

The Zapatistas' Fight is the Universal Fight of Life Against the Desertification of the Earth

By Raoul Vaneigem¹

While the financial interests and the totalitarianism of money kill every single thing by transforming it into merchandise, the wind of revolt² rises up and spreads, less the result of the breath of ideas than the intolerable existence imposed upon men and women all over the world.

It has been 50 years since the most radical aspects of the Occupations Movement of May 1968 [in France]³ manifested its refusal of the imposture called the *welfare state*,⁴ the state of consumerist wellbeing.⁵ And it has been 25 years since the ringing out of the “¡Ya basta!”⁶ by which the Zapatistas manifested their will to freely decide their destiny by forming collectives capable of putting an end to the oppression that, for centuries, had flouted⁷ their rights and their dignity as men and women. If this experiment in true democracy – the strictly local character of which the media’s lies had wanted to emphasize – very quickly caused echoes outside of a small territory [in Mexico], it was the volcanic force of this social eruption that caused the line of a seismic rupture traced out by freedom all through history to resurface. An ignorant form of education and a culture of prejudice had buried in the past the great hopes that had given birth to the French Revolution, the Paris Commune, the Soviet of Kronstadt and the self-managed collectives of the Spanish Revolution. But human awareness never dies out; it might mellow, vegetate or occasionally fall into lethargy; but there’s always a moment in which it wakes up and, in a certain way, makes up for lost time.

The combative determination of the Zapatistas, like the fierce struggle of Rojava,⁸ forms zones of resonance in which human awareness revitalizes itself and the right to life becomes determined to break the powers of profitable death. It is not without reason that capitalist greed deploys its strike force against the territories in which the forms of a radically new society

¹ Raoul Vaneigem, “*Le combat des zapatistes est le combat universel de la vie contre la désertification de la terre*,” published in Spanish on 20 January 2019 by *La Jornada* and in French by *La Voie Du Jaguar* on 21 January 2019. Translated from the French by NOT BORED! on 1 June 2020. All footnotes by the translator.

² The wind is a metaphor that has often been used by Insurgent Subcommander Marcos of the Zapatista National Liberation Army. See for example “Chiapas: The Southeast in Two Winds: A Storm and a Prophecy” (1992), published in translation here: http://www.struggle.ws/mexico/ezln/marcos_se_2_wind.html.

³ Vaneigem himself participated in those events.

⁴ English in original.

⁵ Consumerist wellbeing is not the same thing as the welfare state, which was typified by governmental benefits provided to underprivileged people.

⁶ Spanish in original (“Enough!”).

⁷ The French word used here, *bafouaient*, can also mean “besmirched” or “ridiculed.”

⁸ The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES), often referred to as Rojava, has been a de facto autonomous region in northeastern Syria since 2012.

rediscover, in a human sense, a style of life founded on solidarity, that which is free [*la gratuité*] and creativity in place of work. We saw this when, in France, the technocratic government – a real cog in the profit-making mill – crushed the collective vegetable gardens, the sheep pens, the homemade houses and the new society that was being sketched out at Notre-Dame-des-Landes⁹ under the boot of the dominant order.

At the same time we hear the scythe of desertification getting sharpened, we also hear the echoing cries of a long-contained revolt. Even if the movement of the Yellow Vests¹⁰ must fall back into the ruts of the past, decline into confusion and disintegrate, it will still remain the case that it displayed a form of radicalism summoned to rebirth and self-development. The refusal of leaders and representatives, the rejection of political cronyism, the denunciation of the media's lies, the condemnation of a dehumanizing system in which cynicism and arrogance impose the pauperization required by the frenzy of short-term profit-making and the growth of enormous sums of money that inflate the speculative bubble to an absurd degree. There are billions of dollars spinning around over our heads and yet we must tolerate budgetary restrictions that affect health, education, transportation and the goods that are indispensable to simple survival.

Getting back to basics is the only way of doing away with the politics that, from its imbecilic heights, claims it can make decisions in our place. The republic of statistics, balance sheets and figures has nothing in common with the heating bills and the degradation of the environment that overwhelm those whom power mistreats and manipulates by calling them “citizens.”

Only local assemblies are familiar with the problems encountered by the inhabitants of a town, a neighborhood, or a region. Only popular assemblies can try to resolve these problems and to federate the small entities so that they form a front – *inseparably local and international* – against the Money International [*Internationale du fric*] whose character and ineluctable development is consecrated by journalistic corruption when it baptizes it “globalization.” Does solidarity with the EZLN¹¹ have a better way of manifesting itself than by the spontaneous multiplication and radicalization of self-managed struggles throughout the entire world?

What is in the process of constructing itself here, without any institutional form, is an international of the human being; it is the discovery of the practical poetry that, made by all and for each one, declares “We are nothing, let's be everything.”

⁹ Cf. François de Beaulieu, “Usage of the Commons at Notre-Dame-des-Landes, Yesterday and Today”: <http://www.notbored.org/Beaulieu.pdf>.

¹⁰ Cf. Raoul Vaneigem, “Concerning the ‘Yellow Vests,’” (2018): <http://www.notbored.org/yellow-vests.pdf>.

¹¹ The Spanish acronym for the Zapatista National Liberation Army.