

A Small History of Señor Ik'

Originally published in Spanish by the EZLN

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[The following is a translation of one part of the Opening Remarks at the Fourth Preparatory Meeting for the "other campaign" in the new town of Juan Diego, Chiapas, August 27

A Small History of Señor Ik'

By Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

This part of the land where we are meeting is now called Juan Diego Nuevo Poblado. It is part of the Francisco Go'mez Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipality. But it wasn't always called that. Previously it was a finca by the name of Santa Rita. The finca had around 6000 hectares, and its last owner was Señor Adolfo Na'jera Domi'nguez, from Comita'n, Chiapas, Mexico. A long time ago, the grandparents and parents of some of our zapatista compa~eros and compa~eras worked in what had been Santa Rita. They worked at clearing fields and planting posts for the land's fencing. They were paid seven pesos for a day that began at 6 in the morning and ended at 6 in the evening. Twelve hours of work for seven pesos.

Thirteen years ago, when the residents of the community of San Miguel wanted to go and fish, to gather snails or to cut firewood, Adolfo, the finquero, wouldn't let them. In order to prevent them, he used his white guards, cowboys who carried weapons in order to threaten the indigenous who didn't respect the ban. The wire fence, which their parents and grandparents had worked on for 12 hours a day, along with the weapons of the finca's guards, prevented the residents of San Miguel from having access to the river and from traveling the trails and paths that cross through the finca. Neither they nor their animals could put one foot on any of the 6000 hectares.

When every so often a horse or other animal would cross over, the finquero's orders were clear: whatever was on his land was his property. And so the animals were stolen and concealed someplace until the rightful owner became resigned to his loss.

That was how it was: the indigenous had raised, from sunup to sundown (and not figuratively), a fence that kept them out. Out of the good lands, of modernity, of justice.

The community of San Miguel then held an assembly and reached agreement to ask for a talk with Señor Adolfo Na'jera. The committee went to talk with him, and they politely suggested that he allow the population of San Miguel to have access to the river and to not bother the animals that passed through his finca. The trail that divides San Miguel from the Santa Rita finca was right here, some 200 meters from where we're meeting with you right now. The finquero never understood, and he didn't pay any attention to them. He mocked them, he mistreated them, he threatened them and he ran them off. The next day he ordered the barbed wire fence to be reinforced. In order to do that, he contracted the indigenous from San Manuel themselves - at 14 pesos for 12 hour work days. Mathematics aren't my strong suit, but it seems to me that the distance between the grandparents and the grandchildren would be some 30 or 40 years and a difference of seven pesos. I don't know much about economics either, but I believe that's called exploitation.

The community met once again, and they made some calculations: on one side, hundreds of indigenous, with a few hectares of bad lands, rocky and sloping, where you couldn't even walk. The indigenous' lands were like the ones you can see there: a part of the hillside of the sierra of Corralche'n. On the other side of the trail was one person with 6000 hectares of good land, on flat, fertile land and with good water.

They said that then the community's assembly made calculations: little and bad for many on one side; a lot and good for just one on the other side. Then they did what all campesinos do: they asked for plots of land. And, like the song says, years went by asking for land. Their committees traveled to all the federal government offices, turned in all kinds of papers, cooperated with everyone in order to send committees everywhere, even though the same thing would have happened if they hadn't gone. There was never any resolution to their demands for land.

Then a man came to talk with just some of the residents. He was indigenous like them, dark like them, Tzeltal like them, Mexican like them. His nom de guerre was Hugo, but he was called Señor Ik', playing with the two meanings of the word Ik', which in Tzeltal can mean "black" and "wind." Señor Ik's name was actually Francisco Go'mez. With his unhurried speech, he explained exploitation, contempt, repression. He spoke of rebellion and of organization. "There is a word," Señor Ik' told them, "zapatista, and it says that the land belongs to the one who works it, and we should organize ourselves and fight for our liberty as campesinos and as indigenous and as the Mexicans we are." It was probably already dawn. What Señor Ik' was talking about was secret, and it had to be guarded.

That was why Señor Ik' walked by night, spoke by night, appeared by night. Those who listened to him that night - when morning had not managed to even tint the darkness of the night - said they were in agreement. Señor Ik' was leaving then, and a compa~ero gave him some pozol and asked him: "And what is our organization called?" Señor Ik' put the pozol in his little rucksack and answered him: "We all call ourselves the Zapatista Army of National Liberation."

Señor Ik' left. He walked other nights, appeared in other villages and other dawns found him talking with indigenous in the area. First a few, then dozens, then entire villages, regions. But it wasn't always like that. The moment arrived when Señor Ik' no longer spoke, instead he listened. He listened to the outrage and the fury. He had heard this before, but now there was a difference: it was a fury and an outrage organized collectively.

Señor Ik' listened and walked by night again, and on another dawn he was in our barracks, in front of me, having a cup of coffee without sugar, not because that was how we liked it, but because there wasn't any. Señor Ik' began his talk with a report about his last trip through villages and assemblies. It was not a report about he had said, but about what he had seen and heard. He finished. We remained silent. Señor Ik' began recounting, apparently irrelevantly, another dawn, many years before, when we had just met and were camping close to his village. At that time I had told him the history of Ulysses' fight against the giant with a single eye: Polifemo. Señor Ik' had laughed delightedly when I narrated the part where Ulysses says he's called "nobody" and defeats the Cyclops. Señor Ik' recalled the narrative in his own way, and he was recounting it to me again. Suddenly he was silent, and he lit a cigarette with a stick he ignited in the wood stove. He held the burning branch for a bit, and then he looked me in the eye and told me: "Oi, compa~ero subcomandante, that's why I believe now it's starting to be the hour of nobody."

Like Señor Ik', there were dozens of compa~eros then, natural leaders of their communities and regions, doing the same thing he was doing and saying the same thing he was saying: "now it's starting to be the hour of nobody." It was the year 1992. Then we held the consulta. War was voted.

In 1993 we were preparing ourselves. And so May arrived, May 23. Up there, in that sierra you can see easily from here, we had an insurgent barracks. It was called El Calabazas. A column of federales had entered the ca~ada, and, basing themselves at La Garrucha, they went up into the sierra. Our forces and the federales clashed. After a few fights, our troops withdrew and were taken in by the residents of San Miguel and then accompanied by them to a secure area.

All the EZLN withdrew then. To our way of thinking, the uprising should begin when we decided, not the enemy. We had long ago learned that we should never subject ourselves to the times of the powerful, instead we had to follow our own calendar and impose it on those of above. We have continued to do that. That is why they become so exasperated with our way.

On the first of January of 1994, it was already daytime, and the columns of the EZLN fighters were traveling along that highway heading towards Ocosingo. More than 1200 men and women of the Third Regiment of the Zapatista Infantry, plus others from the Fifth Regiment, passed through these and other lands of the Selva Lacandona. They took the weapons away from the finqueros' white guards, and they used them to take the municipal seat. After several days of fighting in the Ocosingo market against federal army air transport troops, the zapatista troops withdrew. Afterwards, what happened happened, and most of you know it because you were major actors.

All the fincas in this region were recovered, and, after 1995, their lands were divided up by the agrarian commission of the Francisco Go'mez Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipality (MAREZ). Without asking anyone's permission, the

zapatista indigenous knocked down the fence that surrounded the Santa Rita finca, and the lands were distributed among the residents of San Miguel and of the Ach' Lumal village, which means new land.

Then the compa~eros met and they made calculations again, but not of hectares, rather of deaths. In the Ocosingo battle of January 2, 1994, a compa~ero militiaman from San Miguel died in combat. His nom de guerre was Juan. In the Nueva Estrella community, another compa~ero militiaman was assassinated by the federal army during Zedillo's betrayal in February of 1995. His nom de guerre was Diego. The compa~eros thought, made calculations, remembered. The new village then took the name of "Juan Diego."

Naming themselves, not after the death, but after the fight.