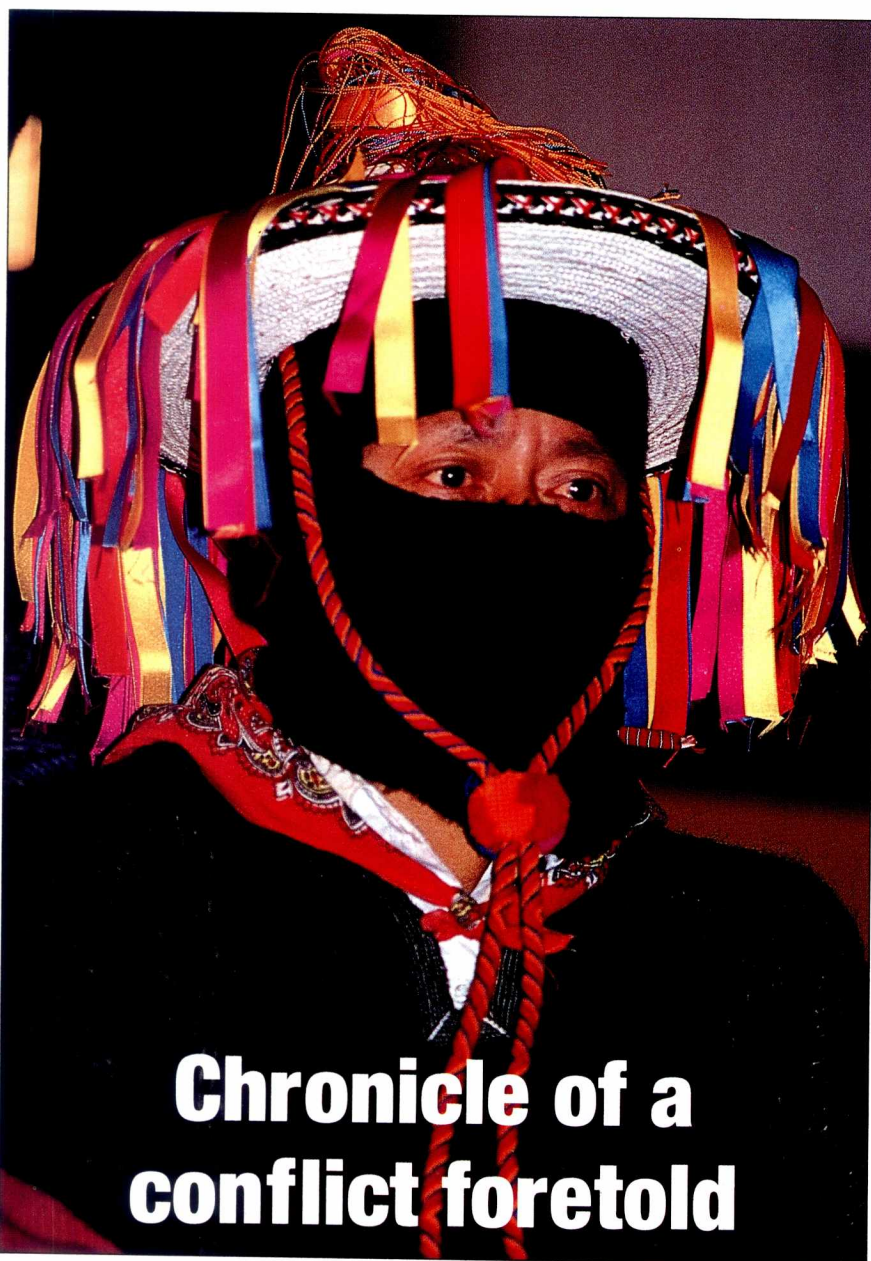


CHIAPAS

Voices of Mexico / April • June, 1994

When the flood waters knock down the houses and the river overflows, sweeping away everything in its path, then it is a sign that without our knowing it, the rains began in the mountains many days ago.

Chiapas peasant.



Chronicle of a conflict foretold

Martin Salas / Imagenlatina.

January 1, 1994 saw the beginning of an Indian rebellion in the southern state of Chiapas. The attack by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) took the whole country by surprise, particularly those whom it targeted: the Mexican government and army. The conflict was surprising not only because of its unexpectedness but because of the speed with which events, reactions and interpretations followed one another, and the impact it is predicted to have on the nation.

Paz means peace. (Editor's note.)

The twelve-day war

At approximately 0:30 a.m. on New Year's Day, a group of armed peasants and Indians, driving trucks stolen a few days earlier, occupied the cities of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las Margaritas.¹ The towns were defended by municipal and judicial police. Preliminary figures in the press reported 6 dead and 12 wounded (*La Jornada*, *Excelsior*, *El Financiero*, January 2, 1994).

The rebels destroyed furniture and windows in municipal and police buildings, prevented access to occupied towns and freed 179 prisoners from the San Cristóbal jail as well as taking provisions from stores. They also took over the radio stations at Ocosingo and San Cristóbal to broadcast messages about their movement, proclamations against the government and the army and invitations to the people to join them. Between 800 and 1,000 guerrillas are said to have taken part in the occupation of San Cristóbal.

In his first public appearance, on the balcony of San Cristóbal's town hall, a man wearing a ski mask and a black and red uniform² identified himself as Commander Marcos,³ spokesman for the movement. Speaking of the motives and objectives of the EZLN's struggle, Marcos said the decision was made to launch the rebellion on New Year's because that was the day the North

¹ *Excelsior* newspaper mentions eight occupied towns (January 2, 1994), while EZLN spokesman *subcomandante* (deputy commander) Marcos told the Multivisión cable network (January 30 and 31, 1994) that in fact seven towns had been taken.

² In accordance with Geneva Convention requirements that combatants should be clearly identified, EZLN members wore a uniform consisting of a brown shirt with red and black insignia, green pants and rubber boots, covering their faces with ski masks or bandannas.

³ Shortly afterwards Marcos clarified that he is a deputy commander rather than commander.



The EZLN takes over San Cristóbal de las Casas.

American Free Trade Agreement went into effect, calling NAFTA "a death sentence for Mexico's Indian ethnic groups, which are dispensable as far as the government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari is concerned."

Marcos went on to say that in Mexico freedom and democracy do not exist, and declared war on the army, calling for Salinas' government to be deposed and a transitional government to be set up that would call clean elections. He described the movement as an ethnic one, based on ten years of political work and preparation, and denied rumors of the presence of Guatemalans in its ranks or that it had any links with drug traffickers. Marcos also said that he was under orders to advance as far as the capital (*La Jornada*, January 2).

The EZLN's General Command distributed a document (the *Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle*) to the people of Mexico, in which it elaborated on Marcos' declarations as well as stating that "we are conscious of the fact that the war we have declared is a last-ditch measure, but it is a just one." The declaration stated that the EZLN fights for "work, land, a roof over our heads, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace," and invited others to join the

rebels. They proclaimed they would not stop fighting until they achieved their demands, and asked to be formally recognized as a "belligerent force," in accordance with international conventions (*El Financiero*, January 2).

In a communiqué issued by the Ministry of the Interior, the federal government appealed to the rebels to use good sense, asking them to lay down their arms and begin a dialogue. The government acknowledged the region's historical backwardness, "which five years of government have been unable to erase," but warned that social demands cannot justifiably be used as a pretext for disturbing law and order and defying authority (*La Jornada*, January 2).

For its part, the Chiapas state government issued a communiqué calling for dialogue and prudence. It stated that "there are approximately 200 Indian insurgents and the problem is restricted to four municipalities," while the rest of the state was reported to be calm. The communiqué asked security forces to "convince the Indians to change their attitude and use legal channels to express their needs" (*La Jornada*, January 2).

That same night, the government of Chiapas issued declarations that the rebels were supported by Catholic

The papal bull "Sublimis Deus"

The Dominicans, champions in defense of the Indians, fought bitterly against the infamy (that held the Indians to be irrational), and when Fray Julián Garcés was Bishop of Tlaxcala, in accordance with Fray Domingo de Betanzos, who was the provincial of Saint Dominic in New Spain, Fray Domingo de Minaya was sent to Rome bearing letters and testimony for His Holiness Pope Paul III, relating to the Indians' absolute rationality and the need for a final pontifical definition which would once and for all put an end to this degrading calumny. It cannot be said for whom this invention was most shameful: for those falsely accused of a supposed incapacity, or for those who knowingly invented this lie for their own benefit.

The Franciscans, for their part, were no less forceful in their defense of the Indians' rationality. Fray Martín de Valencia, Fray Jacobo de Tastera, Fray Cristóbal de Zamora and others wrote to the Emperor in this regard, from Huejocinco in New Spain, on May 7, 1533.

Fray Domingo de Minaya's efforts and the detailed information he presented to the Holy See led to the promulgation of Pope Paul III's bull "Sublimis Deus," on June 2, 1537. Among other things it stated: "It is necessary to confess that man is of such condition and nature that he can receive the very faith of Christ and that whomsoever is of human nature is apt to receive the very same faith. *Euntes, docete omnes gentes*" (Teach to all nations).

The Sublimis Deus bull came to constitute the affirmation of the rationality of some of the Spanish Crown's vassals, whose human dignity no responsible person had put in doubt. On the contrary, this had always been the subject of particular attention in all the Royal Edicts and Ordinances addressed, from the discovery [of the Americas] onwards, to the justices, prelates and captains of the Indies by the monarchs of Spain, who repeatedly recommended the Indians' conversion and attraction to civilized life, stressing the responsibility of all, both kings and vassals, for the salvation of their souls.

This is apart from the fact that Columbus, upon setting foot on Guanahaní lands, was mindful of the importance and grandeur of a future Spanish action which would have as its principal task the conversion of so many people to Christianity.

All this implicitly involved the recognition of the Indians' rationality, until a few malicious and selfish people invented the argument that they were irrational, in order to evade complying with a number of laws that were favorable to the Indians, the disobedience of which would otherwise have earned them the corresponding punishment. This argument gave first Montesinos and later Las Casas ample motive for their censures and campaigns.

The real significance of the Sublimis Deus bull was that it definitively put an end to the question, once the Pontiff, *ex cathedra*, cut short this lowly calumny through the weight of his authority and implacable declaration.

A. Ballesteros, *Historia de América*, Tomo XVI, pp. 264-265.

Nevertheless, signs declaring "we serve people and Indians" still hang outside some barbershops in Chiapas.

The editors.

"liberation theology" priests, "who gave them the use of their radio communications system in the diocese of San Cristóbal."

Members of the Catholic clergy remarked that the uprising was a warning to the Mexican government that extreme poverty leads to violence. The bishops of Tapachula and Tuxtla Gutiérrez offered to act as mediators. The diocese and the Fray Bartolomé de

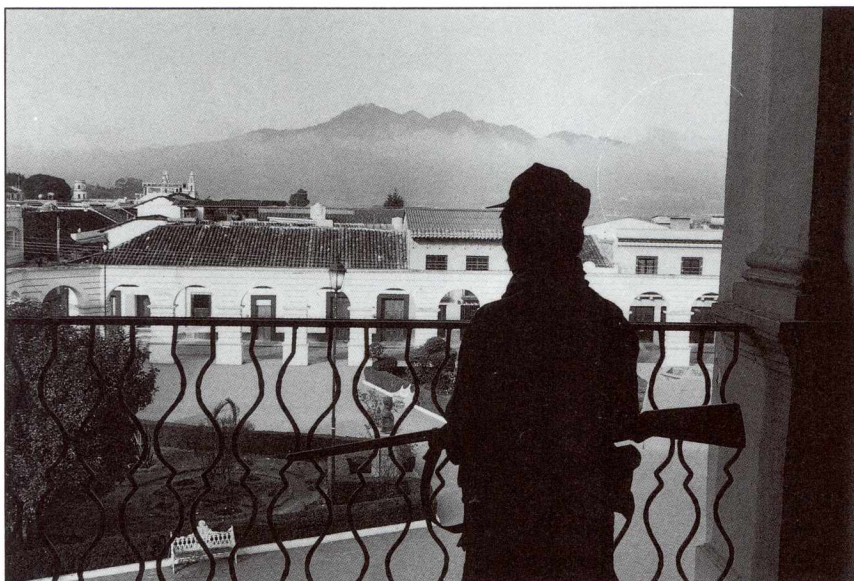
las Casas Human Rights Center in San Cristóbal denied any connection with the uprising, while confirming their total commitment to the defense of Indians' rights through peaceful means.

Meanwhile, the press reported army activity in the 23rd Military Zone (located a few kilometers outside San Cristóbal), Tuxtla Gutiérrez and the outskirts of the occupied zones, although there was no fighting.

The Interior and Defense ministers travelled to Chiapas.

On January 2, the Zapatistas left San Cristóbal, and attacked the military barracks located 10 miles outside San Cristóbal in the village of Rancho Nuevo. The army reported five dead and six wounded among its ranks, while the bodies of 24 Zapatistas were found in the combat zone. Fighting also took place in the

Antonio Turok / Imagenlatina



Zapatista standing guard at San Cristóbal de las Casas town hall.

Ocosingo area, leaving one soldier dead and several wounded.

Fighting between the army and the guerrillas continued for several days thereafter. The press reported bloody clashes in Ocosingo, where Zapatistas' bodies were left lying in the main square for several days. The army bombarded the mountainous areas near San Cristóbal, and there was fighting near army roadblocks and along the highways, as well as in Altamirano, Chiapa de Corzo, Chanal and other towns.

Attacks were reported on vehicles and reporters passing through combat zones. The exact number of victims was unknown, although the Red Cross estimated approximately 120 deaths throughout the area, mostly EZLN members, with 8 casualties among the civilian population (*La Jornada*, January 2-4; *Reforma*, January 17).

On January 3, President Salinas mentioned the events in Chiapas for the first time. While admitting the existence of deficiencies in the area, he condemned acts of violence, since "they delay solutions to social needs." Salinas described the situation as delicate and spoke of respecting human rights at all times. The Zapatistas kidnapped retired army

general Absalón Castellanos Domínguez, a former governor of Chiapas, accusing him of seizing land, abusing power and violating Indians' and peasants' human rights during his term in office.

In a joint communiqué, the ministries of the Interior, National Defence and Social Development, together with the Attorney General's Office, declared that the situation was gradually returning to normal. At the same time, they denied the Indian and peasant origins of the

movement's leadership, saying it consisted of well-educated Mexican and foreign professional experts in violence and terrorism. In their opinion, Indians were "recruited under pressure by the leaders of these groups or by taking advantage of their historical demands."

However, the ministries admitted that since mid-1993, they had been aware of the existence of illegal activities by small groups in the area: trafficking in arms and military equipment, as well as the existence of training centers, but that "the particular circumstances of the region's age-old backwardness made it necessary to act with special prudence and care" (*El Financiero*, January 4; *La Jornada*, January 6).

Despite reports of a return to normality, the conflict spread over a wide area. Hourly declarations were issued on the events. Governors, secretaries of state and businessmen condemned the rebellion, while trade unionists, intellectuals, grass-roots and Indian organizations and political parties regretted the causes leading to the uprising while declaring themselves against armed struggle. The conflict affected the start of the presidential candidates' campaigns for the August elections.



Mexican army troops leaving Tuxtla Gutiérrez for Chiapas' Los Altos region.

Marco Antonio Cruz / Imagenlatina

Still, little was known about the main protagonist, the EZLN. Following its initial declarations during the occupation of San Cristóbal, it remained silent during this first stage of the fighting.

What made front-page news in magazines and newspapers five days after the onset of fighting was the discovery of five corpses of alleged Zapatistas in the market at Ocosingo. Reporters declared the bodies had been found with their hands behind them, as though the men had been tied up; and that they had been given the coup de grâce. The Mexican army was accused of violating human rights, while government sources insisted that if abuses by soldiers were proven, those responsible⁴ would be punished according to the law (*La Jornada*, January 5).

President Salinas ordered the Minister of Social Development,⁵ Carlos Rojas, to visit the scene of events, to set up an Office for Social Reconciliation and attempt to contact the rebels through the various

⁴ Both video images and photographs of the bodies provoked worldwide comments on the abuses allegedly committed by members of the Mexican armed forces. This was the start of a series of declarations that created unease among the armed forces. Since then, there have been numerous declarations by both civilians and the military in defense of the army's actions. In a speech delivered on February 10 to President Salinas during the commemoration of the March of Loyalty, the Minister of Defense, Antonio Riviello Bazán, described the army's intervention in Chiapas as legitimate, legal and necessary. Criticizing those who made apologies for the rebels, he urged his listeners not to forget that the army did not start the violence and was in fact attacked. Photographs of dead Zapatistas clinging to wooden rifles were used by government and military sources to condemn the Zapatista leaders for sending unarmed Indians to fight. According to these sources, this corroborated the version that Indians were used as cannon fodder by non-Indian Zapatista leaders themselves equipped with modern weapons.

⁵ This office is responsible for the National Solidarity Program (Pronasol), a key project in the Salinas government's social policy.



Antonio Turok / Imageniatina.

The Indians of Chiapas have found a great spokesman in subcomandante Marcos.

grass-roots, peasant and Indian organizations in Chiapas. The minister was accompanied by the governor of Chiapas, Elmar Setzer, and other government officials.

To the media's surprise, a press room was set up in the city of San Cristóbal by order of the Ministry of the Interior and official instructions issued to give total access to the national and foreign press. Some foreign newspapers expressed sympathy for the Zapatistas, while U.S. State Department spokesman Mike Curry supported the Mexican government and praised efforts to prevent further bloodshed (*La Jornada*, January 5).

During a press conference, the bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Samuel Ruiz, reported that there had been civilian casualties and denounced the detentions and executions that had occurred. He also requested the presence of national and international human rights organizations to protect the population from possible abuses. The bishop stated he had received no reply from the rebels regarding his mediation initiative, and called for a truce (*La Jornada*, January 5).

An official communiqué from the Ministry of the Interior reported the recovery of towns occupied by the rebels and provided a partial physical description of *subcomandante* Marcos. He was described as a fair-skinned man with a prominent nose and green eyes, fluent in four languages.⁶

Independent peasant organizations in Chiapas denounced the arbitrary detention of their leaders and expressed fear of becoming involved in the conflict (*La Jornada*, January 6).

While the EZLN withdrew to positions in the jungle, army reports spoke of 61 casualties and 34 detainees among the Zapatistas, although they admitted that these figures could not be accurate, since "the transgressors usually pick up

⁶ Marcos' partial physical description led to great speculation and gave weight to the official version that the EZLN was in fact a non-Indian movement led by foreigners or whites. It also provoked ironic comments on the difficulty of capturing a man whose description tallied with that of many government officials and members of Mexico's financial circles. As the conflict progressed, Marcos became a sort of national folk hero.

their wounded and the bodies of their combatants." The Church said it knew of a far higher number of deaths than the official count (*La Jornada*, January 6).

On the morning of January 5, the federal government announced its

willingness to engage in dialogue to avoid further loss of life, on condition of what amounted to a total surrender: suspension of hostilities and attacks; the laying down and surrender of arms, including 1,100 lbs. of dynamite stolen from Pemex (national oil

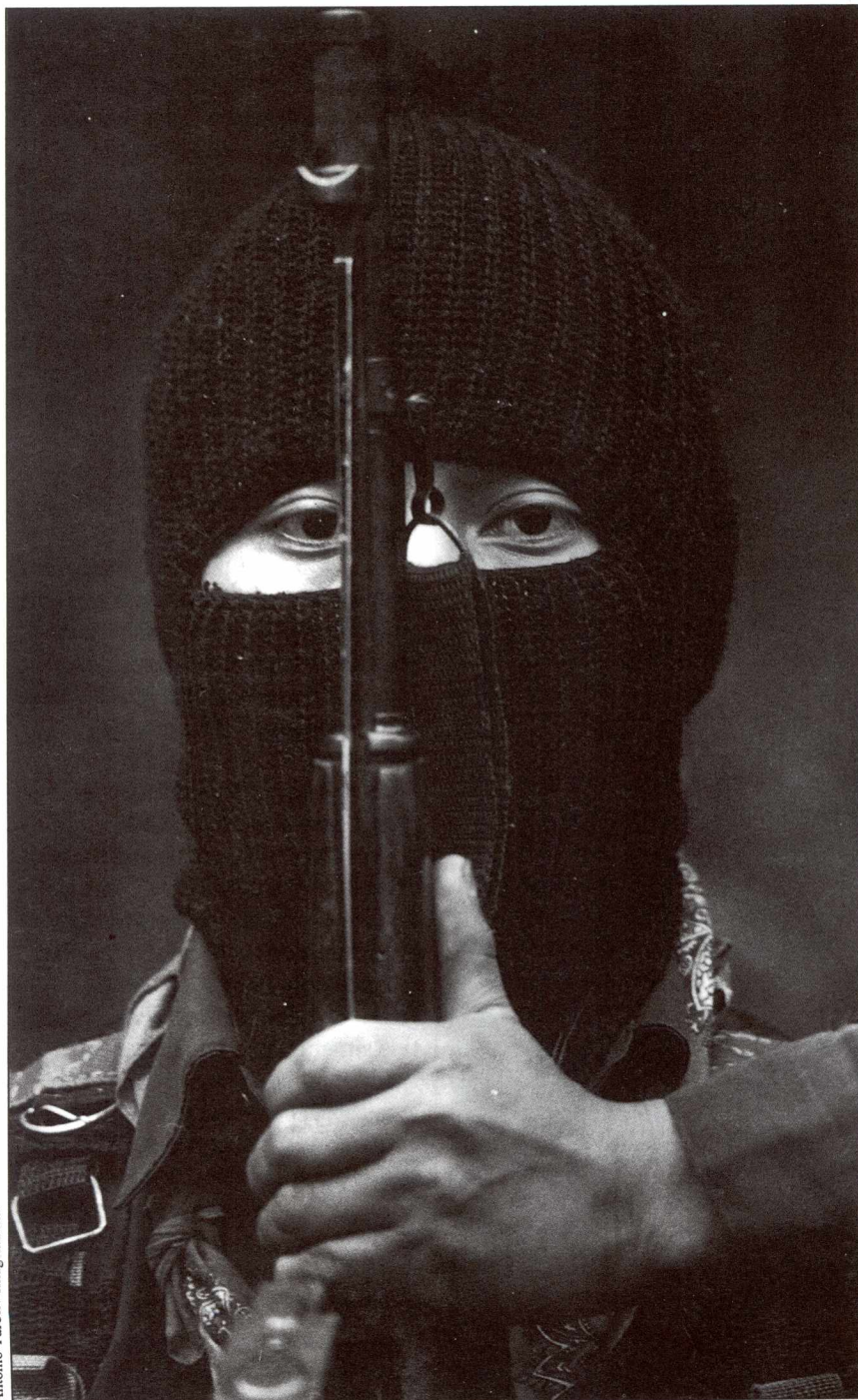
company) facilities on December 31, 1993; the return of hostages and the identification of spokesmen and leaders of the armed groups. For Bishop Samuel Ruiz, these demands "would seem unacceptable, although they are a sign of government interest in a negotiated settlement" (*La Jornada*, January 6).

The next day the president repeated his conditions in a message to the nation, declaring that "for those living in poverty who took part as a result of deception, pressure or even through desperation, and who end their violent, illegal behavior, we shall seek benevolent treatment and still consider a pardon."

The president reiterated the official interpretation of events: "...it is necessary to distinguish clearly between two situations: armed aggression by a violent group on the one hand, and an entirely different one derived from the region's poverty and shortfalls on the other. This is not an Indian uprising, but rather the action of a violent armed group fighting against communities, public peace and government institutions, in other words, against what we Mexicans have taken generations to build"⁷ (*El Financiero*, January 7).

On the morning of January 7, a car bomb exploded at a shopping center in Mexico City; five people were said to have been wounded. Two days later, explosions were reported in four Mexican states, together with several bomb threats in other shopping centers and public offices in the capital. Concern that the conflict would spread

⁷ This interpretation of events has remained substantially unchanged among government officials, the military and government spokesmen. The president himself reaffirmed his conviction regarding the origins of the uprising in a January 27 speech to cabinet members, legislators, members of the assembly and governors, as well as during at the World Economic Forum, which he attended during a quick trip to Switzerland on January 29.



Antonio Turok / Imagenlatina

The ski mask used by the EZLN has become a symbol.

What are they going to forgive us for?

Until today, January 18, 1994, we have only had news of the formalization of the "pardon" that the federal government is offering our forces. What do we have to ask forgiveness for? What are they going to pardon us for? For not dying of hunger? Not suffering poverty in silence? Not humbly accepting the enormous historical burden of contempt and neglect? Taking up arms when all other paths were closed? Not obeying the Chiapas penal code, the most absurd and repressive code within memory? For showing the rest of the country and the whole world that human dignity still exists, among the country's poorest inhabitants? For having prepared ourselves well and conscientiously before we started? For using guns in war, instead of bows and arrows? Learning to fight before we actually started fighting? Being all Mexican? Being nearly all Indian? Encouraging the Mexican people to fight, any way they can, for what belongs to them? Fighting for freedom, democracy and justice? Not following the pattern of previous guerrilla wars? Not giving up? Not selling out? Not betraying each other?

Who should ask for forgiveness and who should grant it?

Those who for years sat at a well-served table until they were satiated, while we sat with death, which became so familiar and so much a part of us that it eventually no longer frightened us? Those who filled their pockets and souls with declarations and promises? The dead, our dead, so mortally dead from "natural" causes, such as measles, whooping cough, dengue, cholera, typhoid, mononucleosis, tetanus, pneumonia, malaria and other gastrointestinal and lung ailments? Our dead, so overwhelmingly dead, so democratically dead of shame because no one did anything since all the dead, our dead, just went, with no one to count them nor finally say, "That's enough!" and no one to ask those who always die, our dead, to come back to die once more, but this time in order to live? Those who denied the right and gift of our people to rule and govern themselves? Those who denied us respect for our customs, our color and our language? Those who treat us like foreigners in our own land, asking us to show our papers and obey a law whose existence and fairness we are unaware of? Those who tortured and imprisoned us, murdered and eliminated all traces of us for the serious "crime" of wanting a piece of land, not a large piece or a small piece, just one we could make something from to fill our stomachs?

Who should ask for forgiveness and who should grant it?

The President of the Republic? Secretaries of State? Senators? Deputies? Governors? Municipal presidents? Policemen? The federal army? The owners of banks, industry, business and land? Political parties? Intellectuals? *Galio* and *Nexos* magazines? The mass media? Students? Teachers? Neighborhood residents? Workers? Peasants? Indians? Those who died a meaningless death?

Who should ask for forgiveness and who should grant it?

Subcomandante Marcos

to other states increased. The EZLN denied any connection with the bombings. The press produced isolated reports on army mobilization in areas where guerrilla movements had broken out in previous decades, such as the mountains of Guerrero, Oaxaca, Veracruz and Hidalgo.

In his third report, the Interior Minister provided extensive information on the EZLN's activities, cadres and weapons. The minister maintained his version that the Zapatistas had received support from ideologues and clergymen and used threats and pressure to recruit Indians.

The minister added that the EZLN had 15 training centers in the state of Chiapas; training cadres made up of Mexicans and foreigners, linked to disbanded guerrilla groups from the 1970s; a radio communications network and various types of modern weapons, which, he stressed, are only used by the elite.

Finally, he regretted the blocking of "justified preventive measures that would have permitted more effective action by the government against the eventual creation of this clandestine, extremist group" (*La Jornada*, January 8).

According to a confidential report drawn up by the state government of Chiapas, there are 42 "high-risk" communities in the state, where conditions were ripe for an armed uprising. The report insisted that activists from social and religious organizations contributed to this situation and recommended special vigilance in 13 zones. It suggested reorienting government action towards Los Altos, the jungle and areas along the Guatemalan border (*La Jornada*, January 8).

A solution to the conflict still seemed very distant, and according to government sources from Chiapas, measures to cope with a long, drawn-out war were predicted.

However, the next day, the president created a Special

Commission for Chiapas, made up of the Chiapas writer Eraclio Zepeda, anthropologist Andrés Fábregas Puig and the senator for Chiapas, Eduardo Robledo (a member of the PRI). Their mission would be to “establish a dialogue with the different social sectors of Chiapas to increase channels for civic participation, help reestablish peaceful coexistence and normality in social life and assist the Office for Social Reconciliation” set up four days earlier.

This commission, the second to be sent to the area, would have autonomy in evaluating situations and problems, as well as in proposing solutions. Two days later, by nominating Manuel Camacho Solís as the Commissioner for Peace and Reconciliation, President Salinas would create a third authority which would overshadow the previous ones and create confusion as to who was responsible for what.⁸

Through the Mexican Primate, Archbishop Ernesto Corripio Ahumada, the Church responded to the Ministry of the Interior’s report by demanding proof of the accusations of complicity by the clergy.

Meanwhile, despite their brand-new press room in San Cristóbal, members of the press, trapped in the city, were unable to provide much news; access to combat zones had been sealed off by the army. Also blocked was a peace caravan organized by representatives of non-governmental organizations to force a cease-fire. The cordon sanitaire also affected members of the

⁸ On January 19, yet another commission was set up, the National Commission for Integral Development and Social Justice for Indian Peoples, as a non-governmental organization for providing opinions, debate and recommendations. Its aim was to orient federal public administration policies to combat the backlog of neglect of Indian peoples, under the direction of Beatriz Paredes, ex-governor of Tlaxcala, at that time Ambassador to Cuba.

The root of the problem

Now the problem will become the responsibility in particular of the Secretary of Agrarian Reform, for the simple reason that the officials of that Secretariat always rejected the Indians’ petitions while protecting the *caciques* [rural bosses] and politicians.

It will not be easy to take away the lands they have stolen. Former Chiapas governor Patricio González himself [until recently Secretary of the Interior] stated in an interview: “Bishop Samuel Ruiz [of San Cristóbal de las Casas] says that the Indians’ lands were stolen and should be given back to them. I would ask the bishop, if this happens, then where will *mestizos* like he and I live.”

And that really is how it was. The governor confessed that he lived on stolen lands and —like the *caciques* and Absalón [Castellanos, ex-governor of Chiapas held hostage by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation]— could not live without the lands that had been stolen from the Indians. The Secretariat must now do the opposite of what it did for so many years and give the Indians back their lands, without which they cannot live. This is what the settlers of Chiapas were told by their first bishop, Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, at the beginning of the 16th century.

The multimillion-peso aid provided by Pronasol (the National Solidarity Program) was of little help, because the *caciques*’ lands were not touched and there was no change in the monopoly of meat, coffee, tobacco, of the coconut growers, banana plantations and commerce.

The revolutionary problem will not be resolved soon. It affects big interests, and only through education and the intervention of honorable officials will the Indians learn how to manage the problems of markets, economics, veterinary science and medicine, in order to enjoy their own riches.

Everybody is talking about Chiapas now, but they are unaware of the magnitude of the problem.

Fernando Benítez

Mexico’s Ambassador in Santo Domingo

Author of *Los indios de México*
(The Indians of Mexico).
La Jornada, February 2, 1994.

National Human Rights Commission. Bishop Samuel Ruiz remarked that limiting press coverage was of little benefit to the country, since “it gives the impression that something is being hidden” (*La Jornada*, January 10).

It was publicly revealed that since January 2, the Minister of Defense had been personally in charge of military operations in the area. The military blockade affected 400,000 inhabitants

of 15 municipalities that were kept isolated, with insufficient food supplies. The army was said to have seized most of the existing supplies for its men.

On January 10, the president announced a series of political measures which were a “recognition of the things that didn’t work.” Interior Minister Patrocinio González, repeatedly accused of being

Chiapas: long-standing problems

Of all Mexico's states, Chiapas is the one with the highest level of marginalization, in other words shortfalls and restrictions on the well-being of its people.

In these regions, nature is generous only in her beauty. In the Los Altos area [of Chiapas] the land is poor and tired; used for many centuries, it has turned miserly; it is degraded and eroded. In the jungle and along the border, rain and vegetation are exuberant but not lavish; the soil is shallow and deteriorates rapidly when deprived of protective vegetation.

Fine woods were taken in the most rapacious, negligent and irresponsible fashion; the jungle has been jeopardized by pillage and can perish if we do not seriously protect it. We should not forget that there is oil, and alternatives for development are not lacking. What is required is persistence, work, resources, imagination, audacity, and once again persistence.

There are very few roads in this zone, and most are bad: precarious openings always threatened by rain and vegetation. Even those roads were expensive to build, and are even more expensive to maintain. Few goods are carried on them, and this has delayed the gigantic investment required for transportation in these regions. Trips—whether to go to market, to a service or carry out some official business—are measured in days. Physical isolation is a fact which expresses itself as social distance.

Settlement continues to abide by an old pattern, colonial in its conception and implementation. Towns, where wealth, services and power are concentrated, inhabited by "people of reason"—as *criollos* [term used in colonial times to describe people of Spanish ancestry born in the colonies] and *mestizos* [people of

mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry] were called until only recently—surrounded by a constellation of small and dispersed communities where the indigenous peasants live. Many services are insufficient or entirely absent in these communities: education, electricity, potable water, medical services, markets—in short, the services common in other places. Once again it proved to be too expensive to provide services for so few people, who were so distant and dispersed.

The pattern of reproduction among the poor—many children to better face needs and restrictions—remained in place despite the fact that mortality rates, while still unacceptably high, have fallen over the past fifty years. Population growth gave rise to migrations, pressure on the land and resources, agrarian conflicts and many other problems, but the pattern of concentration and dispersion was not broken. On the contrary, it expanded. This is the logic people learn to live with, and they project it as their own future; this, among other reasons, is why it has lasted so long.

The majority of the population in the rural communities, and by now many city dwellers as well, are Indians; above all Tzeltals, Tzotzils and Tojolabals. There are those who see this as a problem and also a potential source of rebellion. This is incorrect. It is, rather, a difference which adds dimensions to life and living together. The problem is rooted in the old inequality which continues to persist, which makes the Indian poor by origin and—if we do not change things—by destiny.

There is prejudice and discrimination, without a doubt, although it seems to me they have become less virulent and intense in recent years. There is exclusion and mistreatment. In consequence there

responsible for the armed uprising,⁹ was relieved of his duties and replaced by Jorge Carpizo MacGregor, the then Attorney General and former

⁹ Before being named Minister of the Interior in January 1993, González Garrido—described as a hard-line politician—was governor of Chiapas. His governorship was criticized due to the measures he adopted to eliminate social movements in the region. According to *Proceso* magazine (February 14), the penal code enforced during his administration was "the most repressive in the history of Chiapas. Denouncing government

chairman of the National Human Rights Commission. Carpizo's former position as Attorney General was filled by Diego Valadés Ríos.

officials was punished as libel or slander. Crimes such as rebellion, conspiracy or sedition were included and the free expression of ideas was forbidden. Any meeting could be considered illegal. The code's Forestry Ban was famous because Indians were imprisoned for simply cutting a tree into logs or possessing an axe." When González Garrido was designated Interior Minister, Elmar Setzer was made interim governor.

Another decision that caused surprise in political circles was the so-called rehabilitation of Manuel Camacho Solís,¹⁰ named

¹⁰ A close friend of President Salinas, he was Luis Donaldo Colosio's main rival in the bid for the PRI candidacy for the August 1994 presidential elections. The day Colosio's nomination was made public, Camacho was the only one who failed to congratulate him, breaking an established custom among PRI "pre-candidates" of being the first to congratulate the "winner." This was interpreted among political circles as a sign

are grievances, grudges and also expressions of intolerance, but I think these phenomena are not only “supplementary” but diminishing. To say it another way: the ethnic conflict provides adjectives that describe social inequality, but it does not furnish the definition for mutual tolerance. We are not in Bosnia. Let us reject the forces and fundamentalisms which would seek to lead us to that extreme.

These are the conditions in which *caciquismo* [the rule of local bosses, known as *caciques*] manifests itself: the concentration of political and economic power in one single person, known to all by his first and last name. At times, in extreme cases, this personal power is complemented with private, independent armed forces. The *cacique* is a nodal point of networks of personal relationships which supplement or include civic and institutional relations.

The *cacique* is the obligatory interlocutor with the outside world for everything that concerns his dominion, his bailiwick. He imparts justice and defines economics in accordance with his own particular interests, almost always to the detriment of the people and natural resources. He slows down and combats the advance of institutions, works and services, of all expressions of modernity, which erode the base of his archaic, unipersonal power.

This classic type of *cacique* is present in the memory of the Chiapanecans (the people of Chiapas), who know them by name. *Caciquismo* persists, although it has been deprived of many of its previous characteristics and is clearly in retreat. Its longevity is also the result of its links with other shortfalls and forms of backwardness, as well as the networks of personal relations which are established

in this context, including *compadrazgo* [the relation of being *compadres*; literally a form of ritual kinship but more broadly buddies, partners, allies] and kinship.

The historical lag can —when one observes only those processes that fall within its boundaries— seem almost timeless. Although they were written thirty years ago, the works of Rosario Castellanos seem fresh today. The world described in those works had its own forms of violence. The most frequent form was individualized, with precise victims, identified by their own names, and which was carried out —rarely to be sure— in the forms of assassinations and ambushes. More wounding than violence itself was the impunity and injustice which accompanied it. Much less frequent were the communal riot, the spontaneous revolt with precise and detailed causes and concrete demands.

More or less every century there was an Indian rebellion, a rising which grouped all grievances around a millenarist vision, a divine message to change all existence from the roots on up. Once again one saw the spontaneous explosion, the precariousness of organization after the riots, the appearance of the communities' own religious leaders, the articulation of clear demands for the region —which were incomprehensible to outsiders— and the repudiation of additional wrongs, of the drops that made the cup run over.

Arturo Warman
Advisor to the National Human
Rights Commission and Attorney
General for Agrarian Affairs.
La Jornada, January 16, 1994
(excerpts).

Commissioner for Peace and Reconciliation and charged with creating a framework, agenda and procedure for setting up negotiations

of distancing between the former pre-candidate and the president. At a press conference the next day, Camacho announced his resignation as Mayor of Mexico City and his acceptance of the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs. He also dispelled rumors that he might resign from the PRI to run for president as the candidate of another party, and declared he would remain in public service under the

in Chiapas. The president declared that Camacho would receive no salary for performing this function, nor would he be entitled to create any new

president's orders. His designation as peace envoy was made public the same day that Colosio began his presidential campaign, meaning that the latter received very little press coverage. In the days that followed there were rumors that Camacho might still be nominated presidential candidate, either replacing Colosio or as candidate of an opposition party. However, President Salinas ended these speculations when he “unveiled”

government structure. Camacho is reputed to have been given the post as a result of his recognized skill as a negotiator. Indeed, some political analysts cite him as one of the cabinet ministers who, at the outset of the hostilities, suggested the path of political negotiation, as opposed to the

Colosio again at a meeting with PRI members. (For more information on the *destape* [unveiling] see: “How Presidential Succession Works in Mexico,” *Voices of Mexico*, No. 26, pp. 75-81.)

"hard line" supported by Patrocinio González and presidential advisor José Córdoba Montoya, who argued for the use of armed force.

These nominations were welcomed by Mexican society.¹¹ Political analysts interpreted the changes as a sign of the Mexican government's willingness to solve the conflict by negotiation.

That same day, the EZLN delivered a communiqué to the mass media.¹² Dated January 6, 1994, it rejected the terms of the first proposal formulated by the government (issued on January 4). It proposed the recognition of its troops as a belligerent force, a bilateral cease-fire, the withdrawal of federal troops, the suspension of bombardments of rural populations and the creation of an international mediation commission.

The communiqué also reported lower numbers of casualties among EZLN troops than those given by the Ministry of Defense. It accused the army of executing Zapatista fighters in cold blood and reported having freed over a hundred hostages. Finally, it

denied the existence of foreign elements among its troops and rejected any link with religious institutions of any creed.

Military activity was on the decline, with reports of only a few isolated attacks. Hostages freed by the EZLN declared that the kidnapped general, Absalón Castellanos, still

new pesos (approximately 20 million dollars) as a result of the armed uprising.

They also asked the federal government to "keep the army in the zone of conflict and get rid of all the foreigners in the region, including Catholic priests...since they have been partially responsible for the

“ If my pen had the gift of tears, I would write a book about the Indians, to make humanity weep ”

Juan Montalvo

in the Zapatistas' hands, was in perfect health.

During his first public appearance in Mexico City as peace envoy, Manuel Camacho began by acknowledging the Zapatistas' existence. "This is not the government's position, but for me the existence of the Zapatista National Liberation Army is a fact. If we want a solution to the conflict, we will have to talk to them" (*La Jornada*, January 12). This contrasted with the way the EZLN had been referred to by the military until then.¹³

A delegation of merchants, members of the service sector, industrialists and cattle ranchers from Chiapas travelled to Mexico City to give the Minister of Finance and Public Credit, Pedro Aspe Armella, suggestions aimed at reactivating Chiapas' economy which they stated had experienced losses of 60 million

differences there, given that they are unfamiliar with the local population's problems" (*La Jornada*, January 12).

On January 12, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, in his position as President of the Republic and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, announced his decision to "suspend all attacks in the state of Chiapas" as a first step towards "saving lives and taking the path towards reconciliation." The army would only respond if attacked and to defend the civilian population. The president repeated his offer of a pardon for those who, because of coercion or desperation, had taken part in the uprising.

That same day, Camacho Solís arrived in San Cristóbal wearing a black ribbon on his arm, "for all those who have died." Accompanied by Bishop Samuel Ruiz and members of his logistics group, Camacho Solís declared that the peace process would take some time and exonerated the bishop from blame for the conflict, describing him as a "friend of peace." This was greeted with approval both nationally and internationally.

Thus, the outcome of the armed confrontation between the Mexican army and the EZLN was unlike that of other guerrilla

¹¹ Carpizo and Valadés are government officials with considerable moral authority and credibility among the citizenry. Both are seen as skilled professionals with a sense of vocation and extensive knowledge of Mexican law. In addition, one possible effect of Carpizo's nomination is that the Ministry of the Interior might be called upon to act as impartial judge of the 1994 presidential elections, since its director has declared he has no affiliation with any political party or trend.

¹² This was the beginning of the EZLN's policy of communicating with civil society. Since then, the EZLN has fired off more communiqués than bullets, giving information on its positions, proposals and analysis of the situation through the mass media that they themselves chose: the national newspapers *La Jornada* and *El Financiero*, the local San Cristóbal gazette *El Tiempo* and the weekly magazine *Proceso*. As negotiations proceeded, the Zapatistas agreed to give interviews to the press and TV, both foreign and national. This has led to the presence of a third army in Chiapas: journalists.

¹³ It is worth mentioning that official communiqués from the Ministry of Defense do not refer to the rebels as Zapatistas or members of the EZLN, but as a "group of transgressors of the law." Some radio and TV reporters have been given orders not to include the EZLN's name in their articles, as a result of which they refer to them as an "armed group," "transgressors of the law" and "criminals."

Religion and expulsions

Representatives of the progressive Catholic Church, mainly the Bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Samuel Ruiz, and his group of priests and catechists, have been repeatedly accused of stirring up unrest among the Indian population, as a result of their work in defense of the Indians' rights, based on the principles of "liberation theology." With over thirty years in the area, Samuel Ruiz has gained the affection and admiration of hundreds of Indians, but also the enmity and antagonism of cattle ranchers, local rulers and government officials who regard him as an agitator of Indians. The bishop acknowledges that he has worked to make the Indians aware of the need to defend their rights and fight to improve their living conditions through their own organizations, as well as to recover their dignity and appreciation of their own customs and cultures, although he states that taking up arms is not the best way to fight. In his pastoral letter of August 6, 1993 (a copy of which was personally delivered to Pope John Paul II during his last visit to Mexico in September) Samuel Ruiz denounced the state of dependency, marginalization and oppression in which the Indians are held (*Proceso*, January 24, 1994).

The bishop's position led to attempts by the papal representative in Mexico, Girolamo Prigione, to obtain his removal. The Indians, with the support of grass-roots organizations both in Mexico and abroad, demanded he should stay. This helped to polarize social groups in the state.

At the same time, the heightened presence of other religious groups has served as a pretext for a complex problem in the state: expulsions. The best example of this is the Chamula community, located a few miles from San Cristóbal, where, under the pretext that the "new religions" contradict Catholic customs, respecting neither patriotic symbols nor civil authority, thousands of inhabitants have been expelled from their lands and prevented from returning. These expulsions have prompted all kinds of violence, theft, pillage, rape, imprisonment and even the burning of houses and belongings.

"For more than twenty years, expellees have complained to governors and courts about these outrages, whose main aim is to eliminate resistance to the *caciques* [local political bosses], yet so far they have never obtained a satisfactory response.... The *caciques* in San Juan Chamula are highly aware politically and know that during electoral periods they can do as they please.... In 1987 and 1988, election years at the state and national levels, one expulsion followed another.... In the courts, lawsuits against the expellers had no effect, because the *caciques* in Chamula threatened not to vote for the PRI [in 1988], refusing to accept their 'voting slips' if lawsuits against them continued. The government gave in and once again the *caciques* 'won the war'.... It is estimated that 20,000 Indians have been expelled and scattered throughout a dozen municipalities in the state.... The local deputy from San Cristóbal, Francisco Zepeda, asked the expellees to 'forgive their brothers who expelled them, because they are all God's children,' offering them land on a small farm outside San Juan Chamula as a solution to the conflict" (Gaspar Morquecho in *La Jornada*, February 7, 10, 12 and 13, 1994).

movements in both Mexico and Central America. In a period of just twelve days, the Mexican government ordered a ceasefire in order to begin negotiations.

The negotiation process

On January 16, the Clandestine Indian Revolutionary Committee of the EZLN issued a communiqué (dated January 12) announcing its decision to accept the ceasefire. Despite the fact that the EZLN thought that the demands expressed in its January 6

communiqué had not been fully met, it saw the president's measures as a beginning. The EZLN then ordered its troops to suspend all attacks, while maintaining their positions. It also stressed that it would not lay down its arms or surrender.

From then on, although some fighting was reported,¹⁴ the conflict moved into the negotiating phase.

¹⁴ On January 14, *La Jornada* reported some fighting in the jungle. In a communiqué dated January 13, the Zapatistas also denounced violations of the ceasefire by army troops.

In the days following the armed conflict, before the first meeting between the Zapatistas and the Peace Commissioner was arranged, several events occurred that significantly affected the peace talks. They include the following:

- President Salinas submitted an amnesty bill to Congress on January 16. This was approved by the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate in an extraordinary session on January 21. The law benefits "all those against whom penal

Marco Antonio Cruz / Imagenlatina.



Two jaguars on the prowl.

action has or may be taken in the federal courts, because of crimes committed as a result of the violence that occurred in several municipalities of the state of Chiapas” between January 1 and 3 p.m. on January 20, and authorizes the executive to set up a commission to coordinate the enforcement of this law.¹⁵

¹⁵ Thus on January 22, the president set up yet another commission, the Commission for Amnesty and Reconciliation in Chiapas, made up of the Ministries of the Interior and Social Development, the Attorney General, the Director of the Agrarian Attorney General’s office, and the directors of the National Institute for Indian Affairs and the National Commission for Integral Development and Social Justice for Indigenous Peoples.

Its beneficiaries cannot be arrested or tried for acts covered under this law. In a communiqué sent to the press on January 20, the EZLN rejected the amnesty as premature and also because the political and social causes that led to the conflict still prevailed. *Subcomandante* Marcos sent a letter to various mass media questioning the pardon offered to

the EZLN (see inset)¹⁶ (*La Jornada*, January 21).

- The EZLN acknowledged Camacho Solís as the “real interlocutor” in the negotiations and Samuel Ruiz as mediator.
- The interim governor of Chiapas, Elmar Setzer Marseille, regarded as a continuer of Patrocinio González Garrido’s policies, resigned and was replaced by another PRI member, Javier López Moreno (January 18).
- President Salinas made a lightning visit to Tuxtla Gutiérrez, capital of the state of Chiapas, on January 25, meeting with 42 leaders and representatives of 280 peasant and Indian organizations from the state. The meeting was unusual because of the free, uncensored way in which problems were discussed. Referring to the Chiapas penal code currently in force, a peasant told the president: “Under the present laws, all of us in Chiapas are potential criminals.”¹⁷
- The government announced an immediate injection of funds into Chiapas, through the INI (National

¹⁶ The amnesty was described as “atypical” by opposition members in the Chamber of Deputies, because it was decided before the peace negotiation process, which according to them made it equivalent to asking for surrender (*Proceso*, January 24).

¹⁷ A week after this meeting, Javier López Moreno, recently designated interim governor, submitted a set of bills to the local congress to reform the system of administering justice and create a more democratic environment in the state. The most important bills involved the abolition of the penal code and the prevention and punishment of torture.

“ In our nation there will always be battles for social justice, so long as the memory and example of Emiliano Zapata remain in Mexicans’ hearts ”

Carlos Salinas de Gortari
Fifth State of the Union Address.

Institute for Indian Affairs), Pronasol (National Solidarity Program), IMSS (Mexican Social Security Institute) and other federal organizations.

- General Absalón Castellanos was freed (February 16). In the presence of mediator Samuel Ruiz, Peace Commissioner Manuel Camacho and more than three hundred journalists, the Zapatistas formalized Castellanos' release through the International Red Cross, which certified the latter's good state of health. Before being released, Castellanos listened to a political trial in which he was accused of committing grave abuses during his period as governor, such as seizing land, using public resources and violating the law for the benefit of himself and his family, repressing peasant and teachers' movements and indiscriminately exploiting the region's natural resources (*Proceso*, January 21). The general denied these charges when he spoke to the press.
- The EZLN refused to grant the powerful Mexican television network Televisa¹⁸ permission to cover the peace talks. This sparked an intense debate on the Zapatistas' right to veto the media. Camacho Solís suggested that no one be refused access. Even though the ban was not lifted, the network managed to broadcast General

¹⁸ The Zapatistas had initially extended their ban to the other private Mexican TV network, Televisión Azteca, but this was later withdrawn.

“Unsatisfied aspirations produce feelings of disappointment, but unrealizable expectations cause feelings of deprivation. Disappointment is generally tolerable; deprivation is usually intolerable”

Bert Hoselitz and Ann Willner



The minister of defense described the army's intervention as legitimate, legal and necessary.

Castellanos' release and the start of the peace talks between the Zapatistas and Camacho.

At the same time as these events occurred, repercussions of the conflict began to emerge, revealing the difficulties that both sides would have to face before reconciliation would be achieved:

- Various kinds of peasant and Indian organizations called for a general mobilization, such as taking over public buildings and private banks and invading land, to solve the agrarian problem. The state governor reported that there was no more land to be distributed. The Ministry of Agrarian Reform and the National Peasant Confederation declared that recent modifications of Article 27 of the Constitution (relating to community land rights), promoted by President Salinas, would not be changed.
- Hundreds of Indian families fled their communities, fearing EZLN

Other deaths in Oxchuc

Oxchuc, Chiapas, 1974. Old man Martín died before they got there. He was so skinny that, even with his last convulsion, he didn't take up any more space in the Volkswagen. That's how they die here in these lands, in silence. You couldn't hear his dying gasps; there were a lot of crickets in the weeds by the road, it got dark and the crickets had started singing.

He was in the back seat, flanked by his sons. In the front were the doctor and his wife, who took his pulse and tried to encourage the boys. They were taking him to the hospital in San Cristóbal. Mistake, serious mistake. That hospital, staffed by students, meant a bad death for the Indians and the poor. A bad remedy. Better to die in a hut than venture out in a Volkswagen. The ambulances and vans donated by UNICEF were used by the doctors of Salubridad [the health service] to visit their families. They took the gasoline, medicines, everything, for use in their private practices. The hospital does not even have IV fluid.

When they were near El Chivero, having almost reached San Cristóbal, the sons asked the doctor to take them back to Oxchuc. Otherwise they would have to deposit the old man on the slab at the municipal mortuary, where autopsies are performed. Since the old man died on the road, the officials would start prying, even though his death was not violent. All that happened was that the abscess in his liver ruptured, the kind of abscess amoebas make.

They would have to rent a funeral carriage, pay money to have the body released to them, pay even more if there was a roadblock of *judiciales* (Judicial Police), the army or immigration, even though the dead man was Mexican. That's how things are around here. Then there was the business of carrying the body out naked, stitched up as if it were nothing but a big sack. People here don't understand that, although they do put up with it, the way they put up with all kinds of suffering.

They're on their way back. But they had to get some gasoline. Don Martín was seated tightly between his sons, so he wouldn't tilt over or fall on his face. But even though putrefaction had not yet begun, the odor of death caught the attention of the gas attendant and the boy who cleans the windows. The grimace on the old man's face was not exactly the sort caused by a dream, it didn't look like he was sleeping; he was playing the part of a dead man to a tee.

It took four hours in the fog to reach that town, which doesn't even appear on the maps. Here, not even the anthropologists stop to study the *huipiles* [embroidered Indian dresses]. They are only rags, nothing of elegance to show off at a party in Coyoacán. Would this town be famous some day?

The fog darkens the road, but inside the car the old man begins to emit a sad blackness, as if a cloud of melancholy had somehow gotten inside. This is how they die here, how they get sick.

A few days ago, on Sunday, the door of the clinic in Oxchuc opened. A group of people came in, Indians in an Indian line. Heading the march was a child of eight years, drunk like those who followed him, the sister, another brother, one more, the mother, the father and the grandmother. They came into the dining room where the doctor and his wife—and, curiously, a couple of foreign anthropologists, friends of the doctor—were sitting.

Without saying a word, the family surrounded the table; they went around and around until they were tracking through the big drops of blood that came dripping from the father's hand. He had nearly had his finger cut off in a fight. They had to amputate. The anthropologists ran away, terrified.

Forget about going to San Cristóbal or Tuxtla; they would have allowed the hand to develop gangrene. At least this way he could get used to picking coffee in the *caciques'* fields with four fingers, be able to trim the bosses' gardens with a machete or—why not?—to grasp a rifle when patience wears out and maybe Oxchuc will now show up on the maps and maybe even in other countries. It's only the middle of the seventies.

Eduardo Monteverde
El Financiero newspaper,
February 1, 1994.

Key economic activities and land tenancy problems

In Chiapas, 58.3% of the working population is in the primary sector, where traditional farming practices, with insufficient modernization and little crop diversification, prevail (*El Financiero*, January 5, 1994).

For decades, the region's main products were coffee, wood, cattle and corn, activities which have declined dramatically over the past five years. In 1989, the imposition of a ban on forestry removed a source of income for the region's inhabitants. The international price of coffee fell from \$120-140 to an average of \$60-70 per 100 lbs., leading to a 65% decrease in producers' income. The closure of the government-controlled Inmecafé company eliminated channels of commercialization and technical support in the region. Cattle-breeding experienced a crisis of profitability, while corn productivity fell as a result of the exhaustion of available land (Luis Hernández Navarro in *La Jornada*, January 9, 1994).

The fight for land tenure has been a source of tension in the state throughout its history. Since the beginning of this century, the region's cattle ranchers and farm owners have been accused of depriving the Indians of their lands, through violence and threats, with the protection of local governments. Chiapas is the state with the second largest number of *ejidos* (common-land farms) and agrarian communities in the country, with a total of 2,072, as well as being the state with the highest number of peasant takeovers of private farming land. There is also the pressure of overpopulation. From 1980 to 1990, Chiapas reported an average growth rate of 5.4% annually, twice the average annual rate for the whole country, which was 2.15% during the same period (Sergio Sarmiento in *El Financiero*, January 24, 1994).

or army attacks. The refugees pressured municipal leaders, demanding a solution to the conflict. The lack of clothing, food supplies and medicines for the refugees became increasingly obvious. The government announced numerous investments in the state. Food parcels were distributed at the municipalities in conflict, Solidarity program grants were offered and it was announced

that schools, clinics and training centers would be built. A trust was set up to help those who had been widowed or orphaned as a result of the conflict. Booths were set up to attend land and human rights problems. Teachers were given financial incentives. Twenty-three municipalities in the state were exempted from taxes and inhabitants of the Soconusco region were permitted to negotiate

their overdue debts (*Proceso*, February 14).

- Indians and peasants occupied various mayors' offices in the state, demanding the dismissal of town leaders accused of corruption and *caciquismo* (the rule of local political bosses). Aldermen from various municipalities journeyed to Mexico City to speak to the president, who offered them his support on the condition they

Electoral processes

According to official statistics, there is no opposition in the state of Chiapas. In the last two presidential elections, the population of Chiapas voted solidly for the PRI: while national votes for the PRI fell from 91.9% in 1976 to 70.9% in 1982, with the party achieving its narrowest margin in history in 1988 when it obtained just 50.7% of the vote, in Chiapas the PRI's presidential candidates obtained 91.89% and 89.91% of the votes in the 1982 and 1988 presidential elections respectively. In many municipalities, particularly those where the Chiapas rebellion broke out, votes for the PRI totalled 100% in 1988. "These data are all the more surprising when one considers that they come from one of the country's poorest states, whose population is marginalized and lacks basic social services and where 30% of inhabitants are illiterate" (Sergio Sarmiento in *El Financiero*, January 10, 1994).

The state's governorship and municipal presidencies are held by PRIistas. Complaints abound regarding their alliance with the cattle ranchers and farm owners to the detriment of the Indians' rights. According to analysts, this factor led Indians to take up arms, in view of the evidence that their demands went unheard and unheeded and that their participation in decision-making was not required.

Living conditions

Chiapas is extremely backward, socio-economically speaking, with 80% of its municipalities suffering acute marginalization. 1990 data from the National Population Council show that out of a population of over 3.5 million, 30.1% are illiterate while 62% did not complete their primary education. Almost a quarter of the population (885,605) are Chol, Lacandon, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Tojolabal and Zoque Indians. More than 35% of the state's dwellings lack electricity or drainage, while 51% have earthen floors and 70% are overcrowded. Nineteen per cent of the occupied population receives no income and nearly 40% receives less than the minimum wage, while 21.2% receives between one and two minimum wages. Sixty-five per cent of the population is scattered among communities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants.

This situation is even worse in the Los Altos and jungle regions, where the armed uprising began. Forty-nine per cent of the nearly half a million inhabitants of the area, mostly monolingual Indians, are illiterate, while more than 70% of the population over fifteen did not finish primary school. Eighty per cent of all dwellings are overcrowded, have earthen floors and no drainage or sanitary services. Only one out of every ten people has a daily income of over two minimum wages (*El Financiero*, January 5, 1994).

Paradoxically, Chiapas possesses natural resources that are strategically important for the country. It is Mexico's largest generator of hydro-electric energy, with its four reservoirs accounting for 55% of the country's total production. By contrast, in 1990, 30% of all dwellings had no electricity, 40% lacked piped water and only 2.9% of agricultural land had irrigation systems. As for gas and oil production, Chiapas was the country's third and fourth largest producer respectively for a decade. It also possesses abundant natural resources, some of them underused, such as its 156-mile-long coastline, and others over-exploited, risking ecological catastrophe, such as the Lacandon Forest, whose rate of destruction is so rapid that in the past 30 years it has lost 70% of its resources (María del Carmen Legorreta Gómez, *La república, de Aguascalientes a Zacatecas* [The republic, from Aguascalientes to Zacatecas, forthcoming from UNAM's Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Humanities]).

Health services are insufficient and ineffective. Poverty-related diseases, preventable through vaccination and sanitary measures—such as intestinal and respiratory infections, tuberculosis, malaria and river blindness—are the main causes of morbidity and mortality.



Marco Antonio Cruz / Imagenlatina.

Rancho Nuevo: Zapatistas killed in clash with the army.

carry out their duties honestly. According to *Proceso* magazine, the president told them, "Don't try to eliminate your adversaries. Choose the path of dialogue, unity and government for all" (February 14).

- Indians who in recent years had been expelled from their communities for religious reasons asked the governor to review their cases and provide support to enable them to return to their homes. According to the Indians, the motives behind the expulsions were economic, and therefore unjustified.
- Cattle ranchers and farm owners in the region began to show their displeasure at the treatment given to the EZLN. They requested the

army's continued presence in the state, and asked the governor for guarantees to protect their families and property. They denied the existence of large landed estates or "white guards"¹⁹ in the state, or the fact that they exploited Indians, declaring their willingness to defend their properties and families with their lives. They attacked Bishop Samuel Ruiz and the priests in his diocese, whom they accused of having encouraged and supported the emergence of the EZLN.

¹⁹ One of the main accusations against cattle ranchers and farm owners is that they possess their own armed groups (called "white guards" or "rural defense") to terrorize the Indians, make them give up any attempt at organization, and prevent them from carrying out land takeovers.



Patricio Robles Gil.

In 1990, 40% of all dwellings lacked running water.

The broad national and international coverage of the uprising, together with a diversity of opinions, analyses and references to the situation of extreme poverty prevailing in this Mexican state, proved decisive in creating a forum of discussion on the issue.

Once it recovered from its surprise, civil society rejected violent solutions to the conflict, opting for a negotiated solution instead. It also recognized the need to take part in creating democratic spaces at the national level to permit the pluralistic expression of agreements and divergences regarding the way social, political and economic processes are conducted in this country.

Against this background, on February 21, after an endless series of communiqués, letters and declarations, the first meeting was arranged between the Zapatistas and the Peace Commissioner, with the mediation of Samuel Ruiz, to be held in the cathedral of San Cristóbal de las Casas.

Commitments for peace with dignity in Chiapas

The initial phase of the meetings for peace and reconciliation ended with "Commitments for a Peace with

Dignity in Chiapas," a document containing the agreements reached in response to the 34 demands put forward by the EZLN. Key points in the document include:

1. A point-by-point reply to each of the demands (with the exception of points one and two, regarding democracy on a national scale, excluded from the negotiations from the start, and point thirty,

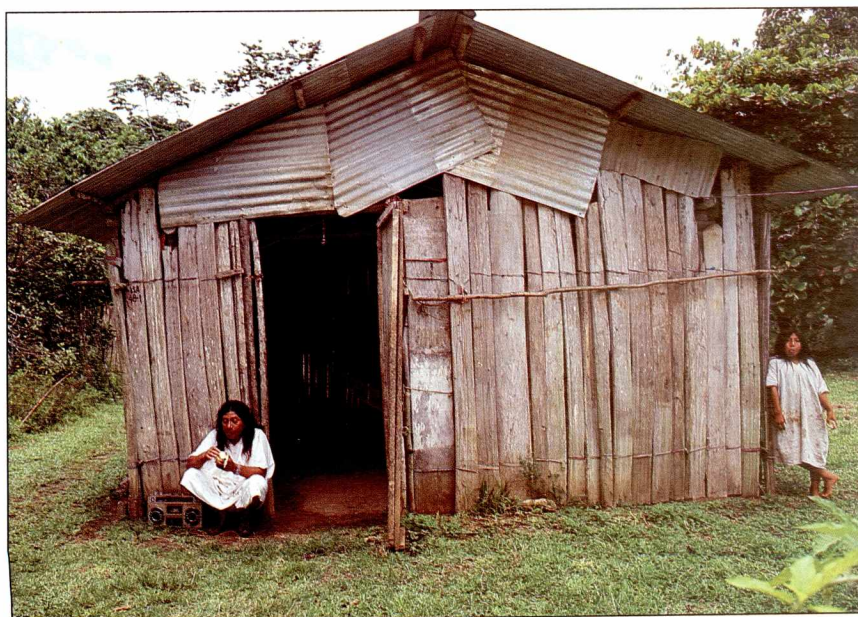
demanding the political trial of three former governors).

2. The establishment of time limits of no more than 90 days to submit evaluations and proposals in response to the commitments assumed.

3. The establishment of an organization responsible for carrying out the development projects specified in the document. This organization would be made up of representatives of Indian communities, federal and state government representatives and citizens with proven experience of working with Indians and peasants. To attend to similar demands in other Indian regions in the country, the National Commission of Development and Social Justice for Indian Peoples will draw up programs similar to those proposed in Chiapas, in conjunction with the corresponding state governments and municipalities.

4. The recognition by both sides that they are in a situation of armed peace, whose final outcome will depend on the total fulfillment of these agreements.

Democracy and electoral processes. At the national level, these points were not scheduled to be



Sergio Dorantes.

In Los Altos, 80% of homes have earthen floors and no drainage or sanitary services.

negotiated at the table, but both sides referred to them, with the EZLN suggesting two possibilities. In the first, it demanded the president's resignation to guarantee truly free, democratic elections. In the second, it proposed a political solution through legal reform and the inclusion of citizens who are not active members of any political party to guarantee the fairness and impartiality of the electoral process. Peace Commissioner Camacho described the first option as impossible but offered to push for the second. He reported President Salinas' decision to have "equitable methods to guarantee impartial representation in the electoral organizations and the incorporation of citizens and civic groups...in both the creation of electoral organizations and at each stage of the process." The possibility has been broached of arranging for extraordinary sessions of the Mexican Congress to reform the electoral law. As for Chiapas, it has been agreed that the governor will summon the State Congress to an extraordinary period of sessions on April 15 to draft reforms that will guarantee the impartiality of the electoral process, define a greater

number of electoral districts providing more representativeness for ethnic groups at the local and federal level, create new municipalities, and arrange for gubernatorial elections to be held at the same time as local elections so as to have both a new state congress and mayors.

Agrarian justice. It is widely recognized that the Mexican Revolution's agrarian reform process was not fully implemented in Chiapas, meaning that solutions have to be found for numerous agrarian conflicts, without affecting small landholdings. There are plans to draft a General Law on the Rights of Indian Communities and a Law of Agrarian Justice for the State of Chiapas. These laws will attempt to establish suitable provisions, uses, reserves and destinies for land, water and forests; establish procedures for dividing up large landed estates (based on Clause XVII of Article 27 of the constitution); determine the instances in which the expropriation and occupation of private property would be of benefit to the public; protect the ownership and integrity of the Indians' common land; provide compensation, based on objective

assessment, for stolen land and water that belongs or used to belong to Indian communities; grant the Agrarian Attorney's Office full authority to resolve controversies; and encourage diversification in the countryside through the introduction of technology and infrastructure and long-term financing to support the capitalization of communities and common land. A time limit of 90 days has been set to assess the scope of demands in the different regions, as well as the possibility of meeting those that are most urgent.

Administration of justice.

Reforms will be implemented in Chiapas' judicial system to guarantee respect for human rights and define new legal paths to agrarian justice. The current penal code will be abolished and a new one drafted in which the expulsion of Indians from their communities will be classified as a crime. Changes will be made in the state constitution and the Law on Judicial Power and Local Police so that judges and government legal officials will be chosen from a list of candidates proposed by the Indians. An Attorney General's Office for the Defense of Indians, with bilingual officials with a knowledge of common law, will be set up to ensure the administration of justice. The Attorney General will be nominated by the State Congress, by a qualified majority, on the suggestion of the communities themselves, taking the opinion of civil society into consideration. Finally, an exhaustive review of the records of all Indians taken prisoner as a result of social conflicts will be carried out to assess the legal possibility of their early release.

Free Trade Agreement.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industrial Development is to conduct a study of NAFTA's impact on Indian communities within a period of 90 days. The study will be used to design job training programs, with the



Sergio Dorantes.

It is estimated that 20,000 Indians in Chiapas have suffered religious expulsion.

Martin Salas / Imagenlatina.



"What are they going to forgive us for?" —subcomandante Marcos.

communities' participation, for those whose productive activities might be affected.

Labor justice and employment.

Salaries and benefits to which workers are entitled are to be paid in full; Indians will be granted representation at labor Conciliation and Arbitration Boards and within a period of not more than 60 days a project for agricultural activities should be presented, with the resources required

for creating the largest number of jobs in the shortest time possible.

The right to information. In a period of not more than 60 days, a radio station run by the Indians and independent of the government is to be set up. If no radio frequencies are available, funds will be provided to purchase a station.

Respect for the Indians' dignity and customs. In April, the president will submit a General Bill on the

Rights of Indian Communities to the Mexican Congress. This law will recognize traditional institutions, authorities and organizations; community uses, habits and customs; a person's right to use his own language in proceedings, educational processes, communication and relations with the authorities. Special attention will be paid to the education of young people and children to encourage the appreciation, respect and admiration of their origins and the culture of Indian peoples and avoid discrimination and contempt towards Indian peoples. A bill is to be drafted —based on Article 40 of the Constitution— to punish, for the first time ever in the Mexican legal system, discrimination by individual persons against Indians. This will also establish state institutions' obligations to enforce equality by law, including the creation of an Attorney General's Office for Indian Rights. Indians and their communities will have guaranteed participation in the planning and development of projects, the supervision of the resources invested in them and the evaluation of results.

Reasons and causes behind the EZLN

On March 1, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) issued a communiqué in which it protested the government's never having provided a genuine solution to the following problems:

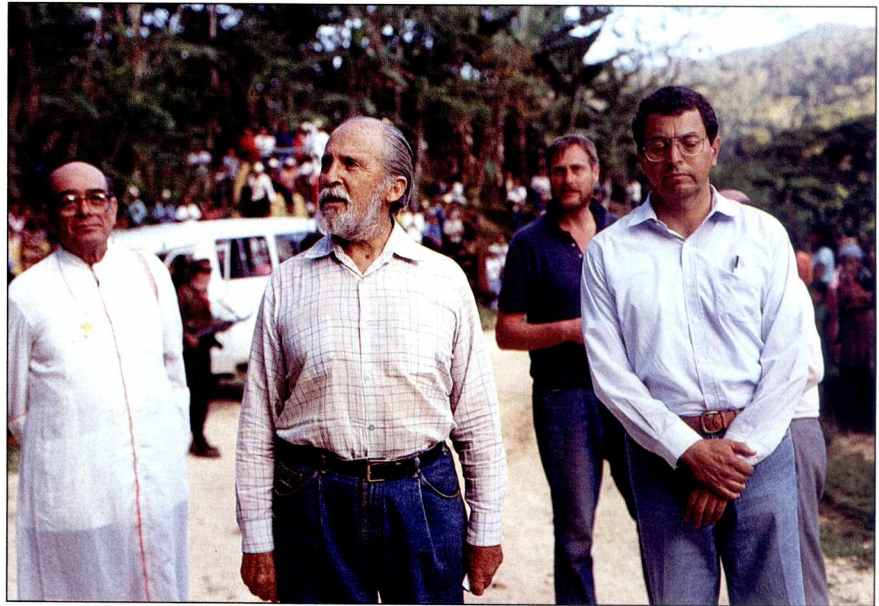
1. *The hunger, misery and marginalization we have always suffered.*
2. *The total lack of land to work on for survival.*
3. *The repression, eviction, imprisonment, torture and murders with which the government has responded to the just demands of our people.*
4. *The intolerable injustice and violation of our human rights as impoverished Indians and peasants.*
5. *The brutal exploitation we suffer in the sale of our products, our working day and in the purchase of articles of basic necessity.*
6. *The total lack of indispensable services for the great majority of the Indian population.*
7. *The lies, tricks, promises and impositions of governments for over 60 years. The lack of freedom and democracy to decide our destinies.*
8. *The application of constitutional law according to the governors' convenience. We Indians and peasants are made to pay for the slightest error and they force us to bear the burden of a law we did not make, while those who made it are themselves the first to break it.*

Infrastructure and basic services.

Greater balance will be sought for Chiapas, to further its contribution to national development and in light of its social conditions, in a way that will cause the least conflicts for other Mexican states. In July, housing construction and improvements are to begin—including basic electricity services, safe drinking water, roads and environmental control and health facilities—through a special program of the Ministry of Social Development, including support for sports and culture.

Health. The state's health programs are to be reorganized, with yearly goals and an emergency plan to cover urgent needs. Campaigns on sanitation and disease control will be launched, and clinics and hospitals are to be set up with doctors, nurses and trained health personnel. Traditional medicine will be supported and special attention given to primary and secondary health care. A program is to be set up with the help of UNICEF to attend children from the age of 0 to 6 suffering from extreme malnutrition. Support will be provided for programs to improve nutrition and set up community stores offering basic articles at a fair price.

Education. A plan is to be drafted immediately to improve the



The freeing of Absalón Castellanos (center), accompanied here by Manuel Camacho and Bishop Samuel Ruiz.

quality of public education in the area and offer bilingual education schemes, permanent teachers and instructors, and the timely delivery of educational material and grants to give students access to high-school and professional education.

The participation of women.

Indian women's projects and demands will be supported, especially those that contribute to developing their participation in

community processes, without neglecting their family relationships.


Support for victims of the conflict.

Economic support is to be provided for widows, orphans and victims of the conflict.

Guarantees for the EZLN.

The Federal and State Amnesty Law is to enter into force a day after the peace agreement has been signed, in favor of all those who took part in the armed uprising and events associated with the conflict. It will also guarantee respect for the lives and rights of all members, sympathizers and collaborators of the EZLN.

Once this initial stage of negotiations was over, Zapatista representatives took the document back to their communities for it to be read and approved. The Peace Commissioner also submitted a report to President Salinas with the aim of consolidating responses to the demands that had been raised.

Regardless of the results of the peace negotiations, the Zapatista rebellion already constitutes a watershed in the history of Mexico 

Martin Salas / Imagenlatina.



Martin Salas / Imagenlatina.

The negotiations took place in the Cathedral of San Cristóbal de las Casas.

Elsie L. Montiel
Assistant Editor.