

## **Foot steps from here to there and back, longing for freedom**

It has been almost 15 years since the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) and the Zapatista communities have self organized their autonomy using both *the Fire and the Word*, mostly a Word that has echoed in all parts of the world with the sounds of an inspiring rebellion.

Since the initiation of the Caracoles (the Conches - a way that the communities are organized in five groups according to their locations) and the Juntas de Buen Gobierno (Councils of Good Government - the Zapatista peoples elected, but instantly recalled representatives) in August 2003, the Zapatista communities have self organized and managed their own health, education, justice, self governance, work cooperatives and gender equality, always in a manner of governing with obedience to the people and moving forwards by asking.

Since 2005 and with the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle, the Zapatistas have started constructing networks of solidarity against the neoliberal capitalist attack against all of humanity and nature. Such networks, based upon respecting differences and using dialogue, are the "*Other Campaign*" in Mexico and the "*Sixth International*" in the world.

Many European collectives have been inspired by the Zapatista struggle and this has led to solidarity projects that have assisted in the construction of the Zapatista autonomy or inspired global processes of grassroots networking.

F.A.R.M.A (Fight for Alternative Renewable Methods and Autonomy) started working as a collective in the autumn of 2006 and set as its primary activity the technical study, the fundraising and finally the construction of a small hydroelectric unit at a Zapatista community in the region of Chiapas, Mexico. Apart from that, F.A.R.M.A. organizes workshops for the construction of DIY (Do It Yourself) wind turbines using simple, low cost materials. These generators are installed in squats and social centres in Athens, Greece. In addition, our activities include the organization of various discussions on the Zapatista struggle and renewable energy sources and we have participated in a series of solidarity actions in the city of Athens. The main issues of concern that our collective deals with are: political solidarity in practice, radical ecology, renewable energy sources and autonomy.

Electricity can be produced in various ways. In most of them, energy production is regulated solely by financial terms without any care for its environmental impacts. The alternative options that make use of renewable energy sources such as wind, water, sun nowadays appear to be part of the solution to the problem. However, once these renewable sources are seen as means of economic benefit and competition, the balance with nature is lost. The result of this attitude is obvious in hydroelectric plants using huge dams, where renewable production is far from friendly to the environment, since it actually destroys local ecosystems. In the context of our activities, it is clear that renewable sources are seen as means for establishing the autonomy of communities with minimal ecological disturbance. This way they can be used for, decentralized energy production without creating dependencies from centers of power and discriminating between privileged and non-privileged users. This can only be achieved, when renewable sources are not controlled by capital as another profitable investment.

Based on this concept, our thoughts traveled over the Atlantic to reach Chiapas, in the mountains of southeastern Mexico and reached the constantly evolving Zapatista movement. A movement advancing by adapting itself from the needs of the indigenous people, as they are expressed through directly democratic and non-hierarchical processes. There, the maintenance of dignity and autonomy sets as a high priority the respect towards the natural environment. On the grounds of supporting the autonomy of these communities in practice and against economic and political power, the idea of constructing a small hydroelectric unit was born and was suggested to the Good Government Councils, who accepted it.

The anticapitalist struggle of the Zapatistas was not restricted to the expropriation of land during the revolt of 1994, but moved forward to the creation of new autonomous structures, questioning

the basis of state control. Now that the people hold the land, they respond also to other aspects of living, such as autonomous schools, clinics and collective shops.

The Zapatistas, apart from facing constant assaults from paramilitary groups, they have to deal with a government policy that tries to break the Zapatista solidarity and values, intending to buy their dignity through many “aid programs”. These include provisions from, animals and cement to the supply of electrical energy.

Following the Zapatista point of view: “not to ask from others to do something for us, but to do it ourselves”, F.A.R.M.A. begun, through internet research, to discover groups that have built similar small energy projects, gathering knowledge and experience from various parts of the world, such as Thailand, Nicaragua and Italy. Believing that, no matter how specialized and unreachable knowledge may seem, we can obtain it at a level that meets our needs. Against patents, while sharing it and realizing the works ourselves. Without being the “experts”, we can access DIY technology on renewable energy sources and spread its application collectively. This DIY concept is the basis for organizing workshops on wind generator construction by using simple, low cost materials for collectives.

We have learned a lot from our visits to the Zapatista communities, some things difficult to be described in words, but the moment you live it you can feel the change within you. You know you are getting involved with something which is local but simultaneously global, something simple but substantial, so different but familiar, while learning through solidarity how to resist by being creative together with others in equal terms. Feeling solidarity like a bridge that links different pieces of a common struggle, while giving and getting at the same time, sharing experiences and learning from each other. This perspective defined the way we chose to express our solidarity from the beginning to the end of the process.

In this concept, the necessary funding for the construction of the hydroelectric project was raised through events of solidarity like concerts, partying, bazaars, without seeking funding from state and capitalist organizations. The main amount of money was collected through the organisation of a concert, where musicians participated voluntarily and the place was offered free of charge. In the spirit of solidarity and trying to avoid authoritarian and commercial relationships, we decided not to have an entrance ticket, but to aim for a voluntary contribution, having a suggested price of 5 Euros. During the event, references to the repression that the Zapatista movement is suffering on a daily basis appeared through readings, documentaries, along with a discussion about their struggle. Afterwards, an extensive report on the expenses and the revenue of the concert was publicized, together with a big thank you to everybody that was involved in any way, since the event received great support.

### **Autonomous and decentralized networks for the production and distribution of electrical energy using renewable energy sources**

*“Unless we realize that the present economy which is structured upon the ruthless competitive tactic of a dilemma between “expansion or extinction”, is a deeply inhumane mechanism, we will falsely tend to put the blame for all environmental problems on technology and overpopulation. We need to see the deeper causes of the problems, namely the globalised market speculations, industrial development and the identification of progress with the interests of corporations.” M. Bookchin*

While trying to describe the histories of our paths, we explored what brought us together on the same struggle. In the first place all of us, and then us with the Zapatistas. We all came together from different directions, with different needs, desires and stimulus, but we all shared the same questioning of the relationship between humanity and nature. We all brought with us our own small piece of experience, carrying within it the knowledge and inspiration of past movements for social change. All this formed our words and actions.

Informing and taking action against the root causes of climate change were upon our urgent needs, so we got involved with the production, distribution and consumption of electrical energy. We consider energy in general, as part of the commons, not as a commodity that can be bought and sold for the production and accumulation of profit. We understand the use of energy as one of the basic needs of people and we propose that its production and consumption should be carried out in a socially just manner. At the same time, we comprehend the authoritarian relationship that we humans impose on nature, which is realized as the senseless and violent exploitation of natural resources and ecosystems. We realize that this relationship stems from the more general idea of exploitation and authority, which is imposed by one person on another. As a result we propose struggling against power relationships of all kinds, as the only social change that could contribute to the struggle against climate change. This in turn can bring about an idea of social justice that could lead towards a balanced coexistence with the natural world of which we are a part of. We also realize that every community, no matter how big or small, has its own way and its own time of doing things. We also see that the paths are many, with many colors, with many dimensions, and we propose autonomy, synthesis and respect for the different. We realize that socially just proposals come from the movements, while moving from the bottom and to the left. So we are engaged in the struggle for the construction of the autonomy of all peoples, here and now, through networks of mutual help and solidarity, towards freedom. While staying away from capitalist, state and authoritarian institutions and the relationships of dependence that they create, we are trying to gather knowledge, to share it and to put it in practice in our everyday lives. In this manner we meet with other histories and we move forward together. This is how we came together. This is how we met with the Zapatistas. This is how we met and continue to meet with comrades from close and far. This is how we are moving forward.

Putting all this to practice, we are concentrating on renewable energy sources as one of the most important tools in the construction of autonomy and self sufficiency. While trying to be independent from the state and multinationals, we have started to satisfy our own needs for energy based on solidarity, and respect for a balanced existence within the ecosystems which we live in. The idea is to install small scale renewable energy sources (such as photovoltaic cells, small hydro generators, and small wind turbines) in cooperation with communities in struggle, trying to share with them the knowledge that we have gathered and at the same time contribute to the self-sufficiency of these communities. The installations belong to the communities themselves and are managed by them. The communities themselves specify the production, the consumption and issues on quantity and quality according to their needs and with respect to nature. This relationship of coexistence is very strong since the installations are designed according to the natural resources of the region. Our first attempt will be the hydroelectric unit in Chiapas, which is planned to be completed within the summer of 2009. So the goal is to construct autonomous and decentralized solidarity networks for the production and distribution of energy, harmonizing our needs with our natural surroundings. All this goes against the ideas of centralized distribution networks of large scale energy production units that are managed by economic and political power centers, in order to produce profit.

The technical know-how is shared, aiming at the creation of small collectives that have the ability to use the technology according to the needs, desires and values of their community. This way, decision making is in the hands of the people that are directly affected and not in the hands of some political and economical elite. An elite that does not want to, and cannot know the needs of the daily lives of communities all over the planet. Only when technology and science once again become tools for the self-determination of communities, based on solidarity, only then can we consider essential climate action, through local solutions of appropriated technology, in small scale applications. All this we have learned throughout the evolution of our project within the Zapatista communities.

We have seen how the communities decided where a project of electricity production would be more useful to them, in a way that was related to their general principals, not dependant on the "bad government" as they say and with love towards Mother Earth. We have seen how the community decided, after we informed them on technical issues, which technology would be used. We saw how the community was willing to manage the limited amount of energy that would be produced, collectively and with solidarity. We saw how knowledge can be transferred and become a tool towards autonomy and self-determination, individually and collectively.

A basic advantage of the small hydroelectric installation is its low cost and the simple technical knowledge required to install it, that of a plumber, an electrician and a builder. In this way, when the project is completed and having shared the required know-how, future installations can be carried out, without dependence on solidarity collectives, such as ours. For this reason, we hope that in the future, such projects could be reproduced in nearby communities, from the Zapatistas themselves, giving birth to the first autonomous microgrids.

### **Do it yourself wind generators, sharing skills and strengthening autonomy**

Having, as we said, the Zapatista movement as our main source of inspiration we started to think that we needed to connect what happens at the other side of the world with the reality which we live in. We have seen that it would not be enough to simply support the struggle against capitalism and the construction of autonomy somewhere else but that it would be necessary to build self-organized procedures where we live, in our everyday life, in a process that aims to strengthen local anti-capitalist social struggles. This is how we got involved with constructing Do It Yourself (DIY) wind turbines from simple materials. A very plain laboratory was set up in a social center in the city of Athens where many people came and offered their views and hands on work.

At the beginning it was difficult since we had no manual, not enough knowledge and no experience of any kind. However, we took it step by step trying to share the existing knowledge and creating a “boiler” of collective knowledge that was growing. Working together and exchanging opinions gave birth to the idea of installing these generators in squats and autonomous spaces, in order to achieve autonomy in energy, while minimizing our carbon footprint. The first attempt to install a DIY turbine was made at a squatted house in the north of Athens, called Prapopoulou Squat. Being only the first attempt it did not have the expected (or better the wanted) results and it ended up with its wings flying all over the place. Nevertheless, it was a liberating experience that showed us which way to go. Our second attempt was a bit more organized, still including a lot of improvisations and although it stayed in one piece, it didn't produce much electricity. And then, after one year and a half of having lots of fun while gaining knowledge, but without groundbreaking results, we reached that crucial point where things started to get together:

We discovered a workshop of constructing DIY wind generators organized by the Escanda collective in Spain. There, we constructed a wind generator that really worked in only 9 days. Our work there was carried out through a process of free cooperation and equality that made no discrimination of sexes and accepted no experts. It was a precious experience which clearly showed that solidarity and the sharing of skills between collectives from all over the world is crucial and that the moments where the little steps of every resistance meet, can be very inspiring.

During our few years of existence, we never had a very clear view of the path we were on, but we kept moving, sensing new possibilities in the air, and always aiming for radical social change. Like the Zapatistas say: *“the path is created while walking”*. Theory was born from practice and through our needs and desires we expressed the framework of our actions and sensed the new ways that were to be opened.

We have realized that apart from protesting and condemning, it is important to try to be creative and start building today the world we fight to be created tomorrow. Taking knowledge and know-how back from the monopoly of state and capital is an important aspect of the struggle and helps us believe in our ability to construct little things now, but much bigger later. Creative resistance gives ground for people to see in action and live what self-organizing is, see the benefits and difficulties in practice and not just have theories and abstract ideas about it.

And then an idea that was abstract in our minds for a long time started to take form. It was the idea of getting involved with the way people learn. So we occupied together with other people an abandoned space inside the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA) and created the Freedoms Accelerator (επιταχυντής ελευθερονίων / epitahintis eleftheronion) squat. The basic

point of the squat was the creation of an autonomous space of free exploration of knowledge in the heart of the boring and suppressing university of the state.

As a result, subjects like libertarian education started to be amongst our interests. Organized workshops of wind generators are starting to take place in a method of equality, trying to abolish power relationships between all the people involved, learning from each other and aiming to take education in our own hands. The evolution of the squat, that is actually going on now that we are writing this text, is a separate procedure from F.A.R.M.A. containing other ideas as well like workshops on open-source software, DIY everything, anti-consumerism, cultivating land etc. Our plan for the future, concerning this project, is to have a workshop of DIY wind generators once or twice a week for students and anybody else who might be interested, as well as organizing some ten-day workshops where people from other places of Greece and other countries can stay, work and learn how to construct wind turbines in a horizontal process.

To complete the geography and calendar of our very small resistance, we need to travel another time to the other side of the Atlantic. To visit this time self-organized collectives that try to apply appropriate technology while working with indigenous people, communities and squats, always from the left and below, in this so fertile land called Mexico. During our visit in Mexico this summer we set the base for a good collaboration in the following years, intending to exchange knowledge, and work together on technologies that can support the struggle for autonomy everywhere. So we keep on going ahead step by step in the unforeseeable future. There is still a long way to cover with a lot of mistakes to be made, but when longing for freedom, life is never boring or infertile.

### **Networking movements of the global north with movements of the global south**

After the Zapatista uprising of 1994 and after the anti WTO Seattle mobilizations in 1999, the movements of the global south have started to network with the upcoming movements of the global north. Clearly, they fight as one against the neoliberal capitalist repression, in the streets of Genoa, Argentina, North Africa etc. and it is evident that a new movement that is not interested in taking political power is starting to form from below, creating new structures towards autonomy.

Our paths have crossed with these movements and we have realized that solidarity between all struggles is our weapon, by building local creative resistances which construct our autonomy, along with communication and coordination with these struggles through common networks, as is proposed in the Sixth International that was created in the depths of the Lacandona jungle in Chiapas.

We have seen the movement of the *Other Campaign* in Mexico and the uprisings in Oaxaca and Atenco, being violently repressed. We have heard other voices speaking up, in the Indigenous Peoples meeting of the Americas in Vicam in October 2007 and in the Second Meeting of the Zapatista peoples with the people of the world in July 2007. The situation of increasing repression is global, against indigenous and rural movements such as the movement against the Winter Olympics in Canada, the struggles to keep the oil in the ground in the Niger Delta, against farmers 'and indigenous peoples' movements such as the MST in Brazil, peasants movements in India and many more throughout the world as they are expressed through Via Campesina (international peasant movement), against the movements in Argentina and many other known or less known local struggles against the many faces of neo-liberalism and capitalism.

The need to get to know and connect with such struggles is evident as they are part of the global anticapitalist struggle, the fight for our Mother Earth and our right of self determination as peoples. The indigenous struggles of "Tierra y Territorio", for land and territory, for land and freedom, have similar goals to the squatting movements, reclaiming the streets and many more struggles in European history of reclaiming the commons and protecting the Earth. The meeting of peasants from India with radical youngsters from Europe, for example, who try to find a common ground to plant seeds and share ideas, despite the differences in theoretical analysis, forms of struggle and culture, has a dynamic worth unleashing.

One of the most important tasks of collectives such as F.A.R.M.A., that travel the world and come face to face with local movements, is to network these local movements with others, while creating a global perspective of a unified anticapitalist struggle. Following the concept “think global, act local” we hope that one day our paths will meet.

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Related links:

F.A.R.M.A.: [www.farmazapatista.blogspot.com](http://www.farmazapatista.blogspot.com)

Freedoms accelerator squat: [www.eleftheronio.org](http://www.eleftheronio.org)

Prapopoulou squat: [www.protovouliaxalandriou.blogspot.com](http://www.protovouliaxalandriou.blogspot.com)

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