e-(re)volution: Zapatistas and the Emancipatory Internet

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> If you have come here to help me,
> You are wasting your time …
> But if you have come because
> Your liberation is bound up with mine,
> Then let us work together.
>
> Lilla Watson

Hans Magnus Enzensberger argued that communication was essential for social change. In his often-reprinted article, "Constituents of a Theory of the Media" from 1970 he wrote that: "For the first time in history the media are making possible mass participation in a social and socialized productive process, the practical means of which are in the hands of the masses themselves" (52). Even though Enzensberger refers here to the mobilizing

potential of the transistor radio due to its capacity for two-way communication, his theory can be applied to the communicative potential of the Internet. According to Enzensberger, for communication to have emancipatory potential it has to facilitate effective exchange among the masses. Thirty years after his article, Enzensberger's vision of the emancipatory potential of two-way communication is being realized in the revolutionary struggles of the Zapatistas in the southern Mexico state of Chiapas. I argue that despite the rapidly mounting corporate and state control of the Internet, it still has the potential as a tool for emancipatory revolution. After a brief examination of the history of the Zapatistas, this essay will examine the potential of and limitations on this medium through the lens of this revolutionary group.

In 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), a socialist revolutionary group struggling for indigenous rights, land reform, and human rights protections, came to the forefront of Mexican politics when they briefly occupied several towns in southern Mexico, which they were soon forced to abandon by the Mexican Army. "[E]quiped with rubber boots, homemade army uniforms, bandanas, ski masks, and weapons ranging from handmade wooden rifles to Uzi machine guns, [The EZLN] seized towns in eastern and central Chiapas, proclaiming a revolution..." (Collier 1). According to George Collier the Zapatistas took the towns of Altamirano, Chanal, Huistán, Las Margaritas, Oxchuc, Ocostingo, and most notably, San Cristóbal de las Casas. After a few days of sometimes heavy fighting and air strikes, the Mexican military pushed the Zapatistas into the jungle. This early appearance of the EZLN was clearly military in nature. The first "Declaración de la Selva Lacandona" gave instructions to its own troops as well as advanced warning of its intentions. The order was: "Avanzar hacia la capital del país venciendo al ejército federal mexicano, protegiendo en su avance liberador a la población civil y permitiendo a los

pueblos liberados elegir, libre y democráticamente, a sus propias autoridades administrativas."[1]

Before this declaration, neither the Mexican people in general nor the international public had truly registered the extraordinary suffering of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas. After their momentous explosion into public consciousness, as a result of their actions in San Cristóbal de las Casas, the Zapatistas increasingly gained media recognition for their cause and eventually gained political leverage with the Mexican government. "Immediately, news of the rebellion and Zapatista communiqués spread throughout Mexico and around the world. Through their communication practices, the initially local Zapatista army became quickly transformed into a broad national and transnational movement of Zapatismo" (Jeffries 129). Even though the EZLN had lost its first military battle it was winning the war of words. On Saturday, February 24th 2001 a delegation of the EZLN came out of hiding in the jungles of southern Mexico and peacefully walked onto the streets of San Cristóbol de las Casas. This moment marked the beginning of their historic march to Mexico City to discuss peace with government officials.

One of the ways the EZLN has tried to inform and mobilize Mexico and the world about the repression in Chiapas, albeit sometimes indirectly, has been via the Internet. As Thomas Olesen points out, "the informational infrastructure of the transnational Zapatista solidarity network is mediated by solidarity activists around the world. Put differently, the EZLN itself does not play a direct role in this infrastructure" (65). There are, however, exceptions as Olesen goes on to note that the Centro de Información Zapatista, which was set up in 2001 was a more direct link to the EZLN. It is, then, important to note that EZLN websites are not

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[1] From: http://palabra.ezln.org.mx/ last contacted on April 10, 2006.

always maintained from within Mexico and due to the fluid nature of the Internet, the websites are not exactly stable. For example, the domain EZLN.org is owned by Justin Paulson, who lists his address in Santa Cruz, California. This particular page, which used to be one of the main pro-Zapatista websites, now does little more than refer the viewer to ezln.org.mx. This newer site is graphically advanced in design and provides in-depth information; it allows the visitor to read recent speeches by EZLN leadership. The use of this technology appears to be what Enzensberger was calling for in his theory of emancipatory communication. "Every transistor radio is, by the nature of its construction, at the same time a potential transmitter; it can interact with other receivers by circuit reversal" (53). For the EZLN, the Internet is a medium that makes possible mass participation and therefore has emancipatory power.

Prior to the brief occupation of San Cristóbal and other towns by the Zapatistas, with the exception of scholars, activists and others working or studying the area, very few people knew much about the plight of that region. Even during and immediately after the uprising, many people outside of Chiapas primarily received the news without the Zapatistas' perspective and the messages that were disseminated through the United States were filtered through the ideology of the major news networks. As Raymond Williams points out in another context, the development of television led to "the provision of centralised entertainment and the centralised formation of opinions and styles of behaviour" (11). When the Mexican military intensified the fighting in Chiapas, television conglomerates continued to report only the sensational. "Even after the cease-fire, when the emphasis of the Zapatista offensive shifted from arms to words, the commercial media overwhelmingly refused to reproduce the striking and often eloquent communiqués and letters sent out by the EZLN" (Cleaver 82). *La Jornada*, a Mexico City daily newspaper, was one of the few to print the communiqués and letters in full.

Because of this bias in reporting, the EZLN has tried to find innovative ways of keeping their movement alive. One of the main goals of the Zapatistas was to communicate their plight, their ideas, their successes and their failures not only to each other, but also to the rest of Mexico and the world. The Internet provided just such a communicative venue: "Vital to this continuing struggle has been the pro-Zapatista use of computer communications. While the state has all too effectively limited mass media coverage and serious discussion of Zapatista ideas, their supporters have been able, to an astonishing degree, to circumvent and offset this blockage though the use of electronic networks…" (Cleaver 81-82) People in Mexico who were, or became sympathetic, to the plight of the people in Chiapas, "typed or scanned the communiqués into e-text form and sent them out over the Net to potentially receptive audiences around the world" (Cleaver 83). Some of those potentially receptive groups have since created their own websites and "mirror" sites (websites that reflect or reproduce other sites).

In spite of the growing commercialism of the Internet, the EZLN leadership continues to rely on it to disseminate information about its activities and goals to a global public. This spread of information has been vital to the survival of the EZLN especially since the Chiapas region is isolated geographically and economically from Mexico and the rest of the world. Since the Zapatistas reported on their struggle via the Internet, they managed to create a globally available public witness to events.

Within Chiapas, many of the Zapatistas' intended audience is unable to read and unlikely to have access to a computer. In 1991, only 67% of households in Chiapas had access to electricity compared to the 88% for all of Mexico. [2] Clearly, the use of the Internet by the

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[2] These statistics were originally provided by Anuario Estadístico de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, 1991).

Zapatistas has not been not directed toward their constituency in Chiapas, but, rather, has been aimed at a providing a global audience with their version of events. When the Zapatistas suddenly appeared in San Cristóbal de las Casas and several other cities of Chiapas in the early hours of January 1, 1994, they brought with them a printed declaration of war against the Mexican state and for the liberation of the people of Chiapas and Mexico. News of that declaration went out through a student's telephone call to CNN, and then as journalists arrived to investigate, stories went out via the wire services, newspaper reports and radio and television broadcasts all over the world. For the most part, however, readers and viewers of that reporting saw and heard only excerpts from the Zapatista declaration of war. They never saw the whole declaration, with all of its arguments and explanations for what were obviously dramatically surprising and audacious actions. Except for the rare exception, such as the Mexico City daily newspaper *La Jornada*, they only got what the editors wanted them to get, according to their own biases (Cleaver 82).

In comparison with television and print media, the Internet allows for the participation of its audience in shaping the flow of information. Chris Toulouse explains in *The Politics of Cyberspace* that the Internet is a "pull" media. Essentially the person interacting with the content on the Internet controls the flow of the content, but this may not always be the case. Through the use of "pop-up" advertising and mass e-mailing techniques the Internet is becoming increasingly a "push" media like television. Television, radio, newspapers and magazines are all "push" media—they pump product at the public whether consumers want it or not; whereas the Web is a "pull" media—consumers can decide for themselves whether they want to call up what the publishers are offering (Toulouse 4).

Because the Internet user must make decisions about which pages to view and which to skip, it allows for a level of engagement

that, to a large extent, is not available to the television viewer. Even though the television viewer can change channels in a manner similar to clicking links for the web surfer, its flow of information is endless; whereas the Internet's flow requires that the user act in order for it to continue. Perhaps the biggest distinction is that the producers of television programs want to entice the viewer to remain still and passively absorb their images, a one-way flow of information that directly contrasts the web designer's interest in enticing the user to explore the intricacies of the website. In a certain sense the web designer seeks to engage the viewer in a communicative exchange: the website offers an array of informational choices hoping that one of these choices will spark greater interest in the user. Without the active involvement of the user, the Internet site is stagnant. Even though the interface between website and user varies and even though commercial sites are increasingly using pop-up advertising and other means to force the user into a passive role, the Internet still requires input from the viewer. The viewer is a participant. In this way, Internet technology lends itself well to the communication of revolutionary politics since these also require active and engaged commitment.

The Internet also has revolutionary potential because it escapes centralized control. According to Enzensberger there are key differences between the "Repressive use of technology" and the "Emancipatory use of technology" (64). The first difference is the control over the program. Repressive technology for Enzensberger has centralized control over the flow of information as in the case of television and radio. Enzensberger thought that the advances in technology that were on the horizon in the 1970s would help decentralize media control by making access to radio programming available to a wider public. Radio, however, has not yet provided the progressive communicative venue envisioned by Enzensberger. Similarly, cable and satellite television initially seemed to offer the

possibility of broader, non-commercial, mass communication. Even though there has been a proliferation of television stations through cable and satellite, including some local products, mass media has been increasingly monopolized and is controlled by a handful of corporate interests. These corporate interests that need to reproduce their own means of reproduction will continue their own struggles to commodify the political struggles of the people in Chiapas, by severing the image of Subcomandante Marcos from the Zapatista's message. As Chris Toulouse explains in the introduction to the book, *The Politics of Cyberspace*:

> The Internet, we are so often told by skeptics, will go the way of cable television in the US; for all the hype it will inevitably be turned into a bazaar for selling our culture back to us and recycling surplus product form the past. Yet so far the Web is proving stubbornly difficult to commercialize. (4)

This leaves the Internet as one of the few decentralized forms of mass communication that Enzensberger foresaw, and supporters of the EZLN are benefiting from that lack of central control. "The social conditions and technological advances which have fueled the spread of the Internet, such as the introduction of relatively inexpensive modems, standardized protocols, widespread use of computers in the home and workplace, and so on, also render state borders of diminished consequence in terms of control over output and infrastructures" (Rodgers 136). Cleaver, an economics professor at the University of Texas, Austin, specializing in Marxist economic theory, created one of these sites: "Zapatistas in Cyberspace". Cleaver's role as site manager exemplifies the open-ended and interactive form of communication allowed by the Internet because he functions both as a receiver and as a transmitter of information. The primary function of "Zapatistas in Cyberspace" is as an internet gateway to other EZLN resources such as web links, Internet lists, newsgroups, and archives about the Zapatistas. Since the University of Texas is the host for "Zapatistas in Cyberspace" there is no

advertising involved in maintaining the site, a fact that allows Cleaver's site to avoid involvement with the corporate side of the Internet.

Cleaver's site suggests another potential pitfall to using the Internet for political communication: It requires technical knowledge and access to computer technology. In fact, Cleaver, himself, points out in his history of Internet use by the Zapatistas that they did not initiate the electronic distribution of information. Production was by various groups of specialists, or rather people, like Cleaver, with knowledge of website hosting and design. Although Enzensberger called for production by a collective instead of by specialists, I do not feel that the use of committed specialists is problematic. A parallel example is the way in which the creators of the Latin American New Cinema theorize the role of filmmaking. They also had a desire to have emancipatory communication emanate from a collective. For instance, directors and theorists Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino argue for film production for the people by the people.[3]

In ways that correspond to the technical requirements of filmmaking, the Internet also creates a complicated context for revolutionary communication: those skilled in the technology must actively collaborate with those skilled in other areas like rhetoric, leadership, and organization. There is a caveat however, as the epigraph by Lilla Watson indicates: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time… But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

Forging a non-hierarchical relationship between those with technical skills and those with an urgent need to express themselves is extremely difficult. Nevertheless, this process has worked relatively well in the case of the Zapatistas. Cleaver, for instance, has used his site to disseminate the political project of the Zapatistas and

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[3] Solanas, Fernando and Gettino, Octavio. "Towards a Third Cinema". *Film and Theory: An Anthology*. Malden: Blackwell, 2000.

to highlight the public relevance of their critical and political interventions. In the following quote from his site, he demonstrates that their critique of neoliberalism has had a global impact:

> The Zapatista analysis of neoliberalism (the Latin American term for pro-market, pro-business and anti-worker/peasant policies) has led to discussions and analyses of the similarities with Thatcherism in England, EU-Maastricht policies in Europe, IMF adjustment programs in Africa and Asia, Reagan-Bush-Clinton supply-side policies in the US and so on. The enormous response to the 1996 Zapatista call for a series of continental and intercontinental Encounters led to an historic gathering in Chiapas at the end of July 1996 where over 3,000 grassroots activists and intellectuals from 42 countries on 5 continents came together to discuss the struggle against neoliberalism on a global scale.[4]

From the standpoint of analyzing the communicative potential of the Internet, the website is noteworthy for its emphasis on interactivity. There are a number of ways in which the Zapatista Internet community can interact. The first link under the main banner offers the visitors a chance to provide their own news items to the page. The second link provides the opportunity to send photos to the site. There is also an administered forum where the community can interact with itself and representatives of the FZLN. These top few links give the site its emancipatory potential. By mid-2005 there were 1250 users and 1131 messages on the forum, a number of which demonstrated interest in active participation in the Zapatistas' struggles.

Another key site that presented the case of the Zapatistas, "The EZLN Page", is a non-profit website that is not an official link to the EZLN. Its Webmaster, Justin Paulson, states, "The EZLN Page was put together in the spring of 1994 in order to provide reliable information on the Zapatista uprising and serve as a mouthpiece for the Zapatistas in cyberspace. The page is always growing, and well

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[4] Cleaver, Harry. May 13, 2005. <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/Homepages/Faculty/Cleaver/zapsincyber.html>

over seven hundred thousand people from Mexico and elsewhere have used it as a resource."[5]   Now, however, this site is currently under revision and directs the visitor to four other sites including the official site of the EZLN, www.ezln.org.mx.   This site resides on servers in Mexico. A communiqué from Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos in November of 2005 explains the formation and changes in the use of Internet communications.

A partir del día 1 de diciembre del 2005, la comunicación de la comisión sexta del EZLN con quien haya menester en los

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[5] This information was taken from the ¡Ya Basta! Website.   It includes contact information and questions regarding the site. Webmaster Justin Paulson webmaster@ezln.org

Editorial Committee: Justin Paulson, (justin@ezln.org); Joshua Paulson, (joshua@ezln.org); Amarela Varela Huerta, (amarela@ezln.org); Héctor Velarde, (hvelarde@spin.com.mx).

"Answers to the most frequently asked questions about this page:
- This website is a private, nonprofit endeavor and is not an official publication of the Ejército Zapatista.
- The domain name ezln.org was registered for this site with the permission of the EZLN leadership.
- You are encouraged to continue to disseminate/reprint/translate the communiqués of the EZLN assembled at this site; they are the work of the General Command of the EZLN, and neither this site nor the webmaster hold any copyright claims to them.
- The access counter on the main page only registers those who view the site with graphical browsers.
- Many people contribute to the presence of zapatismo on the Internet— through this page and many others, as well as through other Internet media (e.g. ftp and gopher).
- Subcomandante Marcos does not have a direct e-mail address.
- The crisis in Chiapas will not be solved in Cyberspace; yet, the Internet can be a powerful tool for activism and information dissemination (hence, the page's existence).

The EZLN Page was put together in the Spring of 1994 in order to provide reliable information on the Zapatista uprising and serve as a mouthpiece for the Zapatistas in cyberspace. The page is always growing, and well over seven hundred thousand people from Mexico and elsewhere have used it as a resource.

Material contained on this page is in English, Spanish, or Portuguese (and occassionally (sic) German), depending on what is available and accessible; sometime in the future it may be split into multiple pages by language. (Incidentally, the page began as a resource primarily for those outside of Mexico, and in English; only in 1995 did the webmaster realize how much it was being used from within Mexico itself.)

All work done on this page is done in the editors' spare time—nobody does this professionally. While we make a concerted effort to make information available on the site as soon as we recieve (sic) it, please understand if there are occassional (sic) delays."

trabajos que le tocan al EZLN en la "otra campaña" ya no será a través de la revista rebeldía, sino de "enlace zapatista."

Quinto.- para la comunicación cibernética directa con la comisión sexta del EZLN (en lo nacional de México) y con la comisión intergaláctica del EZLN (en todo lo que se refiere a lo internacional), estará funcionando una página electrónica especial a partir del 30 de noviembre del 2005: www.ezln.org.mx. La información cibernética que la revista rebeldía fue recolectando, pasará a esta página electrónica.

Esta página electrónica tendrá dos ligas: una al EZLN en la "otra campaña" (www.enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx) y otra al EZLN en lo internacional (zeztainternazional.ezln.org.mx -sí, así, con "z"-). (Nuevas formas de comunicación con la Comisión Sexta, http://palabra.ezln.org.mx/).[6]

The link "cartas y comunicados del EZLN", which is regularly updated, lists the reasons for the movement. The first document is the "Declaración de la Selva Lacandona", a declaration of war against the government, claiming that it is a one party dictatorship supported by the military. This declaration makes it clear that the EZLN is against the commodification of the people of Chiapas.

Pero nosotros HOY DECIMOS ¡BASTA!, somos los herederos de los verdaderos forjadores de nuestra nacionalidad, los desposeídos somos millones y llamamos a todos nuestros hermanos a que se sumen a este llamado como el único camino para no morir de hambre ante la ambición insaciable de una dictadura de más de 70 años encabezada por una camarilla de traidores que representan a los grupos más conservadores y vendepatrias.

(But we today say ¡Enough! The dispossessed, we are millions and we thereby call upon our brothers and sisters to join this struggle as the only path, so that we will not die of hunger due to the insatiable ambition of a 70 year dictatorship led by a clique of traitors that represent the most conservative groups that are selling-out our country.)[7]

How did this statement and the others that followed come to resonate with so many people outside of Mexico and what effect did

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[6] For the entire communiqué see http://palabra.ezln.org.mx/ last visited on July 19, 2006.

[7] Comandancia General del EZLN. "Declaración de la Selva Lacandona". July 19, 2006 http://palabra.ezln.org.mx.

that resonance have? And what effect, if any has the electronic dissemination had on the movement. Judith Hellman attributes much of the appeal to "the extremity of the case":

> It appears as a direct confrontation between the powerless and the powerful, the pure and the impure, the honest and the corrupt. Given the elegant simplicity of these images in a world normally filled with ambiguities (or worse, postmodern relativism!), it is not surprising that there are progressive people around the world who would do anything to support the struggle in Chiapas except learn the confusing details. (n.p. http://www.yorku.ca/socreg/)

What Hellman does not seem to recognize is that the Internet allows the two way communication needed to learn the details of the struggle. Of course, there are people who will support the EZLN without ever truly understanding every aspect of the conflict and culture of Chiapas, but electronic communication allows a conversation with people who are on the ground in Chiapas in a way that no other technology has offered. Furthermore, people engaged with the struggle in Chiapas on many different levels, some took parts of the struggle and made them their own. This adoption of the struggle, especially the struggle against neoliberalism, then gets returned to Chiapas as a sort of validation.

When neoliberalism became the name of the enemy, the Zapatista movement was adopted globally, because the enemy was no longer simply the corrupt government of Mexico, but rather was the free market capitalism associated with global neoliberalism. Emphasizing the connection between the EZLN and the social crisis caused by the extreme form of free trade advocated by neoliberal economics allowed the cause of the EZLN to connect with similar struggles globally and created an international community that became invested in the success of the EZLN. If the EZLN could succeed in acquiring better social status for indigenous Mexicans, then perhaps they could serve as a model for other similar political battles.

One group that seeks to use the Zapatista model is called the "Irish Mexico Group", that operates in Ireland. This site was hosted by flag.blackened.net, which was a server that provided free web-space for anarchists.[8] It has since moved to "The Struggle Site" (http://struggle.ws/revolt.html#Struggles) Again, the "Irish Mexico Group" hosts a number of the communiqués, news and information about the EZLN, most of them have been translated into English for this site. This site is significant for two reasons. First, it is geared toward people unfamiliar with the EZLN: Its first three available links are "Beginners Start Here", "Chronology of Events", and "Information about Chiapas and the EZLN". This site's primary purpose seems to be the facilitation of a political learning process, which is also a part of Enzensberger's "Emancipatory use of media."

Other collective wishes, which capitalism often recognizes more quickly and evaluates more correctly than its opponents, but naturally only so as to trap them and rob them of their explosive force, are just as powerful, just as unequivocally emancipatory: the need to take part in the social process on a local, national, and international scale: the need for new forms of interaction, for release from ignorance and tutelage; the need for self-determination (562).

The "Irish Mexico Group" site, more than the others, has a pedagogical goal. It uses the most space trying to teach its visitors about Chiapas and the Zapatistas. Among the topics are, the history of Mexico, history of Chiapas, and history of the Zapatistas, as well as background information on the politics of Mexico, its economics and even the life of Emiliano Zapata. This site also attempts to interact with its visitors. However, the original site which was located on a "Yahoo Geo Cities" server, which is a commercial website host complete with advertising by banner and pop-up ads, is now defunct along with the Flag.Blackened.net host. The reasons for the loss of

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[8] For more information regarding what this server hosts see the site, <http://flag.blackened.net/flag.html>. Last contacted on July 10, 2006.

the original site and forum are unclear; however the momentum of the Irish Mexico site has been lost. On the new Yahoo listserv, which has over 1200 messages, fewer than fifty even mention the Zapatistas.

Nevertheless, there have been quantifiable gains achieved by the Zapatistas that have improved the lives of the people of Chiapas and the worldwide attention to their struggle facilitated by the Internet likely had a measurable impact on these successes. For example, the Irish-Mexico group had members staying in the community of Diez de Abril from 1997 until 2000. These members served as observers and recorded actions by the Mexican military as well as posted police reports of the jailed and disappeared. "On the 15th of April 1998 the Mexican 'security' forces raided Diez de Abril, arresting three Norwegian peace observers and deporting them. A 17 year old local José Alfredo López Méndez was also seized by the army, tortured and imprisoned. Thanks in part to international pressure he was later released."[9] Due to the presence of international observers and nearly instant international communication the Mexican forces were unable to act with complete impunity. Whereas information is not sufficient to improve the lives of the people of Chiapas, it is a powerful tool. Raising consciousness about the EZLN movement has been a crucial first step towards their success.

The second step must then be mobilization. Enzensberger writes that "The open secret of the electronic media, the decisive political factor, which has been waiting, suppressed or crippled, for its moment to come, is their mobilizing power" (52). The following messages from the original "Irish Mexico Group" guest book attest to the ways that these websites have raised consciousness and changed social views: "I am an Irish Mexican and you have informed me greatly on the zapatista and my heritage and culture." "Thank you

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[9] For more information see http://struggle.ws/mexico/diez.html last visited on July 17, 2006.

for opening my eyes and sharing the messag [sic] to the world. I am going to make a change and do my part to stop globel [sic] injustice."[10]

Although the comments of people who visited this particular website are not enough to prove that there has been any real action taken by the Internet community, a more clearly measurable moment of political activism that stemmed from worldwide recognition of the issues raised by the Zapatistas was the 1996 "Intercontinental Gathering for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism". This event led approximately 3000 people from more than 44 countries to travel to Chiapas to debate the central concerns of the community of Chiapas and their relationship to similar struggles across the globe. According to one of the participants who traveled to Mexico: "The conference ended with this talk of the creation of a global network of struggles and a global network of communication between struggles."[11]

The second conference, held in Spain in 1997, further addressed the communication needs of this "network of struggles":

> There was a tendency to confuse the idea of the network with the Internet and many people there had either no Internet access or very poor Internet access. So while the internet may form one of the major fibres (sic) of information flow it could only be one among many which would include printed words, fax, phone, radio and horseback messengers. We also needed to be open to use new forms of communication and indeed one of the most ambitious papers at our table called for the setting up of a global TV/Radio satellite channel.[12]

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[10] Both of these messages are available at <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/3102/guest_entry.html>. The authors of these statements did not leave detailed information about themselves. The first one was left by "Nick" and the second message by "earth mediano." Last contacted on May 9, 2000.

[11] Flood, Andrew. "The Story of how we learnt to Dream at Reality". May 9, 2000. <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/andrew/encounter1_report.html>.

[12] Flood, Andrew. "Dreaming of a Reality where the Past & Future meet the Present". May 9, 2000. <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/andrew/encounter2_report.html>.

There was also discussion on how to protect radical information networks from the expected repression that will be generated by their success. Due to political pressure applied by the international gathering during the 1996 conference, several political prisoners were released, and a peace agreement was signed in February of 1996. "However, 10 months later, the government has retreated from fulfilling these agreements, putting in crisis the negotiation process and the possibility of advancing towards peace."[13]

Although it may not have been their intention, the use of the Internet has been a positive tool for the EZLN and their supporters. It is not the only tool the EZLN has at its disposal, remember, its first communiqué declared "war on the Mexican state and, crucially, by making good on that declaration with the seizure of a large city and substantial territory, the Zapatistas transformed themselves from an unknown insurgency to a key player in the politics of a major country" (Bob 128). They were, however, forced to retreat into the jungle, compelling the EZLN leadership to shift tactics. Subcomandante Marcos has written or co-written numerous books in a variety of genres including children's books *La historia de los colores*, non-fiction collections of essays and communiqués *Nuestra arma es nuestra palabra,* and mysteries *Muertos incómodos* with Paco Ignacio Taibo II. The military attack in Southern Mexico made the EZLN known internationally; they had to capitalize on their notoriety making the Internet and international communication their most effective tools. Communication that leads to mobilization can bring about the socio-political gains sought by Enzensberger. For instance, in the first few months of 2001, the people of Chiapas achieved real political gains. Between December and January, the

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[13] Ulises, Martinez Flores and Paulina, Fernandez C. for the International Commission of the Zapatista Front for National Liberation. "Demand that the Mexican Government Fulfill the Agreements". May 9, 2000. <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/1996/fzln_peace_letter_dec.html.

Fox administration gave Chiapas a prominent place within its agenda: it annulled the expropriation of lands in the Zapatista community of Amador Hernández (the source of a prolonged and bitter conflict), and ordered the withdrawal of four of the seven military posts.[14] Now, as the Fox administration comes to an end the only thing clear is that the EZLN will once again be forced to alter its tactics to overcome the limitations of Internet activism.

There are three types of limitations that can hinder the effectiveness of Internet activism. The first problem with using the Internet to effect social change, the corporate influence, may seem like the most benign of the three, but if corporations can purchase preferential listings on search engines, activist groups like the EZLN will be harder to find. As of 2006, a simple search of the term "Mexico" will turn up references to the Zapatistas on the first page of Yahoo and Google, the two major search engines. A look at the immediate history of the commercialization of the Internet might offer clues as to where it could eventually go.

In 1994, as the Zapatistas were first using the internet to gain international recognition, there were 3,864,000 hosts on what was by then called the World Wide Web. Despite its original use by the military, the internet currently provides what might literally be described as a complex communicative web. As a sign of the ways that businesses capitalized on the communicative opportunities offered by the internet, by 1994 Pizza Hut offered online pizza ordering. In addition, Internet backbones—the infrastructure of the web that controls Internet traffic—largely belong to private industry, especially phone companies. And yet, as a sign of the ways that the Internet has provided white collar workers freedom from prescribed office spaces, many people telecommute over the Internet, allowing them to choose where to live based on quality of life, not proximity to

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[14] "SIPAZ Report on the Zapatista Caravan to Mexico City". May 8, 2001. http://blackened.net/revolt.mexico/reports/2001/sipaz_caravan-mar01.htm.

work.   From an environmental standpoint, some government officials viewed the Internet as a solution to their clogged highways and fouled air.   For educators the Internet had radically changed pedagogical possibilities and teachers and students use the Internet's vast electronic library as a rich learning resource.   The digital imaging and instant information transfer offered via the internet has revolutionized medicine, allowing doctors to consult with colleagues half a world away. The World Wide Web has radically changed the publishing and media industry and has opened avenues for sharing independent work that were unthinkable before the development of the Internet.   Despite all of these potentially progressive uses of the World Wide Web, commercial use has burgeoned and may arguably be the most powerful mode of Internet applications.   "According to Forrester Research, global Internet advertising revenue will grow from US$3.3 billion in 1999 to US$33 billion in 2004."[15]   This amount of revenue will no doubt lead to increasing control of the flow of information via the Internet.

The Zapatista battle to control the flow of information takes place on several levels.   First, they have struggled against traditional forms of mass media, and second, they also have rebelled against the increasing commercialization and commodification of the Internet. While this political media battle may seem to obfuscate the original cause of the Zapatistas—that of indigenous rights—arguably their effort to use new forms of media speaks to the most basic of human political struggles, that is, the right of the underclass to have a voice. The way in which the Zapatistas have been able to voice their plight has sparked groups around the world to try to replicate the relative success of the EZLN.   However, success, no matter how small, can come with a price.   Mark Poster in his article "Cyberdemocracy Internet and the Public Sphere" claims that the politics of the

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[15] "CDCcorporation". July 17, 2006.
http://www.cdccorporation.net/newsroom/news/000028.shtml.

Internet revolves around issues including, "access, technological determinism, encryption, commodification, intellectual property, the public sphere, decentralization, anarchy, gender and ethnicity" (201). In light of the rapidly increasing corporate use of the Internet, one has to question the degree to which the Internet can provide a revolutionary medium for communication. Also, given the necessary anonymity of the guerrilla leaders of the EZLN, business have been able to use images of Subcomandante Marcos in conjunction with advertising campaigns with impunity. The image of Subcomandante Marcos, one of the main spokespersons for the EZLN, has become so popular that it can be seen on billboards across Mexico hawking everything from hardware to cell phones. Similar to the ubiquitous commercial use of the image of Che Guevara, this article further asks what happens to political struggle when it becomes a product to be marketed for economic gain.

Critics like Joseph Lockhard claim, "True believers who tout the Internet as democracy actualized, as an electronic town hall meeting, live with class blinders in a muddle of self-delusion" (220). Time and space on the Internet is expensive. Statistics regarding the users of the Internet show a correlation between wealth and access. There is no question that the Internet offers democratic and progressive communicative possibilities, but that these opportunities will always be difficult to realize. As Lockhard reminds us, "If we embrace cyberspace uncritically without a political consciousness of its structured dreams, then we are certain to awake 'in the tentacles of the octopus'" (230).

Multinationals are constantly trying to centralize control and flow of information. They are not content with the Internet user wandering amiably across the innumerable strands of the "web." They want to reach-out and grab the potential consumer and keep them in their sites. The Internet, which was created by public funds for military use, was turned over to private multinationals that are

investing billions annually in the Internet as a market place. The expectation is that there will be a further restraining of communication. In fact, search engines like Google and Yahoo! have constantly improved ways to point the average Internet user to commercial sites. Furthermore, Google recently was allowed entrance into the Chinese search engine market by agreeing to limit searches for words such as "democracy," "human rights," and "Falun Gong."

Despite the dangers inherent in the Internet, it is still the emancipatory tool of the sort that Enzensberger envisioned over 30 years ago. Analyzing the relationship between the struggles of the EZLN and the Internet provides a key example of how these new technologies have opened doors for communication. The crisis in Chiapas moved from a local, unknown battle between disenfranchised indigenous groups and the Mexican military to a globally recognized example of the political, economic, and cultural devastation caused by the legacies of colonial power structures and rampant capitalism.

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