts of the state. . . . You go on to Chiapas de Corzo without noticing the Nestlé 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. . . .

Three hundred thousand Tzotziles, 120,000 Choles, 90,000 Zoques, and 70,000 ojolabales 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 Cristóbal 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. . . . Welcome to San Cristóbal 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 so 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 Comitán. Leaving San Cristóbal behind you will see the famous San Cristóbal 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 live-green image still in your eyes, drive on to the intersection and decide not to go to Comitán 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, breathe 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). . . . Pass by Cuxulja and in-

stead of following the detour to Altamirano drive on till you reach Ocosingo: "The Door to the Lacandona Jungle. . . ."

Good, we have arrived at the intersection. Now to Ocosingo . . . Palenque? . . . 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. . . .

The Second Wind: The Wind from Below

Chapter Five

This chapter tells how the dignity of the Indigenous people tried to make itself heard, but its voice only lasted a little while. It also tells how voices that spoke before are speaking again today and that the Indians are walking forward once again but this time with firm footsteps. They are walking together with other dispossessed peoples to take what belongs to them. The music of death that now plays only for those who have nothing will now play for everyone. It also tells of other frightful things which have happened and, they say, must happen. . . .

In the municipal seat of Ocosingo, 4,000 Indigenous campesinos from the organization ANCIEZ [Emiliano Zapata National Independent Alliance] march from different points of the city. Three marches converge in front of the Municipal building. The municipal president doesn't know what it's all about and flees. On the floor of his office is a calendar indicating the date: April 10, 1992. Outside Indigenous campesinos from Ocosingo, Oxchuc, Huixtaán, Chilón, Yajalon, Sabanilla, Salto de Agua, Palenque, Altamirano, Margaritas, San Cristóbal, San Andre's and Cancuc dance in front of a giant image of Zapata painted by one of them, recite poetry, sing, and speak. Only they are listening. The landowners, businessmen, and judicial officials are closed up in their homes and shops, the federal garrison appears deserted. The campesinos shout that Zapata lives and the struggle continues. One of them reads a letter addressed to Carlos Salinas de Gortari [president of Mexico, 1988–1994] in which they accuse him of having brought all of the Agrarian Reform gains made under Zapata to an end, of selling the country with the North American Free Trade Agreement and of bringing Mexico back to the times of Porfirio Díaz. They declare forcefully that they will not recognize Salinas' reforms to Article 27 of the Political Constitution. At two o'clock in the afternoon the demonstration disperses, in apparent order, but the causes persist. With the same outward appearances everything returns to calm. . . .

The viceroy dreams that his land is agitated by a terrible wind that rouses everything, he dreams that all he has stolen is taken from him, that his house is destroyed, and that his reign is brought down. He dreams and he doesn't sleep. The viceroy

goes to the feudal lords and they tell him that they have been having the same dream. The viceroy cannot rest. So he goes to his doctor and together they decide that it is some sort of Indian witchcraft and that they will only be freed from this dream with blood. The viceroy orders killings and kidnappings and he builds more jails and Army barracks. But the dream continues and keeps him tossing and turning and unable to sleep.

Everyone is dreaming in this country. Now it is time to wake up. . . .

The storm is here. From the clash of these two winds the storm will be born, its time has arrived. Now the wind from above rules, but the wind from below is coming. . . .

The prophecy is here. When the storm calms, when rain and fire again leave the country in peace, the world will no longer be the world but something better.

The Lacandona Jungle, August 1992

Central Themes

Indigenous people, state formation, land and labor, race and ethnicity

Suggested Reading

Gilbreth, Chris, and Gerardo Otero. "Democratization in Mexico: The Zapatista Uprising and Civil Society." *Latin American Perspectives* 28, no. 4 (July 2001): 7–29.

Hayden, Tom, ed. *The Zapatista Reader*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2002.

Womack, John, Jr. *Rebellion in Chiapas: An Historical Reader*. New York: New Press, 1999.

Related Sources

47. Precursors to Revolution (1904, 1906)

49. Land and Society (1909)

67. Rubén Jaramillo and the Struggle for *Campesino* Rights in Postrevolutionary Morelos (1967)

73. Popular Responses to Neoliberalism (the Late 1990s)