

Zapatismo, Ancient Touchstone Become Modern: Eduardo Galeano

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Eduardo Galeano's words transmit that active "state of war" which permeates the author's heart. And, in fact, the author of "The Open Veins of Latin America" (1971) enormously enjoys "the debate of ideas, starting with respect." On a trip to Mexico in order to talk with his readers and "to explore what has happened with this long strike at the UNAM," the Uruguayan journalist spoke with the Mexican press yesterday, "with no issues off-limits."

Chiapas and the military siege, "the largest in the world"; the right to liberty; globalization - "or 'boba [idiocy] lization', which is the same" - and education which discredits honesty were some of the issues Galeano wove into his meeting.

The Largest Military Siege in the World

"I am worried and hurt," Galeano maintains, "by what is happening in Chiapas, where the largest military siege in the world exists, with 40 or 50,000 soldiers putting a movement in jail. Can they explain their sins to me? What are they guilty of? Of fighting for justice and democracy?"

"The zapatistas have made an enormous contribution to the democratization of Mexico. Thanks to their pressure, incredibly important things have been achieved in the nation's life, not just for Chiapas, but for the entire country. It is a movement that has won the solidarity of the world, thanks to which it is surviving, because, without it, they would have already been had for lunch.

"I am worried and I feel terrible seeing what is going on there, they don't let them live, they don't let them work. They are not letting them continue that very wonderful process of development and affirmation of the right to identity, justice, the land and democracy. It is a situation that I hope does not continue like this, being stifled. They are people who have a very wonderful energy: please, don't let them be stifled! When there is a place in the world where something new is being breathed, it should not be smothered.

"The powers are obsessed with Chiapas, which is justified from their point of view because zapatismo is a defiance that crosses borders, that has won so many friends all over the world, because they recognize themselves in their message, since it comes from the profundity of history, from the depths of the land: from the indigenous roots, thousands of years old.

"This message knows how to express itself through the grace and sense of humor of Marcos' words. Zapatismo is a movement from remote antiquity which is also extremely modern and which knows how to express the needs of people today, not just of the

campesinos and indigenous of Chiapas. It sends a message which goes beyond borders, because it has to do with ideals the powers despise, but which are being kept alive and open: it is a message of solidarity, of fraternity, of demand for democratization, for the people being paramount.

"The power structures of the world of today are very closed. They are being exercised rather like a secret dictatorship, in Mexico also. Popular participation is limited, distorted or vetoed, as is happening in Chiapas. What the zapatista movement wants is participation, the people leading."

- To what other situations do you say "no"?

"It is necessary to say no to the identification of reality with fate, to this fatalistic idea, which is being disseminated universally now like poison gas, which identifies what is with what will be. One must claim the right and the duty of imagining the future, instead of accepting it.

"Today, this fate is being imposed by dictatorship, by times invisible, which is globalization. They are the laws of the market imposed as if they were by divine order, which implies a conception of the world and of human beings that identifies them with value and price: tell me how much you cost and I'll tell you what you're worth, they say."

The Fruitfulness of Mistakes and Doubt

- With what tools can that tendency be fought?

"The first would be to become aware of the right to liberty. Nothing is completely inevitable, not even death ñ at least for those of us who believe that there are ways of outliving the others. New energies of change and of response are being unleashed in the world at all levels, there are clear signs in this regard."

- Do you also claim the right to be wrong, to change ideas, to even be contradictory?

"Yes. We are all dirtied with human mud. We are creatures condemned to error and doubt, which are very fruitful. There are no wise moves worth trusting that are not born of the mistakes that have allowed the learning of the wise move. And there are no certainties deserving of faith that are not fed by doubt. Making mistakes is the price of action, the issue is in knowing to get up and to learn from mistakes."

- Your most recent book, "Upside Down. The Backwards School of the World ." What ideas does it address?

"I say that this world, the border between two millenniums, is teaching us to live backwards. For example, honesty and work are depreciated, at this point in time they are worth less than garbage. Creation is also being discouraged. On the contrary, a lack of

scruples is rewarded. It is the punishing of voice and the rewarding of echo. In our countries this is reflected in the imposition of a consumer culture, in which each one counts for the number of things one consumes. Which teaches us to look down on ourselves and to accept this horrific idea that what is worthwhile is the monkey and the parrot, that is, the better one is the one who imitates better. And no. One must invent, one must speak, one must create, even at the risk of doing crazy stupid things or of scraping one's knees or heart. That is what is worthwhile."

Translated by irlandesa