

Dateline Mexico by Carlos Méndez

Zapatistas use blackmail

The terrorist Zapatista Army is putting the thumbscrews to the nation if its outrageous demands are not met.

Backed by the rebel bishop Samuel Ruiz, and with the support of the Washington-based Inter-American Dialogue think-tank, the terrorists of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) are threatening to provoke renewed violence if the following demands aren't accepted: the resignation of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, establishment of an interim government, recognition of the EZLN as a "belligerent force," and convening of a national constituent assembly to rewrite the Mexican Constitution.

The EZLN, which is based in the southern state of Chiapas and launched an uprising there on Jan. 1, wants Mexicans to believe that if power isn't handed over to them, the country will be plunged into civil war. While these threats aren't idle ones, not everyone is prepared to give in to the EZLN. Resistance is reflected in the fact that the Army is intact and united, and much of the ruling Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) stands behind presidential candidate Ernesto Zedillo. Zedillo has not submitted to the EZLN's blackmail, nor to that of former "peace commissioner" Manuel Camacho Solís.

In an article in the June 24 *El Financiero*, Federico Arreola, a close friend of the assassinated PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio, quipped sarcastically that "The only war [EZLN] commander 'Marcos' is winning, is being fought in the pages of national and foreign newspapers."

On June 13, journalist Juan Ruiz Healy warned in *Novedades* that "mil-

itary intelligence has clearly identified the risk represented by the Chiapas movement linking up with other guerrillas in the region, and if hooked up to other European-based movements, could potentially transform Chiapas into the Lebanon of Central America. The government should therefore not risk allowing operations inside national territory of a force with the firepower of the Chiapas-based group."

And under the headline "Neither Camacho Nor Samuel, But Instead the President and the Army," the June 29 *Siempre* magazine editorialized, "at this moment, when we need definitions and precision to clear up the political confusion dominating the nation, it is necessary to eliminate one more lie: Neither former peace commissioner Manuel Camacho, nor the bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas [Samuel Ruiz] are—as they have tried to make it appear—the authors of the cease-fire existing in Chiapas. The real architects of that truce . . . are the President and the Mexican Army.

"The undeniable perseverance of those two institutions prevented Chiapas from becoming the site of a massacre, even though the goal of the uprising's leaders, of the foreign mercenaries who participated in it, and of Bishop Samuel Ruiz, was, and still is, to transform [the EZLN] into a national armed movement to overthrow the government and set up a provisional one."

The Zapatista insurgents have dropped all pretense of defending their original banners of indigenism and democracy. They have pro-

claimed themselves to be the sole judges of who should govern and what criteria will determine whether the Aug. 21 presidential elections are sufficiently "democratic." Like the Inter-American Dialogue and some U.S. State Department officials, they warn that the only test of clean elections is whether the PRI will hand power over to the opposition.

On June 13, the bishop of Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, Felipe Aguirre Franco, who is a member of the Bishops Commission for Reconciliation in Chiapas, warned that the EZLN's rejection of the government's peace proposals is "a new declaration of civil war."

Responding in defense of the EZLN, Bishop Ruiz argued that the Zapatistas hadn't rejected dialogue, but rather meant that this process must now be carried out on a national level.

But just a few days later, in an interview in the June 22 *La Jornada*, the EZLN's Subcommander Marcos said that "we aren't proposing to sit down and negotiate with the government." Negotiations are over, "because what we are saying . . . is that there is no need to talk to a [PRI] government which doesn't want to change. . . . We're saying that we could talk to a different government which would result from the Aug. 21 elections or from the convention." The EZLN has proposed holding a "democratic convention" of all opposition forces in the small town of Aguascalientes, Chiapas prior to the election in order to rewrite the national constitution and effectively set up a new "provisional" government.

Marcos concluded that "the only possibility of avoiding war is to mobilize prior to [Aug.] 21st, and then on the 21st or 22nd, see if [Mexico] passes the test of democracy." His threat is that either the PRI loses, or there will be civil war.