

# Table of Contents

March For Indigenous Dignity . . . . . 1



# March For Indigenous Dignity

By Austin Class War

Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos' dynamic identity has offered an unwitting foil for facile interpretation of Mexico's recent March for Indigenous Dignity as a spectacular battle between leaders. Mexico's peoples beg to differ. **Austin Class War** report back from the Zapatista caravan

[IMAGE]

Commentators on both the Left and Right have viewed the Zapatista's recent March for Indigenous Dignity as an 'espectáculo' (spectacle). Media reports have nostalgically compared it to the March on Washington and Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech. Success has been measured largely in terms of a peace negotiated between Subcomandante Marcos and president Vicente Fox, the Zapatista's audience with the legislators and their positive image in the eyes of Mexico's growing middle class. Unfortunately, most interpretations accept the limited political framework of representative democracy by restricting the Zapatista's success to concrete achievements in the traditional political arena.

The March for Indigenous Dignity can hardly be reduced to the well-coordinated media event construed by some analysts and political activists. Far from a mere war of words and astute use of publicity stunts, it must be understood as a direct action by the Zapatistas and an enactment of autonomy by an increasingly organised civil society. The march was also a demonstration of broad popularity, a rolling *encuentro* (encounter) activated by Mexico's indigenous on the move. The Zapatistas did not, in fact, direct the indigenous led series of meetings and cultural events – attended by tens of thousands – which thronged the marchers' 12-state route. Mexico's indigenous peoples joined the Zapatistas and declared full support for the Commission for Peace and Reconciliation (COCOPA) legislation and implementation of the San Andres Accords. The degree of public and clandestine organisation triggered by the march was also part of its success as a whole. The march offered Mexico a new path to dialogue and dignity, while inviting Mexican civil society to acknowledge and celebrate its diversity. Over its 15 days, the 23 Zapatista *comandantes* and Subcomandante Marcos produced a significant number of reactive and strategic communiqués whilst also engaging in a profoundly humble dialogue. The Zapatistas spoke with a variety of sectors in numerous venues, including the over 250,000 who filled Mexico City's main square on 11th March. The march and its support revealed what the Zapatistas had been saying for some time: elected officials should be behind, not in front of, the people and should "lead by obeying". Governmental unwillingness to engage in open dialogue and underhand attempts to regain political ground through legislative sabotage threatened to provoke violent reactions from guerrilla groups and the urban disaffected alike.

Given that no indigenous community has ever addressed the Congress in their 500 plus years of exploitation, the march served to expose the extent of Mexican racism. The at times arrogant and fearful urban reception betrayed this history, manifesting itself in attempts to portray the Zapatistas as quaint and folksy (ridiculous in light of the massive national and international mobilisation that made the march and its political victories possible). To this Marcos countered: "No, we Indian peoples have come in order to...ensure that the inclusive, tolerant, and plural tomorrow which is, incidentally, the only tomorrow possible, will arrive..., we...have resorted to the art of reading what has already been sown yesterday, which is being cultivated today, and which can only be reaped if one fights, if, that is, one dreams." *El Sup* assessed the march as the moment when Mexico's most marginalised population made history, not through great feats by individuals that become the dead historical facts of books, but rather in movement, through action and engaged dialogue.

Austin Class War

For more information about Zapatismo in Mexico, Texas, and elsewhere, see  
[<http://www.utexas.edu/students/nave>]