

MEXICO - EZLN Takes Aim at Leftist Candidate (Diego Cevallos, IPS)

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06/01/2006 - [IPS](#) - *"The Zapatistas have raised doubts in my mind, and now I don't know what to believe, or what to do," says Hanna Molina, a Mexican student originally planning to vote in July for Andrés López Obrador, whose triumph would make Mexico part of the wave of leftist and centre-left governments in Latin America.*

The indigenous Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), a respected force in the region's leftist and anti-globalisation movements, argues that López Obrador does not represent the "true" left, lacks credibility, and does not deserve to be elected.

The former Mexico City mayor, who is the presidential candidate of the leftist Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), which in the past has supported a number of stances taken by the EZLN, has been the front-runner in the polls for the last two years. He stands a strong chance of being elected on Jul. 2 to succeed conservative President Vicente Fox.

Molina, a university student in the capital who identifies with the EZLN's causes, and with López Obrador as well, says he is confused. "A lot of us now have doubts about who to vote for," he told IPS.

On Thursday, Zapatista leader 'Subcomandante Marcos' told a group of peasant farmers who sympathise with the EZLN that the PRD candidate "is not of the left, even though he has claimed to be over and over again. You can imagine whatever you want, but he is lying."

"Try him out if you want. But in six months or a year we'll find that we have just more of the same - or worse. We say it'll be worse," said Marcos.

Pollsters have not yet measured whether or not the EZLN's criticism could deprive López Obrador of votes. But analysts believe it is possible, because many voters who identify themselves with the left and have traditionally backed the PRD are also sympathetic to the barely-armed rebel group.

Marcos and other EZLN leaders set out, unarmed, on Sunday from the Zapatista-controlled portion of the southern state of Chiapas - where they are hemmed in by the army - on a six-month nationwide tour, with government authorisation.

The aim of the tour is to forge alliances with leftist groups that are not taking part in the elections, campesinos, indigenous people, and other sectors, in order to hash out a new blueprint for the country "from the grassroots up," according to the charismatic Marcos.

In his first speeches, Marcos, one of the few mestizo (mixed-race) members of the EZLN, has lashed out against all of the candidates, and against the electoral process itself, which he sees as a circus of lies, big egos and lavish spending.

In the past, the EZLN has frequently received shows of solidarity and support from the PRD. When the rebels made their first public appearance on Jan. 1, 1994, the party was the loudest voice demanding that the government of Carlos Salinas (1988-1994) declare a unilateral ceasefire and agree to peace talks. The skirmishes lasted only two weeks before that occurred.

Over the last 12 years, the EZLN - whose roots can be traced back to the National Liberation Front, a

rebel group founded in the 1970s - has undertaken a series of peaceful political initiatives to demand democracy and justice for Mexico's indigenous peoples, although it has never ventured into the electoral arena. And many of its efforts have been backed by the PRD.

For its part, the PRD, formed in the late 1980s by former members of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), along with communists, socialists and even a handful of former guerrilla fighters, has always pursued the path of political change through the democratic electoral process.

The worst fallout of the widening gap between the EZLN and the PRD will be suffered by López Obrador, observed Raymundo Riva Palacio, a columnist with the Mexican newspaper El Universal.

In the wake of the latest verbal attacks launched by Marcos, the PRD leadership issued a statement saying: "It takes two to fight, and we are not going to fight with the Zapatistas."

"We wish the EZLN the best of luck on its tour, but it is clear that we have taken different paths," the statement added.

According to observers, if López Obrador is elected, Mexico will join the growing bloc of Latin American countries led by progressive governments that have distanced themselves from the United States and its foreign policy, to a greater or lesser degree.

This bloc is currently made up of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Venezuela and now Bolivia, which will be governed as of Jan. 22 by Evo Morales of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), the country's first indigenous president.

But the Zapatistas view López Obrador as a neoliberal in disguise who cannot be considered a genuine leftist.

Marcos has stressed that the PRD presidential candidate's campaign team includes former associates of former president Salinas of the PRI, against whom the EZLN initially rose up in arms.

The Zapatistas first opened fire on the PRD in July 2005, when they issued a statement accusing the party of being "the left hand of the right," while describing López Obrador as "ambitious and sinister."

Those who support López Obrador "cannot be on the side of the Zapatista National Liberation Army," Marcos declared a month later.

In response to these earlier attacks, the PRD referred to the Zapatista leader as disloyal, and urged him to stop "playing into the hands of the right." Now, however, the party has opted to refrain from verbal sparring with the rebel group.

López Obrador has consistently topped the polls for the upcoming presidential elections. But the latest results show Felipe Calderón, the candidate for the ruling National Action Party (PAN), moving up close behind. PRI contender Roberto Madrazo is currently running third.