

truth might have come to the surface. As it is, it is inevitable that Safire & Company will be accorded near-legendary political influence from now on. In a town that worships Power, Bill Safire has now virtually attained the status of a Rajah. ■

## First Fruits of Nafta: The Mexican Revolution by M.N.R.

They told us that one of the main reasons we *had* to pass NAFTA was to save the political bacon of the Salinas regime in Mexico, that beacon light of free markets and democracy in Latin America. Well, folks, welcome to the post-NAFTA world, the direct consequence of NAFTA: the shining new, Mexican peasant revolution!

Brilliantly coordinated and timed to begin on January 1, the day that NAFTA took effect, the revolution of Mexican Indians was timed deliberately in protest against NAFTA. While centering in the southern state of Chiapas, revolutionary activity, including the blowing up of electrical towers, has occurred in distant parts of Mexico. It is clear from the proclamation of the rebellion by Commandante Marcos, leader of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, (ZALN), that the passage of NAFTA was, for the

Zapatistas, the last straw that precipitated the rebellion.

From news reports, it is clear that while the Zapatistas call themselves "socialists," the rebels are far less ideological than other rebel or guerrilla movements in Latin America. Like many anti-NAFTA groups in the U.S., they see that NAFTA will harm the Mexican economy, but they don't see exactly how. The true story is that NAFTA will harm the Mexican economy far more than it will hurt Americans; for the imposition of "side agreement" environmental, labor relations, and minimum wage requirement will have tremendous cost-raising, and unemployment-creating effects in Mexico, where export and investments will be rendered far less competitive in the world market.

According to a recently issued report of the Mexican government, the ZALN has been active for a couple of years, aiding land seizures by the peasantry, and ambushing army and security forces; but then why was the Mexican government, as well as the U.S. media, caught in so stunning a surprise? Why didn't the government disclose, or do anything about, the burgeoning movement of the armed Indian peasantry? Mexican political analyst, Federico Reyes Heróles, put his finger on the answer (*New York Times*, Jan. 9): "I think they [the Mexican government] tried to keep all of this under wraps in order to get the Free Trade Agreement through. But the concrete result is that they let this go on for at least

two years without taking action and they allowed the guerrillas to grow and grow."

The grievances of the Mexican Indians are pointed and specific, and are not simply vague mouthings about "capitalism." They include tyrannical officials imposed upon them by the central Mexican government, and the grabbing of peasant land in order to turn it over to ranchers or, still worse, to the federal government's oil monopoly. In short, the seizure of the "backward" use of their own land by the peasantry, in behalf of other, more "modern" uses to be practiced by the robbers. Like peasants everywhere in the Third World, the Mexican Indians are protesting not against "poverty," but against the confiscation of the land that they properly consider their own. Unfortunately, no one tells these peasants that their yearnings are those of genuine, private-property-based, free-market capitalism. Instead, all they know about capitalism or the market are the mouthings of their hated enemies, the Mexican state-capitalist government (of Salinas or others), as well as their pro-NAFTA "free market" satellites in the U.S.

The bursting forth of the new Mexican Revolution raises a fascinating question about the intrepid U.S. media. The *New York Times* and other papers promptly sent journalists to San Cristobal de las Casas, the major town in Chiapas captured by the rebels, and later retaken. But the question is: was this really

an admirably rapid response, or was the reaction so quick because the media had already been informed of an imminent rebellion? In short, were the U.S. media complicit in the Salinas coverup of the imminent Mexican Revolution?

The Salinas clique, in the meanwhile, is reacting in ways typical of regimes that lack genuine popular support. Thus it claims that the rebellion is not *really* supported by the Indian peasantry, but instead consists merely of a handful of "outside agitators" from Nicaragua or Guatemala, who are coercing the peasantry into going along with the guerrillas. But this is a lot of nonsense, as anyone who knows anything about guerrilla movements will testify. Guerrilla movements can only take root and flourish if they are supported, and supported with enthusiasm, by the bulk of the peasantry in their areas. If they are not, the peasants will simply reveal their location to the more numerous and more heavily armed authorities, and that will be that.

Mao Tse-tung and Che Guevara always stressed the need for the rebel guerrillas to have popular support, and for that reason the peasant

people were to be the "sea" in which the guerrillas "swim." Ironically enough, it was the violation of his own principles that brought Che to a swift and bad end: parachuting with his armed troop into a remote rural area of Colombia, he tried to rouse the Colombian Indian peasantry against their oppressors in Bogota. But, for one thing, Che and his men spoke Spanish, the hated tongue of the conqueror, and not the Indian language of the area; and so the peasantry regarded them as a simple bandits, and turned their location into the authorities. End of Che.

The Salinas regime is also handling the rebellion by a despicable method typical of counter-guerrilla action when the government lacks the support of the people: the imposi-

tion of what has been called a "White [in contrast to a Red] terror." Thus, the government has been executing rebel prisoners, and torching and killing civilian peasants in the region, including women and babies —thereby belying its claim that the peasantry is being coerced by an outside handful of guerrillas.

It's possible, of course, that the White Terror may work, but the revolutionary process appears to be too

far advanced for that. More likely, the tactics will horrify the Mexicans and drive far more of them into the Zapatista camp, thus intensifying the problem. Already, Commandante Marcos and the ZALN have been targeting government oil and electrical installations in urban as well as rural areas.

It looks like a long shot now, but who knows? It might be that the Zapatista Army of National Liberation will be marching in triumph down the streets of Mexico City before the Buchanan Brigades are able to take back Washington, D.C. In any case, the Mayan Indians of southern Mexico are showing a lot more spunk than their ethnic remote cousins in the northern part of that country. Overall, may we say that the Zapatistas form a militant wing of the Mexican division of the North American anti-NAFTA populist front? ■

## Vatican-Israel Rapprochement

by M.N.R.

On December 30, the Vatican ended its long-standing policy, and officially recognized the State of Israel, and the two states exchanged mutual recognition. Contrary to some press accounts, the Vatican's refusal to recognize was not based on Israeli treatment of Palestinians, but quite properly on Catholic religious con-

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