

# Teachers are a mirror and window

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Closing Session of the "Democratic Teachers and Zapatista Dream" Encuentro

August 1, 1999.

Teachers:

Over the last two days, various positions have been taken on the themes of the meeting. All of them, however, have focused on one single point: the need for the word to meet - through it and for it - movements who meet each other and who discover themselves to be moving towards the same destiny, confronting the same obstacles, suffering the same attacks from the same enemies as always.

It could be said that the bridge that joins an indigenous education promoter - like those who spoke in front of you here yesterday - with a primary or secondary teacher from Baja California, from Jalisco, from Veracruz, from Guanajuato, from the Mexican State, from Chiapas or from the Federal District, is the same nightmare that the powerful imposes: low salaries, repression as a response to their demands, a lack of union democracy, bad working conditions, absurd and useless curricula, ineffective and oppressive pedagogical methods, students who do not have the minimal conditions that would allow them to devote themselves to school as it is and as needs to be. So many and so many things that you have put forward in your presentations and that have emerged from the formal and informal talks.

Yes, one single nightmare unites educators throughout the country. But not alone. Also, as we have discovered at this encuentro, the bridge that joins the democratic teachers has much of dreams.

And it is this dream that converts the initial bridge of the democratic teachers into many, and, without trying to, dreams are now being dreamt by workers, electricians, university students, rebel indigenous, campesinos without land, dissident housewives, worried neighbors, base church communities struggling in their commitment to the poor, honest religious persons, artists and intellectuals fed up with the gilded cage in which the Power keeps them, persecuted homosexuals and lesbians, Mexican men and women who say, and who say to each other, who murmur, who by times shout: "Ya basta!"

And, if I am talking of bridges now, it is because I wish to remind you that no one in this country has better opportunities, or better tools, for extending bridges than do teachers. In addition to their own demands, teachers are mirror and window to what is happening throughout the country. Through them are seen the contradictions and contrasts of a country put up for sale by a gang of thieves, but which is unwilling to die as a Nation.

We, the democratic teachers, can build those bridges. If we have not done so before now, it is because we are still shut up within our own horizons, which, although broad, do not include everyone, or it is because we have forgotten that to be a teacher is also to be a builder of bridges. Did I say "we, the democratic teachers"?

Just a minute: Are we not rebel indigenous, zapatistas, transgressors of the law of gravity and of others, stones in the shoes of the powerful, inconvenient witnesses to the antics of the political class, defiant critics of the old politics, soldiers who are fighting so that soldiers will not exist, nocturnal beings without face and without name, shadows of the shadows, talkative fools, dreamers, irredeemable utopians, irreverent ones, and other etceteras that now escape me, but that can be found in any column, magazine, news show or commentator with which the government repeats the lies that not even they believe.

Yes, we are all that and more. But we are also democratic teachers and electrical workers and university students and workers in the city and the country and artists and intellectuals and religious men and women and neighbors and homosexuals and lesbians and ordinary women and men and children and old ones, that is, rebels, dissidents, inconvenient ones, dreamers.

Because of that, the most important thing we zapatistas want to ask you is to see us as another democratic union section. That you do not see us as someone who must be helped, poor things, out of pity, out of alms, out of charity.

We want you to see us as your companeros, as being as willing as anyone to mobilize and to support the teachers struggles. Not only because your demands are just and because you are good and honest persons, but also, and above all, because they are our demands as well.

Because nothing will be complete nor finished if teachers continue to be oppressed by pro-management unions, if bad labor conditions continue - and the low salaries - , if education continues to breed oppressed and oppressors, if school continues to be - for millions of Mexicans - as distant as dignified housing, a fair wage, a piece of land, enough food, full health, freedom of thought and association, popular democracy, authentic independence and true peace.

Now, taking advantage of the fact that you are here, we want to ask something special of you. We want to ask you to support the student movement at the UNAM and the struggle of the Mexican Electricians Union. The one is against the privatization of education, and the other against the privatization of the electrical industry. Currently, the students are the victims of a fierce offensive by the government and by the electronic media that serves the powerful. The struggle of the students, and their collective head, the General Strike Council, is also the struggle of all of us, and no help should be spared them at all. We are asking you not just to help them, but also to make them feel, to know, that the democratic teachers are supporting their struggle and making it theirs.

Democratic teachers:

The EZLN is army and zapatista, yes. But it is also of "National Liberation." And that means not just that its struggle takes in the entire country, it also means that its struggle is for all Mexican men and women.

It means that our struggle is also for the teachers, but it means, above all, that the teachers struggles are also our struggles.

We want you to understand that you have extended a bridge to the zapatistas. And that bridges are made to be crossed, yes, but to be crossed in both directions.

And this bridge, that has much of dreams and sleepless reality, was made so that you could come to us, but also for us to go to you.

I recall now what the zapatista delegate companeros to the March 21 Consulta commented when they returned. They said: "The teachers received us very well, they are companeros and companeras." For us that is more than a medal, a diploma, a fanfare or a homage. It is a commitment, and, more than anything, it is a commitment by us to you.

That is why we are asking you to see us as we see ourselves, as companeros and companeras. That we continue to meet each other directly, without intermediaries. Whether you come or whether we go. Come as union sections, as school groups, as individuals, as affinities, as teacher organizations, as you wish. Keep us informed of your struggles, of your demands, of your problems and of your triumphs. The one and the other are ours.

Come to the communities, bring your other companeros and companeras, your families, your students.

All of them will be well received. If you also wish to bring your pro-management leaders, they will not be well received, but it would not be a bad idea to get rid of them.

Join your schools with those of the communities. Join your union sections with communities and Autonomous Municipalities. Do not allow the bridge to be lost or to only remain in a dream (or a nightmare, depending on the seat each of you get and will get on the return trip).

May the powerful above tremble, may they know that the democratic teachers of the greatest union in America and the zapatistas are meeting each other, they are discovering each other, and they are reaching agreement on something dangerously subversive, revolutionary and destabilizing: to struggle together for democracy, liberty and justice for all Mexican men and women.

Vale. Salud and bon voyage, and, if you need a more clear reference, from here, foreword, this is Section 1111 of the National Coordinating Group of Education Workers, which is how democratic teachers in Mexico are also known.

>From the mountains of the Mexican southeast.  
Subcomandante insurgente Marcos  
Mexico, August of 1999.