

Zapatistas reject Mexican government peace proposal; mediator Camacho quits

by Carlos Cota Meza

The internal war in Mexico took a new turn on June 12, when the foreign-backed Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), which first staged an insurrectionary revolt on Jan. 1 in the southern state of Chiapas, issued a 19-point declaration rejecting a peace proposal which the federal government of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari had offered on March 2. The EZLN announced that the so-called Dialogue of San Cristóbal de las Casas was over, and issued a call for a "new national dialogue" based on "democracy, freedom, and justice for all Mexicans." The EZLN dubbed this new "dialogue" a "Democratic National Convention," an event to be held in Chiapas in August, sometime before the Aug. 21 presidential elections.

The EZLN communiqué ordered "all its forces, regular and irregular, throughout the national territory and abroad, to unilaterally extend the cease-fire" with the Mexican Army, and promised that "the EZLN will not prevent the holding of the upcoming elections." Further, the Zapatistas announced that they would permit the elections in territory under their control to be supervised by "the non-governmental organizations and the International Committee of the Red Cross."

The new declaration, which comes from the Zapatista-held Lacandona Jungle and repeats much of the very first EZLN communiqué announcing its initial uprising, states that the government's peace proposals have been rejected because the Zapatistas' "demands were not satisfactorily answered in any way."

Ernesto Zedillo, presidential candidate of Mexico's ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)—substituting for the assassinated candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio—was the first to respond to the new challenge. From the state of Tabasco (bordering Chiapas), Zedillo promptly declared, "We are greatly disillusioned. We were told that the negotiations had been a success, and now the truth is that we find they were a failure."

The PRI candidate demanded an explanation for "the long period of negotiations," and also insisted on "a total and just peace," and not the "unilateral truce" now being promised. In a later statement, Zedillo absolutely rejected the idea of "political experiments that represent a leap into

the unknown."

With this, the PRI presidential candidate was taking an unequivocal stand against Manuel Camacho Solís, who since Jan. 10 has served as the commissioner of peace and reconciliation in Chiapas. Camacho—who was also a contender for the PRI presidential nomination—never accepted the candidacy of Luis Donaldo Colosio, and has expressed only conditional support for Zedillo's candidacy.

Events in the third week of June show that Camacho has been maneuvering to take control of the national political process, in particular the presidential election process. On June 1, in a private meeting with President Salinas, Camacho requested the President's backing to make a "new proposal" to the EZLN, once their "consultation with their Indian bases" was completed. In a press conference following that meeting, Camacho stated that the negotiations were a complete success, and that the outcome of the Chiapas conflict offered "three strategic possibilities": 1) political decisions by the different parties which "could in the future produce a resurgence of belligerencies;" 2) by will of the different parties, maintaining "the current situation, which has avoided war"; or 3) "a new step in building peace [to] be taken which can increase the security of Chiapas society, the Mexican Army, the EZLN, and the country in its entirety." Camacho also announced that he had sent a confidential communiqué to the EZLN command, containing "the points that would increase the peace" of society, the Army, and the Zapatistas.

What 'security'?

The contents of Camacho's confidential communiqué were leaked to the public by Bishop Samuel Ruiz, a promoter of the Theology of Liberation and outspoken defender of the Zapatista terrorists. On June 2, at a press conference at the headquarters of the San Cristóbal diocese archives (which many describe as the editorial offices where Subcommander Marcos's communiqués are written), Ruiz said, "There is not a single party in the country which feels it can make it to Aug. 21 with a winning majority." Therefore, Ruiz proposed "a political pact between the presidential

candidates, to produce a consensus that would be approved by civil society and which would lead to a historically adequate solution." If this is not achieved, he warned, "one runs the risk of confrontations, which will generate chaos" in the wake of the elections.

Ruiz also brazenly leaked the contents of the second declaration from Lacandano Jungle, ten days before it was supposed to be unveiled. Criticizing those who would limit the conflict only to Chiapas, the bishop said: "This is about national conflict. We are part of the nation. . . . The EZLN did not issue its declaration of war to those most nearby . . . that is, to the cattlemen and landowners; the war was declared on the Mexican Army."

The EZLN cited similar grounds to explain the breakdown of its "peace negotiations" with the federal government. In fact, the EZLN was not really not rejecting the 32 points of the official government proposal presented March 2, but rather was responding to the PRI's rejection of Camacho's "confidential communiqué," which posed the need for "a new step in building peace" that had been discussed with President Salinas.

On June 16, the press published statements of Sub-commander Marcos, calling upon the country's "social organizations" to gather in a Democratic National Convention, to be held prior to Aug. 21 in a town that would be re-named Aguascalientes ("Hot Springs"), inside Zapatista-held territory in Chiapas. Out of that convention, according to Marcos, "would come the proposal for a provisional or transitional government."

In a June 20 interview with the daily *La Jornada*, Marcos said that the convention "would be the political arm of the democratic fight, just as the EZLN is the military arm of the democratic fight." Marcos alluded to the Convention of Aguascalientes of 1914, which was convened by the supporters of rebel chieftain Pancho Villa with the backing of the original Zapatistas, and at which an ephemeral provisional government was named. The Convention of Aguascalientes marked the beginning of the longest and bloodiest phase of the Mexican Revolution, a horrible six-year period in which more than 1 million Mexicans lost their lives.

On June 13, the bishop of Tuxtla Gutiérrez (in Chiapas) and member of the Commission of Bishops for Reconciliation in Chiapas, Felipe Aguirre Franco, described the EZLN's rejection of the government peace offer as "a new declaration of civil war," which puts at risk not only the peace process in the region, but the security and peace of the entire country.

Resigning was the 'best decision'

On June 16, in a public letter addressed to President Salinas, Camacho Solís announced his resignation as commissioner for peace and reconciliation in Chiapas, arguing that Zedillo's criticism had damaged his credibility. Camacho complained that, "just at the moment in which we had

achieved, with your complete support, a consolidated truce for Chiapas, a vote of no confidence against my work has been cast." According to Camacho, "the comments on the Chiapas conflict by the PRI candidate have weakened the line of negotiation and the role this commissioner could play in taking new steps toward peace."

Zedillo responded by reaffirming his comments, and stated that Camacho "made the best decision, for himself and for the country."

The most evident aspect of this whole matter, which previously was only being acknowledged in private, is now regarded as an open political fact: The so-called "generation of change" which President Salinas was supposed to have ushered in, is now a splintered mess. Some observers point out that Camacho's announcement that he is retiring from politics for the remainder of the Salinas administration to dedicate himself to "family life," is but one more instance of sophistry he has become accustomed to employing since he lost the PRI presidential nomination.

Some say that Camacho will in fact continue his "parallel activities" and his private meetings, out of which he will present himself as "leader" of "a political convergence toward democratic transition," in a provisional government after the EZLN triggers the "collisions" which Samuez Ruiz predicted after Aug. 21.

Cheerleaders for terrorism

On June 13, the presidential candidate of the National Action Party (PAN), Diego Fernández de Cevallos, declared that he was not surprised by the EZLN's refusal to sign the government's peace proposal, because "the government has assumed an unclear attitude in this regard: In some cases, it appears to be trying to buy time, while in others, it makes offers it is not going to fulfill. . . . I always thought with concern that the moment would come in which the guerrillas would say: This is unacceptable." Fernández de Cevallos added that what the guerrillas are asking for, "are not things for them, but for society."

Similarly, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, presidential candidate of the leftist Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD) and member of the pro-narco-terrorist São Paulo Forum, said June 17 that "Camacho Solís had made an effort to solve the conflict, with all the limits that were imposed on him." And on June 19, he denounced as "criminal" Zedillo's opposition to Camacho's negotiations.

Cárdenas's view was seconded by Sub-commander Marcos himself, who told *La Jornada* on June 20 that "Dr. Camacho is very brave; what he says about his resignation being provoked is clear, because he has made a serious effort." Marcos added about Zedillo, "In his blindness, he doesn't see the fact that the extension of the cease-fire, the guarantees that there would not be aggression from either side . . . and that the elections are able to be held throughout the country, are all achievements of the negotiating table."