

ZAPATISTA

# Zapatistas in San Cristobal Jan 1 1994



# Subcomandante Marcos in a typical pose









# Time line of the Zapatista Uprising:

## Preconditions

- Chiapas is the poorest part of Mexico. Lots of unemployed Indians, or Indians (Mayans speaking various languages) working for very little for local large ranchers.
- But there are also tons of refugees, from Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, here... Note those are all places where socialist regimes were elected and then deposed with U.S. and corporate-backed violence... 1954 coup in Guatemala directed by the CIA in collaboration with United Fruit... the Contras in Nicaragua and El Salvador...
- Note that there's OIL and URANIUM in Chiapas

# A weird mixture of Leftist Christians (liberation theology people) and Leftist Materialists (Leftist Guerillas)

- Medellin Conference in Columbia, 1968, establishes “Liberation Theology,” emphasizing the early church (pre-Constantine and Council of Nicea), and the obligation to work actively for the poor... Advocates “grass-roots” organizing...
- Bishop Samuel Ruiz is the central figure organizing in Chiapas from the 1970s on.
- 1968, SDS-affiliated students in Mexico City protested (against harsh measures used against workers and the poor in the run-up to the 1968 olympics) and were fired on. 30 – 300 were killed. Over a thousand arrested. This initiated greater radicalism both among leftists and police.
- 1971-1975 a number of splinter leftist groups operate through Mexico, including in Chiapas. Most are eventually killed by “security forces.”
- Rafael Guillén Vicente is studying philosophy at this time, at the Autonomous University and then at the Sorbonne in Paris. He became a Professor of Theory and Analysis, teaching Aesthetics at a Metropolitan Autonomous University known for racialism.
- In the 1980s he slipped away into the jungle...
- Together with at least two others, code-named Germán and Elisa, he formed the EZLN (The Zapatista National Liberation Army)... Like Hamas, they organized health care for the local population...



- 1974 indigenous congress at the Diocese of San Cristobal
- 1979 2 dozen peasant organizations declare independence (compare these autonomous communities with maroon communities....)
- 1983 Zapatistas form
- \*\*\* 1992 Article 27 of the Mexican constitution “reformed” to allow privatization
- 1994, NAFTA further reforms it. No guarantee now for Indian land.
- With NAFTA, foreign oil into Chiapas, and Northern GMO corn too, which collapses the local corn market and produces unemployment
- 1994 Jan. 1: The Zapatista Uprising. The Zapatistas take something like 1600 Ranches over. Some of those lands are still held and are the base of their communities.
- They also take a number of towns, including the state capital San Cristobal.
- The government responds with something like 12000 troops, bombing of Zapatista villages (or those supposed to be that)... Over a hundred die.
- The uprising plays a role in destabilizing Mexican finance. In particular Northern lenders declare Mexico high risk and change their interest rates. Total financial crisis... Mexico becomes the first major state “bailed out” by the IMF and the U.S. This bailing out entails the demand for “structural readjustments”
- Major Northern banks stand to make tons on this deal. A leaked memo from Chase Bank declares one of its key concerns for making Mexico good for business: “The Zapatistas must be eliminated.”

- 1996 futile meetings with government...
- First International “Encuentro for humanity and against neoliberalism”
- 1997 Army allows paramilitaries to conduct the Acteal Massacre, killing 45+ including majority women and children...
- 1998 foreign human rights observers expelled
- Reporters denied access.

# Against whom?

- Pragmatically the Zapatistas have, and probably do, engage in “low intensity” conflict with the Mexican Army, which operates with U.S. military hardware, intelligence, advisors and education (for example at Ft. Benning, at the School of the Americas). They probably also engage with other “special forces” detachments affiliated with other nations, and with mercenary military forces.
- But they *identify* their rebellion as one against “neoliberalism.” Their claim is that at this point in history, the nation-state is nothing but a “manager” for major multi-national corporations. It’s against this financial power, and its myths of “the market” and “the economy,” that the Zapatistas say they are rebelling.
- As such, they constitute only one moment in a wider global resistance movement, which would also include for example Seattle 1999, Greece 2010-2012, riots in London and in Paris...

# What's "Neoliberalism"?

- It's whatever comes after the end of the cold war... It involves the "triumph of capitalism" and its "globalization." Neoliberalism in general denotes the policies, procedures and effects of this globalization, and less publicly, the military component it requires: "counter-insurgency."
- Subcommandante Marcos (El Sup) calls this rapid and violent globalization "The Fourth World War."

# Neoliberalism, according to Marcos and critics like him, involves:

- The supremacy of the economic over the social.
- A widespread ideology of the omniscience and benevolence of “the market” and “the economy.”
- The demotion of nation-states to the status of providers of security for corporations. (Thus the Zapatistas can be, somewhat intriguingly, pro-Mexican-State, while militarily engaging the Mexican army).
- Expansion of “American Life,” = consumerism and hyper-engagement with media, to the whole world, via computer.
- Enclosing of an increasing majority of human bodies within tele-com systems (stop looking at your smart phone!)
- “Precarization” of labor. How many of you are “independent contractors”?
- Destablization of labor forces...

# Marcos tries to encapsulate this all as “7 puzzle pieces,” which don’t quite fit together...

- 1. Expansion of the gap between rich and poor: the world’s wealthiest 85 people have as much as the poorest 3 billion.
- 2. Total exploitation of the total world...
- 3. A life of wandering for increasing numbers of people in displaced populations.
- 4. Increasing relations between crime and state power.
- 5. State violence (in the service of multi-nationals).... Often by individuals educated in the U.S.
- 6. The “mystery of megapolitics,” where real decisions are made above the head of national governments (Marcos calls them “dwarves”). What matters is not who’s in power, but whether they facilitate financial power. Consider the Ukraine.
- 7. Multiple pockets of resistance, in a hyper-international web. Thus the Zapatistas, Black Blocs in Seattle, Rage Against the Machine...

# The revolution has to be fought symbolically as well as militarily

- By using tried and true symbols, like the symbol of Zapata...
- By utilizing contemporary communications, like the internet
- By establishing myths and icons, like the pipe-smoking Marcos
- By insinuating local struggles into larger ones, Zapatista into anti-globalization
- By utilizing literature, murals, fashion (the mask, the t-shirt), popular culture (Rage Against the Machine)... (does this look too much like merchandizing?)

# The goal?

- Make war against oblivion (=the forgetting of history and culture, the erasure of individuals, including “disappearances”)
- Make a new world in which “many worlds may walk”.
- Definitely, one key goal = “direct democracy”
- Direct democracy is not “representative democracy.” No special, elected individuals do decision-making... decision-making is kept with the community itself... Thus the SUB in Subcommandante Marcos, who claims he is not the “leader,” but simply follows local community decisions.



# Seattle 1999



# Seattle 1999



# Greek demos 2012







Rojava—YPJ

# Black Lives Matter on the 405





# Anti-Trump



# Standing Rock







# France: protest against “State of Emergency”



# Arab Spring





# Protest to free Pussy Riot



# Anti-Austerity, Madrid









# Anti-Austerity, London





# Gay Marriage



# Pkk fighting Turkish troops





# Discussion Questions

- Do you know people affected by “civil wars” in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, or Southern Mexico?
- Do you know people impacted by “austerity measures” imposed together with IMF “bailouts”?
- Is neoliberalism inevitable?
- Is it the market, the economy, or just a certain group of very wealthy, very powerful individuals, who drive “globalization”?
- Are the Zapatistas in the right, or not? What about the ranchers they pushed out?
- Is the Zapatista rebellion really against neoliberalism?