

Them and Us VII. The Smallest of them All 2: How is it done?

February 27, 2013

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Note: *Compas*, at another time (that is, if there is one) I will explain to you how our EZLN is organized. For now, we don't want to distract you from the "Sharing." We only want to clarify that you will see something about an "Information Commission." This commission is made up of *compañeras* and *compañeros*, *comandantes* and *comandantas*, (the **CCRI**, or Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee), who are watching over the work of autonomy, supporting the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* (Good Government Councils), and who keep the Zapatista bases of support informed as to how everything is going.

For now, then, more fragments from the Zapatista "sharing":

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*This is how we work, then. The last question here asks: How do you resolve problems? Yes there have been problems in the municipality. Land problems, threats, problems with electricity, yes they exist, and I think that these problems exist in all of the communities because it isn't just bases of support who live together, we have even more problems where we live in the official [ruling party] pueblos where our enemies are, where those who govern are, where there are paramilitaries, that's where we have these problems. But we have to figure out how to govern ourselves, even though it is difficult to learn this because, as other *compañeros* have said, there is no instruction manual. There is not a guide for this, there isn't anything written down anywhere that tells us what to do; rather, we have to remember that this is how our ancestors served when they weren't named by officials but rather by the people, and they served the people, and they didn't get a salary. Corruption and bad service began when salaries entered into the equation.*

*It is in this way, in the little that I have done in my pueblo and in my municipality, that I have been able to serve, although as I said, we continue to learn, we do not just know how to do things because we are older. We continue learning with everyone [male and female]. I think this is the purpose of the distinct levels [of government], and the commissioners and agents, they each have a function but they lack a way to resolve problems. In our case, we have to learn how to govern because we are not trained in this, because we as *campesinos* are more focused on the countryside, our law is the machete, the file, and the pozol*[i]* that we carry with us. So, I don't know if I'm wrong *compañeros*, but this is what I have to share with you.*

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We have had a lot of meetings and made many agreements, more than just once we had to arrive at an agreement. We learned that this is difficult work; it isn't easy to do. Why? Because as I said a little

while ago, we don't have a guide, there is no manual that we can look at to see what to do, a guide we can follow; we learned through our work with our people.

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Compañeros, this is what we have been talking about and I won't add much more about the way we want to work. Many times the Junta cannot do the work alone, even though that idea crosses our minds; rather, the work must be based on coordination with the councils, and the committees [CCRI], so that we can carry out this idea of how we think things should work, this is what we have seen in some cases.

For example, with respect to the cargos, [\[ii\]](#) the responsibilities, we see the difficulty of having lots of work to do. When I had my cargo, we saw that sometimes there was work that the Junta didn't have the capacity to cover. For example, at that time there weren't drivers for the clinic, the Junta had to be the driver, it had to be the cook, it had to fetch firewood; there were a lot of tasks and on top of that we had all of the office work to do, like studying the pending issues, pending tasks or municipal issues that hadn't been resolved, and there just wasn't time for everything. Now I see, and this crossed our minds then, that we needed support, another driver in that case, because sometimes in the middle of the night we would have to go and get someone who was seriously ill, and it was the Junta that had to go, and would get back at three or four in the morning. This problem crossed our minds but we couldn't find a solution, the situation presented itself, but we couldn't resolve it.

One example during my turn as Junta was that we wanted to diagnose which illnesses were the most frequent in the municipalities. We couldn't define this in the Junta, not even with the information we had. I had to ask the mando [local Zapatista authority], as is required, as to whether or not I could go to the municipalities for this information. So I asked the municipalities and some of the municipalities again did not act, some gave this response – they had consulted the people regarding which illness was most frequent and it was typhoid, there had been a typhoid breakout, but they hadn't formed the councils [we asked for]. So work gets done when the process functions well, like a machine. When a machine doesn't function, or a piston or a cylinder doesn't work, the car can't go up the hill; it doesn't have the force. This is what happened with our authority, although the Junta thinks or wants to make a proposal for approval in the assembly, sometimes, many times, it doesn't get approval and doesn't go anywhere.

But yes, this is a necessity. I saw at that time that there was a lot of work that year because we didn't have a driver. Now I see that they are rotating drivers to tend to the clinics, and to do the related work of washing the car, checking the tires, getting gasoline, the Junta isn't responsible for that now.

With this step, things are getting better, and I think that like this, bit by bit, it will continue to get better, as long as we are thinking and studying the necessities that arise, because the work in the zone or the municipality is also growing little by little. Little by little, more compañeras will participate because the work is growing. So we see here that what is really important is coordination among everyone, taking everything into account, in order to develop proposals and new ideas for how we can work.

It is important not to lose contact with the people. These days I hear sometimes that things for which the people were consulted at one point can now be done without consultation, that they can change a few words without the people knowing. This is a problem and can cause things to run amok, because if we teach the people and explain to them, and then all of the sudden leave them aside, they start to talk, to argue.

This can create disagreements, or cause them to speak badly of the authorities, and many times we need to go back and explain to the people. As we said earlier today, the Junta has to be very clear on

the seven principles. [This refers to the 7 principles of “lead by obeying” that guide the Juntas de Buen Gobierno: Serve, not Serve yourself/ Represent, not Supplant/ Construct, not Destroy/ Obey, not Command/ Propose, not Impose/ Convince, not Defeat/ Go Below, not Climb Above.]

The point is to convince the people, not to overcome them with the force of authority, you have to explain to them the reason for modifying certain rules or accords, you have to explain this to them; because if I am an authority and I don't explain to them why we do or don't do something, the question arises – was this point consulted with the people? This could create a grievance even if the people understand the decision, so explanations are meant to convince them and not to overcome them by force, so that people do not get discouraged or confused. This is what I wanted to explain a little more, because that's where dissent begins and how people get demoralized, this is how I see the problem.

You must always be close to the people so that this does not happen.

There are also people who might want to do something without majority agreement, so you have to explain to them that it can't be done, we have had a few cases like this. There are people who come to the office and even raise their voice to the authorities, but we can't accept their proposal because it depends on having majority approval. In these cases one has to be clear, one has to explain to the people and try to convince them, try to help them understand why we do things this way. This is what I think, compañeros, and this is what I try to explain about the seven principles, it is what I have understood, what I have learned a little about. I have not learned much because I only worked in that role for three years and little by little I realized how things needed to be. At that moment we couldn't do the work easily because we entered as new [authorities] without support, but now there are compañeros who have stayed on for one more year to accompany the new authorities, so they have some support.

But when we began it wasn't like that, we had only the support of the committees [CCRI], they were there, and with that support, gradually we were able to understand things. I understood a little, and that is what I could explain to you compañeros.

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How were they chosen?

They were chosen by the assembly; something like where we find ourselves now. In each municipality we convoked an assembly of the entire base and directly chose the group of compañeros to do that would do the work of autonomy.

What is their work? What work were these compañeros going to do? Because we had practically no knowledge about this, maybe a few people had some, but the majority had no knowledge about this task, what would we do? We would work on autonomy, we would govern ourselves, but “how” is the question that arose, what is it exactly that we're going to do? Well, no one knew the answer, but with the passage of time, with these authorities in place, problems arose that they would have to handle. There really were problems in each of our pueblos, in each of our municipalities.

What were the problems that the authorities faced at that time?

At that time, the principal problems we faced were alcoholism, domestic problems, problems between neighbors, and some agrarian problems.

So what did this group of compañeros do when a problem presented itself?

What they did was discuss it: first the person with the complaint would come and they listened to that person's problem. When they had listened, they would call in the other party, they listened to both sides. So this group of compañeros listened, first they listened to what the problem was and who was

right. When they could see that the person with the complaint was right, then they had to talk with the other *compañero* with whom the first had the problem.

At that time, the authorities would try to give them ideas, that is, convince both sides to arrive at a peaceful solution without so much drama.

This is what the authorities did with other types of problems as well, in agrarian issues for instance, they would convince the *compañeros* not to fight, not to fight over a piece of land. If one *compañero*'s land was being taken by somebody else, then they had to explain to the *compañero* who was taking the land why this shouldn't be, what is right, is right.

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Yes, that is true, but my question then is if you need to make a rule, who proposes the idea? Where does the idea come from regarding what the rule should be? Who is it that says, 'I propose this'? Where does the idea come from? And so on. What do you do to unite the voice of the people, if it is originally the Junta's idea? Does the Junta take this on or do they still need the support of the *compañeros* of the Information Commission? Or who is it that says that we need to create a rule here?

Another *compañero*'s response: What you have described, where an initiative comes directly from the *compañeros* who are authorities, an initiative for a rule comes directly from the *compañeras* who are in authority, that hasn't happened yet. It is between *compañeras* and *compañeros*.

No, compa, my question is as Junta de Buen Gobierno, not as *compañeras*. As Junta de Buen Gobierno, and this is just an example that I am giving, it doesn't have to be specifically about a rule or law. When you see that there is a need or there is a problem - I use the example of a rule because it requires a relation – the Junta de Buen Gobierno isn't going to impose a law, and so we want to discuss how it is that you handle this. Because it is here that democracy enters into play, and this is what we want to understand. Because as you told us, there won't always be insurgent leaders present, and, as we understand, the Information Commission, or the CCRI [Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee] won't always be there either. So you as the Juntas de Buen Gobierno, how do you approach something that needs to be handled, a law or a problem, some issue that needs to move forward, a project or whatever it may be. How do the Juntas de Buen Gobierno, the MAREZ [**Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities in Rebellion**], the authorities and the people relate?

That is, how is democracy made?

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To be continued...

I testify.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast.

Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos.

Mexico, February 2013

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Listen to and watch the videos that accompany this text.

Alfredo Zitarrosa, perhaps involuntary teacher of a generation, oriental who still fights with the coplas, vidalitas, and milongas. Here he is singing "[Adagio en mi pais](#)," and by country, of course, he refers to every corner of the many worlds that abound and redound.

Arturo Meza with the song "[La Rebeldía de la Luz](#)." In one part of the song, master Meza mentions each one of the original peoples who, in Mexico, resist and struggle.

Daniel Viglietti, our brother and compa, reads a story called "[La Historia del Ruido y del Silencio](#)," which tries, in vain, to explain the Zapatista silences and the Zapatista gaze.