

Italian 'provocateurs' invade Mexico

by Carlos Cota Meza

One hundred and twenty Italians, organized around the slogan "We Are All Indians of the World," entered Mexico in early May to stage various provocations against the Mexican government's policy toward the southeastern state of Chiapas.

They managed to gain entry to the country with official "observer" visa status, albeit under conditions delimited by the Mexican government, because there were four Italian Congressmen from center-left parties among the group, as well as a Roman Catholic priest and an undetermined number of "representatives" of the City Councils of Venice, Genoa, Padua, and other Italian cities. The remainder of the group, some 100, were a gang of unwashed, long-haired, far-left activists who belong to various Italian "autonomist" groupings whose goal back home is to bring about the disintegration of the Italian nation-state through promotion of separatism.

On paper, these foreigners had come to Mexico to deliver "humanitarian aid" to some townships in Chiapas, which included helping to build a small electricity generating plant in La Realidad, the town from which "Subcommander Marcos," the leader of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) insurgency, has organized several internationally backed propaganda shows.

Once in Chiapas, these "Indians of the world" decided to march toward the townships of Taniperlas and Amparo Agua Tinta (which violated their visa conditions), because these had originally been declared "autonomous" by the Zapatistas in Chiapas. (They have subsequently been recovered by state authorities, at the request of the townships' inhabitants.)

When some of the Italian provocateurs entered Taniperlas, they were met with kicks and blows from an enraged crowd of local Indians. When things calmed down, the local Indian leader, Pedro Chulin, told them: "We don't want the Zapatistas to keep establishing autonomous councils. That's unilateral, and we're not going to allow it."

On the trek to Taniperlas, three Italian "Indians" fainted from the heat and stress. Presumably such physical strains increased considerably when the foreign "Indians" were met by blows from the Indians who live in the area.

Subsequently, the Mexican government expelled the group for visa violations.

The Italian autonomists were rejected and ridiculed by much of the Mexican public. Except for the São Paulo Forum-

linked Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), all other parties, business and religious groupings, and the citizenry in general, attacked the foreigners as "filthy," "provocateurs," "Italian scum," and "criminals in our country." Given the unwashed state of most of the group's members, some observers suggested that some big soap company might have sponsored their trip.

Sponsored by whom?

Jokes aside, the question is valid: No one knows who paid for the group's plane tickets from Italy, or how much daily spending allowance they were given. What is certain, is that someone sent them to Mexico, to openly challenge the Zedillo government and create an international scandal directed against Mexico.

For months now, desperate acts by the Zapatistas have been expected, as being the terrorists' only way of stopping or slowing down the Mexican government's new firm policy toward Chiapas. At the end of April, President Ernesto Zedillo made a surprise visit to the state, specifically to the municipalities where the so-called "conflict" has been centered. To the surprise of the Zapatistas and their international patrons, the local Indian leaders of the Zoque, Tzeltal, and Chole groups accepted the authority of the President of the Republic as any other Mexican would, without reservations or conditions.

In an extemporaneous speech in the municipality of Tumbala, whose mayor is a Chol Indian, President Zedillo remarked, "I want to say that after all these years, I seriously doubt that these people who say they want to help solve the problem, really want to do so." The President demanded that the foreigners show some intellectual honesty, and say "what they really want in this conflict." In an obvious reference to Samuel Ruiz, the real Zapatista commander who is also the bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas, Zedillo said that "perhaps he is motivated by religion, but this has little to do with finding a solution to the human pain in the poverty, backwardness, and violence in Chiapas."

Further evidence that Chiapans aren't opposed to protecting territorial integrity, was seen in the fact that President Zedillo transmitted a message on radio station XEOCH in Ocosingo, which was then translated into several Indian dialects. This was the station the EZLN used on Jan. 1, 1994 to announce its "declaration of war" against the Armed Forces and the federal government of Mexico.

Mercenary Ruiz

As federal and state authorities proceed to reestablish the rule of law in Chiapas, more and more evidence is coming to light which proves this news service's charges that Bishop Ruiz and his EZLN insurgents are nothing but mercenary forces of a foreign invasion which seeks to dismember Mexico.

For example, Javier Elorriaga, the head of the Zapatista

National Liberation Front (FZLN), the supposed “civilian arm of the EZLN,” told the daily *Folha de São Paulo* during a recent visit to Brazil that “the Zapatista communities” practice “organized anarchy. . . . We want the government to disappear, we want them to withdraw the Army, and to let us live in the autonomous townships.” Elorriaga added: “We want to show the government that we don’t need them.”

Elorriaga insisted that the autonomous communities are the de facto authorities in the area, and that they “register births, deaths, and marriages; they organize collective labor, provide education, health, and security.” What the anarchist Elorriaga failed to mention, is that these acts constitute the crime of usurpation of government functions, and that they are being carried out not only by the Indians, but by Bishop Ruiz as well, through his Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center, which has been issuing visas and “international observer” credentials to foreigners who come to his diocese in Chiapas!

The ‘Indian world’ doesn’t exist

As was clear in President Zedillo’s visit to Chiapas, this “Indian world” referenced by Elorriaga, doesn’t exist. The so-called autonomous townships aren’t run by Indians; they are an attempt to set up *foreign* enclaves under the command

of Samuel Ruiz, to then proceed with the strategy of breaking up the country into small pieces.

Prior to the incident with the Italian “Indians,” Enrique Ku Herrera, a Congressman from the ruling Revolutionary Institutional Party who is secretary of the Indian Affairs Commission of the lower House, had denounced the existence of an “international brigade” in Mexico, and specifically in Chiapas, whose purpose, he charged, was to carry out actions to destabilize and overthrow the federal government.

Of Indian descent himself, Ku Herrera produced a list of foreigners — 72 Spaniards, 40 Italians, 22 Greeks, 19 Frenchmen, 6 Canadians, 1 Dane, 1 German, and 1 Moroccan. All of them, Ku Herrera said, had participated in guerrilla movements in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. All had registered as members of the International Commission for the Observation of Human Rights, and were able to enter the country by obtaining visas at Mexican embassies and consulates in Madrid, Seville, and Barcelona, Spain; Copenhagen, Denmark; Athens, Greece; Rome and Milan, Italy; Montreal, Canada; Paris, France; and Managua, Nicaragua.

Press sources report that the “foreign legion” isn’t limited to the numbers denounced by Ku Herrera, but includes another 4,500 foreigners identified by Mexico’s immigration authorities. Beginning in 1994, these foreigners have entered Mexico under many disguises.

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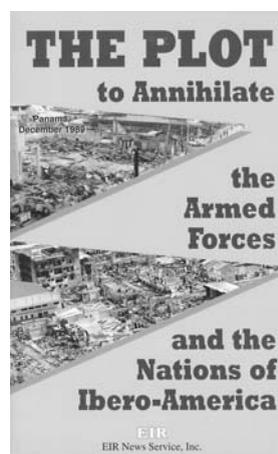
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