

with the catechists, because they directly trained in a course at the Castalia de Comitán. . . . They were handled by Bishop Samuel Ruiz, because he went twice to Guadalupe Victoria where meetings were held to inform us that all the Indians were preparing to rise up in arms.

"That organization was in preparation for more than 20 years. We realized this . . . because when they began to organize we also went.

"First they taught us the Gospel, but later they weren't teaching us the Gospel so much as that now we were a political organization.

"Later still they began the training, from eight at night until two in the morning."

Father Luis Beltrán Mijangos, a Catholic priest from San Cristóbal de las Casas, was interviewed by *EIR* on Sept. 8, 1994. He explained how Bishop Ruiz created this network of narco-terrorist "catechists." He described how, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Ruiz shut down the seminary in San Cristóbal de las Casas, and pressured, expelled, or forced all the priests who opposed him to leave. Today, all the churches of San Cristóbal are controlled by followers of Samuel Ruiz.

The only priest opposing him whom Ruiz was unable to expel is Father Beltrán. Asked by *EIR* what Ruiz has to do with the EZLN, Father Beltrán responded:

"He is the commander! . . . And I say this because of all the actions he has carried out since 1967, when he began to ideologize all the catechists. I have written proof, since 1978, to demonstrate the kind of ideology he was spreading."

The radical priests around Samuel Ruiz today are:

Hervé Camier Duploux (French).

Heriberto Cruz Vera, from Torreón, now in Tila.

Jorge Barón Torres (Argentine).

Ramón Castillo Aguilar, from Amatenango del Valle.

Joel Padrón González (commander).

Eugenio Alvarez Figueroa, from Comitán, now in San Cristóbal.

Mauricio Olvera, from Las Margaritas.

Rogelio Victoria, from Michoacán, now in Frutis.

Eduardo I. García Ruiz (Salvadoran).

Gonzalo Ituarte Verdusco

Pablo Romo Sedano

On Jan. 1, 1994, according to the interview with *EIR*, Beltrán was nearly assassinated by EZLN thugs who, after seizing and burning down the mayor's offices, deployed a death squad to the cathedral at the hour in which Father Beltrán was supposed to be there. However, acting on a hunch, he did not go to the cathedral that day, despite repeated telephone calls insisting that he attend. The priest who went in his place was about to be killed when one of the Zapatista assassins shouted, "It's not him, it's not him."

Interview: Jorge Constantino Kanter

Government must act against Zapatistas

The president of the Belisario Domínguez Regional Union of Rural Property Owners of Altamirano, Chiapas, Kanter headed the growers' hunger strike in Mexico City. His property is 55 hectares in the township of Altamirano, part of a joint property of 165 hectares held among three brothers, of which 15 hectares are for coffee, and the rest is pasturage for cattle. Because of the armed conflict, he told EIR, they

The economic toll

The state of Chiapas has a total population of 3.5 million, of whom 28% are of Indian origin and 8% speak no Spanish. Of the state's economically active population, 58.3% is employed in agriculture, and the main productive activities generating jobs and income are in coffee, corn, beef cattle, bananas, and beans.

The state is one of the country's principal sources of energy, both in terms of oil and in hydraulic and hydroelectric resources.

Before Feb. 9, when President Ernesto Zedillo deployed the Armed Forces into Chiapas to dislodge the EZLN from the "free zone" granted them by the Carlos Salinas de Gortari government, Chiapas had suffered severe economic disruption because of the war declared by the Zapatistas on Jan. 1, 1994. Until the monetary crisis of 1994, losses incurred because of the Zapatista insurgency in Chiapas equaled more than \$500 million, equivalent to the state's entire gross product in 1988.

According to local journalistic sources, and according to information gathered firsthand, the statistics were the following:

Until Feb. 9, 1995, some 36,000 families were displaced from their homes as a result of the EZLN's "liberated territories," and more than 1,600 land invasions outside those territories.

More than 120,000 hectares of land have been invaded by Zapatistas and their sympathizers. The last 50,000

left in early January 1994.

EIR: Before January 1994, were there threats of invasion and warnings that the Zapatistas were coming, or did it all take you by surprise?

Kanter: With the anniversary of the 500 years of the Conquest [Oct. 12, 1992], they said they were coming. The rumors were very ugly, very strong. We prepared to defend ourselves and they never came.

But this time they caught us unawares. We had to leave because of the conflict. I went to Altamirano at the end of January. We stayed there until March. But my brothers had a problem because the Zapatistas held them at gunpoint some 10 kilometers from Altamirano and threatened them if they didn't return. They confused one of my brothers with me, saying that he was the leader of the ranchers, that we had to get out of there because the land was theirs and because they had orders to shoot us.

After that, some eight days later, they threatened us again with another friend who was beaten; they sent us a handful of bullets and a message saying the bullets were for Jorge Constantino Kanter. As president of the Belisario Domínguez Regional Union of Rural Property Owners, I opted not to leave. There are no guarantees of protection on the highway between Altamirano and San Cristóbal. It has already been more than six months since I travelled.

EIR: We have gathered many accounts of people who did not join and were expelled by the Zapatistas. Do you have any idea of how many people were kicked out?

Kanter: I continue to insist that the Zapatistas are a minority, an armed minority. The majority of the people are not with them.

One proof of this is the fact that the PRI [the ruling party] won [in the 1994 national and state elections]. Of the 19 townships of the Highlands, the strongest townships in terms

were invaded in just the past three months. The masked Zapatistas occupied a total of 78,380 hectares in the "free zone," and the non-masked Zapatistas (outside the conflict area) occupy another 50,440 hectares.

Those mainly affected are cattle ranchers, collective farmers, and private growers.

Losses in cattle were \$242.4 million through Dec. 20, 1994. By March 1995, it is estimated that accumulated losses will be more than \$706 million. In non-monetary terms, the state has lost 25% of its herds, out of a total of 3.2 million head of cattle as of Jan. 1, 1994. The losses have occurred in many forms, ranging from total abandonment of the herds, forced slaughter and premature sales, to theft and smuggling to Guatemala—all derivatives of the Zapatistas' activities.

The government offered to pay an "invasion rent" to affected cattlemen, to be paid until "their ranches are returned." However, this pay has only been partially disbursed, and that unevenly. The state still owes some \$5.3 million in compensatory "rent" due through Dec. 20.

The state of Chiapas is the nation's leading coffee producer. Losses in this sector already reach \$25 million, and are expected to reach \$350 million if a deal isn't struck with the so-called State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organizations (CEOIC), one of the EZLN's irregular warfare front groups. CEOIC is asking 150,000 hectares of land from the government, while the government has promised to distribute only 80,000. A large percentage of the land that CEOIC is seeking is already cultivated with coffee, while the government has promised land in other areas where coffee is not produced. If a deal isn't struck,

the CEOIC's occupation of the cultivated lands will lead to losses of 300,000 quintals of coffee, worth some \$70 million.

Coffee cultivation employs a large proportion of Indian labor, and 80% of the income generated remains in Chiapas itself. To get a better idea of this, 93% of the land under coffee cultivation is in the hands of owners who have no more than 14 hectares apiece, and this represents 32% of total coffee production.

It is estimated that coffee production in Chiapas yields some \$500 million a year, obtained through cultivation of about 231,000 hectares. Another 700,000 hectares was dedicated to corn. However, since the best lands have been invaded and occupied, to the tune of some 120,000 hectares, corn production is expected to fall some 40%.

In commerce, 2,500 businesses have been shut down as the result of the Zapatista insurgency, leading to unemployment for some 5,000 families. Sales have fallen 50% across the board, causing another 7 million new pesos' worth of losses.

In Tuxtla, the collapse of sales of furniture and household goods is infamous. For example, one furniture store in the center of the city sold only one set of furniture in 1994. One owner of a store for kitchen appliances, who usually averages 30 such sales a year, last year sold only 7.

The hotel business has suffered nearly \$6.2 million in losses, and only 40% of capacity is in use. In San Cristóbal de las Casas, reservations do not even reach 5% of capacity. There are an estimated \$440,000 worth of losses in the transport sector.