

AlterNet Interview with Zapatista Insurgente Marcos

By Aura Bogado, Free Speech Radio News

Posted on March 9, 2006, Printed on March 10, 2006

<http://www.alternet.org/story/33304/>

(Editor's Note: Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos is considered to be one of the main leaders of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation [EZLN] based in Chiapas, one of the poorest states of Mexico. In January 1994, Marcos led an army of Indian farmers and took over the eastern part of Chiapas, protesting the government's neglect of indigenous peoples. The Mexican government pushed the rebels back into Chiapas' Lacandón Jungle. Since then, Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas have become international icons of the anti-corporate globalization movement and a model for grassroots organizing using modern technologies like satellite telephones and the internet to obtain support.

On New Year's Day, 2006, the Zapatista movement came out of the jungles and launched the Other Campaign aimed at influencing upcoming presidential elections in Mexico in the name of "all the exploited and dispossessed." Marcos is leading a nonviolent campaign to build a broad leftist movement to pressure politicians from the outside to support the rights of autonomous peoples, who comprise roughly one-third of the Chiapas region.

Free Speech Radio News Anchor Aura Bogado just returned from Mexico where she spoke with Subcomandante Marcos -- who recently changed his name to Delegado Zero -- at the Center for the Documentation for Son Jarocho. Bogado and Zero talked about the recent changes in Latin America, the Zapatista women's struggle and Latinos in the United States.)

Aura Bogado: Why the Other Campaign now -- for 2005 and 2006?

Delegado Zero: Well, because we, as Zapatistas, had to endure a process of preparation -- like the uprising in 1994, where we prepared for 10 years to realize it -- we also had to engage in a process of preparation for the Other Campaign.

The Other Campaign was actually born in 2001, when Mexico's three political parties -- the PRI, the PAN and the PRD -- denied the COCOPA initiative for indigenous cultural rights. So at that point, we evaluated that the path with the Mexican political class was exhausted -- we had to find another path. The options were: war, going back to fighting, or staying quiet in silence and waiting to see what would happen, or doing what we are doing now.

When we decided that we had to prepare for this possibility, we anticipated that it would be very likely that people who had supported us up until that point for indigenous cultural rights would take back their support at the hour we distanced ourselves from the political parties, especially from the so-called "institutional left": the PRD. But at the same time, we had to prepare ourselves against a surgical strike, a strike from the military or from the police -- under any pretext, that would attempt to behead the EZLN and without leave it without direction.

For us, the initiative of the Sixth Declaration is of the same magnitude, or maybe even greater, than our Declaration of War in 1994. We had to be prepared to lose our entire leadership. Because, according to our method, at the same time that we set out to do something, we have to put our leaders in front to set the example. We had to be ready to lose not only Marcos, but all of our known leadership, the ones that will be going out to do the political work: the comandantes, like Comandante Esther, Comandante Tacho, Comandante David, Comandante Zebedeo, Comandante Susana .. the ailing Comandante Ramona was also going to come out, but unfortunately [she died] ... all of us who are more or less publicly known were planning to come out, so we had to prepare for that, and we had to make plans for the first exploratory tour, which has fallen on me, which we are doing now.

We specifically choose the electoral period, so that it would be clear that we want to do something else, and so that people could really see and could compare and contrast our political proposal. ... Always, since our birth, we've insisted on another way of doing politics. Now, we had the chance to do it without arms, but without stopping being Zapatistas, that's why we keep the masks on.

AB: For people in Latin America, there is often a lot of hope in politicians like Lula in Brazil, Kirchner in Argentina or Chavez in Venezuela. How do you see this change in the so-called left in Latin America?

DZ: We always turn to look towards the bottom, not only in our own country, but in Latin America particularly. When Evo Morales presented this invitation for his presidential inauguration, we said that we were not turning our gaze upwards, neither in Bolivia nor in Latin America, and in that sense, we don't judge governments, whose judgment belongs to the people who are there. We look with interest at the Bolivian indigenous mobilization, and the Ecuadorian one. In fact, they are mentioned in the Sixth Declaration.

The struggle of the Argentine youth, fundamentally, this whole piquetero movement, and of the youth in general in Argentina, with whom we strongly identify. Also with the movement to recover memory, of the pain from what was The Long Night of Terror in Argentina, in Uruguay, in Chile. And in that sense, we prefer to look at the bottom, exchange experiences and understand their own assessments of what is happening.

We think, fundamentally, that the future story of Latin America, not only of Mexico but for all of Latin America, will be constructed from the bottom -- that the rest of what's happening, in any case, are steps. Maybe false steps, maybe firm ones, that's yet to be seen.

But fundamentally, it will be the people from the bottom that will be able to take charge of it, organizing themselves in another way. The old recipes or the old parameters should serve as a reference, yes, of what was done, but not as something that should be readopted to do something new.

AB: What can men do, for example, to increase the representation of women anywhere in the world -- from families to cultural centers and beyond?

DZ: In that respect, for us and for all organizations and movements, we still have a long way to go, because there is still a really big distance between the intention of actually being better, and really respecting the other -- in this case women -- and what our realistic practice is.

And I'm not only referring to the excuse of "this is how we were educated, and there's nothing we can do ..." which is often men's excuse -- and of women too, who obey this type of thinking and argue for it one way or another among other women.

Something else that we've seen in our process is that at the hour that we [insurgents] arrived in the communities, and they integrated us as part of them, we saw significant, unplanned changes. The first change is made internally among the relationship between women. The fact that one group of indigenous women, whose fundamental horizon was the home, getting married quite young, having a lot of children, and dedicating themselves to the home -- could now go to the mountains and learn to use arms, be commanders of military troops, signified for the communities, and for the indigenous women in the communities, a very strong revolution. It is there that they started to propose that they should participate in the assemblies and in the organizing decisions, and started to propose that they should hold positions of responsibility. It was not like that before.

But in reality, the pioneers of this transformation of the indigenous Zapatista woman are a merit of the women insurgents. To become a guerrilla in the mountainous conditions is very difficult for men, and for the women, it is doubly or triply difficult ... in addition to the hostile mountainous conditions, they also have to be able to put up with the hostile conditions of a patriarchal system of our own machismo, of our relationships with one another.

[Another difficulty that the women face] is the repudiation of their communities, which sees it as a bad thing for a woman to go out and do something else. [After passing their training], a group of insurgent women are now the ones who are superior, and when they head back down to the communities, they now are the ones who show the way, lead and explain the struggle. At first this creates a type of revolt, a rebellion among the women that starts to take over spaces. Among the first rebellions is one that prohibits the sale of women into marriage, which used to be an indigenous custom, and it gives, in fact (even though it's not on paper yet) the women the right to pick their partner.

We also think that while there is an economic dependence from women on men, it will be very difficult for anything else to develop. Because in the end, the women can be very rebellious, and very capable and all of that, but if she depends on a man economically, she has few possibilities. So in that sense, in the communities of the Autonomous Rebellious Municipalities and in the Councils of Good Government, the same women that are already authorities with responsibilities at the municipal level, or on the Councils of Good Government, open spaces, projects, and economic organization for women in such a way that they construct their economic independence, and that gives more substance to [the women's] other independence.

Nevertheless, we're still lacking a lot in the area of domestic violence from men against women. We have gained some in other areas, for example, girls who were not going to school are now going to school. They weren't going before because they were women and because there weren't any schools, and now there are schools and they go, regardless of whether they are men or women.

And women are already in the highest posts of civil authority -- because in the military authority, in the political organizing, we can say that women need to be included -- but in matters of civil society, we [insurgents] don't hold authority, we only advise. So in reality, the women in the communities now reach the civil authority and autonomous municipal posts, which was unthinkable for a woman to reach before. [They reach those positions] through their own struggle, not through the authority of the EZLN.

AB: Do you have any message for [people] in the United States, particularly for Chicanos and Latinos?

DZ: Well, what we've seen while we've been passing through as we're getting the word out -- we've passed through Chiapas, through Quintana Roo, Yucatan, Campeche, Tabasco, and we've started in Veracruz -- in all parts we've seen this pain from the people at the bottom. They feel it's not a product of destiny, or of bad luck, nor from a tourist interest like the Mexican government says. Instead, it is part of this process of suffering that is imposed on us. They feel, and we feel it also along with them, that one part of them is far away and is outside, and that part is our men and women of Latino descent, or of Mexican descent, or Mexicans that have to cross the border -- that are over there.

Like we say, the approach of the Sixth is [to ask]: Who are we? Where are we? What do we want to do? We know there are a lot of people that sympathize with the Sixth Declaration and with the Other Campaign. And we want to insist to them that this is their place, this place right next to those of us who are on this side.

That which has provoked pain from the border, which signifies death, marginalization, apartheid of some kind or another -- we have to construct, and break that border with a bridge of struggle, of dignity. The Other Campaign can be that space. No one will speak for them, no one will speak for the Mexicanos or Mexicanas or the Chicanos on the other side, instead, they will construct their own space, defend it, speak for themselves, explain the reasons why they are there, the difficulties that they face, and what they have been able to construct as rebelliousness and resistance on that other side and that we will see each other there in Juarez and Tijuana.

Aura Bogado is a news producer and anchor at the Free Speech Radio News.

This interview is an excerpt from the forthcoming Open Media book "The Other Campaign, The Zapatista Call of Change from Below" by Subcomandante Marcos to be published by City Lights Books in April. All royalties from the book will benefit indigenous media projects in Chiapas, Mexico. © 2006 Independent Media Institute. All rights reserved. View this story online at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/33304/>