

Schools for Chiapas presents Teach Chiapas, Part 4:
Galeano lives! Painting a Zapatista teacher

On January 1st, 1994, thousands of Mayan indigenous people covered their faces and announced to the world: "We are Zapatistas." As the sun rose that morning, they cried out: "Enough is enough! There will never again be a Mexico without us!" The same day, as the North American Free Trade Agreement went into effect, the whole world turned its attention to that forgotten corner of Southern Mexico called Chiapas. It was there that the expanding echoes of resistance and rebellion were born; and it was also there that the Zapatistas began to build their autonomy.

Those echoes reached thousands of people around the world, and many of them were deeply moved by the Zapatista cause. In response, the Zapatista communities welcomed activists from other struggles who traveled to visit, curious to get to know them, to see with their own eyes that another world is possible.

That was the case for a group of people from 12 countries, who traveled to the Zapatista Caracol in La Realidad, Chiapas, in May of 2015. There, together with community members, they gave life and color to the walls of two projects that sustain Zapatista autonomy: a rebuilt school and clinic.

"I believe the Zapatistas represent a lot of hope: that it is possible to think in different ways, to act in different ways."

"I support the Zapatistas because I believe everyone has a right to live the way they want to. And the Zapatistas have a very different view of the world and a different vision of their future than the Mexican government. And I think they have the right to set up autonomous communities that teach their language and their culture."

"Zapatismo is a symbol of building a different world from the bottom up. There are many things to learn from them, from their daily life, that we can use to nourish our thought."

But this time, the visitors were not only interested in learning about the Zapatistas...

At birth his given name was José Luis Solís López. But in honor of a 19th Century Mexican hero, he assumed the *nom de guerre*: Galeano. From a young age he understood that getting organized is the only path to liberation and at 15, his true revolutionary awakening began.

"I knew I was exploited because the weight of poverty that fell on my sunburned shoulders was enough for me to figure out that exploitation still existed." (Excerpts from Galeano's diary)

“It truly dawned on me that our goal should be to exchange ideas and try to see how to demand a dignified life for all of us who live in conditions of humiliating poverty because of our governments.” (Excerpts from Galeano’s diary)

Galeano participated in the Zapatista uprising on the morning of January 1st, 1994, and after that, thanks to his constant commitment, and as a veteran, the people of his community elected him to represent them in different areas of their autonomous government: as a driver, authority, advisor, and teacher...

On May 2nd, 2014, a paramilitary group armed and organized by the Mexican government attacked the Zapatista clinic and school in La Realidad in order to ambush and brutally assassinate the teacher Galeano.

Galeano died defending the dreams that the Zapatistas have turned into a reality.

“To us, *Compañero* Galeano was and will always be a true man who knew how to think for us, the indigenous men and women of the world. He didn’t just fight for himself and his family, he fought for all of us. We, too, should fight like he did, he led by example with his ideas: he showed us how to be rebels in the struggle.” (Words of compañera Selena, May 2nd 2015 homage)

A few weeks after his death, over a thousand people joined the caravan “Galeano Vive!” and traveled to La Realidad not only to say goodbye to the *compañero* and demand justice, but also to celebrate his life.

“We are all here to lift up our unforgettable *compañero* Galeano. We’re here to raise his name up high. We’re not here to bury him, but to unearth and revive his resistance and his fighting spirit.”

One by one, the visitors paid their last respects to Galeano. Every Zapatista picked up a stone and laid it down on the tomb of the *compañero*. Feelings of pain and rage flowed through the procession. In between the silence and the murmurs, they asked the *compañero* not to leave just yet.

“I can tell you that he was an extraordinary being and that moreover—and this is what is truly amazing—there are thousands of Zapatistas like him in indigenous Zapatista communities, with the same dedication, commitment, clarity, and shared destiny: freedom.” (Sub Galeano, may 2nd Homage in Oventic)

“On May 2nd, 2014, there was only one Galeano. But now thousands and thousands of Galeanos have flourished. So Galeano hasn’t died, he lives on.” (Compañero Manolo)

“Is anyone else here named Galeano?”

—“My name is Galeano!”

—“We are all Galeano!”

—“My name is Galeano!”

—“We are all Galeano!”
—“WE ARE ALL GALEANO!”

Sub commander Marcos, the well-known Zapatista spokesperson is one of those thousands of new Galeanos; he actually gave up his famous identity and has assumed the name of Galeano.

And so, Galeano lives on. And he lives on in the collective effort to rebuild and reopen what those in power destroyed: the clinic and the school that were destroyed the same day that Galeano was murdered.

In a cold, grey world, a joyous rebellion should be colorful.

“I think that painting murals is a peaceful, active way to resist. We are going to keep teacher Galeano’s memory alive.”

“The most important thing here is not our actual skill, but the capacity to make art collectively, to put our heart and soul into this work we created together. We did our best, and I think we did something beautiful: we made our dreams collective, and gave them color.”

“For me it’s an honor to be here and participate to do this mural in honor of Galeano. And it’s an honor to be here to just pay tribute to his legacy and to his teachings, not just to zapatista communities but to the entire world.”

“This is a great example of community art, educational art, rebellious art, art that resists. We’re painting without permission from the government, without permission from artists or fine arts academies.”

Galeano’s life will set an example and bring joy to the Zapatista struggle for generations to come. Galeano died to enrich the soil that will nourish the struggles of people everywhere who decide to live free.

For more information, and to find additional “Teach Chiapas” videos, please visit us at: www.schoolsforchiapas.org