

“Those Who Are Now Asking Us to Forget All This Are Deciding Such Things in This Country’s Castles and Palaces”

Marcos Sets Off Alone on His Motorcycle as the Other Campaign Kicks Off

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Reporting from Chiapas with the Amado Avendaño Figueroa Brigade

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San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, January 1, 2005: As had been announced so many times, the Other Campaign led by Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos has begun. During the day of January 1, 2006, Zapatista support groups were concentrating in the west end of the city of San Cristóbal. As the afternoon ended and the evening began, the march left on its way downtown.

Subcomandante Marcos left La Garrucha, a village in one of the Zapatistas’ autonomous municipalities, in the early afternoon. The surprise for journalists, observers, and curious bystanders was that he came out alone, without any security escort, mounted a motorcycle and took off on his way to San Cristóbal. He is alone, at least in terms of security, and exposed to any kind of undesirable situation — something that no one among the EZLN’s supporters wants to happen, but none of them can offer him any kind of security.

Journalists and other traveling companions were left behind; as everyone knows, a motorcycle goes faster than any other vehicle. This time, there were no police cars clearing the way as happened in the [Zapatista March of 2001](#), when the state government pulled out all the stops, telling the media that it would guarantee the safety of the Zapatista caravan in Chiapas. Now, Rubén Velásquez, the Chiapas secretary of government, simply stated that the security provided to the guerilla chief would be the same as that which the government of Chiapas would provide to any citizen. That is the difference that five years bring.

Meanwhile, the march the gigantic march that has now been seen on other occasions, began. It was impressive for its indigenous contingent, the members of which can only be distinguished by the traditional clothing of the various region that some of them pull out to show off for the *fiesta* (though most simply arrived in work cloths, probably the only clothes they own). There they were, hundreds and hundreds, thousands. The counts are always a little exaggerated, but they are based on the space the people take up in the central plaza, which holds about 20,000, in addition to those spread out nearby, especially the women with their small children who sit to rest on the steps of City Hall.

They arrived in the central cathedral plaza; some call this the plaza of peace, others the plaza of resistance. There was the stage, from which the *comandantes* sent their political message. Later spoke Subcomandante Marcos, known as of yesterday as “Delegate Zero” of the Other Campaign.

The comandantes’ speeches all followed roughly the same tone, talking of the struggle and the same problems they have faced for twelve years. In the audience, the small non-indigenous presence was lost in the crowd of Indians. Some came out of curiosity, others were simply there as tourists, and there were very few local participants from the city. The march was one hundred percent Zapatista.



Subcomandante Marcos in La Garrucha

Photo:

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Chiapas Indymedia

Subcomandante Marcos, in his speech, asked for a moment of silence for the comrades that fell in the uprising twelve years ago.

He later movingly thanked, in Tzeltal and Spanish, the indigenous people of the EZLN that he was now leaving:

“It falls on me to leave first, to see how the road is that we are all going to travel, to see if there is danger there, in order to unite the Zapatista struggle with the struggle of the rural and urban workers. If something bad happens to me, know that it has filled me with pride to fight alongside you. You have been the best teachers and leaders and I am sure that you will carry on our struggle the right way, teaching everyone to be better with the word ‘dignity.’

“We are the wind, we cannot die in the struggle, the word has now been planted in good soil, this good soil is your heart and in it now blooms the dignity of the Zapatistas.”

Then informed the crowd that Comandante Germán, an aging guerilla that the Mexican intelligence agency CISEN has said was an original founder of the EZLN, will be a link between the EZLN and its supporters:

“I want to ask Comandante Germán, someone who has been very important in the history of the EZLN, to come up here with us. The EZLN owes its first seed to him, and I personally owe him more than my life for having shown us the path, the steps to take, and the destination. We Zapatistas know the architect Fernando Yañez as Comandante Germán. We have asked him to take charge of the ‘Zapatista Link’ office, which will be the medium the EZLN and the Sixth Commission will use to stay in contact with all the other compañeros of the Other Campaign. The office will also help us in the relationships we maintain with leftwing and anti-capitalist organizations in Mexico and around the world.”



The crowd on the night of January 1.

Photos: Julie Webb-Pullman

Later in his speech he remarked that the municipal authorities had turned out the lights in the streets that the Zapatista march was using to enter the plaza. He explained that the Other Campaign hopes to unite the struggles of others with that of the EZLN in order to create a light so strong that the powerful give up. He also spoke out against the “[Chapultepec Pact](#),” a proposal for development put forward by the country’s elite last fall.

“The Sixth Declaration proposes that we go, speak, and reach agreements with all those who work the machines, plow the earth, those that provide all the different products and services and end up with nothing.”

“Of all the things we have, our lives are the least important. We are putting our moral authority, our prestige, all the things we have achieved into this initiative.”

“The Sixth Declaration’s main target, Mexico’s financial elite, just months after the Declaration’s release, signed what could be called the Sixth counter-declaration, known as the Chapultepec Pact, signed in the castle of the same name.”

“Those who are now asking us to forget all this, to forget out needs, our struggles, and to put ourselves at their service so that they can decide for us, are deciding such things in this country’s castles and palaces.”

After midnight, the attendees retired, boarded their vehicles, and once again left the cathedral plaza intact. Perhaps they left a bit of trash on the ground, but the city’s obliging street sweepers had it cleaned up by dawn.

The rest of the early morning hours of January 2 passed without incident. The streets of the Jovel Valley became calm again as Subcomandante Marcos checked into a modest inn called “The Mountain’s Guess.”



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