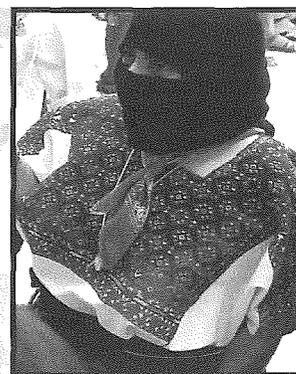


The Great Zapatista March

From Chiapas to Mexico City:
September 8-16, 1997



Demanding the fulfillment of the San Andres Accords and protesting the increasing militarization of the Indigenous regions of Mexico, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) and its many sympathizers hit the road on September 8th to make their long march to the nations' capital. The rebel group undertook the 750-mile journey to Mexico City- its first mass excursion outside of Chiapas- to kick start the staled peace talks with the government and highlight the fact that their movement is still struggling for their initial and basic demands of respect for the Indigenous people in Mexico.

Filling 50 buses, the 1,111 Zapatistas, representing the same number of villages in rebel held territory, drove out of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas and began their week long journey. The caravan steadily increased in size, as the buses stopped to pick up supporters, who came down from their Indigenous communities to line the roads and greet the group at each of their stops. Several thousand sympathizers met the rebels at their next stop in Juchitán, Oaxaca and again when they reached the capital of Oaxaca the following day, September 10th. By the time the bulging caravan reached the tiny village of Acatlán, in the state of Puebla, over 2,000 supporters had joined the Zapatistas on their march.

Once in the capital, the Zapatistas had a busy agenda for the next five days- staging rallies and meeting with other organizations. They emphasized that they are look-

ing for peaceful solutions to the problems wracking the Indigenous communities. They left their arms behind when they embarked on their march, and asked that the Mexican government withdraw the estimated 40,000 soldiers at the 200 military outposts in their home state.

The increased military presence in the remote highlands of Chiapas has further deteriorated living conditions in Indigenous communities. Threatening incidents are on the rise in these regions where people are now virtually surrounded by the army or the guardias blancas- private paramilitary guards hired by landowners.

On September 12 the procession reached Xochimilco and continued marching into the Zocalo of Mexico City, where it held a massive political rally. Hundreds of thousands of people attended the demonstration applauding as the EZLN and the CNI (National Indigenous Congress) speakers called for just and dignified treatment of Indigenous peoples in Mexico and the fulfillment of the San Andres Accords. It was noted that the government's failure to uphold the promises of the San Andres Accords is also a failure to uphold ILO Convention 169.

Saturday was perhaps the highlight of the Zapatista army's activities in the capital- the inaugural meeting of the Founding Congress of the Zapatista Front of National Liberation (FZLN). The FZLN was conceived on January 1, 1996 as a response to the national consultation for peace and democracy held in August 1995. After a 20 month gestation, the FZLN was born this September 13, realizing what was called for in the Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. As a civic organization committed to peace, the Zapatista Front of National Liberation has a specific task ahead of it: not to struggle for power "but for a new

relationship between those who are governed and those who govern." The Zapatistas of the EZLN stressed repeatedly that they will not form a part of the FZLN, the very organization which they called for. They emphasized that the two will be sister organizations, each with similar goals but different approaches. The Frente will adhere to the philosophy of "governing by obeying" whereas the clandestine, rebel wing will continue its armed struggle in the mountains of southeastern Mexico. The EZLN stated that they have great hopes for the FZLN, but that the two must remain separate. They said that they must remain ready for war but look forward to uniting with the front "when there is peace and dignity in Mexico."

On Sunday, September 14, the EZLN met with members of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) to discuss the goals and demands of the Indigenous communities across the country. On the following day an 'Encounter with Civil Society' was held in Cuicuilco to provide a space for all those who "are not in agreement with the way things are, who feel that there is still hope, and who struggle for a better Mexico" to gather and express their thoughts.

The EZLN joined their sisters and brothers of the FZLN on September 16th to celebrate Mexican Independence Day and to attend the closing session of the FZLN Congress. Meetings and events with other political and social organizations were held on the 17th, followed by a farewell ceremony for the Zapatistas, who returned to the mountains of the southeast on September 18th. 🐦

All quotes from communiqués of the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee-General command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation.