

Durito, Chibo the Killer Tarantula, and the Plebiscite



In this transcript of a “Durito Productions” video entitled “The National Plebiscite for Peace, Democracy and National Dialogue,” Durito stars with El Sup and Chibo, a killer tarantula who represents the Mexican party-state system. Together, they introduce the Plebiscite, or Consulta to national and international audiences, outlining its purposes, the questions it poses, and the people and organizations involved with its execution. The production was aired on “Zapatista Television,” that is, via videotape screenings in public spaces throughout Mexico and abroad.

August 8, 1995¹

Well now, we're going to introduce the stars of this exciting episode of the National Plebiscite for Peace and Democracy. As leading man we have Durito. In the role of El Sup we have El Sup himself. And in the role of Chibo, the killer tarantula, who for the moment will represent the party-state system (note its beautiful figure and spontaneous congeniality). Be careful, "camera," because if Chibo decides to strike, then there'll be no video, or anything else. Over and out.

Well, we're going to begin this explanatory program with a series of questions and themes that Durito has suggested to help with the realization of the plebiscite. He proposes (for those who don't normally listen to or understand beetle language), he proposes that, well, an important point to reference is the relationship that exists between the EZLN and civil society, and the entire national situation. In order to explain the National Plebiscite, we issued the Second Declaration of La Lacandona when we realized, or reflected on the role civil society has had in stopping the war and that it has also had in a process of democratization, a process that has not yet begun to concretize, a process that has not yet ceased. In one of the points of the Second Declaration of La Lacandona, we said that it would be necessary to open—that we would open—a national dialogue with civil society, and so as a first step we proposed a National Plebiscite in Aguascalientes, Chiapas. Today, August 8, 1995, marks one year since the time when there was that rain that washed clean many things in Aguascalientes, Chiapas near the community of Guadalupe Tepeyac, which is today occupied by the federal army.²

So as part of this national dialogue, we also thought it important to describe this National Plebiscite that we are convening, where we ask a series of questions that try to make more explicit the significance of each of them. But a series that tries, above all, to find out—or to listen to—what civil society thinks about our banners, our struggle, and above all, about the steps that we must follow or that we must take now. Since we cannot listen to or personally meet with each and every one of the people who have something to say to Mexican civil society and international civil society, we thought that this was one of the forms we could try out to see if it would be effective or would allow for a serious dialogue on some

1 The publication date is taken from the text. Translated for this volume by the AZ Editorial Collective. The text is an extract from the transcript of Marcos' remarks in the video "*La Consulta nacional por la paz y la democracia y el diálogo nacional.*" The full transcripts were done by *Revista Inprecor para América Latina*. Since the video is nearly 90 minutes in length, with a transcript of more than 10,000 words, it has been edited to include only those passages that feature Durito. A half-hour version of the video was shown in the plaza of the Cathedral of San Cristóbal de las Casas, as part of the commemoration of the first anniversary of the CND. A full-length version was shown in the Opera Movie Theatre in Mexico City where the celebration ceremony was double: the first anniversary of the CND and the 18th anniversary of the Eureka Committee, a support group for political prisoners headed by Rosario Ibarra de Piedra.

2 In August 1994, a torrent of rain brought the CND to a close.

questions that are very concrete, very simple, and very defined in respect to whether one is in agreement or not, or whether one can say yes or no in regards to what is being asked.

[Continued reflection on the purposes and processes of the plebiscite.]

Durito has insisted that it is necessary to situate the plebiscite in a national context. He's adamant that it's a desperate maneuver of the EZLN—that we've been corralled, and that this is just about the last card we can play against war since breaking off dialogue with the government. We think the situation is more complex—that it's not possible to discuss the struggles of the EZLN concretely, or particularly, or in isolation (and what the government wants to do is isolate us), without referring to, or situating ourselves in respect to the problems facing democratic forces at a national level.

[Elaboration of the Mexican national situation with President Zedillo carrying on Salinas' legacy of political control and repression of opposition, particularly as seen in Guerrero and Tabasco.]

We had long ago perceived this national context . . . and called for the formation of a national liberation movement. In reality, what is needed is an internal dialogue among the opposition forces. I'm not referring just to political opposition forces. There is a strong citizens' movement, which is much respected, that is opposed not to the regime, but to anti-democratic ways of doing politics; and it must be recognized, say what they will, that in this sense an organization like Alianza Cívica has earned everyone's respect, although it's been accused of being an arm of one political party, or that it's been infiltrated by another. But in the end, it has demonstrated that a citizens' group can organize themselves to be vigilant of power. Its record is beyond reproach.

Durito would like me to touch on our relationship with Alianza Cívica , because he tells me that there have been rumors of tension among Alianza Cívica, the Convention, and the EZLN. Since we first solicited their participation in the organization of the plebiscite, our relationship with Alianza Cívica has always been very respectful. They've made their observations known to us, and the differences they had with what we've proposed. Together we've come to an agreement, and the questions and the organization of the plebiscite were made by mutual accord. There was never any trouble of any kind, and they did not in any way impose on us their decisions or point of view. They have always been very clear that they were ready to subject themselves to what we expressed. But we could not be blind to the series of proposals they made, to their need to maintain their neutrality, nor to the fact that the credibility of this plebiscite would lie with that neutrality.

So we've laid out the national context, which Durito once defined as: improvisation at a national political level.³ When Power improvises, it has to pull

3 See "Durito II."

out all the arms it has on hand. On the one hand it has the mass communications media, above all the electronic media—I mean to say, the lie—and on the other hand, it has the army and the police. If you improvise or you cannot plan, then you work with the things you have on hand. So, in this sense, the question is not “if we’re going to dialogue with the government;” it’s “if we’re going to dialogue amongst ourselves.” And because of that I want to insist that the plebiscite is not the endpoint of anything, nor is it a watershed after which everything will change. We think it is a process. We don’t want the same mistake that was made with the National Democratic Convention (CND), which we conceived from the beginning as a process that had to proceed advancing or proceed receding as any process, but which people thought would have immediate and spectacular results. The grand initiation of August 8 later seemed to become a battleground for infighting. We also want to say that the National Plebiscite needs to be part of a broad movement, including a process of referendums or a series of plebiscites that will be and that are necessary. Among these there is the need to put forth serious questions with respect to Mr. Salinas’ successor in power, to point out that Mr. Zedillo is there as the figurehead, but that the power is still held by Mr. Carlos Salinas.

And so, in an effort to conclude this theme, Durito tells me that he wants to clarify a mirror that is making itself known in the national movement for democracy, which is the issue of whether to speak with the “*duros*” or the “*blandos*” within the government.⁴ We think, well, let’s look at Chibo the killer tarantula. Here, I’m going to tell you a story: Chibo is a tarantula who is also named *Hierba*,⁵ her bite is fatal and her venom is venomous—as they say at the carnival. If Chibo encounters another of her type she will kill it. It is only during the time of heat or during the time of the elections that two of her kind will get along, but the rest of the time they spend fighting so that they alone survive. In this case, she survived because she killed her *compañera*. That’s why she thinks she’s made-to-order for the role of the party-state system in this interesting film that the Zapatista Army of National Liberation is making for the appreciation of young and old alike. Therefore, I insist that the option is not to speak with the government, but that the option this country needs to move forward is to “speak amongst ourselves” (and by “amongst ourselves” I mean to say the democratic forces, not just those who suppose and self-proclaim themselves revolutionaries, but all the forces that want a transition to democracy, that want a better country).

In other words, we could speak and dialogue amongst ourselves and we could bring ourselves to agreement or we could carry on separately, each one for his own cause, opposing one another, thus allowing this government double-speak—lie-repression . . . lie-repression . . .—as they govern, or act like they govern, the country. The economic crisis is not just a result of this form of

4 Playing on the different strategies undertaken by repressive regimes, “*dura*” connoting hard and “*blanda*” meaning soft, i.e., iron fist and velvet glove.

5 *Hierba* translates literally as “weed,” figuratively as “troublemaker.”

government; the political crisis IS the form of government, it's what's governing this country. Maintain the crisis: that is what paralyzes democratic forces, you keep them fighting each other. As for how they're going to take advantage of this crisis, or how they're going to go forward, we say: let's move the discussion from this terrain, this terrain that has no more future than the future of division, co-optation, isolation or self-annihilation. And in reality, the position of the government in relation to the EZLN is just that: "either we co-opt them or we annihilate them, pick one." We think that we need to move the discussion from this terrain; the transition to democracy will not be decided with the government; the transition to democracy will be decided amongst the democratic forces and so we are proposing a way, in this case the plebiscite.

[Here Marcos addresses each of the questions on the plebiscite.]⁶

This is what we want to say for now about the plebiscite. Some day, if we ever get the chance, we could prepare another video and send it to you, but I think that you'll be bored enough with this one, which must run about an hour, hour and a half. But I think we've touched on the most important points. We want to send, of course, greetings to all the conventioners out there; it doesn't matter which political group they're with or which convention it is, (they say there are already two conventions). We want to congratulate you on your birthday, the celebration of your first year today on August 8th, and we want to wish that, well, that you understand Zapatismo's way of viewing things: that no successful process is fast or has a smooth path, but it has difficulties, costs, and takes time. Durito has told me to get him when I get to this part, because he wants to invite the Mexican people, and everyone possible, to participate in the organiza-

6 The plebiscite read: "1) Do you agree with the principal demands of the Mexican people and the EZLN for: land, housing, jobs, food, health, education, culture, information, independence, democracy, liberty, justice and peace? 2) Should the different democratizing forces [in Mexico] unite in a broad-based opposition front to struggle for the 13 principal demands? 3) Should a profound political reform be made [in Mexico] in terms which guarantee: equity, citizen participation, including non-partisan and non-governmental organizations, respect for the vote, reliable voter registration of all the national political, regional and local forces? 4) Should the EZLN be converted to a new and independent political force? 5) Should the EZLN unite with other forces and organizations and form a new political organization? 6) Should women be guaranteed equal representation and participation at all levels of civil and governmental responsibilities? These questions can be answered 'yes,' 'no,' or 'I don't know.' Add other comments if you wish." Over 1.2 million Mexicans, and more than 100,000 people from outside of Mexico participated in this plebiscite with the following results: 97.5% of national voters expressed agreement with the principal demands of the EZLN; 92.7% agreed that all the democratic forces in the country should unite in a broad social and political opposition front in order to fight for those demands; 94.5% approved of a "profound political reform" in order to guarantee democracy; 52.6% suggested that the EZLN should convert itself into a new and independent political force; 48.7% suggested this should be done through a unification process with pre-existing organizations; and 93.1% agreed that women should be guaranteed equal representation and participation at all levels of civil and governmental responsibilities.

tion of the plebiscite with Alianza Cívica and in the promotion of the plebiscite with the National Democratic Convention and other forces that want to gather. Though they may not be conventioners, nor from Alianza Cívica, it seems that those who want to promote the plebiscite should do it. So for the pleasure of his admirers, Durito is going to say this with his own words. [Beetle language is heard here.]

And I, for my part, well, I want to encourage all those who are listening to participate. You have nothing to lose and you have much to win. And your support, your participation—whether it be in the promotion of the plebiscite, in its organization, or in the marking of the ballot—is participation in the new national history of this country, that is being made despite the government. In other words, despite the stupidity, reason will begin to seek its own pathways.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast, for Zapatista Television, El Sup.

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