

A new direction – Marcos outlines the Zapatista change of strategy in 2001.

Marcos Interview by Carlos Monsivais and Hermann Bellinghausen

La Jornada Monday,
January 8, 2001.
La Realidad, Chiapas

Carlos Monsivais: The emergence of the EZLN on January 1, 1994 took all of us by surprise. At first it wasn't clear to us what it was about. I didn't like the First Declaration of the Selva Lacandona. I found it very much in keeping, quite deliberately, with an already outdated style. This plan to advance militarily on Mexico City and to go about gathering forces along the road, the forces of a society that would become radicalized. That and the declaration of war against the Mexican State. Everything seemed quite delirious to me.

Then, two weeks later, a text appeared, which seemed excellent to me: "What Are They Going To Pardon Us For?" I already noted a radical change in emphasis there. From the declaration of war you moved to dialogue with society, almost without prior warning. And I believe that, beginning with that text and with the attitudes that accompanied it, the cease-fire, for example, zapatismo turned into a political, moral and economic argument, based on what would prevent the possibility of military devastation: their character as effective representatives (more than symbolizing, they represented) of the enormous poverty and the enormous misery. That marginalization quickly took on will and argumentative decision, and laid out its reasons. This has been extremely important. Would you agree that there was a leap in language between the first manifesto and "What Are They Going To Pardon Us For"?

Marcos: There wasn't only a leap in language, but in the EZLN's entire political analysis, even the military one. In very simple terms: the EZLN prepared for the 1st of January, but not for the 2nd of January. We didn't have any expectations whatsoever, not even the most delirious ones, they were at one extreme or the other: either the annihilation of the first line - like we said - or the uprising of all the people in order to defeat the tyrant. We were presented one option, not even intermediary, but one which had absolutely nothing to do with the other. We didn't expect it. In the first declaration, one sees a struggle between the analyses which come from an urban organization, constructed with the criteria of political-military organizations and of the national liberation movements in the 70's, and the indigenous ingredient, which entered into and permeated the EZLN analysis. The only group that could say "we are the product of five

hundred years of struggle" is the indigenous. In a very concrete way: the taking of power was not proposed, that was indeed already beyond discussion, but instead it called on one of the branches to assume their role: the Congress of the Union.

The EZLN came out on January 1, it began the war, and it met the world, not the one it had imagined, but something else. In any case, the virtue, if we can so call it, of the EZLN has been, since then, to have known how to listen. Although one of its defects, perhaps, has been in not reacting quickly to what it had heard. In some places, we did so rapidly, in others we've taken longer. At that moment, the EZLN said: "here's something we don't understand, something new." And with the intuition of the EZLN leadership, the companeros from the Committee and we said: "We're going to stop, here's something we don't understand, which we hadn't predicted, and for which we hadn't prepared. The main thing is talking and listening more."

It wasn't what we had been thinking, it was something else, something new. We weren't sure of anything. Our options were so great that we could say: "We're going to enter into dialogue." Not because we knew it would turn out well, or saying "we're going to enter into dialogue because we know it's going to turn out badly and we need time." Beyond that political calculation - which exists in any force, to say yes or no - we needed a portal, in order to understand what was going on, and to understand this other actor, which we generically call civil society, inheriting a bit of what you and others have already pointed out, that shapeless mass that does not respond to a political organization in classic terms, which opened up on January 2. They didn't rise up with us, nor were they apathetic. They didn't join in with the lynching campaign which was already underway, especially in the electronic media. They took on a new role, and they put themselves in the middle of the war in such a way that it made it impossible for one or the other sides to continue. In the midst of that uncertainty, we started to see what was happening, we did so sincerely, it wasn't even a political calculation. We should listen, and that's how we got to the first dialogue and what was built around it.

CM: During the first months, a moral insurrection took place in society. I don't know if was strictly civil society, insofar as its organization was very rudimentary, and it was dependent on emotional and moral reaction. But the ethical resistance of a large sector prevented the destruction, it made Salinas retreat from the positions of his January 6 speech, it brought about the peace bands, it mobilized international interest. And I believe, above all following the text "From Whom Must We Ask Forgiveness?", that moral insurrection was answered with a proposal for dialogue. How do you see, from the EZLN's perspective, the participation in the dialogue? What were the breakthroughs, and what were the setbacks or stalemates?

M: Look, the main thing is that there's two ways of conceptualizing dialogue. When we went to dialogue in the Cathedral, we met all these people. On the one hand, there was sensitization concerning the indigenous problems, which was reflected in cultural, ethnic, moral, political, economic and social terms. The causes which created the

conflict were, and are, undeniable.

On the other hand, we found a vacuum. The EZLN didn't appear in January '94 as merely the one who was stirring the national conscience concerning the indigenous problem. For many people, it filled a vacuum of political expectations of the left, and I'm not referring to those who were always yearning to assault the Winter Palace, nor to the professional groups of insurrection and revolution. I'm referring to common everyday people, who, in addition to the indigenous problem, hoped that a political force would be generated which would fill a space that wasn't being filled by either the parliamentary left, nor even by the extra-legal groups, who aren't illegal but who aren't registered.

CM: Are you talking here about a utopian sense?

M: No, I wouldn't put it like that, since it's something more spontaneous. Many people who wake up to politics see that there's something that doesn't fulfill them. And this is new. In this sense, I believe we generated more expectations than we could fulfill, since they saw us as a political party, or as the organizers of a culture entrenched in the old bosses of the sixties or seventies of anti-imperialism and world revolution. All that, on the left's side. And we were also reclaiming that problem which seemed to have been forgotten, at least by the politicians: the problem of ethics. We began a dialogue, and we discovered we were talking the same language. We hadn't prepared to talk, we weren't in the mountains for ten years in order to talk. We had prepared to make war, but we knew how to talk. Ultimately, it's what the EZLN indigenous communities bequeathed us: speaking and listening to history. At that point we fell into what many people characterized as verbal delirium. So many statements and interviews in the Cathedral. Everybody was given interviews and communiques. We found a portal, and we vented. But, from the other side (not just with the government, but with all politicians) they showed us they had gone to a negotiation with a ticket-box mentality: "You ask me, and I'll blow you away, this yes, this no, it depends on how strong you are and how weak I am."

Beginning with the Cathedral dialogue, we began to construct the idea of a table in which others would participate. We tried to break the scheme of the ticket-box which we battled with throughout the entire dialogue process in the Cathedral, and then at San Miguel and San Andre's. They told us: "We'll arrange it, but you and me. What do you want? Land? Then I'll give you enough." We said: "No, it's not about that." We managed to have other people seated at the table and to see that the accord wasn't give-and-take, about "you ask for ten and I'll give you six", but, instead, something new was created. San Andre's broke the entire scheme of previous negotiation within the political class.

CM: An extremely important element in the Cathedral meeting was the use of ski-masks. The symbolic manipulation, which reached its high point at the Aguascalientes convention, when you put whether or not you should wear a mask to consultation. I

understand it wasn't planned, that it happened naturally. And, previously, the use of the national flag, which was the re-appropriation of the patria or the incorporation of the indigenous into the patria. Displaying the flag in the Cathedral was a very premeditated act. How have you viewed the use of symbols in the course of these seven years?

M: We were responding. Fortunately for us, the government was applying the same criteria as for a classic guerrilla group: accusations of being foreigners, gold from Moscow (even though there was no longer any Moscow, or it no longer had any gold)The Berlin Wall no longer existed, the Central American guerrillas were practically dissolved, or their peace processes had been completed. Their main charge was: "You are foreigners. You want to destabilize peace, and the indigenous are being manipulated." In response to that, we had to recover words that had been stolen from us, those of patria and the nation, fundamental for the native peoples, those who have always been.

It wasn't easy. When we came out, on January 1, many companeros from the Committee said: "We don't want people to think we're only interested in the indigenous issue." We intentionally wanted to downplay the indigenous demands in order to engage the question in a great national issue. At the point at which we realized that it was precisely our essence which gave the movement more strength, we naturally assumed who we are.

In that struggle of symbols, we were able to recover words which had been completely prostituted: patria, nation, flag, country, Mexico...

Hermann Bellinghausen: You arose as an indigenous movement, isolated from the rest, like all those which occurred in the country. But the moment you appeared, this symbolic and representative call was given, and there was a specific response from the indigenous movement regarding you. What is that meeting with the indigenous movement like, and what did you discover, not just in terms of image, but especially in terms of their demands? Indigenous rights are now the lynchpin of the next mobilization in the DF.

M: We have always tried to be honest. In this arena, we began with a misunderstanding with the indigenous movement, the same as with the political class, the left and society. A movement which grows in the clandestine, isolated from everything, prepares itself for entering in to the world, and - surprise! - it's not the world you prepared for. We confronted the indigenous issue, and there we experienced a misunderstanding, because the first thing one sees of the indigenous movement is not the communities themselves, but the professional indigenous, the professional politicians. At that point, we distrusted everything. For various reasons, among them our inexperience and our lack of knowledge about the open political terrain. It's not that we were afraid of professional politicians, the political class, but of our own possibilities. There were many things we didn't understand.

The political class has its own codes, its signs, which we did not understand. There was more than a little friction. Until we realized that we should build something else, the meeting took place, not with the representatives of the indigenous movement in the political class, those who leapt out and made the first contact with us, but with the indigenous movement which, like us, had been in individual or regional struggles.

It was evident that the indigenous peoples had never stopped resisting and moving throughout the country. That's when we had the idea of "taking advantage of the dialogue to resolve the problem, but also to meet with others." Because the EZLN's problem is not that of resolving some demands at the moment it sits down to dialogue, but that its disappearance takes place in that demand. Ultimately, what we were talking to the government, to the opponent (here we're sincere, we want to cease being what we are) about, was to no longer be what we are, we need guarantees, to know that it will no longer be necessary to do what we are doing.

CM: During a very long period, a common element in all your interlocutors, and in you, was verbal over-abundance. You were quite "talkative".

M: Yes, we were. We invited the entire spectrum, from the pro-government newspapers, to the most traditional and most modern indigenous wings all of them. We began to recognize ourselves in what had been one of our struggles and flags, which is the right to difference. We are not equal, as a homosexual and a lesbian are not equal. We are not fighting for equality, in the sense that we are all equal and everyone is similar. There are differences, and the nation has to be built on those differences.

The demand for indigenous rights and culture is fundamental to our struggle, because that is what we are. The recognition of difference is centered on this. Thus our tie with the homosexual and lesbian movements, and also with other movements of the marginalized. On the other hand, there is the problem of a force which does not come from the tradition of the political class, but which inherits its positions from the indigenous communities. The fundamental crux of 'our' struggle is the indigenous, and the others from this one. That's why, at the moment when one says "Never again a Mexico without us," one is saying: "Never again a January 1, 1994". The cameras and the media, and everything that happened, came afterwards. On January 1 there were deaths, destruction, persecution, desolation, misery, anguish, fear, terror. Everything that's war. That's why we're so interested in ending the war. We've already done it: the one who hasn't done it is the one who's interested in its continuing because he hasn't paid that cost. We don't want it to be repeated. We don't need them to give us anything, except guarantees that we can be part of this country, in accordance with our own plans. We don't want excision, or to be another state, or to create the Union of Socialist Republics of Central America.

CM: I believe that one of this movement's great contributions has been the introduction of the issue of racism as one of the nation's undeniable characteristics. When the first

EZLN delegation went to the DF, I believe the first-antiracist demonstration in Mexico's history took place. It is a very notable contribution. At the same time, there are those who say the EZLN did not improve the condition of the indigenous in Chiapas, nor, presumably, in the rest of the country, that it became worse.

M: For us, the history hasn't ended. Today, everyone recognizes, even the most shameless racists, that the situation in the indigenous communities is untenable. Guerrilleros, criminals, may be produced there, but not their disappearance as indigenous. They've tried to do so for 500 years, and they haven't been able to.

The EZLN cannot feign a solution, or end up with the spectacle of its leaders occupying positions, giving teaching conferences, signing books, or whatever the future may be for each one of them - a government, heading social communication for some new regime - while everything stays the same for the rest of the population, with one more clinic or shop, knowing that it will go back to being the same. Under these conditions of poverty, we want to replace the weapon, convert our poverty into an instrument of struggle for liberty and for democracy. We want this to change, not for them to give us charity.

We want to build peace, we have the ability to do so. We want to build a plural society, with everything we simply want to do, without weapons. In this space, in front of us, an armed threat was created, which was not only the federal Army, but also the paramilitary groups, white guards, or whatever they want to call them. Thus the EZLN has no other option or struggle...

CM: I was getting at something else. You are held responsible for setting off the catastrophe in Chiapas. For the harassment of the communities, for the situation of vilification we've seen over these last few years. What do you say to that accusation, according to which everything would be better in Chiapas without the zapatistas?

M: That it's not true, nor is it supported in statistical terms, of social economy, nor in the death rate of children under the age of five. That conditions aren't what they should have been after a bolt from the blue, like January 1, 1994, that's true. But they aren't worse than before. The issue is on the national and international agenda as a point to be resolved. If these seven years hadn't taken place, the heading Indigenous Peoples would be filed under "P" for pending, and for other things. "We'll look at it later, we already told you, we already freed you." That's how the political class has operated.

We feel, believe me, that we have a debt. After all the expectations that were generated, within ourselves and in a good part of society, we can't act as if nothing has happened and reduce January 1 to a media act, a platform for an average writer and worse orator - as has been said - or for a particular elite of indigenous leaders from four or seven ethnic groups, and then, everything else stays the same. No, we can't do that, it would be neither ethical, nor honest, nor consistent. And those three things - being ethical, honest and consistent - are among the few things which we are proud of.

CM: It wouldn't be smart.

HB: We're talking about the change in the perception of the indigenous in the country, in state agendas, in funding, in investment. But what has happened to the indigenous during these years? You're willing to make one more giant step for the same struggle. What is the national indigenous movement like now, how have the people reacted, what is expected of them given the latest changes?

M: Another January 1, but without war. Before January 1, 1994, those who always won, won, and it seemed as if nothing could be done about it. Something similar is happening now: those who won look as if they are going to go on winning, and that nothing can be done against them. Except for a few Lone Rangers who go around fighting. But the rest of the thinking or acting mass, in terms of political efficacy, hand over possession to the one in charge, they accept that that's how it is, and "we all give our full support." Even though the regime has changed, at the end of the day it's full support. Skepticism, despair, immobility, are mixed with that "they're no longer the same ones and they might change", which also produces immobility.

The indigenous movement can say: "Here we are, we continue, resisting." I don't want to use that slogan too much, because, sooner or later, a publicist will grab it and use it without paying royalties. For seven years we have been insisting: here we are! It has been the subtitle of each Declaration of the Selva Lacandona since the first one. It's not the moment for skepticism or cynicism, "That's tough, that's how it turned out, and now we're going along with them, because the PAN are governing where the PRI were." For us, the space is open. And the one who can push to have it filled is not the EZLN, it's the indigenous movement, with very concrete demands. The assault on the Winter Palace isn't being proposed, nor the end of the tyrant, but, rather, a drastic change, not just in the political-military terms of the First Declaration. We have the history which these seven years were part of. We want this nation to legally assume our recognition, not just a moral sentiment that can be silenced according to the manipulation of the media. One which says: "I legally recognize that these who are different have these rights and are part of me." That is the very role of the Constitution, the magna carta which frames everything, although it doesn't have much prestige right now, one might as well swear on anything.

It is very important for us that the nation says: "I assume this, and I put it in writing. I am making it history. I recognize that everything that happened before wasn't good. I not only recognize it, but I'm going to make an effort, to make a commitment so that it does not happen again." Am I being utopian? Perhaps, but I believe that it's around this that many things are going to happen. We see the vacuum with concern, the apathy, skepticism, the fact that just a few pens, to speak of the intellectuals, are getting to the bottom of things. Perhaps it's still the intoxication of the end of the PRI regime, and

things are going to change. Perhaps not. But, either way, it's up in the air. The indigenous movement can be the spark for a very inclusive initiative, unlike war, which is very exclusionary: there are our soldiers, there are the enemy soldiers, and the rest in the middle.

CM: You would say that the "Never More a Mexico Without Us", in the legal terms you're proposing, would be "Never Again a Mexico Against Itself"?

M: Yes. It could be the portal for recognizing other excluded Mexicos. It's not just racism that Mexican society hates, which, as you said, was highlighted in that Zo'calo by the 1111. The nation is saying: "No more. I no longer want to be like that." And that should be applied to other minority and non-minority groups: women, young people, homosexuals, lesbians and transsexuals. I believe that the end of the century and of the millenium should bring, within progressive or leftist movements, however you want to call them, a movement which also posits the end of struggles for hegemony, whether of the left or of the right. At the end of the day, what the traditional left or right want is to homogenize: "I am the vanguard (of the right or of the left). Everyone who is the same as me counts, and everyone who is different than me does not count. They are enemies, counterrevolutionaries, provocateurs, agents of imperialism", Soviet or US, depending on the line.

This should be the century of differences, and not only nations can be built upon them, but also realities, the world. And that is what we are going to dream, we are not saddened.

CM: There is a point about the San Andre's Accords which concerns me: uses and customs. I am not at all clear about the proposition, because I think it's a call for immobility, as and how it's formulated even now. An "I want you like that so that I can continue to recognize you like that." In the new government the idea exists of helping the indigenous communities, always and when they are loyal to their traditions and customs. This is, for me, profoundly unacceptable, because mobility is also a radical right, and it is inevitable. How have you viewed the issue of uses and customs?

M: It's a term that lent itself to this campaign against the San Andre's Accords. Uses and customs, for the right, means everything that is bad...

CM: In the case of the Accords, but the new message, reiterated and omnipresent, is that Mexico is its uses and customs. By citing Lo'pez Velarde out of context, candidate Fox recommended that intellectuals look after the patria: "Be always equal, faithful to your daily mirror." The great call to immobility.

M: Some uses and customs are of no use in the indigenous communities: the buying and selling of women, alcoholism, the segregation of women and young people in collective decision making, which is more collective than in the urban areas, but which is also exclusionary. What the right accepts are the uses and customs which have to do with the

confessional. A case in point, the office of "order and respect". The expression comes from religious colleges. The criteria of seeing society as a college is reflected in the makeup of the cabinet. They are trying to impose those "good", morally acceptable, uses and customs on the entire nation, and they want to marginalize, leave aside, different, legal uses and customs. What the indigenous communities are demanding, not just the zapatistas, all who went to San Andre's, the 56 ethnic groups, including PRI representatives, is the right to be different, and, based on that difference, to decide our destiny. That legal, political and social questions not be brought from outside and imposed. This creates aberrations, like the cacique structure San Juan Chamula, which masks the building of perfect political power as religious intolerance. Like in Ocosingo, before 1994 the PRI had 101% of the votes. It was on that that the Catholic infrastructure was built, which rejects Evangelicals and the history of blood which Chamula has been. Against the San Andre's Accords, San Juan Chamula, and that is how the question of Catholics against Evangelicals is brandished. If the country they are now proposing prospers, there will, in one form or another, be a San Juan Chamula from the Rio Grande to the Suchiate. "Anything that might be different, which is not Roman Catholic, out." Because if there's not even going to be tolerance within religion, forget about the atheists, if there still are any atheists. Are there any still?

CM: I'll have to sleep on that. It's the closest thing in my case to a confessional.

M: We should still reflect on that point. And what the indigenous peoples are saying is: "I am different, I can create laws, forms of coexistence, which might or might not be those of the past, but which allow us to live in society."

CM: Excuse me, but, if the customs of the past are conserved, it will make the building of a rational society extremely difficult, segregation of women, alcoholism and caciquismo. And if there is no about-face, those uses and customs will be irreversible. Are there indigenous communities which are still demanding them?

M: No. I agree, alcoholism, the selling of women, machismo, domestic violence, must be eliminated. In the zapatista, and not just zapatista, communities, there are resistance movements which are changing that situation. But, in legal and political terms, what has come to be new, the removal of authorities, the constant accountability, the vigilance of the governed over those who govern: that indeed comes from before, not from now. Also the application of justice when a crime has been committed. Instead of jail, repayment for the damage done. When there is a murder, what do we do? Do we make two widows, that of the murder victim and that of the murderer? Or does the murderer have to pay his debt to the widow in addition to meeting his punishment? When someone comes and tells you: "I have come to free you, oppressed women," it's not the same as when the movement itself creates this in indigenous women. A feminist from the city saying: "Indigenous women have rights," is not the same as indigenous women saying - as those from Xi'Nich and Las Abejas have just done at the Monument of Independence - "In

addition, we have our demands as gender. We want a peace with justice and dignity. We do not want the peace of the past."

This is already happening, and the results may be uneven, but, believe me, the results will not come from outside. From outside will come a correction against that: "Women shouldn't wear skirts above their knees." They would applaud, for example, something in La Realidad which seems absurd to me, an international center, because people come from everywhere. It's still prohibited here for women to take off their clothes when they go swimming. I believe they can take off their bras, not even their panties. Even though they're all women, they can't. This is what they want to recover, the burdens of the indigenous movement: machismo, alcoholism, conservatism. The rebel communities are the ones which prohibit alcohol. We do not want to isolate ourselves. We wish to relate with the world, without it meaning imposition.

HB: These changes in the indigenous peoples are also perceptible outside the communities in resistance. Is there progress, or is there still an entrenchment of the peoples regarding this undesirable past?

M: We don't know. We did not know the indigenous movement prior to January 1994. We do see it in the long term, we don't know if, for example, the representatives of the National Indigenous Congress - which we recognize as the independent national indigenous movement - is including an increasing number of women. At the beginning, it wasn't like that. There were a few who were very eloquent, but men. And we know that in the last three or four years, and more obviously now, inside this structure - in which we participate, but we don't belong to - we've seen the participation of women increasing. I would venture to say that struggle for place, by gender, in the case of the indigenous woman, is not just in the zapatista communities. I don't know if it's a product of the communities in resistance, but it's not just them now. Especially in the central-southern stretch of the country (Oaxaca, Jalisco, the Tarahumara sierra, Hidalgo, Veracruz, Puebla) the *compañeras* are participating in leadership roles as women and as indigenous. That's how we see it, it's not that the women there send us a letter. I don't know if it was like that before '93, but in '94 and in the first years, our interaction with the indigenous movement was strictly masculine.

HB: After seven years of militarization and siege, how has the situation changed for the towns of Chiapas?

M: The fundamental change has been for the good. There is hope. There wasn't any prior to 1994. The conditions of poverty might have been the same or worse, but there was no hope. The indigenous' only expectation, his political, cultural and social horizon, was the Church, not even school. The Church as community center, the field, the truck - that is, if there was a road - or the *camino real*, and that was it. And that meant his isolation, it was a death sentence. The country was growing, and it left one sector in pre-history, which would end up disappearing due to diseases, due to those bombs that don't

have any lead, which make no sounds, but which are equally effective. Or they could resist...

CM: As I assume you have an academic past, I would like to ask you to do an exercise...

M: My academic past is one of the myths...

CM: I would ask you to do an exercise in periodicity. What, for you, have been the fundamental moments of these seven years?

M: One is the exact period of the war, from January 1 to January 6, 1994, which had finally already been forgotten. Didn't that guy, Fox, say that the EZLN had been nothing more than January 1? Everything that could be death and destruction, not just material, but moral and ethical, of the social fabric within the communities. That lasted for a short time, fortunately, even though the confrontations have been repeated or been dormant. Then came the watershed, the Cathedral dialogue from February to March 1, 1994. A long period of meetings and misunderstandings followed, through the National Democratic Convention (CND) and the Consulta of 1995. Then the attempt to bring expectations down to earth.

The CND took place during this stage of meetings and misunderstandings, following the Cathedral dialogue. There we became aware of reality, we started looking for ourselves and we bumped into a lot of nonsense. Then the attempt to bring our proposal down to earth: we wanted to come out, we wanted to stop being what we were. Not just speeches or communiques now, but building a landing strip with the dialogues. The fundamental aspect of the dialogues was their breaking of the scheme of the ticket window, that they open up to the sides and that responses be constructed. And, lastly...

CM: On February 9, 1995, Ernesto Zedillo's government tried to cancel out the EZLN in one single blow. How, in retrospect, do you view this attack?

M: It was the last great attempt by the regime to apply the old formula of the manuals against subversive movements: discrediting them. Zedillo said: "They are not indigenous, they are university students, whites. They come from the other side." Yes, they aren't Soviets, but they're not from here. The attempt lasted a few hours, thanks, once more, to the people, and, one way or another, that argument was made void, definitively, we hope. February 9 means, for us, the failure of the military option, with its police overtones, the unmasking, the Army's entrance into the communities, and all of that. It demonstrated in just a few hours that this war had no solution in military terms, either for them or for us.

CM: Then came a long stage of comings and goings.

M: It's when we tried to construct a solution not just of words, but also of practice, around the San Andre's dialogue. It's when we offered the "fast track" to Zedillo, who

was already talking about peace, even though the peace process was continuing. That the EZLN could do politics. That meant bringing the EZLN demands down to earth. Then the Cocopa law came in, Zedillo's step backward, and the renewal of persecution, with another objective now. If it's quite costly to attack Marcos, Tacho, Moi and David, then let's drive them underground. Then came the great offensive against the communities, headed by that cacique assassin, Albores, with Zedillo's patronage.

CM: Whom you rewarded with a food fight, calling him The Croquetas

M: There was a key moment at the beginning of the negotiations in San Andre's, the "you're not indigenous" campaign. Then in San Andre's there was a huge mobilization of the people from Los Altos. It was the moment in which Zedillo gave the go-ahead to activate paramilitary groups and counteract this. The plan was already in existence, but on hold, and it was given a green light. They thought they would conquer us by presenting repression as confrontations among communities. Then came the nightmare of Acteal. Not only did the government not stop, it became more belligerent with the great offensive in 1998 against the Autonomous Municipalities.

We responded to that with the departure of the 1111 and the Consulta of 1999. But already knowing that, on the other side, there was no political intermediary, only a military one. We weren't able to think in military terms, not in a calculated way, not because, like they say "they are few and they're poorly armed". Just imagine if we did have tanks, planes, helicopters, and all its paraphernalia, they even say we have submarines. Even if we had that, we wouldn't do it. We didn't come to war in order to make war, but rather to break the circle of vilification. But, since we didn't have an intermediary then, we were confronted with two options, the same way it happened, for example, with the General Strike Council of the UNAM. The CGH was left without an intermediary, and, instead of opening intermediation on the other side, it closed in on itself more and more. If we had done that, neither the indigenous movement nor the zapatista communities would have anything to say, nothing to give anyone, nothing to receive.

We say: "Fine, we ran into the wall, we have to open communication on another side." That was the purpose of the departure of the 1111 and the Consulta. "Yes, we are still committed", we told the people. "The other one doesn't want it, but here we are going to continue, and now the solution is this". If we survived for seven years, it wasn't because of our military capabilities - which we have - it wasn't for our political capabilities and the social organization in the communities, which we also have. It was, above all, because, one way or the other, we remained here with the people, we are on their agenda, in their thoughts, and every so often we confirm it. Every so often it is said: "They are finished now, they are divided". I don't know how many times they've killed me or have taken Tacho prisoner. Sometimes I take him prisoner, sometimes they take me prisoner. And every time we say: "No, perhaps it doesn't matter to the people now, perhaps we're out of fashion now, maybe I'm repeating myself now in the communiqués,

but Chiapas is still Chiapas".

CM: The cyclical revival of the memory is a clearly defined strategy?

M: Yes, and I don't have to say that we come out and it so happens that they do remember us. But, believe me, we don't want to be a pill faithful to memory, we don't want to return, or others to have to return for us. We have absolute confidence in the people, perhaps that is our error.

CM: That's where I was heading. Hasn't there been a mythologizing of civil society by the EZLN?

M: We think not. Every time we've appealed to her, she has responded. There are many people who say: "Here you are". If the political parties consistent with the ideal of revolution called, the people would say: "I'm not here. Don't be calling on me or on all those I care for and love...". Many people have felt included, and they say: "I am civil society. It is a label so broad that I fit into it, and it works, above all, through recognition: I am not of a political party, I'm not from a social organization, I'm a housewife, a neighbor, a campesino, an indigenous, I don't have a structure, but these people give me a place without my having to give anything in exchange." And I believe we have been able to build that feeling that they are participating WITH, and not BEHIND.

HB: We've already talked about February 9, of what followed. There was, in fact, an overwhelming militarization created in what was coming to be the territory where the communities in resistance resided. We are approaching the moment when the new government says it's going to do something in that regard. It's one of the demands in going to Mexico, and throughout these years: that the place where they live not be militarized. What is the current situation? Has anything, in effect, changed? What expectations are there that it will happen now, when one assumes there is a government which spoke, during its first moments, of military withdrawal.

M: We are asking the new regime a fundamental question, which the people have asked us to make: yes, we want to dialogue and to reach resolution peacefully, but, is there any point in our having dialogue, or are we going to confront what happened before? Because we don't buy that about everything having changed. What guarantees are there that they are indeed going to enter in seriously? We are asking the entire political class if they want dialogue, and if they are going to undertake it to the ultimate consequences. We are asking the Congress of the Union if it's going to do its part, that January 1 not be repeated, and we not be left hanging. In effect, never more a Mexico without the indigenous. We are asking the Judicial branch: if it recognizes that it has a valid interlocutor, not a criminal which is kidnapping part of the land, but a social fighter. Why don't you let it go? They treat us like criminals, that's why there are more than 150 prisoners. And we are asking Fox a two-fold question: assuming he is head of the Army,

does he have the commitment, the decisiveness, for military de'tente, or, that is, for demilitarization? To say: "I'm not going to use the military option, I'm going to use the political option." That has a military cost. In the same way there is also a cost to us in entering a peace process. Does that mean that there are not going to be arms and ski-masks then? Yes, that's what it means, that is our cost. That is what we are asking. We are not asking for the 259 positions. We are asking for seven, nothing more, a signal. And the other question: Is Fox the commander of the Army in Chiapas? If he's not in command, why are talking with him? If there has been a "coup d'etat", which some identify on February 9, and others, later, and the Army is autonomous and independent here, what are we going to talk to Fox about, if there is a regional, cacique, militarist power here, which is the one in command? Because our struggle is national, but it's also chiapaneca.

And, if Fox is in command and they obey him, but he doesn't want to get involved, then what for? We are not going to end the conflict saying: "Fine, the war is over now, compa~eros," if we have nothing more than a shop, and indigenous rights are still not fulfilled, and, in addition, 70,000 soldiers are still in the communities, promoting everything they promote. If the EZLN receives three "yes's" we'll be going to a peace process quickly. It's not our plan to drag it out and to wait and see what happens in the six years of Fox's government.

We are asking these three questions. We haven't received any positive response, but we have received frankly negative insinuations. On December 15 they had an interview with Fox on Behind the News, by Ricardo Rocha: "When is the Army going to withdraw from the seven positions the EZLN is demanding?" And he responded that he wouldn't talk any more about measures of military de'tente. He responded inaccurately. He said the EZLN is asking for that, but that many communities are demanding that the Army stay in order to take care of them. That the border would be left unguarded. That drug trafficking could cause huge problems. That the migrants from Central America are also a problem which needs to be resolved. That there are many things to consider. Is there simply not going to be any more military de'tente then?

HB: Does this mean that there isn't any real military de'tente?

M: It means that the visibility has been reduced, because it has been reduced, but not one single soldier has left Chiapas. The same number continues, and so they are less visible to the journalists, to the NGO, to the people. Previously you saw the column of soldiers pass by here, the planes, the helicopters. You don't see them today, but they are there, in Guadalupe Tepeyac, on the Euseba, in San Quinti'n. There are there, everywhere.

The Army has the opportunity, tactically and strategically, to deliver the surgical strike or the rapid offensive, which they are also contemplating, in minutes. The EZLN is not asking for the entire Army to leave prior to dialogue. We are asking Fox for the answer

to this question: "Are you willing to get involved and to abandon the military path? Are you in command of the Army?" That is why we are asking for seven positions, which would not affect the border. There is no one there who is asking for the Army to remain. The people from Guadalupe Tepeyac have been in exile for five years - it's a deserted town. Guadalupe Tepeyac is very far from the border, no one is saying "I want this garrison, the largest in the Selva, to continue here." On the Euseba River, close by here, there isn't even one civilian resident. It's a military position in the middle of the land for the purpose of encircling La Realidad, because the EZLN comandancia appears here. In La Garrucha there isn't one single resident in favor of the military remaining. Not in Cuxulja' either. In Jonalchoj, even the PRIs organized to throw the Army out, and they couldn't. (Marcos takes out a map in order to illustrate his statements) Here are the military positions. The red dots are Army positions, the others are positions held by the Public Security and Judicial police, Migration and others. The border - he indicates it on the map - is covered by the Army. None of those points are being asked for. The ones we are demanding are seven now, because it's the symbol we always use, but it could have been 16, and it wouldn't affect their siege at all. If those seven points were to be left, we wouldn't be affecting their capabilities. The Army presence would continue there. For example, we're not asking the Army to leave the Chenalho' region. There they could have said to us: "NO, the PRIs say that if the soldiers go, poor paramilitaries, who's going to take care of them?" We're not concerned about evasions, we're concerned that the people mobilize along with us, that they don't let themselves be fooled, believing it's already happened, the Army has already left, there is no longer any military pressure. The people in Guadalupe Tepeyac would continue living in exile, children would be born and old ones would die away their lands. And you know how important land is for the indigenous communities. The land where you were born, grew up and where your life is.

These people are not living in exile because of Zedillo now. Since December 1, they are living in exile because of Fox. The military has many interests here. The business isn't fighting the EZLN. The business is land. The General in Guadalupe Tepeyac is an autonomous municipal president who is accountable only to his chief of staff. He's in charge of granting permits, authorizing the entrance of prostitutes and alcohol. The military convoys are escorting the trucks bringing in alcohol. Why? Because zapatista checkpoints intercept the alcohol, because there's a woman's law prohibiting it. There is business with bringing in the prostitutes, some are minors or from Central America, who are also being exploited because they have no rights as Mexicans. Any time they make problems for them, they deport them. In response to this, we are not asking that the entire Army leave, as some media have said.

If the Army leaves Euseba, which is close by here, and Guadalupe Tepeyac, 20 kilometers from here, San Quinti'n remains, the largest barracks in the Selva. Further away, north of La Realidad, are Cruz del Rosario, Vicente Guerrero and Nuevo Momo'n. And Santo Toma's, another military position. The withdrawal of none of these positions

is being demanded. The encirclement of La Realidad would be maintained, but the compañeros don't care. What they care about is knowing whether Fox is going to get involved or not, and whether he's the one in command. And that is why I insist, over and over, on telling the people: we have to mobilize. If we do not seize an honorable peace, as we seize other things, they aren't going to give it to us, nor will it be a concession by the regime.

CM: A subjective element of undeniable force. A person exists, Subcomandante Marcos, who has held a central position in the EZLN for seven years. How would you describe the career of this person called Marcos?

M: Speaking honestly, what happened with Marcos and with the rest of the EZLN, is that they weren't prepared for January 2, 1994. Early on, a series of factors combined which blew his figure out of proportion. Ultimately, he's not indigenous. And all the cultural references were in play, concerning the combination of Indians and whites, something like *Dancing With Wolves*, and all the Mexican films from *The Night of the Mayans*, and the legends. And an arsenal began to be filled, a bunker, which gave special weight to political interaction, although, in organizational terms, talking with Tacho or David, who are leaders, would have had the same impact. In media terms, because politics is a media phenomenon, it's not the same as talking to Marcos. That political weight carries much that is bad. It is bad for the most rudimentary, but most concrete, political activity, which the EZLN needs. Coming and saying "I want to talk with the zapatistas" and thinking about Marcos is not the same as thinking about a zapatista to talk with because you're a worker, neighbor, or whatever. That impacts negatively on that arena. And it also serves as a favorite target for the regime. Not only for bullets, but also for bullets. Because eliminating Marcos is not the same as eliminating Tacho. Either through bullets or by discrediting. And the campaign was also concentrated in that arena. This led me to a dilemma, because we saw that it also helps the movement, for it to be understood more. At the end of the day, I'm the spokesperson. And sometimes I also serve as lightning rod, because the government campaign focuses so much against the figure of Marcos: it leaves the rest of the movement alone. "There's the bad with the ones who are deceived." But then it allows one to speak with others. They would have more problems with a direct interaction with the indigenous movement. I believe an assessment of my role is yet to be done.

CM: I wasn't asking you about the assessment of your role, as much as the repercussions in its development, the way in which you have been transforming yourself. Marcos' language on January 1, 1994 was one thing, and now it's another. You have talked a lot, you have been widely read. You have renounced, I assume, one part of your constituent language prior to January 1.

M: Most especially regarding schemes, from the most elemental, that the revolutionary should be macho and things like that. There are many anecdotes, especially in the

catacombs of the armed left: from whether Yon Sosa was branded as a homosexual and that's why they caught him. In the parliamentary left even the old cultural forms dominate. Don't believe that there was any other reason for Juan Gabriel being vetoed, other than all of that which doesn't speak of blood, death, sacrifice. An entire iconography, even verbal and musical, even though it sounds contradictory, of what the revolutionary program is about.

CM: Still, in the speech at the Aguascalientes convention, you spoke very critically of those who were opposed to the language of sacrifice. And, nonetheless, afterwards you no longer used it.

M: That language was inevitable for us, and not so much because of the heritage of the catacombs of the traditional left, even though we grew up and were formed there, but in great measure due to borrowing from the communities, of the feeling of death and suffering. It was not a cult of "we're happy like that", but it was necessary. In the same way, we are people talking to you, but armed and with ski-masks, and the only thing that is certain is that we don't want either arms or ski-masks. Not just because of our peaceful vocation, although it would be quite practical. It's that we need to do politics, and weapons are an obstacle there. But they won't take them away from us in exchange for anything. We can't say: "Everything has changed now. The PRI fell, which was what we wanted, and we're going to Parnassus or wherever we have to go to talk with the guys." We can't do that. We have ideals, we are a serious revolutionary movement, but we do want to do other things, even though they don't let us. I don't know if our plans are terribly subversive, I don't believe so, but I do know that, if this isn't resolved, something is going to explode, even without us. If the country doesn't recognize that there are different human beings, any side is going to burst. And don't let them think that just the EPR or the EPRI are going to be reproduced, there will be larger, more radical movements, more unyielding, intolerant and fundamentalist on the ethnic question. But they don't want to see us outside, because we represent a phenomenon that is alien to the political class. They say: "Better that they stay there, making communiqués and dubious poetry, but they can't come to speak in the Congress, they can't be interlocutors for this or that person." That's why there haven't been sufficient signals. "Even if you were asking me for just one signal, not seven, even if you weren't asking me for anything, even if you were to take off the ski-masks without doing anything, you're not coming because you're not coming, because you'd mess up the little shop." You see, we are learning quickly, we're using the latest slang. Now we're going to sign as EZLN.com.

CM: Once these indispensable proofs are achieved, can you imagine acting in regional or national politics in a disarmed arena?

M: Yes, and I'm not speaking just for myself. We're not playing with the intellectuals. We are saying yes, that we're waiting for the decline of the regime, and now it has fallen, or that eventually a popular insurrection would occur where the entire world realizes that

hay they have to curse. Ever since we understood what we understood, we have thought that this politics has to be done, for which there are no conditions in place, but they can be built. The problem of our leaving without arms is that now it's not just the enemy, but the alternate enemies, the paramilitary groups, the white guards, the caciques. Nonetheless, we believe all that can be resolved. That is why we put so much effort into the people understanding that the solution is not just our responsibility, it's also their responsibility, or they will have to throw us out. We are very willing, but we can't fix it by ourselves, and they can't alone either. We can get this out of the regime if we all mobilize.

HB: How are you hoping that civil society organizes for your departure and the for the demands you have posed?

M: Our problem is, given the physical isolation, some people on the outside want to say: "I am the EZLN's interlocutor, the hotline." And by saying "I am" they leave many people out. We want to avoid that, the hotlines, the organizing committees. So that people from one end to the other can participate. Those who are organized in the PRD or the PT, those people who have no organization, those who are in social or political organizations, more or less radical, more or less reformist, and, most especially, those people who are not in anything.

In that sense, any organizational format by the people has its place, there will be no monopoly on dialogue with the delegation that's going to be leaving, nor with the mobilization for the three demands. It's about having room for everyone. We already have the experience from before. It was an error to put the entire responsibility on one single group, and for that group to select, filter or be an obstacle for others. That is why we are saying that, for the mobilization, the EZLN is going to be in charge directly. The Consulta was an important step in that sense. It was so flexible that there were many spontaneous organizations which had never been organized before. That is going to happen with the mobilization for the three demands and with the departure of the delegation.

HB: One question which has created concern in people who learned of the message at the press conference on December 2 is precisely that the EZLN was going to be in charge of the organization. What did you mean by that?

M: That there will not be an outside organizing committee saying what is going to happen. Any individual or group can organize to do the work, and there will always be room, without fear of being rejected because of his political affiliation, for his "effective or ineffective" vote, for his participation in the last elections, or for anything. If anyone doesn't participate, it will because he didn't want to.

HB: What are you hoping for from the EZLN's call - or that by leftist bodies - to the movements still in resistance who are looking for a change different from the one

imposed from above?

M: The focus, the backbone, is the indigenous question. We are talking with the National Indigenous Congress in order to agree on points of this mobilization, not just those concerning the delegation's trip, but concerning the seven positions and the release of prisoners. And, regarding what we share with the CNI, we want a more inclusive criteria, more tolerant, without rivalries about who is worse, who is invited or who is the one who has a popular elected position. We will have joint relationships with social and leftist forces.

We optimistically think that what is going to happen will be a stimulant for the leftist movements, very undermined from the July 2 victory, which is a victory. Especially when one has fought for so many years for there to be a regime, and then others win. The mobilization could be important for reactivating the left. Not the guide by any means, but indeed an important point for helping to rebuild the parliamentary as well as the non-parliamentary left. To not let the powers fill the spaces with today's gall. We think the space will remain open, and that is being demonstrated by the emphasis the regime is placing on the building - through the media - of the role of Public Minister. It was said a few days ago - I don't know if you saw it on the news - that a few police officers had committed fraud. There was no public, formal, legal denunciation, within the state of law they talk so much about. It just appeared on prime time TV, and Se~or Fox responded that he was going to resolve it. If your problem doesn't appear on prime time, forget about it, no one is going to pay any attention to you.

The space is open, and, if it is not filled with an alternative - which we hope will be from the left, even more inclusive and broader - then the powers' uses and customs will come, like a national Ten Commandments, and the cultural sector will be one that will be greatly affected. I'm not referring just to progressive ideas, but also to ideas about artistic work, sculptural work, radio, film, theater, culture. The last scandals which took place, the attack on the Ahumada caricature, the several examples in municipalities governed by the right, the persecution of homosexuals, the censoring of theater productions and shows which are presented in the nude. This will be, if they are allowed, the regime's policies, which they aren't proposing to last just six years, but to establish an entire way of doing politics. In bald terms, it means turning history back. Although, obviously, I don't believe the people are willing to lose what advances they've made during this period. Especially in the arena of free thinking, movement and confrontation of ideas. That is what we view with concern, but also with hope, because, ultimately, the one who was, went, the one who is here has not arrived yet, and that's where we think the people should be ready. We see, with a bit of despair, the cultural and intellectual sectors, who are saying: "Ay! Ay! It's not that bad, stop exaggerating". We wind to wind up the clock, so that it doesn't stay at a standstill, nor does it go backwards. Even though there are those who insist on telling the people: "You did wrong in voting for them, it would have been better if you'd voted for us".

HB: In response to the new opportunity for convoking the left, the social movements, can you discern a new left? Is there something different that makes you think that there are changes there also?

M: We believe the left finds itself in that dilemma. We put the right in its historical background, and the left in its, and the problem is that the fundamental issues continue unresolved. In Mexico, the regime spent the greater part of its 71 years doing damage to the symbols of resistance, of freedoms, of democratization, of struggle for transformation, to the point of prostituting them. One needs only mention its use of Zapata and all the iconography of the Mexican Revolution. The referent is not Jua'rez against Maximilian, but the PRI appropriating the figure of Jua'rez among the common people. This underlines the challenge of finding new historical referents from here forward. I believe the problem of the left is to build a new cultural and political referent. That is where we miss the intellectuals' work.

Faced with the rise of the right, it is not enough to accept "the triumph of marketing", but rather what alternative you are offering. Faced with marketing, the Reform laws? That leap is a juggling act that can leave you badly positioned, especially in certain sectors of the population which are left in the vacuum. Another problem is that the political parties are in crisis. The classic political organization of gaining power, of access to power, of interlocation in the face of power.

CM: Part of the situations' complexity is the new role of all the sectors. Public intellectuals, for example, appear, to many, to be an extinct species.

M: They have to organically reconstitute themselves, with all the burdens carried by the right and the left. They have to construct their cultural, historical and intellectual referents. In the face of market studies, what does the intellectual of the left offer in social research? He doesn't intervene, or he returns to the scheme of development and underdevelopment. Or to the Politzer manual. That is going to be our response to market studies? Against Keynes, Marta Harneker, or nothing will be clear and he's a bastard, because he's leaving them to the political operators who are also building that. Those who are not that, and in the tradition of the political organizer, are very often anti-that. Everything that is theory must be despised, it doesn't serve, it's sterile. The organizer goes around building wherever he shows up, and it's all patch, patch. We believe that the intellectual, progressive, leftist intellectual still has a path to build. The challenge is great and very rich, how I envy it, how wonderful to face it. And not just in the intellectual arena, but also in culture, film. I haven't seen much film, but there are those "new Mexican cinema" movies, from Herod's Law, which I saw during the elections, Sex, Sweat and Tears, Puppy Loves...

HB: Now the right wants to create censorship, to take a look underneath what it won.

CM: It wants to, but it's impossible now during the era of the Internet. What is

within its reach, though, is preventing the majority from getting up to date. But a parochial control now, a search for the single way of thinking, is a ridiculous undertaking.

HB: The government is new at the state level also. What changes has it produced? It's said that the zapatistas no longer have a *raison d'être*, because the national and state conditions have changed.

M: Hopefully the statements will be turned into actions. How wonderful that they are not barking, certainly, and, keeping up, may God bless Albores, and may he take the hassle. Much, nonetheless, still remains. And the problem is federal. No matter how much motivation the chiapaneco government has, the fundamental part is the federal government, which would appear to be waiting for the people to mobilize in order to begin resolving our demands.

Originally published in Spanish by La Jornada
Translated by irlandesa