

“I have risen not to enrich myself, but to defend and fulfill that sacred duty of the honest Mexican people, and I am willing to die at any time because I carry the purity of feeling in the heart and tranquility of conscience.”

Emiliano Zapata is the most famous figure of the Mexican Revolution, its conscience and icon. Born on August 8, 1879 in a Nahuatl speaking village in Morelos, Zapata did not concern himself with national politics, but with local towns' right to their territory.

“The land belongs to those who work it with their hands.”

Mexico was ruled by a dictatorship under Díaz. The social system of the time was a proto-capitalist feudal system, with large landed estates (*haciendas*) controlling more of the land, stealing it from independent communities of indigenous peoples and farmers (pueblos), who were then subsequently forced into debt slavery (*peonage*) on the haciendas. Many villages had their lands stolen in unequal contests with landlords. Because of this, many innocent people suffered hunger and misery. Disgusted with the inaction of the government, Zapata began a campaign of collective direct action (simply by taking over the lands in dispute), and became the general the *Ejército Libertador del Sur* (Liberation Army of the South) in Morelos.

“Seek justice from tyrannical governments not with your hat in your hands, but with a rifle in your fist.”

Zapata was influenced by the Oaxacan anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón. The influence of Magón on Zapata can be seen in the Plan de Ayala, and noticeably in the Zapatista slogan of “*Tierra y libertad*” (“land and liberty”). Zapata’s introduction to **anarchism** came via a local schoolteacher, Ottilio Montañón, who exposed Zapata to the works of Magón and Peter Kropotkin, at the same time as Zapata was participating in the land struggles. The anarchist perspective influenced the revolution’s aims – in Zapata’s words: “The land liberated, the land liberated for all, land without overseers and without masters.”

“If there is no justice for the people, let there be no peace for the government.”

Zapata and his communities fought every faction that invaded Morelos, regardless of their so-called “revolutionary” credentials. In his words: “I am resolved to struggle against everything, and everybody.” He did not bow down to the demands of sell-outs, such as Madero (who helped initiate the revolution, but caved in to compromises with rich landlords). “I want to die as a slave to principles, not to men,” Zapata would say. In fact – when their army occupied Mexico City – Zapata was offered the presidential seat, but he turned it down. Zapata and his communities demanded immediate action on the issues affecting them, not political power.

By 1914, the Zapatistas Liberation Army of the South (ELS) were over 25,000 deep! They liberated their territory in Morelos from governmental and capitalist control for years. However, the Zapatista’s vision of land-based freedom was betrayed by sell-outs and conformists.

The struggle for “*Tierra y libertad*” never ended: its relevance continues in the present day. There is no foreseeable end to gentrification, colonialism, and the skyrocketing costs of living and of rent. We can’t keep letting our communities get fucked over; like Zapata, we have to rise up and put an end to social passivity. Let’s fight like the Zapatistas: no more making

demands to government, no more trying to seize power, instead – regain collective ownership of the land that we work and live in, to be able to provide for each other’s needs and desires.

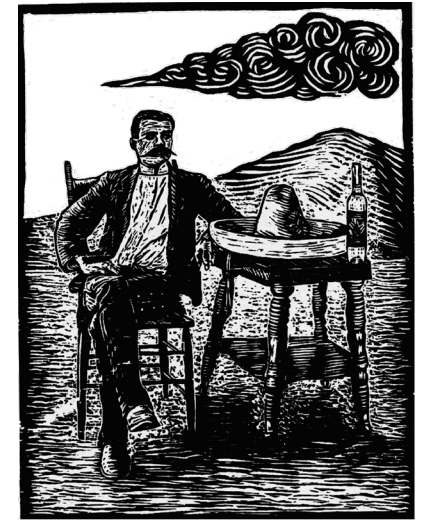
Long live the Morelos Commune!

See the inside of this document to see Zapata’s original ELS manifestos!

“May the calloused hands of the fields and the calloused hands of the workshop shake hands in a cordial greeting of harmony; because in truth, united as workers, we will be invincible, we are the strength and we are the right; we are tomorrow!”



WE ARE TOMORROW!



THE WORDS AND STORY OF EMILIANO ZAPATA

“More than thirty years of dictatorship seemed to have exhausted the energies and put an end to the civility of our race, and despite that long period of slavery and enervation, the revolution of 1910 broke out, like an immense cry for justice that will always live on in the world, the same way that liberty lives on in the hearts of the peoples; to revive them, to redeem them, to raise them from the abjection to which the human species cannot be condemned. The capitalist, the soldier and the ruler had lived peacefully, without being disturbed, neither in their privileges nor in their property—at the cost of the sacrifice of an enslaved and illiterate people, without patrimony and without a future, who were condemned to work without rest and to death by hunger and exhaustion, since, spending all their energy in producing incalculable treasures, they were not given even the essentials to satisfy their most urgent needs. Such an economic organization, such an administrative system that amounted to a mass murder of the people, a collective suicide for the nation and an insult, a shame for honest and conscientious people, could not be prolonged any longer and the revolution arose, engendered, like all collective movements, out of necessity. This is the origin of The Ayala Plan.”

- MANIFESTO TO THE NATION (Morelos, October 20, 1912)

“By virtue of the fact that the vast majority of Mexican peoples and citizens are barely the owners of the land they walk on, suffering the horrors of misery without being able to improve their social condition in any way, and without being able to dedicate themselves to industry or agriculture because the lands, hills and waters are monopolized in the hands of a few; For these reasons, the powerful owners of these monopolies will be expropriated, after compensation of a third of those monopolies, so that the peoples of Mexico can obtain common lands, colonies, legal funds for towns or fields for sowing or labor and to improve in everything and for everything the prosperity and well-being of Mexicans.”

- THE AYALA PLAN (Villa de Ayala, November 28, 1911)

“The current revolution has not been made to satisfy the interests of a personality, a group or a party. The current revolution acknowledges deeper origins and pursues higher ends. The peasant was hungry, suffered misery, suffered exploitation, and if they rose up in arms it was to obtain the bread that the greed of the rich denied them; to take possession of the land that the landowner selfishly kept for himself; to defend their dignity, which the slave driver iniquitously trampled over every day. They launched into revolt not to win illusory political rights that do not feed them, but to procure the piece of land that will provide them with food and freedom, a happy home and a future of independence and growth.”

- TO THE MEXICAN PEOPLE (Milpa Alta, August 1914)

“All those communities, all those who work the land, all whom we invite to stand on our side so that together we may give life to one sole struggle, so that we may walk with your help. We must continue to struggle and not rest until the land is our own, property of the people, of our grandfathers, and that the toes of those who have paws of rocks which have crushed us to the shadow of those who loom over us, who command us; that together we raise with the strength of our heart and our hand held high that beautiful banner of the dignity and freedom of we who work the land. We must continue to struggle until we defeat those who have crowned themselves, those who have helped to take the land from others, those who make much money with the labor of people like us, those who mock us in their estates. That is our obligation of honor, if we want to be called men of honesty and good inhabitants of our communities. Now then, somehow, more than ever, we need to be united, with all our heart, and all our effort in that great task of marvelous and true unity, of those who began the struggle, who preserve purity in their heart, guard their principles and do not lose faith in a good life. We beg that those who receive this manifesto pass it on to all the men and women of those communities.”

- Original Zapatista manifesto written in Nahuatl, from the EZLN's 4th Declaration