



Our Word Is Our Weapon

Subcomandante Marcos

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Suppose that you live in the north, center, or west of this country. Suppose that you heed the old Department of Tourism slogan: "Get to know Mexico first." Suppose that you decide to visit the southeast of your country and that in the southeast you choose to visit the state of Chiapas.

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Good, suppose you have. You have now entered by one of the three existing roads into Chiapas: the road into the northern part of the state, the road along the Pacific coast, and the road by which you entered are the three ways to get to this southeastern corner of the country by land. But the state's natural wealth doesn't leave just by way of these three roads. Chiapas loses blood through many veins: through oil and gas ducts, electric lines, railways; through bank accounts, trucks, vans, boats, and planes; through clandestine paths, gaps, and forest trails. This land continues to pay tribute to the imperialists: petroleum, electricity, cattle, money, coffee, banana,

honey, corn, cacao, tobacco, sugar, soy, melon, sorghum, mamey, mango, tamarind, avocado, and Chiapaneco blood all flow as a result of the thousand teeth sunk into the throat of the Mexican Southeast. These raw materials, thousands of millions of tons of them, flow to Mexican ports, railroads, air and truck transportation centers. From there they are sent to different parts of the world—the United States, Canada, Holland, Germany, Italy, Japan—but all to fulfill one same destiny: to feed imperialism. Since the beginning, the fee that capitalism imposes on the southeastern part of this country makes Chiapas ooze blood and mud.

A handful of businesses, one of which is the Mexican state, take all the wealth out of Chiapas and in exchange leave behind their mortal and pestilent mark: in 1989 these businesses took 1,222,669,000,000 pesos from Chiapas and only left behind 616,340,000,000 pesos worth of credit and public works.¹ More than 600,000,000,000 pesos went to the belly of the beast.

In Chiapas, Pemex² has eighty-six teeth sunk into the townships of Estación Juárez, Reforma, Ostucacán, Pichucalco, and Ocosingo. Every day they suck out 92,000 barrels of petroleum and 517,000,000,000 cubic feet of gas. They take away the petroleum and gas and, in exchange, leave behind the mark of capitalism: ecological destruction, agricultural plunder, hyperinflation, alcoholism, prostitution, and poverty. The beast is still not satisfied and has extended its tentacles

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to the Lacandon Jungle: eight petroleum deposits are under exploration. The paths are made with machetes by the same campesinos who are left without land by the insatiable beast. The trees fall and dynamite explodes on land where campesinos are not allowed to cut down trees to cultivate. Every tree that is cut down costs them a fine that is ten times the minimum wage, and a jail sentence. The poor cannot cut down trees, but the petroleum beast can, a beast that every day falls more and more into foreign hands. The campesinos cut them down to survive, the beast cuts them down to plunder.

Chiapas also bleeds coffee. Thirty-five percent of the coffee produced in Mexico comes from this area. The industry employs 87,000 people. Forty-seven percent of the coffee is for national consumption, and 53 percent is exported abroad, mainly to the United States and Europe. More than 100,000 tons of coffee are taken from this state to fatten the beast's bank accounts: in 1988 a kilo of pergamino coffee was sold abroad for 8,000 pesos. The Chiapaneco producers were paid 2,500 pesos or less.

After coffee, the second most important plunder is beef. Three million head of cattle wait for middlemen and a small group of businessmen to take them away to fill refrigerators in Arriaga, Villahermosa, and Mexico City. The cattle are sold for 400 pesos per kilo by the poor farmers and resold by the middlemen and businessmen for up to ten times the price they paid for them.

The tribute that capitalism demands from Chiapas has no historical parallel. Fifty-five percent of national hydroelectric energy comes from this state, along with 20 percent of Mexico's total electricity. However, only a third of the homes in Chiapas have electricity. Where do the 12,907 kilowatts produced annually by hydroelectric plants in Chiapas go?

In spite of the current trend toward ecological awareness, the plunder of wood continues in Chiapas' forests. Between 1981 and 1989, 2,444,777 cubic meters of precious woods, conifers, and tropical trees were taken from Chiapas to Mexico City, Puebla, Veracruz, and Quintana Roo. In 1988, wood exports brought a revenue of 23,900,000,000 pesos, 6,000 percent more than in 1980.

The honey that is produced in 79,000 beehives in Chiapas goes entirely to the United States and European markets. The 2,756 tons of honey produced annually in the Chiapaneco

countryside is converted into dollars that the people of Chiapas never see.

Of the corn produced in Chiapas, more than half goes to the domestic market. Chiapas is one of the largest corn producers in the country. Sorghum grown in Chiapas goes to Tabasco. Ninety percent of the tamarind goes to Mexico City and other states. Two-thirds of the avocados and all the mameys are sold outside of the state. Sixty-nine percent of the cacao goes to the national market, and 31 percent is exported to the United States, Holland, Japan, and Italy. The majority of the bananas produced are exported.

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We, the first inhabitants of these lands, the indigenous, were left forgotten in a corner, while the rest began to grow and become stronger. We only had our history with which to defend ourselves, and we held it tightly so we would not die. And that's how this part of history arrived, and it seems like a joke because a single country, the country of money, put itself above all flags. When they uttered, "Globalization," we knew that this was how the absurd order was going to be called, an order in which money is the only country served and the borders are erased, not out of brotherhood but because of the bleeding that fattens the powerful without nationality. The lie became the universal coin, and for a few in our country it wove a dream of prosperity above everyone else's nightmare.

Corruption and falsehoods were our motherland's principal exports. Being poor, we dressed in the wealth of our scarcities, and because the lie was so deep and so broad, we ended up mistaking it for truth. We prepared for the great international forums and, by the will of the government, poverty was declared an illusion that faded before the development proclaimed by economic statistics. Us? We became even more forgotten, and until our history wasn't enough to keep us from dying just like that, forgotten and humiliated. Because death does not hurt; what hurts is to be forgotten. We discovered then that we no longer existed, and those who govern had forgotten about us in their euphoria of statistics and growth rates.

A country that forgets itself is a sad country. A country that forgets its past cannot have a future. And so we took up arms and went into the cities, where we were considered animals. We went and told the powerful, "We are here!" And to the whole country we shouted: "We are here!" And to all of the world we yelled, "We are here!" And they saw how things were because, in order for them to see us, we covered our faces; so that they would call us by name, we gave up our names; we bet the present to have a future; and to live . . . we died. And then came the planes and the bombs and bullets and death. And we went back to our mountains, and even there death pursued us. And many people from many places said, "Talk." And the powerful said: "Let's talk." And we said, "Okay, let's talk." And we talked. And we told them what we wanted, and they did not understand very well, and we repeated that we wanted democracy, liberty, and justice. And they made a face like they didn't understand. And they reviewed their macroeconomic plans and all their neoliberal points, and they could not find these words anywhere. And they said to us, "We don't understand." And they offered us a prettier corner in history's museum, and a long-term death, and a chain of gold with which to tie our dignity. And we, so that they would understand our demands, began to organize ourselves according to the wishes of the majority, and so that we too could see what it was like to live with democracy, with liberty, and with justice. And this is what happened:

For a year the law of the Zapatistas governed the mountains of Southeastern Mexico. We the Zapatistas, who have no face, no name, no past, governed ourselves. (For the most part we are indigenous, although lately more brothers and sisters of other lands and races have joined us.) All of us are Mexicans. When we governed these lands, we did the following:

We lowered to zero the rate of alcoholism. The women here became very angry and said that alcohol was only good to make the men beat their women and children; therefore, they gave the order that no drinking was allowed. The people who most benefited were the children and women, and the ones most suffered were the businessmen and the government. With support of nongovernmental organizations, both national and international, health campaigns were carried out, lifting the hope of life for the civilian population, even though the challenge from the

government reduced the hope for life for us combatants. The women are a full third of our fighting force. They are fierce and they are armed. And so they "convinced" us to accept their laws, and that they participate in the civilian and military direction of our struggle. We say nothing, what can we say?

The cutting down of trees also was prohibited, and laws were made to protect the forests. It was forbidden to hunt wild animals, even if they belonged to the government. The cultivation, consumption, and trafficking of drugs were also prohibited. These laws were all upheld. The rate of infant mortality became very small, as small as the children. And the Zapatista laws were applied uniformly, without regard for social position or income level. And we made all of the major decisions, the "strategic" ones, of our struggle, by means of a method called "referendum" and "plebiscite." We got rid of prostitution. Unemployment disappeared and with it ended begging. The children came to know sweets and toys. We made many errors and had many failures, but we also accomplished what no other government in the world, regardless of its political affiliation, is capable of doing honestly, recognizing its errors and taking steps to remedy them.

We were doing this, learning, when the tanks and the helicopters and the planes and the thousands of soldiers arrived, and they said that they came to defend the national sovereignty. We told them that where sovereignty was being violated was at the IUESAY³ and not in Chiapas, that the national sovereignty cannot be defended by trampling the rebel dignity of indigenous Chiapas. They did not listen because the noise of their war machines made them deaf, and they came in the name of the government. As for the government, betrayal is the ladder by which one climbs to power, and for us loyalty is the level playing field that we desire for everyone. The legality of the government came mounted on bayonets, and our legality was based on consensus and reason. We wanted to convince, the government wanted to conquer. We said that no law that had to resort to arms to be carried out could be called a law, that it is arbitrary regardless of its legalese trappings. He who orders that a law be carried out and enforced with weapons is a dictator, even if he says that the majority elected him. And we were run out of our lands. With the war-tanks came the law of the government, and

the law of the Zapatistas left. And once again, prostitution, drinking, theft, drugs, destruction, death, corruption, sickness, poverty, came following the government's war tanks.

People from the government came and said that they had now restored law in Chiapas, and they came with bulletproof vests and with war tanks, and they stayed there just long enough to make their statements in front of the chickens and roosters and pigs and dogs and cows and horses and a cat that had gotten lost. And that's what the government did, and maybe you all know this because it's true that many reporters saw this and publicized it. This is the "legality" that rules in our lands now. And this is how the government conducted its war for "legality" and for "national sovereignty" against the indigenous people of Chiapas. The government also waged war against all other Mexicans, but instead of tanks and planes, they launched an economic program that is also going to kill them, just more slowly . . .

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Months later, the indigenous of southeastern Mexico again reiterated their rebellion, their unwillingness to disappear, to die . . . The reason? The supreme government decides to carry out the organized crime—essential to neoliberalism—that the god of modernity has planned: money. Many thousands of soldiers, hundreds of tons of war materials, millions of lies. The objective? The destruction of libraries and hospitals, of homes and fields seeded with corn and beans, the annihilation of every sign of rebellion. The indigenous Zapatistas resisted, they retreated to the mountains, and they began an exodus that today, even as I write these lines, has not ended. Neoliberalism disguises itself as the defense of a sovereignty that has been sold in dollars on the international market.

Neoliberalism, the doctrine that makes it possible for stupidity and cynicism to govern in diverse parts of the earth, does not allow participation other than to hold on by disap-

pearing. "Die as a social group, as a culture, and above all as a resistance. Then you can be part of modernity," say the great capitalists, from their seats of government, to the indigenous campesinos. These indigenous people with their rebellion, their defiance, and their resistance irritate the modernizing logic of neomercantilism. It's irritated by the anachronism of their existence within the economic and political project of globalization, a project that soon discovers that poor people, that people in opposition—which is to say, the majority of the population—are obstacles. The Zapatista indigenous people's character, armed with, "We are here!" does not matter much to them; they lose no sleep over them. (A little fire and lead will be enough to end such "imprudent" defiance.) What matters to them, what bothers them, is their mere existence, and that the moment they speak out and are heard it becomes a reminder of an embarrassing omission by the "neoliberal modernity": "These Indians should not exist today; we should have put an end to them BEFORE. Now, annihilating them will be more difficult, which is to say, more expensive." This is the burden that weighs upon the born again neoliberal government in Mexico.

"Let's resolve the causes of the uprising," say the government's negotiators (the leftists of yesterday, the shamed of today), as if they were saying, "All of you should not exist; all of this is an unfortunate error of modern history." "Let's solve the problems" is an elegant synonym for "we will eliminate them." The campesinos, the indigenous, do not fit in the plans and projects of this system, which concentrates wealth and power and distributes death and poverty. They have to be gotten rid of, just like we have to get rid of the herons . . . and the eagles.

Notes

1. The exchange of pesos to dollars in 1989 was 3,000 pesos for one U.S. dollar.
2. Pemex stands for Petroleum of Mexico, a government-owned company.
3. IUESAY is a phonetic play on U.S.A.