

Durito IV: Neoliberalism and the Party-State System



While accompanying the Exodus for Dignity and National Sovereignty, a 41-day protest march against electoral fraud from Tabasco to Mexico City, Durito writes a letter to a fictional professor at the UNAM on the current crisis of the Mexican political system and the question of a transition from PRIista one-party rule to democracy. The Tabasco marchers were accompanied by Manuel López Obrador, the PRD candidate whose bid for governor was thwarted by fraud and violence, and they were greeted in the Zócalo by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, former presidential candidate for the PRD. Durito explains why the Zapatistas have refused to participate, and by doing so legitimize the political realm of formal electoral politics. Instead, as he explains, the Zapatistas have called for a diversity of forms of political struggle, with their own being but one among many. Durito IV and V are part of *The Book of Mirrors*, a pivotal document discussing the representation of reality, history, politics and culture. Durito IV is the fourth chapter of the first section, and its beginning references the first chapters.

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Open your eyes and look into the mirror. No, don't look at your reflection. Direct your gaze below, to the left. There? Fine, pay attention and in a few moments another image will appear. Yes, it's a march: men, women, children, and old people that come from the Southeast. Yes, it's one of the highways that lead to Mexico City. Do you see what's walking on the left side of the caravan? Where? There below, on the ground! Yes, that very small and black thing! What is it you ask? A beetle! Now pay attention, because that beetle is . . .

Durito trying to keep up. These folks from Tabasco, even after so many days of walking and physical hardship, don't seem tired. They walk as though they had only begun this Exodus for Dignity and National Sovereignty this morning. Once again, as before in the voice of the Zapatistas, a call to the entire Nation comes from the Mexican Southeast. It is the same desire: democracy, liberty and justice. In the heroic delirium of the Mexican Southeast, hope implies a name: *Tachicam*, the unity of longing for a better future.¹ The dream of a place where the right to dance is guaranteed by the Constitution.

Durito takes advantage of a break in the march, and overcome by the heat, he seeks refuge under a small bush. After awhile, and having caught his breath, he takes out paper and pencil. On a rock replacing the tiny desk he left in the jungle, Durito writes a letter. Go on! Don't be afraid! Look over Durito's shoulder and read:

Zapatista Army of National Liberation
Mexico, May 1995
To: Mister So and So
Professor and Researcher
National Autonomous University of Mexico
Mexico, D.F.
From: Don Durito de la Lacandona,
Knight-errant for whom Sup Marcos is squire
Zapatista Army of National Liberation
Mexico

Sir:

It may seem strange to you that I, a beetle that carries out the obligations of the noble profession of knight-errant, write to you. Do not be perturbed or seek out a psychoanalyst, because I will quickly and promptly explain everything to you . It turns out that you proposed that El Sup write an article for a book (or something like that) about The Transition to Democracy. The book (or whatever it is) would be edited by the UNAM (which just about guarantees that no one will read it; espe-

¹ *Tachicam*, a utopian project for a new autonomous region comprised of the states of Chiapas, Tabasco and Campeche, was promoted during this time by a network of small political groups that were disillusioned with electoral politics.

cially if the crisis in the publishing industry and the increase in the cost of paper are taken into account). The agreement was that the exorbitant amount of \$N 1,000 (one thousand new pesos) that UNAM pays for the written “collaboration” would be delivered in its equivalent dollars or Italian liras to the workers of Fiat in Turin. We have learned as well that the Italian workers in the COBAS have already received this amount from the Zapatistas in solidarity with the struggles of European workers.² You have complied, the Fiat workers have complied, and the only one here who has failed to do so is El Sup, because I remember the deadline well and El Sup has not written anything. January of 1995 arrived, and El Sup was naively going on about the government being, in fact, inclined to the dialogue, and that is why he did not write the assignment. The betrayal of February snapped him out of it and made him (El Sup) run until he arrived at my side. Recovered from the disillusionment, he told me about his commitment to write the article and asked me to help him as he was in such a grave predicament. I, dear sir, am a knight-errant, and we knights-errant cannot refuse to help the needy, no matter how large-nosed or delinquent the helpless soul in question is. So I willingly agreed to grant the help that was demanded of me and that is why I am writing to you and not El Sup. Surely, you must wonder why, if I received the task in February, I am writing to you in May. Just remember, as a journalist pointed out, this is the “rebellion of the hanged.”³

I should also warn you that I write veery seriously and veery formally, so do not expect to find my writing style full of jokes and irreverence like El Sup’s, that so scandalizes the government delegates. That is why I am late. Do not be irritated, it could have been worse, you could have had to wait for El Sup to write to you one day. But it is not worth the risk to wait for such an improbable publication, so here I send you this long boring essay that has the theme I proposed, and that, if memory serves me, is entitled . . .

The Transition To Democracy According To The Zapatistas

Some would prefer to say, “According to the Neo-Zapatistas,” but as Old Antonio already explained in “The History of the Questions,” here the Zapatistas of 1994 and those of 1910 are the same.⁴

2 *Comitati di base*, or COBAS, are militant rank-and-file worker organizations active in a variety of sectors that have challenged the established trade unions and the austerity measures of the Italian government since the early 1980s.

3 “Rebellion of the hanged” refers to the 1954 film *La Rebelión de Los Colgados* (*Rebellion of the Hanged*), directed by Alfredo B. Crevenna and starring Pedro Armendáriz. Based on the novel by B. Traven, who also wrote *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, the film depicts a rebellion of loggers deep in the jungle of Chiapas working in semi-slave conditions. See B. Traven, *The Rebellion of the Hanged* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

4 “The History of the Questions” appeared in a communiqué published in *La Jornada* December 13, 1994. See EZLN, *Documentos y comunicados 2:15 de agosto de 1994/29 de septiembre de 1995* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1995), 153–165.

I will proceed to explain how we view the current political situation, democracy, and the transition from one to the other.

“The Current Political Situation: The Party-State System, Principal Obstacle to a Transition to Democracy in Mexico”

In present-day Mexico we are faced with a structural deformation that cuts across the spectrum of Mexican society, as much in what are called the social classes, as in its economic and political aspects, including its urban and rural geographic “organization.” This “deformation,” in reality a consequence of the savage capitalism at the end of the 20th Century, masks itself in what is called “NEOLIBERALISM” and bases all its development on the permanence and intensification of said deformation. Any effort to “balance” this deformation by Power itself is impossible and never goes beyond cheap demagoguery (Procampo) or the most complete attempt at fascist control at the national level: The National Solidarity Program (Pronosol). We mean by this that the social “imbalance” in Mexico is not a product of excess or a problem of budgetary adjustment. It is the very essence of the system of domination; it is what makes it possible. Without this imbalance, the entire system would collapse.

We will not refer to economic and social “deformations,” but only to the political ones in a very hurried manner: the political system of Mexico has its historical basis, its present crisis, and its mortal future, in that deformation called “the Party-State System.” This is not just about the marriage of the government and the Party-State (The Institutional Revolutionary Party) but of an entire system of political, economic and social relations that invade even the oppositional political organizations and what is called “civil society.”

Even in the best of cases, any attempt at equilibrium by political forces within this system does not go beyond a good intention that encourages the democratizing sectors within the PRI and some members of the opposition. The only way this political system has survived until now is by maintaining a brutal imbalance. On one side is all the force of the state apparatus: the repressive system, the mass media, big capital, and the reactionary clergy under the banner of the PRI. On the other is a fragmented opposition that is challenged primarily from within. In the middle, or better yet, on the margins of these extremes, are the vast majorities, the Mexican people. Both forces, the Party-State system and the organized opposition, bet on that third actor which is the Mexican people, on their absence or presence, on their apathy or mobilization. To immobilize it, all the system’s mechanisms are put into motion; to mobilize it, the opposition’s political proposals (legal or illegal, open or clandestine) are engaged.

Any attempt to equalize the imbalance within the system is impossible. Equilibrium means the death of the Mexican political system consolidated for more

than 60 years. Within the “rules of the game” of the system it is not even possible to concede to a new, more just model of social organization, or to a party system. Just as the dream of free play between supply and demand cannot become reality in an economic system increasingly dominated by monopolies, the free play of party politics cannot become reality in a system based on the monopoly of politics: the Party-State system.

Permit me to leave this point as noted (that is, as a problem and not a solution). Permit me to postpone, for an improbable moon, further explanation. For a more profound characterization of the Party-State system you can refer to more brilliant and forceful analyses (said without sarcasm) by excellent analysts. We are only pointing out one difference with respect to other positions that, in all likelihood, will be presented in this book you are preparing; namely, that any attempt to “reform” or “balance” this deformation is impossible FROM WITHIN THE PARTY-STATE SYSTEM. There is no “change without rupture.” A profound and radical change of all social relations is necessary in today’s Mexico. A REVOLUTION IS NECESSARY, a new revolution. This revolution is possible only from outside the Party-State system.

“Democracy, Liberty and Justice: Foundation for a New Political System in Mexico”

The triptych of Democracy-Liberty-Justice is the foundation of the EZLN’s demands, included within its primarily indigenous base. One is not possible without the others. It is not about which comes first (an ideological trap whispers in our ear, “Let’s postpone democracy, justice first”). It is more about the emphases or the hierarchy of expression, about the dominance of one of these elements in different historical eras (somewhat precipitated in the year 1994 and in what we have seen of 1995).

I will refer now to this thing about a REVOLUTION that we pointed out in a letter to the media on January 20, 1994, when government forces tightened their grip on our troops and our leadership was “hunted” by commando units of the Federal Army:

“We believe that revolutionary change in Mexico will not be the product of only one type of action. That is, it will not be, in a strict sense, an armed revolution or a peaceful revolution. It will be, primarily, a revolution resulting from struggle on various social fronts, with many methods, under different social forms, with varying degrees of commitment and participation. And its result will not be that of a triumphant party, organization or alliance of organizations with its specific social proposal, but rather a chance for a democratic space for resolving the confrontation among diverse political proposals. This democratic space for resolution will have three fundamental premises that are now historically inseparable: democracy, in order to decide upon the dominant social proposal; the freedom to subscribe to one

or another proposal; and justice, to which all proposals should conform.”⁵ (January 20, 1994)

Three points in a single paragraph, three points as dense as bitter *pozol*.⁶ El Sup’s style: conceptual obscurity, and ideas that are difficult to understand and harder to digest. But, I will allow myself to develop what he barely outlined. It addresses then, three points that contain an entire conception of revolution (in lowercase letters, in order to avoid polemics with the multiple vanguards and guardians of “THE REVOLUTION”):

The first point refers to the nature of revolutionary change, of this revolutionary change. It is about a nature that incorporates different methods, diverse fronts, various forms and distinct levels of commitment and participation. This means that all methods have their place, that all fronts of struggle are necessary, and that all levels of participation are important. It is about, then, an inclusive conception that is anti-vanguard and collective. The problem with revolution (note the lowercase letters) is no longer a problem of THE organization, THE method, THE *caudillo*⁷ (note the uppercase letters), it becomes rather a problem that concerns all those who see revolution as necessary and possible, and in its realization, everyone is important.

The second point refers to the objective and the result of that revolution. It is not about seizing Power or the introduction (by peaceful or violent means) of a new social system, but about something that precedes both. It is about successfully constructing the antechamber of the new world, a space where, with equal rights and responsibilities, the different political forces “fight for” the support of the majority of society. Does this confirm the hypothesis that the Zapatistas are “armed reformists?” We do not think so. We are only pointing out that an imposed revolution, without the endorsement of the majority, ends up turning against itself. I know that this is a theme worthy of pages, but since this is only a letter, I am only making points to be developed on other occasions or to provoke debate and discussion (which seems to be the Zapatistas’ “specialty of the house.”)

The third point is about the characteristics, not of the revolution, but of its

5 The Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee-General Command of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (CCRI-CG) of the EZLN issued four communiqués on January 20, 1994 that were published in *La Jornada*, January 25, 1994. The communiqué addressed to Mexican and international civil society outlines the Zapatista demands and forms of struggle. See EZLN, *Documentos y comunicados 1 de enero / 8 de agosto de 1994* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1994), 95-106.

6 *Pozol* is a fermented corn drink that Mayan peoples have developed and used over generations for its nutritional and medicinal benefits, particularly with intestinal ailments. It is also one of the new Chiapan resources targeted for exploitation. In 1999, the Dutch corporation Quest International and the University of Minnesota jointly obtained US patent #5919695—not for the *pozol* itself, but rather an active component that the drink contains, thereby violating indigenous rights to the knowledge used to develop *pozol*. See “Biopiracy: A New Threat to Indigenous Rights and Culture” (San Francisco: Global Exchange, 2000).

7 *Caudillo* translates as “chief” or “leader” and often refers to a military leader who exercises political power.

results. The resulting space, the new political relationships, should fulfill three conditions: democracy, liberty and justice.

In summary, we are not proposing an orthodox revolution, but something much more difficult: a revolution that makes revolution possible . . .

A Broad Opposition Front?

The fragmentation of the forces opposing it allows the Party-State system to not only resist attacks, but also to co-opt and weaken the opposition. The principal concern of the Party-State system is not the radicalism of the forces that oppose it, but their eventual unity. The division of political forces against the regime allows the Party-State System to negotiate or “fight” to conquer the political “islands” that form in opposition. They apply a law of war, the “economy of forces”: a diffuse enemy of small nuclei that is beaten by concentrating forces against each nucleus, isolating it from the others. These opposing nuclei do not consider themselves as confronting ONE enemy but MANY enemies, that is, they emphasize what makes them different (their political proposals) and not what makes them similar (the enemy that they confront: the Party-State system). Of course, we are referring here to the real opposition, not to the puppets. This dispersion of opposing forces allows the system to concentrate its forces to besiege and conquer (or annul) each “island.”

The unity of these “islands” would be a serious problem for the Party-State system, but it alone (unity) would not be enough to see the regime defeated. Still missing would be the presence and action of the “third element,” the Mexican people. Yes, that is in lowercase, avoiding its definition and sanctification. Does this third element have a definitive characteristic as a social class? Yes, but not the one that jumps out at first. What prevails is its skepticism and mistrust of politics, that is, of political organizations. In saying “Mexican people,” we point out a problem and not a solution. A problem, yes, and a reality that presents itself with an obstinacy that overcomes all theoretical schema on one side, and corporate controls on the other.

The unity of these “islands” faces many obstacles. One of them, not the only one but an important one, is the difference in the character of that unity. A unity of exploited classes, or of organizations of exploited classes, versus a multi-class unity. This is where the subdivisions emerge.

Is a parallel construction of both fronts possible or does one counter the other? We believe it *is* possible, that they do not counter one another. But in any case, it is best to ask the third mirror, the one to be “liberated” or “redeemed.” Ask, respond. Speak, listen. A dialogue, then. A national dialogue . . .

(End of the article, commitment fulfilled).

That is all, sir. I'm sure my literary style deserves to be printed under the slogan "Through my people, rock music shall speak," and not like that of my shield-bearer who, although he is loyal and honest, tends to view life as if it were a game of glass and mirrors ...⁸

Vale. Salud, and courage! The looking glass is just over there. All we have to do is find it ...

From who-knows-what kilometer on who-knows-what highway, but, we are, indeed, in Mexico.

Don Durito de la Lacandona

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⁸ This is a play on the UNAM motto introduced by José Vasconcelos in 1921: "*Por mi raza hablará el espíritu*" (Through my people the spirit shall speak).