

What is the Sixth Zapatista Declaration? A Bit of History as the “Other Campaign” Begins in the City of San Cristóbal de las Casas

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The sixth comes before the seventh and after the fifth. What was the Fifth Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle? Few remember, but the history of the Zapatistas is written through the declarations that the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) has released, beginning with the [first](#): the declaration of war. The [second](#): a call to civil society. The [third](#): a call for the creation of a National Liberation Movement. The [fourth](#): the formation of the Zapatista National Liberation Front. The [fifth](#): the Consulta Nacional, the great dialog with all Mexicans except the government. And now, the [Sixth](#), the initiation of the “Other Campaign,” the political struggle that exists outside the electoral farce.

In [the words of Subcomandante Marcos](#), “*Together, we’re going to shake this country up from below, lift it up, and stand it on its head.*”

Mexico’s geographic shape resembles a cornucopia, the mythological “Horn of Plenty,” but in reverse; the horn’s fruits tumble out toward the United States of America, toward the gringos. It is a funnel shape, the top wide and the bottom thin. Chiapas is the country’s “last frontier,” the north being its “first” one. But on the other hand, Chiapas forms the crown of Central America, the beginning of the great nation; Chiapas is a strategic point for North American business.

The Sixth Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle proposes realizing a national campaign for the building of another way of doing politics, for a program of national leftwing struggle, and for a new Constitution.

In order to understand what this will entail, one must review the Sixth Declaration’s twelve pages, which narrate briefly the history of the EZLN, its sufferings, its achievements, its hopes and its dreams. Later, they relate the state of the insurgent army’s structure, which has divided itself into three parts. First, most of the Zapatistas will guard, support and defend the autonomy of the Zapatista villages. This is the General Command of the CCRI, (Revolutionary Indigenous Clandestine Committee). Second, another part of the CCRI will be the “Intergalactic Commission,” which will take charge of the international aspects of the campaign, while a third will take charge of the national aspects. This third group has been named the “Sixth Commission of the EZLN,” and it is Subcomandante Marcos who, starting July 13, has led this fraction of the EZLN.

How will they carry out this “Other Campaign?” Principally, by listening. That essential part of [the six preparatory meetings in the Lacandon Jungle](#) will continue throughout the country. The Sixth Commission will listen, and in that way it will learn and value the real situation in the country. Contrary to what partisan candidates do — hauling out a load of people; buying them off with promises so that they listen to the candidates’ speeches and, of course, cast their vote next July 2; piling on the demagogic rhetoric — Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos will just listen. That is a different way of doing politics.

Later, in the same Declaration, the Zapatistas say: “What we are going to do is ask you how your lives are going, your fight, your thoughts about how our country is doing and about what we can do so that they don’t defeat us. What we are going to do is listen to your thoughts, those of the simple and humble people, and maybe we will find there the same love that we have for our country.”

Later, the document relates, simply, what they are going to do. It demonstrates with examples how they will evoke solidarity, true solidarity, with their resistance all around the world and in this way begin listening, finding points of agreement, and building a “national program of struggle” that they will follow through on.

And nearly at the end of the Sixth Declaration, the Zapatistas proclaim, “No to trying to resolve from above the problems of our Nation, but, rather, they must construct FROM BELOW AND FOR BELOW an alternative to neoliberal destruction, an alternative of the left for Mexico.”

Finally, they propose brotherhood, support for resistance struggles, mutual respect, and an exchange of experiences, stories, ideas, and dreams...

The “Other Campaign” Kicks Off

The Other Campaign begins January 1, 2006, and its first phase will conclude on June 25 of the same year. This latter date coincides with the closing of official electoral campaigns, as this will be an election year in Mexico for the president, congressmen, senators, and, in some states (including Chiapas), governors.

That’s why it’s called “the Other Campaign,” in parallel to the electoral campaigns of the main political parties. The PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution), a leftwing party that has been severely questioned by Subcomandante Marcos, will put forward its only candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. The PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), a losing party after 70 years in power, the party of the “perfect dictatorship” as Vargas Llosa called it, will have Roberto Madrazo Pinado, a priista of dubious reputation in every sense and friend of the country’s top fraudulent bankers, as its presidential candidate. And the conservative PAN (National Action Party) has the very mediocre Felipe Calderón, who was not the first choice of current president Vicente Fox, but was supported by his party. Not one of the three candidates is worthwhile. Within this frame of reference, of the doubtful credibility of the political campaigns, “Delegate Zero’s” Other Campaign will be the counterweight. Nobody can foresee what will come of it all.

And so, the Other Campaign kicks off on January 1 in colonial San Cristóbal de las Casas, the city that was taken over on January 1, 1994 by some two thousand masked, armed, and defiant indigenous men and women, who from the balcony of city hall sent their message of war to the federal government.

Twelve years later, with their numbers multiplied, it is hoped that they return peacefully to take to the streets and avenues of this small city that, due to winter vacations, is full of Mexican and foreign tourists, in addition to the adherents to “the Sixth” who could pay for the trip to be present for the start of the Other Campaign from the cathedral plaza of this city.

There is no advance information, just like 1994. We journalists must wait to see what happens; nobody knows, and if they do, they can’t say. But the rumors have been flying for some time in this little corner of the world, from which the First Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle was first read. That declaration of war is still in effect, as the peace accords were never fulfilled despite the federal government having signed them with the EZLN’s guerilla leaders. The guerillas were not content with a mere signature; they demanded the fulfillment of the [San Andrés Accords](#) that the government froze in a single amendment to the Mexican Constitution, for “the development of the Indian peoples.” The San Andrés Accords deserved a profound constitutional reform, a nearly total change in order to give life and the right to life to the country’s Indian peoples, rather than simply reducing them to a declaration of “development.”

Here in San Cristóbal de Las Casa, the first talks were held in the Cathedral. The fact that [Bishop Samuel Ruiz García](#), or Tatic as the indigenous call him, had proposed and accepted that then-President Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s representative and the Zapatista delegation headed by Subcomandante Marcos meet to negotiate peace accords in the San Cristóbal Cathedral, was denounced as an outrage to authentic “Coletos” (a local name for the city’s conservative non-indigenous community). These unleashed their fury by creating a spontaneous, short-lived organization that never had a formal structure, led by then-Mayor Jorge Mario Lescieur Talavera. The violent group attacked the Bishop’s house a year later, threatening to burn it down. At that time, current Mayor Sergio Lobato García was among Lescieur Talavera’s followers, and he drank a good quantity of alcohol that night to give him the strength and courage to shout incoherencies in front of the Cathedral.

These passages, now part of history, will repeat themselves, but in a different form. Now this spoiled, rude drunk is mayor of the city founded by conquistador Diego de Mazariegos, and tried to make amends with an homage to Bishop Samuel. The same mayor today offers “security and sanitation” for participants in the Zapatista march; two days before the marchers’ arrival the city had installed water dispensers, latrines, and a dozen street sweepers, so that the Zapatistas wouldn’t leave any litter.

While the mayor put on this unimaginative show of offering “security” to the twenty or thirty thousand indigenous that could arrive, a lower-level official, tourism director Marco Antonio Santiago, told the press that the Zapatista march will affect tourism and that “there is a very strong rumor... the question the people have is what is going to happen on January 1, the beginning of the march, which will hopefully be peaceful and calm... this has been a very important factor in people not coming to San Cristóbal in these days...” Nevertheless, the five-star hotels are all filled, there are no vacancies — even the no-star hotels are full. There are Mexican and international tourists, there are journalists on assignment; obviously there are government agents and the usual *zapateurs*, and all those who have arrived by any means possible and will be present. The Coletos, the city’s inhabitants, aren’t saying anything, they’re just waiting for the Zapatistas to arrive, get set up, have their demonstration and leave, as they have done on many earlier occasions.

There has not been (among the general population of San Cristobal) much commotion in expectation of the arrival of Delegate Zero. The march began in the community known as La Garrucha, in the rebel municipality of Francisco Gómez, seat of the Good Government Council for the Tzeltal region. The official name of the municipality is Ocosingo, and it is one of the gates to the Lacandon Jungle.

The Caravan accompanying Delegate Zero is scheduled to arrive sometime during the day. It is expected sometime in the afternoon, but they haven’t specified, they can’t specify, the road is so difficult to travel that the same trip can last four or twelve hours (or more in the case of a caravan, as a single car breaking down can make everyone stop). In the first caravan that visited the jungle on August 7, 1994, when civil society was invited to hold the National Democratic Convention in Guadalupe Tepeyac, the first village to receive the six thousand delegates from across the country, it was democratic insanity; democracy obliged all those present to get covered in mud, as the floor sank after the baptizing downpour that sent off the Ship that would travel through the sky, the imaginary ship the Zapatista built between the two hills of the jungle airfield where the first Aguascalientes was christened. That madness of trying to travel a road full of gaps and holes with 40-passenger busses lasted 24 hours. On the trip back, everyone left in any way he or she could.

That was the EZLN’s first attempt at organizing the unorganized, at bringing together the sectarians, at joining people together and making them respect each others’ differences; that was twelve years ago. Now, the Other Campaign is once again drawing out the more measured, less adventurous opinions of some intellectuals, though those still interested are few and those who speak out even fewer. Not because Zapatismo has been extinguished, but because it is not easy to talk about lightly. Neither can these academics carry out detailed studies because the Zapatistas won’t let them. It’s not that they change their ways, it’s just that they are very simple, very practical, and don’t deal in hypocrisy, and so there is no way to make political analysis of them. The simply speak and what they say is true and that’s all there is. That’s how the autonomous governments of the 38 municipalities finish their communiqués — they say what they have to say and conclude, that’s all.

We’re not like that, we *mestizos*, we always complicate things. The Coletos, descendants of an ancestral mixing of peoples, born in a city founded by Spanish conquistadors who arrived in the Jovel valley accompanied by Indians from other parts of Mexico, installed themselves and created a feudal city. The Royal City is now called San Cristóbal de las Casas for the first Bishop that arrived to Christianize the Indians and then became their biggest ally but was, just like Bishop Samuel Ruiz, attacked and defamed by those Coletos who had descended from the conquistadors. In this city, which has tripled in size since 1994, irregular human settlements inhabited by people from all over the world have been set up. Some come to do business, some come for adventure, but most come simply to survive. Indigenous neighborhoods in the north of the city, mostly made up of Chamulas expelled for apparently religious reasons (being dissidents

from Catholic tradition) but also political dissidents, have existed since 1974, twenty years before Zapatismo.

In the 1940s, after the government of General Lázaro Cárdenas, the Indians began to exist as persons in government policy. This change was spurred by Cárdenas' pro-indigenous government, but it was also the beginning of the compromising of indigenous leaders by *mestizo* ones. This may seem like a separate story, but it is the same, the same story that has been going on since October 12, 1492, when the Spanish discovered América and called its inhabitants Indians, and since March 31, 1528, when the conquistadors under the command of Diego de Mazariegos founded this city with centuries of history barely known to its current residents.

Now this city has returned to the center of the country's history. In 1994 began the indigenous uprising, which the politicians and political scientists expected to die within twelve days. Twelve years have passed and the Indians remain, intact, complete, perhaps greater in number, because in twelve years at least six children will have been born to each of the '94 Zapatistas... and so they will not die but rather keep moving forward. Now the challenge is before the entire country, and later the whole world, and later...

The story of the last six months begins here, with the [Red Alert](#). This Alert did indeed alarm many. When the EZLN declared itself in "red alert," there was uncertainty, a lack of confidence, puzzlement on the part of the government, suspense....

The EZLN cleared things up a few days later, announcing that the Alert was simply issued in order to bring all their troops together safely. There was some relief, but later came a series of communiqués ([1,2,3,4](#)) revealing the group's positions, finally concluding with the [Sixth Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle](#).

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