

The Twilight of the Revolutionaries?

By Jorge Mancillas



"WE apologize for the inconvenience, but this is a revolution," said Subcomandante Marcos on the morning of January 1, 1994, to a confused and alarmed group of tourists visiting San Cristóbal de Las Casas. After late night New Year celebrations, the tourists had been woken by gunshots and the sound of the Zapatistas' rubber boots as they marched swiftly through the cobblestone streets of this charming colonial city nestled in the highlands of Chiapas. The sight of uniformed armed rebels was initially frightening. Yet their courteous manner and their orderly actions after they took over city hall assuaged their concerns.

But the roads were blocked. Could they leave if they wished? the tourists asked. What about their safety if the Mexican army attacked the city? A Frenchman asked if he could take photographs. None of the fighters could understand their questions, so Marcos was sent for, the only one who spoke English and whose assignment was to lead the assault on the police headquarters. "We have reservations to visit the ruins of Palenque," cried a Swiss couple, demanding to know if they were free to leave. "Please forgive us," Marcos responded courteously, "this is a revolution." Asking for a notebook, he scrawled out a few safe conduct passes, telling the tourists to show them to those guarding the roadblocks.

Marcos' use of the word revolution was not accidental. No one then mistook their uprising--timed to coincide with the day the North American Free Trade Agreement took effect--for anything other than the emergence of an armed revolutionary movement intent on overthrowing the Mexican Government. In their "Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle"--distributed widely by the insurgents--they cited the "people's....unalienable right to alter or modify their form of Government" provided by the Mexican constitution, declared war on the Mexican Army and called for "the overthrow of the dictator," President Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

As part of their Manifesto, they issued a set of laws covering areas such as urban and agrarian reform, labor, industry and commerce, social security, and justice to take effect in rural and urban "zones controlled by the EZLN." When asking the "people of Mexico" to support their plans they committed themselves to fighting "until we achieve

the fulfillment of these basic demands of our people by forming a free and democratic government for our country." They instructed the leaders of their revolutionary armed forces to "change the authorities of the places which fall under the power of the revolution, according to the will of the people and as indicated by the law of revolutionary government," commanding them to "advance towards the capital of the nation, defeating the Mexican Federal Army..."

Seven years later, on March 11, 2001, when 23 commanders of the EZLN and a now-familiar Subcomandante Marcos marched on Mexico City, they had undergone a significant transformation. The proclaimed goal of their march on Mexico City was to rally "civil society" and lobby Congress for legislation protecting the rights of indigenous people and granting their communities autonomy. Ironically, the legislation was introduced and supported by President Vicente Fox, of the conservative PAN (National Action Party). From armed revolutionaries calling on the people to overthrow the government, to photogenic media-savvy rebels championing the cause of indigenous people, the transformation of the Zapatistas from revolutionaries to narrow-cause rebels is symptomatic of a worldwide retreat of a demoralized, defeated (or at times co-opted) Left.

THROUGHOUT THE TWENTIETH century, the Left, just as it was all over the world, was a force to be reckoned with in Mexican politics. Mexico experienced the first social revolution of the century in 1910, when armed peasants and middle- and upper-class dissenters challenged the rule of the dictator, Porfirio Díaz. The regime which emerged from the ten-year struggle created a party which, while it twice changed its name (from National Revolutionary Party, to Party of the Mexican Revolution to Revolutionary Institutional Party, or PRI), always clung to the label of "revolutionary." It survived international revolutionary upsurges and internal challenges from a substantial Communist Party in the 1930s, mass urban mobilizations in the 1960s, and significant military challenges from rural and urban guerrillas in the 1970s, by adopting a populist rhetoric and embracing revolutionary regimes abroad, including aiding the revolutionary regimes of Cuba and Nicaragua. Every significant political challenge to the Mexican Government, every major independent peasant or union movement--not to mention several armed guerrilla movements-- was led by leftists inspired by a socialist vision for Mexico.

By the end of 1993, however, on the eve of the EZLN uprising, the Mexican Left was in retreat. In 25 years it had gone from being a force field of militant political protest, of radical union and peasant organizing, to a political opposition with most of its energy concentrated in the electoral arena.

The watershed was the wave of massive demonstrations for democracy that shook the PRI regime in the summer of 1968, when Mexico was preparing to host the Olympics. The student movement rallied behind it independent labor and peasant organizations and was supported by almost all Mexicans, except the political and economic elite. It was finally suppressed by a massacre of hundreds of civilians attending a rally in Tlateloco square the night of October 2. A massive wave of arrests, kidnappings, and torture followed. Student, trade union, and political leaders disappeared, and the authorities clamped down on public protest and political activity. The events of

1968 were branded into the consciousness of a whole generation whose commitment to challenge PRI power was reaffirmed.

The violent suppression of another peaceful demonstration, this time on June 10, 1971, confirmed to many that there were few options for opening the political process via peaceful means. Rural and urban guerrilla groups flowered throughout Mexico, amongst them the FLN (National Liberation Front), the forerunner of the EZLN, which Marcos joined late in that decade.

It was an unequal war, fought by young inexperienced idealists in their twenties, some still teenagers, armed with guns snatched from street policemen, or bought in California or Texas (with money obtained through assaults on small businesses) and smuggled into Mexico. A few guerrilla groups survived long enough to develop tight professional organizations and become experienced enough to stage kidnappings of right wing industrialists or to assault banks. There were a few skirmishes with army units, primarily in the southern state of Guerrero--where two rural guerrilla groups developed a significant base--and in Chihuahua, as well as a few kidnappings of figures tied to the regime. But by and large, for nearly a decade, Mexico lived through its own version of a dirty war, with the systematic hunting and annihilation (on sight or after kidnapping and torturing) of hundreds of young people driven by a vision of a free, just society.

I WAS RESCUED from an early death by a young professor, Alfonso Peralta, who persuaded a handful of us in Baja California to leave one such group and instead embrace the path of patiently building a national political organization. We had helped organize and build "Colonia Tierra y Libertad," an autonomous community of 10,000 squatters who in 1973 took over a steep hillside on the outskirts of Tijuana after their homes in the Tijuana riverbed had been destroyed to give way to a commercial, industrial and tourist development. Their efforts were met with the brutal demolition of their humble homes and the torture and disappearance of some of their leaders. Those of us who escaped were easily recruited by an emerging national urban guerrilla organization. Five of us were persuaded by Alfonso to leave and join his underground political party. Several of those who were not persuaded did not live long after that.

But fighting for democracy, organizing independent labor unions or democratic currents in government-controlled ones was not much safer. It involved dodging bullets in the dark after meetings of dissident members of the oil workers union; enduring threats and persecution while organizing auto workers, teachers or university employees; being subjected to continual surveillance or being jailed for belonging to "illegal" organizations; and on occasion, having to go underground.

None of us, of course, had violated a single law. In 1977, Alfonso Peralta was shot in front of his students as he left his classroom in Mexico City. To this day, I am still haunted by the image of his horrified students watching the growing pool of blood as his body lay limp, his brilliant intellect forever silenced.

I narrowly escaped a couple of kidnapping attempts in 1978. Others who did not were brutally tortured or assassinated. My own vulnerability was brought home when I was jailed in a tiny dark cell with a group of common criminals, after I was arrested for proselytizing for my own group. Hours later, I was pushed into a torture chamber, with large stains of blood--some dry, some still fresh--on the hard, cold concrete walls and

floor. I was lucky, thanks to the efforts of my union, to be freed quickly and before the national political police learned of my capture.

BY THE END of that year, it was clear to me, as it was for many in my generation of political activists, that I did not have long to live, and that my death was going to be meaningless. Many gave up and tried to reconstruct our lives. Some steered their political organizations into entities more acceptable to the regime. They were rewarded with legal status, generous governmental stipends, and entered the electoral arena. Ironically, our efforts had forced a political reform and an opening of the electoral and political system, but the PRI wasted no effort in turning this to their advantage by coopting the political organizations it found most threatening into the safer arena of electoral and parliamentary politics.

A few of us left the country. Some, like me, left quietly and focused our efforts into supporting revolutionary movements in Central America. Others, like Hector Marroquín, became symbols of political persecution in Mexico, as they launched campaigns for political asylum. Unbeknownst to all of us, Marcos and a few survivors of the FLN left for the most remote rural areas of Mexico, clinging to a dream that seemed to be fading.

By 1993, all that remained of the communists, socialists, Trotskyists, Maoists and several guerrilla movements had either closed ranks behind former PRI-ista Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, merged into his party, the PRD, and embraced electoral politics--or barely survived unnoticed as one of a handful of tiny grouplets swamped by the tidal wave of Cárdenas's new party. And after Cárdenas's failure to claim his narrow electoral triumph in 1988, when Salinas had, by any objective account, manipulated the electoral results to snatch the presidency away from him, the PRD's fortunes declined.

Then, unexpectedly, where everyone least expected it, the Zapatistas emerged, challenging not only the Salinas government, but the new international order.

I WAS WOKEN early January 1, 1994, by a call from an old friend from Mexico City, who relayed the news to me. For months, we had heard persistent rumors of a guerrilla group in Chiapas, but were somewhat incredulous. But that morning, the personal reports from several friends were unequivocal. A guerrilla army had taken over four cities. The next day, as I watched the clouds turn scarlet red as the sun set over the Pacific Ocean, it suddenly hit me. I did not know who these guerrillas were--for all I knew they could turn out to be one of those awful brutal aberrations like the *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) or the Khmer Rouge--but I was extremely familiar with the Mexican government and its methods. Given the size of the rebel army and their success in keeping their existence secret, there were going to be consequences for the civilian population. I called some friends, Tom Hayden and Jodie Evans first among them, and in a couple of days, with the support of Jerry Brown, we put together a human rights delegation.

We arrived in San Cristóbal in the midst of the shooting war, bombs still being dropped from Mexican Air Force planes over villages, strafing by helicopters over unidentified targets. Together with the journalists who had arrived from all over the world, we were constrained by the cordoning off of one quarter of the region by the Mexican Army. We interviewed refugees as they streamed by the hundreds into San

Cristóbal. We repeatedly challenged the military roadblocks--hundreds of human rights activists, arms locked, wearing makeshift white vests--to no avail. At night, imprisoned our hotel rooms by the military curfew, we watched the bright flashes on the other side of the mountains and heard the explosions like distant thunder.

Finally, after a demonstration of 100,000 in Mexico city and increasing international pressure, President Salinas ordered a cease fire. After quick clean up operations (hundreds of bodies were flown by helicopter into the Tuxtla stadium, where they were cremated), the roads were opened up.

Everywhere we drove the sea of white flags over the roofs of every hut in the countryside was clear evidence that something monstrous had descended over the region. In spite of the extensive clean up, the signs were hard to miss: the puddles of dry blood clumsily hidden under layers of lime everywhere in the Ocosingo market where a battle had raged for hours. The eerie quiet in abandoned villages like San Antonio de Los Baños, with most of their huts ransacked. The bullet-ridden mini bus by Rancho Nuevo, drenched in blood mixed with abandoned--and unmistakably civilian--personal effects. The civilians in the mass graves we discovered by the IMSS clinic in Ocosingo. And most of all, the expressions of fear, caution, and mistrust on the faces of civilians.

During those days, amidst the chaos and confusion of the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas human rights center in San Cristóbal, I kept running into old friends. They had arrived at the same conclusions as I, and reacted the same way. At night, after harrowing days collecting evidence of the Mexican army's brutality against civilians, we exchanged personal stories and tried to piece the pieces together and figure out who the Zapatistas were.

Given the past preeminence of the Mexican Left, it was natural that many assumed that the Zapatistas had their origins in one of its currents. Even as late as the summer of 1995, when the Zapatistas had reshaped their image to present themselves as an autonomous representative organization of the communities of the highlands of Chiapas, and had been dissected publicly for a year and a half, some were still probing their origins.

IT WAS a humid August morning and the sun had not risen yet over "La Realidad," the small hamlet nestled on the southern side of a long ravine at the southeastern edge of the highlands, where Marcos, Tacho, and other comandantes had retreated after the government's military offensive of February 1995. Several hundred attendees of the First Intercontinental Meeting for Humanity and against Neoliberalism slept in hammocks and sleeping bags under the rustic makeshift facilities built in the jungle. As I went for a walk at first light, I ran into Comandante Tacho, and together with a friend from the Mexican electrical workers union, began a conversation with him. A couple of Italian journalists joined us a few minutes later. At one point, one of them turned on his tape recorder and began probing.

"But what are your origins?" he asked intently, after mentioning how most groups do not arise spontaneously, but are founded by committed cadre formed by an ideological current. "Where did the Zapatista movement come from?"

Tacho paused for a moment, gazing into the distance. "We came from the depths of oblivion," he replied in a soft yet intense voice. "From an abyss so deep, our voices

could not be heard. So dark, we could not be seen. We emerged from the deepest depths of oblivion."

Clearly, the communities which they call their "base of support," and all but a few of their combatants, do come from isolated hamlets and villages of the highlands of Chiapas. They are in every possible way a phenomenon that reflects those indigenous communities. But what triggered the formation of the EZLN was the arrival in the summer of 1983 in Chiapas of roughly 12 members of the FLN, one of the few surviving armed Marxist revolutionary movements in Mexico.

After a few months, only four remained, and during their efforts to win converts to their movement, they were transformed by the communities who embraced them and their message of revolution. When they entered the public arena with their masterfully organized military actions on New Year's Day 1994, they were still committed to a deep transformation of Mexican society. Yet, what started as a harbinger of a renewed challenge to the "new world order" of global capitalism, found itself cornered and able only to survive by adopting an image--which gradually became content--that could insure its physical and political survival.

Clearly, the Zapatistas ignited a spirit of defiance throughout Mexico--from a popular takeover of city hall at the small municipality of San Mateo Atenco, only a short drive from Mexico City, in the first weeks after the Zapatista uprising, to countless individual actions. On January 16, 1994, having spent a harrowing week heading a human rights delegation in Chiapas during the second week of the uprising--in the midst of the shooting war for the first four days, then documenting the deaths of civilians at the hands of the Mexican Army--I waited to meet Francisco Mendoza, a friend and a journalist who helped us communicate our activities and findings to the Mexican press.

We were to meet with the Secretary of Gobernación to submit our preliminary report and demand they investigate multiple violations of human rights. Mendoza was delayed when his taxi driver spotted a fancy limousine double parked in front of a government office. The driver swiftly drove by the back door of the limo and prevented the passenger, dressed in an expensive suit, from leaving the car. He yelled and waved at a traffic policeman standing a short distance away, demanding that he make the limousine move and park legally. Looking furiously at the stunned fat cat, he said firmly "No more, this no longer takes place here, get out of here! If the Indians are willing to die for a better country," he said in a softer voice, turning towards Mendoza, who watched from the back seat, "this is the least I can do. *Go!*" he yelled again to the limousine driver, and did not budge until the limousine drove away.

But in spite of a wave of isolated incidents, including the detonation of a bomb at a Mexico City shopping center, and a demonstration in support of the Zapatistas in Mexico city 12 days into the rebellion, the rest of the country did not rise up against the government. The support and sympathy the rebels garnered stayed the hand of President Salinas and eventually led to negotiations. But they found themselves politically and militarily encircled in Chiapas. This, even though throughout 1994 the nation was rocked by the eruption of a shooting war between warring factions within the PRI--starting with the assassination of Presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio on March 23 and the party's Secretary General José Francisco Ruíz Massieu on September 28--the resignation of Interior Minister Carpizo, massive capital flight (\$17 billion in six months) and a financial meltdown in December. The political system seemed to be coming apart at the

hinges, yet the Mexican Left could do no better than focus on Cárdenas's Presidential candidacy and was at a loss after their defeat at the polling booth. In fact, while supportive of the Zapatistas, for electoral reasons, they distanced themselves from their "methods."

To be sure, the Zapatistas led several attempts at creating a national movement, each time with more and more limited goals. In the second "Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle" issued in June 1994, they convened a National Democratic Convention in Zapatista territory (held that August) and called for the formation of a Constituent Assembly to reform the Mexican Constitution. They proposed a redefinition of the question of power, liberty, and justice and a change in the culture within political parties. In January 1995, in the third "Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle" they called for the creation of a National Liberation Movement to fight for a laundry list of national issues. In 1996, in the second anniversary of their uprising, they issued their fourth "Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle" announcing their decision to pursue politics of a new type, nonpartisan, independent, and peaceful, and which did not pursue the seizure of power. On July 1998, in the fifth "Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle" the EZLN proposed a Law of Rights and Culture of Indigenous People. On March 1999, Zapatista supporters throughout Mexico organized an informal national referendum in which 95 percent of participants asked for respect for the rights of indigenous people. From then on, the defense of those rights became the central focus of the EZLN.

LAST MARCH in Mexico City, Marcos, during multiple speeches and interviews, clearly defined the Zapatistas' current goals and identity. They are rebels, not revolutionaries, he pointed out in several interviews. They do not seek power or the responsibility of implementing policies to solve the nation's problems; their role is simply to identify problems and demand their solution, he told María Elena Salinas of Univisión. They are a movement of the Indigenous people of Chiapas. Their immediate goal is the passage of the Law of Rights and Culture of Indigenous People.

Their criticism was aimed at President Fox and his party, the PAN. Yet, Fox's government was, for better or for worse, legitimately elected by Mexicans, and Fox's team succeeded where the Zapatistas and the left failed by military or political means: removing the PRI from power after seven decades of continuous rule. And the Zapatistas' criticism was devoid of specifics, they offered no alternative policies and stressed that they did not intend to become a national political party or join one.

Marcos criticized the Cuban and Central American revolutionaries, and chose Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and Mandela as figures who better exemplified what they wanted to achieve. In his relations with Mexican and international political groups and currents over a period of seven years, they attempted alliances with political groups, but, while accepting anyone's support, they ended by narrowing their close relations to figures like Danielle Mitterand, writers like Eduardo Galeano and José Saramago, and groups of "rebels" from various countries who challenge the ethics of neoliberalism.

Marcos and the small group of FLN cadre who moved to Chiapas in 1983 survived while other leftist movements were annihilated, withered away into oblivion, assimilated into the political institutions or were coopted, because they adapted to their surroundings. Since 1994, the Zapatistas managed to survive militarily and politically in an adverse environment, because they narrowed their image and goals to become the

expression of a segment of the population whose attraction to the general public became irresistible.

Their success in surviving and impacting the national and international conscience--no small feat--was based on a constant transformation and adaptation to changing political circumstances. But this transformation carried with it the loss of a long-term alternative proposal for Mexican society, a vision of what deep changes are necessary in its economic relations and political system to achieve the goals of justice, liberty, and real democracy for everyone in the nation. The Zapatistas need a consistent strategy to achieve those goals and make them sustainable, because any sustained progress for the indigenous people in Chiapas requires a transformation of economic and power relations throughout the nation. Mexico has had progressive legislation for 83 years, but its implementation and enforcement has been another matter.

And what will be the fate of any legislation on the rights of indigenous people, unless there is a change in the institutions? And what of their economic, medical, and educational needs, even while they manage to preserve their culture and gain some degree of autonomy? During an exchange with sympathetic reporters in Mexico City, Marcos recently told a moving story of a little girl who died in his arms because they did not have a *mejoral* to lower her fever. A reporter asked him--reminding him of that the central point of his efforts is the preservation of indigenous traditions and culture--"well, why did they not use one of their traditional herbs?" He tried to raise a legitimate point: how do you resolve the contradiction between the defense of their culture and traditions, and the realization that the technology which humanity has collectively developed as cultures meet, exchange knowledge, and create a universal culture, has much to offer and will better address traditional problems? Well, needless to say, the reporter almost got lynched.

Yet, the nation's political reality has left the Zapatistas with few choices. And while they received considerable international support, it never crossed a critical threshold. Marcos himself often pondered out loud why their solidarity movement in the United States never approached the magnitude of CISPES (the Salvadorean support movement) or the movement of solidarity with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. After all, none of the leaders of those revolutionary movements received the favorable coverage the Zapatistas got including a piece during CBS's *60 Minutes* and the publishing of pieces by Marcos in the op-ed pages of the *LA Times*. Part of the explanation lies in the EZLN's decision to anoint individuals with little or no political or organizational presence as "official representatives." But support among US Latinos and Chicanos was limited to a few grassroots organizations, and prominent individuals and elected officials were almost universally silent. Latino elected officials had labored so hard to gain respectability in the corridors of power that they were not willing to compromise their image by associating themselves with the rebels. In addition, most of them had supported NAFTA and were (and are) anxious to build relationships with Mexican Government officials.

The predicament of the Zapatistas is indicative of an international reality. Revolutionaries --governments, parties, currents, intellectuals, individuals--are rapidly withering away and seen more and more as unwanted relics of a failed social evolutionary experiment. And "rebels" are stepping into that vacuum. While for a century and a half the Left was primarily a current of various political organizations that fought for one or another version of socialism, it is now becoming primarily a collection

of protest groups and individuals: opponents of neo-liberalism and economic globalization (which Marxists always favored but on the basis of different economic relations), groups and individuals whose goal is the humanization of capitalism, rather than its overthrow, with an amorphous and undefined "civil society" at the lead. Gone is the concept of classes and class struggle. Groups are increasingly critical of political parties and the view that it is necessary to seize the institutions of political power to effectively make economic and political changes.

There is an implied acceptance of the immutability of the current economic system and a rejection, as failed because of an implied inherent bureaucratic nature, of alternative economic systems based on planned economies. And therein lies one of the fallacies which has become widely accepted: That the struggle of the twentieth century was between proponents of free-markets and promoters of planned economies run by central bureaucracies. The central issue was not the nature of the markets, but who would own the means of production, regardless of how goods would then be exchanged--whether democracy should extend also to the economic realm or remain an illusion of the political process, always distorted by political realities and imperatives that inevitably stem from the concentration of wealth in a few hands.

Yet, the predominant discourse in what appears as the left these days is increasingly dominated by concepts like civil society, citizens, plurality, the defense of social or ethnic identity, with social classes or economically derived identities not entering the picture. Increasingly, actions which in any way affect the functioning of the engines of economic production or build organized political power are becoming rare, socially unacceptable, or outmoded, and being substituted by events, actions which more and more have the nature of spectacles which generate images fit-for prime time news--turtle suits, painted faces, brown uniforms, and ski-masks; breaking windows at McDonald's or Starbucks. Symbolism substitutes for substance.

The Zapatistas did not have many options. In the new political framework that their insurrection helped create in Mexico, they did not find a way to present an alternative proposal and a way to organize around them. This is not their fault or shortcoming as much as a reflection of a vacuum of leadership in the rest of the nation and the political realities it created, which the Zapatistas alone were in no position to change. The electoral Left channeled much of the sentiment of defiance they created in 1994, only to lead those who followed into disillusionment and skepticism. Yet, believing that they would be the beneficiaries, the PRD and the electoral Left continued to help convince Mexicans, who were presented with no viable alternative means, that legitimate elections and an experiment in democracy was the way forward. And the Right was better prepared than the Mexican left to capitalize on those advances as well as on the Zapatistas' blows to the legitimacy of the PRI government. Unable first--and unwilling later--to extend and channel their political influence into a national organized structure that can capture spaces in the political institutions, the Zapatistas can be said to have helped pave the way for the Right's takeover. Surely an unintended outcome, but part of the reality that must be faced and contended with.

In the end, perhaps Rosario Ibarra de Piedra said it best when casually assessing the contribution of the Zapatistas. She was almost seventy as we walked on the mud at La Realidad. With her wrinkled face and gray hair barely protected from the sun by a straw hat, and her eyes shining with the inextinguishable energy, we sat down under the

shade of a tree and watched the hundreds of visitors milling around the hamlet: young rebels from various countries attending the Zapatista-sponsored meeting against neo-liberalism. We reminisced about the last 20 years. We had met in 1976, when, her son having been kidnapped by the Mexican Government, she had begun her crusade on behalf of those "disappeared, tortured, persecuted, or exiled" for political reasons. She had founded Mexico's human rights movement and become, in the words of *The New York Times*, a pillar of the Mexican Left. A candidate for President in 1982 and a Congresswoman in 1994, she was at the epicenter of events and witnessed from a privileged vantage and with exceptional clarity the transformation of Mexico's political landscape.

"Hope," she said, "the Zapatistas represent hope, and we must preserve hope at all costs." I agreed and--always the biologist--I replied that hope is like a seed. No matter how gray and hopeless things may look at times, the least we must do is preserve our hopes and the vision of better things to come until once more we find fertile ground.

Who knows the best way forward for humanity? Many believe they do and fight doggedly to bring their own vision to reality. Determinedly, with sacrifice, or brutally. But we cannot let go of the belief that there is a better way to live than by parasitic relationships in which so few concentrate so much, so many suffer endlessly, in which our environment gets plundered and our collective future squandered.

There has to be a better way. The Zapatistas reminded us of the strength of the human spirit, of the value of determination, altruism, willingness to sacrifice, honesty.

The Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano put it well. Following a parade of notables speaking endlessly in support of the Zapatistas at La Realidad, Galeano rose to speak and the assembly of hundreds quieted down. He simply said, "I am here and support the Zapatistas, because in a world full of lies, I believe and trust them."

And believe we must.

The future of the Zapatistas in the new reality of Mexican politics is uncertain. But their contribution has been enormous. They have injected new hope and renewed faith in the possibilities of social change, while reminding us all that it requires the willingness to make personal sacrifices. They have brought renewed attention and legitimacy to the rights and contributions--not just the plight--of indigenous people. Their denunciations of the consequences of economic globalization for the forgotten millions have helped take some of the steam from the triumphant marketing of neoliberal economic policies.

Unfortunately, while the Zapatistas have provided an example of resilience, and how to resist and fight the system, they have not shown how to transform it. That remains the unresolved question, as revolutionaries are replaced by rebels, and capitalism, transformed, triumphant, reinvigorated, continues to expand and entrench itself. And the human suffering and economic and social dysfunction it creates goes eloquently denounced but ineffectively challenged.

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