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Zapatismo

Moorish Orthodox Radio Crusade

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1. The Zapatista uprising in Chiapas has suddenly taken on a certain importance. Despite its small scale it has not yet been crushed, apparently because the PRI fears public outrage. Moreover, municipalities in various places in Mexico have been taken over by various groups in sympathy with the Zapatistas. This news has been blacked out in the US media, doubtless for reasons connected with NAFTA. If the PRI begins to totter, US involvement becomes probable.
2. A reading of Zapatista communiqués and manifestos (as translated by the RESIST! group in California) reveals a program completely in keeping with the principles of Emiliano Zapata himself — modified for contemporary relevance but basically anarcho-agrarian — “Tierra y Libertad”. As anarchists we should remember that Zapata’s goals were supported by the Flores Magon brothers, who worked behind the front organization of the “Mexican

Liberal Party”, but were in fact out revolutionary anarchists. In 1911, European and N. American anarchists ranging from Individualists to Wobblies participated in the short-lived Republic of Tijuana. The revolt in Chiapas which began last New Year’s Eve would appear to be the first non-authoritarian movement with real revolutionary potential since Paris ’68 or Italy in the early ’70s. We should not let marxist-leninist groups in the US “monopolize” the Zapatistas. We should demonstrate our support, and we should make it clear that we offer this support as anarchists.

3. Moreover, it seems possible for ALL tendencies within the anarchist movement to join in offering this support. Anarcho-communists, anarcho-syndicalists, Wobblies, and others with historical reasons to welcome a rebirth of Zapatismo, will need no convincing. As for the individualists, post-Situ’s, “Type-3’s”, etc., we should consider that the Chiapas uprising is a courageous adventure in the spirit of human freedom. The Zapatistas themselves have evoked the romanticism of revolt by choosing their name. “Romanticism” is a value despised only by those too cynical or too tired to remember that — from an “existential” p.o.v. — revolt is an end in itself.
4. It’s important to note that Chiapas seems to be the first real “post- 1989” radical uprising. The involvement of the USSR helped change the Sandinista movement (also named after an anarchist) into an authoritarian government. But this time there is no USSR to get involved. Zapatista documents make no reference to marxist-leninist forms of organization. (The New York Times even went so far as to call the Zapatistas “post-modern”!) For the first time since 1916 we don’t have to watch our backs

or protect our flank against leninism. — or stalinism. Anarchism is free to act.

5. Some anarchists may dislike the involvement of “Liberation Theology” in the Zapatista movement. But since 1989 the meaning of Liberation Theology has also changed or shifted. The Vatican, which tacitly encouraged Lib. Theol. as a wedge into marxism in Latin America, now no longer needs it and has virtually reduced it to the status of a near-heresy. In theory, Lib. Theol. must by now be purged of its “jesuit” wing and its “marxist” wing, leaving only the sincere radicals. The religious situation in Chiapas is very complex, involving Mayan/Christian syncretistic cults, and other churches beside the Roman Catholics. As yet the presence of organized religions in Chiapas seems to offer no real obstacle top anarchist enthusiasm for Zapatismo.

The Stirnerite anarchist Ret Marut adopted the “existential” position (see para. 3 above) when he joined the Bavarian Soviet of 1919 with Gustav Landauer and other anarchists. Escaping a death-sentence in Munich, Marut fled to Mexico and changed his name to B. Traven. In the early '20s he lived for a while in Chiapas and wrote a book about it (unfortunately never translated). Traven went on to write the best of all anarchist adventure novels — The Deathship, The Wobbly, Treasure of the Sierra Madre, and above all his Mahogany series, set in Chiapas during the Mexican Revolution. When Traven died he was buried in San Cristobal — where the Zapatista revolt broke out last New Year’s Eve. Traven is someone we might remember, not only because he was a “gringo” who loved Chiapas and supported the Revolution, but also because he transcended all limited “ideological” anarchist tendencies to embrace a grand vision of human tragedy, endurance, and freedom.

As of this writing the Zapatistas have called on radicals outside Mexico for support but have not yet specified what form they'd like it to take. Obviously, in light of the media blackout, spreading the word has top priority. Sending medicine and supplies, et cetera, may soon become both necessary and possible. Given the very great chance of US involvement to protect the PRI and NAFTA, we should begin the organization of domestic resistance networks now, so as not to be caught napping again. The anarchist press should remain closely informed, and should provide background as well as news (one of our members is in Mexico now, looking for real info). The authors of this letter are prepared to join with any responsible non-authoritarian support group which might emerge. If you are organizing or would like to help organize on behalf of Zapatismo, or if you have information for broadcast, please contact us.

Tierra y Libertad!

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