

Zapatista Uprising (1 January 1994)

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Description On 1 January 1994, 3,000 members of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) seized six towns and hundreds of ranches in Chiapas, Mexico. The uprising was timed to coincide with the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which the Zapatistas called a "death sentence" for Indigenous peoples. The agreement necessitated changes to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, ending land reform and redistribution. This directly challenged the ability of Mexican farmers to earn a living against powerful US-based agribusiness interests and fundamentally threatened the capacity of Indigenous peoples to sustain cultural practices that exist in profound relation to the land. These consequences, along with the explicitly anti-capitalist stance of the EZLN, would lead to the uprising being seen as the first major act of rebellion against global capitalism. Rather than calling for the seizure of state power, the Zapatistas instead directed their uprising toward citizens' control of their local communities and the achievement of ten essential goals: work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace.

Following the tremendous success of the first day of the uprising, the EZLN was quickly and brutally driven back into the jungle of Chiapas by the Mexican Army. On 12 January 1994, however, massive national demonstrations and international attention forced the Salinas government to declare a ceasefire and call for negotiations with the Zapatistas. Despite sporadic and unsuccessful negotiations, a government policy of low-intensity war designed to undermine support for the EZLN, and the electoral defeat of the ruling PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) in 2000, the Zapatistas' rebellion continues today, in pursuit of Indigenous autonomy and "democracy, liberty, and justice" for all Mexicans.

Suggested Reading: **Collier, George A. and Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello.** 1999. *Basta! Land and the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas*. Oakland, CA: Food First Books.

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