

THE

# Final Straw

A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW



The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world.

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# Zapatistas Facing Increasing Attacks



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Also, for example, in 2000, before the EZLN went to Mexico City, there was like a period of three years that they didn't appear publicly. That's the thing, they take their decisions, and take the time to make good decisions. Also, there was what compañeros in the Journey For Life were telling us. They took 11 years to plan their insurgency, and this is a big thing to plan. But also other things, I think they take their time to do the right decision. And, yeah, maybe in some time, there will be big changes. Or maybe it's gonna take a little bit longer and it's not going to be that big. But I think something's going to happen, and the EZLN certainly knows when they want to let us know

**CL: Okay. And about the civil war?**

**Compa:** Ah yeah, the civil war. I think it was in the comunicado they did about the sequestration, the kidnapping of the two bases de apoyo [core supporters] while there was the Journey for Life. And I think they related to this general normalization of violence in Chiapas and that it's like a really delicate situation. That would be my understanding of this statement of the brink of civil war.

**CL: Yeah, we also remember, yes, that during Journey for Life they stressed a lot the challenges ahead and the difficult situation that for sure is awaiting them on their return. I believe that we are quickly running out of time, so I would ask you for the conclusion, just one that's a classic question. It's about what can the supporters of the Zapatista struggle from around the world do? Both about this latest particular incidents of violence, and of course, in general. This, and of course if you would like to add something that hasn't been mentioned before, please feel free to do so.**

**Compa:** Yeah. So I think, sadly, directly here, there can't be done much because the people in power have the weapons. And what we can do is show our solidarity because international solidarity often can prevent other things to happen and also can do much pressure. So I think for one part, yesterday there was published a national and international statement against the attacks against the Zapatista communities. Also there's a convocation for the 8th of June for an international day against the aggressions against the Zapatista communities. And I think that's basically what people around the world can do, show that they see what's happening and show that the state can't do this without people noticing all over the world.

**CL: Thank you for the time that you took. Greetings from North Western Balkans to the southeast of Mexico. Bye bye.**

**Compa:** Bye bye.

**Compa:** In the last few years I didn't hear much about how they answer to these attacks. But a little while longer ago, there was for example in La Garrucha, which is like another Caracol, there were attacks, and the EZLN sent men that were not armed with firearms but just with sticks, but there really were many of the military forces of the EZLN, and they went to this community that was attacked. And the people that were armed with firearms, the aggressors, tried to attack but they went to them and said, "So you can try to kill every one of us, but there really are many of us." In the end they gave their arms, and they went away because there was too much presence of the EZLN.

The Zapatista communities there are also other strategies like from the civil wing. For example, if there's a land in dispute that other groups want to enter, sometimes members of the EZLN go there and plant and have their present presence there so the aggressors don't enter.

**CL: Maybe let's now move a little bit sideways and speak more about the general dynamics in Chiapas in the recent period.**

**Compa:** Yeah, that's a really, really hard thing. The last six years, more or less, the violence in Chiapas increased a lot. That was for one part, I think, because of the elections and because change of power always brings violence with it here. Also in the last years, there is an open dispute between two cartels, like the Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación, which is one really big power, and the Cártel de Sinaloa. Chiapas is the most southern state of Mexico. It is the border with Guatemala, and so this plaza, this region, is very important to traffic drugs. So yeah, these cartels are trying to get the control over it, and to do that a lot of violence is happening.

Also, there are territorial conflicts between communities, and so there are armed groups that are willing to give everything to kill for having territory. It's really crazy around here, like nearly every day you can hear about assassinations, about armed conflict, about a lot of violence. So sadly, the attacks on the EZLN are not the only thing that's happening. There's much more of violence going on.

**CL: After the Journey For Life there was practically no official declaration from EZLN except a short statement about the war in Ukraine, and that was already in March 2022, so more than one year ago. At the same time, some sources that are linked to the Zapatistas and the supporters of their struggle, such as the schoolsforchiapas.org website, they openly warn that Chiapas is on the brink of, as they put it, civil war. Can you maybe comment, both on the silence of EZLN in the context of high tensions and also on the civil war concept itself?**

**Compa:** Yeah. So I think for one part, the silence of the EZLN is a thing that already has occurred in history. For example, a thing that came up two months ago is the case of Manuel Gómez Vázquez, which is the supporter of the EZLN who was taken prisoner two and a half years ago. And just now, two months ago, the EZLN made their research and they finished it and so they did that case openly. They mentioned it to human rights organizations.

Then, Črna luknja shares an interview with a comrade who's been living and active in solidarity with the Zapatista communities in Chiapas, so-called Mexico, about increasing violence and fears of civil war. This segment appeared in the June 2023, the 69th episode of BAD News from the A-Radio Network.

You can hear some live audio this week starting on July 19th and until July 23rd from the St-Imier anarchist and anti-authoritarian gathering in Switzerland, including audio from the A-Radio Network. More info on that at <https://anarchy2023.org/en/radio>

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*Cover image: Last August 22, members of the Regional Organization of Ocosingo Coffee Growers (ORCAO, its initials in Spanish) looted and burned coffee warehouses belonging to the EZLN's support bases at the Cuxuljá Crossroads, Ocosingo municipality, Chiapas.*

**Crna Luknja:** We have on the line a comrade that is now based in Chiapas, Mexico. Thank you for taking your time to make this conversation with us. Let's start with some basic information about what you do in Chiapas. If we understand correctly, you are engaged in different forms of practical solidarity with the struggle of the Zapatista communities. Can you be more specific about what is it that you do?

**Compa:** Yeah, sure. I'm working in a media collective. We're doing audiovisual formation. We started in 1998, when there were like more open state repression on the Zapatista communities. There my collective came in and brought cameras, like video cameras, and started to get information so that all the repression could be captured and could be shown to the world.

From 2014 on the Tercios Compas, the media compas from the Zapatistas, were founded, and so it wasn't necessary anymore that we would give information if the EZLN [Zapatista National Liberation Army] would do it by themselves. And so now we're more working with other struggles here in Chiapas. For example, the defense of territory and stuff like that. But yeah, we're here, and if communities need some help with movie stuff and media we are here to help.

And also we did cover media in the last caravan. That was The South Resists! And yeah, that was our latest thing we did.

**CL:** Okay, now let's turn to the recent worrying events in Chiapas. A few days ago, an urgent news reached us about an attack of paramilitary forces against one of the Zapatista autonomous communities. Can you say more about what exactly happened? How serious was the attack? And are these kinds of attacks against particular communities common?

**Compa:** Yeah. Okay. On May 22nd there was the last attack on the community Moisés Y Gandhi, which is part of the autonomous municipality Lucio Cabañas, which is part of the 10th Caracol Patria Nueva. And yeah, first from one side of the village they started to shoot members of the town at around 4pm, and at 8pm from the other side of the village another part of ORCAO [The Regional Organization of Coffee Growers of Ocosingo] was starting to fire as well. And in this fire, the compa Jorge López Sántis was shot in the chest.

First he was denied medical service, but after urgent action by human rights centers, they got that he went to hospital in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, which is capital of Chiapas, where he still has inadequate medical care. But yeah, his situation as far as I know, he's still living.

Sadly, it's not the only case. There's also aggression on the community Nuevo San Gregorio, which is also part of Caracol 10. One year ago, there was also the displacement of the community Emiliano Zapata and another community where, yeah, you see that violence against communities from the EZLN still happening.

**CL:** Okay, you mentioned ORCAO. ORCAO is, if we understand correctly, a paramilitary force that is behind also this latest attack. Can you say more

about what ORCAO is? What is the agenda that they have, the methods that they use, who are they fighting for? And what is the relation for ORCAO with the Mexican state?

**Compa:** Yeah, so I think for explaining what ORCAO is I will go back in history. The translation of ORCAO is Regional Organization of Coffee Growers. It was founded in 1988 and firstly at the function of fighting for fair coffee pricing, so that coffee planters could have a good life, which is a good thing, I think. But in the late '90s ORCAO started to work with the state and get state funds and positions and power in the government and things like that, in exchange for doing favors for the government. From then on attacks started. In 2002 they attacked the Poblado Javier López and burned the crops of the Zapatistas that are growing their food there.

And it went on. In 2009 there was the attempt of displacing people from Bosque Bonito, which is another community, and also the attempt to attack the Caracol Morelia while there was an international encounter in San Cristóbal. Also in 2011 they attacked Poblado El Paraíso, destroyed 4,500 coffee plants, and there were armed attacks on support bases of the EZLN. In the following years it went on like that. There's a large register of the attacks against Zapatista communities. And yeah, sadly also this attack on Moisés Y Gandhi is not a new thing. They started in 2019 to do armed attacks on this community.

There's total impunity of this organization and their attacks and violence. So I think there you can see like the first connection it has with the state, and also that research of the EZLN brought to light that the money the state was planning for a school was used in arms have of big impact.

Maybe for showing a little bit more how the connection between the state and ORCAO is, I think it's good to look into the program of counterinsurgency that's still going on. The open attacks by military and the open repression after Los Acuerdos de San Andrés, this open violence changed more to a low intensity war, and parts of that are the paramilitaries like ORCAO or Los Chinchulines or other paramilitary groups. And displacements, which we see in Chiapas a lot, there's like 17,000 displaced persons in Chiapas.

Also selective assassinations is sadly a thing that we see often. All of this fits very good into an analysis many critical persons have in Mexico, which is that the State, economic forces like big capitalist firms, and also the organized crime are like doing a thing, the three of them. For example, big landowners very often are the government forces and have their own friends with organized crime. So there's a really, really powerful connection between these and really much corruption.

Often when there's a capitalist interest, they may say to the governors "Oh, yeah, we can give you money for implementing our project in this part." And if the people say no, the organized crime or the paramilitary will hit there, and afterwards, yeah, the capitalist interests can enter there. And so I think this connection is a really visible thing.

**CL:** How does the EZLN and the Zapatista communities deal with these kinds of attacks and other forms of pressure?